

## COHABITATION, AN ALTERNATIVE FOR MARRIAGE IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA: A LIFE TABLE DESCRIPTION

CORNELIA MUREŞAN<sup>1</sup>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The abundance of data collected in Romania by the *Generations and Gender Survey* in 2005 provides the first occasion for a closer look at family-related behavioural changes in this country. Besides marriage, birth, divorce, and similar data collected in vital statistics, now we can look at entry into, exit from, and childbirth within alternative (to marriage) forms of union such as cohabitation. All these family events are interesting to study in the emerging development of the Second Demographic Transition in Romania (Mureşan 2007a). The present life table analysis may be a valuable starting point for a deeper investigation of family dynamic determinants. So far, due to the lack of adequate data, no such analysis could be made for Romania.

As for methodology, the life table approach adapted by Andersson and Philipov (2002) is followed which was used on FFS data for 15 countries. Their study seems to have become a standard description technique for the more recent GGS data since the work for Bulgaria and Russia was published (Philipov and Jasilioniene 2007). We have also carried out all series of standard life tables for Romania (Mureşan 2007b)<sup>2</sup>, a work which inspired the present one.

Our study is divided into six parts. Following this introduction the next parts deals with the data and methods used in this analysis. The next section looks at first union formation, with the aim to compare developments in cohabitations with those in marriages established directly. The next section is dedicated to first unions started as consensual unions, it studies the duration of cohabitation and the transformation of cohabitation from childlessness to parenthood or separation. Then the analysis applies the same framework to first marriages. In this part first, we study the duration of marriage, and then we focus on the transition to first birth or divorce. A summary section concludes the paper.

<sup>1</sup> PhD, Associate Professor, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Centre for Population Studies, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Email: [cmuresan8@socasis.ubbcluj.ro](mailto:cmuresan8@socasis.ubbcluj.ro)

<sup>2</sup> Posted in July 2007 on the MPIDR website.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

### *Data used*

Our study is based on data collected by the *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGS) at the end of 2005.<sup>3</sup> The sample consists of 11,986 respondents (5,977 men and 6,009 women) aged 18–79 when interviewed. At the time of writing this paper, only the unweighted dataset was available. This infers an underestimation of the young group (aged 18–29), and an overestimation of age groups 50+, by about 12%. There are additional overestimations by gender: older women (aged 60–69) and middle-aged men (40–49) are over-represented (by 4% and 1%, respectively). But this is not an obstacle since life tables control for age and each age group in the sample is large enough to assure a good representation of the Romanian population. Event histories were cleaned by a set of adapted versions of *Stata* programs, developed by Philipov for the Bulgarian and Russian GGS data sets. Few errors were found, too few to mention them here.

The GGS questionnaire asked for the occurrence of every event considered by year and month. Our time estimates thus have the precision of a month. The middle of the month was regarded as the exact time of an event.

### *Methods and software used*

Our descriptive measures are based on life table techniques. They are well-known<sup>4</sup> and the complete set of tables developed by Andersson and Philipov (2002) is suitable for describing family behaviour based on micro-level, individual, longitudinal survey data. The authors exemplify the issue by constructing several life tables for 14 European countries and the USA based on data collected by the *Fertility and Family Surveys* (FFS) during the 1990s. Moreover, Philipov and Jasilioniene (2007) published a comparison between Bulgaria and Russia using the life table technique. Their set of tables is closely followed in the present study since their version better describes a post-socialist

<sup>3</sup> The *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGS) was carried out in Romania within the framework of the *Generations and Gender Program* (GGP), with the financial support of the United Nation Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR). More details about the program can be found on the website of the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE PAU, <http://www.unece.org/pau/ggp>), which is the coordinator of the whole project, and on the MPIDR website (<http://www.demogr.mpg.de>).

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see e.g. the textbook by Preston et al. (2001), or a more concise description in Hoem (2001).

country (such as Romania) than the wider range of tables developed on FFS. However, we also introduced a number of new life tables, e.g. on the transformation of first cohabitation and first marriage.

The tables contain Kaplan-Maier estimates of cumulative percentages of respondents having experienced a specific event at different, listed, and exact ages (or exact durations when applicable). These indicators of the level reached at a specified age. The level which is not expected to increase further with age is referred to as the “ultimate” level reached by the synthetic cohort. Other indicators in our tables are well-known timing indicators: mean age (or duration), median age, first decile, first quartile or third quartile.

The figures show estimates of hazard risks, the number of events are related to the number of person-years (with a monthly precision) during a specific time interval—in our case four years. Hazard risks express the instant (monthly) force of transition from a specific status of “origin” to a status of “destination” which are only calculated for real cohorts to evaluate behavioural changes.

Table 1  
*Number of observations in the Romanian sample,  
by synthetical cohort and event studied*

	Men	Women	Couples
<b>1980–1989</b>			
entry into first marriage	3 458	2 912	
first union formation	3 406	2 824	
ending first cohabitation			562
transforming first cohabitation			464
ending first marriage			3 879
transforming first marriage			2 867
<b>1996–2005</b>			
entry into first marriage	1 814	1 334	
first union formation	1 678	1 185	
ending first cohabitation			688
transforming first cohabitation			538
ending first marriage			4 382
transforming first marriage			2 258

GGs data permit a wide variety of choice with regard to periods of time or groups of birth cohorts. Two characteristic periods are analyzed: 1980–1989, the period preceding societal transition, and 1996–2005, the most recent ten years. The period of 1990–1995 was omitted in order to present a more convincing contrast between the former demographic regime and the recent period. This is because immediately after the political change, demographic behaviour could have been affected by the euphoria of achieving freedom following half a century of authoritarian rule. Other advantages of using ten-year periods in-

clude the increase of statistical significance and the compression of confidence interval of estimates.

