

Families and Households, 2001 to 2011



Coverage: UK

Date: **19 January 2012**

Geographical Area: UK

Theme: **People and Places**

Theme: **Population**

Key findings

- In 2011 there were 17.9 million families in the UK. Of these 12.0 million consisted of a married couple with or without children.
- The number of opposite sex cohabiting couple families increased significantly, from 2.1 million in 2001 to 2.9 million in 2011. The number of dependent children living in opposite sex cohabiting couple families increased significantly, from 1.3 million to 1.8 million over the same period.
- In 2011, 38 per cent of married couple families had dependent children, the same percentage as cohabiting couple families.
- There were 2.0 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2011, a figure which has grown steadily but significantly from 1.7 million in 2001.
- There were 26.3 million households in the UK in 2011. Of these 29 per cent consisted of only one person and almost 20 per cent consisted of four or more people.

Introduction

This bulletin presents annual statistics on the number of families by type, people in families by family type and children in families by type. A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child. Children may be dependent or non-dependent. Types of family include married couple families, cohabiting couple families and lone parent families.

The bulletin also presents statistics on the number of households by type, household size and people living alone. Only the statistics for 2011 are published for the first time today but [minor annual revisions have been made to previously published estimates \(41.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#).

The Labour Force Survey, a large household survey of people in the UK, is used to provide estimates about UK families and households presented in this bulletin. The statistics are based on responses to the survey in the April to June quarter each year. Because the estimates are based on a survey, all estimates produced are subject to sampling variability. The majority of estimates are precise but for some smaller groups, such as civil partner couple families and same sex cohabiting couple families, the estimates are considered less precise and should be treated with more caution.

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

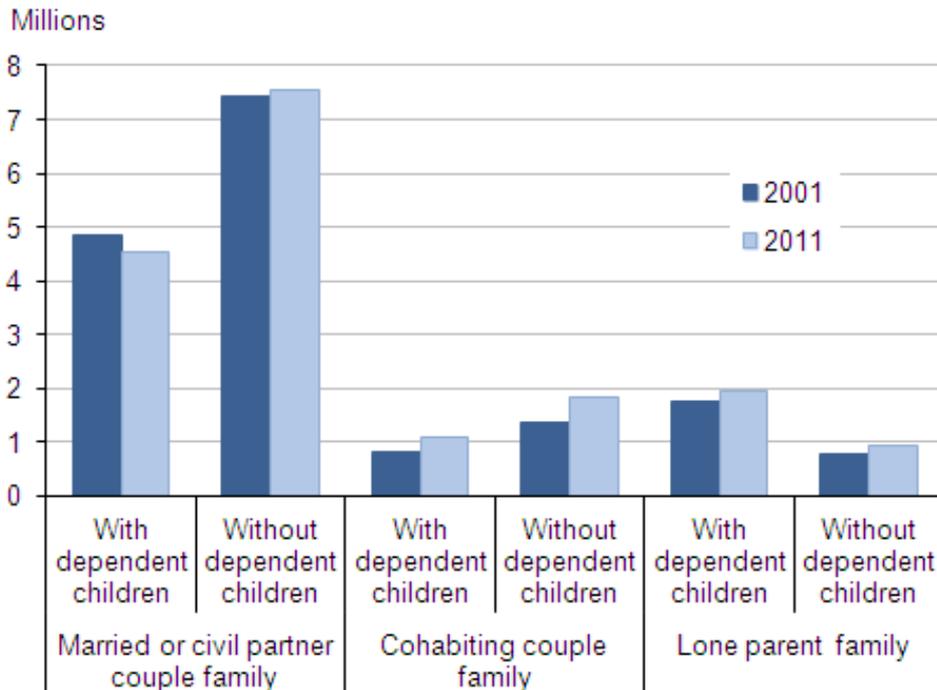
- Policy makers
- MPs
- Journalists
- Charities
- Businesses
- Students
- Researchers and academics
- Members of the general public.

Further information about people who use statistics on families and households and what they use the statistics for can be found in the information note [Families and households statistics: User experience](#).

Families

Figure 1: Families by family type, 2001 and 2011

United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Families without dependent children have only non-dependent children or no children in the household.
2. Civil partnerships were introduced in the UK in December 2005.
3. Cohabiting couples include both opposite- and same-sex couples.

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Figure 1 shows that the most common family type in the UK in both 2001 and 2011 was a married or civil partner couple family without dependent children. There were 7.6 million such families in 2011, an increase of over 100,000 since 2001. The next most common family type was a married or civil partner couple family with dependent children, of which there were 4.5 million such families in 2011. This was the only family type to observe a decrease since 2001. So, despite an increase in cohabiting couple families and lone parent families over the last decade, married couple families are still the most common family type in the UK.

