

# 1.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERSHIP

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### MAJOR FINDINGS

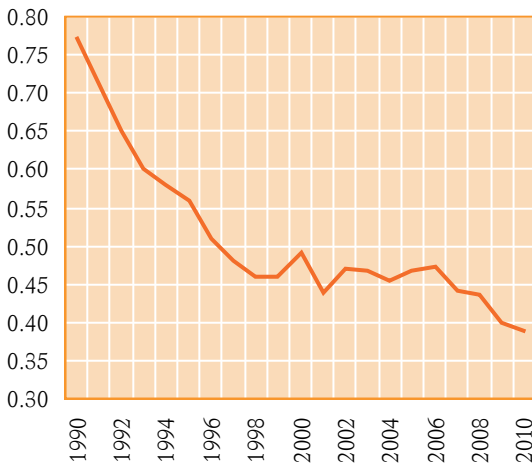
- The past two decades were characterized by a decrease in the number of marriages. Between 1990 and 2011 the number of first marriages decreased by 50 per cent and that of remarriages by 36 per cent. The total first marriage rate for women is 0.39, which means that the majority of women (61%) will never get married should this tendency prevail.
- The average age at the time of a person's first marriage is steadily rising. In 2010 it was 28.7 years with women and 31.4 years with men, which means a rise of 6.7 years with regard to both sexes as compared to the data of 1990.
- The regional distribution of first marriages is varied. In general it can be established that the willingness to get married is higher in Transdanubia than in the Great Plains. In Budapest more marriages are contracted than the national average, especially in the Buda districts.
- The number of remarriages also decreased, though to a smaller extent than that of first marriages. Divorced persons remarry much more frequently than widows and widowers, and the same applies to men. Divorced men are inclined to remarry to the greatest extent and widows are the least inclined (or have less possibilities) to do so.
- Representative data from the survey Turning Points of the Life Course concerning cohabitation lead us to the conclusion that the majority of the couples does not intend to legalize their relationship. It is mostly the younger generations living in a kind of 'trial marriage' that include marriage among their plans for the future.
- Public opinion considers trial marriage the most recommended form of partnership for young people and the preference of marriage without previous cohabitation is gradually decreasing. Cohabitation as the final form of partnership is slightly increasing but it still cannot be regarded as overly popular.
- Raising children safely in a family by parents living in matrimony is no longer a primary issue in the assessment of the various forms of partnership. While earlier the overwhelming majority of the population deemed the legalization of the parents' relationship necessary and important, today this view is definitely a minority opinion.

## CHANGING FORMS OF PARTNERSHIP

The past two decades are characterized by a steady decrease in the number of newly contracted marriages. As compared to the 66,405 marriages in 1990, the year 2011 can boast of a mere 35,520. The decline was the most conspicuous in the case of first marriages (50%), while the number of remarriages fell only by 36 per cent.

This highly unfavourable trend is best illustrated by the changes in the total first marriage rate for women.

**Fig. 1. Changes of the total first marriage rate for women, 1990–2010**



Source: Demográfiai évkönyvek, 1990–2010. (Demographic Yearbooks, 1990–2010).

Whereas in the 1960s almost every woman got married at least once in her lifetime (and about three quarters of them still in 1990), the present tendencies indicate that 61% of all women living in Hungary today will remain unmarried throughout their lives, should these tendencies prevail.

Also the age structure of people getting married changed significantly in these years,

which means that both first brides and first grooms are older by 7 years today than at the beginning of the period. While in 1990 the average age of women at their first marriage was 22 years and that of men was 24.7 years, in 2010 women got married at the age of 28.7 years and men at the age of 31.4 years.

