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## CHANGING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATE IN POLAND COMPARED TO OTHER EU COUNTRIES

**ABSTRACT.** This article focuses on recent tendencies concerning marriages and divorces in the EU Member States and in Poland, including the trends observable in the Province of Lodz broken down by county as a case study. Consideration is given to the factors determining a decline in the number of marriages and an increase in the number of divorces. Additionally the problem of postponing the decision to marry and entering into marriage by men and women at an increasingly later age is discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** marriage, divorce, marriage and divorce rate, male and female age at first marriage.

The demographic changes related to the population growth occurring in the world today are taking place principally outside Europe. The research conducted by the United Nations Population Division (Czerny, 2005) in the years 2000–2005 shown that the European countries experience low and the lowest mean annual population growth rate, which means that the nations of Europe are aging, while the Continent itself slowly undergoes the process of de-population. Of no small importance in this respect is the issue of **marriages and divorces**. The changes in the number of marriages and divorces have a strong impact on the changes in the number of population.

The issue concerning the alleged link between decreasing marriage rate, increasing divorce rate and decreasing fertility rates (the so – called “postponement transition”) in Europe has been already put under close scrutiny by various authors (Billari 2006; Kohler, Billari, Ortega 2006; Sobotka, Lutz, Philipov 2005; Kohler, Ortega 2002; McDonald 2000a, b).

What are the actual existing marriage formation and dissolution trends in the European Union and in Poland? In Poland marriage denotes a legal relationship of personal nature, binding a husband and wife. The *sine qua non* conditions for entering into marriage in our country are as follows: the intending spouses must be of the opposite sex (heterosexual couples) as well as must declare their free and full consent to marry before an authority competent to solemnize the marriage, e.g. a civil registrar (civil marriage), a priest (church marriage), a consul, or in exceptional cases, a proxy.

Under Polish legal regime, the characteristic feature of the institution of marriage is its monogamous nature and equality of rights and obligations enjoyed by either of the spouses in personal and property relations. Thus, marriage may be entered into in the form of a civil or religious ceremony with equal effect. The Concordat concluded on 28 July 1993 between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland recognizes the legitimacy of canonical or religious marriage, so, in other words, it has put marriage effected in the Roman Catholic Church on a par with a civil marriage.

Today, it is a common practice for many couples to set up informal relationships which bear all the distinctive features of a marriage. Relationships of this kind are not taken into account in official statistics, and are recorded only at the time of population census. Such relationships, referred to as unmarried cohabitations, have been excluded from this paper.

A new and quite controversial phenomenon occurring in the Western Europe is same-sex marriages (homosexual couples). Following the example of the Netherlands, Belgium has been second to sanction homosexual marriages. The Parliaments of these states have enacted laws permitting the state of matrimony for homosexual couples and granting them the same legal rights as those enjoyed by heterosexual couples, with one salient exception: such married couples may not adopt children.

In Poland, there are strict rules governing the formation of marriage. Persons who are at least 18 years of age can lawfully get married, however, for serious reasons, the Guardianship Court may grant a woman permission to marry at the age of not less than 16. The statements declaring the fact of voluntary entry into marriage should, in principle, be announced in public in the presence of two full-age witnesses. By law marriage is not allowed for a person who has been legally incapacitated, a person suffering from a mental disease or mentally retarded (though, in certain cases the court may grant such a person permission to marry), a person who is already formally married, an adoptive parent and his/her adoptee, relatives in the direct line, siblings, and both spouses' relatives in the direct line (although for serious reasons the court may permit the spouses' relatives to marry).

The formation of marriage imposes on the spouses a defined set of rights and obligations. The spouses are obliged to lead their lives together, to help each other, to be faithful, to collaborate for the benefit of the family which they have founded, to provide for the needs of the family, each spouse proportionately to his or her earning capacity and the assets owned. Besides, the married couple are jointly and severally liable for the obligations incurred by either of them in matters relating to the obligation to provide for the needs of the family. On the strength of the law, as from the conclusion of marriage, the spouses start sharing jointly the property acquired throughout the duration of marriage.

Marriage is terminated upon death or presumption of death of one of the spouses or adjudication of divorce. Marriage may be annulled by the decision of the competent court (pursuant to Article 1 of the Family and Guardianship Code Law of 25 February 1964).

