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Demographic Trends in Iceland

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Introduction

This report is conducted within the project *Welfare Policy and Employment in the Context of Family Change*. We would like to thank Tómas Bjarnason for his assistance in collecting and preparing the statistical data in this report. Also we would like to thank Ólöf Garðarsdóttir at *Statistics Iceland* who provided help with unpublished data and Kolbeinn Stefánsson for his assistance with various tasks.

Patterns of family formation, fertility and family disintegration, is the outcome of a number of factors, such as the legal environment, socio-economic factors, and finally political factors. Not least has family formation and disintegration been influenced by a change in the nature of relationships between husband and wife, mainly due to increasing individualization, changing roles of the genders and increased emphasis on individual achievement and meritocracy rather than ascribed statuses (Eydal and Bjarnason, in print). This report addresses in particular the demographical trends in Iceland during the 1990s.

Family law constitutes the framework for family formation and Icelandic family law has followed the Nordic pattern in broad outline during the 20th century¹. The laws on marriage and divorce have been liberalized, confirmed partnership of homosexual couples has gained equal status as marriage of heterosexuals, cohabitation has gained some recognition in different laws, rights of lone parents have been increased and the rights of children, in society and in the family, has been ensured through various legislation. The position and the rights of the child have been subject to different changes in legislation and Iceland has followed in the footsteps of the Nordic forerunners in assuring children's rights by law.

Population in Iceland

The number of inhabitants in Iceland was 255.708 in 1990 and in 2000 the number of 282.849. Thus there was a constant population increase during the 1990s (Statistics Iceland, Landshagir, 1991;2001).

The Icelandic nation is still relatively "young". In 2000 24,8% of the nation was younger than 16 years and 7,6 % was under five years old. At the same time the number of old age pensioners, 67 years and older is relatively low or around 11 % (Statistics Iceland, Landshagir, 2001).

The Icelandic nation is still quite homogenous, but during the 1990s there has been an increase in both inhabitants who are foreign citizens from 2,1 % to 3,1% of the population in 2000. Similar increase is also to be found among the inhabitants not born in Iceland, from 4,1% to 6,4%. It is however not possible to state that 6,4 % of the Icelandic nation has foreign background since included in the figure for inhabitants not

¹ The Nordic countries have had formal cooperation on most major changes in family law during the 20th century (Snaevarr, 1959;1972;1983).

born in Iceland is the number of children of Icelandic parents, who are born outside the country. In 2000 25.909 Icelandic citizens had domicile outside Iceland (Statistics Iceland, Fréttatilkynning nr. 19/2002). Nevertheless diversity has increased and now inhabitants with diverse background and religion have gained increased attention.

Marriage, divorce and remarriage

Marriage law has since 1923 declared equality between husbands and wives, provided for no-fault divorce and that in case of divorces the best interests of children should be the main criterion for deciding issues of custody (Althingistíðindi 1923B; Snævarr 1972). Thus the legal grounds for two breadwinner families were established quite early in the case of Iceland.

Marriage rates have been increasing lately after a period of sizable decline. From the 1970s marriage rates dropped considerably. However, from 1995 marriage rates have increased somewhat again. During the early 90s there were about 24 marriages per year on average (per 1.000 not married) compared to 50 during the 50s and until the 70s (Eydal and Bjarnason, in print). Since a similar pattern of increase is to be found among both men and women entering their first marriage the increase cannot be explained by increase in remarriages.

Table 1
Marriage rates by previous marital status 1986–2001. Age-specific marriage rates.
Married annually per 1,000 persons 15 years and older not married

Gender and previous marital status	1986–1990	1991–1995	1996–2000	2001
Males total	24,0	24,1	27,1	24,7
Previously single males	25,0	23,6	26,4	23,9
Previously married	30,0	27,2	30,7	28,5
Females total	26,0	23,9	26,7	24,3
Previously single	31,0	28,1	30,7	28,0
Previously married	15,0	13,6	16,5	14,8

Source: Statistics Iceland; Landshagir, Table 2.24

The marriage age has been increasing during the 1990s and in fact there has been a steady ongoing increase since the 1970s in mean age of marriage for both sexes (Eydal and Bjarnason, in print). In the 1990s it is most likely that men aged 30-34 years old get married compared to 20-24 or 25-30 in the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly the most usual marriage age of women has moved from the age group of 20-24 years old to 25-29 and 30-35. In an analysis from Statistics Iceland it is mentioned that despite the radical changes in marriage age there are no changes in the differences between the sexes: the grooms are still 3 years older than the brides on average (Statistics Iceland: Fréttatilkynning nr. 56/2002). Since divorces are more common in the younger age group, these changes might be important in that connection and it is highly likely that people have already spent some time cohabiting.

Table 2
Mean age at marriage by sex—all marriages and first marriages

Grooms and brides	1986–90	1991–95	1996-00
Grooms mean age of marriage, total	30,2	32,4	34,8
Age at first marriage	28,0	30,1	32,2
Brides mean age of marriage, total	27,8	29,9	32,1
Age at first marriage	26,0	27,9	30,0

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir, Table 2.23

Divorce

As already mentioned above Icelandic marriage law was changed towards more liberal direction already in the 1920s. The divorce rate pr. 1000 married couples has been around 10 since the early 1980s. During the 1990s there was a slight decrease in the figures but it is too small to conclude that there is a trend in that direction. However it seems safe to conclude that divorce rates have stabilized, there has not been an increase for decades and if anything there is a slight decrease in recent years.

As younger couples tend to start their family formation with cohabitation rather than marriage, the break-up of young cohabiting families would not be noted in the divorce statistics.