**Table 1. First marriages by age groups (per thousand) in 1990, 2000, 2010**

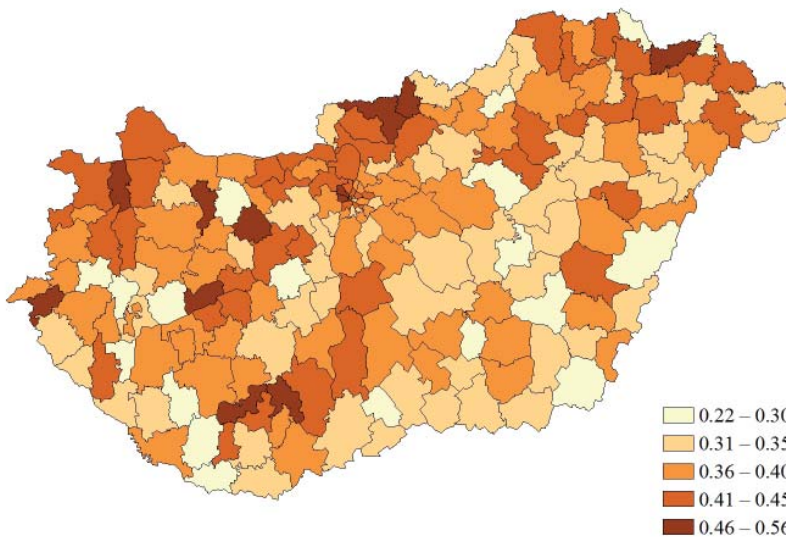
Age group	Men			Women		
	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010
–19	9.3	2.3	0.9	50.7	12.3	3.3
19–24	121.0	32.5	7.4	185.4	60.7	18.1
25–29	122.1	71.1	30.1	114.3	80.5	48.5
30–34	49.4	55.8	41.0	50.7	42.5	41.4
35–39	21.8	23.2	26.9	25.2	19.8	21.5
40–	16.2	16.2	16.2	13.3	10.6	12.5

Source: HCSO vital statistics, 1990–2010.

First marriage rates tend to decrease dramatically in all age groups among men and women alike between 1990 and 2010 but the change in the age structure of the persons to be married caused a considerable shift in the rates. While in 1990 first marriages were the most frequent in the age group 19–24 (185.4), by 2010 the respective figure fell to the quarter of the previous one and the mode shifted to the age group 25–29. In 2010 practically no marriages were contracted in the age group below 19 which was still popular in 1990 (50.7). Significant changes have occurred in the practice and timing of first marriages below 20 years of age. In 1990 20.3 per cent of the women got married after they turned thirty, while in 2010 this rate was already 52 per cent.

The regional distribution of first marriages differs considerably.

**Fig. 2. Regional distribution of total first marriage rates among women**



Source: HCSO vital statistics.

The frequency of marriages is above the national average of 0.39 in Northern Transdanubia and in Central Hungary along the Danube, as well as in certain regions of Northern Hungary. However, the blocs showing specially high rates are interspersed with patches with extremely low ones, so there are no homogeneous regions in this respect. In general it can, however, be established that the willingness to get married is lower in the Great Plains than in Transdanubia. In Budapest the rate of marriages is relatively favourable as compared to the national average, though there are considerable differences among the districts of the capital. Whereas in the Buda districts the total first marriage rate is around 0.50 (in District XII it is even 0.56), in the Pest District VIII it is only 0.32, and in Csepel it is 0.33. The majority of the districts is, however, around or above the very unfavourable national average.

There is a difference also in the relationship of first marriages and remarriages within the total number of marriages in 1990 and

2010. Both figures decreased but whereas the number of first marriages decreased during the 20 years concerned by 50 per cent, the decrease in the number of remarriages was only 36 per cent. In other words, the rate three quarters to one quarter of first marriages and remarriages in 1990 changed to two thirds to one third in 2010.

Remarriage is much more frequent among divorced persons than among widowed ones, and the same is true for men.

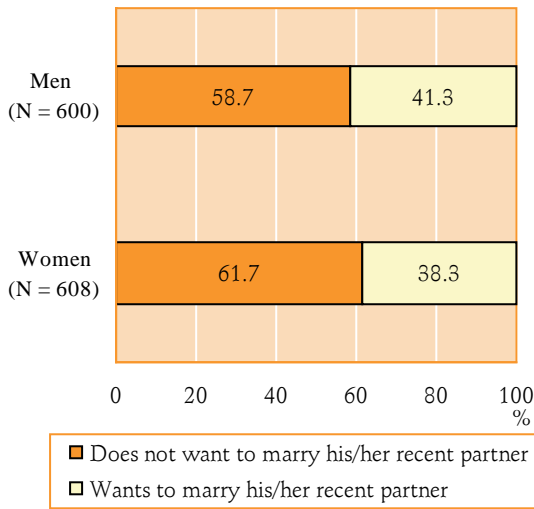
**Table 2. Remarriages by sex and family status (per thousand) in 1990, 2000, 2010**

Year	Divorced		Widowed	
	men	women	men	women
1990	46.4	32.4	10.3	2.1
2000	29.1	19.7	4.9	0.9
2010	21.3	14.0	3.4	0.6

Source: HCSO vital statistics.

