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*Research Article*

### **Overview Chapter 4: Changing family and partnership behaviour: Common trends and persistent diversity across Europe**

**Tomáš Sobotka**

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## **Overview Chapter 4: Changing family and partnership behaviour: Common trends and persistent diversity across Europe**

**Tomáš Sobotka**<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Following the era of the ‘golden age of marriage’ and the baby boom in the 1950s and 1960s, marriage has declined in importance, and its role as the main institution on which family relations are built has been eroded across Europe. Union formation most often takes place without a marriage. Family and living arrangements are currently heterogeneous across Europe, but all countries seem to be making the same shifts: towards fewer people living together as a couple, especially in marriage; an increased number of unmarried couples; more children born outside marriage; and fewer children living with their two parents. The relationship between these changing living arrangements, especially the decline of marriage, on the one hand, and the overall level of fertility, on the other, is not straightforward. In most countries, marriage rates and fertility declined simultaneously. However, the aggregate relationship between marriage and fertility indices has moved from negative (fewer marriages imply fewer births) to positive (fewer marriages imply more births). Thus, the decline of marriage, which is a part of the second demographic transition (see Overview Chapter 6), cannot be considered an important cause of the current low fertility level in many European countries. On the contrary, in European countries where the decline of marriage has been less pronounced, fertility levels are currently lower than in countries where new living arrangements have become most common.

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## 1. Introduction

Families and living arrangements in developed countries have changed dramatically since the 1960s. The major features of this change, such as the gradual decline of marriage and the growth of cohabitation, the postponement of union formation and childbearing, the rise in union instability, and the disconnection between marriage, sex, and reproduction, have been observed in all regions of Europe, and have been analysed in detail in dozens of publications and research articles (e.g., Kuijsten 1996, Lesthaeghe and Moors 2002, Billari 2005, Prioux 2006). These developments also constitute major behavioural landmarks of the second demographic transition, discussed in depth in Overview Chapter 6, and they are widely reflected in different country chapters in this volume.\* Family life and the meaning of family have undergone a profound change. Intimate partnerships and sexuality, but also the relationships between parents and their children, have moved away from the realm of normative control and institutional regulation, giving rise to the new ideal of reflexive ‘pure relationships’ based on mutual consent and the recognition of individual autonomy (Giddens 1992). As noted in the France chapter, family has become “less of a place to reproduce generational and gender hierarchies, and more of a special space where individuals forge their identity” (Toulemon et al. 2008:524).

The ongoing transformation of the family is evidenced by the spread of family forms and living arrangements other than the nuclear families of (married) couples with children. Cohabiting unions, ‘living apart together’ partnerships, same-sex partnerships, one-parent families, and single living have increased in prominence. The boundaries between family and non-family life have become less clear-cut; Ahlburg and de Vita (1992: 2) observed that family patterns in the United States are so fluid that “the U.S. Census Bureau has difficulty measuring family trends.” Legislative changes are also beginning to reflect the new family landscape. New laws and regulations on registered partnerships (of both homosexual and heterosexual couples), same-sex marriages, and, in the case of the Netherlands, the option of a ‘flash annulment’ of marriage without a prior divorce procedure (see the Netherlands chapter), further contribute to the diversity in family patterns. Arguably, the perception of what constitutes a family has changed as well. Kiernan’s (2004) analysis of 1998 Eurobarometer data shows that children, rather than partnership status, appear to be more salient in defining families: according to the survey results, 59 percent of respondents consider a cohabiting couple with children to be a family, whereas 48 percent consider a married couple without children as a family.

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\* All overview and country chapters referred to herein are part of Special Collection 7: Childbearing Trends and Policies in Europe and can be found online at: <http://www.demographic-research.org/special/7/>.

On the other hand, just 27 percent of respondents consider a childless cohabiting couple to be a family. In line with this distinction, research on family change in Germany often focuses on the issue of ‘polarisation’ between family life and other forms of private life (Schulze and Tyrell 2002), whereby family is usually defined on the basis of the presence of children in the household (see Germany chapter).

The pace of change in family life and living arrangements varies across countries, cohorts, and social groups. Thus, the catchphrase ‘convergence to diversity’ best characterises the situation in which most countries follow a similar trajectory of family changes, but at the same time retain many distinct patterns of family behaviour (Kuijsten 1996). The increase in diversity is also manifested in the timing and sequencing of early life transitions. Events like home leaving, marrying, and becoming a parent often do not conform to the norms regarding the ‘proper’ sequence of events, and take place outside the previously accepted boundaries between youth and adulthood (Rindfuss 1991, Corijn and Klijzing 2001, Heinz and Krüger 2001).<sup>3</sup>

This contribution reviews trends and cross-country diversity in family, partnership behaviour, and living arrangements in contemporary Europe. Given the wide scope of this topic, we paint this picture with a broad brush, referring the reader to country-specific chapters and other studies for more details. Discussion of the roots of the observed changes in family behaviour is kept to a minimum; some of these factors are mentioned in Overview Chapter 6, which examines the concept of the second demographic transition and reviews changes in family-related values and attitudes in Europe. This study first outlines trends and regional differences in home-leaving patterns. Section 3 examines the evidence on the gradual retreat of marriage, especially from the lives of young adults. Section 4 discusses the rising importance of unmarried cohabitation, its diverse forms, and legislative responses to it. Section 5 summarises the evidence on the rise of other living arrangements, especially single living and ‘living apart together’ relationships, and discusses the increase in age at union formation. Section 6 analyses the rising rates of divorce and union dissolution, while Section 7 outlines the declining role of marriage for childbearing, highlights the broad diversity in non-marital childbearing in Europe, and notes the surprisingly widespread incidence of single motherhood. In conclusion, Section 8 discusses the relevance of family changes to fertility rates.

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<sup>3</sup> Several studies emphasise a need for a more precise definition and measurement of different processes that supposedly lead to an increasing heterogeneity of individual life course experiences. Using different measures of ‘de-standardisation,’ Brückner and Mayer (2005) provide evidence of such a process in the domain of family formation in West Germany in the second half of the 20th century (they find, however, an increased homogeneity in cohort experiences of education and labour market participation). Similarly, Elzinga and Liefbroer (2007: 246) find “strong support to the idea that the family life trajectories of young adult women all across Western world are becoming more destandardised” (see also footnote 9).

Tables and graphs in our study draw from a number of different data sources, including official statistics and published expert estimates and analyses. We focus especially on the countries covered in this collection, but selected figures and tables also show data for other countries and for broader European regions. This selection, as well as the choice of countries, was in part determined by the limited data availability, especially with respect to long-term time series and specific topics that are not commonly reported in the official vital statistics, such as living arrangements, cohabitation, and leaving the parental home. The Fertility and Family Surveys, FFS (see <http://www.unece.org/pau/ffs/>; Macura and Beets 2002), constitute a unique source of comparable data on living arrangements of adults and children, and on fertility, in Europe. The major drawback of using the FFS lies in their age: Most of the surveys were conducted in 1992-1997, and the collected data thus typically provide a picture of family change and living arrangements up to the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The Gender and Generation Surveys currently being conducted (<http://www.unece.org/pau/ggp/>) will provide more comparable and updated figures (Vikat et al. 2007). The results presented in this chapter, which are based on the FFS, illustrate well the ongoing family transformations, but they may not fully reflect the actual patterns of living arrangements. Specifically for Central and Eastern Europe, the Fertility and Family Surveys often reflect the household and family patterns prevailing in the late stages of state socialism, i.e., before 1990, and do not capture the rapid transformation in living arrangements in the 1990s.

## **2. North-South contrasts in home-leaving patterns**

Departure from the parental home is a key event in the life of a young adult, and is commonly seen as a precondition to living with a partner and becoming a parent. Two studies based on the FFS (Corijn and Klijzing 2001, Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001) provide a comparative analysis of the timing and patterns of home leaving in Europe. They depict wide differences in home-leaving behaviour of the cohorts born around 1960, with the two most contrasting patterns prevailing in Southern Europe and in the Nordic countries (See Table 1 based on Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001; see also Billari 2004). In Southern Europe, the 'latest-late' pattern (Billari 2004) dominates: home leaving takes place late, especially for men who often reside with their parents even after reaching the age of 30, and it has been delayed among the cohorts born in the 1950s (Corijn and Klijzing 2001: Table 13.1) and 1960s (Italy chapter). In Northern Europe, both women and men leave home at a young age (median age for Swedish women is under 19), there is little diversity in the age at home leaving between individuals, and almost everyone leaves before the age of 30. Most of the post-

communist countries did not display a particularly early or late home-leaving pattern at the time of the FFS, but ages at leaving home were more diverse in these countries, as many men and women continued to reside with their parents until their early thirties (Corijn and Klijzing 2001).

**Table 1: Home-leaving patterns among cohorts born around 1960; selected countries of Europe**

Country	Median age			Never left home by age 30 (%)		Percentage leaving home after first union	
	Men	Women	Difference	Men	Women	Men	Women
Northern Europe							
Sweden	20.2	18.6	1.6	2	1	6	6
Western Europe (incl. German-speaking countries)							
Austria	21.8	19.9	1.9	16	6	28	20
France	21.5	19.8	1.7	9	5	5	3
Germany (East)	22.4	20.6	1.8	8	4	19	28
Germany (West)	22.4	20.8	1.6	11	4	11	11
The Netherlands	22.5	20.5	2.0	5	2	NA	NA
United Kingdom	22.4	20.3	2.1	11	5	NA	NA
Southern Europe							
Italy	26.7	23.6	3.1	32	20	8	9
Spain	25.7	22.9	2.8	25	14	11	11
Central and Eastern Europe							
Czech Republic	23.8	21.2	2.6	18	16	31	34
Hungary	24.8	21.3	3.5	27	17	32	35
Lithuania	20.3	19.8	0.5	20	22	28	32
Poland	25.8	22.5	3.3	37	23	27	29
Slovenia	20.9	20.5	0.4	15	13	23	27

Source: Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001 (based on the FFS data).

In Central and Eastern Europe, this long co-residence of children with their parents is mostly involuntary. In the past, it was attributable to a lack of housing coupled with a rigid, centrally organised system of distribution, which meant that housing was often available only to families with children. The housing shortage, now more in terms of cost than availability, is still an important obstacle to home leaving in this region (Czech Republic and Slovenia chapters). Combined with a rapid expansion of higher education, the persistent housing shortage explains the observed trend towards delayed home leaving in these countries (see also Section 5.1). It also helps to explain another interesting feature of the Central-Eastern European home-leaving pattern; namely, a high proportion of first unions that start before leaving the parental home. Around one-third of women in the Czech Republic, East Germany, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia entered a union while still living with their parents. With the exception of Austria, this

proportion fell below 12 percent for other countries shown in Table 1 (especially in France and Sweden, where this pattern was an exception, experienced by three and six percent of women, respectively).<sup>4</sup>

Differences in welfare regimes, combined with long-term cultural differences between the East and the West (Hajnal 1965), and between the North and the South of Europe (Reher 1998), also explain many cross-country differences in European home-leaving patterns (Billari 2004). Besides the availability of housing, specific institutional and economic factors, such as employment, income, and spatial distribution of tertiary education, are often identified as important determinants of home leaving (e.g., Holdsworth 2000; Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001; Aassve et al. 2002; Mulder, Clark, and Wagner 2002). Dense regional networks of universities in Italy and Spain enable many young people to pursue studies while remaining with their parents, whereas in the Netherlands, a generous student loan system, combined with relatively long distances to higher educational institutions, mean that many young people leave the parental home at a younger age in order to attend university (the Netherlands chapter). Interestingly, employment and earnings are particularly important in the late-leaving and weak welfare state countries of Southern Europe, where young adults who have a job and a higher income leave the nest earlier. These factors do not play any significant role for home leaving in the early-leaving and ‘Social Democratic’ welfare countries of Northern Europe, where young adults leave home irrespective of their employment status and personal income. In Northern Europe, young people thus often experience poverty, even if only for a short period, after leaving home (Aassve et al. 2002).

In addition to these factors, young adults (‘mama’s boys’) in Italy and Spain often prefer to stay in the parental home, even when they have gained economic independence (Italy chapter, Dalla Zuanna 2001), and this prolonged ‘cohabitation’ is willingly accepted by their parents (Manacorda and Moretti 2006). The Spain chapter notes that “...the greater freedom of movement enjoyed by adult children (...) and growing household welfare, along with the social differentiation between sexuality and procreation, have weakened the pressures for leaving the parental home at an early age” (Delgado et al. 2008:1086). The progressively postponed departure of children from the parental home in Mediterranean countries has been often interpreted as an outcome of economic insecurity, prolonged education, and limited availability of affordable housing, combined with the persistence of strong family ties between generations; but also as a problematic manifestation of a general ‘delay syndrome,’ and an unwillingness

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<sup>4</sup> We expect that these general patterns of home leaving were retained for younger cohorts in most parts of Europe. The available data indicate, however, that home-leaving among younger cohorts has occurred at much later ages in Central and Eastern Europe (see also different country chapters and Section 5.1).



of young adults to assume adult roles and responsibilities (Dalla Zuanna 2001). Delayed home leaving in these countries is intrinsically linked to delayed union formation and delayed parenthood (e.g., Billari 2004), which may eventually have a negative effect on completed fertility rates (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002).