Nevertheless, our cross-country comparisons also extend to the period 1990–1994 because one of the aims was to reveal similarities to and differences from Bulgaria and Hungary, two neighbouring countries with which Romania shares parts of her history. Table 1 shows the number of observations in each synthetical cohort by the event studied.

While the effect of social changes can be properly analyzed by life table indicators of the synthetic cohorts mentioned above, the birth cohort perspective stands for stressing behavioural changes. We have therefore supplemented the analysis by four distinctive real cohorts: 1950–1959, 1960–1969, 1970–1974, and 1975–1979. Members of the first cohort started family life during communist times while those of the second cohort reached their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday either before or after the turbulences of 1989. The two youngest cohorts entered adulthood in post-socialist times. Instead of using one single birth cohort for those born during the 1970s, we preferred to split them into two five-year cohorts, though the 1975–1979 cohort was not older than 26–30 at the time of interview. We have done so because demographic change accelerated following the transition and we expected stronger differences in the behaviour of the youngest cohort.

All estimates were produced by the use of the *Stata Release 9.1* program (StataCorp 2005), written initially by Philipov for Bulgaria and then adapted to the Romanian GGS. In addition, the software *stcompet2* (Coviello and Boggess 2004) was used to estimate competing-risk cumulative incidence functions.

### 3. FIRST UNION FORMATION

In Romanian tradition marriage has been universal and contracted early. It only started to decline and to be postponed in the early 1990s as documented in the literature (Mureşan and Rotariu 2000; Mureşan et al. 2008). This section addresses the question to what extent an increase in non-marital unions has made up for the decrease in marriages. We analyze marriage and union formation separately by single decrement life tables and also study marital and non-marital unions, using the competing-risks life table method. We only concentrate on first unions (marriage or cohabitation) because the number of repeated unions is very small.

*First marriage: single decrement perspective*

During the 1990s the annual Total First Marriage Rate (TFMR) dropped to 0.8 marriages per woman in each Central Eastern European country studied. Since all three countries experienced significant postponement in this decade, the TFMRs were affected by changes in their age-specific marital rates. Therefore, these TFMRs rather reflect a postponement than a decline in nuptiality. A better indicator of first marriage level (which is not affected by changes in timing) is the cumulative percentage of those ever married up to the exact age 40. We consider these percentages as a proxy for the ultimate level, and they are calculated for synthetical cohorts.

Table 2 shows the real levels of first marriages in 1990–1994 for Romania and Bulgaria (GGs data), and in a comparable period (1988–1993) for Hungary (FFS data). We see that in Romania the cumulative percentages of those ever married are systematically higher at both 30 and 40, for men and women alike. Almost 90% of men and more than 90% of women contract marriage in Romania, while in Bulgaria the percentages are 80% and 86%. In Hungary the gender gap is larger: only 77% of men, but almost 90% of women marry before they reach the age 40.

Table 2  
*Cumulative percentages of persons ever married up to ages 30 and 40,  
by country*

	Romania 1990–1994	Bulgaria 1990–1994	Hungary 1988–1993
At age 30			
Men	77	67	69
Women	88	81	84
At age 40			
Men	89	80	77
Women	92	86	89
Mean ages at transition (of those married up to age 40)			
Men	25	25	25
Women	22	21	22

*Sources:* Philipov and Jasilioniene (2007) for Bulgaria, Andersson and Philipov (2002) for Hungary.

In Romania and Bulgaria there is a gender gap at age 30, but up to age 40 men recuperate more of their delay than their Hungarian counterparts. The main indicator of timing at marriage, the mean age at transition, is very similar for the three countries: 25 years for males and around 22 for females. These are

among the earliest ages at marriage in Europe. The pattern is even younger among Bulgarian women who enter marriage at around 21.

The above estimates refer to the period immediately following system change. Important modifications have taken place since then. Developments in Romania are presented in Table 3. By the time of the survey, the universality of marriage has almost come to an end in the 1996–2005 synthetical cohort. Neither men nor women ever marry to a proportion close to 90%, though women's level is still above 80% for the first marriage. Cumulative percentages of first marriages at age 40 are 76% for males and 85% for females. The mean age at first marriage increased in both sexes, although it is lower for women (24 years compared to 26 years for men).<sup>5</sup>

Table 3  
*Cumulative percentages of persons ever married in Romania*

Age	Men 1980–1989	Men 1996–2005	Women 1980–1989	Women 1996–2005
16	0	0	1	1
18	1	0	10	7
20	6	2	34	21
22	16	10	59	35
24	41	25	75	51
25	50	33	79	58
26	59	40	83	61
28	72	51	88	71
30	78	60	91	76
35	87	72	93	82
40	89	76	94	85
Mean ages at transition (of those married up to age 40)	25	26	22	24
1st decile at age:	21	22	18	19
1st quartile at:	23	24	19	21
Median at age:	25	28	21	24
3rd quartile at:	29	38	24	30

Figure 1 shows first marriage intensities from a birth cohort perspective. Significant changes in the age pattern occurred among men as well as women. Compared to the 1950–1959 cohorts, the 1960–1969 cohorts had a reduced risk of marriage over age 26, thus a process of rejuvenation took place. The younger cohorts (1970–1974) not only continued to have lower risks of first marriage at ages 26–29 but had substantially lower risks at all ages below 30. At ages 22–

<sup>5</sup> The same mean ages were attained in Bulgaria by the synthetical cohort 1999–2003 (Philipov and Jasilioniene 2007).

25 the female marriage risk almost halved, flattening the marriage age pattern of this birth cohort. In our analysis the youngest generation, born in 1975–1980, can only be followed up to age 30, as it contains no individuals above this age. Whereas men’s risk to ever marry decreased at all ages below 30, women’s risk declined only at ages below 22. A recuperation process for these women is very probable. The youngest male birth cohort is still in the process of first marriage postponement and we cannot observe any sign of recuperation due to the common three year age difference between partners.