Whereas in 1990 almost half of the divorced men got married anew, in our days only one fifth of this group attempts a second marriage. It is primarily the young generations (those below 30) that tend to remain single after divorce, while the willingness of the older generations to remarry decreased to a smaller extent. Women – because of their differing age-structure – are in a less favourable position with respect to the chances of remarrying which decrease to a great extent especially in the higher age-groups.

**Fig. 3. Marriage plans of cohabiting men and women in 2008 (per cent)**



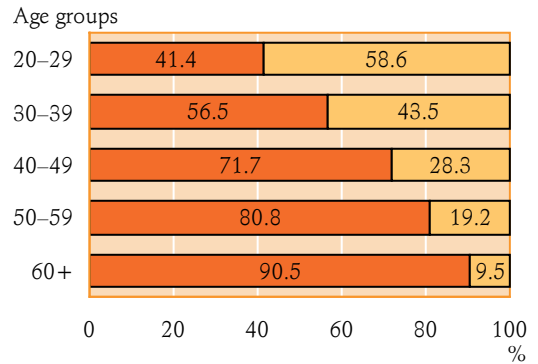
Source: Turning Points of the Life Course. Survey by the Demographic Research Institute, 2008–9, 3rd wave.

The considerable fall in the number of divorces is primarily due to the spreading of cohabitation. The detailed analysis of cohabitation will be possible only after processing the 2011 census results, so we are going to rely here more on the findings of the representative panel survey Turning Points of the Life Course according to which 84 per cent of all persons living in partnership in 2004

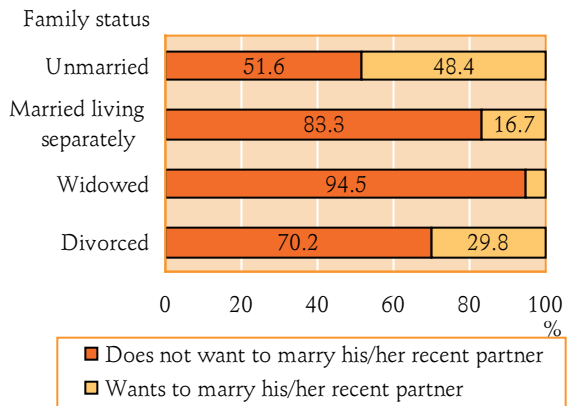
and followed by the survey were married and 16 per cent of them (1191 persons) lived in cohabitation. The repeated survey of 2008 revealed that a mere 15 per cent of the latter got married in the meantime. 63 per cent were still living in cohabitation five years later, and 20 per cent terminated their partnership between the two surveys.

**Fig. 4–5. Marriage plans of persons living in cohabitation**

*By age groups (per cent)*



*By family status (per cent)*



Source: Turning Points of the Life Course. Survey by the Demographic Research Institute, 2008–9, 3rd wave.

The overwhelming majority of those living in cohabitation in 2008 did not want to marry their partners at all. In contrast with common beliefs, there is no considerable difference between the plans of men and women concerning marriage. 59 per cent of men and 62 per cent of women living in cohabitation do not want to legalize their partnerships. The survey does not offer reasons, so it cannot be told whether the refusal of marriage is due to the partners' satisfaction with their way of life or to their dissatisfaction with the relationship. The intention to legalize the partnership is the highest among couples younger than 30 but is still high in the age group 30–39 for both sexes, which corroborates the assumption that the cohabitation of young people can be considered as temporary trial marriage.

The willingness to remarry among divorced and widowed persons living in cohabitation is rather low. Non-marital partnership seems to be their final choice.

## 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 characterized 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. 6).

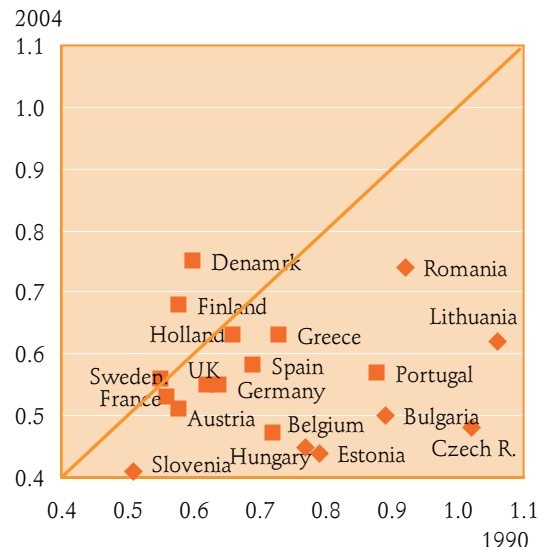
The downward change was less drastic in Western Europe, and in certain Northern

European countries (e.g., in Denmark 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 was rising all over Europe (Fig. 7).

