

## **Civil status dynamics and household composition in Belgium**

Martine Corijn & Edith Lodewijckx

Center for Population and Family Studies (CBGS), Brussels (Belgium)

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### **1. Introduction**

The dynamics with regard to the civil status, as well as the lack of these dynamics, have led over the last 30 years to enormous shifts in the distribution and kind of household types. In Belgium, as in many other countries, partnership and union formation, as well as first and second marriages, got postponed or even renounced. In a European context, Belgium recently belongs to the group of countries with the lowest total female first marriage rate (0.46 in 2002) (Council of Europe, 2004). The increasing number of divorces brought Belgium recently in the group of European countries with the highest total divorce rate (0.54 in 2002). However, these two extreme positions go along with an increase (at a low level) of unmarried cohabitation since the 1990s (Corijn, 2004). This Belgian union formation and dissolution pattern goes along with a total period fertility rate of 1.62 (in 2002), a completed fertility of 1.86 for the female birth cohort of 1960 and 69% marital births (Council of Europe, 2004). As divorce happens at all ages, one wonders which living arrangement options are taken after divorce. As more people get widowed at a higher age, one wonders which living arrangement choices they make.

The questions we want to answer are: Which are the effects on the household composition of a very low (re)marriage rate and a very high divorce rate, combined with a rather low level of unmarried cohabitation and a rather low fertility level? How do these developments affect the kind of partnership and parenthood in the Belgian households, if any? In the first part of this presentation, an overview is given of some marriage and divorce statistics in Belgium for 1970 and for 2000. This picture is completed by the changes in the distribution of Belgian household types between 1970 and 2004. In a second part, dynamics after marriage dissolution are analysed. In a third part, the focus is on the civil status histories of persons in two types of households.

### **2. Data sources**

Until 1991 information on the composition of households in Belgium was based on census data (De Boosere et al., 1997). From 1991 on, CBGS processes the population register data providing yearly data on household types as well as on household positions of all inhabitants (Lodewijckx, 2001). A dataset was prepared for CBGS combining the complete civil status histories of all inhabitants of the Flemish Region (covering about 60% of the Belgian population) and their household information on 1.1.2004.<sup>1</sup> The use of register data seriously limits the number of variables available.

### **3. Marriage and divorce risks: changes between 1970 and 2000**

Around 1970 first marriages (7.59 per 1,000 inhabitants) were quite popular in Belgium, as in many other European countries, and they took place at a rather young age. At that time, unmarried cohabitation was rather rare in Belgium (an overestimated 4% of all households) (De Boosere et al., 1997). Divorce was still quite the exception (0.66 per 1,000 inhabitants). One in 9 marriages

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<sup>1</sup> A weakness of the Belgian Population Register data is that the partner in an unmarried cohabitation is not distinctively identifiable. He/she is identified in relation to the reference person of the household: a non-related person, of a different sex and with a maximum age difference of 20 years. Children of the cohabiting partner are also difficult to identify as only their relationship with the reference person is known; they are non-related and must have an age difference of 15 years with the cohabiting partner.

concerned a remarriage (NIS). In Table 1 the developments with regard to marriage and divorce in Belgium between 1970 and 2000 are summarized.

*Table 1. Marriage and divorce developments in Belgium between 1970 and 2000*

	1970	2000	1970-2000
N of marriages	73,261	45,123	-38
Marriages per 1,000 inhabitants	7.59	4.4	-42
N of first marriages	65,157	29,825	-54
N of remarriages	8,104	15,298	89
% remarriages	11.06	33.90	206
N of first marriages	65,157	29,825	-54
N of unmarried men aged 20 to 80	519,458	959,386	85
First marriage risk per 1,000 unmarried men	125.43	31.09	-75
N of unmarried women aged 20 to 80	391,541	715,191	83
First marriage risk per 1,000 unmarried women	166.41	41.70	-75
Mean age at first marriage			
- Men	24;4	28;4	
- Women	22;0	26;0	
N of divorces	6,403	27,002	322
Divorces per 1,000 inhabitants	0.66	2.64	300
N of married men aged 20 to 80	2,428,548	2,332,467	-4
Divorce risk per 1,000 married men	2.64	11.58	339
N of married women aged 20 to 80	2,421,393	2,361,560	-2
Divorce risk per 1,000 married women	2.64	11.43	332
Median age at divorce			
- Men	37;3	39;11	
- Women	34;1	37;8	
Median duration of marriage at divorce	11;8	12;2	
N of remarriages	8,104	15,298	89
N of remarriages of two divorced persons	1,583	6,123	287
% of remarriages of two divorced persons	19.53	40.02	105
N of remarriages with divorced men involved	3,652	10,477	187
N of divorced men aged 20 to 80	42,662	273,001	540
Remarriage risk per 1,000 divorced men	85.60	38.38	-55
N of remarriages with divorced women involved	3,796	10,434	175
N of divorced women aged 20 to 80	56,575	314,469	456
Remarriage risk per 1,000 divorced women	67.10	33.18	-51
N of remarriages with widowers involved	2,219	881	-60
N of widowers aged 20 to 80	124,807	96,590	-23
Remarriage risk per 1,000 widowers	17.78	9.12	-49
N of remarriages with widows involved	1,806	486	-73
N of widows aged 20 to 80	624,620	407,511	-35
Remarriage risk per 1,000 widows	2.89	1.19	-59