Countries also differ greatly in the extent to which home leaving is coupled with union formation. For the cohorts born around 1960, these two events were most closely related in Belgium (Flanders) and Southern Europe (especially for women; 76 percent of Spanish and Italian women left home at the time they married). In Norway and Sweden, but also in the Baltic countries (data available for Latvia and Lithuania), the timing of leaving home and union formation did not overlap for a large majority of young adults (Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001). In the Nordic countries, but also in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, leaving the parental home remains a mark of independence and signifies the transition to adulthood (e.g., Holdsworth 2000). Consequently, many young people leave home early simply to achieve independence through residential autonomy (the Netherlands chapter, Sweden chapter). It is also important to note that in many countries where late home leaving is common the patterns of departure of young adults from the parental home are more fuzzy and less easily measurable, as many young men and women experience spells of living independently and returning to their parents. These moves are often related to migration for employment or education, but also to changes in income or partnership status.

### **3. The gradual retreat of marriage**

The evidence of the gradual retreat of marriage in all parts of Europe is overwhelming. Marriage rates have declined—to very low levels in some places—and couples are marrying at later ages. Growing numbers of marriages are ending in divorce or separation, and consensual unions have increasingly replaced marriage among younger people. Especially in Northern and Western Europe, marriage has been historically far from a universal institution, and many people married at relatively late ages (Hajnal 1965). But the rapid decline in the centrality of marriage in the lives of individual men and women after the ‘golden age of marriage’ in the 1950s and the 1960s, when marriage was very common and took place early in life (Festy 1980), is remarkable. As Thornton, Axinn, and Xie (2007: 4-5) observe for the United States, “marriage has become less central in organizing economic production, consumption, and the transfer of property across generations. It has become less influential in delineating the relationships between men and women, the transition to adulthood, and the identity for men and women. It has also become less relevant as a context of sexual expression, living arrangements, and the bearing and rearing of children. In addition, marriage has

become less sacred, being increasingly viewed as a secular rather than religious institution.” Clearly, the character and the meaning of marriage have undergone a remarkable transformation. Most people still perceive marriage as an ideal and as the most desirable living arrangement (see Overview Chapter 6), but they marry for different reasons, and at different points in their lives, than in the past. This is well illustrated by changes in the sequencing of early life course events, and the changing relationship between cohabitation, pregnancy, marriage, and childbearing, which is briefly analysed in Section 7. As in the case of home-leaving patterns and other living arrangements, the diversity in Europe is enormous, and our overview only scratches the surface of some region-specific peculiarities. Our main focus is on the decline in marriage rates, the rapid trend towards postponement of marriages, and the diminishing prevalence of marriage among young adults.

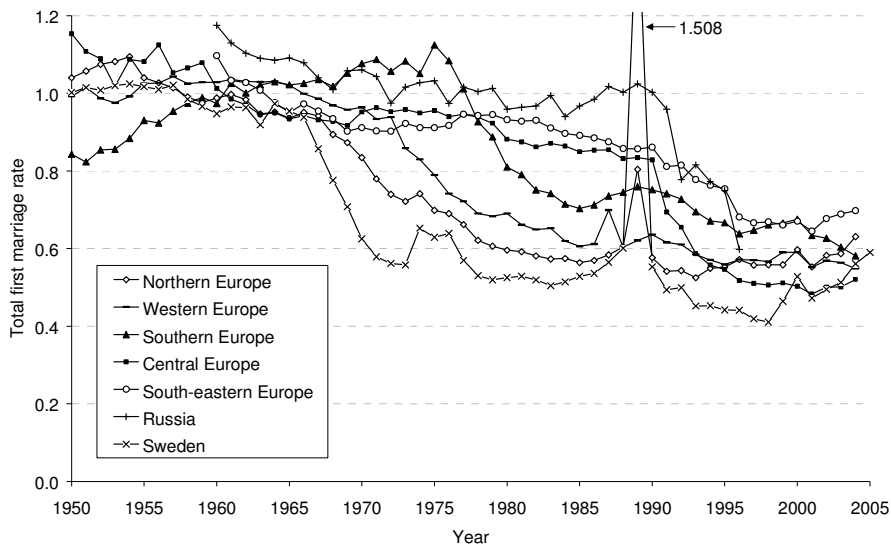
### **3.1 The end of universal marriage**

The near-universal decline in first marriage rates in Europe, and the increase in the proportion of people who never marry, can be documented by diverse indicators. We focus on the period indicator of the total first marriage rate, and the cohort indicator of the proportion of women who have never married by the age of 50. The former indicator is based on period age-specific first marriage rates (‘incidence rates’), which are computed for all women, irrespective of their current family status. It is not an accurate indicator of the intensity of first marriages, as it is distorted by the changes in the age-specific composition of population by marital status (see also Appendix). However, as a simple measure readily available for most countries in Europe, it provides a rough evaluation of marriage trends over time.

Figure 1 depicts trends in the total first marriage rates (TFMR) in different regions of Europe since 1950. The substantial decline in the TFMR first began in the mid-1960s in Sweden and, more gradually, in other Nordic countries. Other regions followed suit: Western European countries experienced a steep fall in first marriage rates during the 1970s; Southern European countries in the late 1970s and the 1980s; and the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s. Thus, between 1960 and 2000, all European regions shifted from being characterised by high first marriage rates, with the TFMR values typically around 1, to low total first marriage rates around 0.6 (somewhat higher in South-eastern Europe). In Central and Eastern Europe, the TFMR remained very high until 1990, and the decline in marriage rates after the fall of the Iron Curtain was particularly steep and rapid. Consequently, the lowest TFMRs in the early 2000s were recorded in the former communist countries. In this region, Slovenia was the main exception, where the steep decline in TFMR had

already begun in 1980, a few years after long-lasting cohabiting unions were made *de facto* equalised with marriage (the change took place in 1976, see Slovenia chapter). A more gradual decline also took place in Hungary and East Germany. A recent slight rise in first marriage rates, observed in many countries, is not necessarily linked to the underlying increase in first marriage intensity, but may rather be a consequence of a slowdown in the pace of first marriage postponement.

**Figure 1: Period total first marriage rates in different regions of Europe, 1950-2005**



Source: Council of Europe (2006), Sardon (1991 and 1993), Eurostat 2008.

Notes: Data are not weighted by the population size of given countries and regions.

The 'marriage-boom' in Sweden in 1989 is related to changes in public pensions for widows, effective from 1990 (see Sweden chapter, Andersson 1998).

Countries are grouped into regions as follows:

Western Europe: Austria, France, Western Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom;

Northern Europe: Denmark (data available from 1955), Finland (from 1955), Norway, and Sweden;

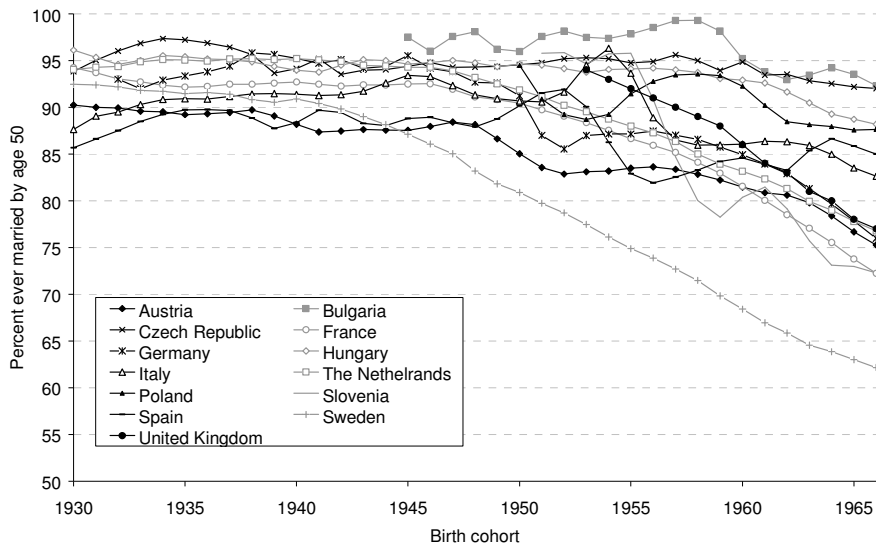
Southern Europe: Italy, Portugal, and Spain;

Central Europe: Croatia (from 1960), Czech Republic, Eastern Germany (from 1960), Estonia (from 1970), Hungary, Latvia (from 1970), Lithuania (from 1970), Poland, Slovakia (from 1960), and Slovenia (from 1970)

South-eastern Europe: Bulgaria and Romania.

This recent convergence in period total first marriage rates is not yet visible in the cohort proportion of women ever married by age 50. However, with the exception of several post-communist societies, there was a steep increase in the proportion of never-married women among the late 1950s and the early 1960s cohorts (see Figure 2 for the trend in the proportion of ever married in the countries included in this collection). Thus, the near universality of marriage, typical for the 1930s and 1940s cohorts, has been replaced by a more diverse pattern, whereby a large and gradually increasing fraction of women remain unmarried throughout their reproductive lives. For those born in 1945, between 89 and 96 percent of women have been married at least once in most countries shown in Figure 2 (Sweden has the lowest proportion of ever married, 87 percent). For those born in 1965, the estimated proportion of ever married by age 50 exceeds 90 percent only in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, whereas it falls below 75 percent for France, Slovenia, and Sweden (see also Prioux 2006). Sweden displays the most pronounced rise in the proportion of never married at age 50, estimated at 37 percent among women born in 1965.

**Figure 2: Cohort proportion of ever-married women by age 50 in selected countries of Europe; birth cohorts 1930-1966**



Source: Council of Europe (2006).

Note: The proportion of ever married has been partly estimated for the cohorts born in the mid-1950s and later.

### **3.2 Long-lasting postponement of marriages**

The trend in the mean age at first marriage evolved in parallel with the trend in period first marriage rates. Marriage postponement started shortly after the onset of the decline in first marriage rates; countries that experienced this decline first were also the first to experience delayed marriages. The rapid increase in the mean age at first marriage is a clear marker of a disconnection between sex, marriage, and reproduction (see also Section 7.2 below). Sweden, where first marriage postponement started in the late 1960s, can again be considered a ‘forerunner’ of new family behaviour. In contrast to the TFMR, the mean age at first marriage still remains widely differentiated in Europe, especially along the ‘East-West divide’. Most post-communist countries, which were characterised by an early marriage pattern until the 1980s, experienced an intensive postponement of marriages only after 1990. Consequently, they still have a younger age at marriage (typically between age 23 and 26 for women) than the countries of Western and Southern Europe (typically, at age 27 to 29 years) and the Nordic countries (mean age 29 to 31 years). However, Central and Eastern Europe has also become heterogeneous in this respect, with the countries of the former Soviet Union (except the Baltic countries) retaining the lowest mean age of women at first marriage, at around 23 years in 2004 (see also Ukraine chapter); and several countries of Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia) exceeding age 26, with Slovenia reaching 27.8 in 2004. In some parts of Eastern Europe, prevailing social norms still encourage early marriage. In the Ukraine, participants of focus group discussions “felt pressure from parents and peers to marry and have at least one child early rather than risk becoming an ‘old maid’” (Perelli-Harris 2008:1151).

Due to a combination of marriage decline and marriage postponement, the proportion of married people has declined rapidly, especially among men and women under age 30. This shift was particularly pronounced in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where early marriages remained common until the early 1990s (e.g., the Czech Republic and Slovakia chapters). At present, marriage has almost disappeared from the lives of young adults in many parts of Europe. In fact, Figure 4 shows that there has been a remarkable convergence in the proportion of people married at young ages, especially for men. For instance, the proportion of men married at age 22 fell to six percent in Romania, and to one to three percent in six other countries analysed in Figure 4 (the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden)<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, the proportion of women married by age 20 fell to 16 percent in Romania, and to two to four percent in the latter six countries, while in 1980 it was as

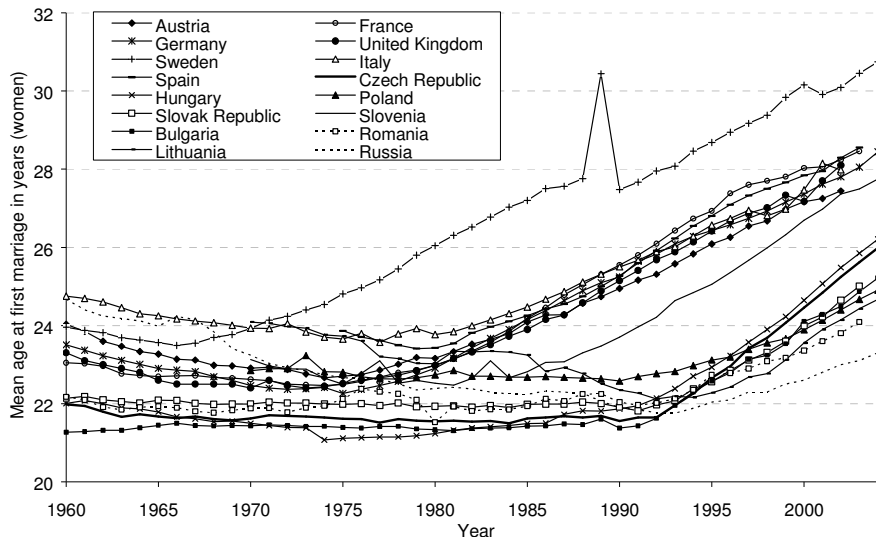
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<sup>5</sup> Due to shortage of space and limited data availability, we do not present the corresponding figures for all the countries included in this collection.

high as 49 percent in Hungary and Romania. Except in Romania, relatively few men (less than 15 percent) and women (13-31 percent) were married by age 25; again, a clear convergence occurs across countries. A marked decline in the proportion married is also observed at age 30, although considerable cross-country differences prevail: only 21 percent of Swedish men and 32 percent of Swedish women were married at that age, compared with 60 percent of Romanian men and 72 percent of Romanian women.

