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# Gender and Re-partnering after Divorce in Four Central European and Baltic Countries

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the demographic and social determinants of re-partnering after divorce in four Baltic and Central European transition countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary), which, despite their common transition paths after the 1990s, developed distinct political economies and have different gender and family cultures. The article explores how the re-partnering chances of divorced women and men are shaped by the social divisions of gender, parenthood, age, and education within various transition-society contexts. In general, the findings support the argument about the relevance and mediating role of the societal context in the process of re-partnering. Although we found an overall gender disadvantage in re-partnering across all countries, in more traditional contexts, parenthood undermines the chances of re-partnering for women but not for men. The negative effect of older age for re-partnering after divorce is almost universal for men, but is context-sensitive for women. Education does not affect women's chances of re-partnering, but it does play a significant role in the attractiveness of men in more traditional settings. The analysis is based on the partnership and parenthood histories recorded in the Generations and Gender Survey.

**Keywords:** re-partnering, divorce, gender culture, Central European countries, Baltic countries.

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## Introduction

In contemporary society, divorce has become a frequent life-course event, but it does not always mark the end of personal partnership history, and at some point in their life course divorced women and men re-partner. Re-partnering after divorce can be advantageous and compensate for some economic and social losses associated with divorce. Though after a divorce men and women experience an economic setback, women with children become an especially economically vul-

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nerable group [Andress and Hummelsheim 2009]. Limited economic resources have a deteriorating effect on their living conditions and negatively affect a child's success at school [Gähler and Palmtag 2014] and psychological well-being [Gähler and Garriga 2013]. Empirical evidence suggests that re-partnering is an effective strategy to overcome the financial distress experienced after divorce, especially for divorced mothers [Janse, Mortelmans and Snoeckx 2009]. It also enhances the emotional well-being of divorced men and women [Fokkema and Dykstra 2002; Sweeney 2010].

The chances of establishing a new union are, however, shaped by gender, parenthood status, and an individual's socio-economic resources [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Skew, Evans and Gray 2009; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013]. Moreover, research has shown the mediating role of the wider contextual factors of re-partnering [Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008]. Among them is the gender culture that shapes women's and men's normative expectations and behavioural choices when it comes to the division of parenting tasks in post-divorce families and ideas about the attractiveness of the prospective partner [Goldscheider, Kaufman and Sessler 2009]. Gender culture is also supported through employment, family, gender, and child custody policies that determine the opportunity structures for divorced women and men to secure their overall well-being and to develop their family and partnership relationships. Re-partnering chances differ depending on how much the gender culture has a traditional or egalitarian orientation [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008], which can be distinguished through gender divisions in public and private spheres.

This paper aims to explore the determinants of the re-partnering of divorced women and men in four Central European and Baltic (CEB) countries: Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary. Taking into account contextual characteristics, among them the gender culture, we analyse how the transition from being single after divorce to re-partnering is structured by gender, age, parenthood status, and education. In this article we do not aim to prove statistically the mediating role of macro-level factors on the predictors of re-partnering, but rather seek to use country settings to develop an explanatory framework and contextualise the findings. All four countries analysed represent the arena of a natural experiment that began with the societal transitions of the 1990s and in many respects reshaped the setting of individual life-course and family trajectories. Under a broad lens, CEB countries could be seen as a homogeneous area, but a more comprehensive view reveals the variety of their transition paths and the possibly diverse outcomes in the context of re-partnering after divorce. Consequently, can we expect similarity in re-partnering trends and determinants given the shared historical fate of the countries? Or, conversely, can we expect variety, indicating the substantial role that country-level policies, gender culture, and demographic contexts have on the determinants of re-partnering? We try to answer these questions using the partnership and parenthood histories recorded in the Generations

and Gender Survey, which is designed on the basis of the life-course approach [Vikat et al. 2007]. In our analysis we used the 1950–1979 birth cohorts, which include people who registered their first divorce in or after the year 1990.

We believe that this paper could contribute to the existing literature on re-partnering in several ways. First, it brings into perspective the empirical evidence on re-partnering trends and determinants in CEB countries. Until recently, the research on re-partnering was predominantly focused on the countries of Northern and Western Europe and the USA. CEB countries have been included in a few studies, but the results are based on older datasets and cover only the demographic trends of re-partnering [Prskawetz et al. 2003], focus on the comparative West-East perspective [Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013], or report only findings for one country [Földháyi 2010]. Second, we hope that the study can contribute to the theoretical discussion about the micro-macro social mechanisms of post-divorce family dynamics in post-communist countries.

The paper is organised into several sections. It opens with a brief introduction to the existing empirical evidence, followed by a description of the theoretical background, a summary of relevant country-level contextual characteristics, and the formulation of a research hypothesis. The adjunct section describes the dataset and the methodology and is followed by a description of the empirical results of the study. The paper closes with a discussion and an outline of the conclusions from the analysis.

## **Previous research**

In general, re-partnering after divorce in Europe is widely understudied. After reviewing the studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, de Graaf and Kalmijn concluded that ‘the number of studies is small and the research area is not growing’ [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003: 1460]. Although the body of research expanded in the 2000s, knowledge about the social mechanisms of re-partnering in CEB countries remains very sketchy. So far the gap has been modestly filled by two comparative studies that also included an analysis of several post-communist countries [Prskawetz et al. 2003; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013].

