

CHANGES IN THE MARITAL BEHAVIOR OF THE POPULATION IN UKRAINE DURING THE WAR

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Abstract. *The Russia-Ukraine war dramatically changes the living conditions of population, as a result of which there are changes in the demographic behavior (marital, reproductive, and migratory). These changes affect both the current demographic situation and future demographic development. The purpose of this study is to determine the changes in the marital behavior in Ukraine which appeared under the influence of the war. In the study were used data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (for the period before the full-scale invasion), data from the Ministry of Justice, media publications, expert assessments, and sample survey materials. In the last decades, a gradual modernization of the marital behavior of the population was observed in Ukraine: age at first marriage of both women and men increased, share of early marriages decreased, and various forms of cohabitation became widespread. In Ukraine the divorce rate remained high but gradually decreased. Russia's war against Ukraine deformed the natural processes of life and development of the Ukrainian population. In the first two years of the full-scale war the increasing number of marriages was caused by growth in cases of official marriage registration by partners who previously delayed or refused to do so. In the extreme conditions of war, couples need the guarantees provided by the state in a registered marriage. At the same time, the number of divorces decreased. The similar trends were observed in 2014–2015, during the period of active military actions in Donbas. Further changes mostly depend on the duration of the war and the security conditions in the country.*

Keywords: *Russia-Ukraine war, marital behavior, marriage, divorce.*

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Introduction. Independent Ukraine "inherited" from Soviet times the model of marriage and family behavior of the population, which was formed in the course of inconsistent, incomplete modernization according to the "Soviet type": a high level of marriage of the population with the spread of early marriages, a high level of divorce, the spread of single-parent families. Over the past thirty years, 1991-2021, a gradual sequential modernization of marital and family relations, forms of marriage and family took place. This was due to the gradual spread of the principles of freedom of choice and pluralism in the conditions of the market transformation of

society. Ideological control over personality development and restrictions on the choice of lifestyle has become a thing of the past; at the same time, complex transformational processes and risks of the market economy have made demographic development difficult in some respects. The influence of socio-economic conditions on the population's life was and remains significant.

The purpose of this study is to determine the changes in the marital behaviour of the population of Ukraine, which appeared under the influence of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Data and methods. The research was carried out based on data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (for the period before the full-scale invasion), data from the Ministry of Justice, media publications, expert assessments, and sample survey materials. The methods of comparative analysis, generalization and induction, surveys, and statistical and graphic methods were used in the research.

Main results. At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, marriage and divorce rates in Ukraine were among the highest in Europe: in 1990, more marriages per 1,000 population than in Ukraine were registered only in Lithuania and Belarus, and more divorces in Latvia and Russia. In 1991, the crude marriage rate in Ukraine was 9,5‰, and starting from the following year, the marriage rate - number of marriages and their number per 1,000 population - gradually decreased (*Figure 1*).

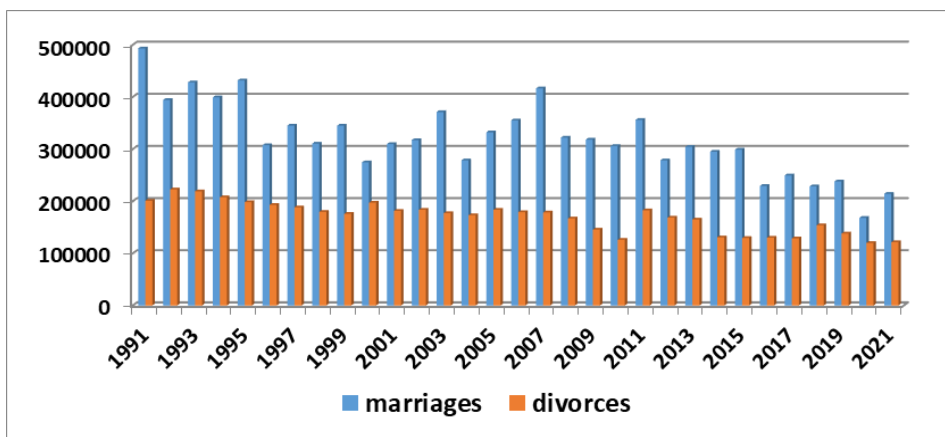


Figure 1. **Number of marriages and divorces, Ukraine, 1991-2021**

Source: data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

In the years 1991-2000 (especially in the first half of the 90s), the decline of marriages was largely due to a sharp worsening in the material living conditions of the population in the context of the transformation crisis of those years, which contributed to the “postponement” of marriages. At the same time, since the mid-1990s, changes in the marital and sexual behavior of the population began to take place. The share of young people, postponing marriage until obtaining an education and economic independence, gradually increased, unregistered marriage

partnerships began to spread, and this contributed to a decrease in the level of registered marriages and divorces. The tradition of considering a leap year as unfavorable for marriage continues, due to which the curve of marriage indicators has a wave-like shape.