As the universality of marriage declines, marriage becomes more a manifestation of individual values and preferences, but is also subject to pragmatic decision-making, as unmarried people react more sensitively to macro-level policies and other factors that can facilitate or hinder marriage. This ‘instrumentalization of marriage’ (Salles 2006) can lead to distinct marriage booms and busts that occur in reaction to the actual or expected changes in public pensions, taxation, or marriage allowances. Such distinct marriage booms took place in Sweden in 1989 (Figure 1, see Sweden chapter and Andersson 1998), and in Austria in 1972, 1983, and 1987 (Austria chapter, Prioux 1993) In addition, short-term marriage booms may also be caused by such factors as ‘lucky’ dates in the calendar, like, for example, July 7, 2007 (07-07-07).

**Figure 3: Period mean age at first marriage for women, 1960-2004**



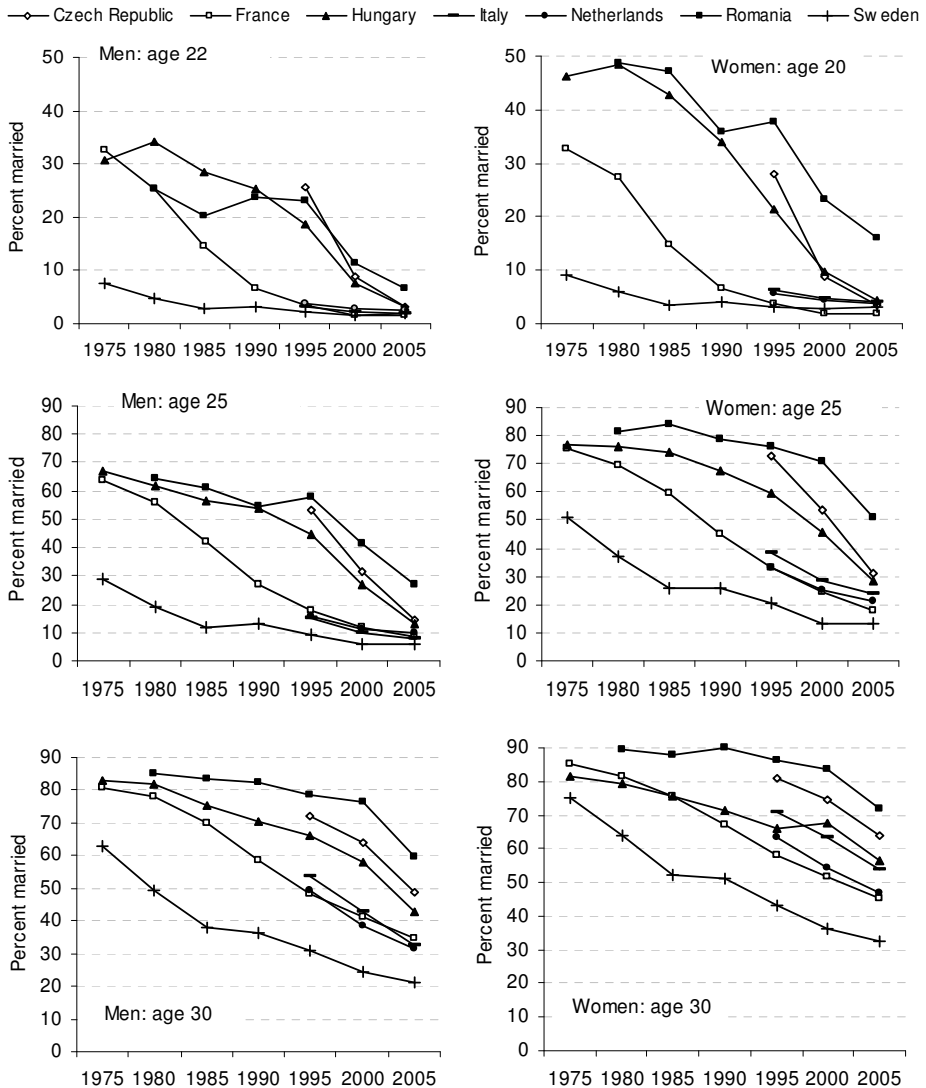
Source: Council of Europe 2006, Russian Federation chapter.

#### **4. The rise of cohabitation and the diversity of cohabiting unions**

The substantial rise in unmarried cohabitation, noted in most country chapters, constitutes a hallmark of the ongoing changes in family life in most developed countries. The unexpected spread of cohabitation and its diversity were initially neglected in sociological literature (Smock 2000). In recent decades these issues have been the subject of extensive demographic research in Europe (e.g., Trost 1979 and 1981, Hoem and Rennermalm 1985, Hoem 1986, Leridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp 1989, Liefbroer 1991, Blom 1994, Manting 1994, Blossfeld 1995, Prinz 1995, Toulemon 1997, Kiernan 1999 and 2004, Haskey 1999, Mills 2000, Murphy 2000, Nazio and Blossfeld 2003, Kasearu 2007) as well as in the United States (e.g., Bachrach 1987, Bumpass and Sweet 1989, Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990, Smock 2000, Bumpass and Lu 2000, Heuveline and Timberlake 2004, Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007). Contemporary research shows that the character and stability of cohabitation vary greatly between individuals, between countries, and over time. In this section, we provide a rough outline of cohabitation in contemporary Europe, and refer the reader for more detail to the more specific literature listed above.

Unmarried cohabitation is not a new phenomenon. It has been historically practiced in many countries of Central, Western, and Northern Europe among people who could not afford to marry, or who were not legally entitled to marry (e.g., separated individuals who could not dissolve their marriages); and, in the case of Sweden, also among some intellectuals opposed to church marriages (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1991, Kiernan 2004, Probert 2004). The reasons behind the contemporary spread of cohabitation tend to vary, however. Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1990: 704) argue that the rise in cohabitation is “the result of historical changes in the dating and sexual relationships among unmarried individuals (...) which in turn are grounded in the rise of individual in Western ideology.” There are different typologies of cohabitation (e.g., Prinz 1995, Heuveline and Timberlake 2004, Kasearu 2007), but the most frequent distinction is that drawn between cohabitation as a stage in the marriage process, and cohabitation as an alternative to marriage (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990). It is apparent that cohabiting unions are very heterogeneous, and include individuals with different social characteristics and very different expectations about the nature of their relationship (Murphy 2000). Although cohabiting unions are frequently compared to marriage, Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1990) suggest that they also have some attributes typical of single living.

**Figure 4: Proportion of women and men married at ages 20 (22), 25, and 30 in selected countries of Europe**



Source: Authors' computations based on Eurostat (2007).



Usually, cohabitation first spreads as a rather marginal phenomenon of relatively short duration, either among divorced and separated people, or as a short pre-marital experience—a sort of a ‘trial marriage,’ or as a part of the courtship process. During that first phase, marriage intensity may increase due to shotgun marriages (Munoz-Pérez and Prioux 2005). In this stage, cohabitation is not ‘competing’ with marriage, and is usually not seen as an appropriate arrangement for childbearing. Over time, cohabitation becomes increasingly popular and accepted by the society. It becomes a habitual or even a ‘normative’ form of entry into union for those who eventually plan to get married, but it also serves as a substitute for marriage: it lasts longer, becomes widely adopted among young adults (e.g., Toulemon 1997, Nazio and Blossfeld 2003) and “enters the arena of reproduction” (Smock 2000). Although unmarried cohabitation may eventually become a ‘marriage-like’ relationship, it is still not a complete substitute for marriage. First, unmarried partnerships remain more fragile than marriages (Prinz 1995, Smock 2000), even when children are born (Toulemon 1995, Andersson 2002 and 2003); and, second, the degree of legal recognition of cohabiting couples and their children differs widely across countries: as the registration of fathers is not compulsory in all countries, some children born to cohabiting mothers do not have a ‘legal father.’ Furthermore, in most societies, long-term cohabitation is more typical of economically disadvantaged couples, as individuals in an economically secure position are more likely to convert their cohabitation into marriage (Kravdal 1999, Oppenheimer 2003, Kiernan 2004).

Many European countries partly deviate from the general picture sketched above. But trends over time comprise three main stages, which are widely shared across countries (e.g., Blossfeld 1995, Toulemon 1997, Haskey 1999, Bumpass and Lu 2000, Mills 2000, Murphy 2000, Nazio and Blossfeld 2003, Steele et al. 2006, see also Russia chapter):

- 1) *Diffusion*: An increasing proportion of young adults enter a consensual union at the beginning of a partnership, and this eventually becomes a majority practice;
- 2) *Permanency*: Cohabitation lasts longer and is less frequently converted into marriage;
- 3) *Cohabitation as a family arrangement*: Pregnancy gradually ceases to be a very strong ‘determinant’ of marriage among cohabiting couples, and, as a result, childbearing among cohabiting couples becomes common.

Moreover, with the further spread of cohabitation, unmarried couples with children may become similar to married ones. The study of British women by Steele et al. (2006) found that, among younger cohorts of women born in 1970, childbearing

reduced the couples' risk of separation, suggesting that the presence of children 'cements' cohabiting partnerships. On the other hand, when cohabitation is widespread, couples married without prior cohabitation become more selected, and their risk of dissolution is smaller (Liefbroer and Dourleijn 2006).

In many countries, in the space of a few decades, cohabitation has almost completely replaced marriage as a normative choice of a first union (e.g., Sweden chapter). In France, a massive rise in cohabitation occurred between 1965 and 1995, when the proportion of couples starting their union by cohabitation soared from 10 to 90 percent (Toulemon 1997). In Austria and the Netherlands, the rule, 'cohabitation first, marriage later or never,' was widely embraced by the cohorts born in the 1960s and later (Austria and the Netherlands chapters). In Russia, the rise of cohabitation was dramatic among the cohorts born after 1960 (Russian Federation chapter), whereas in Hungary, a similar change occurred among the cohorts born between 1965 and 1975 and in the Czech Republic among the 1970s cohorts that reached adulthood after the political regime change in 1989 (Hungary and the Czech Republic chapters). Until recently it appeared that some countries, especially in Southern Europe, but also Poland or Romania, were relatively 'immune' to the erosion of marriage and the spread of cohabitation. Recent evidence, however, indicates that cohabitation is now spreading in these societies as well. For instance, Rosina and Fraboni (2004) found evidence of a "progressive diffusion" of cohabitation among younger generations of Italians, especially those living in Central and Northern Italy, and with higher levels of education. Cohabitation also spread rapidly in the 1990s in Spain, although the incidence of cohabitation remains limited there (Spain chapter). The Bulgaria chapter points out that the rise in cohabitation became particularly pronounced after the mid-1990s, i.e., some years after the start of the political transition. In Slovakia, where cohabitation remains less common among young adults, there was a marked rise during the 1990s in the proportion of women cohabiting in their twenties (Slovakia chapter). In some other post-communist countries, including Poland, Romania and Ukraine, cohabitation remains rather limited, and its prevalence is increasing only gradually (Poland, Romania, and Ukraine chapters). Albania, where the new living arrangements have not gained any significance yet, constitutes a notable exception: according to the 2005 data, only 0.2 percent of people aged 15-29 cohabited there (Gjonca et al. 2008:278).

Heuveline and Timberlake's (2004) study based on the FFS data provides the most thorough analysis of the diversity of cohabitation in Europe. It presents life table estimates of adulthood premarital cohabitation and childhood exposure to premarital cohabitation during the three-year reference period prior to the FFS survey, i.e., in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The study distinguishes countries where cohabitation remained a *marginal phenomenon*, and those where it was a *prelude to marriage* (i.e.,

of a relatively short duration, and with a low frequency of childbearing), a *stage in the marriage process* (i.e., usually leading to marriage, but often after a birth of a child or children), an *alternative to being single* (i.e., of relatively short duration and frequently ending in a separation rather than marriage), an *alternative to marriage* (i.e., of longer duration and frequently involving childbearing), and a status *indistinguishable from marriage*. Such a categorisation ignores the huge diversity of cohabiting couples in each country, and neglects rapid changes over time. Despite these limitations, cross-country contrasts remain large enough to justify this crude differentiation. Table 2 reproduces selected life table indicators estimated from another study based on the FFS (Andersson and Philipov 2002) for women in thirteen European countries and the United States, using the typology of countries proposed by Heuveline and Timberlake. Southern European countries (Italy and Spain), together with Poland, appear on the 'marginal' side of the cohabitation spectrum, with rather traditional Poland showing the highest resistance to cohabitation: only four percent of women were experiencing cohabitation as a first union by age 28, and only two percent of children were born to cohabiting couples (see also Poland chapter).

Sweden is the only society where cohabitation as a family-building institution evolves to be indistinguishable from marriage, and where children are born to cohabiting parents almost as frequently as to married parents (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004, see also Thomson 2005). Almost nine out of 10 Swedish women entered cohabitation as a first union by age 28, and 45 percent of all children were born to cohabiting couples. However, even in Sweden, childbearing intensities are still higher in marriage than in cohabitation, cohabiting unions are of a shorter duration, and many cohabiting unions are typically transformed into marriages, especially after the birth of the first or the second child (Sweden chapter). Cohabitation as an *alternative to marriage* was typical for France, and, outside of Europe, for Canada; whereas cohabitation as an *alternative to single living* was typical only for two non-European societies: New Zealand and the United States (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004). All the remaining European countries analysed by Heuveline and Timberlake belonged to the two categories in which cohabitation typically leads to marriage (*prelude to marriage* and *stage in marriage process*).