What in general is known about the demographic and socio-economic determinants of re-partnering relevant to our study? First, there is consistent evidence about the gender gap in re-partnering: divorced women have a lower propensity to enter into a new union than men [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008; Skew, Evans and Gray 2009; Beaujouan 2012; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013; Gray 2015]. Age is negatively associated with chances of re-partnering after divorce, and the effect is more pronounced for women [Lampard, Peggs, 1999; de Graaf, Kalmijn 2003; Skew, Evans, Gray 2009]. Studies concerning Central and Eastern European countries (Russia, Romania, Hungary) also corroborate these findings [Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013; Földháyi 2010].

The results on the role of children from a previous marriage in re-partnering are inconsistent for women and men. Although there are more studies that demonstrate the negative effect of motherhood on re-partnering, some report a non-significant or positive effect (for a review, see de Graaf and Kalmijn [2003]). Furthermore, some studies note that women's chances of re-partnering are not determined by their motherhood status per se, but by the age of the children. Divorced mothers with older children have higher chances of re-partnering [Skew, Evans and Gray 2009]. Overall, it seems that the chances of entering a new partnership are undermined not by gender, but by parenthood status, because divorced women without children have re-partnering paths similar to men [Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013]. The effect of fatherhood also varies from positive [Wu and Schimmele 2005] to negative [Sweeney 1997] or insignificant [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013] and is country-specific. Though the effect of non-resident children on men's transition into a new union is mixed, fathers with co-resident children have similar chances of starting a new partnership as mothers with co-resident children [Beaujouan 2012; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013; Vanassche et al. 2015].

Contradictory results on the role of children are reported in the few studies that exist on post-communist countries. For Hungary, Földháyi [2010] did not find strong support for the negative effect of children on women's chances of re-partnering while for Russia and Romania the overall effect is negative [Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013]. Both studies also report lower chances of re-partnering for fathers with co-resident children.

Findings about the socio-economic predictors of re-partnering after divorce are also inconsistent. For women, some studies report that education has no effect on the chances of re-partnering [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Dewilde and Uunk 2008], while others report that it has a positive effect [Sweeney 2010]. For men, higher educational achievement increases the chances of re-partnering [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003]. In post-communist countries, women's education plays no significant role in re-partnering, while for men higher education increases the likelihood of re-partnering in Hungary [Földháyi 2010] and has no effect in Russia and Romania [Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013].

Other socio-economic predictors, such as employment and income, also show mixed effects on re-partnering, especially for women. In regard to employment, some studies report a positive association [Lampard and Peggs 1999], others a negative one [Wu and Schimmele 2005] or no significant association [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003]. Dewilde and Uunk [2008], based on a comparative study, conclude that income loss after divorce has a positive effect only on the re-partnering chances of poor women. Findings on men's employment and re-partnering are more consistent and report a positive association [Lampard and Peggs 1999; de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003].

The diversity of the findings highlights the significant mediating role played by the cultural and institutional context. The study on Italy by Meggiolaro and

Ongaro [2008] showed that demographic and socio-economic predictors have a different effect on women's re-partnering chances in the more traditional south and in the modernised north of the country, where the gender roles in the public and private domains are more egalitarian. For example, while children from a previous marriage decrease the chances of entering into a new union in southern Italy, the effect of motherhood is less relevant in northern Italy [Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008]. Less favourable institutional employment opportunities for women are often highlighted as a factor contributing to the importance of re-partnering [Jansen, Mortelmans and Snoecks 2009]. Dewilde and Uunk [2008] found that the effect of post-divorce poverty on women's remarriage is equally strong in low-welfare and high-welfare countries and highlighted the possible mediating role played by cultural attitudes towards divorce and remarriage and by the informal family support network.

### **Theoretical framework**

Re-partnering after divorce is usually articulated by examining the needs, attractiveness, and meeting opportunities of divorced individuals [Becker 1981; Goldscheider and Waite 1986; Oppenheimer 1988; de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003]. In some cases this analytical triad is reduced to the dyad of preferences and opportunities, the latter integrating attractiveness and opportunities to meet [Mott and Moore 1983].

Although the needs behind re-partnering can be emotional, personal, economic, or social, considering the empirical constraints of the study we will discuss only the latter two. The economic need to re-partner could be driven by a deterioration in a person's economic conditions after divorce, which is more common in households headed by single divorced women [Andress et al. 2006]. For poor divorced women, re-partnering could therefore be an individual strategy for improving the economic conditions of their household and, unlike more economically independent women, they may be forced to re-partner 'for the money' [Dewilde and Uunk 2008: 395]. The economic need to re-partner may also be shaped by institutional factors. A generous welfare state can mitigate the negative economic consequences of divorce, support women's employment, and enhance economic independence and thus reduce the need to re-partner for economic reasons. Conversely, if the intervention of social policy is negligible, dependency on the market is high, and inequalities are large, the economic need to re-partner is greater.

The social need to re-partner could be generated by expectations about re-establishing one's status as a married or partnered person. Depending on the societal context, being a single divorced person can be experienced as a deviation from the normative life course and may motivate a person to re-partner. We might expect that higher social pressure to re-partner would be more common in

societies with a more traditional family and gender culture. On the other hand, in these settings the social need to re-partner may be counteracted by the stigmatisation of divorced persons, and this could in particular be the case where divorces are not common.

The attractiveness of a person in the partnership market affects a person's chances of entering into a new union after divorce. As discussed above, older age decreases the attractiveness of a person in the partnership market, but more so for women than for men. Men tend to marry women younger than they are [Morgan and Kunkel 1998] and this results in a smaller partnership market for divorced women. Moreover, in countries with a more traditional gender culture it is likely that older divorced women will have fewer chances of re-partnering than in other settings.