Source: National Institute of Statistics and CBGS-calculations

### *3.1. First marriages*

Between 1970 and 2000, the size of the population at risk for a first marriage (the never-married aged 20 to 80) increased by about 80%, whereas the number of first marriages (i.e. marriages between two

never-married persons) decreased by 46%. Hence, the first marriage risk strongly decreased from 12.5% to 3.1% for men and from 16.6% to 4.2% for women. At their first marriage, the bride and the groom were in 2000, on average, four years older than in 1970. The proportion of ever-married persons no longer reaches 90% for the cohort born in the 1960s.

### 3.2. Remarriages

Between 1970 and 2000, the size of the population at risk for a remarriage increased. The number of remarriages being the divorced persons (aged 20 to 80 years) got multiplied by almost 6 and that of the widowed persons in the same age range decreased by about one third. With almost a doubling of the number of remarriages, their share within the total number of marriages went up from 11% to 34%. Moreover, the civil status of the partners involved in remarriages changed completely. Widowed persons disappeared almost completely from the remarriage market (from 25% to 4%) and divorced persons got more dominant on this market (from 46% to 68%). However, both the remarriage risk of the divorced and that of the widowed persons were reduced by about 50% over a period of 30 years. The remarriage propensity of widowed persons remained much lower than that of divorced persons. The gender difference decreased somewhat for divorced persons; it increased for widowed persons. In 2000, 3.8% divorced men and 3.3% divorced women remarried; 0.9% of the widowers remarried compared to 0.1% of the widows. Like first marriages, remarriages got postponed. Partners in most types of remarriages were 1 to 3 years older in 2000 than in 1970 (Corijn, 2005).

*Table 2. Marriage and divorce rates in the Flemish Region, according to the marriage order, by gender*

	Men	Women
<i>Marriage rate</i>		
- first marriage	64	71
- second marriage	41	37
- third marriage	31	26
<i>Remarriage rate after divorce in</i>		
- first marriage	42	42
- second marriage	31	30
<i>Remarriage rate after widowhood in</i>		
- first marriage	28	11
- second marriage	22	7
<i>Dissolution rate in</i>		
- first marriage	22	24
- second marriage	21	25
- third marriage	13	20
<i>Divorce rate in</i>		
- first marriage	20	20
- second marriage	19	19
- third marriage	12	15
<i>Widowhood rate in</i>		
- first marriage	1.6	3.7
- second marriage	1.4	
- third marriage	1	15

\* Inhabitants of the Flemish Region aged 18 to 63 on 1.1.2004

Source: Population Register and CBGS-calculations

For the Flemish Region, more detailed information on the remarriage rates of people aged 18 to 63<sup>2</sup> is available (Table 2). Remarriage rates decrease across dissolution, divorce and widowhood cohorts. Remarriages get postponed, more after widowhood than after divorce (Corijn, 2005). Repartnering is

<sup>2</sup> This age range was chosen to limit the impact of civil status specific mortality on the civil status dynamics.

well-known to be gender-specific (Cassan et al., 2001, 2005; de Jong Gierveld, 2002; de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Delbès & Gaymu, 2005). After dissolution of both a first and a second marriage, men have higher remarriage rates than women. This is mainly because widowers remarry more often than widows; no gender differences appear after divorce. Remarriages rates are lower for a third marriage, but this is partly because of the age truncation. Repartnering is well-known to be age-specific (Uunk, 1999). Also in the Flemish Region, it applies that the younger one is at the time of the marriage dissolution, the higher the remarriage risk (Corijn, 2005). Duration of the previous marriage is found to have a positive effect on the remarriage rate after a divorce (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003). More generally, we found for the Flemish Region that the longer the previous marriage had survived, the higher the remarriage risk (Corijn, 2005).

