

# **Is Marriage Still Outdated?**

## **The Attitudes towards Marriage in Czechia, Estonia, and Norway**

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### **Introduction**

For a long time, entry to marriage went hand in hand with a person's entry to adulthood. In the second half of the 20th century, unmarried cohabitation started to replace marriage as a first coresident union in many European countries. As cohabitations continued to spread, the meanings of cohabitation and marriage underwent changes. As Cherlin stated, "Marriage is [now] a choice, not a requirement" (Cherlin, 2020, p. 75), while in the countries where the diffusion of cohabitations started early on, it has become an alternative to marriage. However, marriage still holds its symbolic value in social contexts where its practical importance has diminished. Empirical studies (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004; Hiekel et al., 2015; Hiekel & Castro-Martín, 2014) agree that the reasons why people cohabit vary a lot, and while some people are opposed to marriage, others just do not feel ready for marriage yet. In Europe, two models prevail: cohabitation as a step in the marriage process or a prelude to marriage, and cohabitation as an alternative to marriage or indistinguishable from marriage (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004).

This study focuses on the recent development of marital attitudes in three countries – Czechia, Estonia, and Norway – that had different starting points when it came to the meanings of marriage and cohabitation in the 2000s. Norway and Estonia were one of the forerunners of the diffusion of cohabitation. For instance, 80% of women born between 1965 and 1970 chose cohabitation instead of marriage as a first co-residential union by age 25 in Estonia, and the situation was similar in Norway (Macura et al., 2002). In Czechia, the respective proportion of women born between 1970-1975 was around 33%, which shows the profound differences in union formation.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, significant changes have occurred in Europe (and elsewhere) that could impact people's union formation attitudes. Processes such as individualization, educational expansion (mainly among women), and increasing gender equality can influence how individuals perceive marriage. What happened to marital attitudes

in the last two decades? Did people shift further away from the institution of marriage, or do they still believe in its importance? This study adds to our understanding of marriage and cohabitation by examining *how the attitudes of unmarried men and women towards marriage have developed from the 2000s to the 2020s*.

## **Methods**

This study uses data from the first round (GGS1, collected between 2004–2008 in countries included in this study) and the second round (GGS2, collected between 2020–2022 in countries included in this study) of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). The marital attitude was measured by an agreement with the statement “Marriage is an outdated institution.” I focus on three countries that have already published the data from the second round and included this measure of marital attitude in both survey rounds – Czechia, Estonia, and Norway. In each country, I compare to what degree the respondents agreed or disagreed that marriage is outdated and how the agreement changed over time among men and women. In addition, I analyze other statements, such as “It is alright for a couple to live together without getting married,” to further explore the views on marriage and cohabitation in Europe. The analysis focuses on people aged 21–54 ( $M = 35$ ,  $SD = 9.7$ ) who were single or in a non-marital partnership ( $N = 8,011$  in GGS1 and 8,115 in GGS2). Data are analyzed using the multinomial logistic regression models, separate for each country.