Co-resident children decrease the attractiveness of a parent in the partnership market because the role of the stepfather/stepmother presents the prospective partner with additional personal and economic responsibilities. Divorced mothers are also less attractive in a more traditional family and gender setting because a prospective union with them is regarded as unconventional, socially unacceptable, and a challenge to the traditional male identity [Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008], which is based on provision for 'his children and family'. In a similar setting, unions between divorced mothers and divorced fathers, the latter making up a minority, are regarded as more acceptable, because the traditional role of women is oriented towards caring for children [Goldscheider and Sassler 2006]. In the more egalitarian gender context, children from a previous marriage might have less of an effect on attractiveness, because the gender identities are less based on the gendered division of care and economic provision.

Attractiveness in the partnership market is shaped by personal socio-economic resources. A divorced woman having greater socio-economic resources could increase her chances of re-partnering in societies where the dual-earner family model is dominant and institutionally supported through the de-familialisation of care and gender equality policies. And conversely, a divorced woman with greater socio-economic resources could be more unattractive in societies with a dominant male breadwinner and female caretaker model. As for men, greater socio-economic resources are an attractive asset in the partnership market.

Opportunities to re-partner are influenced by the degree of the de-institutionalisation of the family in society. More divorce means more divorcees and the expansion of the re-partnering market [Stevenson and Wolfers 2007] and more favourable attitudes to re-partnering. Additionally, diversification of family forms expands the opportunities to re-partner in cohabitation, which could be more attractive because of the looser bonds compared with marriage.

## **Context and research hypotheses**

After 1990, all four CEB countries experienced profound political, economic, and social changes affecting family life and gender relations, but a closer look reveals cross-country variations. To begin with, there were significant differences in the starting conditions of the transition in 1990, and this influenced the development paths of the countries. Poland and Hungary had ‘relatively marketised economies already in 1989, while the Baltic countries had to start “from scratch” and to introduce reforms later [Bohle and Greskovits 2007: 447]. The starting disadvantages of the Baltic countries required the introduction of more radical liberal reforms that resulted in spectacular economic growth, but produced large social inequalities. Thus Estonia and Lithuania represent a type of neoliberal capitalism [Norkus 2011], while Poland and Hungary are examples of an embedded neoliberal capitalism [Bohle and Greskovits 2007]. The first is distinguished by market radicalism, high inequality, and social exclusion, and less advancement in the industrial transformation, while the second is less radical in terms of the market and has more efficient welfare schemes, higher social inclusiveness, and more successful industrial policies [Bohle and Greskovits 2007]. The risk of poverty in single-parent households is much higher in the two Baltic countries than it is in Hungary and Poland; moreover, the level of poverty reduction through social benefits is significantly lower in the former than in the latter countries [Report on Progress on Equality between Men and Women 2014].

The CEB countries also vary in regard to the de-familialisation of childcare. Estonia outpaces the other three countries by the share of children between the age of three and mandatory school age that attend formal (day-care) institutions (92%), leaving behind Hungary (75%), Lithuania (65%), and Poland (43%), and this is even more pronounced in the case of children under the age of three [Report on Progress on Equality between Men and Women 2014].

After 1990 the gender culture in CEB countries began moving in the general direction of the re-traditionalisation of gender roles [Glass and Fodor 2007], reinforcing the traditional private/public divide. In this respect, CEB countries diverge from Western and Northern Europe, where gender egalitarianism has gained support over the past decades [Inglehart and Norris 2003]. Despite trends in common, the four countries studied show some variety in their adherence to the traditional gender culture, though the results are highly dependent on the methodological design of the studies. Some reveal the most traditional gender culture to be in Hungary, closely followed by Lithuania, with Poland and Estonia scoring slightly better [Philipov 2008]. The others rank Hungary as the least egalitarian, followed by Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland (the last performing best in regard to egalitarian gender culture) [Fodor and Balogh 2010] or argue that Lithuania and Poland have the most traditional views, followed by Estonia and Hungary [Matysiak 2011]. The Gender Equality Index [Gender Equality Index Report 2013], which comprehensively examines gender relations and attitudes in various spheres of life, ranks Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary in very similar po-

**Table 1. Summary of the contextual country-level characteristics**

	Risk of poverty (economic need)	De-familialisation of childcare (economic need + opportunities)	Gender egalitarianism (attractiveness)	Divorce rate (attractiveness + opportunities)	Possible outcome for re-partnering
Estonia	High	High	Higher	High, long standing	Higher likelihood of re-partnering, less gender-specific
Lithuania	High	Medium	Lower	High, long standing	Higher likelihood of re-partnering, more gender-specific
Poland	Lower	Low	Lower	Low	Lower likelihood of re-partnering, more gender-specific
Hungary	Lower	Medium	Lower	High, recent	Lower likelihood of re-partnering, more gender-specific

sitions, while Estonia ranks somewhat higher in terms of gender egalitarianism. The countries’ different values in the Gender Equality Index mainly stem from large gender inequalities in the domestic sphere, most notably the amount of time spent (by men and women) on childcare and household tasks in Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary. This is a strong indication of cross-country differences, because gender divisions in the private sphere are a litmus test for gender egalitarianism in societies with a long pattern of high female employment [Esping-Andersen 2009; Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegård 2015].

All four countries vary according to demographic divorce trends. For Estonia and Lithuania, high divorce rates (total divorce rate—TDR) have been common for more than three decades, although the former outpaced the latter (see Appendix Table 1). In Hungary and especially Poland, marital instability before 1990 was significantly lower. In Estonia and Lithuania, the TDR remained at a steadily high level after 1990, while it increased significantly in Hungary and remained at the same low level in Poland. In the first decade of the 21st century, Estonia, Lithuania, and Hungary experienced some convergence in divorce rates, while Poland remained an outlier. A summary of country-level contextual characteristics is provided in Table 1.

