



Weekly Briefing

**Hungary social briefing:
Marriages in Hungary
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Marriages in Hungary

The actual number of marriages in a country depends on many factors, including the size of the population, the age structure of the society in question, traditions, the financial burden of your population, and their professional opportunities. Fluctuations in the numbers also reflect the economic environment, whether there are good or bad times in the economy. Many of the above factors are not easy to change, but social policies can do a lot in both directions, encouraging or discouraging people to marry. And not surprisingly, the government's vision of society and the ideal family also contributes to the mix of policies implemented by the government

Introduction

The factors mentioned above are the key elements that have led to a new family model. The rapid changes in European and Hungarian families began anew in the 1990s. Young people delayed marriage longer than ever before, permanent singleness increased, and divorces and remarriages continued to increase in the decades after 1990. In contrast to today, the 1950s could be called the Golden Age of Marriage, when high rates of marriage and childbearing at relatively young ages and a low prevalence of divorce and nontraditional family forms were more typical. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, however, several competing family forms and relationships have emerged in European societies. This briefing addresses how and how often the number of marriages in Hungary fluctuates and what policy moves may have contributed to these changes. Before doing so, the briefing offers the reader a brief European comparison.

A European Comparison

For this reason, the long-term trend in the European Union has been the decline in marriages. According to Eurostat, the marriage rate in the European Union has dropped from 8 people per 1,000 in 1964 to 4.3 in 2019. The highest marriage rates in 2019 were in Cyprus (8.9 per 1,000 people), Lithuania (7.6), Hungary and Latvia (6.7-6.7), and Romania (6.6). The lowest marriage rates in the same year were recorded in Italy (3.1), Portugal and Slovenia (both 3.0), France, Spain and Luxembourg (all 3.5 per 1,000 persons). It is interesting to note that the

geographic distribution of marriages in the EU does not follow the traditional patterns we are familiar with in terms of the importance of religion, traditions, etc. Very low numbers are found in the Mediterranean countries (Spain, France, Italy, Greece), while the numbers are relatively high in the Nordic (Sweden, Denmark) and Western European countries (Germany, Austria). The absence of traditional patterns points to the importance of government action in this area.

	The marriage rate (person per 1.000 persons)	The divorce rate (person per 1.000 persons)
<i>EU</i>	4.3	1.8
Bulgaria	4.2	1.6
Czechia	5.1	2.3
Estonia	5.0	2.1
Croatia	4.9	1.5
Latvia	6.7	3.1
Lithuania	7.0	3.1
Hungary	6.7	1.8
Poland	4.8	1.7
Romania	3.2	2.6
Slovenia	6.6	1.2
Slovakia	3.2	1.7
Source: Eurostat		

At the same time we can add that in the geographical distribution of the number of divorces we can confirm the effects of tradition. In strongly Catholic Ireland the number of divorces is the lowest in Europe, i.e. 0.7 divorced per 1,000 persons. Relatively high numbers are found in the Baltic countries (Latvia: 3.1, Lithuania: 3.1, Estonia: 3.0) and in the Scandinavian countries (Sweden: 2.5, Finland: 2.4). Hungary, with 1.8 divorced persons per 1,000, is at the bottom of this list, where lower figures are typical.

Statistical data

Between February 13 and 20, Hungary celebrated the Week of Marriages. For this reason, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) published data on marriages. According to these data, the number of marriages was just over 72 thousand in 2021. The decline in marriages started at the beginning of 1980, when the number of marriages was about 80 thousand.

At this point it is worth mentioning that Eurostat has also published the marriage rate for Hungary from 1964 and 1970. In 1964, this rate was 8.7 and increased to 9.3 in 1970. After decades of slow decline, the marriage rate has increased again to 6.7 in 2019. Using HCSO data, the same almost continuous downward trend can be demonstrated. The lowest point was

reached in 2010, when the economic impact of the global financial crisis (2008-2009) was also reflected in the numbers. In 2021, only 35 thousand marriages were registered in Hungary. Since then, the number of marriages has continuously increased, and not even the Covid 19 pandemic could stop this long-term trend. The number of marriages was 65 thousand in 2019 and 67 thousand in 2020. The last time we could see the record number of 2021 was in 1986. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office has also published the average age of the first married. For men, the average age is 35 years old and for women it is 30 years old when they marry for the first time. There are analyzes of how long these positive trends can be sustained. Several experts indicate that the peak was reached in 2021 or 2022, but from 2023 these numbers will start to decline.

The philosophy of family policy measures in Hungary

This part of the briefing tries to outline the philosophy of family support measures in Hungary, the concrete steps with figures for 2022 can be found in the 2022 January Social Briefing. The Hungarian Prime Minister spoke about the Hungarian government's family policy at the 4th Budapest Demographic Summit 2021. He outlined five principles that the government has in mind when drafting family policies:

1. having children must also be financially beneficial for families,
2. policies should support families' home ownership,
3. family policy steps should be oriented towards mothers,
4. the whole country must function in a family-friendly way,
5. the instruments of the law must be used to protect the institution of the family and children.

It is quite clear that Hungarian family policy is related to the problem of population decline. What is perhaps less clear is that money can only be spent on families when the economy is doing well. This is the reason why the prime minister emphasized in his speech that the Hungarian government spends 5 percent of GDP on supporting families, and he added that we are halfway to what we would like to achieve in this regard. He claimed that the number of marriages has doubled since 201 and the number of abortions has decreased by 41 percent between 2010 and 2020. He pointed out the differences between Western Europe and Hungary in the way they deal with the problem of population decline. He argues that forced migration serves the global plan of a new working class in these countries. He also said that those who advocate broad-based migration fail to see the cultural aspects of demographic trends. He added

that he believes a country functions well when its citizens have more or less the same or similar values on key social issues. If this were not the case, the nation would fall apart. In short, migration and family policies are also about the identity of each country or nations, he argued.

Summary

As we could see in the briefing, the number of marriages increased due to appropriate governmental measures and the direct impact of governmental measures can also be statistically proven. The decline was halted in 2010, in the wake of the global financial crisis. The ultimate goal is to improve the fertility rate in Hungary, but the results occur much slower in this case, as the Hungarian fertility rate is still below the EU average (1.61 in 2021), while the Hungarian indicator was 1.53 in the same year. (The number represents the number of children reaching adulthood in the case of an average woman. A number above 2 means that the population is growing, while a number below that means a population decline.) We should add that the Hungarian fertility rate – based on World Bank data – has been recovering since 2011, when it reached its lowest point at 1.21. The last year the Hungarian fertility rate was above 2.0 was 1979, so the question remains how long it will take to reverse this trend with policy measures. We could also see that achieving population growth targets also serves a broader national strategy as they are linked to migration policy, and in an indirect way to Hungarian foreign policy which regularly carries out its fight with the European Commission regarding sovereignty.