The research into marriages in the EU Member States and in Poland, including the Province of Łódź, has been based on the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants. The absolute number of marriages has been omitted deliberately with a view to avoiding the strains of comparative analysis, which, at a later stage, could lead to erroneous conclusions. For the purpose of this study, therefore, the author shall employ the concept of the **marriage rate** denoting the ratio of the number of marriages to the total number of population, expressed in ‰. This ratio also measures the intensity of marriage formation. In the analysis of divorces, a concept of **divorce rate** is used by analogy.

The main intention of the author is to demonstrate the downward and upward trends in the number of marriages concluded in the EU Member States. Therefore, a declining or rising tendency in the number of marriages has been established on the basis of the data pertaining to the number of marriages per 1,000 population in individual EU states in the period of 1994–2004 (see Table 1).

A downward or upward trend in the number of registered marriages has been determined on the basis of a comparison drawn between the data as of 2004 with the 1994 figures. In order to assess whether the prevailing trend is a rising or a declining one, the mean rate established for the 1994–2004 period has been used. The value lower than the one determined for 1994 means a decreasing trend, while the higher rate denotes a rise in the number of marriages. This method turns out to be unreliable in case of Cyprus where the number of marriages has been dropping, especially since 2001. Such diagnosis proves correct if we compare the figures established for 2004 and 1994, respectively. However, the mean rate for the 1994–2004 period does not confirm this phenomenon (the rate is higher than the 1994 figure). Table 1 below presents the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants by EU Member State. In addition, the table shows mean rates and the prevailing trend in the period concerned.

Table 1. Marriages per 1,000 population in the UE Member States in the 1994–2004 period

MS	YEARS											MEAN RATE	TREND
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004		
Belgium	5.14	5.07	4.98	4.69	4.35	4.32	4.40	4.09	3.91	4.00	4.10	<b>4.46</b>	down
Czech Republic	5.66	5.32	5.22	5.61	5.35	5.20	5.39	5.13	5.17	4.80	5.00	<b>5.26</b>	down
Denmark	6.78	6.64	6.83	6.48	6.55	6.66	7.19	6.82	6.92	6.50	7.00	<b>6.76</b>	up
Germany	5.41	5.27	5.22	5.15	5.09	5.25	5.09	4.73	4.75	4.60	4.80	<b>5.03</b>	down
Estonia	5.04	4.88	3.90	3.99	3.92	4.06	4.00	4.14	4.31	4.20	4.50	<b>4.27</b>	down
Greece	5.38	6.02	4.24	5.62	5.12	5.62	4.48	5.21	5.27	5.50	4.20	<b>5.15</b>	down
Spain	5.09	5.10	4.92	4.97	5.22	5.22	5.39	5.08	5.07	5.00	5.00	<b>5.10</b>	down
France	:	5.10	:	:	:	:	5.00	:	:	:	4.60	<b>4.90</b>	down
Ireland	4.63	4.32	4.45	4.25	:	4.93	5.04	4.98	5.10	5.10	:	<b>4.76</b>	up
Italy	5.13	5.10	4.90	4.88	4.92	4.92	4.99	4.58	4.65	4.50	4.30	<b>4.81</b>	down
Cyprus	9.70	10.25	8.71	10.71	11.40	13.22	14.09	15.07	14.48	7.70	7.20	<b>10.87</b>	down
Latvia	4.59	4.46	3.92	3.98	4.00	3.93	3.88	3.93	4.16	4.30	4.50	<b>4.15</b>	down
Lithuania	6.38	6.10	5.67	5.26	5.21	5.07	4.83	4.53	4.66	4.90	5.60	<b>5.29</b>	down
Luxembourg	5.84	5.08	5.08	4.78	4.80	4.85	4.92	4.49	4.53	4.40	4.40	<b>4.83</b>	down
Hungary	5.23	5.18	4.75	4.56	4.37	4.44	4.71	4.28	4.53	4.50	4.30	<b>4.62</b>	down
Malta	6.75	6.26	6.36	6.43	6.51	6.35	6.60	5.58	5.66	5.90	6.00	<b>6.22</b>	down
Netherlands	5.39	5.27	5.48	5.45	5.54	5.66	5.53	4.97	5.20	4.90	4.70	<b>5.28</b>	down
Austria	5.45	5.40	5.31	5.20	4.91	4.94	4.90	4.25	4.52	4.60	4.70	<b>4.93</b>	down
Poland	5.39	5.37	5.27	5.30	5.42	5.68	5.49	5.10	5.02	5.10	5.00	5.29	down
Portugal	6.60	6.56	6.33	6.52	6.57	6.75	6.23	5.67	5.45	5.10	4.70	<b>6.04</b>	down
Slovenia	4.18	4.14	3.80	3.78	3.80	3.89	3.62	3.48	3.54	3.40	3.30	<b>3.72</b>	down
Slovakia	5.27	5.13	5.11	5.19	5.10	5.07	4.81	4.42	4.66	4.80	5.20	<b>4.98</b>	down
Finland	4.89	4.65	4.77	4.56	4.66	4.70	5.05	4.79	5.19	5.00	5.60	<b>4.90</b>	up
Sweden	3.90	3.81	3.79	3.65	3.57	4.03	4.50	4.02	4.26	4.40	4.80	<b>4.07</b>	up
United Kingdom	5.67	5.50	5.33	5.26	5.15	5.06	5.12	:	:	5.10	:	<b>5.27</b>	down