After a short period of increase in marriage rates in 2003-2007, which was facilitated by changes in the age structure of the population (more generations born in 1983-1986 reached marriageable age), since 2008, despite significant annual fluctuations, a decrease of the total marriage rate has been observed. The tendency to decrease the level of marriage is due, first of all, to changes in the marital behavior of the population: the transformation of the age parameters of marriage, the spread of cohabitation.

The age of marriage is one of the most important characteristics of the marital behavior of the population. Over the past thirty years, the age at which Ukrainians register marriage has increased significantly: if in 1991 mean age of marriage for women was 25,0, then in 2021 it was 31,0, and for men, this indicator has increased from 27,5 up to 33,7 (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Mean age at marriage of men and women, Ukraine, 1991—2021

	all marriages		first marriages	
	men	women	men	women
1991	27,5	25,0	23,9	21,7
1995	27,7	25,1	24,1	21,7
2000	29,4	26,5	25,3	22,5
2005	30,0	27,0	25,9	23,2
2010	30,3	27,4	26,7	24,1
2015	31,1	28,4	27,6	25,0
2019	32,8	30,1	28,6	25,9
2020	33,3	30,6	28,8	26,1
2021	33,7	31,0	29,2	26,4

Source: data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine and calculated by author based on these data

Demographic development is particularly affected by the change in the age of first marriage. In 1991, mean age of women, who married for the first time, was 21,7 years, in 2010 – 24,1, in 2021 – 26,4. Mean age at first marriage for men, respectively, in these years was 23,9; 26,7; 29,2. A steady trend of growth in the age of first marriage in Ukraine has been observed since 1995.

For modern Ukraine, early marriages, i.e. marriages with a bride under the age of 18, are no longer typical. In the early 1990s, in 10 – 12% of marriages, the bride was less than 18 years old, but since 1997, the number of such marriages has been rapidly decreasing, and in 2018 – 2021 they accounted for less than 0,5% of all marriages.

In Ukraine mean age of the first marriage has increased significantly, early marriages have become a rare phenomenon, and this is evidence of the modernization of the demographic behavior of the population: marital, sexual, social. More and more young people are postponing marriage until they achieve economic stability and independence, trying first to finish their studies and achieve success in their

professional activities, striving for economic independence, and not relying on the state and parents to solve their family's material problems, as was the practice in Soviet times. Education and professional achievements have become an important priority for young girls. Therefore, there have been significant changes in the distribution of persons who have first married by age. Among women who had their first marriage in 1991, 47,5% (almost half) were under the age of 20, in 2020 – only 11,2%, at the same time the share age of 25 – 29 increased from 7,4% to 27,1%. Over the years, corresponding changes took place among men who had first marriage: the proportion of men under 20 decreased from 9,2 to 1,9%, the proportion in age 25–29 increased from 16,8 to 36,8%, and those over 30 increased from 7,4 to almost 33% (actually one in three).

Sexual behavior is also changing: "sexual debut" and marriage are "separated in time", young people quite often have a permanent sexual partner in the premarital period, sometimes they live with him in the same household. According sample surveys in 2017 – 2019, about 15% of young people aged 25-34 live with a partner without registering their relationship; and most often they view these relationships as a trial period when the couple decides whether to continue the relationship in marriage or break up.

In the conditions of intensive labour migration, distance forms of marriage became widespread; the spouses have lived separately for a long time. Based on data from sample surveys of migrants, transnational distance marriage has become widespread: more than half of labour migrants, both among women and men, are married both among those whose emigration is short-term (up to twelve months) and among those who are abroad for a long time.

A decrease in the marriage rate is one of the reasons for the decrease in the number of divorces. The increase in the age of marriage and the spread of cohabitation contributed to this decrease. The tendency to decrease divorce (both absolute and relative indicators) has been observed in Ukraine since the second half of the 1990s, after the “surge” of 1992 – 1994. In 1992 – 1994, in Ukraine the largest number of divorces was registered in its history. The crude divorce rate reached its maximum in 1992-1993 – 4,2-4,3‰ due to the highest indicators in urban settlements – 5,3-5,4‰. In the following years a positive trend of a decrease in the number of divorces per 1,000 population is observed, despite significant annual fluctuations (*Figure 2*). The divorce rate of the population remains high compared to European countries, but it has gradually decreased, approaching the average European level.

