

Same-sex marriage around the world: Statistical reporting, trends and patterns

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1 Introduction

Among the recent changes to family demography, the inclusion of the new forms of family in the analysis is one of the key issues. In particular, the legalization of same-sex marriages (SSM) started in 2001 in the Netherlands and has expanded today to more than 40 countries or territories. This contribution elicits trends and patterns in same-sex marriage using the available official data.

Marriage statistics are one of the main components of vital statistics, and most countries, including all countries where same-sex marriage has been legalized, had ongoing reporting systems for different-sex marriages (DSM), mostly since the 19th century. Same-sex marriage means that decisions have to be taken regarding how to report. United Nations (2014) provides the current version of the principles and recommendations for a Vital Statistics System. While there is no word on SSM in the document, it admits in the definition of marriage that “*Countries may wish to expand [the] definition to cover civil unions if they are registered; in that case, registered partnership usually refers to a legal construct, registered with the public authorities according to the laws of each country, that leads to legal conjugal obligations between two persons.*” (United Nations 2014). It also indicates that “*the registration of births, marriages and divorces, as well as other family events — adoptions, for instance — provides tangible proof of the official recognition of the process of family formation, and can yield valuable insights about the evolution of that process through time*”. This is, in particular, the case for official statistical reporting of same-sex and different-sex registered partnerships and marriage. From a legal point of view, in many countries, some type of registered partnership allowed same-sex couples to register starting with Denmark in 1989. With the advent of same-sex marriage, some countries have ceased allowing registered partnerships, some have registered partnerships in addition to marriages for different types of union, while some only provide registered partnerships as an alternative to marriage for same-sex couples (Groot and Schneider 2020).

There is very little information on comparative patterns of SSM, with some exceptions like Cortina and Festy (2020), DeSilver (2023) and OECD (2023). These references only provide very basic information regarding numbers and/or proportions of same-sex marriages. However, there is a great deal of heterogeneity in how National Statistics Offices (NSOs) have adapted to SSM. This is the first study comparing availability of statistics on same-sex marriage provided by NSOs. This allows the identification of good and bad practices. It is relevant for the improvement and homogenization of reporting of same-sex marriages and new types of family, in general.

2 Methods and data gathering

The list of countries that have SSM legalized is based on DeSilver (2023), OECD (2024), Human Rights Campaign (2025) and wikipedia. While Human Rights Campaign (2025) currently lists 38 countries, there

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are dependent territories that report marriages separately.

From July 2024 to October 2025, the webpage of the NSOs in all the countries have been inspected in order to find marriage reporting in databases. Reporting comes in different formats including pcAxis, excel worksheets, interactive pages and data repositories. In addition, and in particular when nothing has been found, other published materials have been searched for within the NSO webpage including press notes, vital statistics reports, statistical yearbooks if available, or as reported in specific wikipedia pages on *Same-sex marriage in XXX*.

Reported data has been classified according to the level of disaggregation. Special focus has been put on reporting by age of the partners that is required in order to estimate standard demographic measures such as the Total Marriage Rate (TMR). This has led to a classification of countries in three groups: those with no reporting (O), those reporting only totals by marriage type (T), and those with some detail on age of partners or, at least, mean ages at marriage by type. In addition, 6 countries are providing access to marriage microdata that makes calculation easier.

Depending on the type of reporting, different measures are analyzed:

For all countries with information on totals by type, three measures are derived: - Incidence of SSM: proportion SS marriages. - Gender differences: MM/FF marriage ratio. - Crude marriage rate, computed separately by sex.

For countries reporting on age, other standard demographic measures are added such as the Total Marriage Rate by type, Total Marriage rates by rank (first marriages/remarriage), mean ages at marriage (from numbers and rates and by rank), age-specific marriage rates, and patterns of age-homogamy.

3 Research plan

First, international standards for reporting are analyzed. Surprisingly, UN 2014 recommendations for vital statistics systems say nothing regarding same-sex marriage. However, note can be taken of recommendations regarding marriage.

Second, I conduct a systematic review of databases and statistical information provided by National Statistical Offices. Results show that from 36 countries where same-sex marriage was legal prior to 2025, 10 do not report on same-sex marriage at all, 14 only report on the number of events, and only 12 report on age at marriage and other important demographic variables. Patterns of reporting are compared within these countries. Five countries (France, Spain, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico) and the state of São Paulo provide, in addition, marriage microdata. Costa Rica and Mexico provide interactive online cross-tabulations. From this analysis, France, Spain, Costa Rica and Mexico can be highlighted as countries with good practices.