With a growing pressure to provide legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, but also with the rise of cohabitation, unmarried couples in an increasing number of European countries can either achieve a specific legal status by registering their partnership, or may be automatically granted some of the advantages and obligations conferred upon married couples. The legal approach to cohabiting couples varies widely across countries (Barlow 2004, Waaldijk 2005). In some countries, a functional approach is adopted, giving cohabiting couples some of the privileges of marriages

**Table 2: Selected life table estimates of cohabitation experience among women, based on the FFS analysis and the typology of cohabitation developed by Heuveline and Timberlake (in percent)**

Role of cohabitation	Country	Period of estimation	Incidence by age 28	Ending in marriage within 5 years	Ending in separation within 5 years	Children born to cohabiting parents
Marginal	Poland	1986-91	4	46	5	2
	Italy	1990-95	8	43	32	4
	Spain	1989-95	17	31	40	4
Prelude to marriage	Belgium (Flanders)	1985-92	28	53	17	4
	Czech Republic	1992-97	46	59	20	7
	Hungary	1988-93	27	47	32	6
Stage in marriage process	Austria	1990-96	67	43	24	19
	Finland	1979-92	76	48	25	13
	West Germany	1986-92	48	46	29	11
	Latvia	1989-95	51	48	34	11
Alternative to single	Slovenia	1989-95	50	52	14	16
		United States	1989-95	52	46	45
Alternative to marriage	France	1988-94	71	38	28	23
Indistinguishable from marriage	Sweden	1978-93	87	31	34	45

Sources: Data estimated by Andersson and Philipov (2002: Tables 4, 20, 21, and 30) on the basis of the FFS surveys. The typology of cohabitation was developed by Heuveline and Timberlake (2004: Table 4).

Notes: Most of the life table estimates of the incidence of cohabitation, conversion of cohabitation to marriage and the percentage of children born to cohabiting couples by Andersson and Philipov come very close to similar estimates provided by Heuveline and Timberlake (2004: Table 4). Data by Andersson and Philipov shown in this table are computed with the competing-risks life table method.

without requiring them to register their union (i.e., Australia, Canada, and to some extent, the United Kingdom, see Barlow 2004). This is also the case in Slovenia, where, since the adoption of the Marriage and Family Relations Act in 1976, long-lasting cohabitation has “practically the same legal consequences for the couple and their children as marriage” (Stropnik and Šircelj 2008:1031). In Sweden, this functional approach is applied to opposite-sex cohabiting couples, while same-sex cohabiting couples may register their partnerships (this is also possible in other Nordic countries, following the pioneering example of Denmark from 1989, see Festy 2006). In many other European countries, cohabiting couples of the opposite sex are treated as unrelated persons, and are not granted any other rights or privileges; whereas same-sex couples, who are not entitled to marriage, can achieve legal recognition by registering their partnership. In Spain, same-sex couples are allowed to marry and partnership registration is possible in some regions as well (Barlow 2004). Countries allowing

partnership registration also widely differ in the number of rights and benefits, including parental rights, granted to registered couples (Waaldijk 2005, Festy 2006). Belgium and the Netherlands grant access to marriage, as well as to partnership registration, to both same-sex and opposite-sex couples; whereas France does not authorize gay marriage, but provides access to ‘civil registration’ to all couples. According to Barlow (2004: 65-66), French and Belgian civil partnerships come closest to recognising cohabitation as a specific family life arrangement that is distinct from marriage, and that endows couples with increased family-style rights and obligations.

In countries where opposite-sex couples were also allowed to register their partnerships, such as France and the Netherlands, they soon outnumbered same-sex couples seeking registration. In France, the new form of civil union, called *Pacte civil de solidarité* (PACS), became relatively popular soon after it was introduced in 1999 (France chapter). In 2005, a record number of 59,800 PACS were registered, compared with 271,600 marriages (see Prioux 2006 and France chapter). This evidence suggests that there is a substantial demand among cohabiting couples to obtain legal recognition of their partnership without getting married. The new forms of registered partnerships and their variety across countries also blur some of the boundaries between marriage and cohabiting union, and constitute a challenge for demographic research on union formation.

## **5. Changes in living arrangements of young adults and the delayed entry into first union**

### **5.1 Living arrangements of young adults**

In addition to unmarried cohabitation, other living arrangements have become more widespread. This section, dealing with living arrangements of young adults, is further complemented with an analysis of living arrangements of ‘younger’ parents (under age 45) in Section 7.3. There is lack of coherent data that would allow us to easily analyse and compare recent changes in the importance of various living arrangements for young adults across Europe. To provide at least a broad snapshot, we employ two different data sources for a number of countries grouped into broader regions: census data showing household arrangements of men and women in 2000 or 2001 (Eurostat 2008, see Table 3);<sup>6</sup> and the period life tables, estimated by Andersson and Philipov (2002) on

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<sup>6</sup> We excluded countries with incomplete records on the selected living arrangements, namely France, Latvia, and Lithuania.

the basis of the FFS data, and pertaining to the 1980s and the early 1990s (Appendix Table A1). Census data, presented in Table 3, distinguish between the three main types of living arrangements of young adults (living with parents, living single, living with a partner). For those who live with a partner, we also show the percentage cohabiting and the percentage with children.

Regional contrasts in the fraction of young adults still living in the parental home are broadly consistent with the analysis of home-leaving patterns in Section 2, although the percentages are higher than would correspond to the median age at home leaving for the 1960 cohort, reported in Table 1. This indicates that the ‘nest-leaving’ has been generally postponed in most countries during the last two decades. Northern Europe, especially Denmark, and parts of Western Europe (especially for women) continue to display a rather low percentage of young adults living with parents. Particularly for men, living in the parental home often becomes a permanent living arrangement throughout their young adult years. In Southern Europe, between 48 percent (Portugal) and 60 percent (Italy) of men aged 20-34 still live with their parents. This finding is consistent with the FFS life table analysis, according to which young adult men in Italy and Spain spend around a half of their time between ages 15 and 39 living with their parents. A high percentage of young adults, especially men, in Central and Eastern Europe also co-resided with their parents around 2000; this proportion equals that observed in Southern Europe for men in the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia; and for women in Slovenia.

In countries with an early home-leaving pattern and larger availability of affordable housing, especially in Northern and Western Europe, many young adults who have left the parental home live alone or share a household with their friends or age-mates for longer periods of time (the Netherlands chapter). In all analysed countries, living single is more common among young men than among women, which is also shown in the FFS data: in Nordic countries, men spend between 12 and 15 percent of time between ages 15 and 39 living single, and as much as 19 percent in West Germany (Table 3; see also Germany chapter). In Southern Europe, Ireland, and most of Central and Eastern Europe, living single is still a rather marginal experience, especially for women. There are, however, signs that more young adults now live single in some Central European countries than was common in the past (the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovakia in Table 3, see also the Czech Republic chapter). Low affordability of housing remains a paramount factor, limiting a faster spread of this living arrangement (the Czech Republic and Slovenia chapters).

Living in union constitutes the most common living arrangement for the group of women aged 20-34 as a whole (except Italy, Slovenia, and Spain), but for young men in Austria, Ireland, post-communist Central Europe, and Southern Europe, it is more common to live with parents than to live with a partner. Only around a quarter of young

adult men live in union in Greece, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain. Central and Eastern European countries are characterised by a high percentage of unions with children, suggesting that many couples still have children soon after they start living together. This region is also most diverse with respect to the percentage of couples who cohabit (see also Overview Chapter 6), although a word of caution is warranted here: Many young adults do not register changes in their address when they move out of the parental home to live single or to cohabit, and they also tend to report their official place of residence in the census, especially if they come back to the parental nest from time to time. This leads to a potential over-reporting of living in the parental home, and underreporting of living single and of unmarried cohabitation in the census data.<sup>7</sup>

Many young adults who live with their parents or as singles have a steady partner living at a different address. This arrangement, frequently called ‘living apart together’ (LAT), has in part substituted postponed union formation. It is commonly perceived as an intermittent relationship, which is “monogamous in nature and an arrangement that is more than a temporary, fleeting, or casual relationship.” (Haskey 2005:36; see also Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997). LAT often comes close to ‘steady dating,’ which was also commonly practised in the past, but LAT is usually considered as a more stable and lasting situation, in which partners perceive themselves as living as a couple, although not in the same dwelling. It may also involve shorter spells of co-residence (‘semi-cohabitation,’ ‘weekend couples’). Because of their unclear definition and diverse character, LAT relationships have not been extensively studied to date (Haskey 2005 lists studies conducted in different developed countries). Haskey’s estimates for the United Kingdom show that LAT is particularly common among men and women in their early twenties. Of those who are unmarried, four out of ten people aged 20-24 are in an LAT relationship, as are one-quarter of those aged 25-34. Pinnelli’s (2001: 61-62) analysis of the FFS data shows that, in a typical European country, 12-13 percent of women aged 20-39 are in an LAT relationship, with Poland having the lowest proportion, 2.8 percent; and Italy having the highest proportion, 20.5 percent. Different definitions, however, may yield different estimates of the prevalence of this phenomenon (Haskey 2005).

For many couples, a LAT arrangement was chosen as a (temporary) solution dictated by their current circumstances, most frequently housing constraints (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997, Pinnelli 2001). Nevertheless, in some countries living apart together is seen as a desirable way to live by an increasing share of the population (the

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<sup>7</sup> We do not know how large is the bias in the census data attributable to this ‘failure’ to report the actual residence (and thus the actual living arrangement). In the Czech Republic, for instance, the level of cohabitation reported in the census data is well below that reported in the surveys (Zeman 2003, the Czech Republic chapter).

Netherlands chapter). Sobotka and Testa (2008) have found that LAT was most frequently preferred as a living arrangement by younger men and women in Germany: in Western Germany, 12 percent of childless women and 14 percent of childless men aged 18-39 expressed preference for an LAT relationship. It is plausible that LAT arrangements are on the rise, especially in Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe, owing to the expansion of higher education and the low affordability of housing. In the case of Southern Europe, where more young adults co-reside with their parents, cultural preferences may also play a role. LAT provides young adults with some advantages of cohabitation, especially of having a sexual relationship, without a need to establish their own household. In countries with progressively delayed home leaving patterns, parents have increasingly accommodated the rising demand for privacy on the part of their adult children, and commonly allow their children to pursue a sexual relationship with their partners in the parental home (see Dalla Zuanna 2001: 146 for Italy; the increased freedom and autonomy of adult children living with parents is also noted in the Spain chapter).

**Table 3: Living arrangements among women and men aged 20-34, in percent (2000-2001)**

WOMEN	In parental home	Single, no children	In union	Other	Of those in union	
					Cohabiting	With children
<b>Northern Europe</b>						
Denmark	5.2	26.9	61.3	6.6	50.3	60.4
Finland	11.0	17.8	58.3	12.8	48.8	57.1
Norway	19.8	15.5	53.6	11.1	45.4	72.8
<b>Western Europe</b>						
Ireland	31.9	3.7	38.6	25.8	31.0	59.4
The Netherlands	14.6	17.4	61.3	6.7	39.3	52.7
United Kingdom	15.9	8.0	52.4	23.7	38.5	58.6
<b>German-speaking countries</b>						
Austria	23.3	12.7	51.2	12.8	27.5	72.4
Germany	18.1	17.2	56.6	8.1	26.6	63.3
Switzerland	15.5	17.4	53.0	14.1	23.8	57.8
<b>Southern Europe</b>						
Greece	34.3	5.2	47.3	13.3	6.7	74.6
Italy	45.6	4.8	42.7	6.9	8.5	68.6
Portugal	34.1	4.0	54.6	7.3	12.3	74.6
Spain	45.9	4.4	37.7	12.0	15.6	62.3
<b>Central and Eastern Europe</b>						
Czech Republic	28.7	8.3	47.5	15.5	9.2	85.6
Estonia	16.0	10.6	52.9	20.5	40.8	81.7
Hungary	25.8	5.6	55.1	13.6	21.2	78.1
Poland	32.7	6.5	46.8	14.1	4.3	85.1
Romania	22.2	2.6	64.2	10.9	12.0	80.7
Slovak Republic	33.5	8.0	47.2	11.3	3.8	90.1
Slovenia	43.4	2.7	42.0	12.0	23.0	86.8



**Table 3: (Continued) Living arrangements among women and men aged 20-34, in percent (2000-2001)**

MEN	In parental home	Single, no children	In union	Other	Of those in union	
					Cohabiting	With children
<b>Northern Europe</b>						
Denmark	10.1	41.2	48.4	0.4	56.3	54.1
Finland	22.3	21.6	47.0	9.1	54.0	51.1
Norway	31.7	25.1	39.3	3.9	50.6	68.0
<b>Western Europe</b>						
Ireland	44.2	5.5	30.5	19.9	34.8	55.2
The Netherlands	26.7	23.0	46.7	3.6	46.1	45.0
United Kingdom	28.0	12.1	43.7	16.1	43.8	53.9
<b>German-speaking countries</b>						
Austria	38.4	16.4	37.1	8.1	32.6	68.0
Germany	31.0	24.6	41.2	3.2	31.8	57.9
Switzerland	25.2	22.2	38.1	14.4	28.7	51.5
<b>Southern Europe</b>						
Greece	49.5	6.0	26.4	18.1	9.5	64.9
Italy	60.0	7.1	26.9	5.9	9.9	61.8
Portugal	47.6	4.7	42.8	5.0	13.2	69.5
Spain	56.1	6.2	26.9	10.8	18.2	55.6
<b>Central and Eastern Europe</b>						
Czech Republic	46.5	14.0	34.2	5.4	10.5	82.5
Estonia	32.3	14.1	44.6	8.9	44.5	78.6
Hungary	41.9	6.8	41.4	9.9	24.4	73.8
Poland	50.7	8.8	35.3	5.2	4.5	82.4
Romania	40.5	3.5	48.5	7.5	14.6	75.5
Slovak Republic	49.1	12.8	34.6	3.5	4.2	88.1
Slovenia	62.8	4.5	26.5	6.2	26.3	82.7

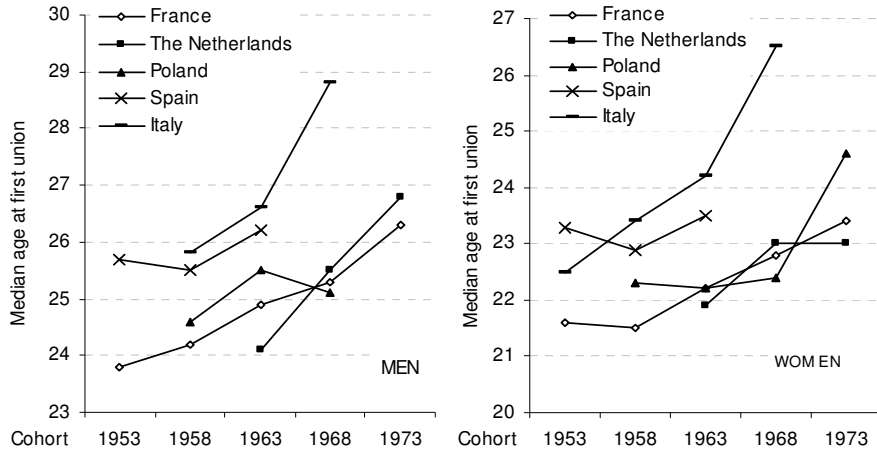
Source: Own computations based on the 2000-2001 Census data provided by Eurostat (2008).

