

SF3.1: Marriage and divorce rates

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on marriages through two measures:

- *The crude marriage rate* (CMR), defined as the number of marriages during the year per 1000 people.
- *The mean age at first marriage*, defined as the mean age in years of marrying persons at the time of marriage. This measure is disaggregated by sex with separate averages for men and women.

Divorce is captured by one measure:

- *The crude divorce rate* (CDR), defined as the number of divorces during the year per 1000 people.

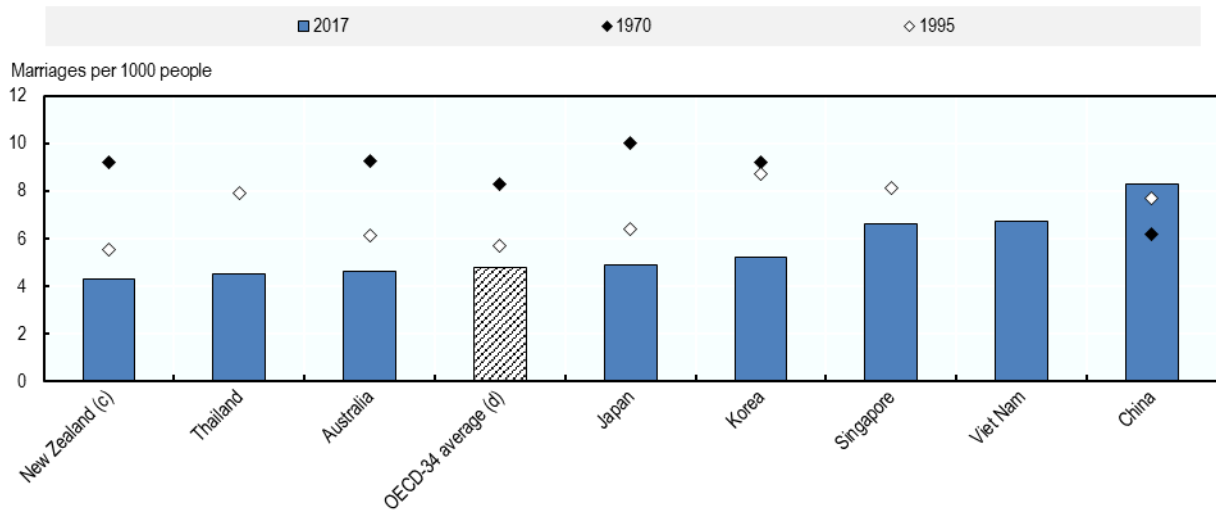
Key findings

Marriage rates are generally fairly high in the Asia/Pacific region, though they do vary considerably from one country to another (Chart SF3.1.A). Among the covered Asia/Pacific countries, current crude marriage rates are highest in China (8.3 marriages per 1000 people). They are lowest in Australia (4.6 marriages per 1000), Thailand (4.5) and New Zealand (4.3), all below the average for OECD countries (4.8).

In most of the covered Asia/Pacific countries, current crude marriage rates are far lower than they were in previous decades (Chart SF3.1.A). In Korea, for example, the current crude marriage rate (5.2 marriages per 1000 people) is about 3.5 points lower than it was in 1995 (8.7 marriages per 1000), and 4.0 points lower than in 1970 (9.2). In Japan, it is about 1.5 points lower than in 1995 (6.4 marriages per 1000) and more than 5 points lower than in 1970 (10.0). However, in China, the current crude marriage rate is actually slightly higher than it was in both 1975 and 1995, by 2.1 and by 0.6 points, respectively.

Other relevant indicators: SF1.1 Family size and composition; SF2.4 Share of births outside of marriage; SF3.2 Family dissolution and children

Chart SF3.1.A. **Crude marriage rate, 1970^a, 1995 and 2017 or latest available year^b**
 Marriages per 1000 people



a) Data for China refer to 1975.

b) Data for Viet Nam refer to 2011, and for China and Indonesia to 2015.