### 3.3. Divorces

Between 1970 and 2000, the number of divorces in Belgium multiplied by more than factor 4 (Table 1). In that same period, the population at risk for a divorce (i.e. the married aged 20 to 80) decreased a little (-4%). Hence, the number of divorces per 1,000 married persons increased from 2.6 to 11.4. Recently, at least 11% of all divorces concern marriages of second or third order (NIS).<sup>3</sup>

Divorce rates increase across marriage cohorts and at all marriage durations. Five years after marriage, 1% of the marriages of 1970 were dissolved by divorce; for the marriages of 1995 this amounted to 9%. Twenty years after marriage, 9% of the marriages of 1970 were dissolved by divorce and 17% of the marriages of 1980. Marriages of 1970 will reach a divorce rate of about 25%; marriages of 1985 reached this rate already after 17 years (Corijn, 2005).

Given the increase of the average age at (first) marriage, the median age at divorce also increased by about 3 years. The median duration of marriage at divorce, however, remains at about 12 years; even after 1994 when the procedure time for different kinds of divorces were shortened.

For the Flemish Region, more detailed data on the divorce rates for the population aged 18 to 63 in 2004 are available (Table 2). 20% of the first marriages, 19% of the second marriages and 13%<sup>4</sup> of the third marriages were yet dissolved by a divorce. Second marriages do not seem to be more or less successful than first marriages. In the literature findings in this regard are inconsistent (van Huis et al., 2001; Wu & Penning, 1997). Divorce rates strongly increase across marriage cohorts. For marriages of all order it applies that the younger one is at the time of the marriage, the higher the divorce rate is, as is well-known in the literature (Corijn, 1999; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; South & Spitze, 1986; Wu & Penning, 1997). This effect is stronger for a divorce in the first marriage (Corijn, 2005).

## 4. Household types: changes between 1970 and 2004

The decreasing marriage and remarriage rates, as well as the increasing divorce risks, are clearly reflected both in a strong decrease of households consisting of couples (-24%) and in a strong increase of one-person households (+74%) and one-parent households (+81%) (Table 3). No longer 74% of all households, but 56% consist of (married or unmarried) partners living together (with or without children). This decrease went along with a compositional change. The doubling of the share of unmarried couples, however, did not fully compensate for the decrease of the share of married couples. The civil status dynamics also affected directly or indirectly the parenthood context. The share of households with living-in children decreased from 50% to 40%. Along with that decrease, went a strong compositional change. The increase of unmarried parenthood and of one-parent parenthood, however, did not fully compensate the decrease of married parenthood. The civil status dynamics resulted in 2004 in 31% of those living in a one-person household to be separated/divorced.

<sup>3</sup> In the NIS-statistics there is no information on the marriage order in 10% of the cases.

<sup>4</sup> This lower rate is caused by the truncation of the data at age 63 to avoid the impact of mortality on the civil status dynamics.

*Table 3. Household types in Belgium in 1970 and 2004*

	1970	2004	(1970-2004)
One-person household	18.8	32.7	74
Married couple without children	26.2	21.4	-18
Married couple with child(ren)	43.7	27.2	-38
Unmarried couple without child(ren)	3.0	4.1	37
Unmarried couple with child(ren)	1.3	3.4	162
One-parent household	5.2	9.4	81
Other type of household	1.8	1.8	0
Total	100	100	
<i>Households with a couple</i>	<i>74.2</i>	<i>56.1</i>	<i>-24</i>
- married couple	94	87	
- unmarried couple	6	13	
<i>Households with child(ren)</i>	<i>50.2</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>-20</i>
- married parents	87	68	
- unmarried parents	3	9	
- one-parent	10	24	
<i>Households with partner and/or child(ren)</i>	<i>79.4</i>	<i>65.5</i>	<i>-18</i>
- partner	37	39	
- partner and child(ren)	57	47	
- child(ren)	7	14	
N of households	3,234,228	4,413,648	36

Source: National Institute of Statistics and CBGS-calculations

## 5. Dynamics after a marriage dissolution

Focusing on all marriage dissolutions that took place in 1999<sup>5</sup>, we obtain a picture of some of their short-term demographic consequences. Based on the literature, we expect higher remarriage rates for men, for the divorced and for those that experienced marriage dissolution at a younger age. With regard to the impact of the duration of the previous marriage, results in the literature are inconsistent. We wonder whether a longer previous marriage refrains people from a next marriage, because of an attachment to the previous marriage partner, or whether it stimulates people to a next marriage, because of an attachment to marriage as an institute. We use proportional hazard models to test the risks. In Table 4, the impact of different factors on the remarriage risks is given, respectively after marriage dissolution, divorce and widowhood.

