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# Realization of Marital Intentions in the Republic of Moldova

## longitudinal analysis based on Generations and Gender Survey

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This analysis was developed under the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) to provide in-depth, targeted insights based on the GGS data and to support national authorities in designing evidence-based policies that strengthen the demographic resilience of the Republic of Moldova.

The Generations and Gender Programme is implemented by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA Moldova) in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Institute of Demography (NIDI). The Programme is funded by the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, the Government of Switzerland, and UNFPA Moldova.

The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) is the most comprehensive longitudinal demographic study carried out in the Republic of Moldova, with Wave I conducted in 2020 and Wave II in 2024, as part of the international programme coordinated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and NIDI. The study's conclusions will help decision-makers better understand the demographic transformations underway in the country and support the development of people-centred demographic policies tailored to the population's needs. In addition, the findings of this analysis will assist the authorities in identifying measures that turn current demographic challenges into opportunities for sustainable development and for advancing demographic resilience in Moldova.

For references: *Republic of Moldova – Generations and Gender Survey wave II (2024). Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, National Bureau of Statistics (study sample), UNFPA Moldova, NIDI-GGP (partner and data distributor).*

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## Executive Summary

Marriage remains a widely held aspiration in the Republic of Moldova, particularly among young adults, yet the transition from intention to marriage is far from automatic. Using longitudinal data from the Generations and Gender Survey, this report examines whether individuals who intended to marry in 2020 had realized this intention by 2024, and identifies the factors shaping different relationship trajectories.

The analysis focuses on 506 respondents who were in an unmarried partnership at Wave 1 and observed again at Wave 2. Among those who intended to marry within three years, only ***28%*** had entered marriage by 2024. Most remained in an unmarried relationship, while a smaller but non-negligible share experienced relationship dissolution. These findings indicate a substantial gap between marital intentions and outcomes, reflecting constraints rather than declining commitment to partnership or marriage.

Economic and housing conditions emerge as major barriers to marriage realization. Respondents who reported difficulty making ends meet in 2020 were significantly less likely to marry and more likely to experience relationship dissolution by 2024. Similarly, dissatisfaction with housing was associated with postponement and breakup, while couples satisfied with their housing situation were markedly more likely to marry. Employment status alone was not decisive. Instead, perceived economic security and housing stability were the key material conditions shaping partnership outcomes.

Relationship quality and gender dynamics also play a central role. Higher relationship satisfaction significantly increased the likelihood of marriage and reduced the risk of separation. More egalitarian divisions of household tasks were independently associated with higher marriage rates and greater relationship stability, even after accounting for relationship duration and satisfaction. Unequal arrangements increased the risk of remaining unmarried or dissolving the relationship, suggesting that perceived fairness and mutual support are critical for long term commitment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that unrealized marriage intentions in Moldova are driven primarily by structural and relational constraints rather than a lack of aspiration. Many couples who wish to marry face economic insecurity, housing barriers, or unequal relationship dynamics that delay or prevent formalization. Supporting marriage realization therefore requires policies that strengthen economic and housing security, promote gender equality within relationships, and reduce uncertainty during early adulthood. Enabling couples to realize their partnership intentions is a key component of Moldova's broader demographic resilience and social well being.

## 1. Introduction

The Republic of Moldova has undergone profound transformations in family formation over the past three decades, marked by later marriage, more diverse partnership trajectories, and sustained demographic pressure from emigration and population decline. Marriage remains an important institution in Moldovan society, both culturally and legally, yet the timing and frequency of marriage have changed substantially since the early 1990s. These shifts have implications not only for partnership stability and individual well-being, but also for fertility dynamics, intergenerational support, and social cohesion.

Figure 1 illustrates one of the most striking long-term changes: a steady increase in the mean age at first marriage for both women and men. Since the early 1990s, the average age at first marriage has risen by roughly five years, reaching around 26 years for women and close to 29 years for men by the early 2020s. This postponement reflects broader life-course changes, including prolonged education, delayed labour market entry, housing constraints, and increased uncertainty surrounding long-term commitments. While later marriage is a common trend across Europe, the pace of change in Moldova has been particularly pronounced, unfolding alongside economic volatility and high levels of youth emigration.

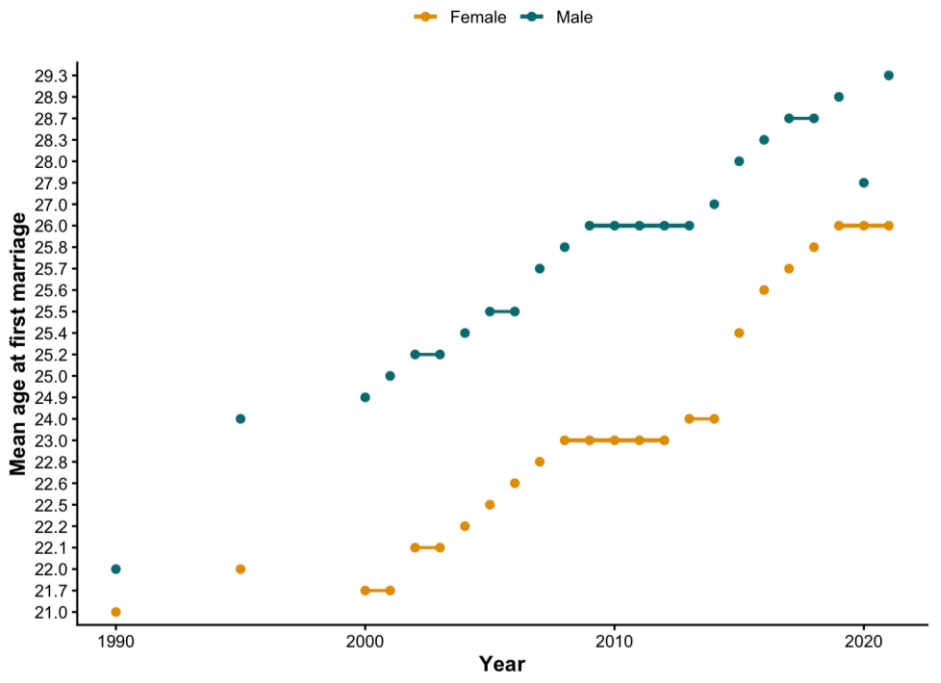


***Figure 1 - Mean Age at First Marriage by Sex (Source: UNECE)***

At the same time, later marriage has not been accompanied by a clear recovery in marriage intensity. As shown in Figure 2, the crude marriage rate has fluctuated around relatively modest levels since the mid-2000s, with short-term increases followed by renewed declines. These patterns suggest that postponement is not merely a timing shift, but may also translate into foregone or unrealized marriages for some groups.

Against this backdrop, survey evidence indicates that marriage remains a desired life event for many Moldovans, particularly younger adults. However, as with fertility, there is growing concern that intentions to marry are not always translated into actual unions within the expected time frame. Economic insecurity, unstable partnerships, migration, and uncertainty about the future may all disrupt the pathway from intention to realization. Understanding this gap between marital intentions and outcomes is increasingly important for policymakers, as marriage is closely linked to subsequent family transitions, including childbearing and long-term partnership stability.

In this context, the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) provides a unique opportunity to examine marital intentions and their realization using high-quality longitudinal data. This report draws on GGS Wave 1 (2020) and Wave 2 (2024) data from the Republic of Moldova to assess the extent to which individuals who intended to marry within a specified time horizon in 2020 had entered marriage by 2024. By following the same individuals over time, the analysis moves beyond cross-sectional descriptions to directly measure realization, identifying who succeeds in translating plans into marriage and who does not.