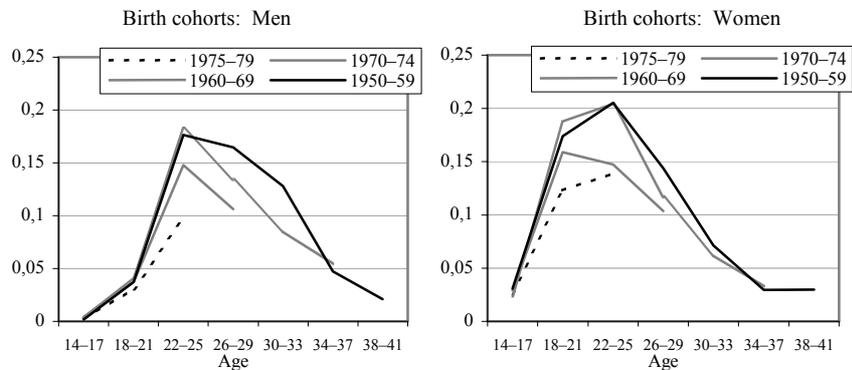


Figure 1  
*Occurrence/exposure rates of persons ever married in Romania*

We conclude that a change in the marriage pattern has indeed taken place, postponement has been observed but at present the loss of universality cannot be documented.

#### *First union: single decrement perspective*

Let us now look at first union, regardless of whether it started as a marriage or as a non-marital union (referred to as cohabitation in the following).

During the early 1990s, cumulative percentages of persons ever in union up to age 40 exceeded 90% for both sexes in Romania. This is slightly higher than in the neighbouring countries (Table 4). The mean ages at union formation are the same in Romania and Bulgaria (24 years for men, 21 years for women) but they are one year higher for both sexes in Hungary. Starting the first union at these ages is not so unusual in Europe, thus—in contrast to marriage—we cannot say that union formation has an early pattern in the three countries studied. The universality is also common in many European countries. The few exceptions

to this pattern, like West Germany and Italy, are interesting to consider (see the life tables published by Andersson and Philipov 2002).

Table 4  
*Cumulative percentages of persons ever in union up to ages 30 and 40,  
by country*

	Romania 1990–1994	Bulgaria 1990–1994	Hungary 1988–1993
At age 30			
Men	82	76	76
Women	91	88	90
At age 40			
Men	92	88	85
Women	96	92	94
Mean ages at transition (of those married up to age 40)			
Men	24	24	25
Women	21	21	22

*Sources:* Philipov and Jasilioniene (2007) for Bulgaria, Andersson and Philipov (2002) for Hungary.

It is interesting to see whether any changes took place in Romania between 1980–1989, a period marked by strong social intervention and control and 1996–2005, a period generally regarded as a more relaxed one. Table 5 lists the corresponding life table indicators.

Table 5  
*Cumulative percentages of persons ever in union in Romania*

Age	Men 1980–1989	Men 1996–2005	Women 1980–1989	Women 1996–2005
16	0	0	2	2
18	2	1	14	11
20	7	5	39	29
22	19	15	63	44
24	45	34	78	62
25	54	43	83	69
26	63	49	87	73
28	75	60	92	81
30	82	70	94	86
35	91	81	96	91
40	93	85	97	92
Mean ages at transition (of those married up to age 40)				
	25	26	21	23
1st decile at age:	21	21	18	18
1st quartile at:	23	23	19	20
median at age:	25	26	21	23
3rd quartile at:	28	32	23	27

The trend is towards postponement in union formation. Men's mean age at their first entry into union is the same as their mean age at first marriage, while it is one year lower for women in both periods. The indicators are, however, not fully comparable, since not all first marriages are first unions; some of them may have been contracted following one or more cohabitations. Nevertheless, the similarity of these indicators suggests that men marry soon after starting their first union, while women tend to cohabit longer before they marry.

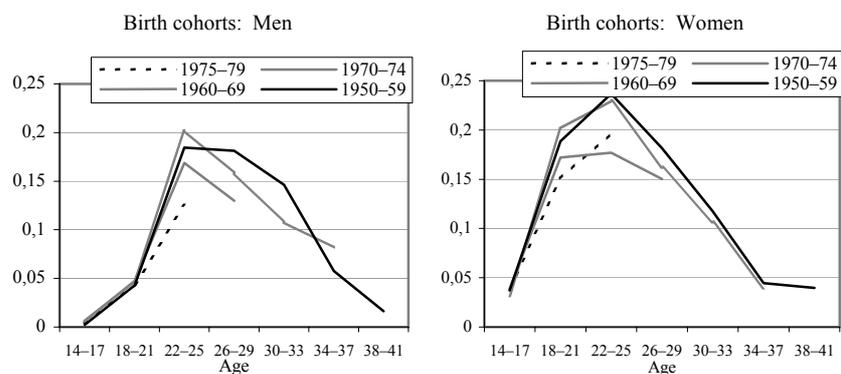


Figure 2  
*Occurrence/exposure rates of persons ever in union*

Changes between birth cohorts in the occurrence/exposure rates of persons ever in union (Figure 2) are similar to those of ever married, although the intensities are normally higher. The 1960–1969 male birth cohort experienced noticeable rejuvenation: compared to the previous cohort, we observe rising risks of union formation at ages 22–25 and falling risks above age 26. Persons born in the 1970s show a different behaviour, they tend to postpone their first union to an extent which is not yet made up for at higher ages. Recuperation can only be documented in the case of the youngest female birth cohort: their risk of first union formation under age 22 was lower, but at ages 22–25 it was significantly higher than in the previous cohort. It seems that the ‘modernization’ process starts with this very young female generation.