Complex households including more than one nuclear family are still present in Southern Europe, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe, in part because a significant share of cohabiting or married young adults live with their parents (see Section 2), but also because many lone mothers and fathers reside with their parents or other relatives. For instance, in Southern Europe—specifically, in Greece, Italy, and Spain—25 to 40 percent of lone parents live with other relatives (Chambaz 2000). These arrangements belong, together with single parents and people living in institutions and student houses, to the last category (‘Other’) in Table 3.

## **5.2 Delayed entry into first union**

The decline of marriage has not been fully offset by an increase in unmarried cohabitation. Consequently, the proportion of adults living in union has decreased, mostly because of the delay of entry into a first union, but also because of more union disruptions that are not rapidly followed by a second union (Philipov 2006). The age at entering first co-residential union has increased most rapidly in Southern Europe, and only gradually in Northern and Western Europe. In France, the median age of women at first union has increased in conjunction with prolonged education and rising unemployment (Prioux 2003). For both women and men born in the early 1970s, the age has risen by more than two years, from a low of 21.5 (women) and 23.8 years (men) among the late 1950s cohorts (see Figure 5). In countries with a late home leaving age and relatively low prevalence of cohabitation, the median age at first union for women has increased with much higher intensity, leading to greater cross-country diversity (Figure 5). For instance, the mean age at entering first union among Italian women increased from 22.5 among the 1951-55 cohorts to 26.5 among the 1966-70 cohorts. The increase has been even more intensive for Italian men, among whom only a quarter had started living with a partner by age 27 in the youngest cohort observed (1966-70, see Ongaro 2001: Table 8.1).

**Figure 5: Cohort median age at entering first union for women and men in selected countries of Europe**



Source: Prioux 2003 for France (pp. 574-575, Table B in Appendix II) and data tables in country studies in Corijn and Klijzing 2001.

Notes: For all countries except France data were computed for 5-year cohort groups and do not refer to the one particular cohort shown in the graphs: e.g., 1953 holds for 1951-55. Data for Poland show median age at first marriage for the cohorts displayed in the figure, as cohabitation was very rare.

## 6. Rising divorce rates: Large differences in Central and Eastern Europe

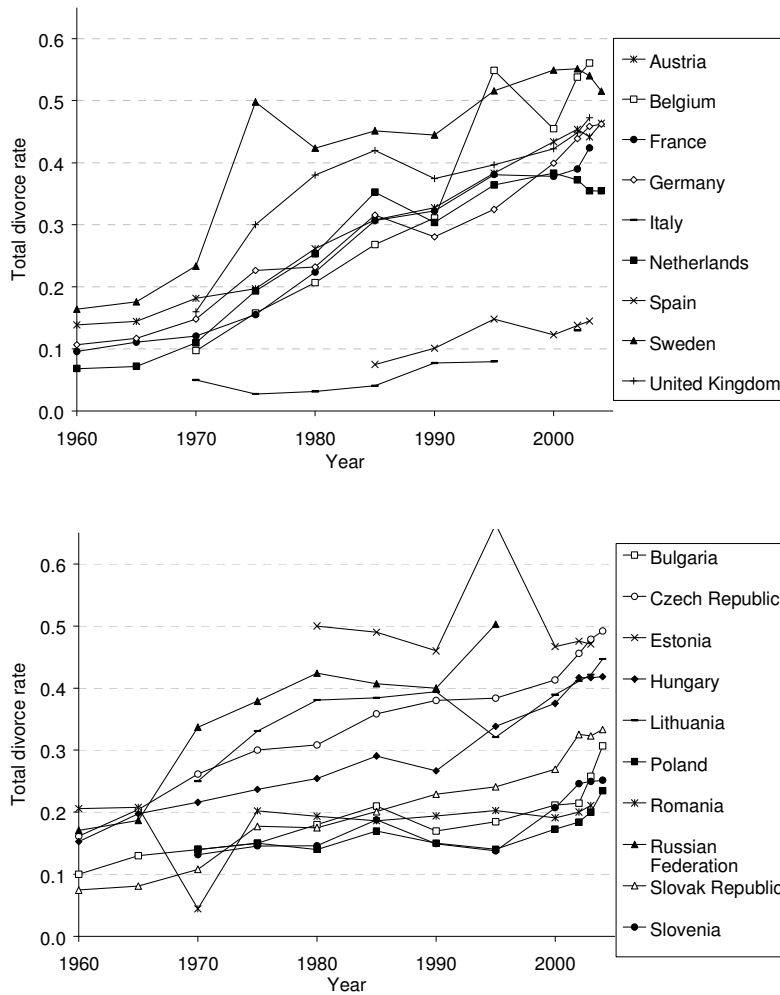
At the beginning of the 21st century, most European countries are experiencing high divorce rates, typically two to five times higher than in the 1960s. In a number of countries, including all the Nordic countries, Belgium, United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Russia, the period total divorce rate (TDR) has reached around 0.5, indicating that under a long-term continuation of current divorce rates, around one-half of all marriages will end up in divorce. In addition, cohabiting unions, which are increasingly common, have higher levels of dissolution than marriage, implying that union dissolution has become a common experience for contemporary Europeans, especially those born after 1960. Consequently, living arrangements and family forms have also become more diverse due to the rising numbers of divorced and separated individuals living alone, with their children, or with their new partners (an arrangement aptly termed ‘re-partnering’). Experiencing family disruption and living with a single

mother or with a stepparent have become increasingly common experiences for children (Heuveline, Timberlake, and Furstenberg 2003, see also Section 7.3).

There has been a universal trend of increasing divorce rates since the 1970s in all parts of Europe (Figure 6). The range of the total divorce rate (TDR) in Europe is currently very wide, from fewer than 10 divorces per 100 initial marriages, to more than 50. However, in contrast to some other indicators of family behaviour, there is no consistent East-West differentiation in divorce rates. Some countries of Central and Eastern Europe exhibit very high divorce rates typical of Northern Europe and parts of Western Europe (e.g., the Czech Republic, Hungary, and almost all the countries of the former Soviet Union), while a number of more traditional or socially conservative countries (e.g., Macedonia, Poland, and Romania) exhibit divorce rates that are well below the European average (e.g., Romania chapter). In Southern Europe, divorce rates also remain relatively low, although they increased markedly after 1990, when the TDR was still at or below 0.1. Some countries of the former Soviet Union can be considered 'forerunners' of the trend towards high divorce rates, experiencing the highest divorce levels in Europe during the 1950s and the 1960s (e.g., Estonia, Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine), with Latvia already registering a total divorce rate of 0.5 in the late 1960s. The Russian Federation chapter suggests that high divorce rates in Russia were in part linked to the high frequency of 'shotgun marriages' that led to high intra-family tension, and to conflicts with relatives.

Time trend data on dissolution rates of unmarried unions are generally not available, with the exception of the dissolutions of registered partnerships in countries where this form of un-married union is legally recognised and recorded in vital statistics. Life table analysis of the FFS data by Andersson and Philipov (2002: Table 20) shows that, in most European countries, between one-fifth and one-third of cohabiting unions dissolve within five years, with Spain reaching the highest dissolution rate of 40 percent (and, outside of Europe, the United States reaching an even higher rate of 45 percent; see Table 2 above). As in the case of marriage, the rates of dissolution of unmarried couples may become increasingly linked to the presence of children (Steele et al. 2006).

**Figure 6: Total divorce rates in selected countries of Europe, 1960-2004**



Source: Council of Europe, 2006.

The increasing economic independence of women, which is closely linked to their participation in the labour force, made divorce increasingly possible,<sup>8</sup> as did the introduction of welfare provisions for women who are not economically active (the Netherlands chapter; see also Kalmijn 2007). Despite the continued negative perception of divorce in some countries (e.g., Romania chapter), divorce rates are unlikely to remain low in societies where divorce is still rare, and the current cross-country heterogeneity will probably diminish in the future. The frequency of divorce is partly influenced by legislation (Stevenson and Wolfers 2007). In some countries, permissive legislation contributes to the ‘normalisation’ of divorce (e.g., the Netherlands chapter), whereas in other countries it makes divorce rather difficult to obtain, for example, by not allowing an easy divorce by mutual consent. Moreover, legislation in a number of countries, including Ireland, Italy, and Spain, stipulates legal separation as a precondition or an alternative to full-fledge divorce. In 2001, a new form of marriage dissolution, termed ‘flash annulment’ or ‘lightning divorce,’ opened up in the Netherlands. It came about as an unexpected consequence of the legislation authorizing registered partnerships (Barlow 2004). Under this procedure, a couple mutually downgrades their marriage into a registered partnership, which can subsequently be easily dissolved without being recorded as a divorce (the Netherlands chapter).

## **7. The declining importance of marriage for childbearing and childrearing**

### **7.1 Marriage is no longer a precondition to childbearing and the key step in the transition to adulthood**

The increase in mean age at marriage is a consequence of the postponement of almost all transitions to adulthood (completion of education, union formation, starting a first job, and, in many countries, leaving the parental home), and of an increasing propensity among young adults to enter a union without marriage, and to delay or even forego marriage when they live as a couple. These changes have been extensively analysed with the FFS data (Billari, Philipov and Baizán 2001, Corijn and Klijzing 2001, Macura and Beets 2002, Prioux 2006). The declining importance of marriage is further illustrated by the data on the rise of cohabitation (see also Section 4) and by the rising

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to providing economic independence, labour force participation of women may contribute to partnership instability by expanding their as well as men’s opportunities to meet a new partner (Stevenson and Wolfers 2007).

diversity of sequences in the early life course transitions, and in the ages when these transitions are commonly experienced.

For younger cohorts, marriage does not seem to have any relevance as a setting for sexual expression: in many countries, the mean age at first marriage is now more than ten years higher than the median age at sexual debut, which is typically around 17-18 in most countries of Europe (Bozon 2003, Kontula 2003, these figures refer to the early 1970s cohorts) and very few couples experience first sex after marriage (see also Overview Chapter 6). The general trend is also characterised by a weakening of the relationship between first union, first birth, and marriage. In a growing number of countries, marriage has become rather unusual as a form of first union, whereas periods of cohabitation, both pre-marital and serving as an alternative to marriage, are increasing in duration (see Section 4). In Western and Northern Europe, as well as in Estonia, only a minority of women born in the 1960s married 'directly,' without previous cohabitation (Prioux 2006).

Furthermore, marriage is no longer seen as the only appropriate arrangement for childbearing. Many people who intend to have a child do not feel any rush to marry, and pregnancy is not a very strong determinant of marriage either. This is in contrast to the situation in the early 1970s, when unmarried cohabitation did not last long, and the probability of marrying was very high among cohabiting couples. Many first marriages took place during the woman's pregnancy, probably due to the social pressure to give birth within marriage (see chapters on Austria, England and Wales, the Netherlands, and France; Toulemon 1995). With the increasing use of more efficient contraception, especially the pill, couples could delay first marriage, as well as the birth of their first child. In the view of van de Kaa (1994), the spread of modern contraception facilitated changes in values and attitudes related to sexuality and reproduction which, in turn, have led to the disconnection of marriage from procreation, and to the rise of new living arrangements. Thus, contraceptive technology, which had the potential to strengthen the link between marriage and reproduction by reducing unwanted pre-marital and extramarital pregnancies, also made it possible to have almost risk-free sexual intercourse without being married. Contraception thus opened the way to a new model of reproduction, which is only loosely linked to marriage. As a result, there are fewer conceptions followed by a 'shotgun marriage,' more long-lasting unions which are not converted to marriages, and fewer births conceived during the first years of marriage. These changes have taken place since the 1970s in Austria, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and in many other countries of Western and Northern Europe; but only since the early 1990s in the Czech Republic, and even more recently in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and the Ukraine (see the respective chapters).