*Table 4. Impact of different factors on the remarriage risk in the Flemish Region, after a marriage dissolution, a divorce or a widowhood in 1999, by gender*

	Men	Women
<i>After a marriage dissolution</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>11%</i>
- age at dissolution	0,959	0,913
- type of dissolution	0,317	0,112
- marriage order	1,40	1,659
- marriage duration	1,014	1,003
<i>After a divorce</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>22%</i>
- age at divorce	0,967	0,9199
- marriage order	1,335	1,656

<sup>5</sup> Of all inhabitants that survived and remained in the Flemish Region until 1.1.2004.

- marriage duration	1,040	1,018
<i>After a widowhood</i>	4%	0.60%
- age at widowhood	0,885	0,908
- marriage order	1,908	ns
- marriage duration	ns	ns

Source: Population Register and CBGS-calculations

### 5.1. Dynamics after a marriage dissolution in 1999

In the Flemish Region almost 14.000 marriages ended in a divorce in 1999. Besides, almost 20.000 marriages ended by the decease of the partner; much more women (14.200) than men (5.000) entered widowhood. 90% of the marriage dissolutions in 1999 concerned a first marriage.

Of all those having experienced a marriage dissolution in 1999, 20% of the men and 11% of the women were remarried by 1.1.2004. Controlling for age at dissolution, marriage duration and marriage order, divorced men have 3,1 times more chance to remarry than widowers and divorced women have about 9 times more chance to remarry than widows. In general, people seem to have more chance to remarry after a second marriage than after a first marriage. Controlling for the effect of dissolution type, age at dissolution and previous marriage duration, men have 40% more chance to remarry after dissolution in a second marriage than after one in a first marriage; women even have 66% more chance. The effect of the age at dissolution is negative: the younger one is at the dissolution, the higher the remarriage rate. The effect is somewhat stronger among women than among men. The effect of the previous marriage duration is positive: the longer the previous marriage has survived, the higher the remarriage rate.

### 5.2. Dynamics after a divorce in 1999

For 88% of the persons divorced in 1999, it concerned a divorce of their first marriage. Of all men divorced in 1999, 25% were remarried by 1.1.2004; of all women 22% were remarried. Men have 33% more chance to remarry after a divorce in a second marriage than after a divorce in a first marriage; women even have 66% more chance. The effect of the age at divorce is negative: the younger one is at the time of the divorce, the higher the remarriage risk. The effect is stronger among women than among men. The effect of the previous marriage duration is positive. This result suggests that divorced people are more attached to marriage as an institute, than to the previous marriage partner.

*Table 5. Household position on 1.1.2004 of persons divorced in 1999 in the Flemish Region, by gender and age at the time of the divorce*

	Men		Women	
	<40	>40	<40	>40
<i>With parent(s)</i>	7.3	3.7	3.2	1.3
<i>Alone</i>	29.8	41.6	10.4	32
<i>Unmarried cohabitation</i>	31.1	21.1	27.5	17.6
- 0 children	12	10.8	7.1	9.4
- 1 child	10.4	5.2	8.8	4.5
- 2 children	6.1	3.6	8	2.7
- 3 or more children	2.6	1.5	3.6	1
<i>Remarried</i>	24.1	18.6	22.4	12.2
- 0 children	6.3	8.8	4.1	7.6
- 1 child	8.5	4.7	6.9	2.7
- 2 children	6.1	3.2	6.8	1.1
- 3 or more children	3.2	1.9	4.6	0.8
<i>One-parenthood</i>	4.4	10.5	34.7	33
- 1 child	2.6	7.1	14.4	17.3
- 2 children	1.4	2.8	14.7	12.1
- 3 or more children	0.4	0.6	5.6	3.6

<i>Other</i>	3.3	4.5	1.6	3.9
<i>Living with partner</i>	55.2	39.7	49.9	29.8
- Married	44	0.47	0.45	0.41
- Unmarried	56	0.53	0.55	0.59
<i>Living without partner</i>	41.50	55.80	48.30	66.30
- With parents	18	7	7	2
- Single	72	75	22	48
- One-parent	11	19	72	50
<i>Living with children</i>	41.3	30.6	73.4	45.8
- unmarried parents	46	34	28	18
- married parents	43	32	25	10
- one-parent	11	34	47	72
1 child	52	56	41	53
2 children	33	31	40	35
3 or more children	15	13	19	12
<i>Living without children</i>	55.4	64.9	24.8	50.3
- with parents	13	6	13	3
- single	54	64	42	64
- unmarried cohabitation	22	17	29	19
- remarried	11	14	17	15
<i>With partner and children</i>	36.9	20.1	38.7	12.8
- unmarried parents	52	51	53	64
- married parents	48	49	47	36
- 1 child	51	49	41	56
- 2 children	33	34	38	30
- 3 or more children	16	17	21	14
N	7,521	6,762	9,085	5,682