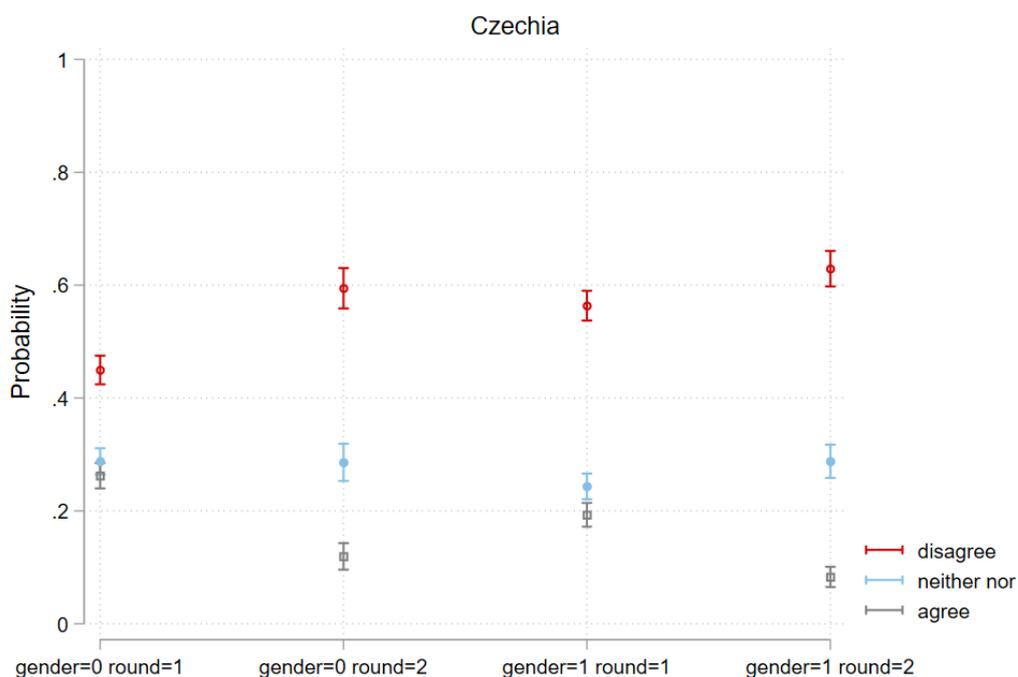
## **Results**

Preliminary analysis showed a massive decrease in negative attitudes towards marriage in Estonia (see Figure 2) and a more modest decrease in negative marital attitudes in Czechia (see Figure 1). In Estonia, the probability of agreeing that “marriage is an outdated institution” was around 0.5 for men and a little over 0.4 for women in GGS1. In GGS2, the probability was approximately twice as low for both Estonian men and women. On the other hand, Estonian respondents were more likely to feel indifferent (i.e., neither agree nor disagree) towards marriage in GGS2 than in GGS1. In Czechia, the probability of agreeing that marriage is outdated was already low in GGS1 (around 0.25 for men and 0.2 for women) but decreased in time. Czech women and especially men were more likely to disagree (i.e., have a positive attitude towards marriage) with the statement in GGS2 than in GGS1. Therefore, in Estonia and Czechia, there was a shift towards more positive marital attitudes. However, the share of those feeling indifferent towards marriage was also high in Estonia (especially among men). In

Norway (see Figure 3), the changes in marital attitudes were less pronounced and not significant substantively – marital attitudes of Norwegian respondents were more similar in GGS2 to those of Estonian (rather than Czech) respondents, with a relatively high proportion of people feeling indifferent towards marriage. An exploratory analysis of marital plans of Czech and Estonian respondents with co-resident partners revealed that the probability of reporting marital plans for the next three years decreased between GGS1 and GGS2 among respondents who agree that marriage is outdated (in Czechia and Estonia) and those who neither agree nor disagree (only in Estonia).<sup>1</sup> This result suggests a decrease in conformists (see Hiekel et al., 2015) who plan to marry despite their negative/indifferent attitudes to marriage.