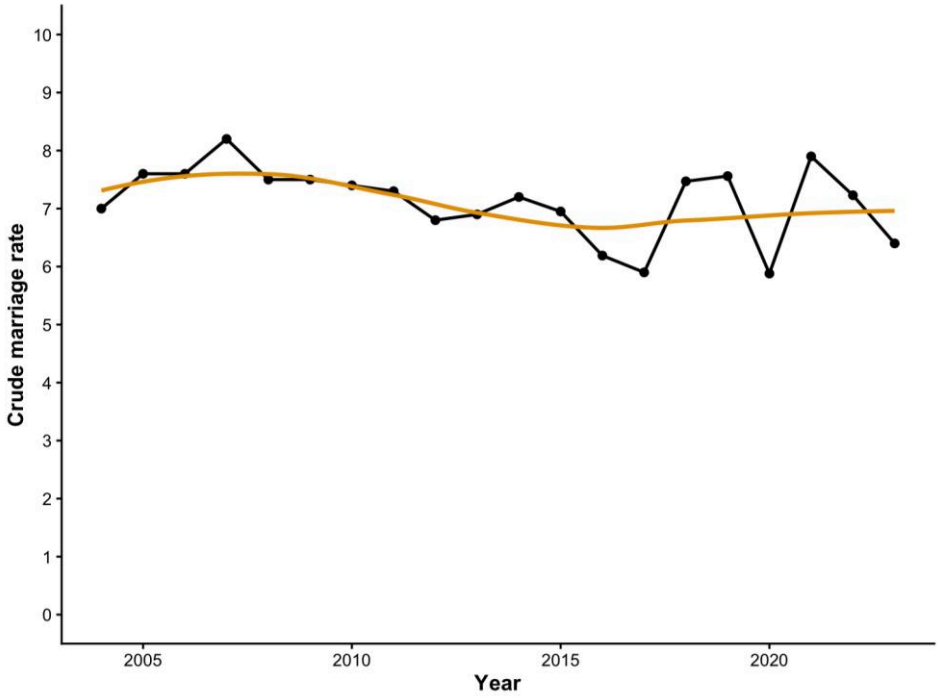


***Figure 2 - Crude Marriage Rate in Moldova (Marriages per 1,000 population, Source: NBS)***

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Marriage is best understood as a life-course transition that results from the interaction between individual intentions, relationship dynamics, and broader structural conditions. An expressed intention to marry reflects a couple's assessment, at a given point in time, that their relationship is sufficiently stable, desirable, and feasible to be formalized. However, intentions are inherently conditional and forward-looking, and their realization depends on whether enabling conditions persist or improve. As a result, not all stated intentions lead to marriage, and some partnerships instead remain unmarried or dissolve.

In this report, marriage is conceptualized not as an isolated event, but as one of several possible relationship trajectories that can unfold over time. Among unmarried couples who express an intention to marry, three outcomes are possible within the observed period: (1) transition into marriage, (2) continuation of the relationship without marriage, or (3) relationship dissolution. The conceptual framework therefore treats marriage realization as a competing-risks process shaped by factors operating at the individual, relational, and contextual levels.

*Intentions and the Life-Course Perspective*

Marital intentions are embedded within the life course and reflect age-graded norms and expectations. Age plays a dual role: younger adults may express positive intentions but lack the resources or stability to realize them, while older adults may experience increased urgency to formalize relationships as they approach normative milestones related to family formation, childbearing, or housing. At the same time, prolonged postponement can increase exposure to uncertainty and partnership instability. From a life-course perspective, marriage intentions are therefore sensitive to timing, sequencing of transitions, and perceived readiness.

Importantly, the realization of marriage intentions is not automatic even among those who intend to marry "within the next three years." Such intentions often signal aspiration rather than commitment to a fixed timetable, and they may be revised in response to changing circumstances. This framework recognizes intention realization as a probabilistic process rather than a deterministic outcome.

*Relationship Characteristics and Commitment Dynamics*

At the core of the framework lies the relationship itself. Relationship duration is a key indicator of accumulated commitment and shared investment. Longer relationships are expected to be more likely to transition into marriage, as partners have had more time to assess compatibility, establish routines, and integrate social networks. However, extended duration without marriage may also reflect ambivalence or structural barriers, increasing the likelihood that relationships stagnate or dissolve rather than formalize.

Relationship quality further conditions these trajectories. High levels of satisfaction, trust, and perceived fairness within the partnership are theorized to increase the likelihood that intentions are realized, as marriage represents a long-term commitment that requires confidence in the relationship's stability. Conversely, dissatisfaction or unresolved conflict may weaken the link between intention and action, leading either to postponement or separation.

Gender dynamics within relationships form an additional relational dimension. Perceptions of fairness in the division of household tasks and responsibilities capture broader norms of gender equality and mutual support. More egalitarian arrangements may facilitate marriage by signaling shared expectations

about future roles, while imbalances can generate uncertainty about long-term compatibility and increase the risk of dissolution.

*Socio-Economic Conditions and Material Constraints*

Marriage intentions are also shaped and constrained by material conditions. Economic security influences whether couples feel able to assume the financial and social obligations associated with marriage. Employment status alone may be insufficient to capture this dynamic. Instead perceived economic strain, difficulty making ends meet, and housing conditions are more proximate indicators of readiness to marry.

Housing plays a particularly important role in the Moldovan context, where marriage is often associated with residential independence and long-term settlement. Dissatisfaction with housing quality or overcrowding may delay marriage even among committed couples, while secure and satisfactory housing can facilitate the transition from intention to realization. In this framework, economic and housing conditions are expected to differentiate between couples who proceed to marriage and those who either postpone or dissolve their relationships.

*Social Embeddedness and Normative Support*

Marriage is not solely a private decision between two individuals; it is also a socially embedded institution. How partners meet reflects the degree to which relationships are embedded in shared social networks. Partnerships formed through family, friends, or community settings are typically subject to greater social visibility and normative expectations regarding marriage. Such relationships may benefit from stronger social endorsement and clearer pathways to formalization. Over the last three decades an increasing number of couples meet in online settings and these change long standing dynamics in relationship formation. Meeting online is often considered to lead to greater homophily and potentially more stable relationships. Equally, they can be less embedded in local communities of friends and family and may therefore provide a less stable social foundation for such relationships/ By contrast, relationships formed in more individualized or weakly embedded contexts may experience fewer external pressures or supports to marry, potentially prolonging ambiguity. Social embeddedness thus operates as a mechanism that can strengthen or weaken the translation of marital intentions into realized marriages.

*Contextual Shocks and Uncertainty*

Finally, the realization of marital intentions is conditioned by broader contextual factors. The period between 2020 and 2024 was marked by significant disruptions in Moldova, including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic volatility, and the spillover effects of the war in Ukraine. These shocks heightened uncertainty and may have altered priorities, delayed life-course transitions, or increased the risk of relationship strain. Migration, both internal and international, also represents a critical contextual factor, as mobility can interrupt relationship trajectories or shift marriage plans beyond the observed setting. Taken together, this conceptual framework views marriage realization as the outcome of interacting processes rather than a simple response to intention. Individual readiness, relationship quality, economic and housing conditions, social embeddedness, and contextual uncertainty jointly shape whether intentions to marry are fulfilled, postponed, or abandoned. This framework directly informs the empirical strategy of the report, which models relationship outcomes as competing possibilities and examines how these dimensions influence the likelihood of marriage relative to continued cohabitation or breakup.

## 3. Data and Methods

This analysis uses data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) in the Republic of Moldova, a nationally representative longitudinal survey designed to study family dynamics, partnership trajectories, and life-course transitions. Wave 1 of the Moldovan GGS was conducted in 2020 and interviewed 10,074 respondents. Wave 2 followed the same respondents in 2024, with 5,599 individuals successfully re-interviewed, corresponding to a re-contact rate of 55.6%. The longitudinal design allows for the direct observation of changes in relationship status over a four-year period, making it particularly well suited to studying the realization of marital intentions.

