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Partnership forms in Europe: A systematic literature review

Abstract

Marriage and cohabitation are the two most common forms of partnership in Europe. We examined the extent to which marriage and cohabitation are studied from a demographic perspective and to identify differences across European countries. The methodology was established on a keyword search and four phases of preference indicator, based on which we selected 85 articles and incorporate them into the literature review. As determined by the literature review, we identified seven areas: Cohabitation, Marriage, Union Formation, Migrants Partnership Behavior, Fertility, Divorce, and Second Demographic Transition. The influence of society plays a significant role in forming the attitudes and aspirations of individuals in each area of life, and for some, even in the most important, which is starting a family and getting married or not, and on the other hand, in individual aspirations and modern lifestyles.

Keywords: marriage, cohabitation, union formation, divorce.

1. Introduction

Marriage is considered one of the oldest social institution. The main function of marriage was to control sexual relations and biological reproduction (Milić, 2001). The institution of marriage was administered by the church and the state. Since the 18th century, the role of the church has been dwindling, and the primacy in regulating the marriage issue has been assumed by the state (Vuletić, 2008). Divorce was not possible in some European countries until the 1960s (in Russia, divorce law was liberalized in 1965) (Kok and Leinarte, 2015) and until the 1970s and 1980s (in Italy, under the influence of the Vatican, divorce was prohib-

ited by law, and in Spain, divorce was not allowed until 1981 – making it the last country in Europe to allow divorce) (Milic, 2001, Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor, 2011, p. 773).

One of the most important marriage researcher was John Hajnal (1965). He incorporated all the demographic findings on marriage known up to that time, and on this basis determined two marriage models east and west of the Trieste-Leningrad line. Today, in the 21st century, this line is slowly losing its firmness, because even in the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe the age of marriage is rising, divorces are becoming more frequent, and a certain proportion of women do not marry but live in an extramarital union with their partner reflects the prevalence of the second demographic transition. Of course, the differences are still visible today, but we are witnessing sudden changes due to the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, and these changes will continue, but in a different proportion – depending on the socio-political situation, economic factors, educational level, personal aspirations and quality of life. The importance of understanding marriage and cohabitation, as well as the tendencies to marry, i.e., to enter into a cohabitation, is particularly evident from the fact that marriage, as well as cohabitation, together with births, is one of the basic indicators of the second demographic transition.

The meaning of life has changed. It used to be important to get married just because it was socially desirable and the only acceptable way to produce offspring, but today social ties are dissolving and the emphasis is on personal satisfaction, quality of life, relationship with our partner, and mutual respect and individuality (Giddens, 1992). Cohabitation represents the mutual life of partners who are not married (extramarital union) (Thane, 2013), but share all the obligations related to the upbringing of children (if they have any), the maintenance of the premises in which they live, and household expenses, but on the other hand, have more freedom than people who are married. Fear of commitment is one of the reasons for delaying marriage (Perelli-Harris *et al.* 2014). Cohabitation has become more prevalent since the 1960s and 1970s, but its roots go deep into history and are associated with the history of marriage (Kok and Leinarte, 2015; Lesthaeghe, 2010). The communist regime in Eastern Europe was not sympathetic to extramarital partnerships, so these partnerships were not treated as existing in census data (Hoem *et al.* 2009; Plakans and Lipša, 2014). From the late 16th to the 20th century, religions and governments prohibited or at least condemned cohabitation between unmarried partners. In some cultures that still adhere to traditional or religious principles, cohabitation is not appraised as a desirable or socially acceptable lifestyle even today. Yet cohabitation is becoming a common practice in most European countries explained

differently (Perelli-Harris *et al.* 2014). In literature, there are two aspects of cohabitation. According to the first, cohabitation is considered one of the stages of marriage preparation, and according to the second, cohabitation is a special form of life shared by partners that is an alternative to marriage (Hiekel *et al.* 2015, p. 238). So, people who are in the first type of cohabitation are in a way testing their relationship, they want to get to know each other better and understand if they can accept each other's habits before they decide to be together for the rest of their lives (Perelli-Harris *et al.* 2014). In this second type of cohabitation, partners do not want their relationship to be regulated by someone else (state or church), they are more independent and often do not believe in the institution of marriage. In Europe, there are differences in the understanding of cohabitation. In Western Europe, cohabitation was contemplated as an „introduction to marriage,” during the same time in Eastern Europe, cohabitation was equated with bigamy until the beginning of the 20th century (Kok and Leinarte, 2015). People who were already married often opt for postmarital cohabitation rather than remarriage because they continue to believe in love but have lost faith in marriage (Dudić, 2020). Also, a significant proportion of cohabitation relationships do not lead to marriage. The best example is Sweden, which has a substantial proportion of the population in Europe living in cohabitation (Kiernan, 2004). All demographic changes are accompanied by cultural, social, and technological changes, and modernization, and form the basis of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa, 1986; van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 2010, 2014). Scholars wonder about the impact of the Second Demographic Transition, i.e., how social, cultural, economic, and political factors affect the population and what their outcomes are. What is certain is that they take the form of changes in family structure, the frame of marriage, an increase in divorces, later marriages, and a decline in population size with lower birth rates, postponement of births, and an aging population. The modern (nuclear) family is also affected by the contemporary way of life, which brings a change in the position of women (Čikić, 2017). The changing occupation of women is primarily predisposed by emancipation, the duration of education, the availability of adequate contraceptives, the possibility of family planning, and the desired number of children, as well as individual aspirations that lead to greater satisfaction with the quality of life and opportunities for personal development. Therefore, partners increasingly practice cohabitation before marriage or, as an alternative to marriage, marriage is „postponed” to later years, resulting in the birth of fewer children. Changes in marriage behavior lead to changes in the family structure.

This literature review aims to examine the areas of demography in which the topic of marriage and cohabitation is studied and to what extent there are differences between European countries and, if so, what. The subject of the research is part of the study of the family as a basic unit of society, which has undergone and is undergoing numerous changes caused by changes in the economy, politics, mindset, human needs, and perception. In this way, marriage and cohabitation occupy a central place and shape all other trends, first from a demographic point of view and indirectly in all the ways mentioned.