A third section looks at trends in same-sex marriage since legalization. Putting together information from other sources, the number of same-sex marriages can be ascertained for some of the countries where the NSO does not report. Dependent territories under the jurisdiction of France, the United Kingdom and Denmark report separately on SSM and have been included in the analysis. Some countries including the US, Mexico, Argentina or the United Kingdom do not report at the country level but estimates are available for some or all of the country regions.

The fourth section presents results of the more sophisticated age-based measures of nuptiality for countries with the adequate data, computed from marriage microdata where available.

4 Preliminary results

Out of the 36 countries that had legalized SSM before 2025, most of the countries are localized in Europe (22), the Americas (11), and only 3 elsewhere: New Zealand, Australia and Taiwan. South Africa is often included in the list, but only civil unions -not marriages- are performed and it is not included in our analysis.

There are countries that do not report at all on SSM in their databases. These include Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, Malta, Uruguay or the United States. In the case of Argentina, some of the provincial governments do report some numbers. In Canada, statistics are provided for all marriages irrespective of gender and type of marriage. In Chile, Colombia and Uruguay numbers are not available from the NSO, but can be found elsewhere. In the case of Iceland, the advent of SSM meant the discontinuation of the marriage time series, both for SSM and DSM. Malta also stopped publishing its demographic report, including information on marriage, in 2014. In the United States the collection of detailed data was suspended in 1996 due to budget considerations. Currently, only provisional figures on total marriages are published, and with a considerable time delay.

Other countries only report the number of marriages by type and year. This includes Andorra, Australia, Austria, Cuba, Ecuador, Denmark, Greece, Estonia, Germany, Norway, Slovenia and Taiwan. In many of these cases, countries only reporting the annual number of SSM by sex provide more detailed statistics either for total marriages (Australia, Taiwan) or DSM (Denmark, Cuba, Germany, Norway, Slovenia). Australia is, since 2022, the first country updating marriage forms to include non-binary as a gender.

In the case of Ecuador, there has been an attempt to minimize changes to the reporting system. This means that the previous tabulations by age of bride and groom have been modified to age of partner 1 and age of partner 2. The result is a meaningless statistic, since who is partner 1 and 2 is irrelevant for same-sex marriages. A similar situation arises in Taiwan, where age cross-tabulation is provided for age of male/spouse 1 vs age of female/spouse 2. Note, that such a tabulation could make sense if made separately according to marriage type. In the case of Ecuador, it is possible to do so, because the marriage microdata is available including information on the sex of the partners, but the NSO tabulation should be replaced.

Table 1 provides the level of detail in reporting for the rest of countries. Figure 1 provides trends by major region in the number of SS marriages in log-scale, with a noticeably dip caused by covid within a general rising trend; incidence measured as the percentage of SSM of all marriages, with sharp differences among countries; and the ratio of male to female SSM with a noticeable common trend towards a lower ratio (more importance of FF marriages).

Table 1: Available data for SSM in countries with better reporting

Country	Marginal						Cross tabulation			
	Geography	Period	Age	Marital status	Nationality	Other	Ages	Marital status	Nationalities	Other
Brazil	MUN	M	5yr	X		X	5yr	X	Geo	5yr-Geo; POB
Costa Rica	PROV	M	5yr				5yr	X	X	ACT+OCCUP
Belgium	PROV	Y	1yr+REG	X		X	10yr+REG	REG	REG	RES
Spain	MUN	M	5yr+MUN	MUN		PROV	5yr+MUN		PROV	EDUC; OCCUP; ACT
Sweden	MUN	Y	5yr	5yr						
Portugal	MUN	Y	5yr	X			5yr+MUN	MUN		NPM+MUN
France	REG	D	1yr	1yr		M	POP	1yr	REG	
England&Wales	DISTRICT	D	5yr	5yr			CER		X	COHAB
Ireland	COUNTY	WD+M	5yr				CER; RES	CER		
Finland	NAT	M(SS)	5yr (SS)			SS	LANG (SS)	5yr (SS)	SS	LANG (SS)
Switzerland	CAN	M	1yr+CAN			X		1yr+CAN	X	