We assume that country-level contextual factors shape the needs of divorced persons and their attractiveness and opportunities to re-partner. The economic need to re-partner after divorce should be higher in the countries where depend-

ency on the market is higher, in particular for groups at risk of poverty, in particular single mothers with lower levels of education. Since it helps to combine employment and childcare, the de-familialisation of childcare should be expected to reduce the economic need to re-partner, but only for those people with good employment. In addition, the de-familialisation of childcare should favourably affect the meeting opportunities of divorced parents, since it gives them more time for social activities. The attractiveness of divorced people in the re-partnering market would likely be higher in more egalitarian gender settings, especially for women; their likelihood to re-partner would there be less affected by such demographic characteristics as age or motherhood status. A long-standing high divorce rate should also positively influence the attractiveness and consequently the likelihood of re-partnering, because it increases the pool of potential partners and reduces the stigmatisation of divorcees. Since the pool of prospective partners is larger, it is also likely to favourably affect opportunities to meet a new partner.

On the basis of these assumptions, we formulate several main research hypotheses. First, we expect that the overall level of re-partnering after divorce will be higher and less gender-specific where the gender culture is more egalitarian and the prevalence of divorce high and long [H1]. Second, we expect that the likelihood of divorced women re-partnering will be undermined by older age and motherhood in countries with a more traditional gender culture and a less pronounced long-term divorce trend. In these contexts, men's chances of re-partnering will be not significantly affected by older age and fatherhood [H2]. Third, divorced women with lower socio-economic status will be more likely to re-partner in countries with a higher risk of poverty and low childcare de-familialisation [H3]. Fourth, divorced men with greater socio-economic resources are more likely to re-partner in societies with a more traditional gender culture [H4]

## **Data and methods**

We use data sets from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) carried out between 2004 and 2011 in the countries studied. The GGS samples are large and nationally representative and include men and women aged 18–79 and living in non-institutional households [Simard and Franklin 2005]. The surveys recorded complete partnership and fertility histories and dates of events with monthly accuracy [UNECE 2005] and in this regard are a unique dataset in CEB countries. The GGS provides data for seven countries in CEB and Eastern Europe: Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, and Georgia.<sup>1</sup> Several countries were, however, excluded from the research for some analytical and technical reasons. First, we decided to limit our analysis to only the countries

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<sup>1</sup> The Czech data became available after the start of our study.

that have joined the EU because there are some commonalities to the post-communist transition of their institutional frameworks. For that reason, we excluded the Russian Federation and Georgia. Second, for Bulgaria and Romania the groups of women and men divorced after 1990 were too small. These two countries were therefore not included in the following analysis. Overall, the GGS fertility and first-marriages data are fairly accurate from the 1970s onward for many GGS countries; however, for the countries in this study, the data quality so far has been assessed only for Estonia and Hungary [Vergauwen et al. 2015]. We believe that we can partly solve this problem by limiting our observation to the younger birth cohorts. Information on the datasets is provided in Appendix Table 2.

To achieve more macro-contextual homogeneity, we selected only women and men who had registered their first divorce in 1990 or later. We analysed family trajectories from the status of being divorced and single to the status of being re-partnered in the context of a transition society. We considered the birth cohorts of 1950–1979 to reduce the heterogeneity of the individual stages of people's life course. Moreover, this corresponds to the recommendations based on the GGS dataset quality assessments [Vergauwen et al. 2015].

Our dependent variable was the transition from the state of being single after divorce to re-partnering, which could be either cohabitation or marriage. The population at risk were all women and men born between 1950 and 1979, married at some point in their life, and divorced after 1990. The process time was measured in months elapsed since the divorce. The respondents were followed for ten years after the divorce and right censoring was performed. The time axis was partitioned into ten intervals each twelve months in length. We applied the descriptive life-table and parametric event-history methods. Piecewise constant exponential models [Blossfeld and Rohwer 2002] were used to examine the shift from the state of being single after divorce to re-partnering. The modelling strategy included separate models for every country, followed by models for the sub-populations of men and women. The baseline was time elapsed after divorce measured in years. Additional demographic controls were age at the time of divorce (up to 29, 30–39, and 40 and over), duration of the previous marriage (less than 5 years, 5–9 years, 10–14 years, and more), and parental status. The variable of parental status considered the presence of children and the age of the youngest child at the time of divorce. The variable was calculated using the dates from the fertility calendar and the date of divorce. Five categories were constructed according to the age of the youngest child: 0–2, 3–7, 8–15, 16 and over, and no children. We did not consider the arrangement of child custody, because information was not available for all countries, and if it was provided, the absolute majority of children after divorce resided with the mother (Lithuania—96%). The socioeconomic variable included education and three categories were distinguished (high—ISCED 5–6, medium—ISCED 3–4, low—ISCED 0–2). The GGS dataset does not contain information on the respondent's income at the time of divorce or re-partnering that would be relevant for the purpose of our study. Cultural in-

indicators of religious identity and religiousness are not available for all countries and the dataset records religious identity only at the time of the interview. In the following section, we present the results of the descriptive analysis, followed by the results of the multivariate analysis.