The analysis focuses on respondents who, at Wave 1, were in a romantic relationship but not legally married. Among this group, we further restrict the sample to those who were asked the question on marital intentions and provided a valid response. This results in an analytical sample of approximately 506 individuals who were in an unmarried partnership in 2020 and observed again in 2024.

Measurement of Marital Intentions and Outcomes

Marital intentions were measured at Wave 1 using the question: "Do you intend to get married in the next three years?" Respondents could answer on a graded scale ranging from "definitely not" to "definitely yes." Consistent with prior research and the fertility intentions analysis, we define individuals as intenders if they responded "probably yes" or "definitely yes." Those responding "probably not," "definitely not," or "don't know" are treated as non-intenders in descriptive analyses but are retained in some models where appropriate for comparative purposes.

Relationship outcomes are observed at Wave 2 and classified into three mutually exclusive categories:

*Married – the respondent legally married their Wave 1 partner by 2024;*

*Still in an unmarried relationship – the respondent remained with the same partner but did not marry;*

*Relationship dissolved – the partnership reported at Wave 1 had ended by Wave 2.*

This trichotomous outcome captures the fact that non-realization of marriage intentions may reflect either postponement within an ongoing relationship or relationship breakdown, two processes with distinct implications for individual well-being and demographic behavior.

*Explanatory Variables*

Explanatory variables are primarily measured at Wave 1 to ensure correct temporal ordering. These variables are grouped into five conceptual domains:

- Life-course and demographic characteristics, including age and gender;
- Relationship characteristics, such as relationship duration, relationship satisfaction, and attitudes toward marriage;
- Gender dynamics within the household, measured using an index of gender equality in the division of household tasks;
- Socio-economic conditions, including perceived ability to make ends meet, and housing satisfaction;
- Social embeddedness, proxied by how the couple met (e.g., through family, friends, work, education, or online).

Where relevant, variables are standardized or categorized to improve interpretability and to ensure comparability across models.

*Analytical Strategy*

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, descriptive analyses are used to document patterns in marital intentions and relationship outcomes. Cross-tabulations and graphical summaries examine how intentions vary by relationship duration, attitudes toward marriage, economic conditions, and gender dynamics, and how relationship outcomes at Wave 2 differ across these dimensions. This stage provides an intuitive overview of heterogeneity in pathways from partnership to marriage and motivates the multivariate analysis.

Second, we estimate a multinomial logistic regression model predicting relationship outcomes at Wave 2 among individuals who were in an unmarried partnership at Wave 1. The three outcome categories—marriage, continued unmarried partnership, and relationship dissolution—are modeled simultaneously, allowing us to examine how the same factors influence different partnership trajectories. Remaining unmarried serves as the reference category, enabling direct comparison of factors associated with marriage versus both postponement and breakup.

This modeling approach reflects the conceptual framework, which treats marriage as one of several possible outcomes rather than the inevitable endpoint of a relationship. Coefficients are reported as relative risk ratios, with statistical significance assessed using conventional thresholds ($p < 0.10$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$). Robust standard errors are used throughout.

*Attrition and Limitations*

As with all longitudinal surveys, attrition between waves may introduce bias. Individuals who migrated, refused re-interview, or could not be located are not observed at Wave 2. This is particularly relevant in the Moldovan context, where migration is common among young adults. If some respondents left the country and married abroad, their marriages would not be captured, potentially leading to an underestimation of marriage realization. Conversely, if those who dropped out were more likely to experience relationship instability, realization rates may be overstated. Survey weights provided by the GGS are applied where appropriate to adjust for sampling design and differential non-response. Nonetheless, results should be interpreted as reflecting relationship trajectories among those observed in both waves, rather than exact population-level transition rates.

By combining longitudinal survey data with descriptive and multinomial regression analyses, this study provides a rigorous assessment of how marital intentions translate into relationship outcomes in Moldova. The methods are explicitly designed to distinguish between marriage realization, postponement within ongoing relationships, and partnership dissolution, offering a nuanced understanding of family formation processes during a period of heightened social and economic uncertainty.

## 4. Findings from Wave 1

Figure 3 describes the distribution of relationship durations among unmarried couples at the time of the Wave 1 survey in 2020. The figure shows that most respondents who were in a relationship were not in newly formed relationships, but rather in partnerships of moderate to long duration. A substantial share of couples had already been together for several years, indicating that intentions to marry are typically expressed within relatively established relationships rather than at very early stages of partnership formation. It should also be noted at this point that we do not delineate between cohabiting relationships and LAT relationships as LAT arrangements are uncommon in Moldova.

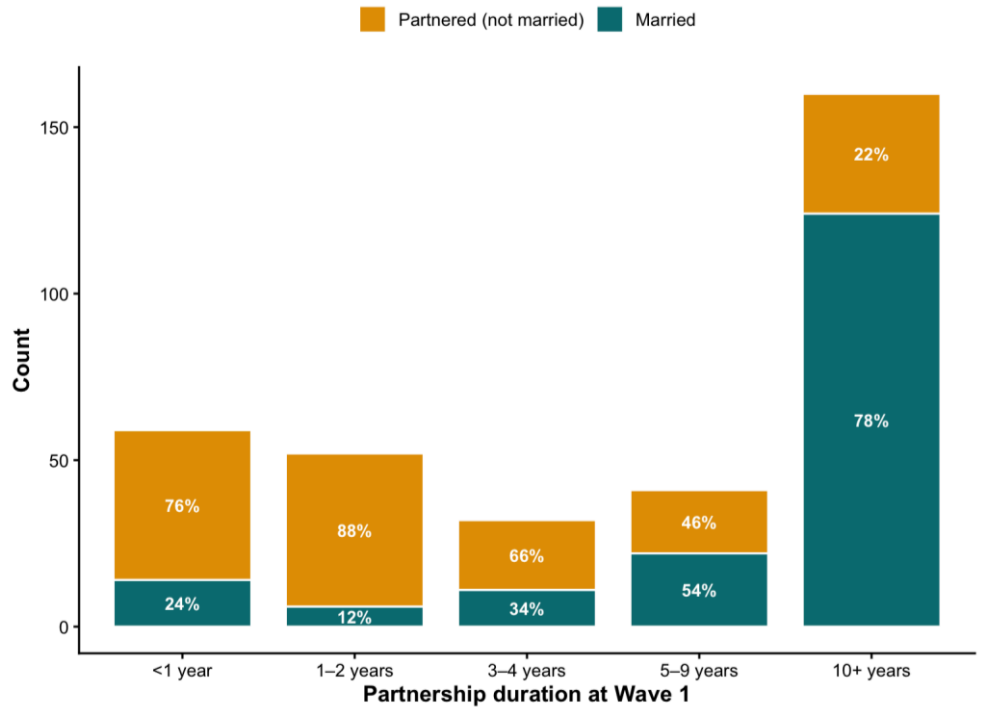


***Figure 3 - Relationships by Duration at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

This pattern is important for interpreting marital intentions. It suggests that expressed intentions to marry are generally grounded in ongoing relational investment, shared histories, and accumulated commitment. Short-term relationships, which may still be characterized by uncertainty or exploration, are underrepresented among those considering marriage. Instead, marriage intentions appear to emerge once partners have passed an initial phase of relationship formation and have begun to evaluate long-term compatibility.

At the same time, the presence of many long-duration unmarried relationships points to postponement rather than absence of commitment. Remaining unmarried for several years does not necessarily reflect rejection of marriage, but may instead indicate structural constraints, such as housing shortages, economic insecurity, or uncertainty about future prospects. In the Moldovan context, where marriage is often associated with residential independence and financial stability, these constraints can delay formalization even among committed couples.

