

# 1.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERSHIP

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### MAJOR FINDINGS

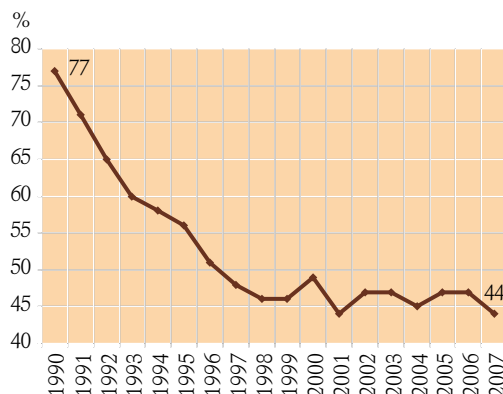
- The willingness to get married diminished significantly by 2007. The number of marriages was nearly 40 per cent lower than in 1990. Mostly those below 25 lagged behind the former data, whereas the number of marriages concluded by those in their thirties slightly increased. The marriages not concluded at a young age cannot be counterbalanced by the increased willingness to get married among older age groups, so the overall number of marriages is still decreasing.
- Due to the changes in the age distribution of the newly married the mean age of the newly wed persons is steadily rising. While in 1990 first brides were 22 years old on an average, in 2007 they got married at the age of 27.5. The average age of men marrying for the first time rose five years in the same interval, from 24.7 to 30.1 years of age.
- The alternative forms of partnership, most of all cohabitation, are steadily gaining ground. However, the rising number of consensual unions does not compensate the decreasing number of marriages, consequently the rate of those living in stable partnership is decreasing, too.
- According to census results the rate of couples living together unmarried rose from 5.1 per cent in 1990 to 11.3 per cent in 2001. The rate of those who tried cohabitation at least once in their lifetime is still higher than that. The data of the demographic survey *Turning Points of the Life Course* reveal that one quarter of all men and women who ever lived in partnership have tried this free type of union involving no legal consequences. In the age group 25–29 the rate of non-marital cohabitation reaches 40 per cent. Later the majority of these unions are legalized and the proportion of cohabiting people in older age groups gradually decreases.
- Public opinion polls reveal that despite the diminishing willingness to get married the prestige of the institution of marriage is invariably high. Marriage is still the most preferred form of partnership.
- The attitude towards cohabitation has, however, changed considerably. A few decades ago non-marital cohabitation was considered deviant but by now it has become a generally accepted form of partnership.

## CHANGING FORMS OF PARTNERSHIP

In the period after the change of regimes a marked shift can be observed in the various forms of stable partnership. Marriage tends to lose its exclusivity as a form of lasting union and non-marital forms of partnership tend to be more and more popular and accepted. Cohabitation still does not supplant marriage. Cohabitation preceding marriage (the so-called trial marriage) is ever more frequent, which calls attention to the fact that the two forms of partnership are becoming closely interconnected. Nevertheless, not all instances of cohabitation end in marriage or are intended to, so their spreading is in fact a serious challenge to the established institution. This fact is proved also by the constant fall in the willingness to get married and its uniquely low level, the period of the two world wars excepted.

By 2007 the number of marriages fell by 40 per cent as compared to 1990, and the data showing the changes in the total first marriage rate lead us to still more dramatic conclusions (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Changes of the total first marriage rate for women, 1990–2007



Source: Demográfiai évkönyv

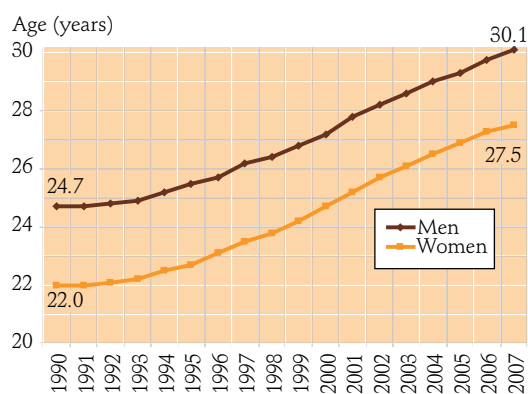
Whereas in the 1960s almost every woman got married at least once in her lifetime and nearly three quarters of them did so even in the 1990s, over half of the women today (56 per cent) are likely to spend their whole life as *de iure* spinsters, postulating the marital habits of the day to be lasting tendencies.

At the same time the age structure of the persons to be married is changing as well. The number of those marrying young, i.e., in their early twenties is steadily decreasing. In the case of women the mode of marriages has shifted from 20–24 to 25–29 years. In the early 1990s 28 per cent of the women about to get married were still teenagers. Today the respective rate is merely 4 per cent. Owing to the changes in the age distribution of the persons about to get married their average age is increasing, also (Fig. 2).