As a result, there is no longer a dominant standard biography of family formation (Rindfuss 1991; Germany chapter). The once 'normative' pathway of 'direct' marriage

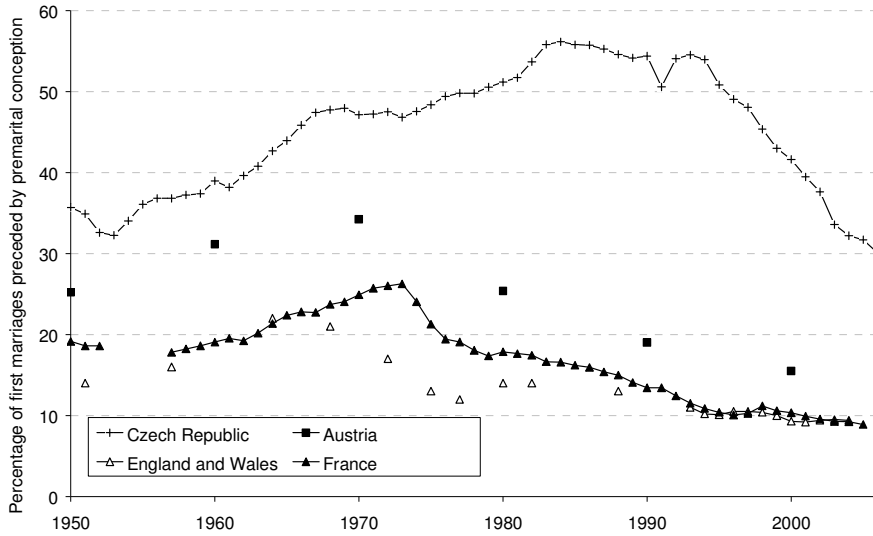
(without previous cohabitation) followed by childbearing has been increasingly replaced by a number of alternative pathways: in some societies, the sequence of cohabitation – marriage – childbearing has become most common, while in other countries, the sequence of ‘cohabitation–first or second birth–marriage’ is now the most prevalent pattern, and many couples with children do not marry at all.<sup>9</sup> The increasing frequency of marriages involving the ‘legitimisation’ of children can be illustrated by the example of France, where the proportion of marriages of couples with child(ren) increased rapidly during the 1980s and the 1990s, from five to seven percent in the 1950s through the 1970s, to 29 percent in 2000 (Munoz-Pérez and Prioux 2005: 354, Annex 4). The phenomenon of shotgun marriages (i.e., the sequence of ‘pregnancy, within or outside cohabiting union–marriage–first birth’) initially increased in prevalence as a result of an early decline in the relevance of marriage for sexual activity, and the associated rise in unplanned (‘accidental’) conceptions. As marriage was still considered important for childbearing, many couples decided to ‘legalise’ their union before childbirth, while other couples conceived a child once they had finalised their plans to marry. The frequency of shotgun weddings later declined as a result of a loosening tie between marriage and childbearing, and pregnant women are now more likely to start cohabiting or remain in a cohabiting relationship instead of marrying in response to a pregnancy (Smock 2000, Steele et al. 2006, Toulemon 1995). In Western and Northern Europe, the share of first marriages that were preceded by a premarital conception peaked between 1965 and 1975, and subsequently declined between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s (Austria chapter; see Figure 7 for trends in shotgun marriages in selected countries). A similar development took place about a decade later in Southern Europe. Meanwhile, in Central and Eastern Europe, marriages ‘under the pressure of pregnancy’ remained very common, at least until the 1990s, and a large majority of children conceived outside marriage were eventually born within marriage (the Czech Republic and Slovakia chapters; see also Munoz-Pérez 1991, Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna 1994).

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<sup>9</sup> Elzinga and Liefbroer (2007: 247) note that the evidence in the Netherlands and Sweden, where almost all young people enter their first union through cohabitation, suggests that new standards of behaviour may be emerging over time, leading eventually to a ‘re-standardisation’ of family behaviour and living arrangements.



**Figure 7: Percentage of first marriages following a conception in Austria, the Czech Republic, England and Wales, and France, 1950-2006**



Source: Austria the Czech Republic, and England and Wales chapters; own calculations from Beaumel et al. 2007, Hobcraft 1996, and ONS 2007.

Note: Percentage of pre-marital conceptions refers to the fraction of all marital first births in a given year that took place within eight months following the marriage (Czech Republic and Austria) or the percentage of marriages with pre-maritally conceived birth (England and Wales and France).

As marriages have been postponed more intensively than births, and the share of extramarital births has remained highest at younger ages, first marriages now take place in most countries at higher ages than first births. This pattern is most pronounced in Sweden, where first marriage takes place on average almost three years later than the birth of a first child, suggesting that marriages have become more frequent among parents than among childless couples. Among the countries analysed in Table 4, only Italy and several countries of Central and Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia) recorded a higher mean age of mothers at first birth than the mean age of women at first marriage in 2005.

**Table 4: Mean age at first birth and at first marriage among women in selected European countries, 1970 and 2005<sup>(1)</sup>**

	Mean age at first birth			Mean age at first marriage			Age at first birth - Age at first marriage <sup>(2)</sup>	
	1970	2005	Change	1970	2005	Change	1970	2005
Austria	24.1	27.2	3.1	22.9	28.6	5.7	0.3	-1.4
	(1984)						(1984)	
Bulgaria	22.1	24.7	2.6	21.4	25.8	4.4	0.7	-1.1
Czech Republic	22.5	26.6	4.1	21.6	26.4	4.8	0.9	0.2
France	24.0	27.7	3.7	22.6	29.4	6.8	1.4	-1.7
Hungary	22.8	26.7	3.9	21.5	26.7	5.2	1.3	0.0
Italy	25.1	28.7	3.6	23.9	28.5	4.6	1.2	1.5
		(1997)			(2003)			(1997)
Lithuania	24.0	24.9	0.9	23.2	25.0	1.8	0.8	-0.2
	(1978)			(1978)	(2004)		(1978)	(2004)
The Netherlands	24.8	28.9	4.1	22.9	29.1	6.2	1.9	-0.2
Poland	23.4			22.8				
	(1971)	25.8	2.4	(1971)	25.4	2.6	0.6	0.4
Romania	22.6	24.8	2.2	21.9	25.4	3.5	0.7	-0.6
Russian Federation	23.1	24.1	0.9	22.5	23.3	0.8	0.6	0.7
	(1978)			(1978)	(2004)			(2004)
Slovenia	23.7	27.7	4.0	23.1	28.5	5.4	0.6	-0.8
Spain	25.1	29.3	4.2	23.9	29.3	5.4	1.2	0.0
	(1975)			(1975)				
Sweden	24.2	28.7	4.5	23.9	31.5	7.6	-0.3	-2.8
	(1974)						(1974)	
England and Wales	23.7	27.3	3.6	22.4	27.2	4.8	1.3	-0.8
					(2000)			(2000)

Source: Eurostat 2007, Council of Europe 2006, Russian Federation chapter, and national statistical offices.

Notes: (1) To make the data on the mean age at first birth comparable, this table includes only countries that collect data on biological ('true') birth order of children or countries for which expert estimates for the biological birth order are available. Thus, we do not include data for Germany and we use the following estimates on the mean age at first birth: France (France chapter, Toulemon and Mazuy 2001), Russian Federation (Russian Federation chapter), and England and Wales (Smallwood 2002 and ONS 2007).

(2) For countries where data on both mean age at first birth and at first marriage in 1970 and 2005 are not available, the computation of the difference between these ages is shown for another year (as indicated in brackets). This year does not always correspond to the years shown in the previous columns of the table (also indicated in brackets when different from the default years).

## 7.2 More children born outside marriage, to an unmarried couple or to a single mother

The disconnection of childbearing from marriage is most clearly illustrated by a steep rise in the proportion of non-marital births over the last three decades that began in many countries in the early 1970s (earlier in Northern Europe, see Figure 8). This does not imply a similar increase in the frequency of single motherhood, as extramarital births are, with increasing frequency, taking place in the context of stable cohabiting partnerships (see below). In total, one-third of all births in the EU-25 occurred outside

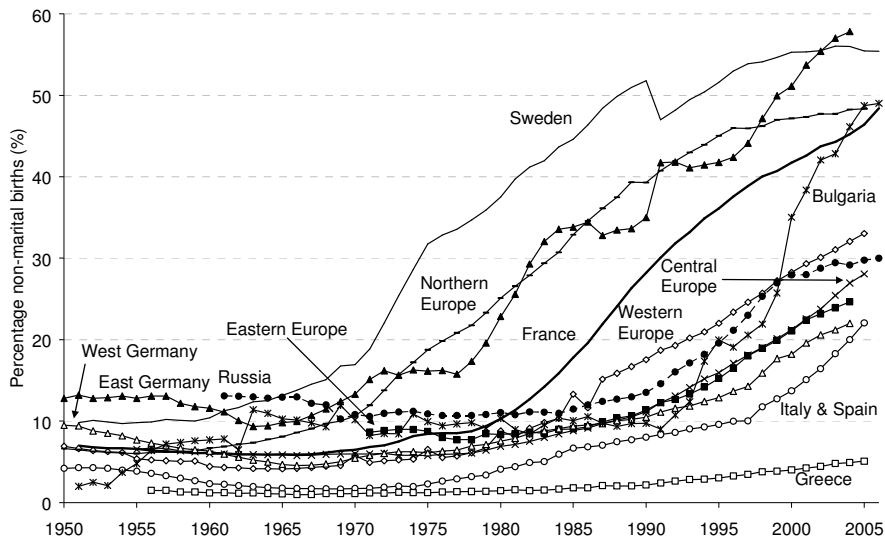
marriage in 2005, up from five percent during the 1960s, and 18 percent in 1990 (Eurostat 2006a). This change accelerated in Central and Eastern Europe after the breakdown of state socialism in 1989, and in Italy and Spain after 1995. The recent rise in extramarital childbearing in the latter two countries might seem surprising, given the persistent importance of marriage and traditional family bonds in these societies (Reher 1998; Dalla Zuanna 2001). It is linked to the rise in cohabitation (see Rosina and Fraboni 2004 for Italy), but also to an influx of immigrants from the countries where extramarital childbearing is common (see Spain chapter). In most societies where childbearing outside wedlock had remained rare until recently, such as Belgium, Italy, or Poland, it is a common phenomenon now. Only in Albania, Cyprus, and Greece do extramarital births remain marginal, accounting for less than six percent of all births in 2005. Albania, where only 0.5 percent of births in 2003 were non-marital, is the most extreme outlier (Albania chapter). A growing number of countries and regions register a majority of births outside marriage. In 2005, Estonia, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the former GDR (East Germany) were in this group, and it is likely that Bulgaria, France, and Slovenia will follow suit. Interestingly, in the Nordic countries that experienced an early and dramatic rise in extramarital childbearing, the proportion has stabilized since the late 1990s, after reaching a level of about half of all births. First births, in particular, frequently occur outside marriage (Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the Netherlands chapters). For instance, almost one-half (49.6 percent) of first births in Austria were outside marriage in 2005, compared with 36.5 percent of all births (Austria chapter).

Despite common trends, contemporary Europe is characterised by considerable diversity in non-marital childbearing. As in the case of divorce, this division does not follow simple geographical boundaries or old geo-political lines. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in particular, remain very diverse in this respect, comprising countries with both very low and very high percentages of non-marital births. Differences within countries also remain pronounced, following long-established religious and cultural divisions, as well as different historical patterns (e.g., the Czech Republic chapter). Germany constitutes a specific case of persistent regional differentiation in non-marital childbearing: the already high percentage of non-marital births in Eastern Germany shot up further after unification in 1990, whereas the percentage of non-marital births in Western Germany increased gradually, remaining below the EU average (Figure 8; see Germany chapter for an overview of various hypotheses for this divergence; see also Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2002 and Salles 2006). Differences between ethnic groups can also be large. For example, the Bulgaria chapter notes a very steep rise in the ratio of extramarital births among the Roma population—to around 55 percent in 2001—which can be explained by a rise in *de facto*

marriages that are not legally registered, and that are recognised only within the Roma community.

Childbearing outside marriage covers various family forms, which have different implications for the economic position and well-being of parents and their children (Heuveline, Timberlake and Furstenberg 2003; Kiernan 2004). It is essential to make a distinction between children born within consensual unions, and those born outside a stable partnership union. For the latter group, it is often difficult to differentiate between mothers who bring up their children without a father, and couples who do not live together, but have some relationship and act as a 'parental couple.' Some mothers who do not live with a partner, and who are thus identified as 'lone mothers,' may in

**Figure 8: Percentage of children born outside marriage in selected countries and regions of Europe (1950-2005)**



Source: Council of Europe 2006, Eurostat 2006a and 2006b, Grünheid 2006.

Notes: Regional data are not weighted by the population size of given countries.

Countries are grouped into regions as follows:

Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom;

Northern Europe: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden;

Central Europe: Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia;

Eastern Europe: Belarus, Moldova (excluding Transnistria), Russia (including Asian part), Ukraine.

fact have a long-term relationship with the father of the child(ren). The information included in the FFS about the status of couples at the time of the birth of children is very useful in distinguishing between unmarried parental couples and lone mothers. In Northern Europe and most countries of Western Europe, a majority of extramarital births are planned, intended by both parents, and usually take place within the context of stable cohabiting unions. In Sweden, where the proportion of extramarital births has been the second highest in Europe for many decades (after Iceland), only around one-tenth of births are to single mothers, and many couples marry after having their first or second child (Sweden chapter). In France, where parents who recognise their non-marital child have rights and duties identical to those of parents of children born within marriage, around 94 percent of children are recognised by their fathers (France chapter; see also Munoz-Pérez and Prioux 2000). At the same time, in some countries of Western Europe, a relatively high proportion of first births take place before a woman enters her first union (Table 5). In Central and Eastern Europe, single mothers account for a large portion of all extramarital births (Heuveline, Timberlake and Furstenberg 2003). In some of these countries, non-marital births may still largely be unplanned (Romania chapter), and may meet with disapproval among the majority population (Poland chapter, see also Overview Chapter 6). Coleman (2006) posits that births among single mothers are partly fuelled by specific welfare policies providing support to single mothers (see also González 2005 and Salles 2006). The Austria chapter offers the same explanation for the unusually high proportion of children born to lone mothers, who represent one-fifth of all first children (see Table 5). Arguably, some single mothers may intentionally live separately from their partners in order to qualify for the higher parental leave payments granted exclusively to mothers who live alone.