This figure therefore highlights a central tension explored in the report. Marriage intentions often arise within stable partnerships, yet realization is not automatic. The duration distribution underscores that many couples are already in stable relationships, but may face barriers that slow or interrupt the

transition. Understanding how these barriers interact with relationship duration as well as a preference or aversion to marriage, is essential for explaining why some partnerships progress to marriage while others remain unmarried or dissolve.

*Marriage Intentions*

Figure 4 examines how marital intentions vary according to the length of the relationship at Wave 1 amongst those who have not yet married. A clear gradient is visible: the likelihood of intending to marry increases with relationship duration before then declining past the 5 year mark. Couples who have been together for several years show substantially higher levels of intention compared to those in relationships of less than a year, suggesting that over time the intention to marriage increases as the amount of certainty and stability in a relationship grows.

The decline after 5 years should then be understood as a 'selection effect' where those who want to marry have generally done so after 5 years together and those still in our analysis are increasingly those who consciously choose not to marry. Even then, at 10+ years there are still approximately 1 in 4 relationships who have not yet married but still intend to do so in the next 3 years and only half say they will either probably or definitely not marry.

This pattern aligns with life-course theories of partnership development, which emphasize that commitment builds cumulatively over time. Longer relationships typically involve greater emotional investment, shared routines, and integration into each other's social networks, all of which support readiness for marriage. For many couples, marriage becomes a logical next step once the relationship has demonstrated stability and endurance.

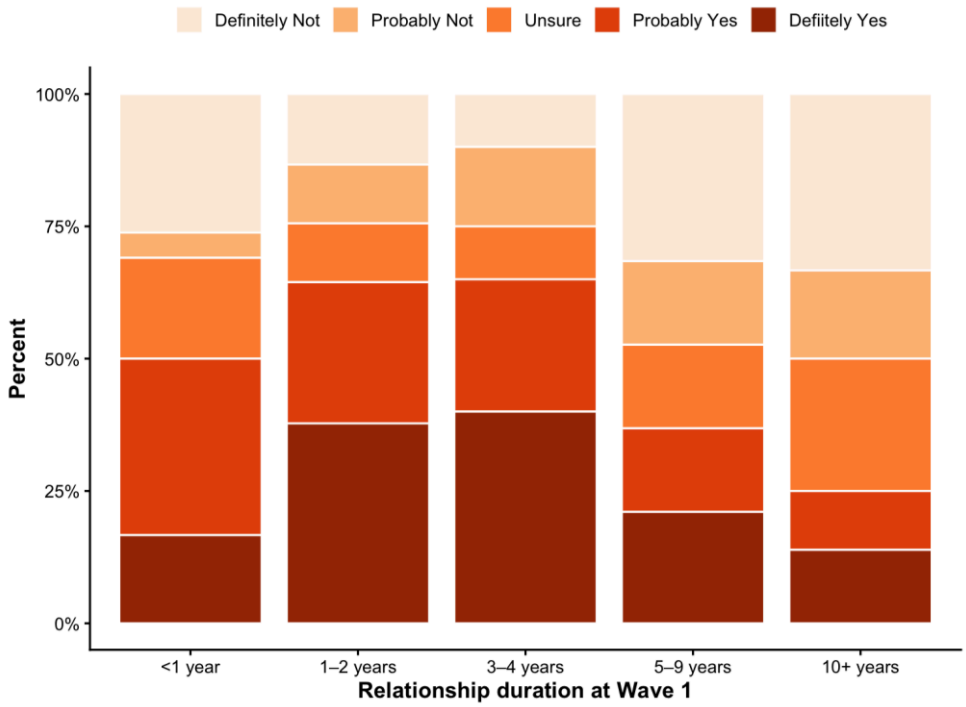


***Figure 4 - Intention to Marry by relation duration of the unmarried at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

.Overall, Figure 4 demonstrates that relationship duration is a strong but imperfect predictor of marital intentions. It structures opportunities for intention formation, but does not fully determine them. This

reinforces the need to consider additional factors such as economic conditions, gender dynamics, attitudes, and social context when examining whether intentions ultimately translate into marriage.

*Attitudes to Marriage*

Figure 5 shows the association between individuals' attitudes toward marriage and their intention to marry within the next three years. The pattern is clear and pronounced. Respondents with positive attitudes toward marriage are substantially more likely to express an intention to marry, while those with ambivalent or negative views are much less likely to do so. This finding highlights the importance of normative orientations and values in shaping partnership plans. Marriage is not only a legal or economic decision, but also a symbolic one, embedded in beliefs about commitment, family life, and social recognition. Individuals who view marriage as meaningful or desirable are more likely to frame it as a personal goal, whereas those who question its relevance may prefer alternative partnership arrangements or prolonged cohabitation.

It is also notable that in terms of seeing marriage as outdated, there is a relatively strong consensus against this, irrespective of whether they have an intention to marry themselves or not. This indicates that there remains strong societal support for the institution even in contexts where it may not suit personal preferences.

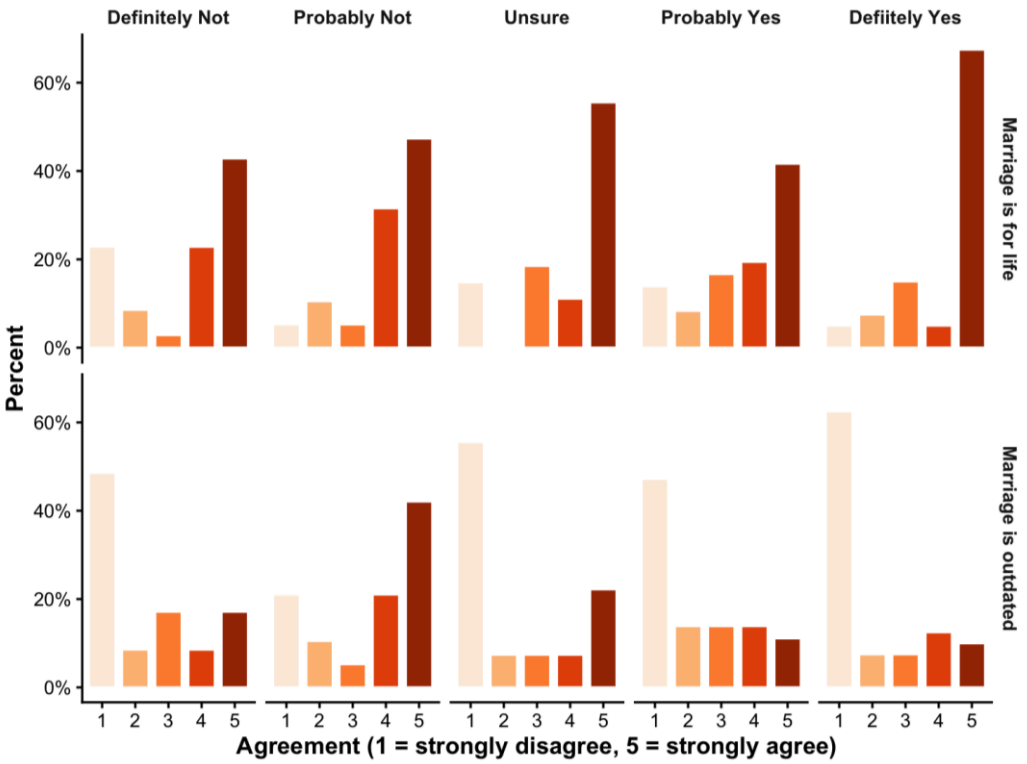


***Figure 5 - Intention to Marry by attitudes to marriage at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

In the Moldovan context, where marriage remains socially significant but increasingly postponed, attitudes toward marriage help explain why some long-term couples still do not intend to formalize their relationship. Even under similar structural conditions, couples may differ in their willingness to pursue marriage depending on how they perceive its benefits and obligations. Importantly, attitudes toward marriage are themselves shaped by lived experience. Economic instability, exposure to divorce, or

observation of unequal gender roles within marriage may contribute to more cautious or negative views. Thus, attitudes both influence and reflect broader social conditions. Figure 5 underscores that policies aimed at supporting family formation cannot rely solely on promoting marriage norms. Where intentions are absent, the issue is not unmet realization but differing preferences. The more relevant policy concern lies with those who value marriage and intend to marry but face barriers that prevent realization, an issue explored in subsequent figures.