Source: Compilation prepared by the author based on the data available from Eurostat /U.S. Bureau of the Census

When analysing the variable such as the number of marriages concluded per 1,000 inhabitants in individual Member States of the EU, one may notice two opposing tendencies. In the analyzed period of 1994–2004, a decline in the number of marriages can be observed in 20 EU states. This group of states also comprises Poland (more precise information about Poland can be found further in this paper). It is a large group, accounting for 80% of the European Community countries. The remaining states, except for France (no data are available), showed an increase in the number of marriages. This group, which, in the author's opinion, is the most interesting one and worth researching, includes the following countries: Denmark, Ireland, Finland and Sweden.

In the analysed period, Cyprus, Denmark, Malta and Portugal recorded the highest number of marriages concluded per 1,000 persons on average, whereas in the last year of the period the highest number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants occurred in Cyprus, Denmark, Malta, Finland and Lithuania. The lowest average number of marriages per 1,000 persons was contracted in Slovenia, Sweden, Latvia and Estonia. In 2004 the fewest marriages were, in turn, concluded in Slovenia, Belgium, Greece, Italy and in Hungary. Among the named states, the countries of the European South, Scandinavia and the Baltic Region occupy the dominant position.

Within the meaning of the Polish law, divorce is defined as the dissolution of marriage by the competent court as a result of irretrievable breakdown of marriage when any emotional, physical and economic bonds linking the spouses have ceased to exist. Either spouse is entitled to demand that marriage be dissolved by divorce adjudicated by the court.

The court will not adjudicate the divorce when it has been filed for by the spouse guilty of the marriage breakdown or in the event the divorce may cause harm to the minor children of the spouses. The court may adjudicate the divorce upon finding one of the spouses or both spouses guilty of marriage breakdown, or without determining the guilt.

In the divorce ruling the court decides *ex officio* on matters such as the custody of the common minor children, the amount of alimony, and in case the couple has shared an accommodation, on the rules and conditions concerning the usage of the accommodation which the spouses continue to share after the divorce. Upon unanimous motion of both spouses, the court may also apportion the jointly shared flat between the claimants or award it to one of the spouses, in the latter case provided that the other party agrees to move out of the flat concerned without being offered a substitute or equivalent accommodation.

Within three months from the time of entry into force of the divorce ruling, the spouse who assumed a different family name upon the formation of the marriage may resume the family name used prior to entering into the marriage (in the majority of cases this procedure concerns women). After the divorce verdict becomes final and binding the marriage is dissolved and each of the spouses may found a new family. Unless, prior to entering into marriage or during the course of their relationship, the spouses have concluded a matrimonial agreement stipulating their separate legal interests in the property, once the divorce becomes binding the spouses automatically cease to jointly own the property and become tenants-in-common holding distinct shares in the property owned. Upon divorce, there also arises the obligation to provide maintenance to the divorced spouse (alimony) in accordance with Articles 56–61 of the Family and Guardianship Law of 25 February 1964.

The falling number of marriages is certainly correlated with the rise in the number of divorces. Following this line of reasoning, one may argue that the countries with the highest number of marriages should experience the lowest number of divorces, and the countries with the fewest number of marriages should show the highest number of divorces. Unfortunately, this is not the rule of thumb applicable to all states under study. Nevertheless, there are examples of the EU countries where such correlation can be found. The examples are Malta and Belgium. While Malta records a high number of marriages and low number of divorces, Belgium with its small number of marriages and high divorce rate is experiencing an opposite trend. The number of divorces tends to decline in only

Table 2. Divorces per 1,000 population in the EU Member States in the 1994–2004 period