## Figures

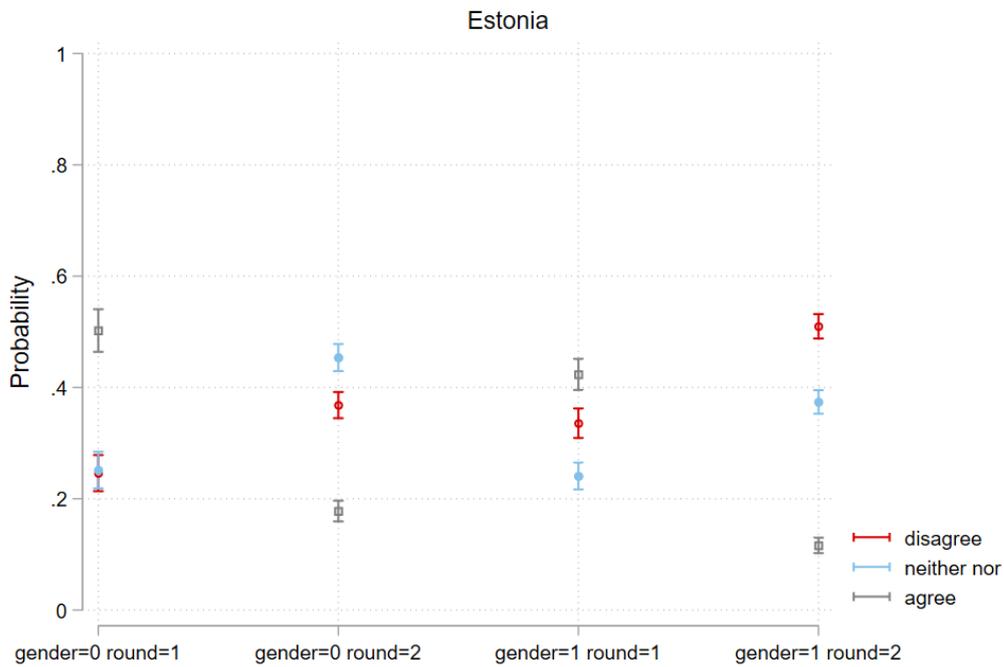
**Figure 1: An agreement with the statement “Marriage is an outdated institution” in Czechia (N = 4,642). Data from GGS1 and GGS2.**



Note: Gender was coded as 0 (men) and 1 (women).

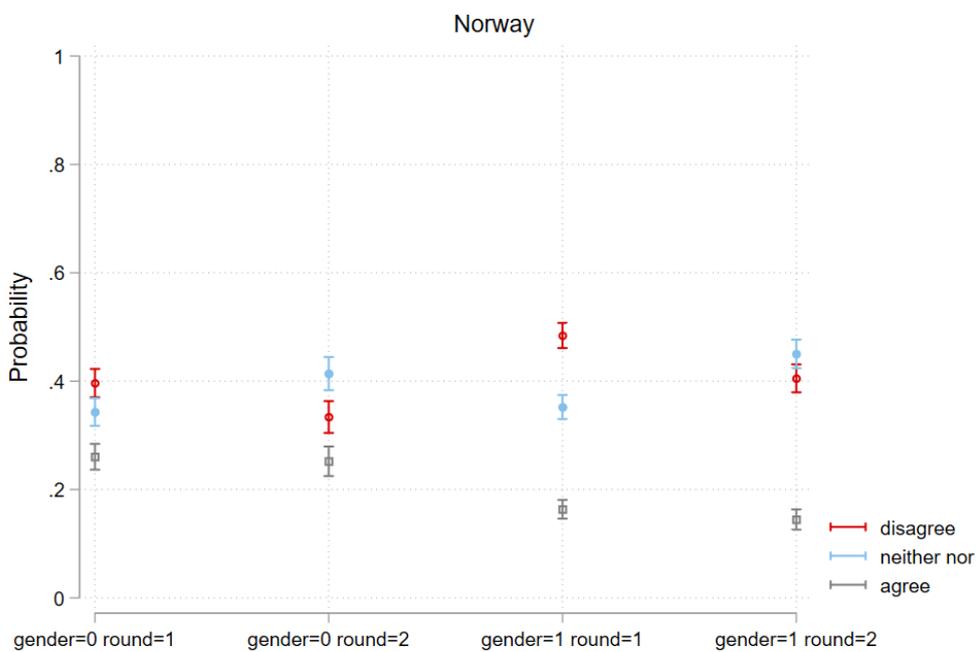
<sup>1</sup> Norway was not included in this analysis because marital plans were measured differently in Norwegian GGS.

**Figure 2: An agreement with the statement “Marriage is an outdated institution” in Estonia (N = 5,700). Data from GGS1 and GGS2.**



Note: Gender was coded as 0 (men) and 1 (women).

**Figure 3: An agreement with the statement “Marriage is an outdated institution” in Norway (N = 5,529). Data from GGS1 and GGS2.**



Note: Gender was coded as 0 (men) and 1 (women).

## References

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