Source: Population Register and CBGS-calculations

Having experienced a divorce in 1999, how does one live on 1.1.2004 (i.e. 4-5 years after the legal registration of the divorce)? In Table 5, we make a distinction between persons that were younger than 40 and those that were older than 40 at the time of their divorce. Men divorced before age 40 do have two alternatives: living alone (30%) or living in an unmarried cohabitation (31%). Remarriage (24%) is less a choice. Living alone (42%) is the most common living arrangement for men divorced after age 40. 10% of the older divorced men are head of a one-parent family compared to 4% of the younger divorced men. Of all women, one third ends up as head of a one-parent family. For those divorced at a younger age unmarried cohabitation (18%) is a choice more than remarriage (12%). For the women divorced at an older age, living alone is a common living arrangement (32%).

As expected, repartnering after divorce, in the sense of living together with a partner, is more done at younger age than at older age; it is most often done by younger men (55%) and least often done by older women (50%). Among the divorced that repartner, somewhat more than half of them do this at this stage of the post-divorce process in the context of an unmarried cohabitation.

Parenthood after divorce, in the sense of living together with – his, her or their - children, is most often an outcome among divorced women at younger age. Among those parenting after divorce, younger divorced men do it rarely as single fathers (11%); older divorced women do it mostly as single mothers (72%). Parenthood, both in a context of an unmarried cohabitation and of a remarriage, is more common among men than among women. One-parenthood is the case for one third of the divorced women and concerns most often one child or two children. One in 10 men, divorced at an

older age, is also involved in single parenthood; for them, it mainly concerns one child. Without information on the age and the type of the (his, her, their) children, it looks as if the presence of children does not affect much the choice between an unmarried or married cohabitation after a divorce. The living arrangement options 4-5 years after a marital breakdown are more limited at older age, both for men and for women, both in case of living-in children or not.

### 5.3. Dynamics after widowhood in 1999

Short-term dynamics after widowhood are few (Table 4). Of all men widowed in 1999 4% are remarried by 1.1.2004; of all widowed women 0.6% are remarried. For 94% of the widowed persons it concerned a widowhood of their first marriage. Men widowed in a second marriage have 90% more chance to remarry than men widowed in a first marriage. Remarriages among widows are so rare that marriage order does not play a role. The younger one is at the time of the widowhood, the higher the chance to remarry. This effect is stronger among men than it was for divorce. Duration of the previous marriage has no impact on the remarriage risk among widowed persons (Corijn, 2005).

*Table 6. Household position on 1.1.2004 of persons widowed in 1999 in the Flemish Region, by gender and age at the time of the widowhood*

	Men		Women	
	<70	>70	<70	>70
<i>With parent(s)</i>	0.7	0	0	0
<i>Alone</i>	55.1	72	64.7	72.6
<i>Unmarried cohabitation</i>	8.8	1	4.2	0.3
- 0 children	6.3	1	2.7	0.3
- 1 child	1.4	0	0.8	0
- 2 children	0.7	0	0.4	0
- 3 or more children	0.4	0	0.3	0
<i>Remarried</i>	6.1	0.7	1.1	0
- 0 children	3.1	0.7	0.4	0
- 1 child	1.2	0	0.4	0
- 2 children	1	0	0.2	0
- 3 or more children	0.8	0	0.1	0
<i>One-parenthood</i>	24.4	10.4	24.6	9
- 1 child	16.6	9.5	16.5	8.4
- 2 children	5.8	0.9	5.8	0.6
- 3 or more children	2	0	2.3	0
<i>Institution</i>	1.3	10.3	1.1	12.4
<i>Other</i>	3.6	5.6	4.3	5.7
<i>Living with partner</i>	14.9	1.7	5.3	
- married couple	41	41	21	0
- unmarried couple	59	59	79	100
<i>Living without partner</i>	79.50	82.40	89.30	81.60
- single	69	87	72	89
- one-parent	31	13	28	11
<i>Living with child(ren)</i>	29.9	10.4	26.8	9
- unmarried parents	8	0	6	0
- married parents	10	0	3	0
- one-parent	82	100	92	100
1 child	64	91	66	93
2 children	25	9	24	7
3 or more children	11	0	10	0
<i>Living without child(ren)</i>	64.5	73.7	67.8	72.9