Table 3
Divorce per 1,000 married
15 years and older

Year	Men	Women
1991	11,6	11,6
1992	11,3	11,2
1993	11,4	11,4
1994	10,4	10,3
1995	10,1	10,0
1996	11,3	11,2
1997	10,9	10,9
1998	10,2	10,1
1999	9,8	9,8
2000	11,2	11,1

Source: Statistics Iceland
Landshagir, own calculations

The rise in marriage age has had some influence on the divorce rates. The divorce rates among young people were high and the decline in marriages among them has resulted in lower divorce rates. The fact is that very few individuals younger than 20

years get married. This explains the great fluctuation in the figures for women 15-19 years in the 1990s. No radical change can be observed in the 1990s and the pattern is similar to previous decades: The divorce rates are still higher for younger age groups in particular for both men and women under 30 years. After the age of 30 the figures start to decline and are lowest for those who are 50 years and older

Table 4
Age specific divorce rates, per 1,000
married in each age group

Age groups	1991-95	1996-00
HUSBANDS		
Total	11,0	10,7
15-19 years
20-24 years	30,7	40,4
25-29 years	24,1	26,9
30-34 years	20,0	18,6
35-39 years	15,0	16,3
40-44 years	13,0	14,9
45-49 years	12,0	12,6
50-54 years	9,7	9,1
55-59 years	6,7	6,8
60 years and over	2,1	2,2
WIVES		
Total	10,9	10,7
15-19 years	80,0	23,6
20-24 years	30,9	37,1
25-29 years	24,1	22,0
30-34 years	15,5	17,1
35-39 years	14,3	15,4
40-44 years	13,5	14,7
45-49 years	10,2	11,7
50-54 years	8,8	7,7
55-59 years	4,5	5,0
60 years and over	1,3	1,5

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir

Beside some fluctuation in the figures for the youngest age groups, due to the low number of cases, the tendency is that lower percentage of marriages in the 1990s ends in divorces within the first 5 years compared with the 70s when 1/3 of all the marriages did end with a divorce within 5 years. This is also reflected in the figures for mean duration of marriage, which have also become gradually higher since the 70s. One explanation is that people are marrying later. The importance of cohabitations before marriage is also relevant in this connection.

Table 5
Divorces by duration of marriage 1966–1999.
Proportion of marriage ending in divorce within 5
years and mean duration of marriages

	1991–95	1996–99
0 - 5 years %	26%	25%
Mean duration of marriages	13,7	14,3

Source; Statistics Iceland: Landshagir, Table 2.28-
partly own calculations

Separation

There exist very limited statistics on separation. However, in 1999 77% of couples that got divorced were separated prior to the divorce (Statistics Iceland, Landshagir, 1999). According to the marriage law the stage of separation lasts for at least 6 months where there is an agreement between both partners to seek divorce but for a year if the partners disagree. If there are children in the family and the divorce is not granted according to wishes of both partners after a period of separation the couple will have to attend a session were an attempt is made to make them reconsider their decision. Otherwise such sessions are optional. It is possible to seek a fault base divorce in case of an adultery, violence, or incest. Under such circumstances divorce is granted immediately. If a married couple seeking divorce agrees on their financial arrangement the authorities will only have to ratify their settlement, but if they do disagree, the court can decide on their behalf how the financial arrangement will be organized (Friðriksdóttir, 1994:76; Hjúskaparlög nr. 31/1993).

Remarriages

The mobility in family formations is reflected in the increase of remarriages. Men have slightly higher figures than women, thus it is more likely that a divorced man remarries than a divorced woman. This applies also for widows and widowers; it is more likely for a widowed man to remarry than a widowed women. However the chances of remarriage for these groups are much smaller than for the groups of divorcees, probably due to age differences among the groups. During the 1990s there is a slight increase in the rates of remarriages after a decline in the early part of the decade especially amongst divorcees.

Table 7
Remarriages: Men and women per 1,000 divorced / widowed population

Year	Men, remarriages of divorced	Women, remarriages of divorced	Men, remarriages of widowed	Women, remarriages of widowed
1991	40,7	30,5	5,6	2,3
1992	34,7	29,0	5,9	1,5
1993	39,1	27,0	4,6	2,0
1994	38,3	30,4	5,0	2,5
1995	33,5	26,6	4,9	1,8
1996	35,0	30,0	6,0	1,9
1997	40,5	34,3	8,4	1,8
1998	40,6	31,3	6,4	1,9
1999	42,2	31,5	5,2	2,6
2000	43,0	34,6	7,2	2,7

Source: Statistics Iceland, Landshagir, own calculations

In accordance with higher marriage age the age of remarriage is increasing and this is an ongoing development from the 70s when the mean age of remarriage was 38,3 for grooms and 35,0 for brides, compared to 46,1 and 42,1 by the end of the century. When viewing age at first marriage, similar patterns emerge. Age of bridegrooms and brides at first marriage drops from the 70s until the 80s when it starts to rise again. In the 70s brides entered their first marriage at the age of around 23, in the 1990s at the age of 30. The bridegrooms, in comparison, entered their first marriage at the age of around 25-26 in the 70s but at 32 at the end of the 20th century (Eydal and Bjarnason, in print).

Table 8
Mean age at marriage, first marriage and remarriage

	1991-95	1996-00
Grooms		
Mean age of marriage, total	32,4	34,8
Age at first marriage	30,1	32,2
Age of remarriage	43,0	46,1
Brides		
Mean age of marriage, total	29,9	32,1
Age at first marriage	27,9	30,0
Age of remarriage	40,0	42,1

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.23

Confirmed partnership

In 1996 laws on registered partnership between homosexuals were ratified. The law provides homosexual couples that choose to confirm their partnership similar legal status

as married couples. However, homosexual couples did not gain the legal right to adopt children together nor to seek insemination (Lög um staðfesta samvist nr. 87/1996).