*Gender Equality in Household Tasks*

Figure 6 presents the distribution of the gender equality index measuring the division of household tasks within unmarried couples at Wave 1. For this index a score of 0 would reflect a household where tasks are evenly distributed between the man and the woman. In this analysis, we are looking exclusively at heterosexual couples. A score of more than 0 suggests that the woman is doing more of the tasks and a score of less than 0 suggests that the man is.

The distribution suggests that most couples exhibit moderate gender inequality with the majority of household tasks done by women. Extreme inequalities or perfectly equal divisions are less common. This pattern reflects transitional gender norms in Moldova, where expectations around partnership and household roles are changing but remain heterogeneous. Many couples appear to negotiate practical arrangements that blend traditional expectations with emerging norms of shared responsibility. These arrangements are likely shaped by employment patterns, income differences, and cultural expectations.

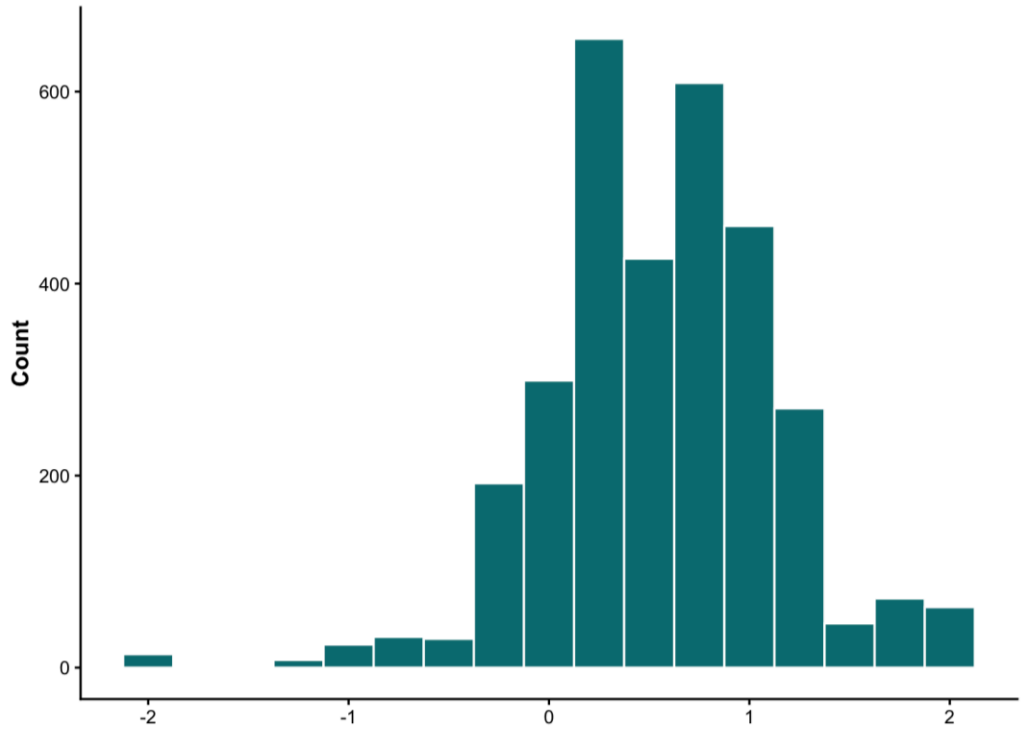


***Figure 6 - Gender Equality Index of Household Tasks at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

The relevance of this figure lies in its connection to long-term commitment. Perceptions of fairness in everyday tasks are a key component of relationship satisfaction and stability. While unequal divisions may be tolerated in the short term, they can generate tension over time, particularly as couples consider marriage and future childbearing.

The figure also provides important context for later analyses linking gender equality to relationship outcomes. It shows that there is meaningful variation in household arrangements among unmarried couples, creating scope for these dynamics to influence whether relationships progress to marriage, remain unmarried, or dissolve. From a policy perspective, the figure highlights that gender equality within relationships is not an abstract concept but a lived reality that varies across couples. Supporting more equitable sharing through parental leave design, childcare provision, and workplace flexibility, may therefore have indirect effects on partnership stability and marriage realization.

## 5. Findings from Wave 2

Figure 7 examines relationship outcomes in 2024 by marital intention expressed in 2020. As expected, individuals who intended to marry were significantly more likely to have married by Wave 2 than those who did not intend to marry. This confirms that intentions are meaningful predictors of subsequent behavior. However, the figure also reveals important limitations to intention realization. A substantial proportion of those who intended to marry remained unmarried four years later, and some experienced relationship dissolution. This gap between intention and outcome underscores the central theme of the report: intentions alone are insufficient when structural or relational constraints intervene.

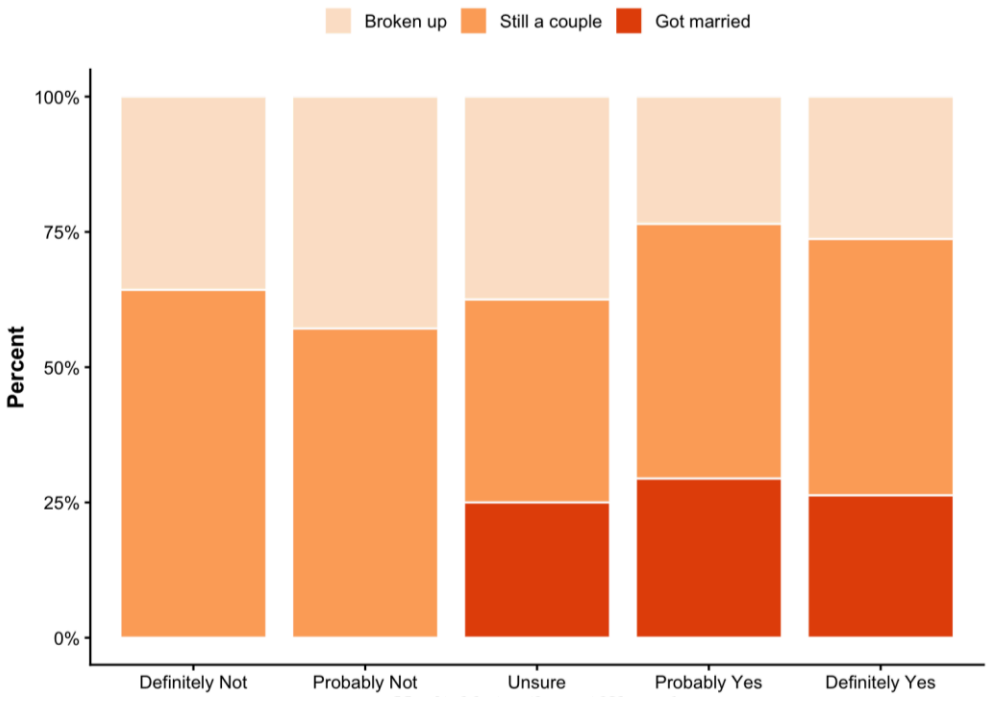


***Figure 7 - Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 by intention to marry at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

Among non-intenders, marriage is completely absent. This suggests that intentions change little over time, and that marriages rarely occur without prior planning or foregrounding. The figure therefore illustrates both continuity and change in partnership trajectories. Intentions increase the likelihood of marriage, but they do not guarantee it. The divergence between intention and outcome points to the importance of examining mediating factors such as economic security, housing, gender dynamics, and social support that enable or obstruct realization. It is also worth noting that the risk of dissolution for a relationship is only moderately lower amongst those with an intention to marry when compared to those with no intention to marry. This would indicate that an intention to marry is itself not especially protective against relationship dissolution.

