

Table 24 - Demographic Yearbook 2008

Table 24 presents the marriages cross-classified by age of groom and age of bride for the latest available year between 1999 and 2008.

Description of variables: Marriage is defined as the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted. The legality of the union may be established by civil, religious or other means as recognized by the laws of each country¹.

Marriage statistics in this table, therefore, include both first marriages and remarriages after divorce, widowhood or annulment. They do not, unless otherwise noted, include resumption of marriage ties after legal separation. These statistics refer to the number of marriages performed, and not to the number of persons marrying.

Age is defined as age at last birthday, that is, the difference between the date of birth and the date of the occurrence of the event, expressed in completed solar years. The age classification used for brides in this table is the following: under 15 years, 5-year age groups through 90-94, and 95 years and over, depending on the availability of data. Age classification for grooms is restricted to: under 15 years, 5-year age groups from 15 to 59, and 60 years and over.

In an effort to provide interpretation of these statistics, countries or areas providing data on marriages by age of groom and bride have been requested to specify "the minimum legal age at which marriage can take place with and without parental consent". This information is presented in the table 24-1 below.

Reliability of data: Data from civil registers of marriages that are reported as incomplete (less than 90 per cent completeness) or of unknown completeness are considered unreliable and are set in *italics* rather than in roman type. Table 23 and the technical notes for that table provide more detailed information on the completeness of marriage registration. For more information about the quality of vital statistics data in general, see section 4.2 of the Technical Notes.

Limitations: Statistics on marriages by age of groom and age of bride are subject to the same qualifications as have been set forth for vital statistics in general and marriage statistics in particular as discussed in Section 4 of the Technical Notes.

The fact that marriage is a legal event, unlike birth and death that are biological events, has implications for international comparability of data. Marriage has been defined, for statistical purposes, in terms of the laws of individual countries or areas. These laws vary throughout the world. In addition, comparability is further limited because some countries or areas compile statistics only for civil marriages although religious marriages may also be legally recognized; in other countries or areas, the only available records are church registers and, therefore, the statistics may not reflect marriages that are civil marriages only.

Because in many countries or areas marriage is a civil legal contract which, to establish its legality, must be celebrated before a civil officer, it follows that for these countries or areas registration would tend to be almost automatic at the time of, or immediately following, the marriage ceremony. This factor should be kept in mind when considering the reliability of data, described above. For this reason the practice of tabulating data by date of registration does not generally pose serious problems of comparability as it does in the case of birth and death statistics.

Because these statistics are classified according to age, they are subject to the limitations with respect to accuracy of age reporting similar to those already discussed in connection with Section 3.1.3 of the Technical Notes. It is probable that biases are less pronounced in marriage statistics, because information is obtained from the persons concerned and since marriage is a legal act, the participants are likely to give correct information. However, in some countries or areas, there appears to be a concentration of marriages at the legal minimum age for marriage and at the age at which valid marriage may be contracted without parental consent, indicating perhaps an overstatement in some cases to comply with the law.

Aside from the possibility of age misreporting, it should be noted that marriage patterns at younger ages, that is, for ages up to 24 years, are influenced to a large extent by laws regarding the minimum age for marriage.

Factors that may influence age reporting, particularly at older ages include an inclination to understate the age of the bride in order that it may be equal to or less than that of the groom.

The absence of data in the unknown age group does not necessarily indicate completely accurate reporting and tabulation of the age item. It is sometimes an indication that the unknowns have been eliminated by assigning ages to them before tabulation, or by proportionate distribution after tabulation.

Another age-reporting factor that must be kept in mind in using these data is the variation that may result from calculating age at marriage from year of birth rather than from day, month and year of birth. Information on this factor is given in footnotes when known.

Earlier data: Marriages by age of groom and age of bride have been shown for the latest available year in most issues of the *Demographic Yearbook*. Data cross-classified by age of groom and bride have been presented in previous issues featuring marriage and divorce statistics. For information on the specific topics and the years covered, readers should consult the Historical Index.