Table 9
Number of registered partnership

	Total	Two males	Two females
1997	12	5	7
1998	12	6	6
1999	11	6	5
2000	12	5	7
2001	13	5	8

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.2

Alternatives to marriage

Cohabitation

It has been argued that because consensual unions and its resulting illegitimacy, were social patterns well known in Iceland during the 19th century, cohabitation was already a social institution in Iceland at the same time as it was being introduced in the other Nordic countries (Troost, 1994). As a result, cohabitation became a recognized family form earlier in Iceland than in the other Nordic countries.

Cohabitation has during most of the 20th century only been partially recognized by law, despite the fact that it has been a relatively usual family form and widely accepted as such. Laws grant official recognition by means of allowing people to register their cohabitation (consensual union) (Lög um lögheimili nr 21/1990). There exist however no laws on cohabitation that can be compared to laws on marriage or confirmed partnership. Cohabitation has been recognized to some extent in different legislation; for example already in the social insurance laws from 1946 cohabiting couples could gain certain rights due to their cohabitation (Einarsson, 1970; Erlendsdóttir, 1977, Knudsen, 1993). Gradually most laws have recognized cohabitation to some extent, but it still varies how the law defines by which means couples shall qualify for being counted as cohabiting (Lög um tekju og eignarskatt nr.75/1981; Lög um almannatryggingar nr. 117/1993; Lög um lögheimili nr.21/1990).

Despite the recognition that cohabitation has received in the law there is a clear difference between the rights of cohabiting and married couples. Cohabitants do not have any automatic inheritance rights, and there are no laws on how to administer the financial affairs in case of break up of the relationship (Erlendsdóttir, 1977; Erfðarlög nr. 8/1962). Thus cohabitation has not been put on equal foot with marriage, but some rights and duties of cohabitants are recognized in various laws

Unfortunately there is limited research on the status and meaning of cohabitation as a family form during the 20th century, but according to survey on the civil status of parents of children born out of wedlock in a certain municipality in 1946-60 13% of the parents got married when the child was baptized, 3 % were officially engaged to be

married and 52% were cohabiting. Only 31% were neither engaged nor cohabiting (Björnsson, 1971). Björnsson, concluded that the “Icelandic” way of starting a family was:

-Meeting->conception->cohabitation->birth of first child->wedding

While the “recognized” way is/was:

-Meeting->engagement->wedding->conception->birth of first child

(Björnsson, 1971; Broddason and Grímsson, 1978; Jóhannsson and Sveinsson 1986).

These changes are most obvious for newly formed families, thus, in the early 70s, nearly 25% of parents of first-born children were in a consensual union, compared to 64% in the year 2000² (Landshagir, 2002). There is a considerable decrease in the number of married parents at the birth (of all children), from 44% in 1991 to 35% in 2000. And accordingly there is an increase in both cohabitation from 46% to 51% and in the proportion of lone parents from 10% to 14% .

Table 10
Marital status of parents at the birth of children. All births

	Parents married	Parents in consensual union	Parents not cohabiting	Total
1991	44%	46%	10%	100%
1992	43%	46%	12%	100%
1993	42%	50%	8%	100%
1994	40%	50%	9%	100%
1995	39%	50%	11%	100%
1996	39%	50%	10%	100%
1997	35%	51%	14%	100%
1998	36%	52%	12%	100%
1999	37%	50%	12%	100%
2000	35%	51%	14%	100%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir 2.32

The pattern of nuclear families seems to have been fairly stable during the 1990, thus very little increase in cohabiting couples (with and without children) is registered (table 11).

² Note that these figures are for the first born children, the figures for parents in cohabitation of all born is 51%.

Table 11
Nuclear families 1991–2000

Nuclear families 1991–2001	Married without children	Married with children	Consensual union without children	Consensual union with children	Father with children	Mother with children
1991	35%	38%	3%	11%	1%	12%
1992	35%	37%	4%	12%	1%	12%
1993	35%	36%	4%	13%	1%	11%
1994	35%	35%	4%	14%	1%	11%
1995	36%	34%	4%	14%	1%	11%
1996	36%	33%	5%	14%	1%	11%
1997	36%	33%	5%	13%	1%	12%
1998	37%	32%	5%	13%	1%	13%
1999	35%	33%	5%	13%	1%	13%
2000	34%	34%	4%	13%	1%	14%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir, Table 2.13- own calculations

However, an increase in cohabitation of parents with children could be noted in Iceland during the late 1980s. Thus, cohabiting couples roughly doubled from 1980 to 1990, from 7 to 14 percent. Marriages declined accordingly during the same period. Comparing figures from 1981 to 1993, however, reveals a changing nature of cohabitation, from a transitory nature to a more permanent one. Cohabitation of people age 35-44 has tripled from 1981 to 1993 and the married couples declined accordingly. (Eydal and Bjarnason, in print).

Table 12
Civil status by age 1960-1993

Age	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-64
Cohabiting women				
1960	9%	5%	5%	5%
1981	23%	12%	5%	4%
1993	30%	30%	15%	5%
Married women				
1960	27%	76%	77%	63%
1981	17%	71%	82%	73%
1993	6%	45%	70%	73%
Cohabiting men				
1960	6%	6%	5%	5%
1981	20%	10%	5%	4%
1993	23%	37%	15%	6%
Married men				
1960	12%	64%	74%	72%
1981	14%	66%	79%	76%
1993	1%	32%	70%	78%

Note: that 100% - (% cohabiting + % married) for each age group and each sex, equal those who are single or previously married. Data for 1960-1981, Census data, data for 1993, Labor market survey data.

Hagstofa Íslands.