MS	YEARS											AVERAGE	TREND
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004		
Belgium	2.2	3.5	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.8	3.0	3.0	3.0	<b>2.8</b>	up
Czech Republic	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.1	2.3	2.9	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.2	<b>3.0</b>	up
Denmark	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.9	<b>2.6</b>	up
Germany	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.6	:	<b>2.3</b>	up
Estonia	3.8	5.2	4.0	3.8	3.2	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.0	2.9	3.1	<b>3.5</b>	down
Greece	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.1	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.1	<b>1.0</b>	up
Spain	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	<b>1.0</b>	up
France	:	2.10	:	:	:	2.0	:	:	:	:	2.2	<b>2.1</b>	:
Ireland	:	:	:	:	:	:	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	:	<b>0.7</b>	:
Italy	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	:	<b>0.7</b>	up
Cyprus	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.9	2.0	2.2	<b>1.5</b>	up
Latvia	3.3	3.1	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.3	<b>2.6</b>	down
Lithuania	3.0	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.2	<b>3.1</b>	up
Luxembourg	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.3	<b>2.2</b>	up
Hungary	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.4	<b>2.4</b>	up
Malta	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	:	0.0	0.0	:	:	:	:	<b>0.0</b>	:
Netherlands	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.9	<b>2.1</b>	down
Austria	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.3	<b>2.3</b>	up
Poland	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.1	up
Portugal	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.9	1.8	2.7	2.2	2.2	<b>1.8</b>	up
Slovenia	1.0	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2	<b>1.0</b>	up
Slovakia	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.0	2.0	<b>1.8</b>	up
Finland	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.5	<b>2.6</b>	down
Sweden	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.2	<b>2.4</b>	down
United Kingdom	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	:	<b>2.8</b>	down

Source: Compilation prepared by the author based on the Eurostat and U.S. Bureau of the Census data.

6 EU states, i.e. Estonia, Latvia, Holland, Finland, Sweden and Great Britain. In the remaining countries, including Poland, the number of divorces is on the rise. In some EU states, e.g. in Sweden and Finland, the rise in the number of marriages has resulted in a diminished number of divorces.

Based on statistical data on the number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in the EU Member States in the 1994–2004 period (see Table 2), it is possible, by analogy to the marriage pattern, to distinguish the countries where divorces are on the rise and those where their number is diminishing. Using the same methods of estimation as for marriages, the author has arrived at the following conclusions. The highest average number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in the period of analysis occurred in Estonia, Latvia and in the Czech Republic. In the same period, the lowest average number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants was observed in Ireland and Italy. In 2004 the most divorces per 1,000 inhabitants were recorded in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia and in Belgium, while countries with the lowest number of divorces were Greece, Spain and Slovenia. It may be assumed (on the basis of the data concerning 2003) that in Ireland and in Italy the number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants was very small.

Figure 1 below depicts the comparison between the average numbers of marriages and divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in the 1994–2004 period. The cause for concern is the fact that in some countries the mean number of divorces per 1,000

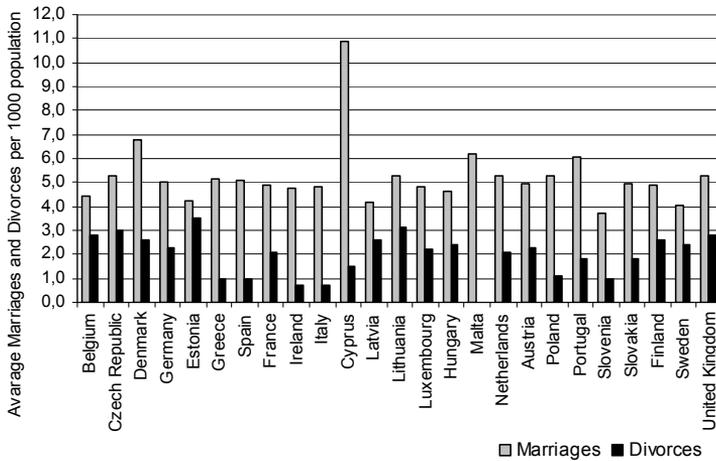


Fig. 1. Marriages and divorces per 1,000 population in the EU Member States in the 1994–2004 period

Source: Compilation prepared by the author based on the Eurostat and U.S. Bureau of the Census data.

inhabitants accounts for over 50% of the average number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants. It can probably be tied up with the crisis of family as the basic social unit, the breakdown of which is driven, in the majority of cases, by economic reasons and the effects of social transformations. In many countries, changes have occurred not only in the family model but, above all, in the lifestyle with its shift away from marriage no longer viewed as the value of primary importance. Such process took place in Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Belgium and in Great Britain.