2. Methodology

The research is based on the examination and selection of scientific articles on marriage and cohabitation. The process involved searching, screening, and extracting studies for detailed analysis. The Web of Science academic database was used to quest and select relevant scientific articles. Studies were selected using the search terms “marriage” and “cohabitation.” We limited the document type to articles, review articles, and early access. We selected only English language papers that originated from European countries. Considering the substantial quantity of studies in diverse scientific disciplines, our focus is on demography. The search covered the period from 2002 to November 22, 2022. The entire process of the literature review provides Figure 1. The process of literature extraction consists of four phases. On the basis of the first search with the keyword „marriage” 51082 results were obtained, after including the second term „cohabitation” we get 2469 results. In the next phase, we applied filters to restrict the document type (articles, review articles, and early access), area (European countries only), language (English), access (open access), and category (restricted to demography). After applying the filters, we excluded 2329 results. In the third phase, as Pullin and Stewart (2006) recommend we read the titles and abstracts of all 140 studies in detail. We then excluded 27 articles that included non-European countries that the program could not exclude in the initial search, as well as articles that mentioned only the terms marriage and cohabitation but covered other topics. In the fourth phase, we read all 113 studies in full text. We then excluded 28 articles that referred exclusively to fertility and articles that integrated non-European countries with European countries. In the end, 85 studies were included in the literature review.

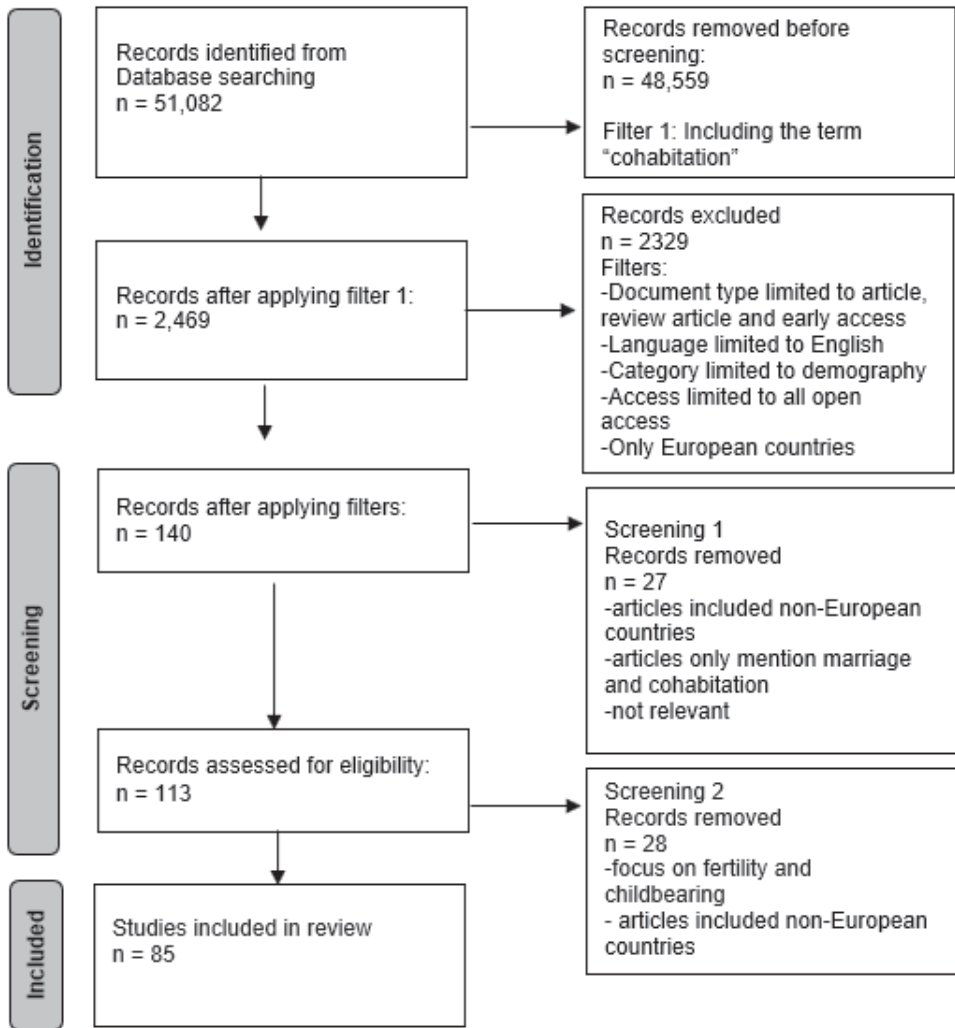


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram of literature search and selection development

Source: Moher *et al.* 2009.

Keyword analysis was performed only in articles that contained a keyword-related segment. All articles used in this literature review published by the journal *Demographic Research* and the journal *Population and Development Review* (56% of the total number of articles) did not have prominent keywords and could not be encompassed in the analysis. Marriage is the most common keyword in the articles, along with the synonyms civil union and marital status. This is followed by cohabitation, premarital cohabitation, and consensual union. The third most common is separation and divorce. We also singled out the term

fertility and similar terms such as childbearing, non-marital childbearing, and parenthood.

3. Results and discussion

the approach to this literature review included the identification and screening of all papers. After a detailed analysis, we selected seven areas related to marriage and cohabitation. The number of articles addressing these topics fluctuates but has a positive growth trend. In the analysis, we considered papers from 2002 onwards. Throughout the observation period (2002–2022), articles from the following areas are intertwined: Marriage, Cohabitation, Second Demographic Transition, Fertility, Migrants partnership behavior, Divorce, and Union Formation (Figure 2). One-fifth of the articles relate to fertility, that is, the relationship between childbirth and marriage, cohabitation, or divorce. The smallest part of the contributions (6%) deals with the changes caused by the second demographic transition (Figure 3), which mainly affects the marriage