Table 1: Families: by family type in 2001 and 2011

United Kingdom

Thousands

| Family type | 2001 | | 2011 | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---|----------------|-------------------------|---|----------------|
| | With dependent children | Without dependent children ¹ | Total families | With dependent children | Without dependent children ¹ | Total families |
| Married couple family | 4,833 | 7,447 | 12,280 | 4,514 | 7,505 | 12,018 |
| Civil partner couple family ² | N/A | N/A | N/A | 5 | 54 | 59 |
| Opposite sex cohabiting couple family | 808 | 1,321 | 2,129 | 1,097 | 1,755 | 2,853 |
| Same sex cohabiting couple family | .. | 44 | 45 | 3 | 60 | 63 |
| Lone parent family | 1,745 | 767 | 2,512 | 1,958 | 925 | 2,883 |
| All families | 7,386 | 9,580 | 16,966 | 7,576 | 10,299 | 17,875 |

Table notes:

1. Families without dependent children have only non-dependent children or no children in the household.
2. Civil partnerships were introduced in the UK in December 2005.
3. .. indicates that estimates are not sufficiently reliable to be published.
4. Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

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Table 1 shows that the total number of families in the UK has increased by 5 per cent since 2001, the same as UK population growth during this period.

The number of married couple families decreased by 262,000 between 2001 and 2011 to 12.0 million in 2011. This reduction is statistically significant. It is also consistent with both the decrease in the number of marriages since the early 1970s, and the statistically significant increase in opposite sex cohabiting couple families between 2001 and 2011 from 2.1 million to 2.9 million. In 2011 there were an estimated 63,000 families consisting of a same sex cohabiting couple and 59,000 consisting of a civil partnered couple, the latter having steadily increased since the introduction of civil partnerships in the UK in December 2005.

In 2011, 38 per cent of married couple families had dependent children, the same percentage as cohabiting couple families. A much lower percentage of civil partner couple families and same sex cohabiting couple families had dependent children. However this percentage is much higher for lone parent families at 68 per cent, partly because it is not possible to be a lone parent without at least one child in the household.

Notes for Families

1. Dependent children are those aged under 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Lone parents

There were nearly 2.0 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2011, a figure which has grown significantly from 1.7 million in 2001. Lone parents with dependent children represented 26 per cent of all families with dependent children in 2011, an increase of two percentage points since 2001.

In 2011, women accounted for 92 per cent of lone parents with dependent children and men accounted for 8 per cent of lone parents with dependent children. These percentages have changed little since 2001. Women are more likely to take the main caring responsibilities for any children when relationships break down, and therefore become lone parents.

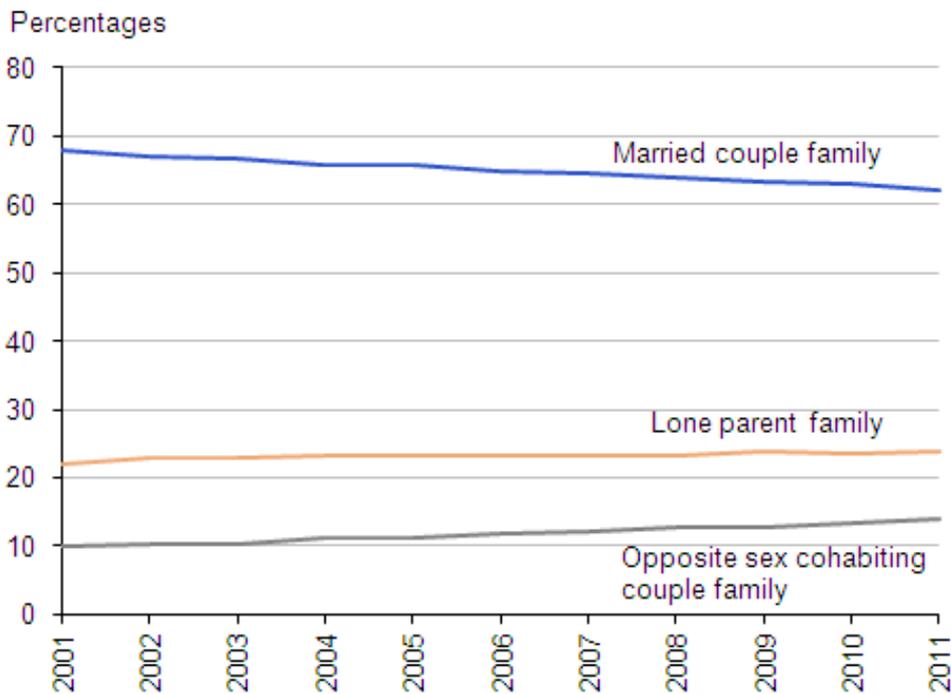
Further information about lone parents can be found in the [summary of lone parents with dependent children](#).

Dependent children

Dependent children are those aged under 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household. There were 13.2 million dependent children living in families in the UK in 2011, slightly less than in 2001, despite the generally increasing number of births each year since 2001. Although the number of children aged under five has increased between 2001 and 2011, the number of children aged five to 16 has decreased, leading to a slight decrease overall in the total number of dependent children over this period.

Figure 2: Percentage of dependent children: by family type, 2001 to 2011

United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Less than 1 per cent of dependent children lived in civil partner or same sex cohabiting couple families in 2011. Therefore the percentages are too small to be shown.

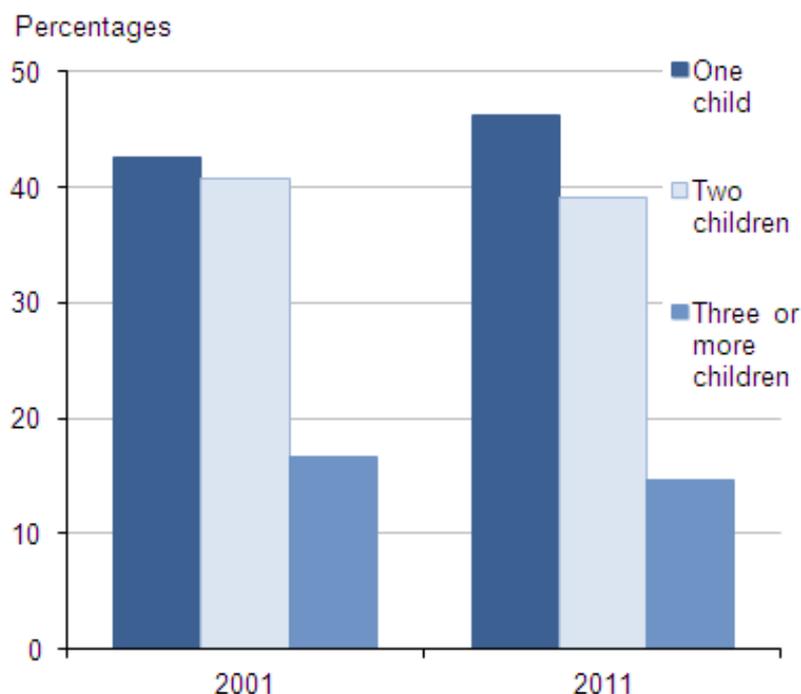
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The types of families in which dependent children live have changed significantly. Figure 2 shows that 62 per cent of dependent children lived in a married couple family in 2011, a decrease from 68 per cent in 2001. Over the same period, the percentage of dependent children living in opposite sex cohabiting couple families increased by four percentage points to 14 per cent, and those living in lone parent families increased by two percentage points to 24 per cent.

Figure 3: Percentage of families: by number of dependent children in the family, 2001 and 2011

United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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Figure 3 shows that in 2011, 46 per cent of families with dependent children had only one dependent child in the family at the time of the survey, a significant increase of 4 percentage points since 2001. In 2011, 39 per cent of families with dependent children had two dependent children and 15 per cent had three or more dependent children. The statistics do not necessarily indicate that the proportion of only children is increasing. Women have been postponing their childbearing to older ages in recent years; this could be temporarily increasing the proportion of families who have had a first child but not yet had their second. Further information about only children can be found in the [summary of statistics available about only children](#).