Source: Karlsson, 1994

Even though cohabitation has been historically relatively prevalent family form in Iceland there is still some increase to be noticed in particular among cohabiting couples with children. But it should also be kept in mind that the official statistics on cohabitation only count couples that have formally registered their cohabitation and it is possible that couples without children do not necessarily register their cohabitation until parenthood becomes an issue since some parental duties and rights are established by formally registering the cohabitation.

Table 13
Women (all ages) cohabiting with and without children under 18 as a percentage of all women

Year	No children	With children	Total
1991	2,1%	13,3%	15,5%
1992	2,3%	14,2%	16,6%
1993	2,6%	16,0%	18,6%
1994	2,8%	16,3%	19,2%
1995	2,9%	16,5%	19,4%
1996	3,0%	16,4%	19,5%
1997	3,1%	15,8%	19,0%

1998	3,1%	15,5%	18,5%
1999	3,0%	15,5%	18,4%
2000	2,8%	15,4%	18,1%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir-own calculations

By examining the age distribution of cohabiting couples (in the year 1993) it becomes clear that cohabitation is not only a temporary family form before marriage, since it is also quite common in older age groups. Due to lack of statistics on cohabiting couples it is however quite difficult to put the theory of the relevance of cohabitation as a more lasting family form to the test, but the indication is that for the majority it is a temporary condition.

Table 14
Cohabitors: Age by sex in
1993

	Women	Men
16-24	30%	23%
25-34	30%	37%
35-44	15%	15%
45-64	5%	6%

Source: Karlsson, 1994

There exists no official statistic on the number of past cohabitations not ending in marriage by current marital status and sex and in general the statistics on cohabitation is not included in the statistics on previous civil status before marriage.

In a survey that was conducted in the year 1993, 19% of the respondents had dissolved either cohabitation or marriage. Of those 57% got divorced but 43% dissolved cohabitation. The medium length of marriages was 10.3 years but cohabitation was much smaller or 4,1 year (Júlíusdóttir et. al, 1995: 41). It is indeed strange that so limited official statistics are available on cohabitation and dissolution of cohabitation, keeping in mind that cohabiting couples have been such a large proportion of Icelandic families for decades.

Never marrying

The proportion of 30- 34 years never married at each time has fluctuated considerably during the period from 1930-1990. These figures mirror the marriage rates at each time and the prevalent age of first marriage. The figures are lowest in the 70s for both genders when the marriage age was quite low. It starts to rise again in 1980 and in particular in the 1990.

Table 15
Proportion of 30–34 years
unmarried (never married)
each year

Year	Men	Women
1930	41,7%	35,5%
1940	43,9%	33,8%
1950	38,1%	26,7%
1960	27,1%	17,3%
1970	19,8%	11,0%
1980	20,9%	12,6%
1990	42,7%	30,8%

Source: Statistics Iceland:
Hagskinna, 1997

It should also be noticed that there has also been a considerable rise of one-person households (Yearbook of Nordic Statistics, 2001).

Living apart together and living together apart relationships

There is a long tradition for one spouse, usually the man, to be absent from his family for a longer period of time due to work. The breadwinner then traveled away to be able to support his family. This is also well known phenomena in the 1990s and increasingly usual also for women who move away from their families for longer period in order to work or go to school. One good example about “living-together-apart” relationships is the family pattern that is created by the long stays at sea for the seamen at the biggest factory trawlers which can be away from harbor for up to two months at a time.

The phenomenon of couples “living–apart-together” is a more recent phenomenon but during the 1990s it did become possible for a married couple to register their homes at different addresses. There is however no statistics available on these family forms and therefore it is not possible to state how common they are.

Births

Births and fertility

Iceland has for a long time had relatively high fertility and birth rates in comparison with most European countries. Despite relatively higher figures, they have followed the same overall pattern of decline for the past decades. This has also been the case during the 1990’s, both fertility and birth rates have decreased. There was a slight increase in births in the year 2000 but already in 2001 the decline was apparent again and now for the first time in the century Iceland is experiencing fertility rates below replacement level.

By law parents have maintenance duty until the child is 18 years old, when children gain independence. Children's rights to best possible care and education are insured through different laws and Iceland has ratified UN's child convention (Erlendsdóttir, 1976;2000).

Table 16
Fertility and birth rate

Year	Fertility rate	Births pr 1.000 inhabitants
1991	2,19	17,57
1992	2,21	17,65
1993	2,22	17,53
1994	2,14	16,70
1995	2,08	15,99
1996	2,12	16,10
1997	2,04	15,32
1998	2,05	15,26
1999	1,99	14,80
2000	2,08	15,35

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Tables 2.30 & 2.33

As already mentioned in the section on population, the proportion of inhabitants in Iceland that have been born in other countries or have foreign residence is still relatively low. Official family statistics on inhabitants of different nationalities have been lacking in richness. However by examining figures for number of births per 1000 women by different nationalities it appears that there is some difference between groups of inhabitants from different countries (table 17).

Table 17
Fertility rates in Iceland by nationality

Nationalities	Number of children pr. 1000 women
Iceland	66,9
Denmark	87,6
Poland	54,8
Philippians	97,5
Thailand	60,6

Source: Data from Statistics Iceland

Births outside marriage

Iceland has experience high figures for births outside marriage for more than a century (even in comparison with the other Nordic countries). The laws have ensured the rights of children born out of wedlock in various ways and the concepts illegitimate and legitimate

children were abolished from the laws in 1991. The attitudes towards lone motherhood are according to the international value survey quite positive in Iceland. In 1991 84% of the respondents answered that they considered it acceptable that a woman wished to have a child as a lone mother even if she did not wish to make any kind of permanent commitment to the father (Jónsson and Ólafsson, 1991). Results from different research on lone motherhood in Iceland also indicate that the lone motherhood is highly accepted and that the attitudes are fairly neutral (Júlíusdóttir, 1989; Kissman, 1989). Thus historically there is a high acceptance towards births outside marriage and during the 1990s the majority of births took place outside marriage. The figure is still growing and in 2000 65,2% of births were births outside marriage.