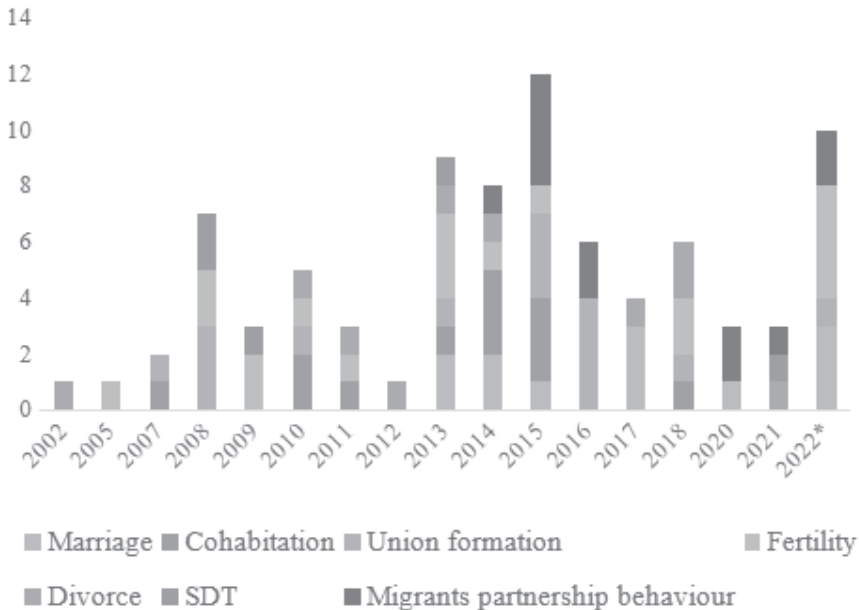


Figure 2. Chronological display of the research articles, arranged according to subject area

*Included articles published until 22 November, 2022

market in Europe. We singled out migrant marriage behavior as a separate category because the majority of migrants whose marriage behavior was analyzed come from countries on other continents and our research focus is on Europe. Migrants constitute a significant part of the European population and accordingly, it is necessary to analyze these articles. However, their marital behavior is generally different from the marital behaviour of Europeans, which was the main reason for creating a separate category.

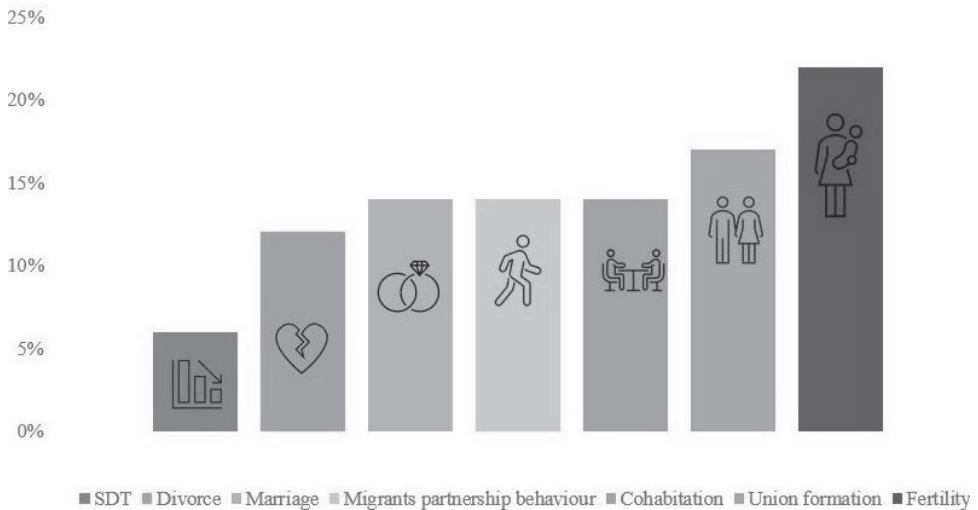


Figure 3. Distribution of articles according to the subject field

3.1. Cohabitation

Di Julio and Rosina (2007, p. 460), confirm the influence of intergenerational relations in the family on the formation of cohabitation. They found that the education of the father (head of the family) influences his daughter's decision whether she will cohabit or not. When marriage was a dominant social framework for family creation, the women's role was raising children, but in modern times, there are changes in the forms of partnership, and in care for children, which also, but slowly take fathers. The results of the longitudinal survey in 10 European countries indicate that cohabiting fathers spend slightly more time with their children, compared to married fathers. The main reason is employment, but the reason we can also find is higher education (González *et al.* 2010, pp. 449–469). It is inevitable that the number of cohabitation increases in Ita-

ly, however, the regional disproportion is present. In the northern and central parts of the state cohabitation is present, while the southern region has a negligible share of cohabitation, a major impact in the south is tradition (exceptional patriarchal society) and religion (Gabrielli and Hoem, 2010, p. 42). Kalmijn (2011, p. 288) confirmed that Oppenheimer's theory can also be implemented in the example of European countries. Men's unemployment, a small income, and part-time jobs negatively affect marriage. Although we live in a time where many women work and economically contribute to the household. While European countries support gender equality, the results still show that the role of men as the breadwinner is still influential on European soil. Highly educated women in Britain are prone to cohabitating. We can find the reasons for the longer education and greater freedom after departure from the parent's home to study. However, cohabitation for most women in Britain is not an alternative to marriage majority of women marry after cohabitation (Bhrolcháin and Beaujouan, 2013, pp. 448–450). Cohabitation in Austria symbolizes a life period that serves to meet partners fully and determine their desires and limitations. Cohabitation is widespread, but it does not represent an alternative to marriage. The inhabitants of Austria enter marriage in later years when they provide all the conditions for decent family life (Berghammer *et al.* 2014, p. 1157). Highly educated cohabiting men with lower educated women are not diverging that communities are not permanent. The education of respondents has a leading impact on the separation of cohabitation than socio-economic characteristics (Maenpaa and Jalovaara 2014, p. 1786). Respondents from Poland believe that cohabitation is a significant and desirable step in partnerships, due to the further introduction of partners before marriage, but not a permanent decision because cohabitants do not have legal rights, such as those who are married. For this reason, but also because of society's disrespect, and the impact of tradition and religion, the minimal number of partners is decided for this type of community (Mynarska *et al.* 2014, p. 1125).

