



# **Multicultural Marriages and Their Family Life**

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- Newly-created social links between people across national borders due to international migration and tourism are some of the most notable features of globalization
- One of the consequences of easier access to other countries and increased intercultural communication is the increased incidence of multicultural marriages
- Multicultural marriage may eventually function as a "bridge between different cultures" (Lauth Bacas, 2002)
- The population of foreigners married to citizens of a destination country constitutes a particular element of settlement migration. Such foreigners are usually privileged in the sense that they are given legal rights to entry which other potential migrants may not receive (Górny & Kepinska, 2004)
- Viertola-Cavallari (2004) emphasizes that in a multicultural marriage, the immigrant spouse becomes a part of the non-immigrant family, and that such integration is nearly mandatory, if the marriage is to last for example for the sake of future children. Socially, multicultural marriage works as a status passage as well: it functions as a strong and effective mechanism for turning a stranger into "one of us" in the eyes of a specific kin group (Lauth Bacas, 2002;

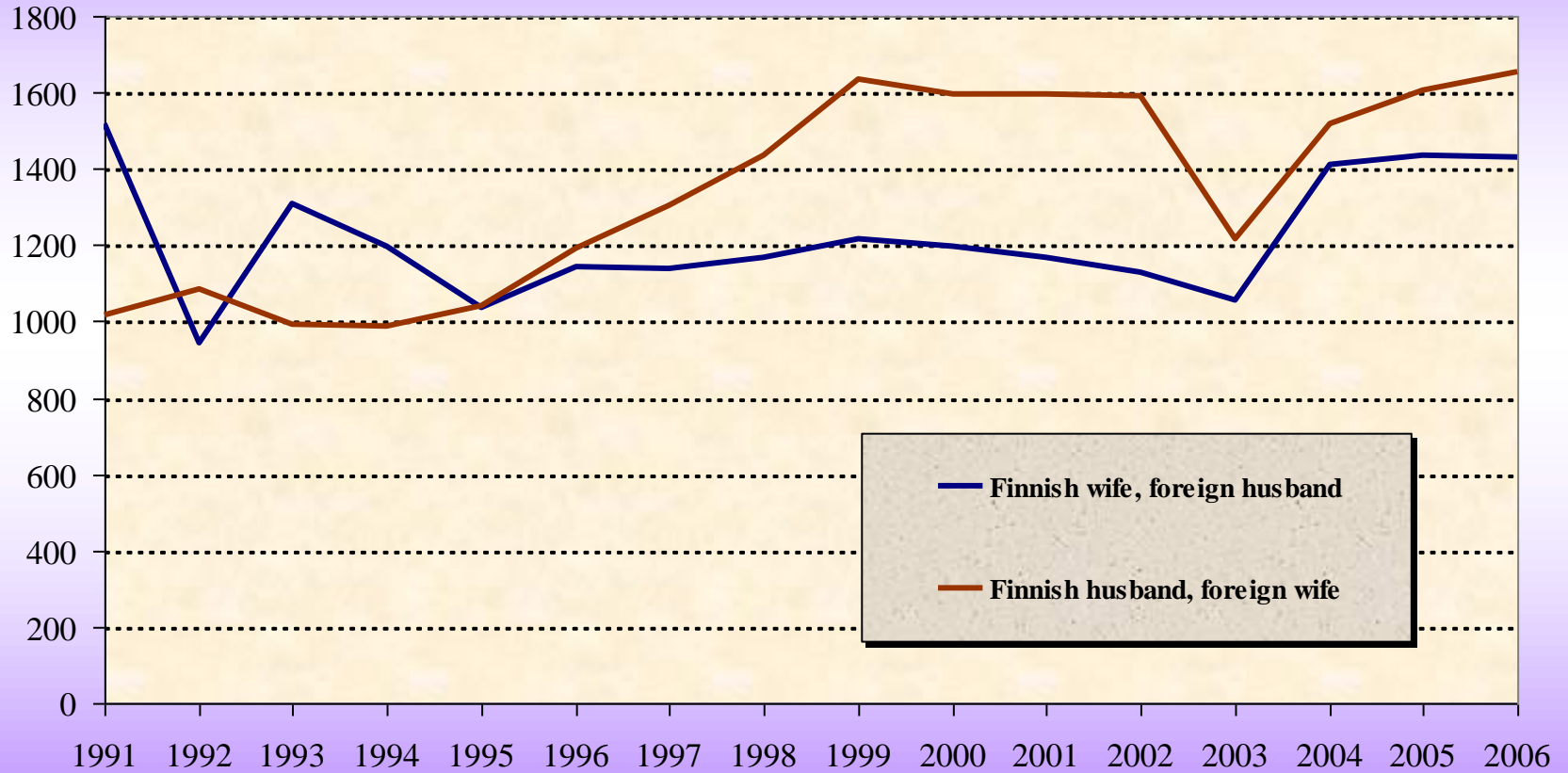
# Some Statistics of Multicultural Marriages