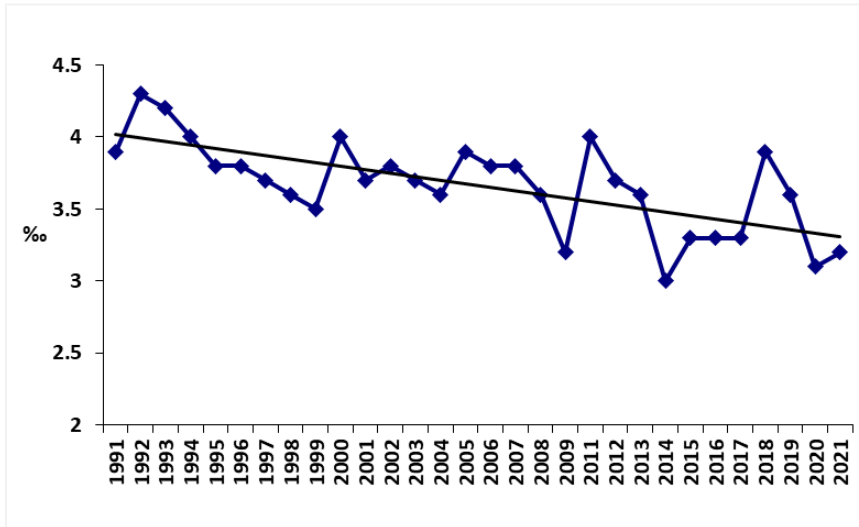


Figure 2. Crude divorce rate trends, Ukraine, 1991-2021

Source: data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

The greatest and most tragic challenge for the population of Ukraine during the years of independence, was the armed aggression of the Russian Federation. Russia’s war against Ukraine deformed the natural processes of life and development of the Ukrainian population. Initially, in 2014–2015, this deformation affected certain regions of the country — Donetsk and Luhansk regions, although it also influenced the entire population of the country: the dynamics of marriage and divorce rates, forced migration to other regions of the country. In 2014 – 2015, the number of marriages increased in all regions except Donetsk and Luhansk, and the number of divorces decreased significantly in all regions. However, in the following years, the marriage rate gradually decreased, and in 2018, a compensatory rise in the divorce rate was observed.

After February 24, 2022, a full-scale war fundamentally changed the life of the country and every family. The demographic development of Ukraine was strongly affected by the military-political and socio-economic destabilization caused by the large-scale war. The war interrupted the natural process of life and development of the Ukrainian population. The death of a large number of people – both military personnel and the civilian population, forced mass migration to other regions of the country and abroad became the causes of the deformation of socio-demographic development. There are changes in the demographic behavior of population: marital, reproductive, and migratory.

In the conditions of a full-scale war, Ukrainians did not give up marriage. In 2022, there was a “surge” in marriages: according to the data by the Ministry of Justice, 222890 marriages were registered, which is 8,9 thousand more than in 2021 (Figure 3). According to our estimates, the total marriage rate has increased to about 7%. This is a high figure, especially considering that part of the territory was occupied.

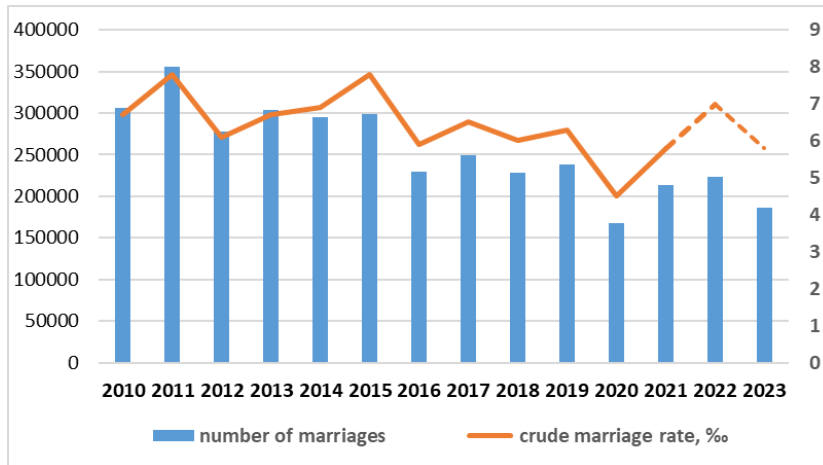


Figure 3. **Number of marriages and crude marriage rate, Ukraine, 2010-2023**
Source: data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine and data of the Ministry of Justice

The increase in the number of marriages is due to the fact that during the period of military operations and mobilization, couples who previously, for certain reasons, were in no hurry to legally formalize their relationship register their marriages. In an official marriage, the wife of a mobilized man can feel more confident: in case of his capture, disappearance, injury, she has more opportunities to contact the relevant authorities regarding his search, return, additional treatment; a military family has certain benefits. The man also feels more protected and understands that his marriage partner will be more protected. Couples, who previously took their time or refused to legally formalize their relationship, registered their marriage. Therefore, in the extreme conditions of war, the processes of delegalization of marital relations slow down, partners need guarantees and support provided by the state in a registered marriage. At the same time, a certain part of marriages in 2022 was registered on an emotional upswing before sending to the front after a short acquaintance. Psychologists assure that this is a reaction in response to the challenges of reality; it is typical for couples in all wars and in any stressful circumstances.