Addressing and loyalty are higher in cohabitation because they do not have to prove their love with a piece of paper nor testify to the state, church, or people. Men in the UK do not want to commit forever (Berrington *et al.* 2015, pp. 338–341), and that is one of the reasons for the increase in cohabitation. In the Netherlands, cohabitation is almost equalized with marriage because if you are in a stable union with confidence, love, and children, you do not need to get married. The breakup is benign and cheaper in contrast to divorce (Heikel and Keizer, 2015, p. 333). The term „repeated cohabitation” is correct for the western part of Germany instead of the phrase serial cohabitation. A large proportion of the respondent was at least one in cohabitation, but a small number chose the

cohabitation of the second and higher order. Any other cohabitation union outgrows into marriage after three to four years until each fifth ends (Heikel and Fulda, 2018, p. 864). Most cohabitants in Germany do not want to get married, because they do not think it is significant. Partners who experience cohabitation as an alternative to marriage are at a greater risk of separation. Once again, it is proved that persons from the eastern part of Germany have a higher propensity to live outside of marriage, and the inhabitants of the western part of the country perceive a joint life (Hiekel *et al.* 2015, p. 247).

Table 1. Studies of cohabitation identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Di Julio and Rosina, 2007	Italy	intergenerational family ties
González <i>et al.</i> 2010	Western European countries	fatherhood
Gabrielli and Hoem, 2010	Italy	marriage
Kalmijn 2011	Denmark, Finland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece	marriage
Bhrolcháin and Beaujouan, 2013	Britain	education
Berghammer <i>et al.</i> 2014	Austria	marriage
Maenpaa and Jalovaara, 2014	Finland	education and socio-economic background
Mynarska <i>et al.</i> 2014	Poland	freedom
Berrington <i>et al.</i> 2015	Southampton, United Kingdom	marriage
Heikel and Keizer, 2015	Rotterdam, the Netherlands	marriage
Heikel and Fulda, 2018	West Germany	marriage, separation
Hiekel <i>et al.</i> 2015	Germany	marriage, separation

3.2. Marriage

Kalmijn (2013) studied the impact of education on marital status in 25 European countries. He concluded that nearly two-thirds of middle-aged Europeans are married and one in ten are cohabiting. Men with high levels of education are more likely to be married than men with low levels of education since education is also related to employment levels and income. But, of course, there are many

differences. In countries that take gender equality seriously, women's education has a positive effect on marriage and they are least likely to divorce, while the situation is completely reversed in countries that rely more on traditional lifestyles (Kalmijn 2013, pp. 1508–1515). People aged 25 to 40 have different personal attitudes toward marriage. For most of them, marriage does not make sense if everything works between the partners, women are not dependent on men, and there are not even big differences between people with different levels of education (Klärner, 2015, p. 261). In Sweden, there is a variable trend of nuptiality that depends on the socioeconomic situation over the years, as well as the extent of foundation measures implemented by the state to increase nuptiality and fertility (Sandström, 2017, p. 1644). Attitudes toward marriage in Germany are divided. Respondents from East Germany are less interested in marriage, and women want to work. For children, it does not matter what status their parents have if the parents are happy. Individuals in the western part of the country think that marriage is still important and that the woman should take care of the children and the man should earn (Klärner and Knabe, 2017, pp. 1651–1654). The differences in attitudes have their basis in the former division of the country and in the different socioeconomic conditions in which people lived and grew up. Those who drink more alcohol are less likely to marry in Russia, but the main influence is the socioeconomic condition (Keenan *et al.* 2014, p. 299). Individuals in a better financial situation are more likely to marry (Lersch 2017, p. 979). Married couples are the most affluent, especially married couples who have separate finances, but the results should be viewed with some caution as it is a short period of only three years (Frémeaux and Leturcq, 2022, p. 670). Italian couples who lived together before marriage know more about the possibilities of property management than people who did not live together before marriage. Commonly, spouses who own property before marriage have separate finances in marriage (Vitali and Fraboni, 2022, p. 746). In northern Italy, the extensive influence of religion on less educated people who live traditionally, but highly educated men and women choose to live together because of the freedom offered. In the south, only the excessively poor opt for cohabitation but against the traditional way (stealing the bride) (Vignoli and Salvini 2014, pp. 1090–1099). Jews are a fairly closed community and enter into marriages exclusively with members of their religion. However, in the rural areas of Wales and England, Jews more often marry with non-Jews. The main reason for this is the low density of Jews in these areas. Socio-economic status or education level does not affect the marriage decision of Jews in England and Wales (Sapiro 2020, p. 432).

Marriage has a positive effect on mental health, with the best effect being direct marriage without prior cohabitation. However, the quality of mental health

depends fundamentally on the quality of a marital or extramarital community and its stability (Kravdal *et al.* 2022, p. 14). Unlike other European countries, marriage in the Czech Republic began to decline only in the 1990s. Mortality among married individuals has been declining since the 1960s, while mortality among unmarried men increased until the 1990s (Pechholdová and Šamanová, 2013, pp. 308–317).

Table 2. Studies of marriage identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Kalmijin 2013	25 european countries	education
Vignoli and Salvini, 2014	Florence, Italy	cohabitation, religion
Keenan <i>et al.</i> 2014	Russia	cohabitation, alcohol consumption
Klärner 2015	Rostock, Germany	social norms
Lersch 2017	Germany	wealth
Sandström 2017	Sweden	nuptiality
Frémeaux and Leturcq, 2022	France	wealth
Vitali and Fraboni, 2022	Italy	wealth, cohabitation
Sapiro 2020	England and Wales	religion
Kravdal <i>et al.</i> 2022	Norway	mental health, cohabitation
Klärner and Knabe, 2017	Germany	cohabitation
Pechholdová and Šamanová, 2013	Czech Republic	mortality

3.3. Union formation

In Russia and Bulgaria, the earliest they enter into a first union is between the ages of 19 and 21, while in Italy they enter into a first union at the latest and usually only at the age of 25 and above (Hoem *et al.* 2010, p. 203). The formation of the first partnership in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania shows a completely different trend: the mean age at entering into the first partnership (marriage or cohabitation) is falling (Katus *et al.* 2007, p. 265). In Romania, Poland, Italy, Russia, and Latvia, the first choice for entering into a partnership union is marriage in most cases, while in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Estonia, the first choice is cohabitation (Hoem *et al.* 2010, p. 206; Katus *et al.* 2007, p. 268). The high marriage rate in the Baltic countries can be traced back to socialism,