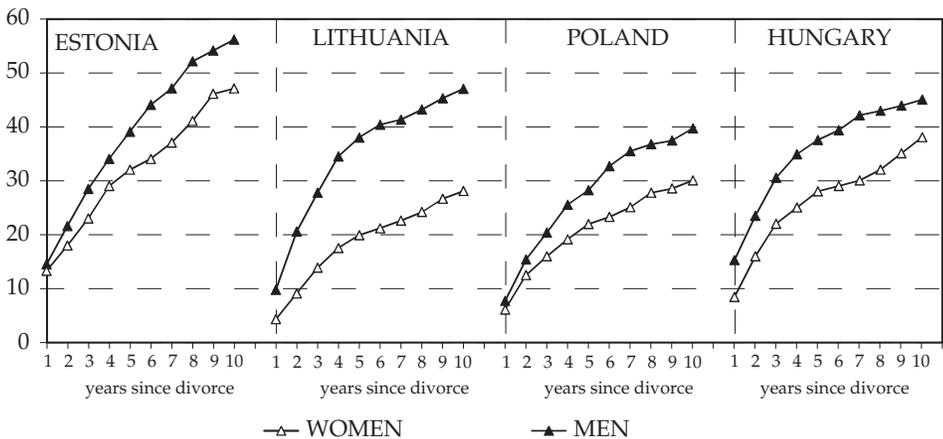
## Results

### Descriptive results

We used the life-table method to provide descriptive statistics on the scope of re-partnering within the period of ten years after divorce. Figure 1 present the trends of re-partnering within each country across gender groups.

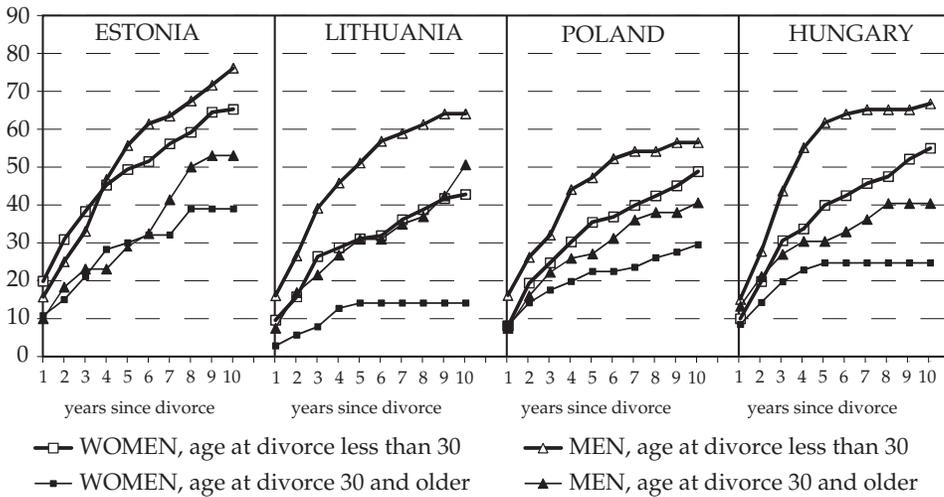
There are significant variations in the level of re-partnering by gender ten years after divorce across the countries. In Estonia almost half of women (47%) have a new partnership within 10 years of divorce, and this is the highest re-partnering level achieved by women. In Hungary divorced women’s re-partnering levels stand at 38%, while the share of women who enter a new union is the lowest in Poland and Lithuania at close to 30% (30% for Poland and 28% for Lithuania, respectively). For men the rate of re-partnering within ten years after divorce is also highest in Estonia (56%), followed by Lithuania (46%), Hungary (45%), and Poland (40%). The descriptive results therefore show that the overall level of re-partnering for men and women is highest in Estonia, where both

**Figure 1. Proportion of men and women who re-partner by time elapsed since divorce (in years) by country**



Source: GGS database, authors’ calculations.

**Figure 2. Proportion of men and women who re-partner by time elapsed since divorce (in years) according to the age at divorce, by country, cohort 1960–1979**



Source: GGS database, authors' calculations.

gender groups re-partner after divorce more frequently than in the other three countries. Hungary occupies an intermediate position, followed by Lithuania, where significant gender differences in re-partnering are evident. Poland stands out with the lowest rate of re-partnering for men and almost the lowest for women. The gender gap in re-partnering is evident in all countries, but the size of it varies significantly. Among the four countries, Lithuania is the clear outlier with the widest gender gap at 18 percentage points and the biggest difference in the re-partnering rate of divorced men and women. In the three other countries, the share of men who enter a new union within ten years of divorce exceeds that of women by only 7 to 10 percentage points.

Figure 2 provides additional descriptive information on the role of age in re-partnering. Here we consider only the cohort of 1960–1979 and do not include those who at the beginning of the observation period in 1990 reached the age of 40 and consequently had lower chances of re-partnering. The descriptive results show two distinct age and gender interaction patterns. The first is represented by Estonia, where the differences in the level of re-partnering by gender within the same age-at-divorce groups are relatively small (in particular for the younger age-at-divorce group) and the rate of re-partnering is highest for all gender and age groups. We found that women who divorced before the age of 30 re-enter new partnerships at a very similar rate as men in the same age group. Within ten years of divorce, 76% of Estonian men and 65% of women who were the age of 30 at the time of divorce form new partnerships. Men and women divorced at older

ages (30 and over) re-partner generally less frequently and achieve a lower level of re-partnering; nevertheless the gender differences are also relatively limited, in particular in the first five years after divorce in Estonia.

The second pattern is typical in Lithuania, where we observe larger gender differences in re-partnering within the age-at-divorce groups and a significantly lower rate of re-partnering: 64% of Lithuanian men and only 42% of women who divorced before the age of 30 established new partnerships within ten years of divorce, and in the older age group (those who divorced when they were over the age of 30) the proportions are 42% and 13%. The two remaining countries occupy intermediate positions between these two extremes. In those countries, the level of re-partnering is lower than in Estonia for all gender and age groups (especially in Poland), but the gender divisions are not so pronounced.

Cohabitation is the dominant form of post-divorce union and direct marriages constitute only a small proportion in all four CEB countries (see Appendix Table 3). Between 70 and 85% of partnerships formed after divorce live in cohabitation, and there is very limited variation between countries and gender groups.

#### *Multivariate event-history analysis*

As noted above, we used piecewise constant exponential models to analyse the transition from the status of being a single divorced person to the status of living with a partner. In the first step, we ran separate models for every country (Table 2).

In general the results of the multivariate analysis corroborate the life-table evidence on the effect of gender and age on re-partnering if individual and partnership-level variables are controlled for. In all countries the relative risk of re-partnering after divorce is statistically significantly lower for women than for men, but the effect size varies between the countries. The relative risk for divorced women is around 30% lower than the risk for men in Estonia, Hungary, and Poland, while in Lithuania it is 65% lower. Age decreases the relative risk to re-partner in all four countries, though in Estonia the age disadvantage is less pronounced. In Lithuania and Hungary, people who divorced in their thirties have a 50% lower risk of re-partnering compared to the reference group (divorced under the age of 30), while in Poland the risk is 35% lower and in Estonia the effect is not significant. Marital break-up experienced at the age of 40 and older decreases the relative risk of re-partnering in all four countries.

Next, to provide an insight into the gender differences in re-partnering, we ran separate models for women and men for each country. Generally, for women the years elapsed since divorce significantly decrease the relative risk of re-partnering and have no effect on men's re-partnering (Appendix Table 4). The exception to this is Lithuania, where women's re-partnering is not affected by the time

**Table 2. Relative risk of entering a new union after divorce, cohorts 1950–1979, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary**

	Estonia	Lithuania	Poland	Hungary
Sex of respondent				
Men	1	1	1	1
Women	0.71*	0.35***	0.67**	0.70*
Age at divorce				
Less than 30	1	1	1	1
30–39	0.65	0.50*	0.65*	0.50**
40 and more	0.39*	0.41*	0.39**	0.28**
Initial LL	-430.85	-385.17	-631.53	-516.73
Final LL	33.29	-22.88	-60.19	9.58
Degrees of freedom	28	28	28	28

Source: GGS database, authors' calculations.

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Other controls: years since divorce, parenthood and age of the youngest child, duration of previous marriage, educational attainment.

elapsed since divorce, and Hungary, where men's relative risk of re-partnering decreases with time. Overall, in all the countries the duration of the previous marriage has no effect on re-partnering for men and women; a significant association is observed only for Lithuanian women.

Table 3 summarises the model results for the main independent variables (age at divorce, parental status and the age of youngest child, and education) and substantially extends the descriptive results.

The older a woman is when she divorces, the less likely she is to re-partner, but this was proved statistically significant only for Lithuania and Hungary. In Lithuania women who divorce at the age of 30–39 have a 61% lower relative risk of re-partnering, and in Hungary the age effect is significant only for women who divorce at the age of 40. In Estonia and Poland, the differences in relative risk are not statistically significant. Age is also significant for the risk of divorced men re-partnering in all the countries except Lithuania. In Estonia and Hungary, men who divorce at the age of 30–39 have a 60% lower relative risk of re-partnering and the effect is even more pronounced for the older age group. In Poland, a significant age effect is observed only for men who divorce at the age of 40 and over. Juxtaposing women's and men's chances of re-partnering by age at divorce, we can observe the relevant cross-country differences. In Estonia and Poland, the age disadvantage in re-partnering is distinct for men and does not affect women; in Lithuania it is pronounced only for women; and in Hungary affects both genders.

**Table 3. Relative risk of entering a new union after divorce, for women and men, cohorts 1950–1979, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary**

	Women				Men			
	Estonia	Lithuania	Poland	Hungary	Estonia	Lithuania	Poland	Hungary
Age at divorce								
≤29	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
30–39	0.89	0.39*	0.69	0.62	0.46*	0.64	0.67	0.4**
40 >	0.61	0.38	0.50	0.26*	0.15**	0.58	0.28**	0.30*
Parenthood status, age of youngest child								
0–2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3–7	0.96	1.68	1.22	1.42	2.44*	0.88	0.95	1.37
8–15	0.77	1.86	1.56	1.56	2.15	1.27	1.05	1.59
16+	0.18	3.06	1.26	2.44	3.57	1.31	0.57	1.65
No children	0.76	2.04*	1.96*	1.57	3.27**	0.24***	1.28	1.79
Educational group								
Low	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Medium	1.24	1.48	0.89	1.05	0.65	1.19	2.49	2.32*
Highest	1.12	1.26	0.79	0.66	0.77	1.57	4.74**	2.56*
Initial LL	-283.88	-214.47	-383.5	-296.71	-146.64	-165.73	-245.5	-218.71
Final LL	15.69	-43.39	-44.10	-15.59	34.57	38.46	2.84	36.31
Degrees of freedom	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27

Source: GGS database, authors' calculations.

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Other controls: years since divorce, duration of previous marriage.

Motherhood decreases the relative risk of re-partnering in Lithuania and Poland, but it has no effect in Estonia or Hungary. Lithuanian women without children from a previous marriage have a more than two times higher risk of entering a new partnership compared to women with small children from a previous marriage. Almost the same effect size applies to Polish women. We also observe in both countries that the effect size increases with the age of the children, but the effect is not statistically significant. Being a father does not affect re-partnering in Hungary or Poland, but has the opposite impact in Estonia and Lithuania. In Estonia, men without children have a higher risk of entering a new union compared to men with very small children from a previous marriage. Overall, the relative risk of Estonian men re-partnering increases when children are older;

men with children aged 3 to 7 years have a significantly higher risk compared to those with very small children (younger than 3 years). In Lithuania the direction of the association is reversed. Divorced men without children have a 70% lower risk of re-partnering compared to divorced fathers. Hence there are significant gender differences in the role parenthood plays in the process of re-partnering after divorce. In Estonia parenthood has no effect on women's post-divorce partnership history, but decreases men's likelihood of re-partnering, in particular if the children are young. In Lithuania and Poland parenthood negatively affects women's chances of re-partnering and has no impact on men's likelihood of re-partnering (Poland) or affects it favourably (Lithuania). In Hungary parenthood does not play any significant role in the chances divorced women and men have of forming a new partnership.

Contrary to our expectations, women's education did not affect re-partnering. Educational attainment is nevertheless significant in determining men's re-partnering in Poland and Hungary, but not in Estonia and Lithuania. Thus, in Poland, divorced men with the highest level of education have a more than four and a half times higher risk and in Hungary a two and a half times higher risk of re-partnering compared to divorced men with a low level of education.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this paper was to investigate the effect of gender, age, parenthood and education on re-partnering after divorce in four Central European and Baltic countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary and Poland). We analysed only the divorces that occurred after 1990 in order to have more contextual homogeneity and in the analysis observed the trajectory of women's and men's family life from being single after divorce to remarriage or cohabitation. Our theoretical framework was based on the approach of needs, attractiveness, and opportunities to re-partner [Becker 1981; de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003] and the assumption that macro-contextual factors play a mediating role in the process of re-partnering as proved in several earlier studies [Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013]. On the contextual level, we consider gender culture, demographic divorce trends, the de-familialisation of childcare, and poverty risk. In this study the mediating role of the macro factors is analysed in an explorative way, and we consider the country-level characteristics as the interpretative framework for contextualising the empirical results.

Our first research hypothesis suggested that the overall level of re-partnering after divorce would be higher and less gender-specific in countries with a more egalitarian gender culture and in societies with a longer and higher prevalence of divorce. The findings partially support this hypothesis. We found that the highest re-partnering rate for men and women is found in Estonia. It is lower in the other three countries and among them the lowest in Poland. How do gen-

der egalitarianism and the high and long prevalence of divorce contribute to the increased propensity to re-partner? It is possible that these contextual factors add to the attractiveness of divorced women and men and give rise to a more gender-equal distribution of meeting opportunities. They reduce the stigmatisation of divorcees, regardless of their gender, expand the re-partnering market, support the general dynamics of family formation and dissolution, and liberalise attitudes towards family life. However, the second part of our first hypothesis on the gender gap in re-partnering was not supported by the research findings. Overall the results of the descriptive and multivariate analysis proved that a gender gap exists in all countries, and this corroborates the findings of previous studies [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Beaujouan 2012; Ivanova, Kalmijn and Uunk 2013; Földháyi 2010]. The findings show the gender gap in re-partnering to be widest in Lithuania and comparably narrower in the three other countries, which diverge in terms of gender egalitarianism and divorce trends. These results highlight the possible relevance of other contextual factors that possibly mediate the gender opportunities to re-partner but were not considered in the study. The re-partnering chances of divorced Lithuanian women, the lowest in our study, could be affected by demographic factors such as very intense emigration and large gender differences in mortality, both of which influence the state of the re-partnering market. Lithuania leads EU countries in terms of its net migration rate [Sipavičienė 2009] and has very large gender differences in life expectancy that to a large extent are caused by the very high mortality rate of middle-aged men as a result of their self-destructive behaviour [Jasilionis and Stankūnienė 2011].

Second we hypothesised that older age and motherhood would more detrimentally affect divorced women's likelihood of re-partnering in a traditional gender culture and in societies with a less advanced divorce trend. Generally our findings support this hypothesis; they reveal that women's chances of re-partnering are negatively affected by age in Lithuania and Hungary and by motherhood in Lithuania and Poland, while Estonia stands out as the country where women's re-partnering is not significantly affected by motherhood or age. The findings on the effect of age to some extent contradict the other evidence to date [Lampard and Peggs 1999; Skew, Evans and Gray 2009], but this could be due to the design of our study in that we considered younger birth cohorts and relatively recent divorcees. With regard to the role of motherhood, our results are in line with previous research suggesting that in more gender-egalitarian cultural contexts the selectivity of divorced mothers decreases and their re-partnering chances are enhanced [Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008]. An egalitarian gender culture could also have a positive impact towards a more equal division of childrearing responsibilities among divorced parents and this consequently enhances women's meeting opportunities. In addition, in terms of the impact of motherhood on re-partnering, it is possible that the gender culture plays a more significant mediating role than demographic divorce trends. The two countries (Lithuania and Poland) in which motherhood was found to have an effect on re-partnering are similar in

terms of their adherence to the traditional gender culture, but diverge according to divorce trends. We were surprised to find that motherhood had no effect in Hungary, but this does replicate earlier results [Földháyi 2010]. To explain this, more in-depth country-level studies are desirable.

Fatherhood proved to be of no significance for re-partnering in more traditional gender and family settings (Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary), and this is consistent with our expectations and with some previous research [de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003]. The attractiveness of divorced men may not be undermined by fatherhood because in more traditional gender contexts childrearing is predominantly associated with the mother and after divorce child custody is mainly given to the mother. We also found that age has a strong effect on men's re-partnering, and this replicates previous results [Skew, Evans and Gray 2009; Földháyi 2010]. This was proved for almost all the countries, despite the contextual differences, and could be interpreted as the decline in physical attractiveness associated with older age. In this respect, Lithuania is an exception, and the comparable demand of men in all age groups could be a result of the shrinking pool of men for re-partnering.