The average age of men and women at their first marriage rose by approximately 5.5 years in the given period.

The timing of first marriage is greatly determined by the person's level of education (Table 1).

Fig. 2. Average age of men and women at first marriage, 1990–2007



Source: Demográfiai évkönyv

Table 1. Distribution of first marriages by age groups and level of education, 2008 (per cent)

Educational level	Age group							Total
	-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-49	50-X	
<i>Men</i>								
0-7 grades	20.3	29.7	23.4	13.3	3.2	5.1	5.1	100.0
8 grades	7.1	23.7	28.6	24.5	8.4	4.7	3.1	100.0
vocational	0.7	11.4	36.8	35.7	9.9	4.3	1.2	100.0
secondary	0.3	11.5	42.1	33.3	9.3	3.0	0.6	100.0
higher	-	3.3	43.4	39.3	10.3	3.2	0.5	100.0
Total	1.1	10.2	39.8	34.8	9.6	3.5	1.0	100.0
No	327	3,159	12,317	10,767	2,978	1,092	300	30,940
<i>Women</i>								
0-7 grades	49.5	15.0	15.0	6.5	6.5	5.1	2.3	100.0
8 grades	29.5	28.4	21.1	13.3	4.1	2.8	0.8	100.0
vocational	4.3	30.9	37.2	20.3	5.1	1.9	0.2	100.0
secondary	1.9	31.8	40.3	19.7	4.5	1.4	0.5	100.0
higher	-	11.6	55.3	26.6	4.8	1.3	0.3	100.0
Total	4.0	23.0	44.4	22.0	4.7	1.5	0.5	100.0
No	1,254	7,195	13,883	6,884	1,464	479	142	31,301

Source: Central Statistical Office, vital statistic

Men with eight grades of primary school or less still tend to get married early and the majority of women with similar schooling wed in their early twenties. Men and women with higher education mostly get married for the first time at the age of 25 to 29 but nearly 40 per cent of the men and one quarter of the women prolong it still further, to their early thirties. The higher age of university or college graduates at their first marriage is conspicuous even as compared to the early 2000s. Whereas earlier the majority of men got married before they turned 29, the rate of those marrying at thirty or even above thirty-five is growing.

Half as many female university or college graduates get married at the age 20 to 24 now as around the turn of the century, and twice as many postpone marriage to their early thirties. The positive changes in the level of education of young adults

and the ever stronger tendency to postpone marriage among those with higher education contribute to the rising average age at first marriage.

The analysis of cohabitation spreading side by side with marriage and even supplanting it is hindered by the lack of full vital statistics. Data on the phenomenon can be collected from census results and representative surveys. According to the 2001 census the rate of those living in cohabitation was 11 per cent, nearly double the respective rate in 1990. The distribution of the types of first partnerships by the year of union formation is highly varied (see *Table 2*).

The data inform us that cohabitation is rocketing among young people and indicate that their first partnership involving cohabitation is more frequently a non-marital one rather than a legally valid union. The demographic survey entitled *Turning Points*

Table 2. Distribution of first partnership by the time of union formation

Period of first union formation	Type of partnership		Total (no.)
	marriage (per cent)	cohabitation (per cent)	
1960–1964	96.9	3.1	873
1965–1969	94.3	5.7	1,163
1970–1974	92.5	7.5	1,294
1975–1979	88.9	11.1	1,301
1980–1984	79.6	20.4	1,166
1985–1989	66.6	33.4	1,047
1990–1994	55.7	44.3	1,054
1995–1999	37.5	62.5	1,004
2000–2004	30.0	70.0	793

Source: Spéder and Kapitány (2007).

of the Life Course suggests that in most cases it is not a final way of life but merely a trial marriage that is eventually legalized.

In close connection with the ever younger age-groups entering cohabitation there came a change also in the distribution of the cohabiting by family status. Whereas earlier (even as late as the early 1990s) unmarried persons living in a free union were mostly divorced or widowed, today this form of partnership is the most popular among bachelors and spinsters. More than half of the cohabiting (57 per cent) are single, one third of them are divorced and one tenth are widowed.

Besides certain objective factors, the choice between marriage and cohabitation is influenced also by the personal attitudes of the partners such as religiosity (see Table 3).

Among the persons living in matrimony the rate of those following the teachings of the Church is 10 per cent higher than among cohabiting persons, and the rate of the unreligious among the latter is similarly higher by 10 per cent than among married people.