Table 3. Male and female age at first marriage in the EU Member States in the 1994–2004 period.

MEMBER STATE	MALE AGE			FEMALE AGE		
	1994	2003	CHANGE	1994	2003	CHANGE
Belgium	26.9	29.3	2.4	24.9	27.1	2.2
Czech Republic	24.4	28.4	4.0	21.7	25.6	3.9
Denmark	30.8	32.3	1.5	28.5	30.1	1.6
Germany	28.8	30.6	1.8	26.1	28.1	2.0
Estonia	25.1	28.1	3.0	23.0	25.5	2.5
Greece	29.4	31.0	1.6	25.3	27.3	2.0
Spain	28.4	30.2	1.8	26.3	28.3	2.0
France	28.7	30.4	1.7	26.7	28.2	1.5
Ireland	29.1	30.0	0.9	27.3	28.2	0.9
Italy	29.1	30.4	1.3	26.1	27.4	1.3
Cyprus	:	:	:	:	:	:
Latvia	24.2	26.8	2.6	22.4	24.8	2.4
Lithuania	24.0	26.6	2.6	22.1	24.4	2.3
Luxembourg	28.3	30.2	1.9	25.7	27.9	2.2
Hungary	24.4	28.6	4.2	21.7	25.8	4.1
Malta	:	29.0	:	:	26.5	:
Netherlands	29.0	30.8	1.8	26.7	28.4	1.7
Austria	28.1	29.9	1.8	25.6	27.7	2.1
Poland	:	26.6	:	21.9	24.7	2.8
Portugal	26.4	28.0	1.6	24.4	26.1	1.7
Slovenia	27.6	30.1	2.5	24.7	27.5	2.8
Slovakia	24.4	27.7	3.3	22.1	25.0	2.9
Finland	28.6	30.4	1.8	26.6	28.8	2.2
Sweden	30.6	32.9	2.3	28.1	30.5	2.4
United Kingdom	28.0	29.3	1.3	25.8	27.2	1.4

*Source:* Compilation prepared by the author based on the Eurostat and U.S. Bureau of the Census data.

Undoubtedly interesting is the age of men and women at first marriage. Demographers have already noted the phenomenon of entering into marriage at an increasingly later age by both sexes. This tendency stems from the changes in the young generation's attitudes that took place at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Decisions to postpone marriage are taken for social and economic reasons, due to a shift in priorities, whereby higher priority is given to education and the career advancement (Holzer, 1994) as well as on account of existing cultural patterns and, also, because "being single" is in fashion.

There are EU states (11 according to available data) where mean male age at first marriage is over 30. The eldest male first-timers live Sweden, Denmark and Holland. The women who get married for the first time at the age of over 30 are Swedish and Danish females. The youngest first-time brides and grooms are Lithuanians, Poles and Latvians.

From the author's point of view, the interesting phenomenon is the postponement of the decision to marry with the simultaneous extension of the period of enjoying by males and females the civil status denoted as „bachelor” in case of men and „spinster” in case of women.

Table 3 above shows mean age of males and females at the start and at the end of the period of analysis, i.e. in 1994 and in 2004. Additionally, a difference between the status as of 2004 and that as of 1994 has been calculated to show the length of time by which the age at first marriage has increased for both males and females. The lowest increase in age at first marriage for both men and women has been observed in Ireland, while the highest rise by 4 years for both sexes occurred in Hungary.

It is estimated that over 192,000 new marriages were formed in Poland in 2004, which represents a fall by 3.5 thousand compared to the year 2003. Since 1994, the marriage rate has decreased from 5.4‰ down to 5‰ (see Table 1). The frequency of entering into marriage is substantially lower in cities. About 75% of legally registered marriages are religious ones, i.e. those entered into in a church and, at the same time, registered at the civil registry office. First time marriages, formed by bachelors and spinsters, account for about 87% of all new marriages.

In Poland, the mean female age at first marriage was 24.7 in 2004 compared with 23 in mid 1990s, while for bachelors it rose by 1 year to 26.6.

Considering the number of marriages per 1,000 persons, it is worth examining the changes in the marriage rate that were taking place over the time span from the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, i.e. beginning in 1895 and ending in 2005. Figure 2 illustrates the trends in the change in the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants as well as shows the trend curve depicting the overall direction of the change.

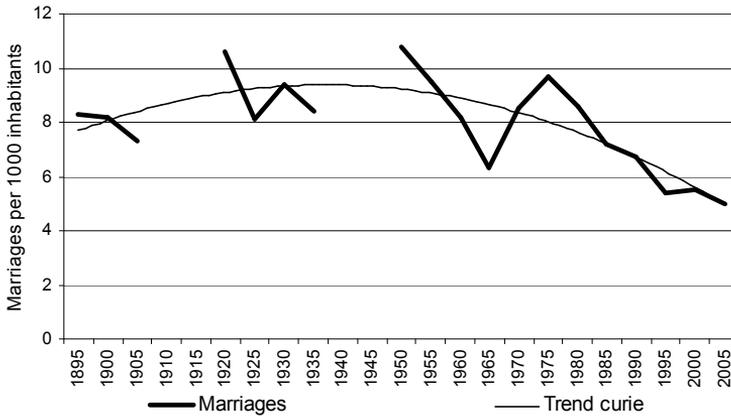


Fig. 2. Marriages per 1,000 inhabitants in Poland in the 1895–2005 period.

Source: Compilation prepared by the author based on *Demography* by J.Z. Holzer and CSO data relating to 2004

In Figure 2 the author has presented the changes that occurred in Poland in the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants over the past 110 years. The comparison of the data as of 1895 with those compiled for 2005 shows that the number of marriages dropped from 8.3‰ down to 5‰. The declining tendency is also illustrated by the trend curve embedded in the Figure. The second degree multinominal trend for the data series for the following 5-year periods over the time span beginning in 1895 and ending in 2005 has been calculated. A visible decrease in the marriage rate, especially after 1990, is in line with a similar tendency taking place in the majority of the EU states.

In the analysed period, the marriage rate twice exceeded the value of 10‰: in 1920 and in 1950. In the author's opinion the highest rise in the number of marriages took place after WW1 and WW2. It worth noting that the curve illustrating this phenomenon is broken, which is the result of the lack of precise data relating to both wartime periods. At this point it must be added that during the wars the population inevitably diminished with the resulting drop in the number of marriages.

In Poland, the highest number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants were formed in 2004 in the Lubelskie, Podkarpackie and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. On the other hand, the lowest number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants was recorded in Zachodniopomorskie, Opolskie and Lubuskie Voivodeship. The marriage rate higher than national average of 5‰ was observed in 6 provinces, lower than the average rate in 4 voivodeship, while 6 voivodeship (including the Łódzkie Voivodeship) reached the national average rate. The detailed data are shown in Figure 3 below.

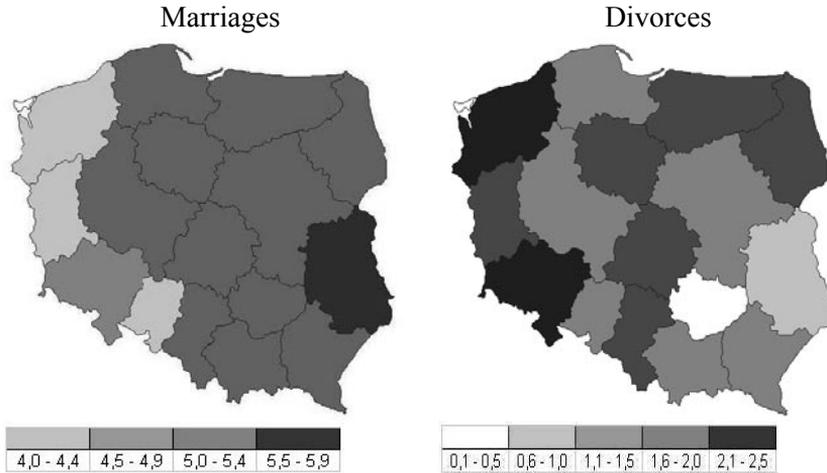


Fig. 3. Marriages and divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in Poland in 2004

Source: *Compilation* prepared by the author based on CSO data relating to 2004.

In Poland, out of all terminated marriages about 22% are dissolved by divorce. According to estimates, about 51,000 married couples were divorced in 2004 (compared to over 48 thousand in 2003). On average, 5.4 marriages per 1,000 were terminated through litigation. The divorce rate is rising (reaching 1.3‰ in 2003 and 1.5‰ in 2004), but nevertheless it still remains one of the lowest in Europe. It is worth mentioning that the intensity of divorces is higher in cities than in rural areas.

