

# DIVORCE

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## MAIN FINDINGS

- » In the couple of decades following the change of regime, the number of divorces changed little from year to year (fluctuating at 22,000–25,000); however, since 2010 there has been a declining trend: whereas in 2010, 23,873 divorces were finalized, by 2017 the number was only 18,600.
- » The mean age at the time of divorce is continuing to rise, even though the age at time of marriage remained unchanged for the three years prior to 2016. In 2016, the mean age of divorce for women was 41.5 years and for men 44.5.
- » Spouses are divorcing perceptibly later as time passes – that is, the duration of marriage is growing: marriages that ended in divorce in 2016 lasted an average of 14.7 years, whereas those ending in 2010 lasted 13.9 years. The primary reason for the rise in the mean duration is the fact that the proportion of marriages dissolved after 20 years or more is growing: close to a third of marriages that ended in divorce in 2016 were of such duration. Compared to earlier decades, fewer marriages were dissolved in the early years in 2010 and 2016, though more ended after a long duration.
- » The fact that marriages are lasting longer does not mean greater stability than a few decades ago. Approximately a quarter of marriages contracted in 1977 and 1980 ended in the first 15 years, whereas the figure is close to a third of marriages that started in 2000. Nearly as many marriages contracted in 2000 were dissolved in the first 15 years as were dissolved in the first 30 years of marriages that began in 1977.
- » The number of divorcees in the total population has decreased somewhat since 2011: in 2016, some 10.7% of the population over 15 was divorced.
- » In 2016, 12% of the female population and 9% of the male population – close to 900,000 people – were divorced. The proportion of divorced women is higher than that of divorced men in all age groups, and irrespective of level of education, since men remarry more frequently than women. The proportion of divorcees in the population is highest among 45–54-year-olds: in this group, 23% of women and 18% of men are divorced.

- » Since 2001, the number of divorcees living with a cohabiting partner has grown: 26% had a cohabiting partner in 2016. The largest proportion, however – over a third – continue to live in a one-person household. About a quarter become single parents.
- » A small section of the married population – some 3% – do not live with their spouse. There were about 113,000 such persons in Hungary in 2016.
- » The number of children affected by their parents' divorce shows a decreasing trend. In 2016, 16,700 minors experienced their parents divorcing; and at least one common minor child was affected in 55% of divorces.
- » In cases of divorce, the 'shared placement' of children has grown, according to 2016 data. But this signifies the greater prevalence of joint parental responsibility, rather than of actual shared placement of the children, alternating between the parents.
- » There has been a slight growth in the number of people opposed to divorce in Hungary over the past decade, mainly among the younger population aged under 40.

## INTRODUCTION

Divorce is the dissolution of a marriage by a court decision. A marriage also ends with the death of one of the spouses. However, in this chapter we focus on divorce and the characteristics of the *divorced*<sup>6</sup> population. The time of dissolution of the marriage is the point at which the court decision to end the marriage takes effect, giving both parties the opportunity to marry again.

From a demographic point of view, the event of divorce accords married people the marital status of 'divorced'. However, not all those who have been divorced have divorced status, as those who remarry acquire 'married' marital status. The significance of official marital status has declined in recent decades: whereas previously it was of exceptional importance from the perspective of family planning (the overwhelming majority of children were born in wedlock), these days it is quite common for both men and women to have children, even though they are single, divorced or widowed; only about half of all children are born to parents living as a married couple.

Today, in both Hungary and Europe generally, the analysis of divorce means analysis of an event that in many ways involves a selective population. The selection already makes itself felt in the earlier stages of a relationship: many people do not get married, but live instead with a *cohabiting partner*<sup>6</sup>, in an arrangement that is similar in nature to marriage. Divorce also only affects a certain proportion of those who get married. And divorce does not give us a complete picture of the dissolution of relationships, as it does not register the break-up of cohabiting partnerships.

A few decades ago, when the majority of those living in a partnership ended up married, an examination of the instability of relationships was essentially concerned with a study of the dissolution of marriages.

Currently, cohabiting partnerships have to be studied separately; this is harder to do, because no official procedure registers them. We can only deduce how many people – and from what groups of the population – are living in a cohabiting partnership on the basis of surveys, census data collections, and responses from the population surveyed. These sources usually record the date when the cohabiting partnership began; however, its 'fate' – when it may have ceased – cannot usually be followed up. By comparison, we have official data available on divorces: filing for divorce entails the courts recording for statistical purposes the main attributes of the parties and their children (if any), as well as the main data on the marriage and the final court decision.

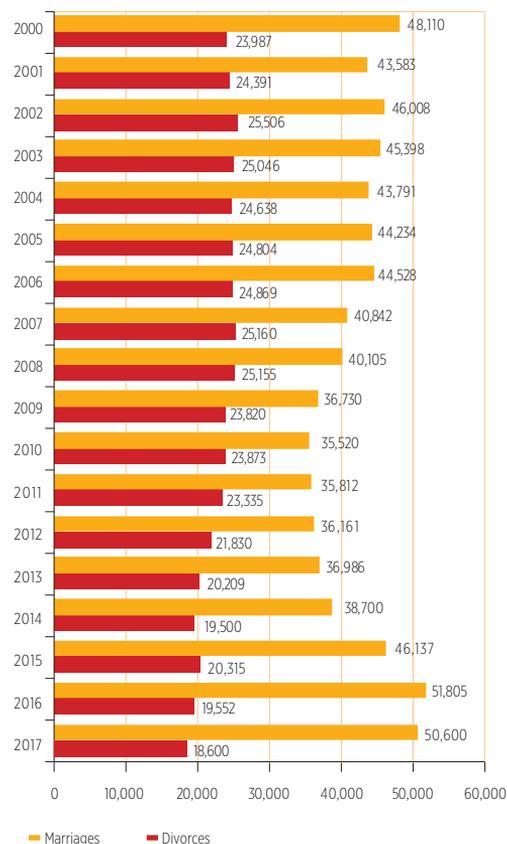
In this chapter, we first present the main Hungarian trends as regards divorce, and then briefly cover the on-going European processes. We discuss the main demographic attributes of the divorced population, along with those of the population who, though married, do not live with their partners. This is followed by a look at divorce proceedings in court. We further consider children (minors) caught up in divorce: how the divorce impacts children, and to what extent this has changed with the change in regulations in recent years. We show to what degree society finds divorce acceptable, and how opinions have changed in this regard over recent years.