#### *First union: direct marriage or cohabitation?*

The cumulative percentages of persons ever starting a union can be decomposed into percentages attributed to different decrements. First unions can be formed in two ways: by direct marriage or by cohabitation. The competing-risk life table method provides a good description of the actual fraction of people who enter either a marital or a non-marital union. Both risks are estimated jointly, with each decrement related to the same population of never-partnered individuals. Table 6 presents the fractions of men and women who start their first union by cohabitation. Table 7 presents the fractions of direct marriages. The sums at each exact age give the fractions of population who ever enter either type of union (Table 5).

Table 6 shows that women enter cohabitation younger than men and more recently (in 1996–2005) cohabitation also starts at younger ages, than in the former, socialist period. Although cumulated percentages of persons ever starting their first union as cohabitation at age 40 increased by more than 10% points during the last 15 years, they are still as low today as they were in Hungary around 1990 (see Andersson and Philipov 2002, p. 84). These levels are far below the 60% documented for Bulgaria for similar periods (Philipov and Jasilioniene 2007). Albeit cohabitation levels are highly variant among the three neighbouring countries, the timing indicators are similar.

Table 6  
*Cumulative percentages of persons ever starting their first union in cohabitation, competing-risk life table method with direct marriage as a competing event*

Age	Men 1980–1989	Men 1996–2005	Women 1980–1989	Women 1996–2005
16	0	0	1	1
18	1	1	5	6
20	3	4	12	13
22	5	8	15	18
24	10	15	17	24
25	11	17	17	27
26	12	19	18	29
28	14	22	19	31
30	16	25	20	33
35	17	29	20	35
40	18	30	20	35
Mean ages at transition (of those married up to age 40)	24	25	20	23
1st decile at age:	24	23	19	19
1st quartile at:	-	30	-	24
median at age:	-	-	-	-
3rd quartile at:	-	-	-	-

The occurrence/exposure rates of persons ever starting their first union in cohabitation (Figure 3) are very low in each birth cohort. Up to five non-marital unions occur per 100 person-years at any age, and this applies to both sexes and each period represented in the figure. The only exception is the youngest female birth cohort with the highest risk at ages 22–25 (0.07 per woman-year).

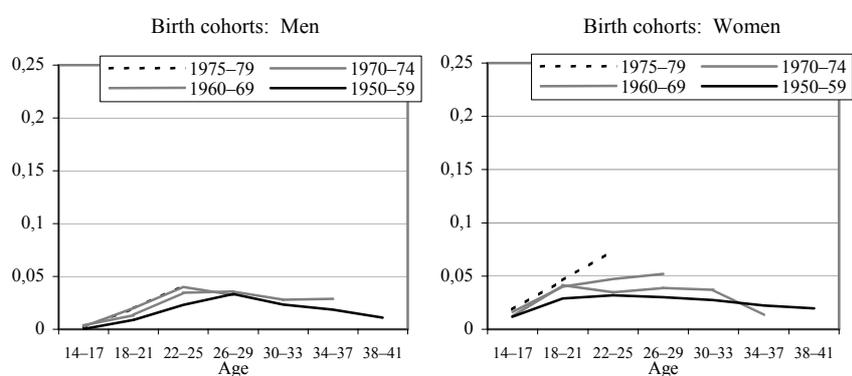


Figure 3  
*Occurrence/exposure rates of persons ever starting their first unions in cohabitation*

By contrast, it is more common to start a union in direct marriage, even though the fractions of men and women marry straight as their first union up to age 40 dropped from three quarters to half between 1980–1989 and 1996–2005<sup>6</sup> (Table 7).

<sup>6</sup> Period life table indicators are calculated for hypothetical cohorts. It is hypothesized that the probabilities observed during the give calendar years would prevail for a long period of time.

Table 7

*Cumulative percentages of persons ever starting their first union in marriage, competing-risk life table method with cohabitation as a competing event*

Age	Men	Men	Women	Women
	1980–1989	1996–2005	1980–1989	1996–2005
16	0		1	1
18	1	0	7	5
20	4	1	26	15
22	12	7	47	26
24	34	19	61	37
25	42	25	65	41
26	50	30	68	44
28	61	38	73	50
30	66	45	74	53
35	73	52	76	56
40	75	55	76	57
Mean ages at transition (of those married up to age 40)				
	25	26	22	23
1st decile at age:	21	23	18	19
1st quartile at:	23	25	20	22
median at age:	26	33	22	28
3rd quartile at:	40	-	32	-

Logically, the hazard rates of ever entering first marriage and starting first union in direct marriage are similar, also in a birth cohort perspective. Figures 4 and 1 *prima facie* appear to be the same. However, a closer look would reveal some differences. They concern a lower level (but not timing differences) of rates for the most young cohorts born in the 1970s.

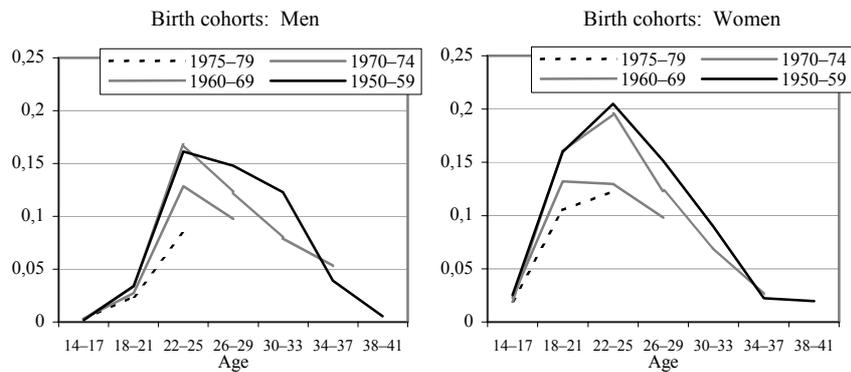


Figure 4

*Occurrence/exposure rate of persons ever starting their first union in marriage*

#### 4. THE TRANSFORMATION OF FIRST COHABITATION

Now we turn to the analysis of couples in order to gain a deeper insight into the developments of cohabitation. In this section, we study first unions which started as cohabitation and we look at their evolution. Cohabiting couples may marry, may separate later, or stay together in consensual union “forever”, i.e. until one of the partners dies. Persons belonging to the first and second group prefer to discover how living together works before moving on to marriage, and they may succeed or fail. People forming the last category do not believe in the institution of marriage.