In 2004 the highest divorce rate was observed in the following voivodeship: Dolnoslaskie, Zachodniopomorskie and Lubuskie, and the lowest in Swietokrzyskie and Lubelskie. In as many as 8 voivodeship (including the Province of Łódź) the number of divorces per 1,000 population exceeded the national average (1.5‰) and in 7 provinces this number was lower than the average for Poland. Only in Opolskie voivodeship the divorce rate was equal to the national average figure.

The author's attention has focused on the two pairs of voivodeship: Lubuskie and Zachodniopomorskie versus Swietokrzyskie and Lubelskie. The first two voivodeship are characterized by a high rate of divorces and a low marriage rate, while the opposite correlation can be observed in the other two. With the lowest number of divorces per 1,000 persons, they have the highest number of marriages per 1,000 at the same time.

When analysing the issue of marriages and divorces in Poland it is worth studying the correlations between the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants

and the birth rate. If the relation between these two variables were directly proportional, the rise (or fall) in the number of marriages would entail a rise (or a fall) in the birth rate, accordingly. If an inverse correlation was at stake, an increase (or a decrease) in the number of contracted marriages should translate into a decrease (or an increase) in the birth rate, respectively. However, the correlation between these variables is very weak in Poland. Among the voivodeship with the highest number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, two voivodeship experience a negative birth rate, i.e. Lubelskie and Swietokrzyskie. The birth rate is positive in Podkarpackie Voivodeship. In the group of provinces with the lowest number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, positive birth rate is observed in Lubuskie and Zchodniopomorskie Voivodeship. The negative value of the birth rate has been

Table 4. Marriages in the Łódzkie Voivodeship in 2004 by county

COUNTIES OF THE PROVINCE OF LODZ	TOTAL NUMBER OF POPULATION	TOTAL NUMBER OF MARRIAGES	NUMBER OF MARRIAGES PER 1000	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Belchatow	112,279	615	5.5	4.7
Kutno	105,584	557	5.3	4.3
Lask	51,090	264	5.2	2.0
Leczyca	54,018	252	4.7	1.9
Lowicz	82,767	449	5.4	3.5
Lodz Wschodnia	63,859	315	4.9	2.4
Opoczno	79,067	480	6.1	3.7
Pabianice	119,473	612	5.1	4.7
Pajeczno	53,752	293	5.5	2.3
Piotrkow	90,106	458	5.1	3.5
Poddebice	42,595	202	4.7	1.6
Radomsko	119,598	642	5.4	4.9
Rawa	49,677	297	6.0	2.3
Sieradz	121,676	606	5.0	4.7
Skierniewice	37,994	194	5.1	1.5
Tomaszow	121,447	622	5.1	4.8
Wielun	78,454	441	5.6	3.4
Wieruszow	42,481	227	5.3	1.7
Zdunska Wola	67,929	343	5.0	2.6
Zgierz	160,352	772	4.8	5.9
Brzeziny	30,682	164	5.3	1.3
County Borough of Lodz	774,004	3,517	4.5	27.0
County Borough of Piotrkow Trybunalski	80,085	434	5.4	3.3
County Borough of Skierniewice	48,733	255	5.2	2.0
GRAND TOTAL	2,587,702	13,011	5.0	100

Source: Compilation prepared by the author based on CSO data concerning 2004

recorded in Opolskie Voivodeship. Weak correlation or often a lack of any correlation between these variables stems, amongst others, from the following:

- the conclusion of marriage does not need to be associated with the birth of a child/children;
- children are also born outside of marriage;
- the number of births may be lower than the number of deaths.

The author thinks it interesting to consider the marriage rates at the county level in the Łódzkie Voivodeship. Apart from the number of marriages concluded per 1,000 people by county, the Table 5 below shows, in addition, the percentage share of each county in the total number of marriages entered into in the analysed province. The percentage representation of the counties in the total number of marriages concluded in the Łódzkie Voivodeship is depicted in Figure 4.

Considering the marriage rates for the counties of the Łódzkie Voivodeship achieved in 2004, one may notice that the rate was the highest in the counties of Opoczno (6.1‰) and Rawa (6.0‰) and the lowest in the county of Lodz (4.5‰), Poddebeice and Leczyca (4.7‰). In the counties of Sieradz and Zdunska Wola the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants was identical with the average rate for the whole Łódzkie Voivodeship, i.e. 5.‰. 17 counties out of the 24 constituting the entire Łódzkie Voivodeship showed a marriage rate exceeding the average for the province, and 5 counties had a lower than average rate.