In the East Central European region the rise was unquestionably higher than in the rest of Europe but the traditional differences persisted and the marital patterns 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.

**Fig. 6. Total first marriage rate for women in Europe in 1990 and 2004**

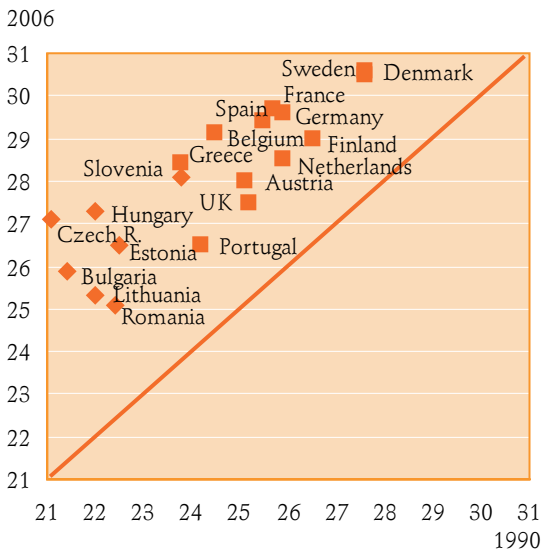


Source: Demográfiai évkönyvek (Demographic Yearbooks).

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.

**Fig. 7. Average age of women at first marriage in Europe in 1990 and 2006**



Source: Demográfiai évkönyvek (Demographic Yearbooks).

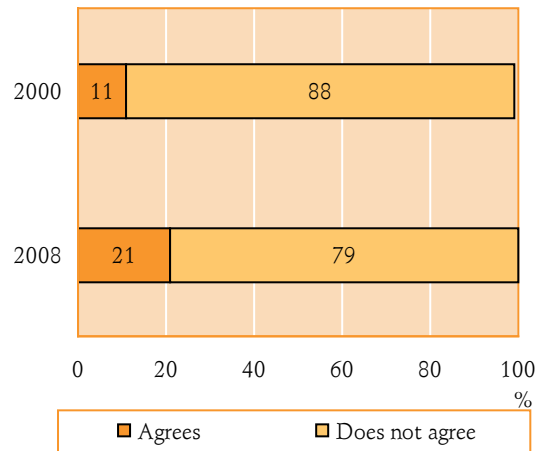
As a contrast, in some Southern European countries (Italy, Greece or Cyprus) non-marital unions are less wide-spread and marriages no longer concluded at a definitely young age are generally not preceded by a period of cohabitation. In these countries cohabitation is no real alternative to marriage. 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. 8).

**Fig. 8. Distribution of opinions about the statement „marriage is an outdated institution”**



Source: Turning Points of the Life Course. Survey by the Demographic Research Institute, 2008–9, 3rd wave.

Although the rate of those rejecting the institution of marriage almost doubled by the end of the 2000s, the group is still a minority. Four fifths of the people interviewed do not consider marriage outdated.

As regards the recommended form of partnership, young people are especially pro-marriage. The question „What way of life would you recommend young couples?” was posed several times between 1990 and 2009.

**Table 3. Changes of opinion about the preferred form of union (Men and women between 18 and 50 years of age, 1991, 2001, 2004, 2009) (per cent)**

Recommended way of life	1991	2001	2004*	2009
Marriage	87.8	84.9	83.5	80.0
following previous cohabitation	55.6	67.3	69.9	69.7
without previous cohabitation	32.2	17.6	13.6	10.3
Cohabitation	7.7	9.7	11.8	15.0
Other or uncertain opinions	4.5	5.4	4.6	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.00	100.0
Number of cases	569	10,089	7,424	1,515

\* Persons between 21 and 50.

Source: Demographic Research Institute data surveys for 1991, 2001, 2004, and 2009.

Marriage is still a highly preferred way of life for young people. However, there is a great difference in the attitude to its realization, namely in the growing acceptance of previous cohabitation, i.e., trial marriage. The rate of those recommending cohabitation as a lasting or final form of partnership is still very low despite its rising tendency. It can be established that although the Hungarian society does not consider cohabitation as an optimal way of life, it tolerates its existence and growing frequency to an ever greater degree.