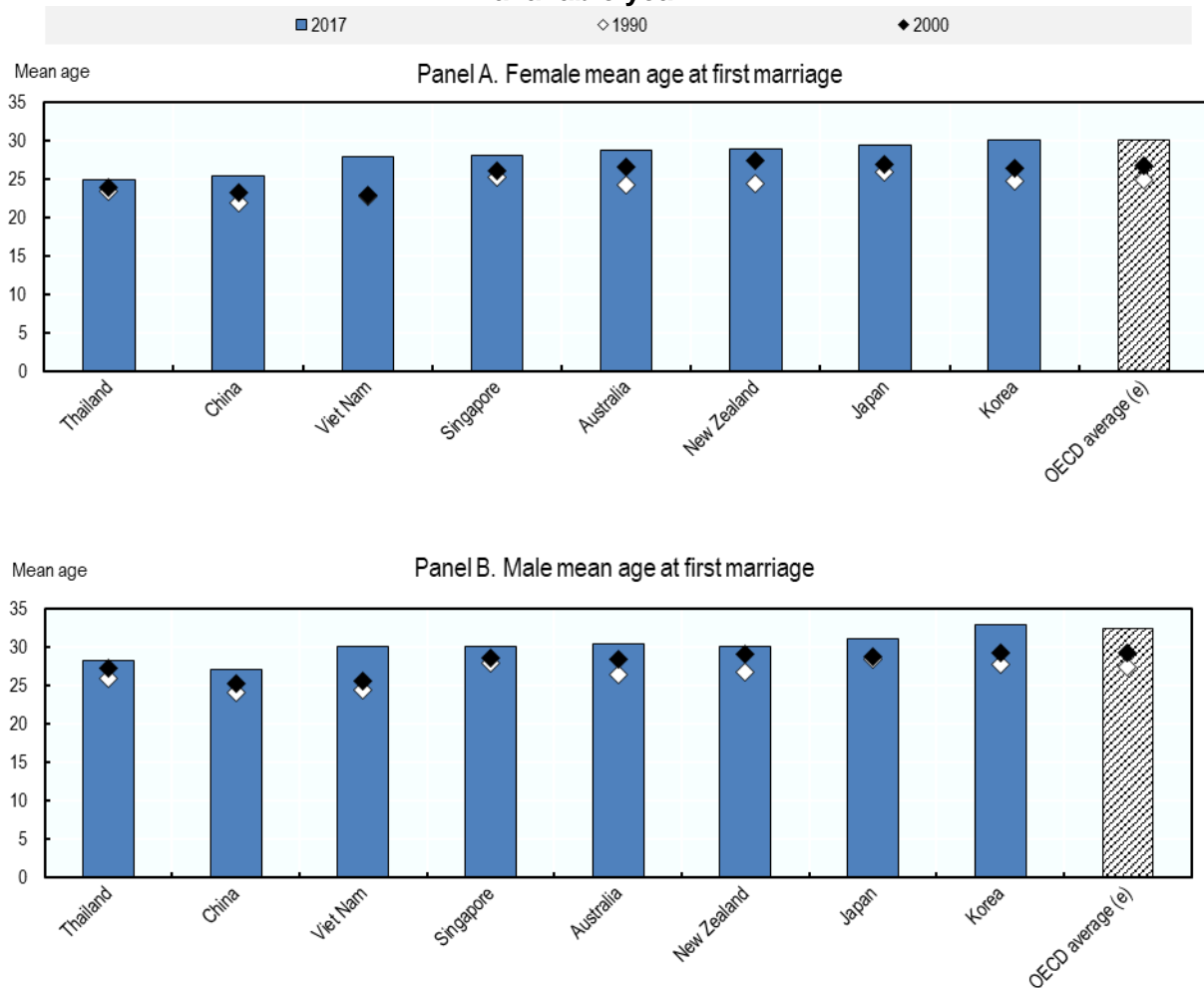
c) Data for New Zealand include civil unions.

d) The OECD-34 average refers to the unweighted average across the 34 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.1 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [China: China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Civil Affairs](#); [Indonesia: Statistics Indonesia](#); [Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Population Statistics](#); [Korea: Statistics Korea, Vital Statistics](#); [New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand](#); [OECD-34 average: OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.1](#); [Singapore: Department of Statistics Singapore, Statistics on Marriages and Divorces](#); [Thailand: Department of Provincial Administration](#); [Viet Nam: Statistics on Marriages & Divorces, 2011](#)

In Asia/Pacific countries as also in most OECD countries, the average age at which both men and women first marry has increased markedly over the past couple of decades (Chart SF3.1.B). For women (Panel A), all covered countries except Thailand have seen the average age at first marriage increase by around or more than 2.5 years since 1990, with the largest increases coming in Korea (5.4) and Viet Nam (5.2). Korea has the highest current female mean ages at first marriage at 30.2 years of age, the same level as the average across OECD countries. For men (Panel B), mean ages at first marriage have increased in all covered countries by at least two years since 1990, with the largest increase again in Viet Nam (5.6 years) and the highest current mean age in Korea (32.9 years of age). However, despite these increases average ages at first marriage still remain relatively low in Asia/Pacific countries – for example, in all covered Asia/Pacific countries except Korea mean ages at first marriage remain lower than the average for OECD countries.