## DIVORCE TRENDS IN HUNGARY

Between 2000 and 2008, the annual number of divorces ranged from 24,000 to 25,000. This was followed by a drop, so that by 2016 there were fewer than 20,000 divorces – close to 20% fewer than a decade earlier. Since the turn of the millennium, 2017 saw the smallest number of divorces – 18,600 (*Figure 1*).

The number of marriages – which must be considered, since a divorce can only follow a marriage – fell between 2000 and 2010; after a low of 35,520 in 2010, the number began rising again, reaching 50,600 in 2017.

Figure 1: Marriage and divorce numbers, 2000–2017

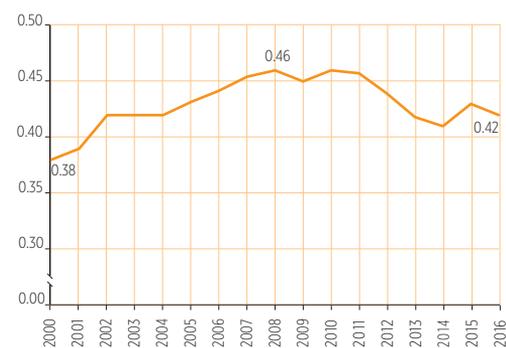


Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), Demographic Yearbooks.

The number of divorces is dependent on the size of the married population, as well as on the propensity to divorce. The frequency of divorce may be measured in various ways. The *total divorce rate*<sup>6</sup> takes account of the number and the duration of marriages as well, thereby avoiding distortions caused by their annual fluctuation. This indicator shows the ratio of the number of divorces finalized

in a calendar year, compared to the number of marriages contracted in the same year, estimating the percentage of marriages ending in divorce on the basis of the divorce rates and the duration of marriages. The indicator reached its highest ever figure of 0.46 in 2008, meaning that divorce could be expected in the case of nearly half of all marriages. Since the beginning of this decade, there has been a declining trend: the total divorce rate in 2016 was 0.42, which means that divorce can be expected in around 42% of marriages (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Total divorce rate, 2000–2016



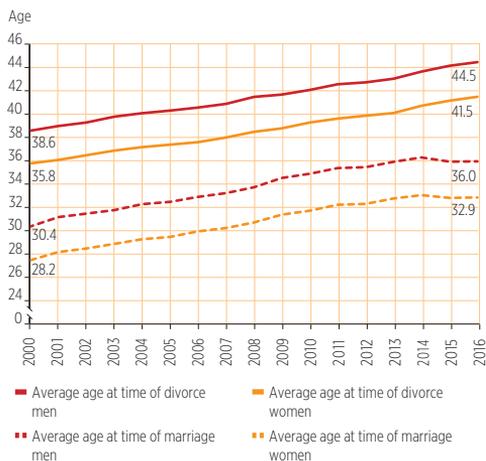
Source: HCSO, Demographic Yearbooks.

Taking both sexes together, since 2000 the mean age at marriage has risen by 5.5 years, and at divorce by 5.8 years. In 2016, at the time of the divorce being finalized, the average age among women was 41.5, while among men it was 44.5 years (Figure 3). It can be observed that the average age at divorce was still showing a tendency to rise, whereas the average age at marriage had not risen since 2014.

The growth in average age at divorce may be explained by two factors: first, since 1990 – and discounting the last few years – there has been a long-term rise in the age at marriage; and secondly, married couples are divorcing increasingly

late. The average duration of marriages at the time of divorce was 14.7 years in 2016, against just 13.9 years in 2010. The reason for this rise in average duration is that an increasing proportion of divorces separate married couples who have lived together for a long time: close to a third of all divorces in 2016 ended marriages that were of at least 20 years' duration, whereas 10 years previously the proportion had been only 24% (Figure 4). On the other hand, the proportion of marriages that break up after (at most) only 4 years has decreased, while the proportion of those lasting between 5 and 19 years has barely changed. (Regarding the characteristics of those marriages that end after more than 20 years, see the text box below.)

Figure 3: Mean age at marriage and divorce, by sex, 2000–2016

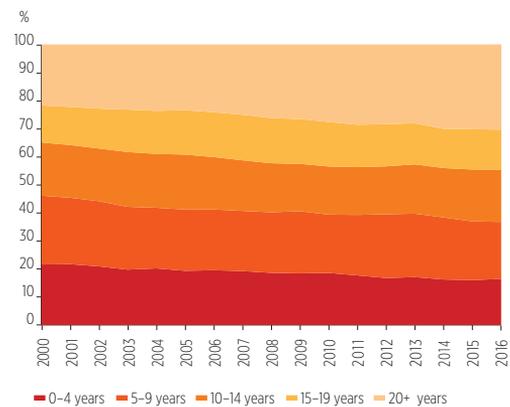


Source: HCSO, Demographic Yearbooks.

