

Divorce and post-divorce behaviour in Flanders (Belgium): differentials according to migrant origin

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Over the last decades the prevalence of divorce has been increasing in many European countries. In Belgium, the divorce rate multiplied by 4 since 1970. Marriage-cohort-specific divorce rates approach 1 divorce per 3 marriages after 25 years of marriage. Within a Western-European context, Belgium has recently a quite high divorce rate, combined with a quite low marriage rate (Council of Europe, 2005).

Research has looked for determinants of divorce (Andersson, 1997; Corijn, 1999; De Valk et al., 2004). The level of the educational attainment, the religious background, the presence of children and the migrant origin are factors that often play a mayor role. Recently efforts have been done to explore whether these determinants of divorce are stable over time or change (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006; Neels, 2006).

Register data for people living in Flanders (Dutch speaking part of Belgium; 60% of the Belgian population) allow to find out whether divorce rates differ according to the migrant origin of people and their migration history. Information on the civil status history and the migration history of all residents in Flanders by 1.1.2004 is available. The migrant origin is identified by the nationality at birth; the date of entering Belgium and the date of naturalisation, if any, are known. Given their higher prevalence in the country, divorce rates of migrants from the Netherlands, France, Italy, Turkey and Morocco will be compared with those of the native Belgians. For Turkish and Moroccan marriages it is known that respectively 93% and 84% are non-mixed marriages. To minimize the mortality bias, the data are confined to the age group 16 to 54; control for re-emigration after divorce is more difficult.

How will migrants, coming from other European countries and cultures with a lower divorce rate (France, the Netherlands and particularly Italy) and migrants from a non-western origin (Turkey, Morocco) behave in a context with a high divorce prevalence?

In Belgium, the impact of the educational level on the divorce rate changed, as in the Netherlands, from a positive to a negative effect (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006; Neels, 2006). The register data, however, do not allow control for this change.

Until the 1990s the religious background was one of the strongest determinants of divorce in Flanders, with the distinction between the practising Catholics versus the other Catholics and the non-Catholics (Corijn, 1994). Evidence from the Netherlands shows that migrants born in Islamic countries have higher divorce rates than native people (De Valk et al., 2004). We will explore whether this is the case for people with a Turkish or Moroccan origin in a destination country with a quite high divorce rate.

We also will explore whether the sequence of the marriage and the migration to Belgium has any impact on the divorce rate and whether naturalisation, if any, has an impact on the divorce rates.

The increasing number of divorces has enlarged the potential remarriage market. But remarriage rates are not increasing in all Western countries because of the competing popularity of post-marital unmarried cohabitation. In Belgium the number of divorced people multiplied by 6 over a period of 30 years, but the remarriage rates for the divorced people halved in that same period. Belgium is still a country with a quite low rate of unmarried cohabitation, but recently 1 in 4 divorced people live in an unmarried cohabitation. The remarriage behaviour of the 5 migrant groups and the natives will be compared.

To explore the recent post-divorce behaviour, we will describe in which household type people divorced in 1999 live in 2004 according to their migrant origin. Are their differentials among the migrant groups whether one lives (officially) alone, with a partner (unmarried or remarried), with or without children 5 years after the (official) divorce date. Dutch research points out that young Moroccans living in the Netherlands are the most traditional ones with regard to their living arrangement (de Valk & Billari, 2007). We could expect that people with an Italian origin also behave more traditional. Does this also apply after a divorce? In the 1990s one-parent households and unmarried cohabitation after divorce increased by about 20% (Corijn

& Lodewijckx, 2005). Do divorced people from Turkish and Moroccan origin join this pattern? And what about people with an Italian origin?

The restrictions of the register data – lack of information on socio-economic determinants – limit the interpretations of the differentials observed.