Overall, the proportion of births outside marriage is closely linked to the proportion of women living in unmarried cohabitation. Most non-marital births take place within unmarried unions, and the key explanations of rising non-marital fertility relate to cohabitation; namely, to a combination of the rising number of people entering cohabiting unions, the longer duration of these unions, and the declining propensity of unmarried couples to get married during the pregnancy (Raley 2001, Kiernan 2004, Philipov 2006, Steele et al. 2006). The Netherlands chapter notes a shift that has occurred since the 1960s, when most extramarital children were born to young single women, usually with low levels of education, who had not planned to become pregnant. In contrast, most births to unmarried mothers today take place “within a relationship, usually to a couple in their late 20s or early 30s who have made a conscious decision to have a child and obviously do not (yet) see the necessity to marry” (Fokkema et al. 2008:756). Data for France and England and Wales further illustrate this shift: as the proportion of non-marital births rises, ever higher percentages of these children are recognised by their fathers; these two trends practically mirror and compensate for each

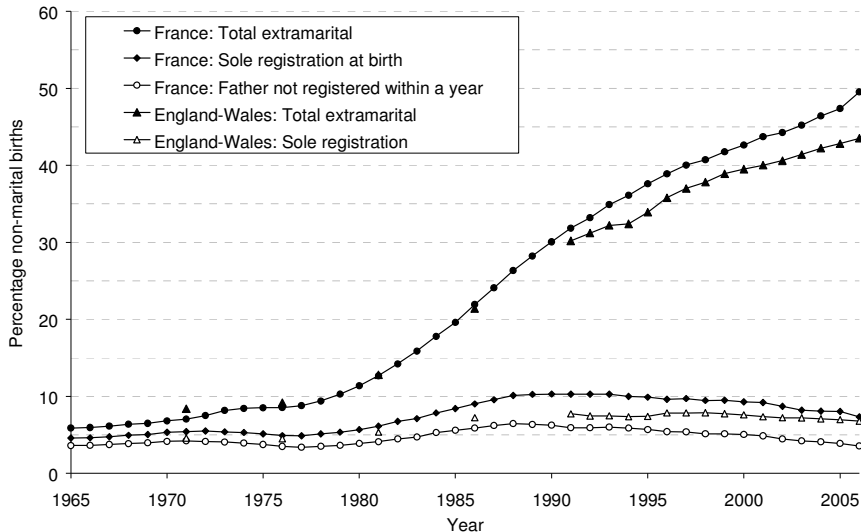
other (Munoz-Pérez and Prioux 2000). In England and Wales as well as in France the proportion of children not recognized by their fathers increased slightly during the 1980s, but it has been stable since 1990, while the proportion of extramarital births has continued to increase (Figure 9). In England and Wales, seven percent of children were not recognized by their fathers in 2006, while extramarital births exceeded 40 percent. In France, half of all children were born to unmarried parents, but only seven percent were not recognized at birth and only four percent of children remained unrecognized within a year of birth (Figure 9). A clear sign of a ‘normalisation’ of non-marital childbearing (but not of ‘single motherhood’) is given by its spread to different ages and social groups (Russian Federation chapter). This trend is mostly attributable to the diffusion of unmarried cohabitation as a way to live as a couple, and not to the increase in the proportion of women having a child ‘with no father.’ In many countries, however, the differences between social groups in the frequency of non-marital childbearing remain pronounced (Overview Chapter 6).

**Table 5: Partnership context at first birth, percentage distribution of women with first births at age 20-45 (Northern, Western, and Southern Europe)**

	Before any union	In first cohabiting union	In first marriage	After first union
<b>Northern Europe</b>				
Norway	12	18	65	5
Sweden	7	51	29	13
<b>Western Europe</b>				
Austria	20	22	53	5
France	6	14	74	6
West Germany	10	13	70	7
Switzerland	5	7	77	11
United Kingdom	9	9	75	8
<b>Southern Europe</b>				
Italy	5	3	90	1
Spain	5	3	90	1

*Source:* Data computed by Kiernan (1999) on the basis of the FFS surveys.

**Figure 9: Proportion of non-marital births in England and Wales and in France, and proportion of children not recognised by their father at birth (or during the year of birth in France), 1965-2006 (percent)**



Source: Own computations based on ONS 2007 and Population Trends 2006 for England and Wales; Beaumel et al. 2007 for France.

### 7.3 Most mothers who remain unmarried do not live with a partner

As a result of rising marriage instability and an increasing prevalence of less-stable living arrangements (cohabitation and LAT partnerships), combined in many countries with a high frequency of single motherhood, there has been an increase in the proportion of one-parent families across Europe. More children live in single families or in stepfamilies, formed when their parents enter a new union (Andersson 2002, Heuveline, Timberlake, and Furstenberg 2003). While unmarried cohabitation has rapidly gained on importance for childbearing, it remains in most countries considerably less frequent than single motherhood when the distribution of living arrangements of younger parents (aged 20-44) is analysed.

According to the census data from 2000-2001, in each of the 21 countries analysed in Table 6, with the exception of France, there were more 'lone mothers' living without a partner than cohabiting mothers at that age. Only in three Nordic countries (Denmark,

Finland, and Norway), did the share of cohabiting mothers (15-17 percent) come close to the share of single mothers (17-19 percent). Assuming that these results reflect reality, they are also surprising given the overall high proportion of mothers living without a partner; more than one-fifth in the Czech Republic, United Kingdom, and Estonia (29 percent). The relatively low importance of cohabitation as a living arrangement among younger parents can be explained by a combination of three factors. First, these data partly mirror past childbearing history; some of these parents had a child in the 1980s, when cohabitation was much less common than at present, and more children were born within marriage. Second, as cohabiting unions remain more fragile than marriages, many cohabiting unions with children dissolve relatively soon after the birth of the child (e.g., Osborne, Manning, and Smock 2007 for the U.S.). Third, many couples who have a child in an unmarried union subsequently marry within several years after childbirth, thereby contributing to the pool of married parents with children.

The data on living arrangements of younger fathers reflect new differences in the family histories of men and women: second unions may be equally frequent for men and women, as in France (Toulemon and Lapierre-Adamcyk 2000); or less frequent for women. In most cases, however, children live with their mothers after a union disruption. Thus, solo parents are almost always single mothers, and stepfamilies are most often made up of a (biological) mother and a stepfather (Prskawetz et al. 2003). Overall, considerably fewer men live with their children or their partner's children at age 20-44, in part also because men become fathers at a later age. While in all the countries studied, except for Ireland and Spain, a majority of women aged 20-44 were living with children, only a minority of men were living with children, with the lowest proportion, just above one-third, registered in Ireland, Greece, Italy, and Spain. Among those living with children, men more often cohabit than women do, and relatively few live as 'single fathers.' This proportion is not entirely negligible, however, and reaches close to four percent in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Norway, and Spain.



**Table 6: Living arrangements of women and men living with children at age 20-44; census data for 2000-2001**

	WOMEN				MEN			
	Percent living with children	Of which:			Percent living with children	Of which:		
Married		Cohabiting	Single parents	Married		Cohabiting	Single parents	
<b>Northern Europe</b>								
Denmark	55.8	67.5	15.4	17.1	39.2	77.8	19.4	2.8
Finland	53.4	67.6	14.5	17.9	37.7	78.5	18.8	2.7
Norway	57.9	64.0	17.0	19.0	39.0	75.6	20.8	3.7
<b>Western Europe</b>								
France	57.5	68.3	17.6	14.1	43.3	76.2	21.7	2.2
Ireland	47.2	76.3	6.8	16.9	34.9	89.2	8.9	1.8
The Netherlands	53.7	78.9	9.3	11.8	40.1	85.9	12.8	1.3
United Kingdom	55.7	64.7	10.8	24.5	39.1	80.9	16.0	3.1
<b>German-speaking countries</b>								
Austria	57.9	73.4	8.4	18.2	40.4	86.2	11.2	2.6
Germany	57.3	79.0	6.9	14.2	41.7	88.3	9.4	2.3
Switzerland	50.6	83.6	5.2	11.2	38.0	90.7	7.7	1.6
<b>Southern Europe</b>								
Greece	53.1	90.1	1.3	8.6	35.1	96.1	1.9	2.0
Italy	50.6	87.6	2.6	9.8	36.1	95.0	3.3	1.7
Portugal	58.9	84.7	5.2	10.1	46.5	93.0	5.6	1.4
Spain	46.1	83.4	3.9	12.6	34.1	91.3	5.0	3.8
<b>Central and Eastern Europe</b>								
Czech Republic	65.1	75.3	2.8	21.8	43.0	92.9	3.6	3.5
Estonia	65.8	56.6	14.6	28.9	45.3	76.4	20.1	3.5
Hungary	61.9	75.5	7.4	17.0	43.6	88.4	9.5	2.1
Poland	63.6	81.1	1.3	17.6	44.9	96.8	1.5	1.7
Romania	65.8	82.7	5.8	11.5	49.1	91.0	6.9	2.1
Slovak Republic	64.4	82.4	1.6	16.0	46.7	96.0	1.9	2.2
Slovenia	60.9	75.1	7.6	17.4	39.2	88.5	8.8	2.7

Source: Own computations based on the 2000-2001 Census data provided by Eurostat (2008) and Insee 2002 for France (1999 census).

Heuveline, Timberlake, and Furstenberg (2003) found that a substantial percentage of children are exposed to living with a single parent before reaching the age of 15. The total exposure ranged from 11-18 percent in Southern Europe (Italy and Spain), Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia; to 39-41 percent in Austria, Germany, and Latvia; and, outside of Europe, to a very high level of 52 percent in the United States (these figures are period life table estimates based on the FFS data). In agreement with the evidence provided by the census data in Table 6 above, the authors argue that, while the pace of family change has varied across countries, the shift of childrearing from married parents to single mothers is universal in Western societies, and has been proceeding faster than the shift to cohabiting parents and stepfamilies.

## **8. Concluding discussion: marriage, living arrangements, and fertility**

Family and marriage behaviours have changed considerably in all the countries of Europe, perhaps with the notable exception of Albania. Different societies are following a similar trajectory of change; namely, towards delayed union formation and further postponement of marriage, a sharp decline in marriage rates, a rise in unmarried cohabitation and in non-co-residential partnerships, and an increase in union instability. Monogamous life-long marriage, which was the ‘normative’ experience for most Europeans born before 1960, has been progressively eroded by delayed entry into union and increased cohabitation on the one hand, and rising levels of divorce and separation on the other. Marriage has thus lost its two main roles as an institution: first, as a ritual linking the formation of a new couple with their social environment and the society (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004); and, second, as a way to sanction the link between parents and their children. In many European countries, entering a union is now perceived as a private matter, and children born to unmarried parents have the same legal status as children born to married couples. Furthermore, unmarried cohabitation is often becoming a long-term substitute for marriage.

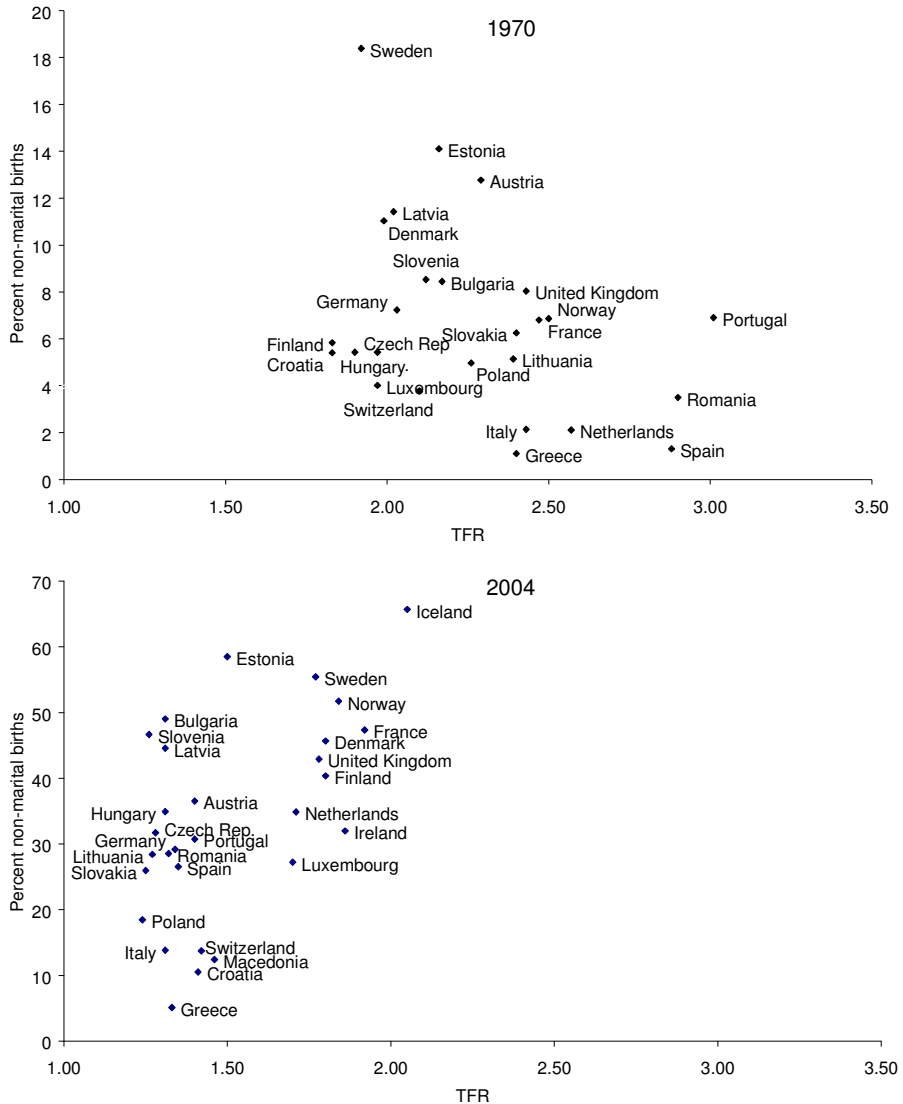
Although some signs of cross-country convergence may be noted—e.g., in the shift to low levels of period first marriage rates, or in a gradual disappearance of marriage from the lives of young adults—most patterns of family behaviour remain widely differentiated across Europe. Such persistent contrasts are manifested in the timing of home leaving, in the importance of cohabitation for union formation and childbearing, in the timing of first unions and first births, and also in the rates of divorce and the frequency of non-marital childbearing. Some of these cleavages follow long-established regional differences (e.g., the North-South contrasts in home-leaving patterns), whereas some other contrasts reflect the persistence of more traditional cultural or religious influences in some societies (e.g., frequency of cohabitation, divorce, and non-marital childbearing). Yet other contrasts have been evolving over time, and do not appear to be closely linked to the established regional and cultural divisions (e.g., the frequency of single motherhood).