in which there were certain restrictions on unmarried people. A significant proportion of women aged 20–29 in Spain live in a committed relationship, but not with a partner (LAT). This type of partnership represents one of the stages before cohabitation or marriage. Since young women in Spain mostly live with their parents and are still in education, this situation could indicate an unfavorable socio-economic situation rather than the influence of tradition (Castro-Martín *et al.* 2008, pp. 452–462). This is also confirmed by Régnier-Loilier (2016) using France as an example. Young partners live separately (LAT), which is due to low economic income and the length of education. Highly educated people are more likely to cohabit than marry in France. One in ten people in France live in a committed partnership but do not live with their partner. This type of partnership lasts the shortest. At a certain point, someone decides to live together or even marry, but in most cases, they break up (Régnier-Loilier 2016, pp. 1173–1184). In Finland, education has a strong influence on family formation, but there are no gender differences. Individuals with lower education tend to live alone and without children, while those with high education generally form partnerships or marry (Jalovaara and Fasang, 2015, p. 1249). Highly educated women are more likely to cohabit in Spain, in contrast to highly educated women in Portugal. Higher education leads to greater independence for women. Women's employment leads to a higher rate of cohabitation. The incentive to marry is the employment of both partners (Domínguez-Folgueras, and Castro-Martín, 2008, p. 1538). The research findings of Palumbo *et al.* (2022) indicate that economic insecurity leads to increased risk in the formation of partnered unions. In Russia, cohabitation is associated with a greater degree of freedom for both partners as well as trust. One of the reasons for the increase in cohabitation in Russia is the lack of trust in the government, resulting in fewer formal marriages. However, it is noticeable that as mutual trust grows, partners value their union with marriage (Isupova, 2015, p. 359). The role of children is substantial when it comes to reuniting parents or finding new partners. While there are differences between the genders, women with children have a copious difficult time forming new partnerships and face significant financial risks. Because these women are accomplished mothers, they are even less likely to want to remarry or live with a new partner. The age of the children can also be a determining factor. Younger children are a special bond between parents (Ivanova *et al.* 2013, p. 439). “Family background shapes young adults’ decisions in their transition to adulthood, and the outcomes of these decisions lay the foundation for their subsequent life course” (Mooyaart and Liefbroer, 2016, p. 885). In France, women in a second union have a more stable relationship with their partner than in their first part-

nership and generally choose to live together (Beaujouan 2016, p. 311). Marriage behavior in Germany is still analyzed into two parts, the East and the West. Even after three decades of reunification, significant differences in the behavior of the population can be felt. The eastern part is distinguished by a high proportion of cohabiting couples and LAT communities, while in the western part, the majority of the population decides to marry before the age of 40 (Fulda 2016, p. 1127). In Italy, the transformation of family behavior has begun only recently, much later than in other European countries. However, there are differences between regions. Women in the north have more freedom and independence, adopting a model of behavior common in developed European countries, while women in the south of Italy live more traditionally and are more dependent on their partners and parents. Divorce is not welcome in Italy, so remarriage or cohabitation is rare but more common in the north than in the south. New community formation is influenced by socioeconomic living conditions, societal influence, and lifestyle (Meggiolaro and Ongaro, 2008, p. 1927). Partners who have married or cohabited after a certain period (one or two years after the relationship began) have a lower risk of divorce or separation because they have built their relationship gradually and on a stable foundation (Schnor 2015, p. 638). People who are married have lower mortality rates than people who are cohabiting or single. Such results are available for the countries of Western Europe. In England and Wales, mortality is higher for men than women (Franke and Kulu, 2018, p. 113).

Table 3. Studies of union formation identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Katus <i>et al.</i> 2007	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	first union
Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín, 2008	Spain and Portugal	women's role, education, employment
Castro-Martín <i>et al.</i> 2008	Spain	partnership, LAT
Isupova 2015	Russia	marriage, cohabitation, trust
Jalovaara and Fasang, 2015	Finland	family trajectories, education
Régnier-Loilier 2016	France	non-cohabiting relationships, LAT
Franke and Kulu, 2018	England and Wales	mortality, partnership status
Palumbo <i>et al.</i> 2022	United Kingdom	economy, partnership
Ivanova <i>et al.</i> 2013	Norway, France, Germany, Romania, and the Russian Federation	re-partnering
Meggiolaro and Ongaro, 2008	Italy	re-partnering

Mooyaart and Liefbroer, 2016	Netherlands	parental education
Beaujouan 2016	France	union stability, second union
Fulda 2016	Germany	partnership status
Schnor 2015	Germany	history of pre-marital life
Hoem <i>et al.</i> 2010	Russia, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Italy	marital and non-marital unions, age profiles

3.4. Migrants partnership behaviour

European countries are tempting migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Immigrants enter into their first marriage or cohabitation later than French people. They usually opt for marriage rather than cohabitation when entering into their first partnership, although there are also differences between them in terms of country of origin, cultural, religious, and socio-economic conditions. Their offspring already show a lower intention to marry compared to cohabit (Pailhé 2015, pp. 468–474). There are differences between immigrant women, their offspring, and British women in entering into cohabitation. Women of South Asian origin enter into their first marriage directly, without prior cohabitation, and are least likely to divorce compared to all other people in Britain. Partnership formation is different for Caribbean and South Asian women than for British women, while immigrants from Europe show very similar patterns of partnership formation to British women (Hahnemann and Kulu, 2015, p. 300). Migrants, unlike Finns, tend to marry more directly, and the duration of cohabitation is short. Since migrants in Finland are mainly from Eastern Europe, origin and religion influence early marriage in Slavic countries. However, the descendants of migrants slowly adopt the marriage patterns of the host country (Rahnu *et al.* 2015, pp. 1547–1548). Kleinepier and de Valk's (2016, p. 696) research findings for second-generation migrants in the Netherlands also show similar patterns. Even when it comes to migrants who are not of European origin (Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans). Young people adapt their lifestyles to the society in which they live and to their personal beliefs and desires, albeit with some influence from their parents' opinions and traditional behaviors. Kulu and Hahnemann (2016, p. 40) summarized several studies of immigrants partnership dynamics and their offspring in Europe. They see certain partner patterns that stand out depending on the lifestyle and traditions in the country of origin. The behavior of the offspring is modified by the degree of integration into the society in which they live and in which they were born. Hannemann *et al.* (2020, p. 15) studied the partner-