- Multicultural marriages in Finland are defined as marriages between a foreigner and a permanently residing citizen of Finland
- Of all foreigners living in Finland who are married, 47 % have a Finnish spouse (Ylänkö, 2000: 188)

# Marriages of Finnish citizens with foreign citizens in 1991 - 2006

(Statistics Finland 2007)

## Marriages



- Among the Finnish men who entered into multicultural marriages between 1996 and 2006, their wives are most often Russian, Thai and Estonian citizens (Table 1)
- Of the Western wives' countries of origin, Sweden and the United States are frequent

**Table 1. Marriages between Finnish men and foreign citizens in 1996–2006 (Source: SVT, 2007).**

<b>Wife's country of citizenship</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>1996–2006</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Russia</b>	445	37,3	614	38,5	441	26,7	5,617	34,4
<b>Thailand</b>	78	6,5	150	9,4	341	20,6	1,959	12,0
<b>Estonia</b>	175	14,7	208	13,1	94	5,7	1,890	11,6
<b>Viet Nam</b>	22	1,8	25	1,6	65	3,9	404	2,5
<b>Sweden</b>	40	3,4	54	3,4	58	3,5	498	3,1
<b>China</b>	21	1,8	44	2,8	64	3,9	460	2,8
<b>Ukraine</b>	13	1,1	25	1,6	28	1,7	231	1,4
<b>The USA</b>	38	3,2	36	2,3	37	2,2	367	2,3
<b>Philippines</b>	42	3,5	25	1,6	31	1,9	337	2,1
<b>Brazil*</b>	--	--	14	0,9	34	2,1	180	1,1
<b>Others</b>	320	26,8	399	25,0	462	27,9	4,402	26,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,194</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>1,594</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>1,655</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>16,345</b>	<b>100,0</b>

\*1997–2006

- From 1996–2006, the majority of Finnish women's spouses came from the United States, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Russia and Morocco (Table 2).
- In contrast with Finnish men, for Finnish women foreign spouses are most often Western.

**Table 2. Marriages between Finnish women and foreign citizens in 1996–2006 (Source: SVT, 2007).**

Husband's country of citizenship	1996	%	2000	%	2006	%	1996–2006	%
United Kingdom	67	5,9	116	9,7	107	7,5	1,142	8,5
The USA	155	13,6	122	10,2	94	6,6	1,306	9,7
Turkey	122	10,7	90	7,5	100	7,0	1,157	8,6
Sweden	84	7,4	91	7,6	92	6,4	931	6,9
Germany	80	7,0	69	5,8	73	5,1	770	5,7
Nigeria	9	0,8	12	1,0	47	3,3	234	1,7
Russia	29	2,5	39	3,3	47	3,3	451	3,3
France*	33	2,9	19	1,6	--	--	306	2,3
Morocco	34	3,0	52	4,3	37	2,6	424	3,1
Netherlands	26	2,2	34	2,8	26	1,8	304	2,3
Serbia and Montenegro	15	1,3	10	0,8	25	1,8	210	1,6
Egypt	15	1,3	12	1,0	31	2,2	206	1,5
Spain*	10	0,9	11	0,9	--	--	152	1,1
Italy	22	1,9	21	1,8	33	2,3	268	2,0
Viet Nam	10	0,9	17	1,4	35	2,4	179	1,3
Estonia**	--	--	26	2,2	28	2,0	234	1,7
Others	431	37,7	458	38,2	657	45,9	5,219	38,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,142</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>1,199</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>1,432</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13,493</b>	<b>100,0</b>