In 2023 186100 marriages were registered, which is 36800 less than last year. In 2024, according to the data for the first half of the year, even fewer marriages will be registered. Therefore, it can be preliminarily stated that the marriage “surge” at the beginning of the war has ended. In our opinion, the marriage orientation of the population is not decreasing, but the marriage potential began to diminished due to military losses, significant forced emigration, and mobilization.

The number of divorces in 2022 has decreased sharply, because in the conditions of war, the vast majority of the population has other problems — issues of safety and survival in extreme conditions come to the fore. This is the opinion of most experts. However, we cannot accurately estimate the scale of this decrease, as there are statistical data for 2022 and 2023 only for divorces registered in the institutions of state registration of acts of civil status. Here we have a significant decrease in 2022 – 40% less than in 2021. But this is information only about a part of divorces, since under martial law there are no data on divorces by court decision (in the pre-war years, this was about 70% of all divorces). According to the Family

Code of Ukraine, a divorce must take place by a court decision if the spouses have minor children, or there is a conflict regarding joint property. In 2023, the number of divorces registered in the civil registry offices increased by 35% compared to 2022, although it did not reach the pre-war level of 2021. According to data for the first half of 2024, the number of divorces is increasing significantly. This may be partly due to divorces postponed in the previous year, but the main reason is the problems and risks of wartime.

We emphasize that according to the available data for 2022–2023, we are monitoring and analyzing only the general trend, and not quantitative changes in the dynamics of divorce rates.

In the future, in the conditions of the continuation of the war, we can forecast that the number of marriages will decrease and divorces will increase. The number of marriages that will be registered annually will decrease due to the reduction of the population of marriageable age as a result of military losses and external migration. At the same time, the relative indicators of marriage, for example, the total marriage rate — the number of marriages per 1000 population, will remain quite high, since high marriage orientation, traditional for Ukraine, will still be preserved.

We can predict an increase in divorce rates. This will happen, first of all, if a significant number of women will stay abroad for a long time, when contacts between spouses are only virtual. Psychologists claim, that a spouse, who has not seen each other for more than six months, has no sexual contacts, at some point loses shared family moments, the context of their lives is too different, and there is less and less in common. Only some couples can maintain family life at a distance. Much depends on family relations before the war and on the partners' desire to save their marriage. Law firms are already offering the service “divorce in court online in the absence of a spouse in Ukraine”.

A difficult test for many married couples can be the return home of a husband who participated in military operations. War changes a person, his behavior and assessment of many aspects of life, including family life, new habits and needs arise. International experience shows the problems of adaptation to the peaceful life for military personnel. The impact of post-traumatic stress disorder on family life is unfavorable, and the risk of divorce is high for veterans in all countries (John J. Schwab M. D. et al., 1995). Ukrainians already now consider the risk of psycho-emotional instability and conflicts in the families of veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war to be high. According to survey data of Group «Rating», the share of Ukrainians, who consider conflicts in the families of veterans to be “very likely” and “rather likely” for 2022–2024 increased from 44% to 74%. This problem is felt most acutely by the relatives of veterans who fought since 2014 and are fighting now.

Conclusion. In modern Ukraine, the war and its risks have become the main factor affecting demographic development, including changes in marital and family relations. Significant human losses, forced mass migration, large-scale mobilization, destruction of housing and social infrastructure deformed demographic processes and structures, interrupted their gradual modernization, natural development. The experience of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014–2015 and the reality of a modern full-scale war shows that in the extreme conditions of wartime, official registration

of marriage makes it easier for spouses to solve numerous problems that arise in these conditions (regarding state benefits and guarantees, the ability to support each other, etc.), therefore the number of registered marriages increases. The population's marital orientation currently remains high, but the processes of deformation of marital relations observed before the war are slowing down to certain extent/partially.

At the initial stage of the war, the spouses “put aside” their conflicts and disputes for the sake of solving more urgent problems of family – personal safety, safety of children, relatives, property, etc. However, after a certain time, the problems and risks of wartime have a negative impact on marital relations. Long-term separation of partners due to forced external migration and mobilization, changes in the behavior of men and women who took part in military operations, destruction of the achieved gender balance in the distribution of family responsibilities (due to the mobilization of men, all responsibilities for maintaining and raising children are transferred to women), stress and psychological exhaustion, etc., contribute to conflicts and misunderstandings in marital relations, and as a result, to an increase in the number of divorces.

Further changes in the situation in the marital sphere depend on the duration of the war and the security conditions in the country.

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