

# Marriage and divorce statistics

Statistics Explained

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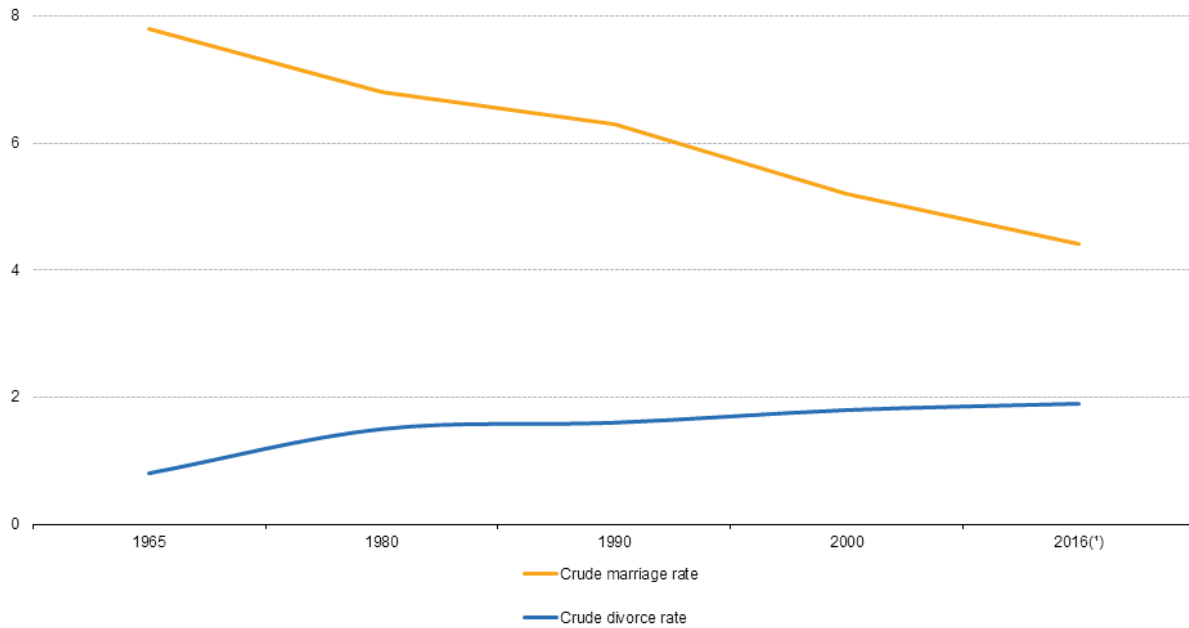
This article presents developments that have taken place in relation to family formation and dissolution through an analysis of [marriage](#) and [divorce](#) indicators. Marriage, as recognised by the law of each country, has long been considered to mark the formation of a family unit. However, the analysis of trends in family formation and dissolution based on just marriage and divorce data might not offer a full picture. Legal alternatives to marriage, like registered partnership, have become more widespread and national legislation has changed to confer more rights on unmarried couples. Recent demographic data show that the number of marriages per 1 000 persons decreased within the [EU-28](#) in recent decades, while the number of divorces increased. An increase in the proportion of children who are born to unmarried couples was also observed.

## Fewer marriages, more divorces

Some 2.2 million marriages and almost 1 million divorces took place in the EU in 2016, according to the most recent data available for all EU Member States. These figures may be expressed as 4.4 marriages for every 1 000 persons (in other words the [crude marriage rate](#) ) and 1.9 divorces for every 1 000 persons (in other words the [crude divorce rate](#) ). The value for divorces in 2016 is an estimate based on 27 countries, since the figure for Ireland is not available.

Since 1965, the crude marriage rate in the EU-28 has declined by close to 50 % in relative terms (from 7.8 per 1 000 persons in 1965 to 4.4 in 2016). At the same time, the crude divorce rate has more than doubled, increasing from 0.8 per 1 000 persons in 1965 to 1.9 in 2016. Part of this increase may be due to the fact that in several EU Member States divorce was legalised during the period (for example, in Italy, Spain, Ireland and Malta).