\*1996–2005

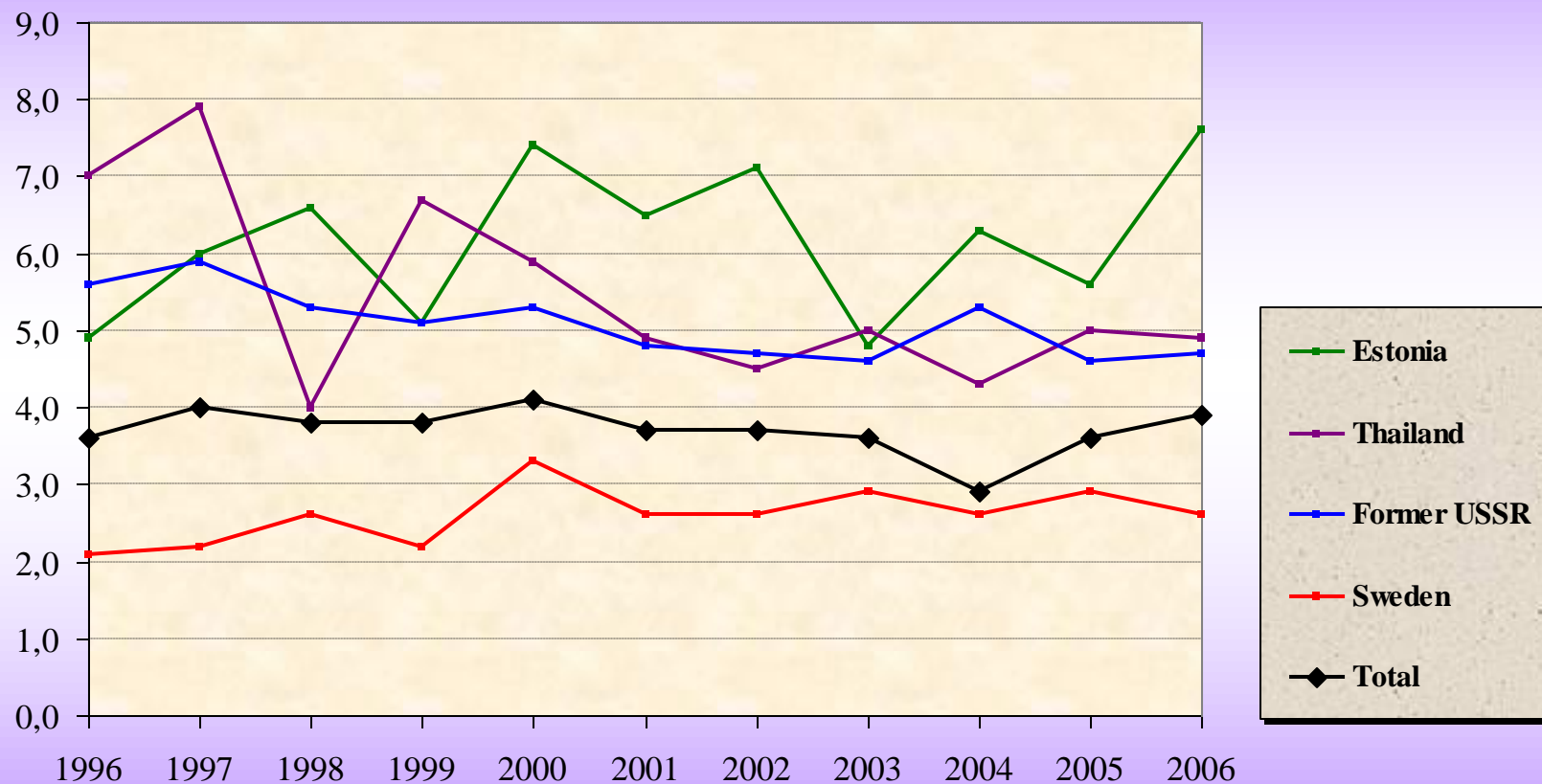
\*\*1997–2006



- For a long period of time, Finnish men have had the highest divorce rates from Estonian, Thai and Former Soviet spouses (Figure 2.)