ship behavior of migrants and offspring in European countries. They partially confirmed the assumption/hypothesis that offspring's marriage behaviour is influenced by the microclimate of the society in which they live and by social norms from the country of origin. The offspring of migrants often live in cohabitation, but marriage is still the crown of family life, despite high divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births, even if the influence of local climate (lifestyle, different attitudes, different traditions, and religion) is noticeable (Berrington 2020, p. 929). Van den Berg *et al.* (2021, p. 995) concluded that the socioeconomic conditions under which migrants live in Belgium, the level of income, and the type of employment influence the decision to move to Belgium. When both men and women earn, they are more likely to live in cohabitation. There are differences between the offspring of Turkish and Maghrebi women on the one hand and the offspring of migrants from Southern Europe and Belgian women on the other. Second-generation Turkish and Maghreb women are in a less favourable economic position, marrying earlier, largely due to the considerable influence of family tradition and lifestyle. Belgians generally choose a person of equivalent origin as a partner, which is also an occurrence for Turkish and Maghrebi migrants. Marriages between people who belong to the same nation are constant, but in mixed marriages, couples who lived together before marriage have the lowest chance of divorce (Van den Berg and Mortelmans, 2022, pp. 494–514). Descendants of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands marry at a later age than their parents. Large-scale changes in marriage behavior follow Turkish descendants (Wachter and de Valk, 2022, p. 504). Migrants are more likely to marry members of their nation. The risk of divorce is higher in marriages between migrants and the native population due to cultural differences, attitudes, lifestyle and mentality, family upbringing, traditional and religious beliefs, supplementary judgment, and negative comments from the society. Migrants have more children than the native population because women are often less educated and raised to look after children and households, while men work and earn money for the family (Kulu and González-Ferrer, 2014, p. 426). Migrants divorce more often than Swedes, half of Swedes cohabit while very few migrants choose to cohabit before marriage, migrants from the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, and the Middle East marry very early compared to their hosts (Andersson *et al.* 2015, pp. 37–41). Andersson *et al.* (2015) provide an excellent overview of immigrants from almost all parts of the world with detailed analyzes of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Table 4. Studies of migrants partnership behaviour identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Pailhé 2015	France	partnership dynamics
Hannemann and Kulu, 2015	United Kingdom	cohabitation, marriage, divorce
Rahnu <i>et al.</i> 2015	Estonia	cohabitation, marriage, divorce
Kleinepier and de Valk, 2016	the Netherlands	cohabitation, family trajectories
Kulu and Hannemann, 2016	Sweden, France, the UK, Spain, and Estonia	partnership dynamics
Berrington 2020	United Kingdom	cohabitation, marriage
Hannemann <i>et al.</i> 2020	United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Estonia	marriage, cohabitation, divorce
Van den Berg <i>et al.</i> 2021	Belgium	marriage, cohabitation, divorce
Van den Berg and Mortelmans, 2022	Belgium	cohabitation
Wachter and de Valk, 2022	the Netherlands	age at first marriage
Kulu and González-Ferrer, 2014	Europe	family dynamics
Andersson <i>et al.</i> 2015	Sweden	marriage, divorce, remarriage

3.5. Fertility

Marriage is the subject closely associated with fertility (childbearing). Until a few decades ago, it was acceptable only for married people to have children. Today the situation is different, modern societies also accept births outside marriage. Therefore, there is an even greater need for research on the relationship between marriage and divergent forms of cohabitation. Of course, the choice of whether to have children is not only regulated by social norms but is only one of many factors. Delaying the first marriage also affects postponing childbearing (Nishikido *et al.* 2022). Children are the link that holds their parents' marriage together, especially if they are young children. Cohabiting women tend to marry when they are expecting a child. However, when a child is born, parents rarely marry. The situation is different for children living with mothers who have entered into a union with a new partner. In this case, the risk of separation is high (Steele *et al.* 2005, p. 669). In Romania, the average age at marriage of women is increasing, but these values are lower than in Western European countries. The increase in the average age at marriage also affects the enlarge in the average age at the birth of the first child. An eminent percentage of children are

born out of wedlock, but an insignificant proportion of the population lives in cohabitation, suggesting that a remarkable rate of out-of-wedlock pregnancies are unplanned (Mureşan *et al.* 2008, p. 880). In Austria, marriage and cohabitation are lingered, leading to a postponement in childbearing and thus to a lower number of children born, but also to an increase (one-third) in out-of-wedlock births (Prskawetz *et al.* 2008, p. 320). Italy is slowly „adapting” to the marital behavior and fertility levels that have been detected for several decades in the Western and Northern European countries (Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna, 2009, p. 21). However, this trend toward divorce of the first marriage among women in Italy may affect fertility decline (Meggiolaro and Ongaro, 2010, p. 988). Rijken and Liefbroer (2009, p. 41) show that the stability and quality of the relationship influence the decision about the number of children and the timing of childbearing. Partners in a stable relationship may want to maintain that stability as long as possible, which may lead them to delay having children, while people who are not in a strong relationship may reach for a child to strengthen their relationship. Romania is distinguished by a low amount of births outside partnerships (marriage or cohabitation) (Hoem and Muresan, 2011, p. 311). In Finland, fertility is highest among women who marry directly and lowest among cohabitation (Hoem *et al.* 2013, p. 416). Cohabiting parents in Sweden have the highest risk of separation (Thomson and Eriksson, 2013, p. 1178). Sweden is a pioneer in the changes in the marriage market. Yet despite the pervasive changes, marriage survives, albeit on a smaller scale. The majority of those who marry do so before children are born, although marriages also occur after the birth of the first child, and even after the couple has reached the desired number of children (Holland 2013, p. 297). Women from West Germany who were cohabiting when their first child was born are more likely to separate than mothers from East Germany. One factor influencing such a decision may also be the length of cohabitation – in West Germany, cohabitation is shorter, so partners have less time to get to know each other better (Schnor 2014, p. 154). In the United Kingdom, partner unemployment influences the decision to have children. In most cases, childbearing is rescheduled when the man is unemployed, but when the woman is unemployed, she decides to have a child earlier (Inanc 2015, p. 243). Research using focus groups in Norway as an example suggests that marriage and childbearing are linked, but Norwegians often have children while cohabiting (Lappegård and Noack, 2015, p. 307). Lesner (2018, p. 995) examined how child poverty later affects marriage in Denmark. He found data on the negative impact on cohabitation, marriage, and parenting, suggesting that financial situation has a sizeable impression on the life course. Perelli-Harris and Blom (2022, p. 460) concluded that happiness is the most important predisposing factor for

marriage and that married people are more certainly to choose to have children, regardless of socioeconomic status. In Norway, there is a positive correlation between cohabitation and childbirth, while in Spain this is not the case. In Spain and Russia, marriage is still the crucial framework for starting a family (Rutigliano and Esping-Andersen, 2018, p. 382; Andreev *et al.* 2022, p. 53). In Finland, the number of first births has declined as partnership formation has changed (Hellstrand *et al.* 2022, p. 210). The decline in the number of first births in Spain and Sweden is affected by the stability of partnership unions, which is limited by socioeconomic factors in each country, but the focus is on Spain (Nishikido *et al.* 2022).