**Crude marriage and divorce rates, EU-28, 1965–2016**  
(per 1 000 inhabitants)



Note the change in time interval on the x-axis. Up to 1990: excluding French overseas departments

(\*) 2016 divorce rates estimate based on 27 countries (Ireland not available)

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: demo\_nind and demo\_ndivind)

eurostat 

**Figure 1: Crude marriage and divorce rates, EU-28, 1965–2016(per 1 000 persons)Source: Eurostat (demo\_nind) and (demo\_ndivind)**

Table 1 shows that in 2017 among the EU member States, the highest crude marriage rates were in Lithuania (7.5 marriages per 1 000 persons) and in Romania (7.3). The lowest crude marriage rates were reported in Slovenia (3.1 marriages per 1 000 persons) and Italy and Luxembourg (both 3.2). In the [candidate countries](#), the crude marriage rate was generally higher than in the EU. It ranged between 5.1 marriages per 1 000 persons in Serbia and 7.9 in Albania. Among the [EFTA](#) countries, the crude marriage rate was available for Norway (4.4 marriages per 1 000 persons) and Switzerland (4.8).

**Crude marriage rate, selected years, 1960-2017**  
(per 1 000 persons)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>EU-28 (*)</b>	.	7.9	6.8	6.3	5.2	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.4	
Belgium	7.1	7.6	6.7	6.5	4.4	3.9	3.6	4.0	3.9	3.9
Bulgaria	8.8	8.6	7.9	6.9	4.3	3.3	3.4	3.9	3.8	4.0
Czechia	7.7	9.2	7.6	8.8	5.4	4.5	4.3	4.6	4.8	5.0
Denmark	7.8	7.4	5.2	6.1	7.2	5.6	5.0	5.1	5.4	5.5
Germany	9.5	7.4	6.3	6.5	5.1	4.7	4.8	4.9	5.0	4.9
Estonia	10.0	9.1	8.8	7.5	3.9	3.8	4.7	5.2	4.8	4.9
Ireland	5.5	7.0	6.4	5.1	5.0	4.5	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.6
Greece	7.0	7.7	6.5	5.8	4.5	5.1	4.9	5.0	4.6	4.7
Spain	7.8	7.3	5.9	5.7	5.4	3.6	3.4	3.6	3.7	3.7
France (†)	7.0	7.8	6.2	5.1	5.0	3.9	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.5
Croatia	8.9	8.5	7.2	5.8	4.9	5.0	4.6	4.7	4.9	4.9
Italy	7.7	7.3	5.7	5.6	5.0	3.7	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.2
Cyprus (‡)	.	8.6	7.7	9.7	13.4	7.3	6.3	7.2	7.5	6.8
Latvia	11.0	10.2	9.8	8.9	3.9	4.4	6.3	6.9	6.6	6.8
Lithuania	10.1	9.5	9.2	9.8	4.8	6.0	7.6	7.6	7.4	7.5
Luxembourg	7.1	6.4	5.9	6.1	4.9	3.5	3.0	3.6	3.2	3.2
Hungary	8.9	9.3	7.5	6.4	4.7	3.6	3.9	4.7	5.3	5.2
Malta	6.0	7.9	8.8	7.1	6.7	6.3	6.6	6.7	6.7	6.3
Netherlands	7.7	9.5	6.4	6.5	5.5	4.5	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8
Austria	8.3	7.1	6.2	5.9	4.9	4.5	4.4	5.1	5.1	5.1
Poland	8.2	8.6	8.6	6.7	5.5	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.1	5.1
Portugal	7.8	9.4	7.4	7.2	6.2	3.8	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.3
Romania	10.7	7.2	8.2	8.3	6.1	5.7	5.9	6.3	6.8	7.3
Slovenia	8.8	8.3	6.5	4.3	3.6	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.1
Slovakia	7.9	7.9	7.9	7.6	4.8	4.7	4.9	5.3	5.5	5.8
Finland	7.4	8.8	6.1	5.0	5.1	5.6	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.8
Sweden	6.7	5.4	4.5	4.7	4.5	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.2
United Kingdom	7.5	8.5	7.4	6.6	5.2	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.4	.
Iceland	7.5	7.8	5.7	4.5	6.3	4.9	.	.	.	.
Liechtenstein	5.7	5.9	7.1	5.6	7.2	5.0	.	.	.	.
Norway	6.6	7.6	5.4	5.2	5.0	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.4
Switzerland	7.8	7.6	5.7	6.9	5.5	5.5	5.1	5.0	5.0	4.8
Montenegro	.	.	.	.	.	5.9	5.7	6.2	5.1	5.3
North Macedonia	8.6	9.0	8.5	8.3	7.0	6.9	6.7	6.8	6.4	6.6
Albania	7.8	6.8	8.1	8.9	8.4	.	8.2	8.7	7.8	7.9
Serbia	.	.	.	.	5.7	4.9	5.1	5.2	5.1	5.1
Turkey	.	.	8.2	.	.	8.0	7.8	7.7	7.5	7.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10.1	9.3	8.5	6.7	5.6	5.1	.	.	.	.
Kosovo (‡)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	9.1	9	9.6