Table 18
Live births outside marriage as a percentage of live births

Year	Percent
1991	56,4%
1992	57,3%
1993	58,3%
1994	59,6%
1995	60,9%
1996	60,7%
1997	65,2%
1998	64,0%
1999	62,6%
2000	65,2%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir 2.32

The fact that children are born outside of marriage does not implicate that they are born into lone parent families since the majority of the children born out of wedlock is indeed born to cohabiting parents. During the 1990s there has been some fluctuation between years but the general pattern is that 80% of the children are born into cohabiting families while 20% are children of lone parents.

Table 19
Types of births outside marriage as a percentage of all births outside marriage

Year	Cohabiting parents	Non-cohabiting parents	Total
1991	81,6%	18,4%	100,0%
1992	79,6%	20,4%	100,0%
1993	85,7%	14,3%	100,0%
1994	84,2%	15,8%	100,0%
1995	82,0%	18,0%	100,0%
1996	83,1%	16,9%	100,0%
1997	77,8%	22,2%	100,0%
1998	80,7%	19,3%	100,0%
1999	80,5%	19,5%	100,0%
2000	78,6%	21,4%	100,0%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.32

By examining the combination of births outside marriage and the age of the mothers, it is clear that the majority of the mothers in the youngest age groups give birth to children outside marriage. But the figure for the youngest age group has been more or less stable during the 1990s. The increase is relatively higher for the older age groups and there is even an increase in the group for 40 years and older.

Table 20
Births outside marriage as a percentage of all births in each age group

Year	- 20 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years	35–39 years	40 years and older
1991	96,6%	81,3%	56,5%	34,6%	33,3%	33,7%
1992	96,5%	83,0%	55,7%	39,3%	31,5%	37,5%
1993	97,0%	83,7%	56,5%	42,1%	36,0%	28,8%
1994	99,6%	84,6%	57,3%	44,6%	36,4%	43,3%
1995	97,1%	86,6%	58,8%	45,4%	40,9%	37,3%
1996	98,2%	87,8%	59,5%	46,5%	36,0%	31,3%
1997	97,6%	88,2%	65,6%	49,3%	44,4%	42,6%
1998	98,5%	89,8%	63,7%	46,6%	43,0%	50,0%
1999	98,1%	87,7%	64,7%	43,4%	39,7%	46,4%
2000	98,8%	88,0%	68,2%	48,3%	42,6%	46,0%

Source: Data from Statistics Iceland

The age of mothers at first childbirth has been increasing continuously but became stable at about 25 years in the latter half of the 1990s. However in the year 2000 the figure went up to 25,4 and whether that is somehow related to the peak in births that year or if it is a first step in a new period of increase remains to be seen. The average mean age for total births has remained stable at 28 years during the decade, but a slight increase can also be observed there.

Table 21
Average mean age of mother at first
and all births

Year	Total births	First births
1991	28,3	24,4
1992	28,4	24,6
1993	28,5	24,8
1994	28,6	24,9
1995	28,7	25,0
1996	28,8	25,0
1997	28,6	25,0
1998	28,8	25,1
1999	28,7	25,0
2000	28,8	25,4

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir
Table 2.31

The age specific fertility rates show that the fertility rates are still highest among 25-28 years old. The rates for the age groups of 20-24 and 30-34 are also, quite high. At the age of 35-44 the figures are, naturally, declining. The fertility rates for the youngest age group 15-19 years are quite high, but have declined during the 1990s. Even bigger decline is to be found in the age group of 20-24 years old. The rates for the older age groups are fluctuating without showing a decisive trend or bigger changes. Data on social class of parents at first live births is not available.

Table 22
Births, 2001: Age specific fertility rates 1991-2001

Year	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
1991	28,4	101,9	137,1	107,5	52,4	10,0
1992	26,4	103,8	141,2	108,3	52,4	9,9
1993	22,9	104,9	143,5	109,1	52,3	11,6
1994	23,1	98,6	137,2	106,3	53,3	9,8
1995	23,4	94,1	128,8	110,6	50,2	8,4
1996	22,1	93,1	134,7	109,8	55,4	8,4
1997	24,5	92,4	126,2	105,7	49,6	9,5
1998	24,1	88,5	131,5	104,8	49,7	10,6
1999	23,7	88,3	122,6	103,4	52,6	8,3
2000	22,5	88,4	130,4	112,4	50,6	10,5

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.33

Minor fraction of births to the youngest fathers takes place within marriage/matrimony while about a half of all births in the age groups 30 years and older take place within marriage.

Table 23
Paternities, inside marriage live births: age of father as a % of all paternities

Year	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40 +
1994	0,0%	10,1%	31,9%	50,4%	61,4%	56,0%
1995	2,6%	8,6%	33,0%	50,3%	56,2%	48,5%
1996	0,0%	10,4%	28,7%	50,1%	60,3%	52,8%
1997	0,0%	6,4%	26,3%	46,0%	51,5%	50,1%
1998	0,0%	5,5%	26,2%	46,5%	58,3%	49,1%
1999	0,0%	8,2%	26,8%	49,2%	56,6%	50,0%
2000	0,0%	7,8%	24,0%	42,5%	54,9%	51,5%
2001	0,0%	8,8%	26,8%	46,1%	58,0%	47,9%

Source: Data from Statistics Iceland

Completed family size

There has been a considerable change in the composition of nuclear families since 1965. Married couples with children, which constituted 60% of nuclear families in 1965, dropped down to 34% of nuclear families in 2000. Accordingly, there has been a rise in other family forms, mainly cohabitation, and to a lesser degree single parent families.