Chart SF3.1.B. Mean age at first marriage^{ab} by sex, 1990, 2000^c and 2017 or latest available year^d

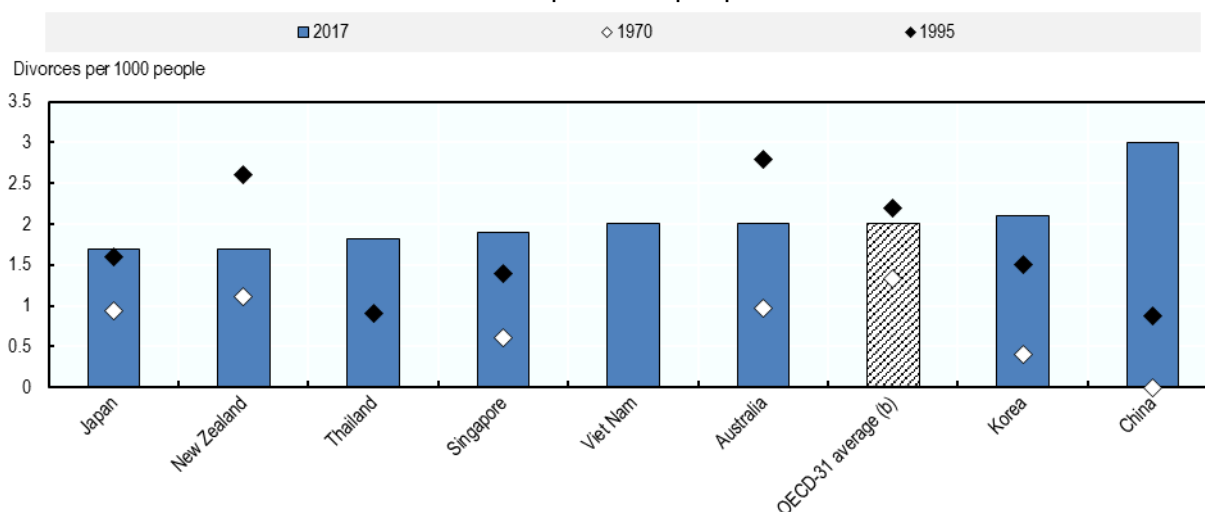


- a) For Australia and New Zealand, median age at first marriage
- b) Data for New Zealand include civil unions. From 2007 onwards, data include those who transferred their civil union to a marriage
- c) Data for Viet Nam refer to 2001
- d) Data for Thailand refer to 2010, for Viet Nam to 2013 and for China refer to 2016.
- e) The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across the 36 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.1 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [China: China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Civil Affairs](#); [Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Population Statistics](#); [Korea: Statistics Korea, Vital Statistics](#); [New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand](#); [OECD average: OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.1](#); [Singapore: Department of Statistics Singapore, Statistics on Marriages and Divorces](#); [Thailand: Population and Housing Census](#); [Viet Nam: Population Census 1989,1999, 2009; Population Dynamic Surveys 2001-2012; Statistics on Marriages & Divorces 2013](#)

In the Asia/Pacific region as also in many OECD countries, one of the most striking demographic developments in recent decades has been the increase in the frequency of divorce (Chart SF3.1.C). In all covered Asia/Pacific countries with available data, crude divorce rates are far higher today than they were in 1970. In China for example, the current crude divorce rate (3.0 divorces per 1000 people) is 2.1 divorces per 1000 higher than it was in 1995 (0.9), while in Korea the crude divorce rate has increased by as much as 1.7 divorces per 1000 over the same period. Recent trends are a little mixed, and in Australia and New Zealand crude divorce rates are actually lower now (by 0.8-0.9 than divorces per 1000) than they were in 1995. Generally, however, divorce rates remain high by historical standards across Asia/Pacific countries.

Chart SF3.1.C. **Crude divorce rate, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available year^a**
 Divorces per 1000 people



a) Data for Viet Nam refer to 2011, for China, New Zealand and Thailand to 2016.

b) The OECD-31 average refers to the unweighted average across the 31 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.1 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [China: China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Civil Affairs](#); [Indonesia: Statistics Indonesia](#); [Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Population Statistics](#); [Korea: Statistics Korea, Vital Statistics](#); [New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand: OECD-29 average: OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.1](#); [Singapore: Department of Statistics Singapore, Statistics on Marriages and Divorces](#); [National Population and Talent Division, Population in Brief 2016](#); [Thailand: Department of Provincial Administration](#); [Viet Nam: Supreme Court of Vietnam Annual Statistics 2000-2010; Population Trends, 2013](#)

Comparability and data issues

For all countries, data on marriage and divorce are based on civil registration statistics. In some covered countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand), partners who live together for a specified period of time have a similar legal status as a married couple. These couples are not taken into account in marriage statistics and are not included here.

Divorce is possible in all covered Asia/Pacific countries, though divorce laws do vary from country to country. These variations influence the length and nature of the divorce process, and should be borne in mind when comparing divorce rates across countries.

Sources and further reading: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017), *World Marriage Data 2017*, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/marriage-unions/WMD2017.asp>; Eurostat (2019) *Statistics Explained: Marriage and birth statistics - new ways of living together in the EU*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics.