

# Families and households statistics: User experience

## Introduction

Statistics are published by the Office for National Statistics about families and households. They present recent estimates of the number of families by type, people in families by family type and children in families by type. Types of family include married couple families, cohabiting couple families and lone parent families. Tables on household size, household types and people in different household types are also provided. These include estimates of people living alone, multi-family households and households where members are all unrelated. The statistics are available at [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2001-to-2010/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2001-to-2010/index.html).

It is important that the Office for National Statistics ensures that these statistics meet the needs of the people who use them, and that feedback on the statistics is acted upon.

This document describes:

- our understanding of what use is made of these statistics
- feedback we have had about these statistics
- how we are acting on this feedback.

## Uses of these statistics

An understanding of families and households is crucial for those involved in planning and decision making at the national and local level. In addition, family and social relationships are one of the most important factors contributing to wellbeing.

The statistics are used by those who want to improve their understanding of the UK's families and households including:

- Policy makers
- MPs
- Journalists
- Charities
- The private sector
- Students
- Researchers and academics

- Members of the general public.

Examples of recent uses of the families and households estimates (both published estimates and requests for ad hoc analysis) are shown below:

- The Department for Work and Pensions carries out economic analysis of lone parents and couples with children to ascertain the cost and impact of current and future policies
- A company has used the statistics to ascertain the number of mothers and the ages of their children in the UK, a target audience for their products
- Charities for lone parents have used the statistics to ascertain the number of lone parents in the UK and the ages of their children
- An academic has used statistics on the number of women with dependent children for use in a book on women and employment
- A student has used the statistics to help write an essay on same-sex parents
- The media have used the statistics to highlight areas where there are greater proportions of lone parent families. The statistics were used in a TV programme on lone parent families and the benefits they receive
- MPs have used the statistics to ascertain the number of lone parent families with children.

## Feedback from users

This section provides a summary of feedback from people who use our statistics and our response to specific points.

The team which produces these statistics at the Office for National Statistics has received feedback from:

- Consulting a small selection of people who are known to be interested in families and households during the initial development of these statistics
- Contacting a wider range of users on the day of publication to notify them that the statistics had been released and asking for feedback
- The UK Statistics Authority who asked people who use these statistics for their views during the assessment of the statistics
- A presentation at the British Society for Population Studies conference
- People who contact the Office for National Statistics directly.

## General views

In general, people have welcomed the publication of the statistics and say that the statistics are clearly explained. They are also happy with their engagement with the team at the Office for National Statistics who produces these statistics.

## Geographical level

During the development of the statistics, people who use families and households statistics stated that they were more interested in statistics for the UK as a whole and had less demand for statistics at smaller geographical levels. However, since publication in April 2011, the Office for National Statistics has received more requests from people who would like similar statistics to those published, for geographical areas such as local authorities. The Office for National Statistics intends to monitor requests for statistics for local authorities and may publish selected statistics at this level in the future.

## Publishing percentages

The Department for Work and Pensions, who use the published statistics, has asked that percentages are published alongside the estimates. A small number of percentages are published in the statistical bulletin. However the Office for National Statistics has responded that:

1. For some tables it is not clear what a particular estimate should be divided by in order to create a percentage, and if the meaning of the percentage would be clear to others. For example, it is not clear whether lone parents with dependent children should be divided by all families with dependent children or all families.
2. The method used to produce the coefficient of variation and confidence intervals takes a long time to produce, and producing it for percentages in addition to estimates would take nearly twice as long. However the Office for National Statistics will shortly be testing a replacement system and in particular will examine the time taken to produce these quality measures. If the time taken by the system is much less, producing the percentages would be less of a burden. Alternatively the Office for National Statistics has suggested supplying estimates which are not rounded to the Department for Work and Pensions for them to produce the percentages they need.

## Frequency and timeliness

One person who uses statistics on families and households suggested publishing the statistics during National Family Week (in May). According to the code of practice for official statistics<sup>1</sup>, statistical reports should be released as soon as they are judged ready, so that there is no opportunity, or perception of opportunity, for the release to be withheld or delayed. The publication of the 2011 statistics is planned for January 2012, and the publication of the 2012 statistics is planned for late November 2012. Therefore delaying publication until May each year is deemed too long a wait.

## Only children

Several different people have asked for statistics about only children and how these statistics have changed over time. A [summary about only children](#) was published on 16 December 2011.

The Office for National Statistics will continue to monitor requests about specific families or households topics, and will respond by publishing statistics if similar themes recur.

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<sup>1</sup> Code of practice for official statistics: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf>

## How to give us your feedback

The Office for National Statistics would appreciate feedback on the uses made of the statistics and the usefulness of the information provided. Please email [families@ons.gov.uk](mailto:families@ons.gov.uk) (preferred) or call 01329 444022 to provide feedback.