There has also been a considerable decline in nuclear family size, from 3,6 persons in 1965 down to less than 2,96 persons in 2000.

Table 24
Nuclear families by family type and size, years 1965, 1975, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000

Year	1965	1975	1985	1990	1995	2000
Population in 1.000	193	219	242	256	268	283
-In nuclear families, total	77%	75%	72%	72%	72%	73%
-Not in nuclear families	23%	25%	28%	28%	28%	27%
Nuclear families (in 1.000) ¹	41	50	57	62	65	70
Nuclear families by family type¹						
-Married couples without children	26%	29%	33%	35%	36%	34%
-Married couples with children	60%	56%	45%	39%	34%	34%
-Cohabiting couples without children	1%	1%	2%	3%	4%	4%
-Cohabiting couples with children	3%	3%	8%	11%	14%	13%
-Lone fathers with children	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
-Lone mothers with children	9%	10%	11%	12%	11%	14%
Average size of nuclear families	3,61	3,28	3,04	2,97	2,94	2,96
-Married couples without children	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0
Married couples with children	4,48	4,11	3,93	3,91	3,91	3,96
Cohabiting couples without children	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0	2,0
Cohabiting couples with children	4,12	3,63	3,59	3,66	3,70	3,73
Lone fathers with children	2,52	2,49	2,23	2,21	2,19	2,27
Lone mothers with children	2,54	2,45	2,33	2,39	2,44	2,52

Note:

¹ A nuclear family refers to all couples (married and cohabiting), their children 15 years and under single men and women who live with their children 15 years and under as well as those children. Persons 16 years and over who live with their parents are not included in nuclear families and the same applies to single parents with children 16 years and over.

Source; Statistics Iceland: Hagskinna, 1997, table 2.17 & 2.20; Landshagir Table 29

Aspirations

According to the value survey conducted in Iceland in 1990, the emphasis the Icelanders put on children is clear. 54% of the respondents believed that 3 children is the ideal and childlessness and having one child was not considered to be ideal. 24% believed that 2 children was the ideal number, 17% 4 children, 3% five and 1 % six or more (Jónsson and Ólafsson, 1991).

Abortion

Abortions have increased during the 1990s. It is difficult to offer an explanation of why this increase takes place, since at the same time sexual education and the quality of contraception's have been increased. The increase in abortions is biggest among the youngest age group. By higher age a more stabilized pattern emerges and the oldest age group even shows a decline.

Table 25
Percentage of "conceptions" ending in abortion (conception = life
births + abortions)

Year	% Abortions of conception	Induced abortion per 1,000 live births
1991	13%	145
1992	14%	161
1993	15%	179
1994	15%	174
1995	16%	189
1996	16%	197
1997	18%	222
1998	18%	216
1999	19%	231

Source: Statistics Iceland; Landshagir- partly own calculations

Table 26
Percentage of conceptions (births + abortions) leading to abortion by age

Year	20 years and younger	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years	35–39 years	40 years and older
1991	31%	15%	9%	7%	11%	35%
1992	34%	17%	9%	10%	13%	34%
1993	41%	17%	10%	11%	15%	30%
1994	40%	18%	9%	10%	14%	29%
1995	40%	21%	10%	9%	15%	31%
1996	49%	19%	11%	8%	15%	28%
1997	47%	22%	10%	11%	16%	33%
1998	50%	21%	11%	10%	15%	27%
1999	47%	22%	13%	11%	15%	31%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir – own calculations

Teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancies have not decreased pr 1000 in the age group in the last years. The rate per 1000 was in 1991 41,2 but in 1999 it was 45,1. The difference is that more pregnancies do not lead to life birth but abortions. The rate for live births was in 1991 28,4 but was in 1999 23,7. The rate for abortions has increased from 12, 8 per 1000 to 21,4.

Table 27
Teenage (15-19 years) birth and abortion rates (conception rates)

	Live births pr. 1000 women	Induced abortion per 1,000 women	Abortion as a percent of births + aborts
1991	28,4	12,8	31%
1992	26,4	14,1	34%
1993	22,9	15,9	41%
1994	23,1	15,5	40%
1995	23,4	15,3	40%
1996	22,1	20,6	49%
1997	24,5	21,7	47%
1998	24,1	24,1	50%
1999	23,7	21,4	47%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.2 & 19.20 –partly own calculations

When live births pr. 1000 women is examined both for age and nationality there are some indications that there are some differences among the different groups, but it is impossible to make any conclusions since the number of births in each age group is still too small to draw any conclusion.

Table 27
Fertility rates in Iceland by nationality and age

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
Iceland	22,9	87,0	130,9	104,9	52,1	9,7
Denmark	8,5	61,5	145,6	138,2	75,9	8,1
Poland	23,3	77,0	79,2	42,9	30,7	7,2
Philippines	22,7	122,4	142,9	105,5	44,4	27,0
Thailand	46,5	50,6	82,5	90,9	44,1	22,4

Source: Data from Statistics Iceland

Lone Parents

One of the characteristics of Icelandic families is the traditionally high proportion of lone motherhood (Gunnlaugsson, 1985; 1988; 1993). During the 1990s there is some increase both among families of lone mothers and lone fathers. However there is no panel data available that could cast some light on how families are moving from two to one parent stage or vice versa in their life cycle. The data on lone mothers is not available for divorced, previously cohabiting, previously in registered partnership, lone, widowed or single mothers. Thus it is difficult to make any further analysis based on the official statistics on the types of lone parent families. Data on the civil status of mothers at birth provides a certain indication but that can also change in a short period of time.

