

SF3.2. Family dissolution and children

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on the nature and characteristics of family dissolution, divorce, and separation in terms of the duration of marriage prior to divorce and the number of children affected by divorce. Information is presented through three main measures:

- The *distribution of divorce by the duration of the marriage* in years, with the preceding marriages grouped into those that lasted: less than 1 year, 1 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, 15 to 19 years, and 20 or more years.
- The *distribution of divorce by the number of children involved*, with ‘children involved’ defined as children under the age of 18 who depend on either of the parties to a divorce at the time the petition for divorce is filed. Children of any previous partnership are also included.

Data for these two measures refer to the number of divorces and not to the number of persons divorcing, with data derived from civil registration statistics. ‘Divorce’ in these cases is defined as the final legal dissolutions of a marriage, which confer on the parties the right to remarry as defined by the laws of each country or area. Legal separations which do not allow remarriage are excluded from divorce statistics. All the persons living within the borders of a country are covered, unless otherwise specified.

Because family dissolution may not always involve couples that are legally married, a third measure is used to capture dissolution involving children in wider terms:

- The *proportion of adults (16+) that report they are either separated or divorced by parenthood status*, with on this particular measure ‘parents’ defined as any individuals that report they have ever had at least one child and ‘divorced or separated’ defined by the individual’s self-reported partnership status.

This information is taken from the World Values Survey, where respondents are asked about their marital and parenthood statuses at the time of the survey. The experience of partnership dissolution is only partially addressed through these surveys however, since a separation is not identified when parents have entered into a new partnership.

Key findings

The duration of marriages that end in divorce is similarly distributed in all Asia/Pacific countries, though there are some cross-country differences (Table SF3.2.A). Early divorce is most common in Japan where almost 30% and Viet Nam, where 38% of marriages that end in divorce last less five years. In other Asia/Pacific countries, marriages that end in divorce are likely to last a little longer. In New Zealand, for example, almost 30% of marriages that end in divorce have lasted 20 years or more. In Korea, this figure is as high as 39%. In Singapore, 30% of divorcées have been married between 5 and 9 years.

<i>Other relevant indicators:</i> SF1.1 Family size and composition; SF2.4 Share of births outside of marriage; SF3.1 Marriage and divorce rate

Table SF3.2.A. **Distribution of divorce by duration of the marriage, 2021 or latest available year**

	Duration of marriage before divorce (%):						Not stated	Last year available
	Less than 1 year	1 to 4 years	5 to 9 years	10 to 14 years	15 to 19 years	20+ years		
Australia	0.6	13.6	26.7	32.0	27.1	..	2021	
China	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Indonesia	5.3	23.7	19.4	14.8	8.8	20.5	7.6	2014
Japan	5.3	24.2	18.5	13.2	10.7	21.1	6.9	2021
Korea	2.7	16.1	17.1	14.3	11.1	38.7	0.0	2021
Malaysia
Mongolia	1.2	8.8	10.9	13.8	65.2	..	2021	
New Zealand	10.6	25.2	19.8	14.9	29.5	..	2021	
Singapore	17.1	29.8	18.4	11.7	23.0	..	2021	
Thailand	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Viet Nam	0.2	37.4	23.6	15.4	10.3	13.1	2021	
OECD average	0.8	16.2	22.8	17.7	13.5	28.3	1.3	2017

Notes: For Australia, the categories '10 to 14 years' and '15 to 19 years' are considered together. For Japan, data refer to duration of "cohabitation" before divorce. For Mongolia, the categories '15 to 19 years' and '20+ years' are considered together. For New Zealand and Singapore, the categories 'less than 1 year' and '1 to 4 years' are considered together. The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across the 32 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See [OECD Family Database](#) Indicator SF3.2 for more detail.

Sources: Australia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and OECD average: [OECD Family Database](#) Indicator SF3.2; Indonesia: 2014 Indonesia Family Life Survey; Mongolia: [Population Statistics](#); Singapore: Department of Statistics, Statistics on Marriages and Divorces 2021; Viet Nam: Ministry of Justice (2021).

Across Asia/Pacific countries included here, roughly 60% of all divorces involve at least one child, subject to cross-country variation (Table SF3.2.B). In 2017, 56% of divorces in OECD countries involved children. The share of divorces involving children is highest at 90% in China and lowest at 40.5% in Korea. Among those divorces that involve any children, most involve either one or two children with very few involving three or more. The share of divorces involving only a single child is highest at 66% in China, and the share involving two children is highest at 21% in Japan and particularly at 26% in Indonesia. Indonesia also reports the highest share of divorces involving 3 or more children (19%).