24-1 Minimum legal age at which marriage can take place

<i>Country or area</i>	<i>With parental consent</i>		<i>Without parental consent</i>	
	<i>Groom</i>	<i>Bride</i>	<i>Groom</i>	<i>Bride</i>
Africa				
Botswana	18	18	21	21
Egypt	18	16	...	...
Ghana	...	...	18	18
Malawi	18	18	18	18
Mauritius	16	16	18	18
Namibia	18	18	21	21
Saint Helena ex. dep.	16	16	21	21
Seychelles	16	16	18	18
South Africa	18	15	21	21
Uganda	18	18	18	18
America, North				
Anguilla	...	...	18	18
Aruba	18	15	18	18
Bahamas	..	..	..	..
Bermuda	18	18	18	18
Canada	16	16	16	16
Cayman Islands	16	16	18	18
Costa Rica	15	15	18	18
Cuba	16	14	18	16
Dominican Republic	16	16	18	18
El Salvador	15	14	18	18
Jamaica	16	16	16	16
Mexico	16	14	18	18
Netherlands Antilles	...	...	18	18
Panama	16	14	18	18
Puerto Rico	16	14	18	16

Country or area	With parental consent		Without parental consent	
	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride
America, South				
Brazil	14	12	...	...
Chile	14	12	18	18
Ecuador	12	12	12	12
Suriname	17	15	21	21
Uruguay	14	12	18	18
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	12	12	12	12
Asia				
Armenia	18	17	...	...
Azerbaijan	18	17	...	...
Bahrain	15	...	...	...
China, Hong Kong SAR	16	16	21	21
China, Macao SAR	16	16	18	18
Israel	17	17	17	17
Japan	18	16	20	20
Kazakhstan	16	16	18	17
Kyrgyzstan	18	18	18	18
Occupied Palestinian Territory	15.5	14.5	15.5	...
Philippines	18-20	18-20	21	21
Republic of Korea	18	18	20	20
Singapore	18	18	21	21
Tajikistan	16	16	17	17
Turkey	15	14	18	18
Uzbekistan	17	17	17	17
Europe				
Åland Islands	18	18	18	18
Albania	18	16	...	...
Austria	16	16	18	18
Belarus	18	18	18	18
Belgium	17	15	18	18
Bosnia and Herzegovina	18	18	18	18
Bulgaria	16	16	18	18
Croatia	16	16	18	18
Czech Republic	16	16	18	18
Denmark	15	15	18	18
Estonia	15	15	18	18
Finland	Under 18 ²	Under 18 ²	18	18
France	18	18	18	18
Greece	Under 18 ³	Under 18 ³	18	18
Hungary	16	16	18	18

Country or area	With parental consent		Without parental consent	
	Groom	Bride	Groom	Bride
Iceland	18	18	18	18
Ireland	...	...	18	18
Isle of Man	16	16	18	18
Italy	16	16	...	...
Latvia	16	16	18	18
Liechtenstein	Under 18 ⁴	Under 18 ⁴	18	18
Lithuania	15 ⁴	15 ⁴	18	18
Luxembourg	...	...	18	16
Malta	16	16	18	18
Montenegro	16	16	18	18
Netherlands	16	16	18	18
Norway	16	16	18	18
Poland	-	16	18	18
Portugal	16	16	18	18
Republic of Moldova	16	14	18	16
Romania	18	18	18	18
Russian Federation	16	16	18	18
Serbia	16	16	18	18
Slovakia	...	...	18	18
Slovenia	15	15	18	18
Spain	14	14	18	18
Sweden	18	18	18	18
Switzerland	...	...	18	18
TFYR of Macedonia	16	16	18	18
Ukraine	15	15	18	17
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	16	16	18	18
Oceania				
Australia	16	16	18	16
New Zealand	16	16	18	18

NOTES

¹ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System Revision 2*, Sales No. 01.XVII.10, United Nations, New York, 2001.

² Persons less than 18 years old need the permission of the Ministry of Justice.

³ Under some conditions (e.g. pregnancy) the marriage can take place without age restrictions.

⁴ Persons less than 18 years old need a decision of the court.