#### LIVING APART TOGETHER

Recently, there is an ever growing interest both in Hungary and in Europe in the so-called LAT partnership which is by no means casual but a recognized, exclusive form of partnership in which the partners live in separate households. Living apart can be a conscious, voluntary choice but can be the result of unfavourable circumstances as well, such as distant working places or housing problems.

The survey *Turning Points of the Life Course* for 2008-2009 reveals that about half million adults live in this type of partnership. The majority (300,000 persons) is below thirty. About 100,000 of them are in their thirties and the rest is above forty. As compared with the respective age groups, these figures are lower than those in other parts of Europe.

About half of these relationships can be considered very close and intensive. Fifty per cent of those living apart together meet their partners nearly every day (at least twenty times a month). A quarter of them meet a few times a week (8 to 19 times a month). A quarter of the persons concerned live no farther from their partner's home than a ten-minute ride and four fifth of them (83 per cent) can get there in an hour. This fact indicates that distance does not play a decisive part in establishing LAT partnership in Hungary.

#### CONDITIONS IN THE REST OF EUROPE

The diversification of the forms of partnership is a tendency in most European countries but the process takes place at a different pace and to a different degree. Prior to the early 1990s the East Central European countries, Hungary included, were charac-

Table 3. Distribution of married and cohabitant persons by age groups and religiosity (per cent)

	Age group							No
	Total	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–75	
Married person								
I am religious and follow the teachings of the Church	17.1	13.0	13.4	12.8	16.9	26.1	35.7	1,551
I am religious in my own way	57.3	57.4	54.7	56.5	60.6	60.2	49.6	5,196
I do not know	4.4	7.8	6.0	4.8	2.9	1.9	1.7	395
I am not religious	20.1	20.0	24.9	25.0	18.4	10.6	12.4	1,819
I do not want to answer	1.0	1.5	0.7	1.0	1.1	1.2	0.6	93
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	9,054
Cohabiting persons								
I am religious and follow the teachings of the Church	7.0	6.9	5.5	4.0	11.5	21.4	23.5	105
I am religious in my own way	53.8	48.5	56.2	54.2	59.4	63.3	58.8	715
I do not know	6.5	8.1	5.9	6.8	5.5	2.0		86
I am not religious	31.2	35.9	32.1	34.7	23.6	11.2	11.8	414
I do not want to answer	0.5	0.4	0.3	–	–	2.0	5.9	6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	1,326

Source: Turning Points of the Life Course. Demographic survey, DRI 2001. (Author's calculations)

#### SINGLES

The term *single* pops up in all types of the media ever more frequently nowadays. Being single is a chosen way of life of the younger layers of the middle-aged population (i.e., those in their thirties and forties) in this post-modern world. These people live without a steady partner and their life centres strongly around work, consumption and free-time activities. The precondition of this way of life is affluence as single persons have to create the financial basis of their independent life by themselves. The growing disparities resulting from the transformation of the Hungarian economy and society in the 1990s created a

narrow but affluent layer that can afford being single.

Besides the financial circumstances there is, however, a mental precondition, too: the persons wanting to remain single tend to prefer temporary partnership to the lasting one and want to live free of obligations. Still a mere 5 per cent of the youth considers independent existence ideal. Utasi (2004) shows that remaining single is a conscious choice only for one fifth of those living without a steady partner. The majority just lets it happen, following other objectives and focusing primarily on their career or is single only temporarily having lost their former partner and not having found a new one yet.

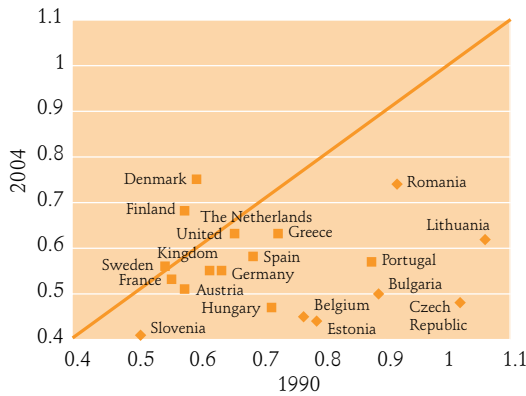
terized by a high rate of marriages concluded at a young age unlike Western Europe where this rate was much lower and the age at first marriage much higher.

As a result of the radical decrease in the number of marriages in the past decade and

a half the East Central European countries feature the lowest marriage rate in Europe today (Fig. 3).