The restructuring is probably caused by changes over recent decades in the part that marriage plays within the life course: nowadays, it is usually preceded by cohabitation (only about a tenth of couples marry without having lived together previously; see Murinkó and Spéder 2015), meaning that the parties first move in together before getting married, and not after. In the decade after 2000 (and this is

also true of the 1990s), significantly more married couples decided to divorce in the first few years of living together. Now, presumably, those people who marry are already past a 'trial marriage' of some length, and have had a positive experience of living with the other person. This does not mean, however, that the newly contracted marriages are more stable in the long term.

Figure 4: Distribution of divorces by duration of marriage (in years), in year of divorce, 2000–2016

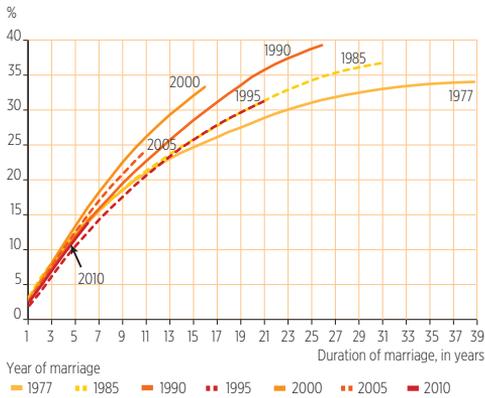


Source: HCSO, Demographic Yearbooks.

Taking the year of marriage and the duration of the marriage into account together, it is apparent that the instability of marriages has definitely grown, compared to the marriage cohorts preceding the change of regime: whereas a quarter of marriages contracted in 1977 were dissolved in the first 15 years, for those contracted in 2000 the figure is close to a third (Figure 5). However, compared to the situation prior to 2000, the fragility of relationships in the first five years of marriage has decreased somewhat, although the difference is just a couple of percentage points: 14% of those married in 2000 divorced within the first five years, compared to 12% of those married in 2010. It will take a few more years to determine whether this trend of growing stability in the first few years of marriage will continue.

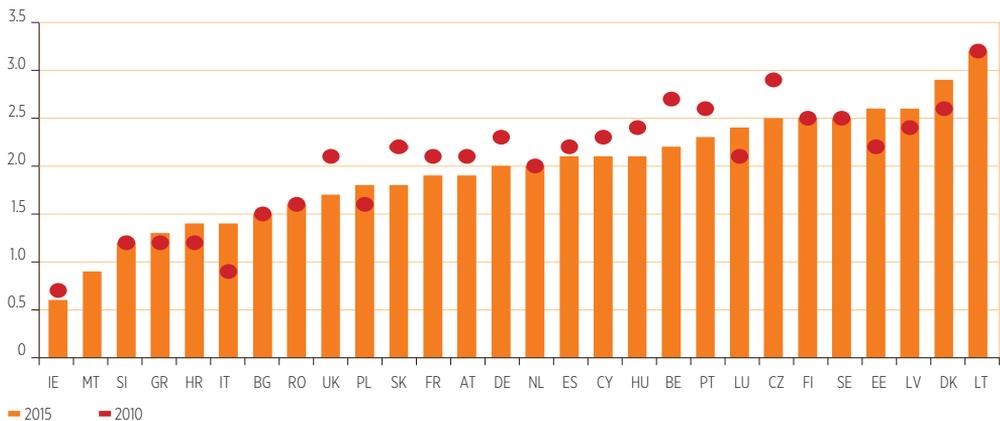
In the case of marriages contracted in 1977, 1985 and 1990, the fate of the relationship can also be traced over a longer period. It is clear that marriages get less stable with time: 31% of marriages contracted in 1977 had been dissolved before the 25th anniversary; 34% of those celebrated in 1985; and 39% of those entered into in 1990. Of marriages in 2000, almost as many were dissolved in the first 15 years as were dissolved in 30 years of marriages contracted in 1977.

Figure 5: The cumulative rate of dissolved marriages, by the year and duration of marriage, 1977-2010



Source: HCSO, Vital statistics; authors' calculations.

Figure 6: Crude divorce rates in Europe, 2010, 2015



Source: Eurostat.

Note: In the case of Ireland, data from 2013 are used instead of from 2015; in the case of Greece, the data are from 2014. Divorce was only made possible in Malta in 2011, and so no data are shown for 2010.

## EUROPEAN TRENDS IN DIVORCE

Divorce numbers and trends across Europe are rather varied. The highest rates of divorce can be found in the Baltic states and Northern Europe, while the lowest are in the Southern parts of Europe, as well as in Ireland and Slovenia. Differing legislations have a strong impact on the number of divorces. For example, in Malta, it has only been possible to divorce since 2011, and the court can only dissolve the marriage – as in Irish law – if the parties have been living separately for at least four years. The strict regulation is unquestionably reflected in the low rates of divorce (Figure 6).