We also expected to find that women with fewer socio-economic resources would re-partner more in societies with a higher dependency on the market and lower childcare de-familialisation. Our expectation was based on the assumption of a possibly higher economic need to re-partner. The findings did not, however, provide evidence for this hypothesis; women's educational attainment proved not to be relevant in any of the four countries. It could be that the role of education is very limited in securing divorced women's economic well-being in all four countries despite the specifics of their economies. Thus, the economic need to re-partner could be comparable in every educational group. On the other hand, educational achievement is only an indirect and partial indicator for measuring socio-economic resources, and this may have had an impact on the research findings.

Finally, we hypothesised that men's greater socio-economic resources would increase their attractiveness in the re-partnership market in societies with a more traditional gender culture. Our results prove this hypothesis. In Poland and Hungary, divorced men with a higher education are more likely to enter into new unions. Lithuania is in this regard an outlier, and this could be explained by the above-mentioned demographic factors that shrink the pool of men suitable for re-partnering and increase the attractiveness of men from all educational groups.

In conclusion, our results highlight the possible mediating effect of contextual factors in the process of re-partnering, even if the investigation is focused only on post-communist transition countries. Among contextual factors considered in this study, the gender culture can be identified as possibly the most important macro-level factor influencing the process of re-partnering. It has a significant impact that defines the link between gender and parenthood, providing gendered notions of attractiveness and producing gendered divisions in re-

partnering. Further studies based on a multi-level approach and on hierarchical models may offer significant insights and a more thorough understanding of the re-partnering process in CEB countries. Moreover, this study revealed the need for more comprehensive datasets on post-divorce family dynamics, with numerous and more precise demographic, socio-economic, and cultural indicators of re-partnering. An understanding of the mechanisms of re-partnering could benefit from datasets that include household incomes, job information, child custody arrangements, and gender and family values and norms at the time of re-partnering. Despite the limitations of our study, we believe that it contributes to the field and reveals systematic gender inequalities in re-partnering in CEB countries.

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## Appendix

**Appendix Table 1. Total divorce rate in four CEB countries in 1960–2002, selected years**

Year	Estonia	Lithuania	Hungary	Poland
1960	.	0.07	.	.
1969	.	0.25	0.21	0.14
1974	.	0.33	0.22	0.14
1979	.	0.38	0.25	0.14
1980	0.5	.	.	.
1984	.	0.38	0.28	0.18
1992	0.51	0.42	0.24	0.11
1997	0.51	0.39	0.36	0.16
2002	0.48	0.42	0.42	0.18

*Source:* Council of Europe, Generations and Gender Programme Contextual Database.

Note: “.” = data not available

**Appendix Table 2. Characteristics of GGS datasets**

Country	Year of data collection	Size of the working sample (all divorced after 1990 and born between 1950–1979)	Events of re-partnering	Person-months of exposure
Estonia	2004–2005	516	206	235889
Lithuania	2006	562	159	269780
Poland	2010–2011	928	263	481905
Hungary	2004–2006	685	225	315323

*Source:* GGS database, authors' calculations.

**Appendix Table 3. Type of first post-divorce union by sex and by country**

Country, gender Partnership, type	Estonia		Lithuania		Hungary		Poland	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Marriage	25.3	16	23.1	29.1	28.4	30.1	31.8	28.8
Cohabitation, then marriage	24	25.2	19.2	21.5	13.7	6.5	27.1	18.5
Cohabitation	50.7	58.8	57.7	49.4	57.8	63.4	41.1	52.7

**Appendix Table 4. Relative risk of entering a new union after divorce, for women and men, cohorts 1950–1979, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary**

	Women				Men			
	Estonia	Lithuania	Poland	Hungary	Estonia	Lithuania	Poland	Hungary
Years since divorce								
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	0.29***	1.04	0.90	0.94	0.48	0.97	0.98	0.63
3	0.38***	0.96	0.60	0.82	0.50	0.80	0.60	0.47**
4	0.50*	1.02	0.46*	0.39*	0.55	1.08	0.79	0.43**
5	0.36**	0.54	0.54	0.30**	0.59	0.57	0.44	0.21**
6	0.13***	0.36	0.21**	0.23**	0.63	0.27	0.69	0.25**
7	0.26**	0.52	0.31**	0.13**	0.28	0.17	0.62	0.22*
8	0.38*	0.30	0.67	0.31*	0.64	0.00	0.13*	0.09*
9	0.67	0.72	0.09**	0.38	0.40	0.76	0.28	0.10*
10	0.22*	0.44	0.51	0.47	0.24	0.37	0.32	0.12*
Duration of previous marriage								
<5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5–9	0.73	0.52*	1.02	0.96	0.53	0.97	0.67	1.30
10–14	0.75	0.52	0.70	0.93	0.83	0.67	0.70	0.95
15+	1.10	0.86	0.74	0.68	2.01	0.76	1.49	0.86
Initial LL	-283.88	-214.47	-383.5	-296.71	-146.64	-165.73	-245.5	-218.71
Final LL	15.69	-43.39	-44.10	-15.59	34.57	38.46	2.84	36.31
Degrees of freedom	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Other controls: age at divorce, parenthood and age of the youngest child, educational attainment.

Source: GGS database, authors' calculations.