### Divorce rates of multicultural marriages (%) for Finnish men, according to wife's country of birth in 1996 - 2006 (Statistics Finland 2007)

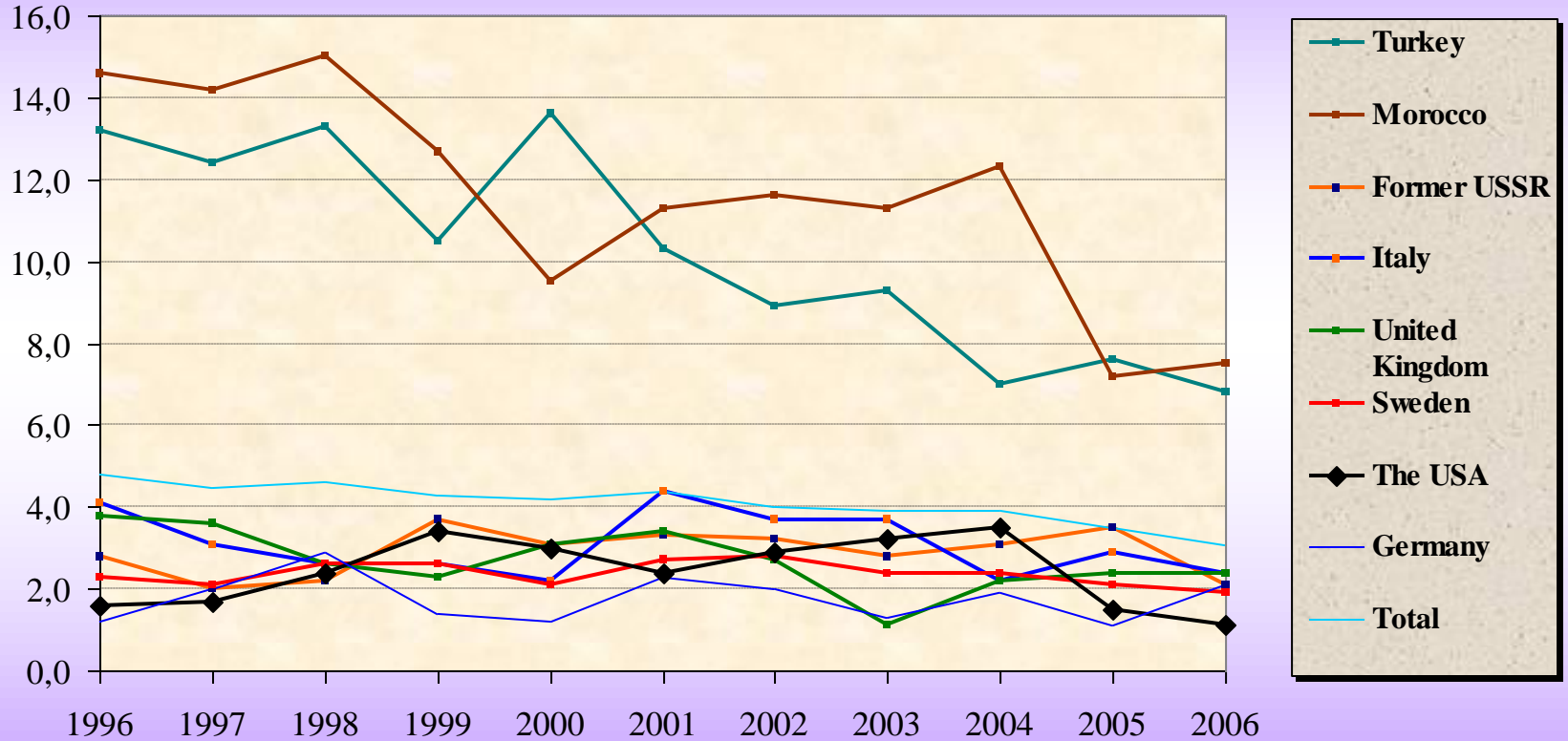
Divorce rate (%)