While it is true that propensity for divorce has grown throughout Europe in recent decades (the crude divorce rate<sup>6</sup> in the countries that today form the EU-28 stood at 1.6 in 1990 and had risen to 2.0 by 2000), the trends in the last few years show a mixed picture: the crude rate of divorce has decreased in almost half of the countries since 2010. In certain countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom), we can speak of a trend that dates back to the mid-1990s; meanwhile in Hungary – as

observed – the number of divorces has only begun to decrease in recent years.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIVORCED POPULATION

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) records and publishes the number of marriages and divorces; however, censuses give us the opportunity to gain a cross-sectional overview of the total population according to marital status. The distribution of the population by official marital status is determined by the proportion of people who are married, have never married, or whose marriages have ended through the death of a spouse or divorce. However, the life courses underlying these set categories are diverse: some people become widowed; some get divorced and then remarry; and yet others are married but live separately. Current marital status does not necessarily give an overview of these diverse life situations and past processes. However, the distribution and the changes in official marital status over time can only be interpreted by using these sources of data.

This section presents the demographic features of the population with divorced marital status in 2016 (though their divorce could have been in that or any previous year), on the basis of data from the most recent microcensus (2016). The data are compared with the 2001 and 2011 census data, to get a longer chronological overview of the groups that have undergone change, whether large or small.

In 2016, the proportion of the population aged over 15 and with divorced status was 11% (895,000 people). These values were somewhat lower than in 2011, but higher than in 2001 or 1990 (*Table 1*).

The proportion of divorced women is higher than that of divorced men in each census year. This is linked to the fact that

divorced women remarry less frequently than divorced men: while 27 out of 1,000 divorced men married again in 2016, only 17 out of 1,000 divorced women did so (HCSO, Demographic Yearbook 2016). The difference measured in the proportion of divorced women and men in 2016 was 3 percentage points – a larger difference than in 2011 or 2001 (*Figure 7*).

*Table 1: The number and proportion of divorced people in the population aged 15 and over, 1990–2016*

Year	Number of divorced persons	Proportion of divorced within the population aged 15 and over, %
1990	607,216	7.4
2001	758,030	8.9
2011	980,663	11.6
2016	894,806	10.7

Source: HCSO, Censuses of 1990, 2001, 2011; HCSO Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations.

The proportion of divorced men and women is similar in each of the age groups and groups categorized by level of education. For example, in 2016, among both men and women, the highest number of divorced people were in the age group 45–54: 18% of men and 23% of women. Categorized by educational level, the highest proportion of divorced people was among those who had completed vocational school: 12% among men and 16% among women. It is apparent that a difference of at least 3 percentage points can be found between men and women in every single category.

Between 2001 and 2016, the proportion of divorced individuals grew markedly among people aged 45 and over; this can presumably be explained by the afore-mentioned lengthening of marriage durations. By contrast, the proportion fell in the younger age groups (*Figure 7*).

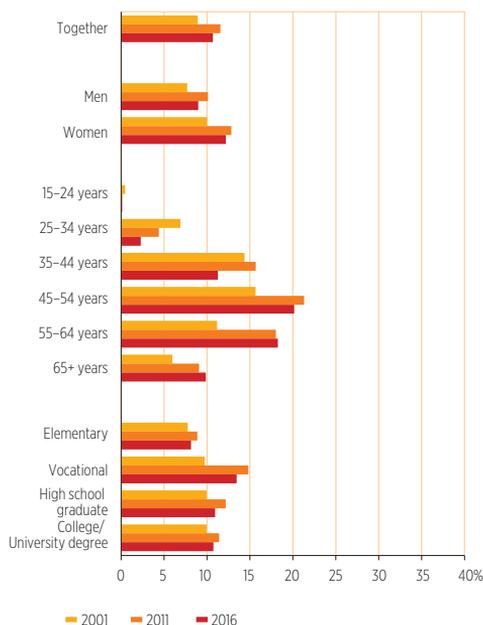
In recent years, the proportion of divorcees did not even reach half a percentage point in the youngest age group (15–24). They will not be discussed separately in the following analysis, so that the percentages presented for such a small number of people do not become misleading. If we examine the groups by educational level, the following can be observed: the largest proportions of men and women with divorced marital status are found among those who have completed vocational school; moreover, they also account for the most dynamic growth in the period 2001–2011.

The population with divorced marital status does not necessarily live alone. Many do not remarry after divorce, but establish a cohabiting partnership. In 2016, 26% of the divorced population lived in a cohabiting partnership, with a far greater proportion of men in such partnerships (34%) than

of women (22%). Differences according to age group are important. Divorced young people are far more likely to live in a cohabiting partnership than are older people: close to 35% of people aged 25–34 in 2016, as against only 15% of people over 65. Since 2011, the biggest growth can be seen among those aged 35–44 and 45–54. When educational level is concerned, it is easier to highlight the similarities: with the exception of the vocationally educated group, in all other education-level groups the proportion of those cohabiting was 23–25%. The figure for the vocationally trained was 31% (Figure 8).

The status or role of people within the family and household (so-called *family status*<sup>6)</sup> gives a picture of what proportion of parents are rearing their children alone after divorce. It is also possible to see what proportion live alone or with a cohabiting

Figure 7: The share of the divorced population aged 15 and over within the given demographic groups, 2001, 2011, 2016



Source: HCSO, Censuses of 1990, 2001, 2011; HCSO Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations.

Figure 8: Share of cohabitees in the divorced population, 2011, 2016



Source: HCSO, Censuses of 1990, 2001, 2011; HCSO Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations.

Table 2: Distribution of the divorced by family status within the population aged 15 and over, living in a household, 1990–2016

(%)

Year	Cohabiting partner	Parent living alone with their child	Living with parent without partner or child	Lives in some other household structure	Single-person household	Total
1990	19.1	28.1	9.9	9.1	33.8	100
2001	25.7	28.4	9.7	6.9	29.3	100
2011	24.4	25.9	7.9	7.8	34.1	100
2016	26.2	25.4	7.2	7.7	33.5	100

Source: HCSO, Censuses of 2001, 2011; HCSO, Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations.