In this section, we consider responses from all categories, taking men and women together.

##### *The duration of first cohabitation: marriage or separation?*

Tables 8, 9, and 10 display the cumulative percentages of either married or separated individuals, treating the two events as competing risks. Table 11 adds up the cumulative percentages and provides an overall picture of persons who experience one of the two events and those who remain in cohabitation (100-complement).

As previously, Romanian and Bulgarian data are from 1990–1994 while Hungarian ones from 1988–1993. The analysis is restricted to the first five years of cohabitation because in Bulgaria the number of population at risk falls under the minimum of 15 couples necessary to maintain comparison.

Table 8

*Cumulative percentages of persons married, by the number of years elapsed since their forming a consensual union, with separation as competing risk*

Duration in years	Romania 1990–1994	Bulgaria 1990–1994	Hungary 1988–1993
1	43	63	24
2	61	74	36
3	67	79	42
5	74	83	47
Median duration	1.1	0.5	7

*Sources:* Philipov and Jasilioniene (2007) for Bulgaria, Andersson and Philipov (2002) for Hungary.

*Note:* The analysis is based on men's and women's responses taken together in Romania and Hungary while in Bulgaria it is limited to female respondents.

In Romania around 50% of cohabitations end in marriage within one year. This compares to half a year for Bulgaria. In Hungary the pace of transition is much slower: it takes 7 years. In the fifth year of entering cohabitation three-quarters of Romanian couples are married, 10% points less than Bulgarian ones but significantly more than Hungarian couples (47%).

Before 1990, the pace of marrying was relatively fast in Romania (shown in Table 9), but it slowed down in the period of a market-economy. Half the couples in the 1996–2005 synthetical cohort are not married in their third year of consensual union, and one third remain unmarried even in their 15<sup>th</sup> year of cohabitation. But these percentages are smaller than in Bulgaria where 40% of couples from the 1999–2003 synthetical cohort do not marry within 15 years of their union formation (Philipov and Jasilioniene 2007). The mean duration of transition from the first cohabitation into marriage increased slightly (from 1.5 years to 1.9 years) in Romania between the two investigated periods (Table 9).

Table 9  
*Cumulative percentages of persons married, by the number of years elapsed since their formation of a consensual union in Romania, with separation as a competing risk*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	45	27
2	63	45
3	68	52
4	71	57
5	74	60
7	77	62
10	79	64
15	80	66
Mean duration at transition to marriage (of those marrying within 15 years)	1.5	1.9
1st decile:	0	0
1st quartile:	0	1
median:	1	2
3rd quartile:	6	-

In contrast to marriage, separation has become more widespread. The cumulated percentages of separations up to the exact duration of 15 years of cohabitation increased from 8% to 20%. But here again, the mean duration (of failed cohabitations) hardly changed, it remained close to four years (Table 10).

Taking marriage and separation together, the great majority of first unions which had started as cohabitation were going through transformation within 15 years (see Table 11). It is, however, unknown whether the remaining percentages, i.e. 11% in the 1980–1989 period and 14% in 1996–2005, are made up of “post-modern couples”, or those at the margin of society, who live in precarious conditions and do not register their union. This question reaches beyond the scope of this paper and thus remains to be answered by further studies.

The mean duration at transformation increased by 0.8 years during the one and half decades between the two periods.

Table 10

*Cumulative percentages of persons separated, by the number of years elapsed since their formation of a consensual union in Romania, with marriage as a competing risk*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	1	3
2	3	5
3	5	7
4	6	9
5	6	12
7	6	15
10	7	17
15	8	20
Mean duration at union disruption (of those breaking up within 15 years)	4.0	4.6
1st decile:	-	4
1st quartile:	-	-
median:	-	-
3rd quartile:	-	-

Table 11

*Cumulative percentages of persons no longer in a consensual union, by the number of years elapsed since their union formation in Romania*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	50	34
2	68	51
3	73	61
4	77	67
5	80	72
7	83	77
10	86	81
15	89	86
Mean duration at transformation (of those changing status within 15 years)	1.7	2.5
1st decile:	0	0
1st quartile:	0	1
median:	1	2
3rd quartile:	3	6

The transformation of first cohabitation: childbearing, separation, or marriage?

Childbearing changes the every-day life of a couple. Moreover, pregnancy may prompt cohabiting couples to marry or separate. Thus we consider three competing risks for the transformation of cohabitation: childbirth, separation, and marriage.

Each of the following Tables (12, 13, and 14) represents one risk, with the two others considered as competing risks. There are no cumulative percentages for durations longer than 4–7 years in either table (with the exception of entry into parenthood in 1996–2005). This is because of the small number of population at risk over 4–7 years in cohabitation. Only Table 15, where the three risks are taken together, shows the share of cohabiting couples who have not experienced any of the three events. Table 15 shows that almost all couples experience one of the three events before they reach the 15<sup>th</sup> year in cohabitation. In their cases the mean duration of transformation is very short: 1.3 years during socialist times and 1.8 years during post-socialist times.