Table 5. Studies of fertility identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Steele <i>et al.</i> 2005	Britain	cohabitation, marriage
Mureşan <i>et al.</i> 2008	Romania	family formation
Prskawetz <i>et al.</i> 2008	Austria	marriage, cohabitation
Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna, 2009	Italy	marriage, cohabitation
Rijken and Liefbroer, 2009	Netherlands	relationship quality
Meggiolaro and Ongaro, 2010	Italy	marrige, divorce, cohabitation
Hoem and Mureşan, 2011	Romania	partnership unions
Hoem <i>et al.</i> 2013	Finland	marriage, cohabitation
Thomson and Eriksson, 2013	Sweden	partnership status
Holland 2013	Sweden	marriage, cohabitation
Schnor 2014	Germany	cohabitation
Inanc 2015	United Kingdom	partnership status, employment
Lappegård and Noack, 2015	Norway	cohabitation, marriage
Lesner 2018	Denmark	childhood poverty, marriage, cohabitation
Rutigliano and Esping-Andersen, 2018	Norway and Spain	partnership status
Andreev <i>et al.</i> 2022	Russia	partnership status
Hellstrand <i>et al.</i> 2022	Finland	marriage, cohabitation
Nishikido <i>et al.</i> 2022	Spain and Sweden	partnership status
Perelli-Harris and Blom, 2022	United Kingdom	marriage, cohabitation

3.6. Divorce

Marital stability is affected by the work status of both spouses, but when it comes to women's employment, there is often a risk of divorce. Poortman and Kalmijn (2002, p. 198) confirmed these statements using the Netherlands as an example. Every fifth woman who is gainfully employed is at risk of divorce. In the second half of the 20th century, a higher proportion of working women divorced than today. Vignoli *et al.* (2018, p. 1078) also conducted research in Poland, Italy, Germany, and Hungary. Depending on the socioeconomic living conditions in a given country, there is an imbalance when it comes to divorce. In countries (Hungary and Germany) where working women are protected and receive some support from the state, they may become independent more easily if they are dissatisfied with their marriage, but the results of this research do not show dependence. In Italy and Poland, working women are most at risk of divorce. In Italy, a large proportion of women are unemployed, while in Poland more women work because one salary is not a sufficient source of income for the family.

Divorce among women who married before 1981 was strongly influenced by the woman's education level as well as her employment status. Highly educated and employed women who married after the liberalization of divorce laws in 1981 have a lower risk of divorce. Women who have children in the marriage and whose parents were divorced and women who were cohabiting before marriage have a higher risk of divorce (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor, 2011, p. 789). The relationship between cohabitation and divorce exist. Due to the rising divorce rate, partners are choosing to live together non-maritally to avoid the financial, emotional, and psychological consequences of divorce, but also to test their relationship and find out if they are meant to be together, thus reducing the likelihood of divorce. Cohabitation is also a common decision for people who have divorced to avoid going through the same again. In most European countries, divorce rates began to increase significantly before cohabitation rates increased, leading to the idea that the increase in divorce rates triggered the increase in cohabitation. However, research shows that three-quarters of cohabitators in European countries were not married at that time (Perelli-Harris *et al.*, 2017, pp. 309–321). Kulu and Boyle, (2010, p. 895) confirm the findings of numerous studies that people who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce. However, they are less likely to divorce than those who marry immediately. Women who marry young have a higher risk of divorce. This is because they have not had enough time to think about what they want in a partner and lack life experience. In addition, the most recent marriages, those that occurred in the last decade, have a higher

risk of divorce (Lampard 2013, p. 195). The highest risk of divorce is around the fifth year of marriage, after which the risk decreases, and before the fifth year of marriage, it increases (Kulu 2014, p. 891). Marital instability is on the rise in Italy, although religion influences family formation. However, Impicciatore and Billari (2012, p. 134) found no association between cohabitation before marriage and cohabitation affecting divorce. Divorce in Germany is significant to the life satisfaction of both partners, i.e., the quality of their relationship (Arpino *et al.* 2021, p. 181). Van Houdt and Poortman (2018, p. 450) suggest that cohabiting couples have a lower risk of divorce than couples who live apart.

Table 6. Studies of divorce identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Poortman and Kalmijn, 2002	Netherlands	labour market
Vignoli <i>et al.</i> 2018	Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland	womens employment
Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor, 2011	Spain	marriage, education, employment
Impicciatore and Billari, 2012	Italy	marriage, cohabitation
Lampard 2013	England and Wales	womens age at first marriage
Kulu 2014	Finland	marriage
Perelli-Harris <i>et al.</i> 2017	Norway, Poland, Germany, UK, Austria, Italy, Netherlands, and the Russian Federation	cohabitation
Arpino <i>et al.</i> 2021	Germany	life satisfaction
Van Houdt and Poortman, 2018	Netherlands	joint lifestyles
Kulu and Boyle, 2010	Austria	cohabitation, marriage