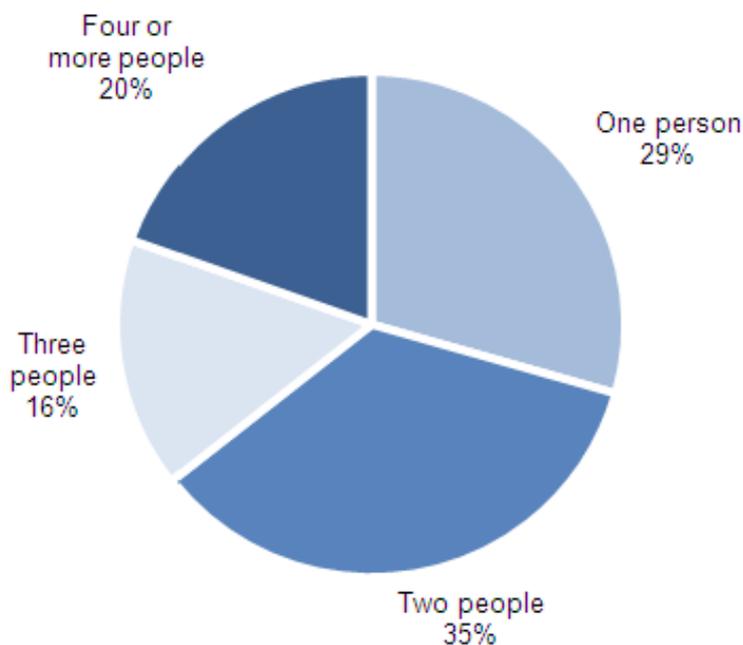
Household size

A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area. A household can consist of more than one family or no families in the case of a group of unrelated people. The definition of a household changed slightly in 2011 (see background note 5 for more information). This change in definition has no impact on the comparability of the statistics over time.

There were 26.3 million households in the UK in 2011. The number of households has increased by 7.0 per cent since 2001, slightly faster than the 5.3 per cent growth in the size of the UK population. This is due to the trend towards smaller household sizes: the proportion of households containing four or more people decreased from 20.7 per cent in 2001 to 19.6 in 2011, while the proportion of households containing one person increased from 28.6 to 29.4 per cent, or by nearly 0.7 million to 7.7 million, over the same period. A different source, the General Lifestyle Survey, which provides more historic information, shows that 17 per cent of households in Great Britain contained one person in 1971. Although not directly comparable, this is 12 percentage points lower than the Labour Force Survey shows for the UK in 2011.

Figure 4: Percentage of households by household size in 2011

United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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Household size in 2011 is shown in Figure 4. The percentage of UK households which contain one person (29.4 per cent) is similar to the European average of 30.3 per cent. In 2011, the average number of people per household was 2.4, the same as the European average. Of the UK constituent countries, Northern Ireland had the highest average number of people per household at 2.5.

Notes for Household size

1. The EU Statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) is the source of the European comparisons. The statistics are for 2009 and can be found on the [Eurostat web page Income and Living Conditions](#) and the countries covered are the EU27 countries.

Household type

Table 2: Households: by household type in 2001 and 2011

United Kingdom

Millions

| Year | One person households | One family household: couple | One family household: lone parent | Two or more unrelated adults | Multi-family households | All households |
|------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 2001 | 7.0 | 14.2 | 2.4 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 24.5 |
| 2011 | 7.7 | 14.6 | 2.8 | 0.9 | 0.2 | 26.3 |

Table notes:

1. Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

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Table 2 shows that the most common household type in 2011 was one family consisting of a couple with or without children. There were 14.6 million such households, an increase from 14.2 million households in 2001. Despite this increase in absolute numbers, there is a reduction in the proportion of all households of this type, from 58 per cent of all households in 2001 to 56 per cent in 2011.

The next most common household type was one person households, of which there were 7.7 million in 2011. UK households containing one lone parent family increased from 2.4 million in 2001 to 2.8 million in 2011.

International comparisons of household type

Although international comparisons are not straightforward due to definitional differences, the proportion of households in the UK which consist of a lone parent with dependent children is much higher than the European average; of the 27 EU member states only one country (Ireland) has a higher proportion.

In comparison with the rest of Europe, a slightly lower proportion of households in the UK contain dependent children than the European average. One possible reason for this is that, although current UK fertility is relatively high, a larger proportion of women remain childless by the end of their childbearing years in the UK than in most other European countries.

Notes for International comparisons of household type

1. The EU Statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) is the source of the European comparisons. The statistics are for 2009 and can be found on the [Eurostat web page Income and Living Conditions](#) and the countries covered are the EU27 countries.
2. [Chapter 2 in Demographic Research, Volume 19: Parity distribution and completed family size in Europe: Incipient decline of the two-child family model? By Tomas Frejka](#)