The downward change was less drastic in Western Europe, and in certain Northern European countries (e.g., in Denmark

Fig. 3. Total first marriage rate for women in Europe in 1990 and 2004

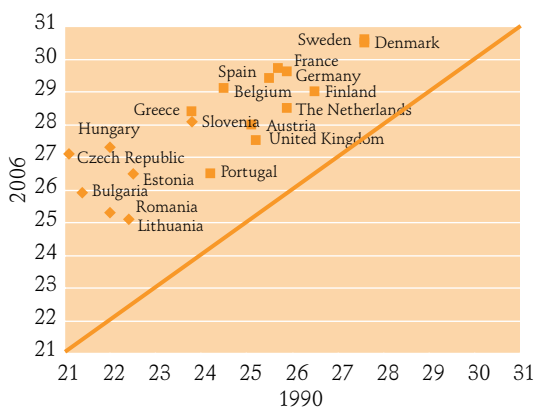


Source: Demográfiai évkönyvek

and Finland) the willingness to get married even increased. Consequently, the East Central European rates tend to reach the initially lower rates in Western and Northern Europe or even drop below them.

In the past decade and a half the average age of women at first marriage has been rising all over Europe (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Average age of women at first marriage in Europe in 1990 and 2006



Source: Demográfiai évkönyvek

In the East Central European region the rise was unquestionably higher than in the rest of Europe but the traditional differenc-

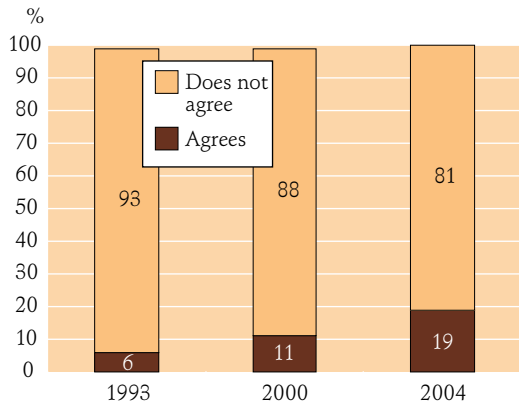
es persisted and the marital patters of the two regions continue to differ. As a result the general tendency is that in Western Europe people usually get married for the first time at a later age but to a greater degree than in most eastern countries.

The spreading of cohabitation is a universal tendency in Europe but there are considerable differences in the degree of its popularity, and in the length and outcome of the relationship. It is highly popular in Northern Europe and is almost exclusive as regards first partnership. Its rate is as high as 30 per cent among those who consider it a final arrangement. As a contrast, in some Southern European countries (Italy, Greece or Cyprus) non-marital unions are less wide-spread and marriages no longer concluded at a definitely young age are generally not preceded by a period of cohabitation. In these countries cohabitation is no real alternative to marriage. Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania show similar tendencies, which indicates that the shared values of the Catholic Church play a great role in influencing marital behaviour. Hungary takes place mid-field. Non-marital union is common mainly in the case of first partnership but the rate of those choosing it as a lasting form of conjugal union is definitely increasing.

### THE POPULARITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL FORMS OF PARTNERSHIP

Public opinion polls conducted by the Demographic Research Institute testify that despite the fundamental changes in marital behaviour the institution of marriage is still regarded as something positive (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Distribution of opinions concerning the statement "marriage is an outdated institution" (1993, 2000, 2004)



Source: Datasurveys by the Demographic Research Institute from 1993, 2000, and 2004. (Authors' calculations)

The rate of those who considered marriage outdated did not reach 20 per cent even at the latest date, i.e., the vast majority did not agree with the allegation. However, the rate of the supporters of marriage was gradually decreasing in the decade in question, which can be attributed to the growing popularity of cohabitation.

The increased frequency of non-marital unions brought about a change in the reception of cohabitation in the society. It

Table 4. Changes in the social reception of cohabitation, 1991 and 2000

	Agrees	Does not agree
	(per cent)	
It is socially indifferent whether people get married or live in cohabitation (1991)	25,4	59,5
There is nothing bad in a young couple living together without wanting to get married (2000)	70,7	26,1