(\*) up to 1990: excluding French overseas departments

(†) up to and including 2002: data refer to total marriages contracted in the country, including marriages between non-residents; from 2003 onwards: data refer to marriages in which at least one spouse was resident in the country; 1980: break in series.

(‡) this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo\_nind)

eurostat 

**Table 1: Crude marriage rate, selected years, 1960–2017(per 1 000 persons)Source: Eurostat (demo\_nind)**

As regards divorce (see Table 2), in 2017 the lowest crude rates in the EU were registered in Malta (0.7 divorces per 1 000 persons) and Slovenia (1.2); in general eastern or southern Member States —Bulgaria, Croatia and Italy (all three 1.5) and Romania (1.6) — had low crude rates. By contrast, divorce rates were higher in several northern Member States, notably Latvia (3.1 divorces per 1 000 persons), Lithuania (3.0), Denmark (2.6) and Estonia (2.5). In 2017 the **candidate countries** had generally low crude divorce rates, with the lowest rate in North Macedonia (1.0 per 1 000 persons) and the highest in both Albania and Turkey (1.6). Among the **EFTA** countries for which data are available, the crude divorce rate was around 2.0 divorces per 1 000 persons.

**Crude divorce rate, selected years, 1960-2017**  
(per 1 000 persons)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>EU-28 (*) (*)</b>	..	0.9	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.0	1.8	1.9	1.9	..
Belgium	0.5	0.7	1.5	2.0	2.6	2.7	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.0
Bulgaria	..	1.2	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Czechia	1.4	2.2	2.6	3.1	2.9	2.9	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4
Denmark	1.5	1.9	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	3.4	2.9	3.0	2.6
Germany	1.0	1.3	1.8	1.9	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.9
Estonia	2.1	3.2	4.1	3.7	3.0	2.2	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.5
Ireland (*)	..	..	..	..	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7	..	..
Greece	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.6	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.0	1.8
Spain (*)	..	..	..	0.6	0.9	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1
France (*)	0.7	0.8	1.5	1.9	1.9	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9	..
Croatia	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.5
Italy (*)	..	..	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.9	0.9	1.4	1.6	1.5
Cyprus	..	0.2	0.3	0.6	1.7	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.3	2.2
Latvia	2.4	4.6	5.0	4.0	2.6	2.4	3.1	2.6	3.1	3.1
Lithuania	0.9	2.2	3.2	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.0
Luxembourg	0.5	0.6	1.6	2.0	2.4	2.1	2.6	2.4	2.1	2.0
Hungary	1.7	2.2	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.0	2.1	2.0	1.9
Malta (*)	..	..	..	..	..	..	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7
Netherlands	0.5	0.8	1.8	1.9	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.9
Austria	1.1	1.4	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.8
Poland	0.5	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.7
Portugal	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.9	1.9	2.6	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.1
Romania	2.0	0.4	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.6
Slovenia	1.0	1.1	1.2	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Slovakia	0.6	0.8	1.3	1.7	1.7	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.8
Finland	0.8	1.3	2.0	2.6	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.4
Sweden	1.2	1.6	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.4
United Kingdom	..	1.0	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.1	1.9	1.7	1.8	..
Iceland	0.7	1.2	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.8	..	..	..	..
Liechtenstein	..	..	..	..	3.9	2.4	..	..	..	..
Norway	0.7	0.9	1.6	2.4	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0
Switzerland	0.9	1.0	1.7	2.0	1.5	2.8	2.0	2.1	2.0	1.9
Montenegro	..	..	..	..	..	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.2
North Macedonia	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.8	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Albania	0.5	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	..	1.5	1.3	1.9	1.6
Serbia	..	..	..	..	..	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.3
Turkey	..	..	..	..	..	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	..	..	..	..	..	0.4	..	..	..	..
Kosovo (*)	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	0.7	0.6	0.6

(\*) up to 1990: excluding French overseas departments.