Table 12

*Cumulative percentages of parents, by the number of years elapsed since consensual union formation of childless couples in Romania with separation or marriage as competing risks*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	14	9
2	24	20
3	27	24
4	29	27
5	-	28
7	-	29
10	-	29
15	-	30
Mean duration at birth (of those having the first child within 15 years)	1.4	2.0
1st decile:	1	1
1st quartile:	2	3
median:	-	-
3rd quartile:	-	-

Table 13

*Cumulative percentages of separated couples, by the number of years elapsed since consensual union formation of childless couples in Romania, with childbirth and marriage as competing risks*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	1	3
2	2	5
3	3	7
4	4	8
5	4	11
7	-	12
10	-	-
15	-	-
Mean duration at union disruption (of those separating within 15 years)	3.0	3.6
1st decile:	-	4
1st quartile:	-	-
median:	-	-
3rd quartile:	-	-

Table 14

*Cumulative percentages of married individuals, by the number of years elapsed since consensual union formation of childless couples, with childbirth and separation as competing risks*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	43	26
2	54	40
3	58	46
4	58	49
5	60	51
7	-	52
10	-	-
15	-	-
Mean duration at marriage (of those marrying within 15 years)	1.1	1.3
1st decile:	0	0
1st quartile:	0	1
median:	1	4
3rd quartile:	-	-

Table 12 shows that almost 30% of cohabiting couples have a child relatively soon, within the first four years of their cohabitation. In the more recent period, out-of-wedlock fertility was slightly postponed.

In the communist period only 4% of first cohabiting couples separated within four years since of their union formation, but after the change of the regime twice as many did (8%), as shown by Table 13. Nevertheless, the level of separation, as a first change in the union status of cohabiting couples remains low. Marriage is much more often the next step. Possibly, couples marry when a child is conceived and they do so before the child is born. Our analysis has considered the date at first birth rather than the date at first conception (ending in birth), though we have to note that we do not know the share of “shotgun” marriages.<sup>7</sup>

As Table 14 shows, in 1980–1989 60% of cohabiting couples changed their union status to marriage within five years. In the more recent period this percentage decreased by nine percentage points. Still, this form of transition remained the major form among all types of transitions. Moreover, marriage takes place relatively shortly, soon after the first year of cohabitation in both periods of analysis.

Table 15  
*Cumulative percentages of consensual union transformations, by the number or years elapsed since their formation in Romania*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	61	43
2	81	66
3	89	77
4	91	86
5	94	90
7	95	93
10	97	94
15	98	96
Mean duration at transformation (of those changing status within 15 years)	1.3	1.8
1st decile:	0	0
1st quartile:	0	1
median:	1	1
3 <sup>rd</sup> quartile:	2	3

We conclude that most first cohabitations change their status in a relatively short period (within 1–2 years on average), either as a result of childbirth or as

<sup>7</sup> We deal with this in Section 6.

a result of marriage. Only separation takes longer time (3–4 years on average) to happen. The time elapsed between union formation and the change in union status increased slightly from one period to the other but by no more than half a year. The most common path is entering into marriage, followed by childbirth and then by separation.

## 5. THE TRANSFORMATION OF FIRST MARRIAGE

In this section, we look at first marriage disregarding preceding events: direct marriage, following only one or several cohabitation(s). The first part concentrates on the duration of marriage and the second focuses on changes in the status of childless marriages due to childbirth or divorce.

### *Duration of first marriage: divorce or partner's death?*

A marriage may end by divorce or by the death of the partner. In a study of marriage duration, we need to consider both events as competing risks, just as Philipov and Jasilioniene did in their recent study (2007).

Although in this analysis the couple represents the statistical unit, men's answers have been excluded because higher male mortality may bias the results. Excess male mortality is large and even increased in Romania during the last 15 years. Women's advantage in life expectancy at birth increased from around 6 to 7 years. Advanced-age marriages may end owing to the partner's death and as mortality is higher among men, it is likely that the sample would include more widows than widowers.

Table 16  
*Cumulative percentages of first marriages ending by divorce, by the number of years elapsed since the wedding in Romania, with the husband's death as a competing risk (female responses only)*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
5	4	4
10	7	8
15	10	11
20	12	13
25	13	14
30	14	15
40	14	16
50	-	16
Mean duration at divorce (of those divorcing within 25 years)	10	11
1st decile:	14	14
1st quartile:	-	-
median:	-	-
3rd quartile:	-	-

Table 16 shows that the level of divorce is not higher than 14%–16%. Comparing the two periods, a small 2% point increase is observed, owing to higher divorce rates during the early years of marriages. The mean duration of first marriage ending in divorce increased from 10 to 11 years from one period to the other, documenting the stability of marriage in Romania.

We have comparable data for Bulgaria but not for Hungary. Very similar levels of divorce were observed in Bulgaria. An increase in the duration of marriages ending by divorce is also noticed in Bulgaria, though the mean duration is two years shorter than in Romania (7 years in 1985–1989, and 9 years in 1999–2003).

Dissolution of marriages owing to the husband's death is rare before the 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary (Table 17). However, the cumulative percentages of first marriages ending by the husband's loss increased by 2% points (from 10% to 12%) from the first to the second period. Before reaching the 50<sup>th</sup> year of golden wedding anniversary, 32% of first married wives became widows in the 1980–1989 synthetic cohort compared to 45% in the 1996–2005 synthetic cohort. Rising adult male mortality (in ages 30–59) in Romania during the 1990s was documented by Mureşan (1999). Naturally, mortality levels influence the pace and duration of marriages, at least when data refer to marriages reported by surviving women during a period of increasing female life expectancy.

Table 17  
*Cumulative percentages of first marriages dissolved by the husband's death, by the number of years elapsed since the wedding in Romania, with divorce as competing risk (female responses only)*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
5	0	1
10	1	1
15	2	2
20	4	4
25	6	7
30	10	12
40	21	25
50	32	45
Mean duration at the husband's death (truncated at 40 years of duration)	26	29
1st decile:	30	28
1st quartile:	42	40
median:	-	-
3rd quartile:	-	-

The duration of marriages dissolved by the husband's departure increased by three years, from 26 in socialist times to 29 in post-socialist times. In Bulgaria the duration of marriages ended by widowhood also increased from 25 to 28 years between the 1980s and early 2000.