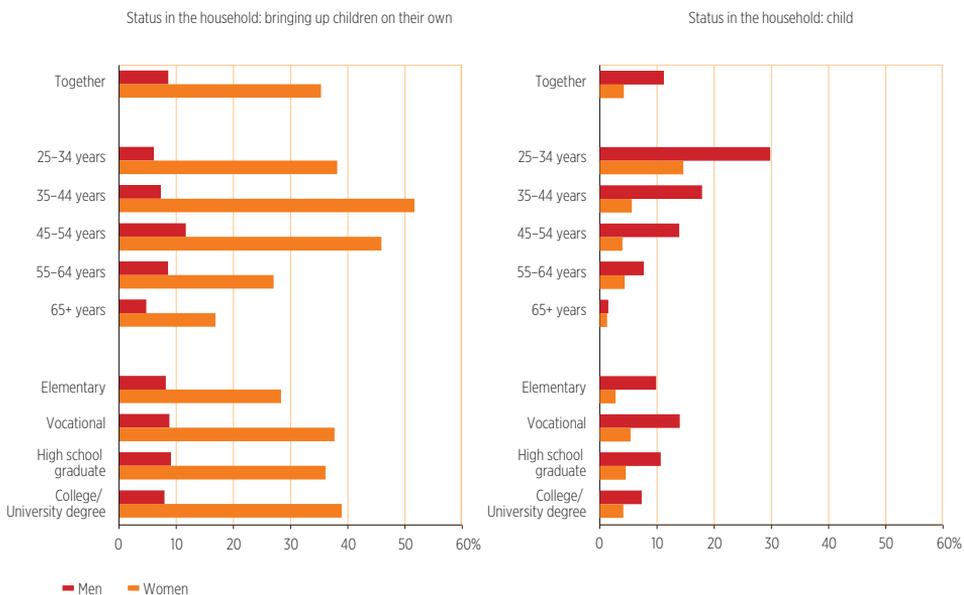
partner, and what proportion continue (or return to) child status (i.e. living with their parents in the same household, and with no partner or children of their own).

A third of the divorced population was living in a single-person household in 2016. This proportion was 60% among the divorced aged over 65, and 47% among divorced men with tertiary education (HCSO, Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations). The other most

frequent scenarios after divorce (see above) are that either a cohabiting partnership follows (26%) or people become single parents (25%) (Table 2).

In the divorced population, the proportion of parents rearing their children alone and the proportion of those in child status have both decreased, while the proportion of people living in single-person households has increased somewhat.

Figure 9: Share of parents bringing up children on their own, and people with child status within the divorced population, 2016



Source: HCSO Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations.

Which groups of divorcees were typically rearing their children alone or living again with their parents (having moved back into the parental home after divorce) in 2016? The proportion of divorced women living alone with their children is far higher than the proportion of divorced men: 36% compared to 9%. This goes to show that after divorce, mothers continue to bring up their children. More than half of divorced women aged 35–44 have a parental role, while this is only true of 12% of divorced men (*Figure 9*, left-hand panel). Men find themselves back in their parents' household more often than women (12% compared to 4%). Among divorced men aged 25–34, 30% have this status (*Figure 9*, right-hand panel).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE LIVING APART FROM THEIR SPOUSE

A segment of the population, though legally married, does not live with their spouse. There may be several reasons for this. Possibly they do not want to divorce formally, or one of the parties does not want a divorce; it may also be the case, especially among young people, that they cannot move in together because they do not have a shared flat; or else they voluntarily choose this condition, because they prefer to maintain separate homes and ways of life. The separation, which is often merely transitional, does not necessarily mean that the quality of the relationship is bad: it may be a consequence of external circumstances (e.g. employment in a different town or country). According to the interpretation used in censuses, however, *married, living separately from spouse*<sup>6</sup> does not cover those cases, but rather instances where the cause of the separation is a breakdown of the relationship. According to the definition, spouses are considered to be living

separately if they do not uphold a conjugal life, whether or not they live under the same roof.

According to the definition used in censuses, in 2016 the number of persons married but living apart was about 113,000, and the proportion within the married population was 3%. This share was very similar in 2001 and 2005, though it was 5% in 2011 (*Table 3*). It is possible that, under the impact of the economic crisis that began in 2008, more people chose to live separately, rather than to divorce.

A greater fluctuation can be observed in the number of those living apart from their spouse, but in a cohabiting partnership. In 2016, 13% of the population living separately had a cohabiting partner, and a majority of them also lived under the same roof as their partner (88%) (HCSO, Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations). This means that every tenth person living separately had already established a stable partnership. The proportion of those living apart from their spouses, but already with a cohabiting partner was 17% in 2001 and 9% in 2011.

*Table 3: Number and proportion of persons living separately within the population aged 15 and over, 2001–2016*

Year	Number of persons living separately from spouse	Proportion of people living separately within the married population, %	Cohabitees as a percentage of the population living separately from spouse, %
2001	128,206	2.9	17.0
2005	113,907	2.7	13.6
2011	188,439	5.0	9.3
2016	112,785	3.1	12.7

Source: HCSO, Censuses of 2001, 2011; HCSO, Microcensus 2016; authors' calculations.

## DIVORCE PROCEEDINGS IN PROCESS AND PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

In the following, we return to our analysis of the event of divorce itself (the divorces completed in a given year constitute the unit of analysis) to examine features of the divorce proceedings, how the impact on the children involved has changed in recent years, and where those children are typically placed after the divorce.