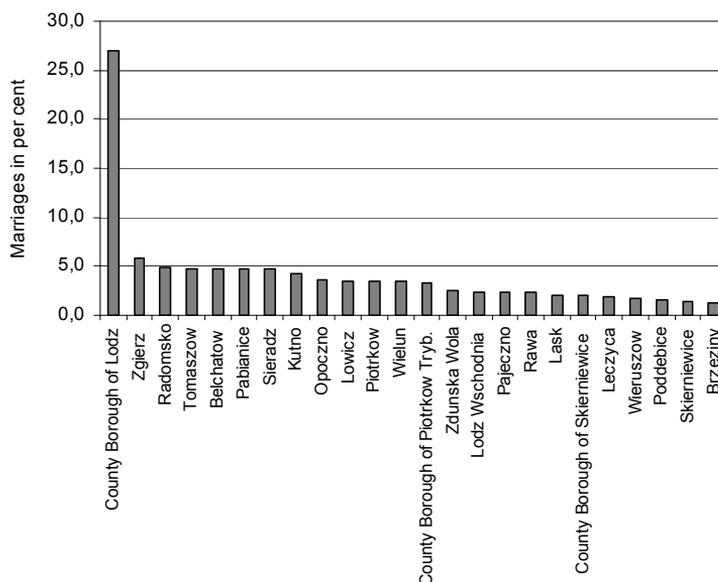


Fig. 4. Marriages per 1,000 inhabitants in 2004 by county

Source: Compilation prepared by the author based on the CSO data.

The analysis of the diagram in Figure 3 shows that an increase in the number of population in a county is accompanied by a rise in the number of marriages. This pattern is justifiable, and thus the highest percentages of marriages were observed in counties with the highest number of population: County Borough of Lodz (27%) and Zgierz (6.9%). The lowest percentage was recorded in the counties with the smallest population, i.e. in Brzeziny (1.3%) and Skierniewice (1.5%).

## CONCLUSIONS

The changes in the number of marriages and divorces in the EU states demonstrated by the author in this paper confirm the belief that Europe is in the course of moving from the fourth to the fifth stage of demographic transition marked by pursuit for individual attainment and the dependence of demographic processes on social and economic changes. A fall in the number of marriages and a rise in the number of divorces occurring in the majority of the Member States are not the only social processes taking place in the study area, however the article focuses on these two phenomena due to the author's interest in the issue. In the EU, the aging of the population is progressing, the age at first marriage of both men and women is increasing, the family model which does not ensure the generation-to-generation replacement is becoming an established pattern (fertility rate below 2) and, finally, the population growth is slowing down and there is a possibility of a decline in the number of population of Europe in the foreseeable future.

The analysis of marriage and divorce rates carried out in this study together with the analysis of the male and female ages at first marriages in the UE area allows one to speculate that similar demographic processes will continue to occur in the EU, however their pace and direction are not going to be identical in all countries concerned. Visible differences already exist between the North and the South of the European Community in terms of marriage and divorce rates, despite general tendencies common to all EU states described earlier in this paper. A closer similarity could be found in respect of the postponement of the decision to marry. The countries which acceded to the EU in 2004 are converging to the Western European patterns, however in the new Member States the said demographic processes are not so far-reaching, of which Poland is the best example.

Poland's demographic development in the 1994–2004 period has begun to resemble the processes that have been taking place in the Western societies for many years now, the difference being that demographic developments in Poland are strongly correlated with the new economic situation of the country. And

thus, Poland's population in real terms is declining due to the negative birth rate and a negative balance of international migration (outflow trend in search for employment). The cause for concern is also the below-replacement fertility resulting from the low birth rate (1.2), which remained unchanged since the 1990s and which fails to ensure the generation-to-generation replacement (see CSO data).

In the author's opinion, the decline in number of marriages accompanied by a rise in the number of divorces that we can observe since mid 1990s together with an increase in the age of men and women at first marriage are the result of the personal choices towards postponed nuptiality taken by the young people on an increasingly wider scale. The achievement of a desired level of education and economic stability is given top priority by young people, which only then is followed by a decision to found a family or expand the existing one. The reasons for such behaviours, prominent in other countries as well, are an increased drive for education, difficult labour market situation, reductions in the family-oriented social benefits, lack of a philosophy within the social policy framework for the support and strengthening of family and, finally, increasingly tough economic conditions.

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