Considering all marriages ending by divorce or the wives' widowhood, the mean duration of married life would be evidently shorter (more recently 24 years), but also increased (by five years in comparison to 1980–1989). The relevant figures are shown in Table 18.

Table 18  
*Cumulative percentages of dissolved first marriages, by the number of years elapsed since the wedding in Romania (female responses only)*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
5	4	5
10	8	9
15	12	13
20	16	17
25	20	21
30	23	27
40	35	41
50	-	61
Mean duration at dissolution (of those whose marriages dissolve within 40 years)		
	19	24
1st decile:	12	11
1st quartile:	32	29
median:	-	45
3rd quartile:	-	-

The 100–complements of cumulative percentages at duration 25 in Table 18 give us the percentage of couples who celebrate their “silver” wedding anniversary. The complements to 100 at duration 50 give us the percentages of those who celebrate their “golden” wedding anniversary (if both divorce and death rates are fixed at the levels valid in the period to which the life tables refer). This means that about 80% of first marriages celebrate their “silver” wedding anniversary in both periods and about 40% of first marriages celebrate their “golden” wedding anniversary in the 1996–2005 period. We cannot comment on the “golden” marriage anniversary in the period of 1980–1989 because the population at risk, who would have been married for more than 50 years are in their 80s and thus they are not included in our sample: taking into account the mean age of 21 at first marriage, the necessary 50 years of marriage and the 15 years elapsed since 1990, the respondents would have to be more than 86 years old at the time of the interview. There are no such women in our sample (the maximum age is 79).

In Bulgaria, a similar percentage of couples (81%–82%) celebrate their “silver” wedding, and about half of them (10% points more than Romanian couples) celebrate their “golden” wedding provided that the patterns shown by the 1999–2003 synthetic cohort do not change (as shown by Philipov and Jasiloniene (2007)).

*The transformation of first marriage: childbearing or divorce?*

We are interested to see how childbearing affects the status of childless marriages. In particular, we want to estimate the interval between marriage and first birth in that marriage, and the extent to which childless couples divorce. We apply a competing-risk life table method, considering two competing risks: childbearing and divorce. A third competing risk, the partner's death is omitted because childbearing is almost universal in Romania and therefore widowhood is extremely rare in childless couples. Since gender difference in mortality does not affect our analysis, the three life tables presented below are, again, based on the responses of both sexes (as in the analysis on the transformation of marriage).

Table 19 displays estimates for the level and timing of marital-births, with divorce as a competing risk. Table 20 shows similar indicators for divorced childless couples (with birth as a competing risk). Table 21 sums up the two risks and gives estimates for the levels and timing of first transformations in marriages. The aim is to compare these transitions in marriage and in cohabitation: marital-births with out-of-wedlock-births, and divorces with separations. We recall that cohabitation has a third competing risk, change into marriage. Conceptions in first cohabitations may end as births in first marriages if marriage is contracted before the delivery. The first line in Table 19 provides an illustration of such situations.

Table 19

*Cumulative percentages of parenthood, by the number of years elapsed since childless couples' first marriages in Romania, with divorce as a competing risk (based on responses of both sexes)*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
before 0.6 (7 months)	12	11
1	30	23
2	60	49
3	72	63
4	77	70
5	81	74
7	84	79
10	86	82
15	88	83
Mean duration at birth (of those becoming a parent within 15 years)	2.1	2.4
1st decile:	1	1
1st quartile:	1	1
median:	1	2
3rd quartile:	3	5

About 11%–12% of pregnancies are conceived before the wedding and there is no substantial change between the first and second periods. The great majority of couples have the first birth during their first marriage: 88% and 83% in 1980–1989 and 1996–2005, respectively.

Birth follows wedding shortly: the mean interval between marriage and first birth is two years. Again, we do not observe any substantial change between the two periods, only a slight increase of four months.

The above mean interval between first marriage and birth is, however, slightly longer than the mean interval between entering the first cohabitation and birth (see Table 12). In the latter case birth takes place sooner. The finding suggests that in Romania cohabitation is rather chosen by people with low socio-economic status to whom the timing of childbirth may not be so strict and to whom cohabitation is not so much a “trial” period before marriage (where birth should occur later).

Childless married couples are rare and only 3%–4% of all first marriages break up before birth is given (Table 20). Divorce is less frequent than separation of cohabitating partners, especially in the more recent period when the number of consensual union separations increased. Childless cohabitations are more unstable than childless marriages: 12% of them end up in separation before they reach exactly 7 years, while only in 4% of childless marriages is divorce the first event of transformation in the 1996–2005 synthetical cohort.

Table 20  
*Cumulative percentages of divorced couples, by the number of years elapsed since childless couples' first marriages in Romania, with childbirth as a competing risk (based on responses of both sexes)*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	0	1
2	1	1
3	1	2
4	2	2
5	2	2
7	2	3
10	3	4
15	3	4
Mean duration at divorce (of those divorced within 15 years)	5.4	5.2
1st decile:	-	-
1st quartile:	-	-
median:	-	-
3rd quartile:	-	-

The above finding is also documented by the mean duration of broken childless unions, which is 3.6 years for cohabitations and 5.2 years for marriages in the last period. Neither the level nor the duration of divorce changed significantly over time.

No more than 9% of couples in the synthetical cohort of the socialist period remain in the status of childless marriage; this compares to 13% in the synthetical cohort of market times (Table 21). In 1980–1989, at the exact duration of 15 years, 91% of marriages experienced transitions (birth or divorce) compared to 87% in 1996–2005. The mean duration of childlessness only slightly increased, from 2.2 years in the first period to 2.6 years in the second.