A growing proportion of divorces take place without any minor child of the union being involved. While this was the case with 45% of divorces in 2016, in 1990 the proportion was below 30% (Table 4). One explanation for this is that fertility is declining; another is that the duration of marriages is growing, and so it is possible that a majority of divorces involve adult children. This will be addressed in the text box below, though the available data are not completely accurate, as divorce statistics record only the number of minor children in common, as well as live-born children not necessarily in common with the (previous) spouse.

In close to a third of divorces in 2016, one child was involved; two were involved in 19% of divorces; and in approximately 5% of cases, the divorce occurred in a large family (of three or more children).

Table 4: Distribution of divorces, by number of living minor children in common, 1990–2016

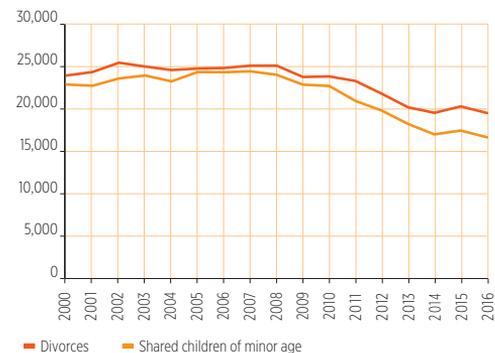
Year	0	1	2	3 or more	Total (%)
1990	29.5	36.0	28.2	6.3	100
2000	37.8	35.4	21.6	5.2	100
2010	40.5	32.0	21.1	6.4	100
2016	44.7	31.4	19.1	4.8	100

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), Demographic Yearbooks.

Overall, since 2008 there have been fewer and fewer minors affected by the divorce of their parents, though their number continues to be high: 16,700 altogether were involved in 2016, while in 2008 it had been 24,000 (Figure 10). Their distribution by age shows that the proportion of older children affected by their parents' divorce is rising: whereas in 1990, a third of children involved were under the age of seven, by 2016 this proportion had dropped to 24%; meanwhile three-quarters are now aged 7–18 when their parents' marriage breaks up.

In the course of amendments to the Civil Code in 2013, the rules regarding the placement of minors changed. Earlier, if parents decided to divorce, or to end their conjugal life, the first decision they had to make was which parent they would place their children with. The placement meant that the parent in whose household the child remained exercised custody rights, while the custody rights of the parent living separately were suspended (except in some highly important matters, when the parent living separately maintained the right to be involved in a decision). The court could not order joint custody: that could only be decided by agreement between the parties.

Figure 10: Number of divorces and shared children of minor age, 2000–2016

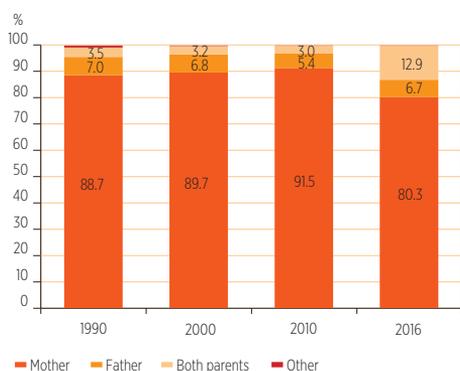


Source: HCSO, Vital statistics; authors' calculations.

Conversely, the change introduced in 2013 considers the joint custody rights of separated parents to be fundamental. Joint custody means cooperation in decision-making on important questions concerning the children – not that the child lives with the parents alternately. The child’s domicile must be designated in the course of the court proceedings.

Divorce statistics have not adjusted to the above changes, and the courts continue to provide data on ‘where the child is placed’. This formulation does not make it clear whether it is the joint custody rights or the child’s placement in terms of domicile that is entered in the statistics; this can lead to misinterpretations. *Figure 11* must be approached with this in mind: according to data from 2016, the proportion of ‘shared’ placements has grown substantially since 2010; however, we suppose that this indicates the greater use of joint custody, rather than the shared placement of children (*Figure 11*).

*Figure 11: Distribution of court decisions on child placement, 1990–2016*



Source: HCSO, Vital statistics; authors’ calculations.

The length of the divorce proceedings depends greatly on the kind of divorce. In cases of mutual consent, the proceedings are far shorter than in the case of evidence-

based divorce trials, when the court has to uncover the whole process leading to the break-up of the marriage, in order to establish whether the marriage has completely and irretrievably broken down.

The length of divorce proceedings is also affected by the age of the children involved: if any joint child born of the marriage is still a minor, the earliest that a marriage can be dissolved is at the second hearing. An exception is made if the parties have been living separately for at least three years and have settled certain issues related to the children: (1) exercise of parental custody in relation to common children, (2) contact between the absent parent and the child, (3) child support payments, (4) use of the joint marital home, as well as – if the demand arises – (5) the issue of alimony. These are the sorts of questions that the parties are required to settle in every case. After the first hearing, the parties have to submit a plea for the continuation of proceedings, and the court may only set a date for the next hearing to take place 30 days after the plea has been submitted; thus the length of the proceedings is extended by this period as well.

*Figure 12: Distribution of divorce proceedings, by duration, as a percentage of the total, 1990–2016*



Source: HCSO, Vital statistics; authors’ calculations.

## WHO DIVORCES AFTER AT LEAST 20 YEARS OF MARRIAGE?

Close to a third of all divorces in 2016 ended a marriage that had lasted for at least 20 years. In 1990, only 15% of divorces dissolved a marriage that had lasted for at least 20 years. Thus the proportion of long marriages that end in divorce has grown considerably. What are the characteristics of those people who divorce after such a length of time, and how do they differ from those people who file for divorce earlier?