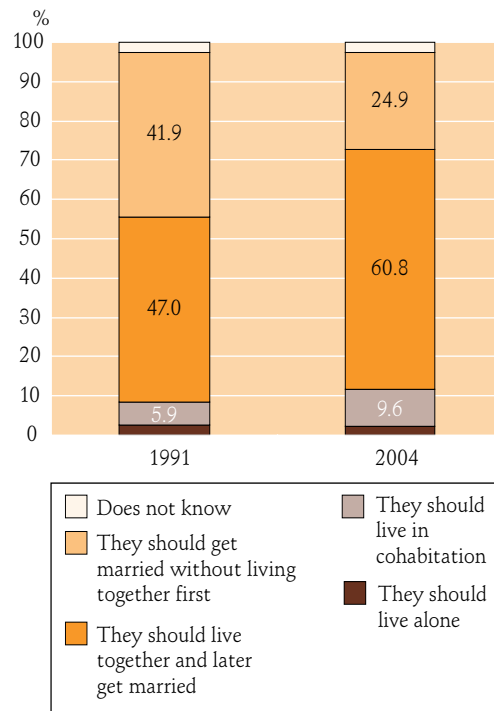
Source: Datasurveys conducted by the Demographic Research Institute in 1991 and 2000 (authors' calculations)

was not fully rejected in 1991 either but the positive change of public opinion in merely a decade is really remarkable (Table 4).

It seems that the past decade and a half brought considerable liberalization as regards the forms of partnership both in practice and in their social reception. Nevertheless, with regard to preferences, liberalization and positive attitudes towards alternative ways of living together cannot or hardly be observed (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Distribution of opinions about the preferred form of union

(Answers to the question "What way of life would you recommend to young couples?", 1991 and 2004)



Source: Datasurveys conducted by the Demographic Research Institute in 1991 and 2000 (authors' calculations)

It turns out from this that the Hungarian society definitely supports marriage today as it used to do in the past. The only difference lies in the opinion concerning

cohabitation prior to marriage. The rate of those supporting trial marriage followed by a wedding increased considerably in the given period but cohabitation as a final form of union is still not recommended.

#### Demographic consequences of the changes in partnership

- The proportion of those living with partner or spouse decreases. The drastic drop in the number of marriages is not counter-balanced by the rising number of cohabitations, consequently the number of those living without a steady partner increases. This process is unfavourable both in respect of the social values and the demographic processes.

- Non-marital relations are less stable than marriages, which in turn decreases the stability of families.

- The growing number of births out of wedlock (see Chapter 3 of the present volume) is the result primarily of the growing rate of cohabitation. Due to the instability of such relations, the number of single-parent families is likely to increase, too.

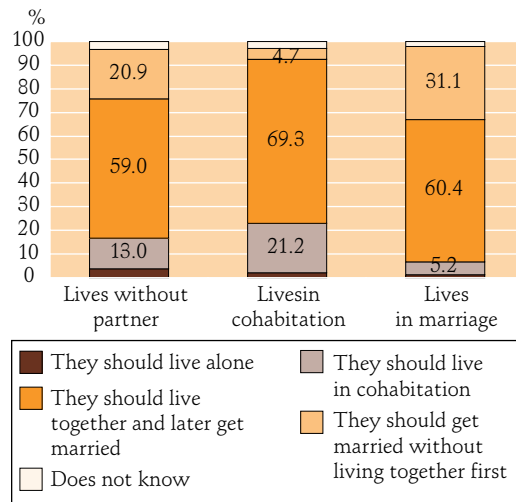
- Married couples tend to have more children than unmarried ones. The decreasing willingness to get married and the spread of cohabitation may contribute to lower fertility rates, anyway.

- The close correlation between family status, mortality, and life expectancy is a statistical fact. Married people are in the most favourable position in this respect, coming before unregistered couples. In other words, cohabitation is not equal in value with marriage as regards the couple's life expectancy, either.

Strangely enough, it is not popular even among the persons concerned, i.e., among those living in cohabitation. The majority of this group supports the idea of marriage, also, though most of them recommend cohabitation first (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Distribution of opinions about the preferred form of union

(Answers to the question “What way of life would you recommend to young couples?” by the type of union of the respondents), 2004



Source: *Turning Points of the Life Course. Demographic survey, DRI 2004. (Authors' calculations)*

The rate of those dissatisfied with their own form of partnership is surprisingly low. It is probable, however, that dissatisfaction is merely apparent since the majority of cohabiting people does not consider their current way of life final and plan to get married the way they consider ideal, i.e., following a period of cohabitation.

To sum up, it can be established that in parallel with the decrease in the willingness to get married non-marital cohabitation is becoming ever more frequent especially among young couples. However, this shift of attitudes does not question the hegemony of marriage as the preferred way of life held ideal by the majority. At the same time it can be expected that due to the growing tolerance of the society the share of temporary or permanent non-marital unions will be increasing in the future, which does



not augur well as regards demographic phenomena like fertility, divorce, the rate of single-parent families, etc.

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