Earlier it was a social requirement that couples got married when pregnancy occurred. The legalization of the relationship was important not only from the point of

view of the child's future status but also from that of the parents, and especially because of the society's moral judgement of the mothers.

**Table 4. "There is nothing wrong in a young couple living together without wanting to get married" (Men and women between 18 and 50 years of age, 1991, 2001, 2009) (per cent)**

Opinion	1991	2000	2009
Agrees	25.4	70.7	75.7
Disagrees	59.5	26.1	7.9
Uncertain	15.1	3.2	16.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	569	1,776	1,515

Source: Demographic Research Institute data surveys for 1991, 2000, and 2009.

Unmarried mothers were not tolerated at all or only to a small degree. This social norm could still be observed in the 1990s, which is proved by the fact that in those years 23 to 25 per cent of the brides were pregnant at the time of marriage and the rate of births out of wedlock was merely 13 per cent in contrast with the 40 per cent of today. The public opinion polls of 1991 and 1997 revealed that about two thirds of the people interviewed found it important that couples expecting children should get married before the child is born.

Today both public opinion and the actual demographic situation are totally different.

The rate of those considering marriage important and not important has become balanced. The slackening of the earlier social norms can be seen also in the behaviour of couples, namely in the fact that in 2010 the rate of brides getting married during pregnancy fell to about half of the previous rate, i.e., to 11.6 per cent.

**Table 5. "How important is it to get married in the event of pregnancy?" (Opinions of men and women between 18 and 50 years of age, 2001, 2009) (per cent)**

Getting married is...	2001	2009
Important	57.7	50.2
before birth	83.3	65.2
after birth	14.7	10.9
does not matter when		23.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Not important	41.1	49.0
Does not know	1.2	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	10,089	1,616

Source: Demographic Research Institute data surveys for 2001 and 2009.

One or two decades ago public opinion found the status 'married mother' important also from the point of view of the stable status of the child to be born.

**Table 6. "Today it is already indifferent for a child whether its parents are married or not" (Opinions of men and women between 18 and 50 years of age, 1990, 1997, 2009) (per cent)**

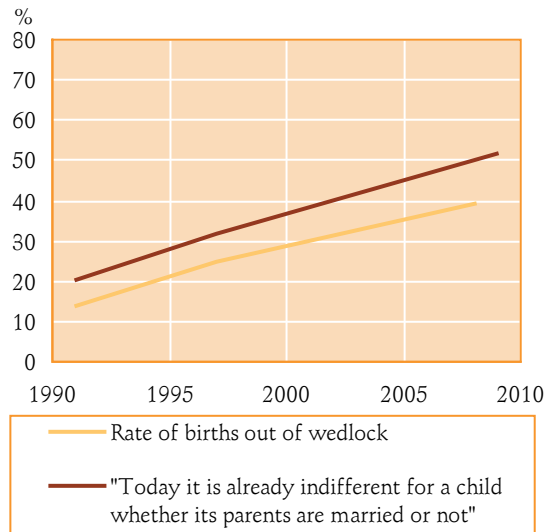
	1991	1997	2009
Agrees	20.4	30.7	51.7
Partly agrees	17.2	14.2	23.1
Disagrees	62.4	55.0	24.3
Does not know	–	–	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Number of cases	569	889	1,616

Source: Demographic Research Institute data surveys for 1991, 1997, and 2009.

The ever growing rate (around 40 per cent today) of births out of wedlock has transformed public opinion also as regards the attitude towards these children. While earlier it was found important from the point of view of the child's status in the kindergarten

or at school that the parents should be married and the child be legitimate, the last twenty years have brought about a drastic turn in this respect and the opinion of those finding the married status of the parents of secondary importance prevails.

**Fig. 9. Rate of births out of wedlock and the change in the opinion "it is indifferent from the point of view of children...", 1991–2009**



Source: S. Molnár E. (2010).

To sum up, it can be established that the negative tendency in the attitude towards marriage, i.e., the continuous decrease in the number of marriages since 1990 has not stopped. The fall is greater in the case of first marriages than in the case of remarriages. The change of values as regards partnership does not so much come from the people's views as to the justification of marriage but rather from the growing acceptance of the alternative forms of partnership. The emphasis on the legalization of the child with respect to its growing up in a stable family so important earlier has been pushed to the background that calls attention to individualization getting an ever greater ground and to the falling into the background of the traditional values.



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