In some countries, this shift in family behaviour is associated with low fertility. Presumably, the higher prevalence of more fragile non-marital unions should lead to lower fertility (Sweden chapter). However, such a relationship cannot be identified when all countries are compared. The aggregate-level association seems to shift in the opposite direction: countries where the prevalence of divorce is high had higher total fertility rates in both 2004 and 1990. In a context of very low fertility, conjugal instability may be seen as a potential fuel to fertility, at least when the partners want to have at least one child in their new union, irrespective of their previous fertility

(Prskawetz et al. 2007). Curiously, if more and more couples limit their childbearing aspirations to one child only—as is the case in Southern and Eastern Europe—rising union instability may be seen as a way to raise fertility. As Billari (2005: 80) points out in a slightly provocative way, “If the rule is ‘one child per couple’, the only way to reach replacement is to have individuals experience two couple relationships!”

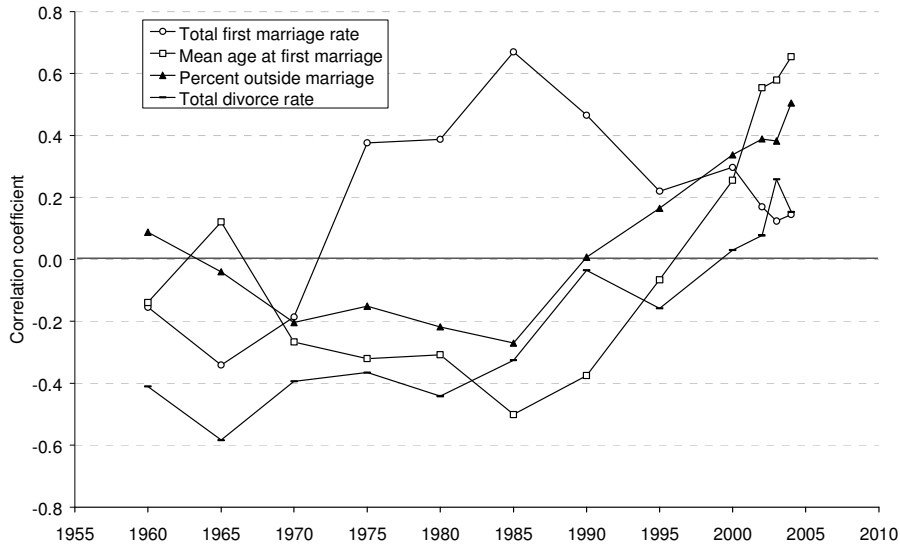
Changes in family behaviour and living arrangements are related to many other social and economic changes. The concept of the second demographic transition offers a general interpretation of these changes (see Overview Chapter 6). The relationship between the progression of this transition and the level of fertility is not straightforward. Looking at inter-country correlations may be misleading, as the strength of the relationship may vary between countries (Kögel 2004; Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004; Billari 2004). Such patterns at the macro level do not necessarily reflect causality in terms of individual behaviour (see e.g., Courgeau 2002). Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the association between the proportion of births outside marriage and the total fertility rate has reversed since 1990, and is now positive; while it was negative, despite many outliers and a strong heterogeneity, during the 1970s and 1980s (Figures 10 and 11). This is also true of the mean age at first marriage and the total divorce rate, while the positive correlation between total first marriage rates and fertility has almost vanished (Figure 11). These changing relationships, however, may not be explained by a change in the causal relationship between fertility and family behaviours at the individual level: such an erroneous inference is known as the “individualistic” or “atomic” fallacy.

**Figure 10: Correlation between the period TFR and the proportion of non-marital births in 1970 and 2004**



Source: Own computations based on Council of Europe data (2006)

**Figure 11: Correlation between the period total fertility rate and four indicators of family-related behaviours, 1960-2005**



Source: Council of Europe, 2006. Update of computations by Billari (2005).

Note: Unweighted correlations, data include all countries of the Council of Europe.

At the individual level, remaining unmarried or marrying late is undoubtedly and strongly linked with having fewer children: under fixed constraints, the relationship is well established, but it may not be generalised at the macro level. When looking at the time trend within each country, or when comparing several countries at the same period in time, we compare situations with different constraints, family and social policies, and values and norms. Thus the relationship which holds at the micro level may not be linked with the relationships between the changes in these constraints at the macro level. Clearly, complex causal mechanisms not discussed here may be at stake in the country-level relationships between fertility and family and partnership behaviour. However, our key point is that the strong positive relationship which is still present at the individual level between being married and having children is not present at the country level. On the contrary, countries where extramarital births are more common in the early 2000s are the ones where the total fertility rate is at the highest level.

A similar result has been shown for the correlation between mean age at first birth and overall fertility. The negative relationship at the micro level is strong and robust to

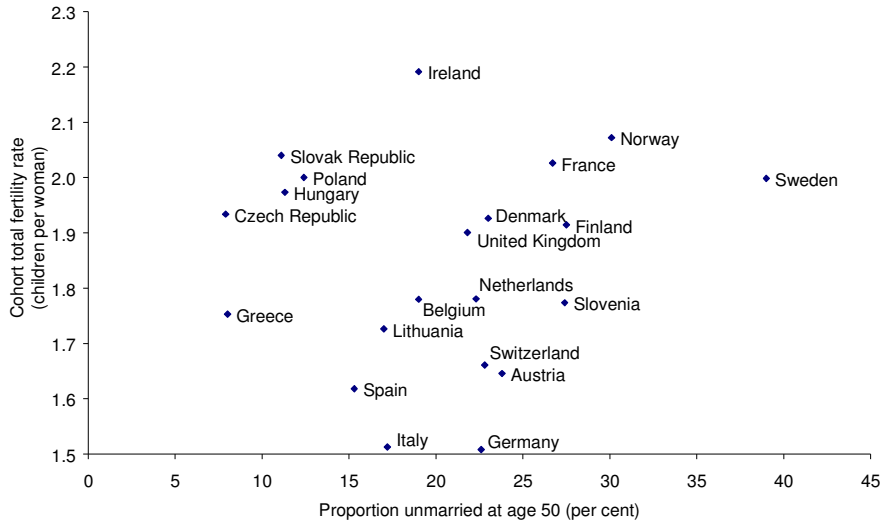
standardisation by cohort or level of education: late mothers end up having fewer children than young mothers (Billari et al. 2000). Nevertheless, the macro-level trends do not show the same relationship in all countries. For instance, French women born in 1960 have as many children as women born in 1950, despite a later age at first birth, and their parity progression ratios remain stable (France chapter). Furthermore, when we compare cohort fertility from one country to the next we find that the higher the increase in the mean age at first birth, the less pronounced is the decline in fertility (Toulemon 2006).

The positive relationship between period marriage and fertility indices is no longer visible: low marriage rates do not imply low fertility (Figure 11). Among the 1965 cohort, the correlation between marriage and fertility behaviour also appears very weak at the inter-country level (Figure 12). The European countries where the 1965 cohort TFR is the highest include some countries where marriage is still common for these women (Poland, Hungary, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic), as well as countries where many women are unmarried (France, Norway, Sweden).

In most countries, marriage rates declined in parallel with fertility, and it could be assumed that these two trends are part of a consistent change in demographic behaviour. But the evidence leads us to a different conclusion: among European countries, fertility is highest in those countries where marriage is most intensively delayed, where births outside of marriage and unmarried cohabitation are frequent, and divorce rates are high. In most countries, the decline in marriage rates is not related to an increase in the proportion of women and men who chose to remain childless and unmarried, but more to an increase in the number of men and women who decide to enter a union without marriage, and a parallel increase in the number of couples who decide to have children without getting married.

Marriage and partnership behaviour is changing throughout Europe, and countries where fertility is lowest are the ones where the change in partnership behaviour is limited, while fertility is higher and more stable in countries where partnership behaviour has already changed dramatically. In countries where marriage and fertility are no longer linked, fertility is still high; while in countries where the 'traditional family' is still 'strong' as an institution, marriage rates are low (as is the case everywhere), and fertility is also low (see, e.g., chapters on Sweden and Italy). This macro-level relationship will be discussed further in Overview Chapter 6. In our view, the 'big change' in family life and living arrangements discussed in this chapter should not be seen as a reason for the current low level of fertility in Europe.

**Figure 12: Correlation between the proportion never-married at age 50 (horizontal axis) and cohort TFR (vertical axis), among women born in 1965**



Source: Own calculations from Prioux 2006, Council of Europe 2006.

Note: The proportion of ever married has been partly estimated for the cohorts born in the mid-1950s and later.

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## APPENDIX: Methodological note

### Imperfect indices are sufficient to show the dramatic trends in marital behaviours since the 1960s in Europe

None of the period measures used in this chapter is a very accurate index. Total first marriage rate (TFMR) is computed from incidence rates by age, and does not take into account the fact that only single women are 'at risk' of a first marriage. In addition, this indicator is based on information on marriages within the country, and does not take account that some inhabitants, especially those of foreign origin, may marry abroad. Finally, it is very sensitive to changes in marriage timing (see, e.g., Winkler-Dworak and Engelhardt 2004): when the age when women marry increases, the number of marriages declines in that period and the period TFMR falls even if the number of marriages that women have over their life course does not change. This distortion is frequently referred to as 'tempo effect'.

In the same way as the total first marriage rate is sensitive to 'tempo effect,' the period mean age at first marriage is also very sensitive to changes in the total first marriage rate: when the latter is declining, the decline is often the strongest for incidence rates at young ages, leading to a strong increase in the mean age.

Total divorce rates (TDRs) are computed from incidence rates of divorce by duration of marriage, and do not take into account the fact that only the existing ('surviving') marriages are 'at risk' of divorce. Thus, the TDRs are subject to 'tempo distortions,' like the total first marriage rate.

The proportion of extramarital births is a simpler index, and it does not take into account the age structure of the population or of the births. The main shortcoming of this index is, however, that it only indicates the legal status of parents at birth, and not their *de facto* living arrangement. It also does not reflect the intensity of childbearing among unmarried women: it can either increase as a consequence of an increase in the number of unmarried women, or as a consequence of an increase in fertility rates among them (or a combination of both factors).

## APPENDIX Table A1

**Table A1: Percentage of time spent in different family types at ages 15-39 years (period life table estimates)**

	Period	In parental home (no family)		Single, before union, no child		In consensual union		In marriage		Other (no more in union)	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Northern Europe											
Finland	1983-92	22	33	11	13	13	14	47	37	7	3
Norway	1974-89	21	28	9	12	10	10	53	46	7	4
Sweden	1978-93	17	23	13	15	27	25	34	29	9	8
Western Europe											
Austria	1990-96	23	32	7	11	13	14	48	37	9	6
Belgium (Flanders)	1985-92	31	40	5	5	5	6	55	47	4	2
France	1988-94	26	34	7	9	15	14	43	37	9	6
West Germany	1986-92	27	34	13	19	9	9	40	30	11	8
Southern Europe											
Italy	1990-95	44	52	4	8	2	1	49	37	1	2
Spain	1989-95	38	48	3	4	3	4	53	42	3	2
Central and Eastern Europe											
Czech	1992-97	25	na	1	na	7	na	60	na	7	na
Hungary	1988-93	26	41	2	2	5	3	63	49	4	5
Latvia	1989-95	25	32	3	4	7	5	53	53	12	6
Lithuania	1989-95	26	30	6	8	2	3	58	56	8	3
Poland	1986-91	30	na	3	na	1	na	59	na	7	na
Slovenia	1989-95	27	30	3	10	9	10	57	47	4	3

Source: Data estimated by Andersson and Philipov (2002: Table 29) on the basis of the FFS surveys.