Figure 8 shows how relationship outcomes vary by the length of the relationship at Wave 1. Longer-duration relationships are less likely to transition into marriage, which supports the idea of selection effects in our observations of relationships. Those who intend to marry are most likely to have done so within 5 to 6 years of the relationship starting. Nevertheless, relationships that have not converted to marriage are not particularly more prone to dissolution. This pattern reflects accumulated commitment and shared investment over time. Nevertheless, the figure also indicates that long duration does not eliminate risk. Some long-term relationships still fail to result in marriage and may end instead. This suggests that duration alone is not sufficient; quality, compatibility, and external conditions also matter.

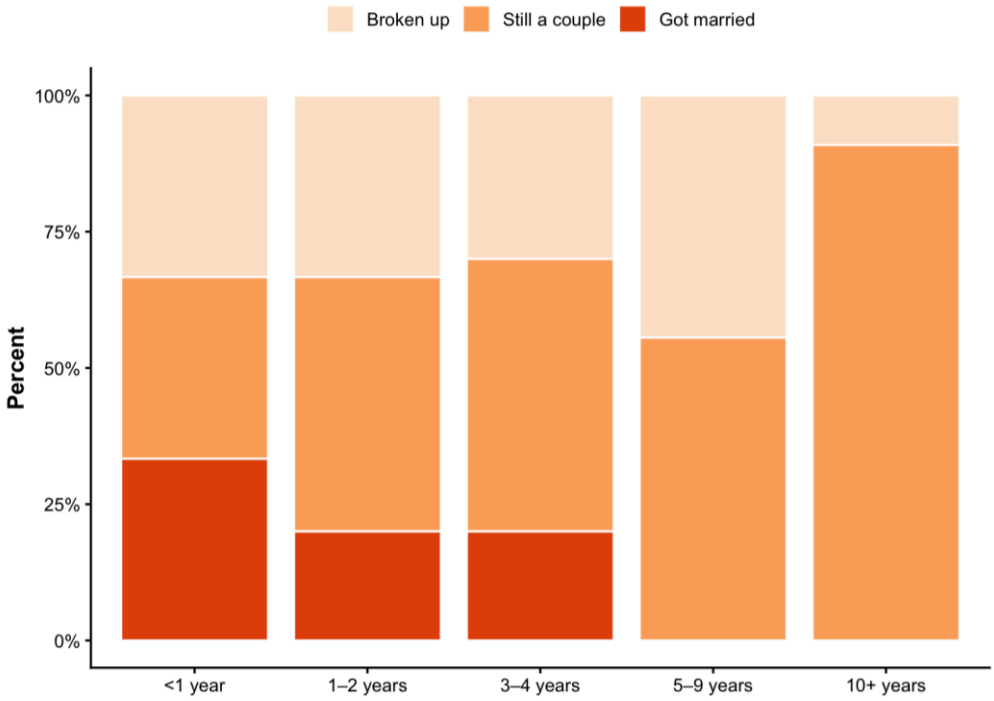


***Figure 8 - Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 by relationship duration at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

Figure 9 demonstrates a strong association between perceived economic strain and relationship outcomes. Couples who reported difficulty making ends meet in 2020 were less likely to marry by 2024 and more likely to remain unmarried or separate. Economic insecurity appears to function as a considerable barrier to marriage realization. Even when relationships are stable and intentions exist, financial stress can delay or prevent formalization. Marriage often entails expectations of financial independence, housing stability, and the ability to support a household—expectations that are difficult to meet under economic strain. The figure does however not suggest that economic pressure may contribute to relationship breakdown. Financial stress can increase conflict and reduce relationship satisfaction, raising the likelihood of dissolution but that is not evidenced by the findings here.

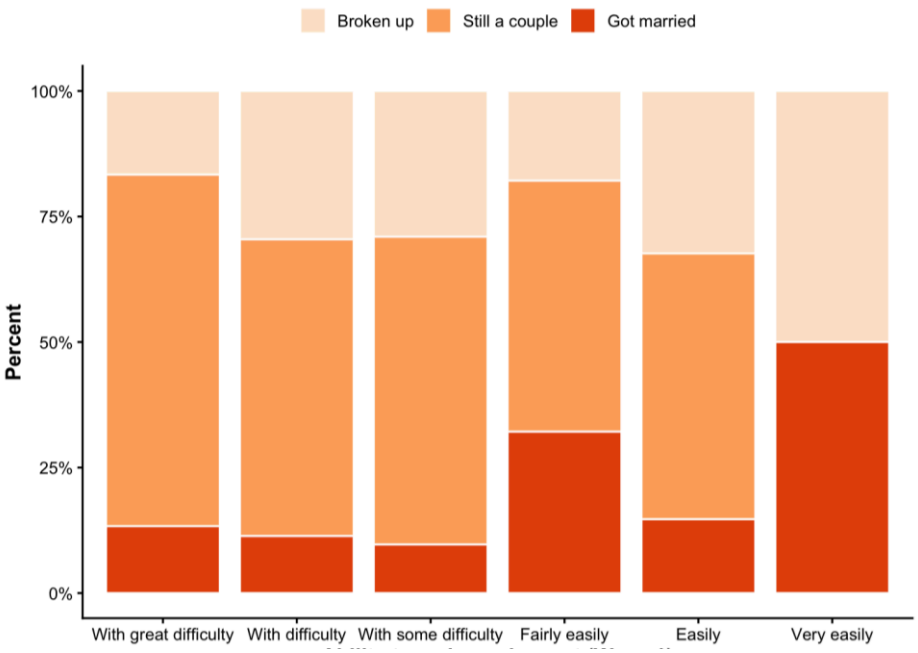


***Figure 9 - Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 by ability to 'make ends meet' at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

Figure 10 highlights housing satisfaction association with relationship outcomes. From the descriptive statistics alone it is not apparent that satisfaction with housing is a clear contributor to realization of marital intention. The conversion of a relationship to a marriage is not higher amongst those who are satisfied with their housing than those who are not and this in itself is surprising. Housing is a particularly salient issue in Moldova, where access to adequate, independent housing is limited for many young couples. Nevertheless, these results alone suggest that the low realization of marital intentions are consistent across a range of housing circumstances.