- Divorce rate for Finnish women has been the most noticeable in the case of men born in Morocco and Turkey

**Divorce rates of multicultural marriages (%) for Finnish women, according to husband's country of birth in 1996 - 2006 (Statistics Finland 2007)**

**Divorce rate (%)**



- The average number of divorces is clearly greater in the case of multicultural marriages (2003: 3.6 %) than in marriages in which both spouses were born in Finland (2003: 1.3 %)
- In 2006, the number of divorces in multicultural marriages was 748 for Finnish men and 474 for Finnish women

According to Oksi-Walter (2004), a multicultural relationship provides the building blocks for a rich, multifaceted marriage and for personal growth. Though it involves many risks, it is also an opportunity for a more fulfilling relationship. Fully different cultures and circumstances of growing up that define each spouse individually can still leave room for interaction among the couple and their family that will produce a "third culture". Moreover, since there are simply no routine responses, and they cannot easily make decisions on the basis of assumptions, a multicultural couple arrives at solutions with greater awareness.

## Family life: in a multicultural marriage, the following topics can be challenging

- 1) **Values:** what is or is not acceptable; what is important or less so. Differences in values may lead to differences of opinion, to misunderstandings, and even to serious conflicts within the marriage.
- 2) **Importance of language:** what is the mutual language; is it the language of only one spouse; how is love expressed between husband and wife? (Youakim, 2004: 159).
- 3) **Meals:** what type of food and drink to be consumed, its preparation, mealtimes, table manners, and so on
- 4) **Sexuality:** birth control, virginity, premarital relations, makeup, dress, family size etc.
- 5) **Gender roles:** each spouse has his/her own ideas about how the other should behave
- 6) **Friends:** it is recommendable to find friends who are also in multicultural marriages, with whom one can share experiences. Such friends would understand the problems faced by the couple and can give positive feedback for the couple's solutions.
- 7) **Relatives and in-laws:** different conceptions of the family, a patriarchal family, etc.
- 8) **The upbringing of children:** upbringing approaches differ according to religion and nationality. One problem arising from different cultural codes is the question of the christening and naming of children. From which language they will be drawn; what language or languages will the children be taught etc.
- 9) **Religion and celebrations:** what role religion plays within the family; does the family celebrate Christmas, Easter, Ramadan  
(Lauth Bacas, 2002; Interracial Marriages 2005; Viertola-Cavallari, 2004; Youakim, 2004: 159).

## Everyday Experiences Within Multicultural Marriage

- Low-wage jobs or unemployment cause economic dependence on the Finnish spouse
- Finnish spouse and his/her networks can help however to find a job for a foreign partner
- Disorientation experienced in a new environment leads to informational dependence
- The language barrier is another challenge; often in the beginning of a marriage, the couple uses a language foreign to both, such as English, German and Spanish
- Loneliness and language difference are major problems among women who have come to Finland because of marriage
- Some immigrant wives suffer in silence, nor are they always aware of their options. They may not know when and from whom to seek help



- Basic language training can begin in the foreign spouse's country of origin, before he or she moves to Finland
- Also, the immigrant should, as soon as possible, become informed about Finnish society and his/her basic rights
- Though there is no formula for the success of a multicultural marriage, adopting an open and realistic attitude from the beginning the relationship will prevent many conflicts and misunderstandings
- For each member of the family multicultural families can promote broader and stronger social and cognitive skill sets, as well as personal strengths such as cultural adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, greater interpersonal flexibility and less ethnocentric attitudes. Presence of more than one culture within a family provides greater richness and variation in potential solutions (see Crippen and Brew, 2007: 112).

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