Based on divorce statistics, it is rare for there to be common children of minor age in these relationships when the marriage is dissolved. In two-thirds of cases, there are no minor children, and it is virtually unheard-of for such couples to have children below the age of seven at the time of divorce. Presumably, the spouses kept the marriage going until their children were grown up, whereupon they discontinued their life together. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that in 95% of cases those couples had had live-born children, whereas only 75% of those divorcing earlier had had children (there is no difference on this issue between men and women).

There are other differences compared to people divorcing earlier. In the level of

education, for instance: a quarter of late-divorcing wives have a diploma, whereas the figure is 31% for those divorcing after a shorter marriage. The same phenomenon can be observed among husbands, though it is less pronounced. This difference may be explained as an effect of age ranges: in 2016, women who divorced after at least 20 years of marriage were in the older age groups (a third were over 50, compared to only 2% of those divorcing after a shorter marriage), which might in itself explain the difference in terms of educational level.

*Table B1: Share of the divorced population with minor and live-born children, by duration of marriage in 2016*

	Duration of marriage at divorce		
	0–9 years	10–19 years	20 years or more
With shared minor child	51.6	82.0	35.8
With live-born child	62.2	90.3	95.1

Source: HDRI GGS Turning Points of the Life-course survey, Waves 1 and 5 (2001 and 2016); authors' calculation (N = 14,664 in 2001 and N = 8,420 in 2016).

It is slightly more frequent for the husband to file for divorce after a long marriage: this is the case in 37% of long marriages, as opposed to in 33% of earlier divorces.

Some 76% of divorce proceedings are concluded within half a year, and 93% within a year; thus the vast majority of divorces are settled soon (*Figure 12*). One explanation for this is that in close to half of all divorces, no minor is involved, meaning that the case can be concluded at one hearing. Another explanation is that most divorce cases come to court with mutual consent, and so the court only needs to approve the agreement between the parties. Of the divorces finalized in 2016, about 6% were settled

within 1–2 years; the proportion of those that took longer than that was below 1%.

## SOCIAL OPINION ABOUT DIVORCE IN HUNGARY, COMPARED WITH EUROPE

Social acceptance of divorce influences the frequency of divorce (and vice versa), because individuals presumably find it easier to decide to divorce in a more permissive

environment. The social norms also affect how society regards divorced persons – to what degree divorce is viewed as a regular fact of life or is condemned.

The way in which Hungarian society regards marriage and the placement of children in the event of divorce is presented through analysis of the data from the 2005 and 2016 Turning Points of the Life-course surveys. Five questions were examined, where respondents over 21 years of age had to select their level of agreement on a five-point scale.

The results show that acceptance of divorce has decreased among both men and women. In 2005, 30% of men agreed with the statement that ‘Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended’; by 2016, this proportion had grown to 41% (Table 5). Among women, the share of those agreeing with this statement grew from 28% to 35%. Simultaneously, the proportion of those who believed that the presence of a child should not be an obstacle to a couple divorcing also decreased somewhat.

Over the period under consideration, the number of divorces decreased by 21%, and so the shift in opinion can be seen to have had an effect on demographic behaviour.

We can only hypothesize, however, with regard to the causes of these changes. Is it possible that the strong, family-centred political rhetoric since 2010 has had an impact on social relationship norms? Or are there other reasons why more people believe that divorce is not the best solution to relationship problems? Seeing the rise in the propensity for marriage in recent years, the first hypothesis seems the more likely; but other explanations cannot be ruled out.

Is it better for children to stay with their mother after divorce? In 2005, the population was split on this question: close to half of respondents did not agree with the statement. In 2016, the share of those in agreement was even lower. The figure of 45–50% in agreement reflects a relatively modern approach for a country where, in many cases, the traditional gender stereotypes serve as the standard – whether we are speaking of parental roles or traditional male–female roles; however, in an international comparison it counts merely as average.

With regard to another statement pertaining to children (‘A child needs both a father and a mother to grow up happy’), agreement is virtually unanimous at 90%, though the level of agreement with this

Table 5: Opinion survey related to marriage and divorce: distribution of those in agreement with the statements, by sex, 2005, 2016

(%)

	Men		Women	
	2005	2016	2005	2016
Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended.	30.0	40.7	27.8	35.1
It's all right for a couple to divorce even if they have children.	72.9	68.4	78.1	76.1
If parents divorce it's better for a child to stay with the mother than the father.	45.0	40.4	57.2	50.2
A child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happy.	93.6	91.7	92.6	87.7

Source: HDRI GGS Turning Points of the Life-course survey, Waves 2 and 5; authors' calculations.

*Table 6: Opinion survey related to marriage and divorce: distribution of those in agreement with the statements, by age group, 2005, 2016 (%)*

	Aged 21–39		Aged 40–59		Aged 60+	
	2005	2016	2005	2016	2005	2016
Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended.	22.6	38.3	25.7	31.3	43.0	43.4
It's all right for a couple to divorce even if they have children.	74.8	69.9	78.3	74.3	72.9	72.8
If parents divorce it's better for a child to stay with the mother than the father.	46.8	45.3	49.0	41.3	62.7	50.2
A child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happy.	91.5	86.8	93.1	88.1	95.5	92.7

Source: HDRI GGS Turning Points of the Life-course survey, Waves 2 and 5; authors' calculations.

statement has decreased a little over the past decade. Yet the question does not expressly indicate that the parents must live in the same household: it is only concerned with the fact that the child will be happy if contact with both parents continues.