WD-Weekday,REG-Region,CER-Type of ceremony,ACT-Activity,OCCUP-Occupation,EDUC-Education,LANG-Language,RES-Residence,MAR-Previous m

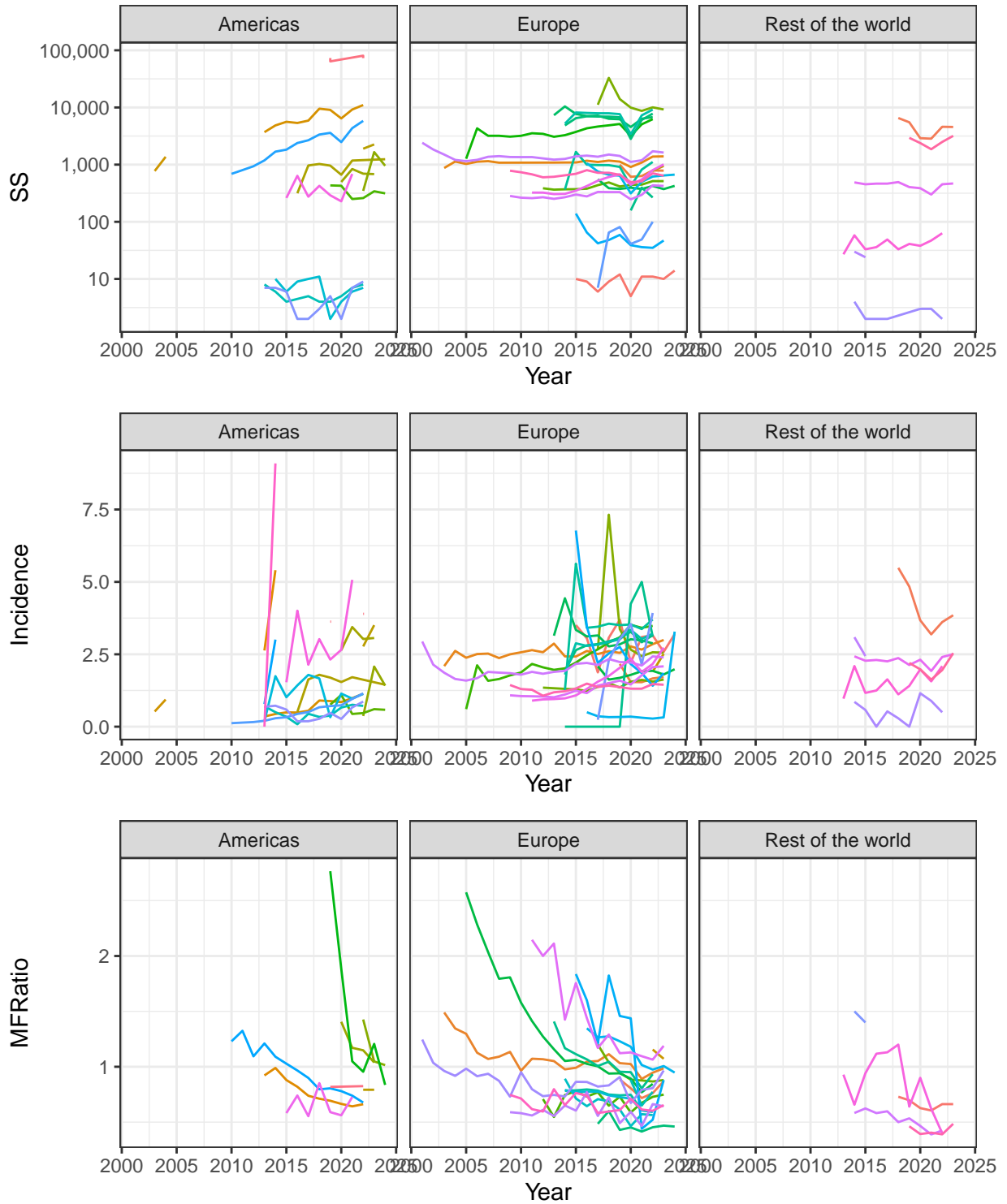


Figure 1: Trends in SS marriages, its incidence, and the MF ratio by major region

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