- single	85	98	95	100
- unmarried cohabitation	10	1	4	0
- remarried	5	1	1	0
<i>With partner and chil(dren)</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>0</i>
- unmarried parents	45	0	68	0
- married parents	55	0	32	0
1 child	47		55	
2 children	31		27	
3 or more children	22		18	
N	2,659	2,552	7,563	7,415

Source: Population Register and CBGS-calculations

Having experienced widowhood in 1999, how does one live 4-5 years later? In Table 6 we make a distinction between those that were under age 70 and those that were older than 70 at the time of the decease of their partner. The most common living arrangement is living alone. This is to a similar extent the case for the older men and women (72%); it is to a larger extent the case for the younger widows (65%) than for the younger widowers (55%). For those widowed at a younger age, there is also the arrangement of one-parenthood; for men (10%) less than for women (25%). Younger widowed in a one-parent household have more often the care for two children than those in two-parent households.

Repartnering within 4-5 years after widowhood, in the sense of living together with a partner, is mainly but still rarely done by the younger widowers (15%); they do it somewhat more unmarried than married. Younger widows are much more reluctant or prefer less to repartner (5.%) and those that do this also mainly opt (80%) for an unmarried cohabitation.

Parenthood after widowhood, in the sense of living together with children, is of course more common among the younger widowed. Three in 10 of the younger compared to 1 in 10 of the older widowed persons are involved in parenthood; gender differences are small. Those widowed at a younger age do somewhat more parenting combined with repartnering (18% men and 9% women), but for women this is seldom in the context of a remarriage. Parenthood after widowhood at a later age happens exclusively in the context of one-parent household. At older age options seem to be more limited for the widowed.

Among the older persons that got widowed in 1999, 10% of the men and 12% of the women got institutionalised within 4-5 years after the death of their partner. This is more than among the widowed population in general in the Flemish Region (7% men and 10% women). It seems as if there is a kind of short-term effect towards an institutionalisation after the loss of a partner, both for men and for women.

## 6. Civil status dynamics of persons in particular household types

### 6.1. The civil status dynamics of the partners in unmarried cohabitation

In Belgium unmarried cohabitation got only popular from the 1990s on (Corijn, 2004). The composition of the persons living this way changed between 1992 and 2004. The never-married are now dominating the market of unmarried cohabitation as their share increased (from 48% to 63%); that of the separated/divorced (from 42% to 32%) and that of the widowed (from 9% to 5%) decreased. At the couple level the matches on the market of unmarried cohabitation are not that different from those on the (re)marriage market. For the Flemish Region one observes that whereas the (re)marriage market of 2002 consisted for two thirds of two never-married persons, half (52%) of the couples in unmarried cohabitation in 2004 consisted of two never-married persons. The divorced follow on the second place of both markets, both to live together with another divorced person (respectively 17% and 19%) or with a never-married person (respectively 14% and 16%). Widowed

persons are almost absent on the remarriage market (2.5%) and somewhat less on the cohabitation market (10%).

Among all cohabiting couples in the Flemish Region 42% do have living-in children, compared to 56% of the married couples. If both partners are never-married 36% do have living-in children; if both partners are divorced or if one is divorced and the other is never-married half of them (52%) do have living-in children.

## 6.2 The civil status dynamics of the older persons living alone

Living alone is not only a gender- and age-related living arrangement, but it consists also of more and more diversity with regard to the past civil status dynamics. As the number of divorces started rising sharply from the 1970s on, and as widowhood got postponed due to the increasing longevity, the diversity of the civil status histories of persons aged 60 and over living alone increased (Table 7). Among those surviving until their 80s, living alone is still almost always the outcome of widowhood in a first marriage both for men and for women. Living alone in your 70s became less often the outcome of widowhood, but also of being never-married and of being divorced. Men and women in their 60s living alone show the largest diversity. Not having any information on in-between periods of unmarried cohabitation divorced persons are divorced in their first marriage since about 17-18 years and those in their second marriage since about 10-13 years. Peters and Liefbroer (1997) illustrated the link between well-being in old age and partner and civil status history.

Table 7. Civil status history of persons aged 60 and older, living alone on 1.1.2004 in the Flemish Region, by gender and age

	Men			Women		
	60-69	70-79	80+	60-69	70-79	80+
<i>Never-married</i>	30	23	10	10	8	6
<i>since*</i>	58	66	74	66	73	84
<i>Still married</i>	7	4	2	3	1	0
<i>Since</i>	40	47	55	42	49	56
<i>Divorced in first marriage</i>	26	12	3	17	6	2
<i>Since</i>	17	21	28	18	24	33
<i>Widowed in first marriage</i>	30	56	80	61	80	86
<i>Since</i>	8	9	10	10	11	15
<i>Remarried</i>	1	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Since</i>	16	20	25	22	28	33
<i>Divorced in second marriage</i>	4	2	1	2	1	0
<i>Since</i>	10	13	16	13	17	25
<i>Widowed in second marriage</i>	2	2	3	4	3	4
<i>Since</i>	7	7	9	8	11	15
<i>Other situation</i>	0	0	1	2	1	2
N	22,686	35,071	20,984	40,990	102,159	76,129

\* duration in year.