As mentioned above, opinions about divorce were more traditional in 2016 than in 2005. The question of which groups became less well disposed towards the dissolution of marriages is addressed in the following.

Across the age groups, we can see that the opinions of the younger groups changed most over the intervening 11 years. In 2005, among respondents under the age of 40, 23% agreed with the statement that 'Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended'; by 2016, 38% were in agreement (*Table 6*). Over the same period, the proportion of those who believed that divorce is a solution if the marriage is broken decreased somewhat. Opinions on these two questions also became a little more conservative among respondents aged 40–59, while opinions remained essentially the same in the age group over 60. It is conceivable that the stance of young people has changed because they can actually choose whether they want to get married or to live in a cohabiting partnership. This

option was limited for older generations, as the social norms deemed marriage (and parenthood within marriage) to be the most acceptable. Young people may believe that, as more options are available nowadays, if someone does decide to marry, he or she should stick by that decision and look upon it as truly a lifetime commitment.

So far as the placement of children is concerned, the opinion of those under 40 has changed the least since 2005. They were most likely to think at the time that a child ought not to be placed automatically with the mother. The change among 40–59-year-olds is more spectacular (7 percentage points), and among those aged over 60 it is even greater: the percentage of those who think that it is always better for a child to stay with the mother has dropped by 13%.

The notion that a child needs both parents to grow up happy also lost traction in every age group, especially among those under 60 (by about 5 percentage points). In 2016, 13% of those under 40 did not necessarily agree with the statement – an interesting result not only from the point of view of divorce, but also because it indicates that in those generations it is more acceptable for children to be brought up by a single parent; this trend may well continue in years to come.

We also examined the results by official marital status (we shall not present them separately). If we compare the opinion of divorcees with those of married people, it is plain to see that the former accept divorce more readily (84% of divorcees think that a divorce is better than a bad marriage, as opposed to 70% of married people). Yet the conservative turn in opinions can also be perceived among divorcees. For example, in 2016 more divorced people (and those of other marital status) agreed with the statement that marriage is a lifetime commitment and should not be dissolved than was the case in 2005.

Finally, we take a look at how socially acceptable divorce is in other countries of Europe, compared to Hungary. Using the results of the international Generations and Gender Survey (GGG), we are able to compare three of the former statements in the case of three Eastern European and three Western European countries. Does geographical location determine social views on divorce?

The data show that there are differences between East and West, while geographical location does not necessarily determine opinion. Of the six countries, it is in France that the most respondents agree with the statement that marriage is a lifetime commitment and should not be dissolved

(48%). In the two other Western European countries (Austria and Germany), the share is 36%, which is close to the figure for Hungary (33%). In the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, a quarter of the population agrees (*Table 7*).

In all three Western countries, approximately 85% of the population think that it is alright for a couple to divorce even if there are children, while fewer people agree with this in the three Eastern countries. The differences between countries are also larger here: 61% in the Czech Republic, 72% in Hungary and 81% in Bulgaria.

It is surprising that the greatest proportion of people in agreement that marriage is a lifetime commitment that should not be dissolved is to be found in France; nonetheless – as in Austria and Germany – there is a high acceptance of the statement that a marriage need not be maintained even if there are children. We found that the divorce rate was above the European average in those countries in 2010, but not by much.

The greatest difference between Western and Eastern countries is to be observed on the issue of the placement of children with their mothers: whereas around a quarter of the population in the three Western countries think it is better for the child to remain with the mother after divorce, the proportion is closer to 50% in the East, and stands at 62% in Bulgaria.

*Table 7: Opinion survey related to marriage and divorce: proportion of those in agreement with the statements in selected countries in the years 2007–2016*

	Bulgaria	Hungary	Czech Rep.	Austria	France	Germany
Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended.	27.0	32.7	25.5	35.8	48.1	35.6
It's all right for a couple to divorce even if they have children.	80.5	71.7	60.9	86.7	84.7	86.4
If parents divorce it's better for a child to stay with the mother than the father.	62.1	45.3 <sup>a</sup>	47.8	19.6	26.5	28.1
<i>Survey year</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2016</i>

Source: Generations and Gender Survey; authors' calculations.  
<sup>a</sup> 2016 data.

## GLOSSARY

*Cohabiting partner:* A person living in a cohabiting partnership without being legally married, irrespective of marital status. In the population reports by the HCSO, it is not a condition that those who declare themselves to be in a cohabiting partnership should live under the same roof or in the same household as their cohabiting partner. In demographic research on families and households, only persons living in the same household as their cohabiting partner are considered to be living together in a cohabiting partnership (HCSO).

*Crude divorce rate:* The crude divorce rate shows the number of official divorces per thousand citizens of a given population in the year in question, based on the mid-year population.

*Divorced:* A person whose marriage was dissolved by a final court decision, has not married again, and has not established a registered partnership.

*Family status:* Family status indicates the family or other (economic) relationship among individuals living in the same household.

*Married, living separately from spouse:* Spouses are living separately if they are not maintaining a conjugal life (whether or not they are living under the same roof).

*The total divorce rate:* shows the number of divorces over the number of marriages contracted in the observed period (usually one year) if the divorce rate by duration of marriage has remained unchanged. The procedure is based on the assumption that people who get married in the given year face the same risk of divorce every year of their marriage as couples divorcing – after different lengths of marriage – in that given year.

## REFERENCES

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