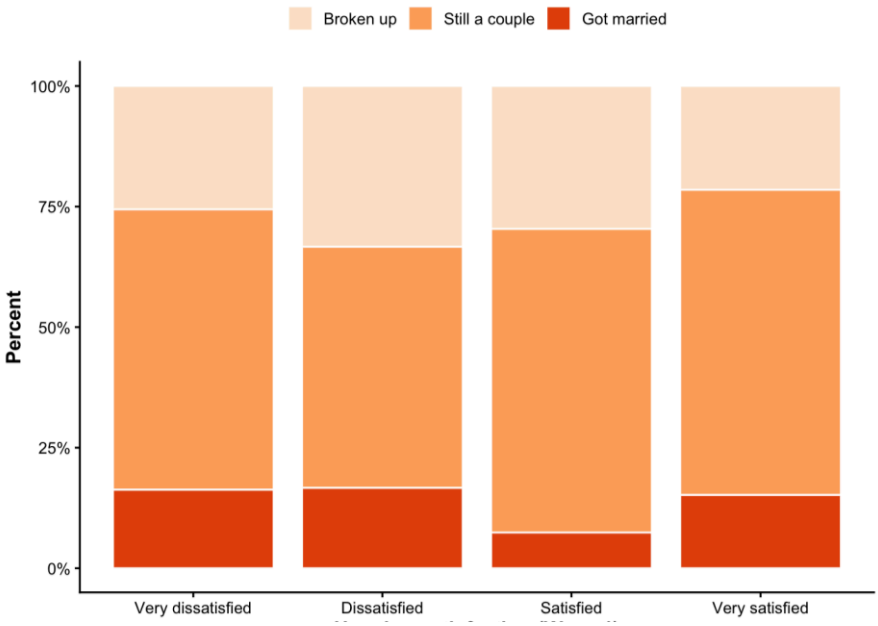


***Figure 10 - Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 by Satisfaction with Housing at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

Figure 11 shows that more egalitarian divisions of household tasks are associated with higher rates of marriage. Less equal arrangements correspond to greater instability. This pattern suggests that perceptions of fairness and mutual support play an important role in sustaining relationships and enabling long-term commitment. Unequal arrangements may generate dissatisfaction or uncertainty about future roles, particularly as marriage implies deeper interdependence. The figure highlights gender equality as a relational resource that supports marriage realization, reinforcing the importance of gender-sensitive family policies.

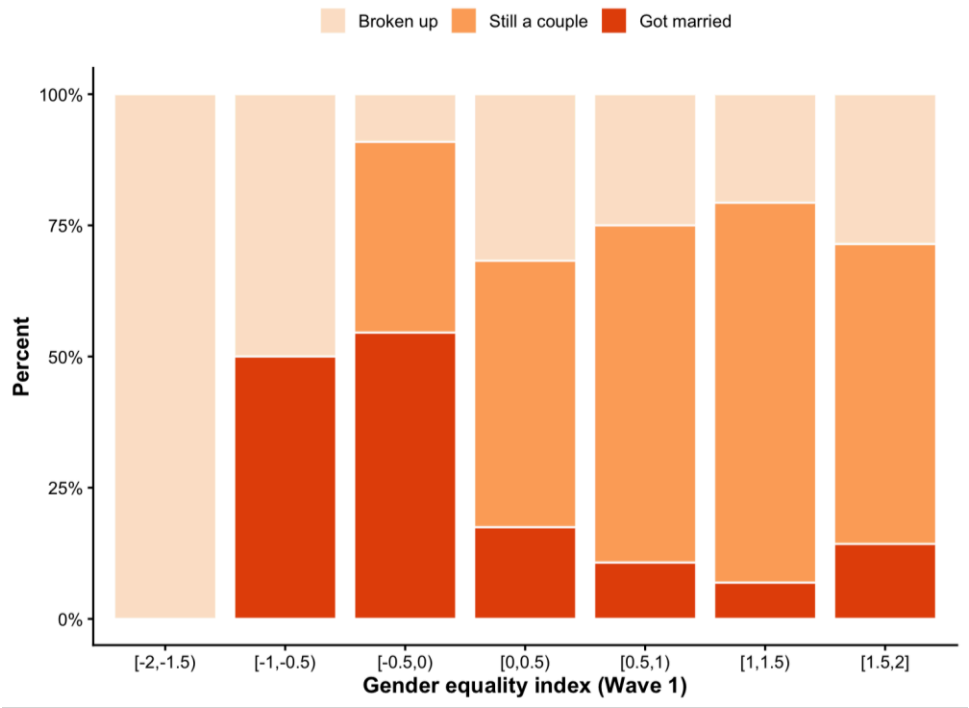


***Figure 11 - Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 by Gender Equality Index at Wave 1 (Source: GGS)***

Figure 12 examines relationship outcomes by the pathway through which partners met. Couples who met through online or at a bar were more likely to marry than those who met through work church or school. This is a surprising and potentially unintuitive finding. Social embeddedness does not appear to facilitate marriage by providing normative support, social monitoring, and clearer expectations. Instead the opportunities to meet people from new social contexts afforded by online dating and apps may be providing opportunities for individuals to find a partner that has matching relationship expectations and similar interests which result in higher rates of conversion to marriage. This figure underscores the social nature of marriage and highlights the changing ways in which relationships are formed and that technological change need not stand in conflict or contrast with traditional insitutions.

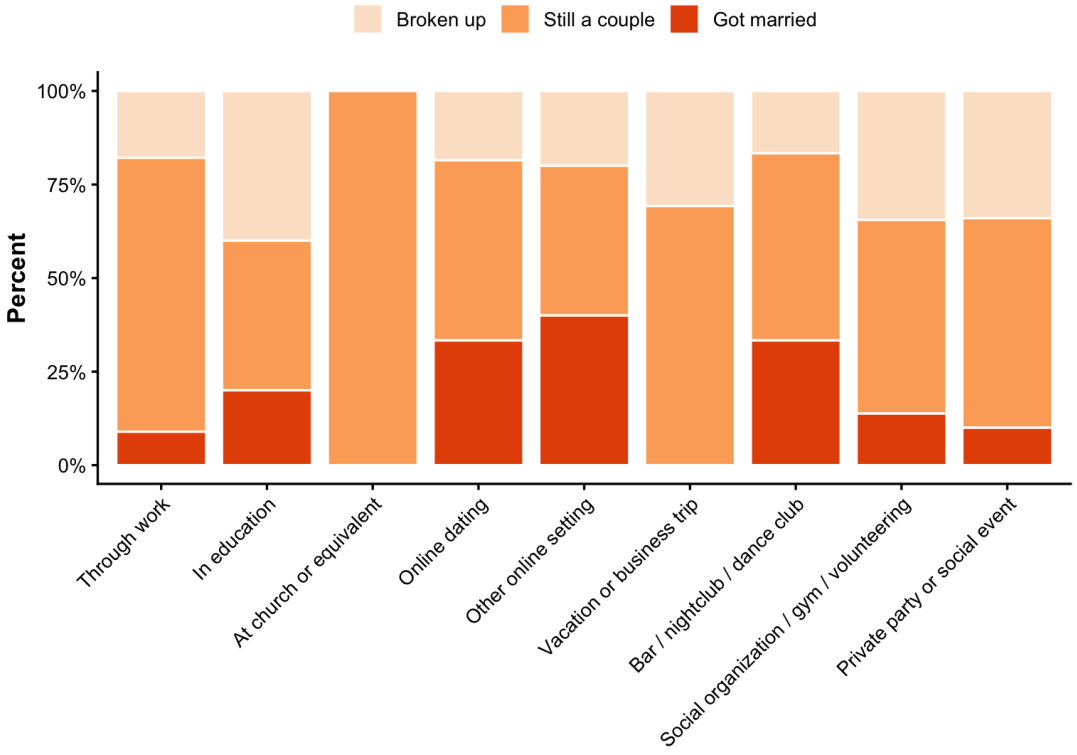


***Figure 12 - Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 by how the couple met (Source: GGS)***

## 6. Multinomial Logistic Regression

This report set out to examine whether marital intentions expressed in 2020 were realized by 2024, and which factors shaped relationship trajectories among unmarried couples in Moldova. While descriptive analyses highlighted a range of associations related to relationship duration, satisfaction, gender dynamics, housing conditions, and social embeddedness, the multivariate results provide a clear and focused conclusion: economic strain is the single factor that independently and robustly predicts relationship outcomes once other characteristics are held constant.