Table SF3.2.B. Distribution of divorce by number of children involved, 2021 or latest year available

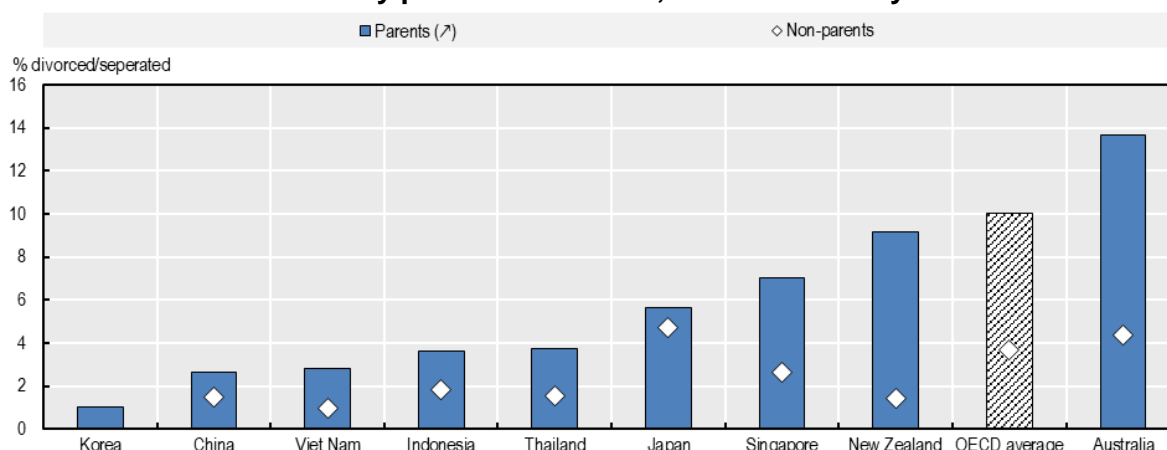
	Divorces not involving children	Proportion (%) of divorces					Latest year available
		Total	Divorces involving children:			Unknown	
			1 child	2 children	3 or more children		
Australia	52.9	47.1	18.8	20.1	8.2	..	2015
China	10.3	89.7	66.2	19.3	4.1	..	2019
Indonesia	13.4	86.6	42.1	25.8	18.6	..	2017
Japan	43.1	56.9	26.5	21.4	9.0	..	2019
Korea	56.9	40.5	21.7	15.7	3.1	2.6	2021
Malaysia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mongolia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
New Zealand	57.8	42.2	17.4	18.4	6.4	..	2016
Singapore	51.4	48.6	27.2	16.1	5.3	..	2015
Thailand	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Viet Nam	42.3	57.7	30.4	20.5	6.8	..	2021
OECD average	44.4	55.6	27.1	21.3	6.6	..	2017

Notes: For Japan, data refer to Japanese nationals in Japan only. For Korea, dependent children are children under 20 years of age. The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across the 27 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See [OECD Family Database](#) Indicator SF3.2 for more detail.

Sources: Australia and New Zealand: [United Nations Demographic Yearbook](#); Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, [Population Statistics 2021](#); Korea: Statistics Korea, [Vital Statistics](#); OECD-27 average: [OECD Family Database](#) Indicator SF3.2; Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Statistics on Marriages and Divorces, 2015; Viet Nam: Statistics on Marriages & Divorces, 2012.

The share of parents that report being separated or divorced differs considerably across Asia/Pacific countries (Chart SF3.2.A). In Australia, for example, almost 14% of parents report their current partnership status as ‘separated or divorced’, whereas in China and Viet Nam less than 3% of parents are separated or divorced, and in Korea it is as low as 1%. In all Asia/Pacific countries included here, parents are more likely to report being separated or divorced than adults without children (Chart SF3.2.A). This is especially the case in Australia, New Zealand and Viet Nam, as well as on average across OECD countries, where parents are around 3 times more likely to report being separated or divorced than non-parents. In New Zealand, parents are 6.4 times more likely to be divorced than non-parents. However, in Japan, parents (5.7%) are almost as likely to be separated or divorced than adults without children (4.7%).

Chart SF3.2.A. Proportion of adults (16+) that report they are either separated or divorced by parenthood status, latest available year



Notes: 'Parents' are those who report at least one child when asked the question 'Have you had any children?'. Those who report that they have not had any children are classified as 'non-parents'. Data for the for Australia, China, Korea and Thailand refer to 2018, for Indonesia and Japan to 2019, and for New Zealand, Singapore and Viet Nam to 2020. The OECD average refers to 2010-2014. The OECD average refers to the unweighted average across the 26 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See [OECD Family Database](https://www.oecd.org/fdb/) Indicator SF3.2 for more detail. Sources: China: China Social Survey 2019; Indonesia: Estimated from the 2019 National Socio-Economic Surveys; all other countries: [World Values Survey](https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/), various waves.

Comparability and data issues

The data on divorce used in Tables SF3.2.A and SF3.2.B are based on statistics derived from civil registers. Divorce, like marriage, is a legal event, and this has implications for international comparability of data. Divorce is possible in all covered Asia/Pacific countries, but divorce laws do vary from country to country. These variations influence the ease, length, and nature of the divorce process, and should be borne in mind when comparing across countries the distribution of divorces by the number of children involved and in particular by the duration of the preceding marriage.

Most of the data used in Chart SF3.2.A come from the World Values Survey (WVS), a worldwide network of representative national surveys carried out in 97 societies covering almost 90% of the world's population. Seven waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2022, with the last wave carried out over the 2017-2022 period. Sample sizes do vary across countries, from approximately 1000 individuals in e.g., Korea and New Zealand to about 2500 in Japan. Estimates based on smaller samples may be less reliable than those based on larger samples.

Sources and further reading:

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019), *World Marriage Data 2019*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/world-marriage-data>; Eurostat (2023) *Statistics Explained: Marriage and divorce statistics - new ways of living together in the EU*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Marriage_and_divorce_statistics.