(\*) 2016: estimate based on 27 countries (Ireland not available)

(\*) divorce was not possible by law in Italy until 1970, in Spain until 1981, in Ireland until 1995 and in Malta until 2011.

(\*) this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo\_ndivind)

eurostat 

**Table 2: Crude divorce rate, selected years, 1960–2017(per 1 000 persons)Source: Eurostat (demo\_ndivind)**

## A rise in births outside marriage

The proportion of **live births outside marriage** in the EU in 2016 was 42.6 % (see Table 3). This is an estimate based on 27 countries, since the figures for Malta were not available. This share has continued to increase, signalling new patterns of family formation alongside the more traditional pattern where children were born within marriage. Extramarital births occur in non-marital relationships, among cohabiting couples and to lone parents.

In 2017, extramarital births outnumbered births inside marriage in several EU Member States: France (59.9 %), Bulgaria (58.9 %), Estonia (58.6 %), Slovenia (57.5 %), Portugal (54.9 %), Sweden (54.5 %), Denmark (54.2 %), and the Netherlands (51.0 %), as well as in Iceland (71.2 %) and Norway (55.7 %) among the **EFTA** countries. Mediterranean countries like Greece, Croatia and Cyprus along with Poland and Lithuania, were generally at the other end of the scale as more than 70 % of births in each of these Member States occurred within marriage; in Turkey this share was as high as 97 %.

**Live births outside marriage, selected years, 1960-2017**  
(share of total live births, %)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>EU-28 (*)</b>					27.3	38.1	42.0	42.5	42.6	
Belgium	2.1	2.8	4.1	11.6	28.0	45.7	49.4	48.0	49.0	
Bulgaria	8.0	8.5	10.9	12.4	38.4	54.1	58.8	58.6	58.6	58.9
Czechia	4.9	5.4	5.6	8.6	21.8	40.3	46.7	47.8	48.6	49.0
Denmark	7.8	11.0	33.2	46.4	44.6	47.3	52.5	53.8	54.0	54.2
Germany	7.6	7.2	11.9	15.3	23.4	33.3	35.0	35.0	35.5	34.7
Estonia				27.2	54.5	59.1	59.4	57.9	56.1	58.6
Ireland	1.6	2.7	5.9	14.6	31.5	33.8	36.3	36.6	36.6	37.6
Greece	1.2	1.1	1.5	2.2	4.0	7.3	8.2	8.8	9.4	10.3
Spain	2.3	1.4	3.9	9.6	17.7	35.5	42.5	44.5	45.9	46.8
France (†)	6.1	6.8	11.4	30.1	43.6	55.0	58.5	59.1	59.7	59.9
Croatia	7.4	5.4	5.1	7.0	9.0	13.3	17.4	18.1	18.9	19.9
Italy	2.4	2.2	4.3	6.5	9.7	21.8	28.8	30.0	28.0	32.8
Cyprus		0.2	0.6	0.7	2.3	15.2	15.4	16.6	19.1	20.3
Latvia	11.9	11.4	12.5	16.9	40.4	44.4	44.0	41.5	40.9	40.4
Lithuania		3.7	6.3	7.0	22.6	25.7	29.0	27.7	27.4	26.7
Luxembourg	3.2	4.0	6.0	12.8	21.9	34.0	39.1	38.8	40.7	40.8
Hungary	5.5	5.4	7.1	13.1	29.0	40.8	47.3	47.9	46.7	44.7
Malta	0.7	1.5	1.1	1.8	10.6	25.3				
Netherlands	1.4	2.1	4.1	11.4	24.9	44.3	48.7	49.8	50.4	51.0
Austria	13.0	12.8	17.8	23.6	31.3	40.1	41.7	42.1	42.2	42.0
Poland		5.0	4.8	6.2	12.1	20.6	24.2	24.6	25.0	24.1
Portugal	9.5	7.3	9.2	14.7	22.2	41.3	49.3	50.7	52.8	54.9
Romania					25.5	27.7	31.8	31.6	31.3	31.2
Slovenia	9.1	8.5	13.1	24.5	37.1	55.7	58.3	57.9	58.6	57.5
Slovakia	4.7	6.2	5.7	7.6	18.3	33.0	38.9	39.2	40.2	40.1
Finland	4.0	5.8	13.1	25.2	39.2	41.1	42.8	44.3	44.9	44.8
Sweden	11.3	18.6	39.7	47.0	55.3	54.2	54.6	54.7	54.9	54.5
United Kingdom	5.2	8.0	11.5	27.9	39.5	46.9	47.6	47.9	47.7	48.2
Iceland	25.3	29.9	39.7	55.2	65.2	64.3			69.6	71.2
Liechtenstein	3.7	4.5	5.3	6.9	15.7	21.3	21.8	15.1	22.2	22.2
Norway	3.7	6.9	14.5	38.6	49.6	54.8	55.5	55.9	56.2	55.7
Switzerland	3.8	3.8	4.7	6.1	10.7	18.8	21.7	22.9	24.2	25.2
North Macedonia	5.1	6.2	6.1	7.1	9.8	12.2		11.0	12.0	11.6
Serbia					20.7	24.0	25.1	25.5	25.9	26.3
Turkey						2.6	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina							10.8			
Kosovo (‡)						40.3		42.6	41.6	