The multinomial regression analysis shows that the perceived ability to make ends meet at Wave 1 is the only variable that is statistically significant in differentiating relationship trajectories. Individuals who reported greater difficulty making ends meet were significantly less likely to transition into marriage and significantly more likely to experience relationship dissolution, compared to remaining in an unmarried partnership. This effect persists even after accounting for age, relationship duration, relationship satisfaction, gender equality in household tasks, housing satisfaction, and how couples met.

Importantly, several factors that appeared influential in descriptive analyses do not retain statistical significance in the regression model. Relationship duration, housing satisfaction, gender equality, and social embeddedness all show clear bivariate patterns, but their effects are not independently distinguishable once economic strain is taken into account. This suggests that many of these observed associations operate through or alongside economic insecurity, rather than constituting separate pathways to marriage realization.

These findings point to a central conclusion: unrealized marital intentions in Moldova are primarily driven by economic constraint rather than by a lack of commitment, weak relationships, or unfavorable attitudes toward marriage. Even among couples with long standing relationships, high relationship satisfaction, or egalitarian household arrangements, financial insecurity substantially reduces the likelihood that marriage plans are realized. Economic strain does not merely delay marriage; it also increases the risk of partnership breakdown.

From a policy perspective, this has clear implications. Measures aimed at promoting marriage or strengthening family formation cannot be effective if they do not address the underlying economic conditions faced by young adults and couples. Employment alone is not sufficient. What matters is whether households perceive their resources as adequate to sustain a shared future. Policies that reduce financial uncertainty, stabilize incomes, and protect households against economic shocks are therefore central to enabling couples to act on their marriage intentions.

This includes not only labor market policies, but also social protection measures that reduce income volatility, support young households during periods of transition, and buffer the effects of inflation and rising living costs. Given the strong association between economic strain and relationship dissolution, such policies are likely to have broader benefits for partnership stability and individual well being, beyond marriage alone.

In conclusion, the results underscore that marriage realization in Moldova is less a question of values or intentions and more a question of economic feasibility. Strengthening demographic and social resilience therefore requires sustained attention to the material conditions under which young people form and maintain partnerships. Enabling couples to make ends meet is a necessary precondition for enabling them to make long term commitments.

***Table 1 - Multinomial Logistic Regression: Relationship Outcome at Wave 2 (Source: GGS)***

| Outcome | Term | Coef | Std. Error | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Broken up | (Intercept) | 3.393 | 2.931 | 0.247 |
| | Age | -0.031 | 0.034 | 0.365 |
| | Ends Meet: Difficult (ref: Very difficult) | -3.469*** | 1.028 | 0.001 |
| | Ends Meet: Easy | -2.173* | 0.924 | 0.019 |
| | Ends Meet: Fairly Easy | -6.909*** | 1.175 | 0.000 |
| | Ends Meet: Some difficulty | -5.132*** | 0.969 | 0.000 |
| | Ends Meet: Very Easy | -0.945 | 0.759 | 0.214 |
| | Gender (ref: Male) | -1.167 | 0.773 | 0.131 |
| | Intention: Definitely yes | 0.759 | 1.156 | 0.512 |
| | Intention: Probably not (ref: Definitiely not) | 1.262 | 0.970 | 0.193 |
| | Intention: Probably yes | -1.541 | 1.088 | 0.157 |
| | Intention: Unsure | -0.775 | 0.816 | 0.342 |
| | Relationship length at wave 1 | -0.138 | 0.091 | 0.130 |
| | Satisfaction with housing | -0.355 | 0.249 | 0.154 |
| | Values: Marriage Outdated | -0.316 | 0.394 | 0.423 |
| | Values: Marriage is for life | 0.142 | 0.297 | 0.634 |
| Got married | (Intercept) | 23.233 | 20.951 | 0.267 |
| | Age | -0.566 | 0.375 | 0.132 |
| | Ends Meet: Difficult (ref: Very difficult) | 21.760** | 7.513 | 0.004 |
| | Ends Meet: Easy | 1.352 | 8.144 | 0.868 |
| | Ends Meet: Fairly Easy | 35.283*** | 5.502 | 0.000 |
| | Ends Meet: Some difficulty | 17.649* | 7.702 | 0.022 |
| | Ends Meet: Very Easy | 6.629 | 4.422 | 0.134 |
| | Gender (ref: Male) | 1.286 | 4.047 | 0.751 |
| | Intention: Definitely yes | -2.007 | 35.634 | 0.955 |
| | Intention: Probably not (ref: Definitiely not) | -2.694 | 48.113 | 0.955 |
| | Intention: Probably yes | -4.301 | 29.679 | 0.885 |
| | Intention: Unsure | 14.969 | 35.527 | 0.674 |
| | Relationship length at wave 1 | -3.064 | 2.019 | 0.129 |
| | Satisfaction with housing | 0.389 | 0.907 | 0.668 |
| | Values: Marriage Outdated | -1.259 | 0.858 | 0.142 |
| | Values: Marriage is for life | -1.189 | 1.015 | 0.241 |

*Notes: $p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$*

## 7. Conclusion

This report has examined the realization of marital intentions in the Republic of Moldova using longitudinal data from the Generations and Gender Survey collected in 2020 and 2024. By following unmarried couples over time, the analysis moves beyond cross sectional descriptions to directly observe whether stated intentions to marry translate into marriage, continued cohabitation, or relationship dissolution. The findings provide a nuanced picture of partnership dynamics during a period marked by economic uncertainty, demographic change, and social transformation.

The results show that marriage remains a valued and intentional life goal for many Moldovans, yet realization rates are modest. Only 28 percent of those who intended to marry in 2020 had entered marriage by 2024. Most remained in an unmarried relationship, while a smaller share experienced separation. This gap between intention and outcome does not reflect declining support for marriage as an institution. Instead, it points to constraints that limit couples' ability to act on their plans within the expected time frame.

Descriptive analyses highlight the importance of relationship duration, satisfaction, gender equality within the household, housing conditions, and the ways in which couples meet. Longer and more satisfying relationships, more egalitarian divisions of household tasks, and certain pathways of partner meeting are associated with higher rates of marriage. These patterns are consistent with life course theories that emphasize accumulated commitment, perceived fairness, and social context as facilitators of long term partnership transitions.

However, when these factors are considered simultaneously in a multivariate framework, one finding stands out clearly. The perceived ability to make ends meet is the only factor that independently and statistically significantly predicts relationship outcomes. Couples who experience economic strain are substantially less likely to marry and more likely to see their relationships dissolve, even when they report stable relationships, positive attitudes toward marriage, and high levels of satisfaction. Other factors that appear influential descriptively do not retain independent significance once economic insecurity is taken into account.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore that supporting family formation cannot rely on normative messaging or symbolic support for marriage alone. Policies aimed at strengthening partnerships and enabling marriage need to address the economic realities faced by young adults and couples. Employment status by itself is insufficient. What matters is whether households feel able to sustain a shared future in the face of rising living costs, income volatility, and uncertainty.

Measures that reduce financial strain, stabilize household incomes, and protect couples during periods of transition are therefore central to enabling marriage realization. Such policies are likely to have benefits that extend beyond marriage itself, supporting relationship stability, individual wellbeing, and broader demographic resilience. Ensuring that couples can make ends meet is not only an economic objective, but a foundational condition for enabling long term commitments across the life course.

In conclusion, this report shows that marriage intentions in Moldova are widespread but unevenly realized. Bridging this gap requires sustained attention to the economic conditions under which partnerships form and evolve. Supporting couples' capacity to plan, commit, and build a shared future is a key component of strengthening Moldova's social and demographic resilience in the years ahead.