Table 28
Percentage Lone mothers and Lone fathers, as a proportion of all families with dependent children

Year	Lone mothers	Lone fathers
1991	18,0%	1,4%
1992	19,4%	1,4%
1993	21,8%	1,3%
1994	22,3%	1,3%
1995	22,9%	1,3%
1996	23,1%	1,3%
1997	22,4%	1,5%
1998	22,1%	1,5%
1999	21,3%	1,7%
2000	20,4%	1,9%

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir – own calculations

Lone parents tend to have fewer children than cohabiting or married couples. The figures are more or less stable but slight fluctuation can though be noticed. By comparing 1991

and 2000 it seems as if the general tendency is an increase in numbers of children for all family types.

Table 29
Average number of children in lone parent families compared to couple families

Year	Married with children	Con-sensual union with children	Lone parent families	Lone father	Lone mother
1991	1,91	1,68	1,40	1,21	1,41
1992	1,91	1,69	1,40	1,22	1,42
1993	1,91	1,70	1,40	1,23	1,41
1994	1,91	1,71	1,40	1,20	1,41
1995	1,91	1,70	1,42	1,19	1,44
1996	1,90	1,71	1,43	1,19	1,45
1997	1,90	1,71	1,44	1,21	1,46
1998	1,89	1,70	1,45	1,20	1,46
1999	1,93	1,72	1,47	1,25	1,49
2000	1,96	1,73	1,50	1,27	1,52

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.20

When examining the age distribution of lone mothers it is clear that lone motherhood is not a phenomenon that is to be found among all age groups and that actually the age distribution is quite even between the age groups.

Table 30
Age of lone mothers

Age-distribution of lone-mothers	Percent
18 – 24 years	14%
25 – 29	19%
30 – 34	18%
35 – 39	20%
40 years and older	30%
Total	100%

Source: Data from Statistics Iceland

Step parenting

There exists not official data on stepfamilies with dependent children by family type. According to a survey conducted in the year 1994 among more than 1000 families, stepfamilies are 10.7 percent of all families with children. 76,9 % of families with children are two parents families (thereof 4,3% with grandparents) and 12,5 % were lone parents families (thereof 3,2% with grandparents) (Júlíusdóttir et al. 1995).

Table 34
Types of families in Iceland year 1994. Results from a survey.

Types of families	Number	% of total group of families	% of families with children
Couples with own children	523	50,2	72,6
Couples with own children and stepchildren	77	7,3	10,7
Couples with own children and parents	31	2,9	4,3
Lone with own children	67	6,3	9,3
Lone with own children and parents	23	2,2	3,2
Only adults	321	30,3	-
Total	1041	100%	100%

Source: Júlíusdóttir et al., 1995:40

Absent parents (fathers and mothers)

Official statistics are not available on the number of parents who do not share residence with their children. By examining the figures on custody of children it is clear that it is still more usual that children share residence with their mothers and traditionally the custody has been given to the mother after a divorce. However during the 1990s Iceland legalized joint custody as an option and the use of it has increased during the period in question. Usually it does though involve primary habitation of the child with the mother.

Table 35
Divorce and the custody of children, % of total divorced couples with children

Year	Mother holds custody	Father holds custody	Joint custody
1991	88	11	1
1992	84	4	11
1993	86	8	7
1994	71	7	23
1995	62	4	35
1996	66	1	33
1997	57	4	39
1998	54	5	39
1999	58	4	38
2000	49	4	47

Source: Statistics Iceland: Landshagir Table 2.29

Visiting

In a survey, non-residential parents were asked how their relationship with their child/children was. It should be noted that the survey was conducted before joint custody was legalized in Iceland. The results are that more than one third of the respondents (majority being fathers) was unsatisfied with the visiting rights and 17,7% had no contact with their child/children (Júlíusdóttir, 1995).

Table 36
Visiting rights with non-residential parents

	Single	Divorced with custody	Divorced without custody	Total
How are the visiting rights organized?***				
According to agreement	9,9	19,4	21,8	16,9
More than according to agreement	6,3	16,6	38,2	16
Less than according to agreement	1,4	14,2	0	8,8
Changes as times goes by	51,4	35,6	38,2	40,5
None	31	14,2	1,8	17,7
How do you feel about the arrangements ***				
Accepts	39,6	54,2	71,7	52,1
Neutral	19,4	10,4	18,3	14,0
Disagree	41	35,4	10	33,9

Source: Júlíusdóttir et al., 1995

Same sex parents

Gay couples are by law neither allowed ³to undergo artificial insemination nor adopt children (Lög um staðfesta samvist nr. 87/1996). In cases where a gay mother or father enters a registered partnership his or hers partner gets by law full parental responsibilities (custody) towards his/hers step child. In cases where the biological parents have had joint custody the biological non resident parent can also hold custody, thus a child can have more than two parents (Barnalög nr. 9/1981).

Leaving home

When a child becomes 18 years old he/she is registered as living alone despite whether he/she keeps on living in the parental home or moves to another residence. Therefore the

³ The child law are under revision right now and the fact that by law a child can have four parents with parental obligations (custody) has called for a revision of this (Althingistidindi, 2002).

official statistics do not provide information on when children move from neither their parental home nor how common it is that three generations live together in the same household. It is also common that children from the countryside and smaller communities do move to bigger municipalities in order to go to high school or university.

As already mentioned in the section on stepfamilies, the survey among 1041 families showed that it was not uncommon that three generations lived together in one household, or 5.1 % of all families (Júlíusdóttir et al. 1995). Unfortunately the survey does not account for the relationship when there are only adults in the household so the number of children older than 18 living with parents is not known.