(\*) 2014 to 2016: estimate based on 27 countries (Malta not available).

(†) up to 1990: excluding French overseas departments.

(‡) this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo\_find)

**Table 3: Live births outside marriage, selected years, 1960-2017 (share of total live births, %)** Source: Eurostat (demo\_find)

The share of children that were born outside of marriage increased in the EU-28 from 27.3 % in 2000 to 42.6 % in 2016. Looking at the latest available data, extramarital births increased in fifteen EU Member State in 2017 compared with 2016. The most relevant exception to this trend was Hungary, where a decrease in the share of children born outside of marriage by 2 percentage points (from 46.7 % to 44.7 %) was observed. In 2017 compared with 2016, extramarital births increased also in the [candidate countries](#) and in the [EFTA](#) countries, with the exceptions of North Macedonia and Norway, while in Lichtenstein they remained stable.

## Source data for tables and graphs

- [Marriage and divorce statistics: tables and figures](#)

## Data sources

Eurostat compiles information on a wide range of demographic data, including data on the number of marriages by sex and previous marital status and statistics relating to the number of divorces. Data on the number of [live births](#) according to the mother's marital status may be used to produce an indicator that shows the proportion of births outside marriage.

## Context

The family unit is a changing concept: what it means to be a member of a family and the expectations people have of family relationships vary with time and space, making it difficult to find a universally agreed and applied definition. Legal alternatives to marriage, like registered partnerships, have become more widespread and national legislation has changed to confer more rights on unmarried and same sex couples. Alongside these new legal forms, other forms of non-marital relationships have appeared, making it more difficult for statisticians to

collect data within this domain that can be compared across countries.

Due to differences in the timing and formal recognition of changing patterns of family formation and dissolution, these concepts have become more difficult to measure in practice. Analysts of demographic statistics therefore have access to relatively few complete and reliable data sets with which to make comparisons over time and between or within countries.

## See also

- [Fertility statistics](#)
- [Mortality and life expectancy statistics](#)
- [Population and population change statistics](#)

## Publications

- [Short analytical web note — Demography report — 2015 edition](#)

## Main tables

- [Marriage and divorce \(t\\_demo\\_nup\)](#) , see:

Crude marriage rate (tps00012)

Crude divorce rate (tps00013)

## Database

- [Marriages and divorces \(demo\\_nup\)](#)

## Dedicated section

- [Marriages and divorces](#)

## Methodology

- [Marriages and divorces](#) (ESMS metadata file — demo\_nup\_esms)

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