Source: Population Register and CBGS-calculations

## 7. Discussion

What are these civil status dynamics and the resulting changes in household types all about?

### *Are they a partnership issue?*

A recent survey among persons 20 to 64 years old, living in the Flemish Region, revealed that 81% had a steady partner (Corijn, 2004). Those (temporarily) not having a partner were mainly men (21%), persons in their 20s or 30s (30%), never-married (47%) and separated/divorced (51%). Even in this age range, widowhood most strongly affected partnership as particularly the widowed persons did

report not having a steady partner (76%). A recent survey among persons 55 to 90, living in the Flemish Region, revealed that 85% men and 62% women do have a steady partner. The widowed are the most reluctant for a partnership (7%); more than the never-married (17%) and the divorced (31%) at this age; gender difference are large (Audenaert & Vanderleyden, 2004). Among the young and never married, partnership is postponed. The separated/divorced seem to be reluctant for new partnership. At all ages a new partnership seems to be least a choice (or opportunity) for widowed persons, particularly for widows.

#### *Are they about a living together issue?*

Any preference, choice, opportunity or obligation to live together with another or others is no longer the case in 80% of the Belgian households but only in 67%. Not living together is becoming more and more an outcome or a choice (Lodewijckx, 2004). With 17% of the total population living alone in 2004, Belgium is above the European average (13%) (Philipov, 2005). Danish data suggest that 23% may be or not an upper limit. This decrease of living together goes along in Belgium with an important compositional shift as less households constitute of both partners and children and more households consist of partners only and of one-parent families (Table 3). At the individual level, one observes in the 1990s a small, but further, decrease of the share of those living together with a partner (with or without children).<sup>6</sup>

Also among the younger adults (18-29 years) - coming on the partnership and marriage market since the 1980s and having witnessed a serious decrease in the number of marriages, a serious steady increase of the number of divorces<sup>7</sup> and having witnessed a start of the popularity of unmarried cohabitation – their percentage living together with a partner decreased (from 36% in 1992 to 28% in 2004). This decrease was partially compensated by living more as a single (from 10% to 12%) and somewhat more by remaining at (or having returned to) the parental home (from 49% to 53%). At this age, changes can be part of a postponement of living together with a partner. That seems to be the case as among the persons aged 30 to 39 75% were living together with a partner in 1992 and 71% in 2004. At this age, when divorce can have entered the life scene, more than 7 in 10 persons do choose to live together with a partner. The option to live together with a partner among the older adults (50-69 years) decreased less between 1992 (76%) and 2004 (74%), even in a context of more non-married people (from 22% to 26%; including a doubling of the share of divorced persons from 5% to 12%).

In a context of marriage postponement and of less people marrying, we observe that more non-married people choose for living together with a partner, but that the widowed persons participated least in this trend.

#### *Are they about a marriage issue?*

First marriage risks as well as second and third marriages risks decreased. Marriage and remarriage became less often the choice. With respect to the sustainability of marriage, most marriages (80%) survived almost four decades (38 years) for those married in 1965 and only one decade (11 years) for those married in 1990. If one considers 20 years a reasonable duration for a marriage, especially when one wants to or has to raise children, 90% of those married in 1960 reached that point, compared to 74% of those married in 1980. Among the Flemish cohort born in the 1960s 10% is not yet married. As they are in 2004 35 years and older, this percentage will not decrease that much. As such marriage postponement is the issue, as marriage renouncement does not seem to be widespread.

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<sup>6</sup> The size of the civil status groups changed differently. While the number of the persons aged 18 and over increased by 5%; the number of those living together with a partner did not change. The size of the never-married population increased by 28%; their number living together with a partner increased by 225%. The size of the married population decreased by 8%. The size of the divorced population increased by 84%; their number living together with a partner increased by 116%. For the widowed the changes are smaller, respectively -3% and +31%.

<sup>7</sup> From 66.369 marriages in 1980 to a dip of 56.563 marriages in 1987 to a further dip of 40.434 in 2002; from 14.457 divorces in 1980 to 30.628 in 2003.