Table 37
Type of families in Iceland year 1994

Types of families	Number	% of total group of families	% of families with children
Couples with own children	523	50,2	72,6
Couples with own children and step-children	77	7,3	10,7
Couples with own children and parents	31	2,9	4,3
Lone with own children	67	6,3	9,3
Lone with own children and parents	23	2,2	3,2
Only adults	321	30,3	-
Total	1041	100%	100%

Source: Júlíusdóttir et al., 1995

However an indication of how usual it was for young people to start cohabitation is to be found in the survey, when it is asked where people started their first cohabitation, then 27% of the respondents answer in the home of the parents or parents in law and 11% answer that it was in a house or flat owned by the parents or parents in law. 62% started cohabitation in their own apartment (rented or owned) (Júlíusdóttir, et. al. 1995).

When the respondents were asked why they moved away from home the majority answered that they started cohabitation. The group of respondents that answered “other reasons” was quite big, or 40.9 %. Our guess would be that in this category the many young people that move away from home to seek education are to be counted for.

Table37
Why people move away from home?

Reasons	%
Started to cohabit	48,4
Wanted to live independently	31,3
Wanted to get away from home	13,5
Other reasons	40,9

Source: Júlíusdóttir et al., 1995

Conclusion

The demographic trends in Iceland during the 1990s are mainly parts of processes that have been ongoing for decades, like the rise in marriage age and the decline in fertility rates. At the same time there are some signs of new directions like the stagnation in divorce rates. During the 1990s there has also been new additions to the variety of family forms; by law it became possible for gay couples to confirm their partnership and for divorcing parents it became possible to obtain joint custody and parental responsibilities towards their children. The increase of inhabitants in Iceland who have been born in foreign countries and the increase in new citizens also add to the variety in the demography of families during the period in question.

During the 1990s marriage rates and marriage age have been raised. At the same time there is a stagnation in divorce rates and marriages seem to last longer. To what extent this can be explained by increased mobility in cohabitations is however impossible to tell, due to lack of statistics on cohabitation. This lack of official statistical data is also evident regarding data on composition of step families, very limited information is available on the how families are reformed. The same applies for the mobility between family forms; no panel or cohort data is available that could cast some lights on the great changes that Icelandic families undertake each year. The annual statistics on divorces tell us that the number of children that experience changes in their families during their childhood is high. There is also a lack of statistics on when children leave their parental homes.

Statistics on birth shows that Iceland has during the 1990s for the first time in the century reached the historical moment of experiencing fertility rates below replacement level. There is an ongoing constant increase in the number of children born out of wedlock and the rate is in 2000 up to 64%. However only 14% of these are families headed by lone mothers and 50% are families of cohabiting parents. A striking finding is that by adding the number of abortion pr. 1000 women 20 years and younger to the number of births the result is that pregnancies among this age groups has not decreased during the 1990s. However an increase in abortions leads to lower number of births among women younger than 20 years.

Despite the rich data on families the official statistics do not present a holistic picture of all family forms or the life cycles of families. The seriousness of this is obviously debatable, but the consequences are nevertheless that the picture of the demographical trends in Iceland in 1990s is limited and that the families are moving far beyond the framework of the available statistics.

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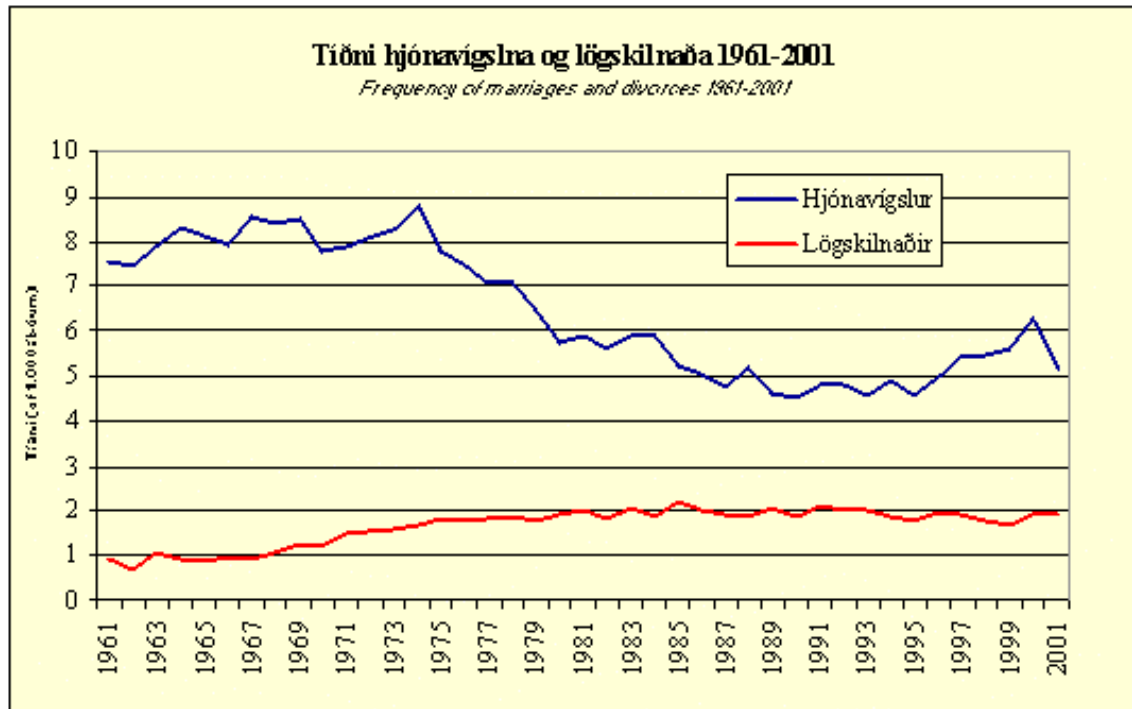
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Appendix



Statistics Iceland