3.7. Second demographic transition

Changes in marital behaviour are introduced in all European countries except Albania. Using the „RWA – Ready-Willing-Able” model, Sobotka (2008, p. 210) sought to explain the impact of SDT on the territory of Eastern and Central European countries. Second demographic transition interprets the spread in two ways concerning the economic situation. The first picture includes the area with progress in income, higher education, and quality of life. The second picture shows a lack of resources, low levels of education, and a significantly lower quality of life. What both approaches have in common is that they require changes in marital behaviour and family formation, but they assume completely different

push factors. Compared to Russia and Romania, France is undeniably dominant in SDT. It is presumed that Romania and Russia have similar scores on SDT parameters, but there are significantly fewer cohabiting couples in Romania and the proportion of out-of-wedlock births is low, unlike in Russia (Pota^ˆrca^ˆ *et al.* 2013, p. 91). On the other hand, Iceland is the country that is at the forefront with 60% of children born out of wedlock. Due to history and the different mentality of people, cohabitation outside of marriage is considered a normal behavior and always has been, but marriage is also equally represented, and cohabitations substantially end in marriage after the couple has provided all the necessary means. Legally, cohabitations and marriages are unconditionally equal. There is no decline in marriage in Iceland, although the rate of cohabitation is high, which may indicate incomplete SDT. A certain proportion of women marry later in life before that, they give birth and cohabit (Jónsson 2021, p. 71). Jónsson (2021, p. 82) disregards significant changes in the family structure in Iceland and the rest of Europe. From the 1960s to the beginning of the 21st century, in Russia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, after the collapse of communism, there is a significant decrease in marriages of women who have not given birth to children and are still childless. Bulgaria has experienced a significant decline in cohabitation since the end of the 20th century (Hoem *et al.* 2009, p. 246). Based on a comprehensive analysis of marriages, cohabitation, divorces, and parenthood in European countries, Sobotka and Toulemon (2008, p. 124) believe that the effects of the second demographic transition have not led to low birth rates in Europe.

Table 7. Studies of second demographic transition identified in this literature review

Study	Location	Subject field
Sobotka, 2008	Europe	family and fertility patterns
Sobotka and Toulemon, 2008	Europe	family and fertility patterns
Hoem <i>et al.</i> 2009	Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary	union formation
Pota ^ˆ rca ^ˆ <i>et al.</i> 2013	Romania, the Russian Federation, France	family formation
Jónsson 2021	Iceland	family and fertility patterns

4. Conclusion

Marriage was the only acceptable form of family formation and procreation. In the last decades we have seen more and more changes: partners live together unmarried, children are born out of wedlock, fewer children are born than in

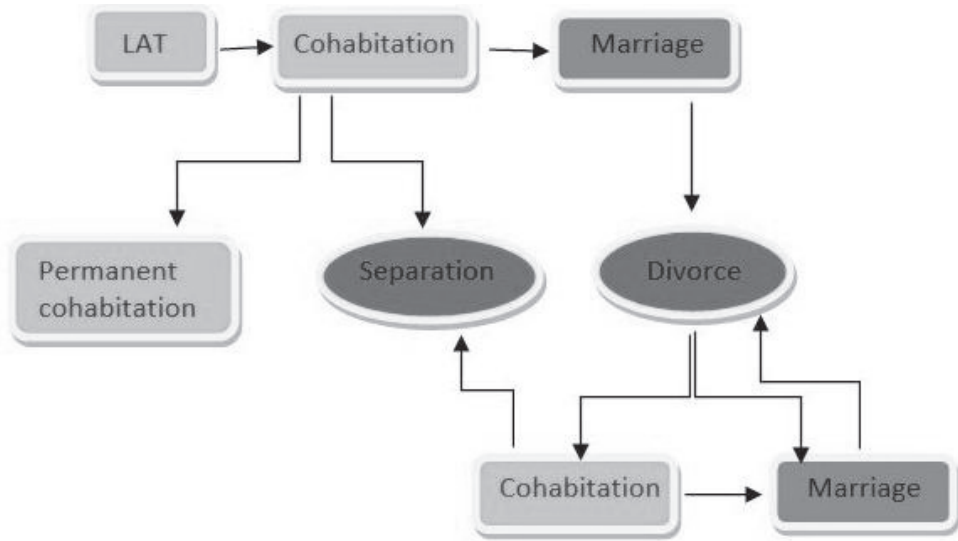


Figure 4. Representation scheme of the forms of partnerships mentioned in our literature review

Source: Created by the author based on Perez Amador, 2016.

the past, people marry later, and divorces become more frequent. Our task is to find out what is causing these changes. This literature review is an attempt, based on a detailed analysis of studies in this area, to help put the puzzle together to see the bigger picture. However, indeed we need longitudinal studies on these issues with much larger numbers of people from all European countries but also using the whole world as an example. There are not enough resources to study the LAT partnerships because there is no official data on the status of partner relationships, their duration, and stability, but these can only be achieved through longitudinal research such as questionnaires or focus groups. Our proposal to policy makers is to include questions of this type in the regular census in all European countries.

Some of the reasons we found in our review are related to the social perception of the family, the economic situation in each country, culture, religion, tradition, personal beliefs, and the desire for a certain way and quality of life. Mavropoulos and Panagiotidis (2022) also confirm, using the U.S. population as an example, that the economic situation in the family influences the subsequent decision to marry. Satisfaction with quality of life is likely a determinant of marriage quality, as noted in this literature review. Other authors (Gattig and

Minkus, 2021) concluded that married people are happier and more satisfied with their quality of life than those living in cohabitation. A large part of the analyzed studies has presented the role of marriage only from the perspective of women. In the future, equal attention in research should be appointed to men. Of course, the woman has always been the one who has taken care of the family and kept it together, but over time, changes occur and women become autonomous, stand up for themselves, and want to work to fulfill themselves, not only as mothers and wives but also as individuals. If we were to include men in the research, the results would help us better understand the demographic changes in the field of marriage. Analysis in Serbia has shown that highly educated women are more likely to marry, but have a greater desire for independence (Džigurski *et al.* 2023, p. 26). Which is confirmed by European studies within this literature review.

The importance of understanding marriages and cohabitation, as well as the tendencies to marry, i.e., to enter into a cohabitation relationship is particularly evident from the fact that marriages and cohabitation, together with births are one of the basic indicators of the second demographic transition that the population of most European countries is undergoing.

The shortcomings of this literature review are reflected in the fact that only 85 papers are covered and not all areas of demography related to marriage are encompassed. In addition, the studies were gathered from only one scholarly database, limiting the scope and diversity of the work presented. The challenge is significant because the population is not homogeneous and different nations have different marriage norms. The conclusion is that the influence of society plays a significant role in the formation of individuals' attitudes and aspirations in every area of life, and for some, in the most important one, namely starting a family and getting married or not, and on the other hand, individual aspirations and modern lifestyle.

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