The reluctance or postponement to live together with a partner among young people goes hand in hand with a shift in commitment as married cohabitation becomes less common. Among those aged 18 to 29 living together with a partner, 85% were married in 1995; in 2004 this decreased to 52%. Among those aged 30 to 39 living together with a partner, one observes an analogous shift towards less marriage (from 93% to 81%). But with more than 4 married couples on 5 couples, one has to conclude that marriage is still the rule once people are in their thirties.

Of all unmarried people in their 40s in 1992, 7% were living in an unmarried couple. In 2004 this has increased to 22%. An indication that for an increasing share unmarried cohabitation could be an alternative for marriage. This is confirmed by two thirds having living-in children.

Remarriage rates after divorce reach 42%, but they are decreasing across cohorts. Among the divorced that are not (yet) remarried, 20% were cohabiting in 1992; in 2004 this amounted to 25%; no strong indication that unmarried cohabitation becomes a (temporary) alternative after divorce. Among those that got divorced in 1999, one observes that among those that choose to repartner almost half of them have chosen for a marriage within 4-5 years. But that among those with children - and that is mostly the case for younger women - marriage is least chosen. The effect of the marriage order on the remarriage risks after divorce suggests that for a subgroup serial marriage becomes the rule: a failed marriage opens the way to a second and to a third marriage.

Widowhood does not pave the way to repartnering or remarriage, except for some dynamics among men widowed under age 70. Among the men that got widowed in 1999 and choose for repartnering, almost half chose for remarriage. Among the widows remarriage is not a choice, even if there are no children involved. The main road after widowhood leads to living alone; for the younger widowed it also includes one-parenthood.

A strong first marriage postponement and a weak first marriage renouncement seem to be the issue. Remarriage became less the choice of the divorced. Among the divorced that repartner only half opt for a remarriage. Remarriage became even more less the choice of the widowed and among the very few that do repartner remarriage is, particularly among widows, negligible.

#### *Are they about a divorce issue?*

Changes in the divorce legislation, the divorce prevalence and the public opinion on divorce interplayed the last 35 years in Belgium. The changes in the legislation in the mid-1970s and mid-1990s pushed up the number of divorces (Corijn, 1999). Public morality became much more tolerant for divorce. Divorce numbers and risks increased strongly. Divorce became an option; at all ages and at all marriage durations and for all marriage orders. Divorces of second marriages are increasing and of all third marriages 90% were preceded by two divorces (Corijn, 2005). In this strong development, the age at marriage continues to have at the individual level a strong impact on the divorce risk: the younger one is at marriage, the higher the divorce risk. However, at the population level the increase of the age at first marriage did not have this effect, as the cohorts married at an older age also have higher divorce risks. The marriage order and the marriage duration effect suggest that some people 'strictly hold' to the institute of marriage. Up to now nothing seems to be able to stop the divorce increase.

#### *What about parenthood after divorce and widowhood?*

Since 1970, one observes a general trend of less parenting<sup>8</sup>, in the sense of living together with children. Even among those aged 18 to 54, one observes in the 1990s somewhat less parenting (from 53% to 49%) with the decrease of two-parents parenting (49% to 43%) not being fully compensated

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<sup>8</sup> The Belgian divorce statistics have in 70% of the cases no information on whether there are minor children involved in the divorce or not; a shortcoming that reduces strongly the societal relevance of these data.

by the increase of the one-parent parenting (4% to 6%). Moreover, the decrease of two-parents parenting went along in the 1990s with an increase of unmarried two-parents parenting (from 4% of all two-parents parenting to 12%) (Corijn & Lodewijckx, 2004).

Four to 5 years after a divorce before age 40 in 1999, two-parents parenthood is the case for or the choice of 37% men and 39% women, thereby creating a kind of reconstituted family with his, her or their children. There is only a slight preference to do this parenting unmarried instead of married. Four to 5 years after a widowhood before age 70 in 1999, two-parents parenthood is the case for or the choice of 5% widowers and 2% widows. Widows (68%) prefer more than widowers (45%) to stay unmarried in this situation.

#### *Are they about a gender issue?*

Most issues that were discussed were strongly gendered. However, at the household level as many men as women do live alone. Unmarried men have lower marriage risks, but divorced and widowed men have higher remarriage risks. After divorce men do both live (temporarily) more alone than women and more with the partner only; they live less with children. The men that divorce at young age end up shortly after the divorce more often in a reconstituted family. Gender dynamics are somewhat different among the younger widowed: men live less alone, more with the partner only and more in a reconstituted family. No difference shows up with regard to children or not, as after the decease of a partner there is no choice of who takes care of the children.

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