Table 21  
*Cumulative percentages of first marriage transformations, by the number of years elapsed since marriage (based on responses of both sexes)*

Duration in years	1980–1989	1996–2005
1	35	26
2	63	52
3	74	66
4	79	72
5	83	77
7	86	82
10	89	85
15	91	87
Mean duration at marriage transformation (of those whose marriage transformed within 15 years)	2.2	2.6
1st decile:	1	1
1st quartile:	1	1
median:	2	2
3rd quartile:	3	5

In conclusion, no major change has been found in the behaviour of first married couples between the two periods.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Universal and early marriage has been predominant in Romania for long. But in the 1996–2005 synthetical cohort the universality of marriages has nearly come to an end. Neither men nor women ever marry in a proportion close to 90%, though women still have a level above 80% for the first marriage and a postponement toward older ages can be observed.

Other forms of union have developed, especially cohabitation. A greater number of people (especially women) start their first union in cohabitation and they do so earlier than in socialist times. Conversely, direct marriages have declined but continue to be much more common than cohabitation, and much more common than in Bulgaria. Cohabitation is generally a prelude to marriage, even when the share of cohabitations-turned-into-marriages decreased from the socialist period to the post-socialist period. The number of split-up cohabitations more than doubled though but duration increased.

The duration of marriages increased as well, both in case of divorce and widowhood. No substantial increase has been observed concerning first divorce.

Birth follows first marriage rather shortly, even sooner if the first union started as cohabitation. The patterns changed very little between the two periods. Shotgun marriages when wedding follows pregnancy, remained at the same level.

Marriage and childbearing have been early and universal in Romania. Almost every woman had a child in the synthetic cohort living under communism, although the same cannot be said for men. Motherhood is no longer universal in democratic Romania, but it is still above 80%. Postponement to higher ages of first births in marriage can be observed.

In sum, our life table analysis confirms that in Romania the Second Demographic Transition has set in. However, it is in an early stage, seemingly earlier than in Bulgaria, or in Hungary.

But in a wider perspective people in Romania continue to place high value on marriage and childbearing despite evident changes in family behaviour which accompanied the political and socio-economic transformations following the collapse of the communist regime. There are some opinions among Romanian demographers which argue that ideational change, considered as main determinant for the set of Second Demographic Transition, do not play a major role in drop of fertility and marriage rates in Romania, despite of the significant postponement in the timing of the two phenomena (Rotariu 2006). This finding indicates that the demographic change neither follows from change in the value system surrounding the family and relationships among its members, nor is it necessarily associated with behavioural changes, such as higher levels of cohabitation, increasing divorce rates, and higher instances of single motherhood.

We personally believe that the Second Demographic Transition has started (relatively recently), not by the top but by the bottom strata of the Romanian society. New behaviours, like spread of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing first emerge in disadvantaged strata as response to changed structural conditions in society. Subsequently, this behaviour gradually becomes accepted and adapted by other social groups, which in turn leads to wider changes in attitudes toward it. Many structural changes featuring the transition to a market

oriented economy, like unstable working conditions, high income disparities, and a need for more lifestyle flexibility are not compatible with the ‘bourgeois ideal’ of stable family consisting of a married couple with children, and lower-educated individuals were often at the forefront of a shift towards extramarital childbearing and cohabitation. Perhaps unwillingly, disadvantaged segments of the population may thus become trendsetters of new behaviour, paving the way to a wider legitimization and acceptance of the new family forms, which are later openly embraced by rising number of more educated individuals.

#### *Acknowledgments*

This study was partly written while I was a guest researcher Max Plank Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany. I am grateful to Jan Hoem for his continuous encouragement, to Dimiter Philipov for his help in cleaning life-histories and programming life tables with GGS data, and to Gunnar Andersson and Hill Kulu for their valuable comments. I wish to thank Aiva Jasilioniene for technical advice, to Susann Backer, Melegh Attila and Daróczi Etelka for language editing.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andersson G. and Philipov D. 2002. “Life table Representations of Family Dynamics in Sweden, Hungary, and 14 other FFS Countries: a Project of Descriptions of Demographic Behavior.” *Demographic Research*, 7, 4: 67–270.
- Coviello M. and Boggess M. 2004. “Cumulative Incidence Estimation in the Presence of Competing Risks.” *Stata Journal*, 4, 2: 103–112.
- Hoem J. 2001. Life table. In: Smelser N. and Baltes P. (eds.). *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier: 8832–8836.
- Mureșan C. 1999. “The Decrease of Life Expectancy at Birth in Romania and Some Crisis Contributing Factors.” *Health & Place*, 5, 2: 187–192.
- Mureșan C. 2007a. “How advanced Romania is in the Second Demographic Transition?” *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*, 1 (1–2): 46–60
- Mureșan C. 2007b. “Family Dynamics in Pre- and Post-Transition Romania: a Life Table Description.” *MPIDR Working Paper*, WP–2007–018.
- Mureșan C. and Rotariu T. 2000. Recent Demographic Development in Romania. In: Kucera T., Kucerova O.V., Opara O.B. and Schaich E. (eds.). *New Demographic Faces of Europe*. Berlin: Springer: 267–85.
- Mureșan C., Hărăguș P.T., Hărăguș M. and Schroder C. 2008. „Romania: Childbearing Metamorphosis within a Changing Context”. *Demographic Research* 19 (23): 855–906.
- Philipov D. and Jasilioniene A. 2007. “Unions and Fertility in Bulgaria and Russia: a Life Table Description of Recent Trends.” *MPIDR Working Paper*, WP-2007-005.

- Preston S.H., Heuveline P. and Guillot M. 2001. *Demography: Measuring and Modeling Population Processes*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Rotariu T. 2006. "Romania and the Second Demographic Transition. The Traditional Value System and Low Fertility Rates." *International Journal of Sociology*, 36(1): 10–27.
- StataCorp. 2005. *Stata Statistical Software: Release 9. User's Guide*, College Station, Texas: StataCorp LP.