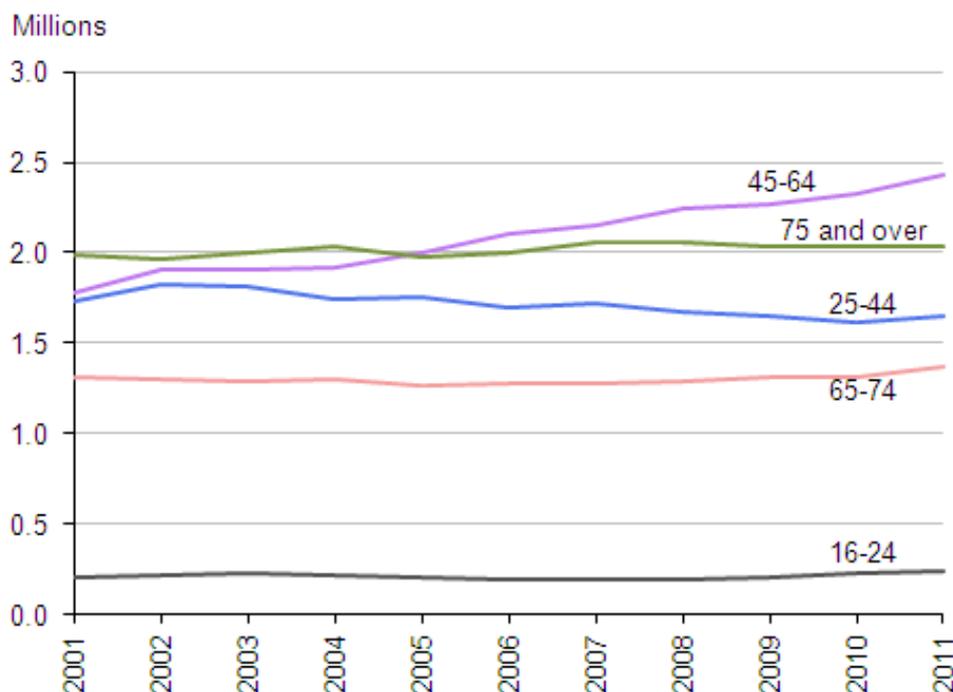
Living alone

In 2011, 7.7 million people in UK households lived alone, of which 4.3 million were aged 16 to 64. Of those in this age group, the majority (59 per cent) were male. One possible reason for this is that a higher proportion of men than women never marry by each age; 62 per cent of men aged 16 to 64 living alone have never married compared with 50 per cent of women living alone in the same age group.

For those aged 65 or over, the pattern is reversed; at this age the majority of people living alone (69 per cent) were female. This is partly because there are more women than men in the total population aged 65 or over due to women's higher life expectancy. There are 1.7 million widowed women aged 65 or over living alone in the UK, three times the number of men. By the age of 65 over 90 per cent of women have been married, and husbands are typically older than their wives, accentuating the gap in life expectancy between husbands and wives.

Figure 5: People living alone: by age group, 2001 to 2011

United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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(25 Kb)

Figure 5 shows the trends in the number of people living alone by age group between 2001 and 2011. The largest change is in the 45 to 64 age group, where the number of people living alone increased by 36 per cent between 2001 and 2011. This is partly due to the increasing population aged 45 to 64 in the UK over the last decade, as the 1960s baby boom generation have been starting to reach this age group. The increase in those living alone also coincides with a decrease in the percentage of those in this age group who are married (from 77 per cent in 2001 to 70 per cent in 2011), and a rise in the percentage of those aged 45 to 64 who have never married, or are divorced (from 18 per cent in 2001 to 27 per cent in 2011).

Notes for Living alone

1. Further information about the marital status of the population can be found in the [population estimates by marital status](#).

Further information

The following have been published today:

- [data tables on families and households \(202.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)
- [a summary about lone parents](#)
- [a description of the minor revisions made to previously published estimates for 2002 to 2010 \(41.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)
- [a note comparing statistics about families and households from different sources \(171.1 Kb Pdf\)](#).

Also available on the ONS website are:

- a [Summary Quality Report \(105.5 Kb Pdf\)](#) of these statistics
- [information about people who use statistics \(47.8 Kb Pdf\)](#) on families and households and what they use the statistics for.

Further information about only children can be found in the [summary of statistics available about only children](#).

Further information about the Labour Force Survey can be found in the [Labour Force Survey user guidance](#).

Further statistics on [marriages](#), [divorces](#) and [civil partnerships](#) are available on the ONS website.

[Population estimates by marital status](#) provide the estimated resident population by single year of age, sex and marital status (single, married, divorced, and widowed) for England and Wales.

Estimates of the [England and Wales population cohabiting](#) by age, sex and marital status are also available on the ONS website.

The [General Lifestyle Survey](#) provides statistics on households, families, marriages and cohabitation back to the 1970s.

The [Overview of Population Statistics](#) outlines the range of demographic statistics which are published by ONS.

Next publication: Late 2012

Issued by

Office for National Statistics, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport NP10 8XG

Media contact

Tel: Media Relations Office +44 (0) 845 6041858

Emergency on-call 07867 906553

Email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Background notes

1. 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.gsi.gov.uk (preferred) or call +44 (0)1329 444677 to provide feedback.
2. A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child. Children may be dependent or non-dependent.
3. Dependent children are those aged under 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.
4. A small number of dependent children are excluded from the analysis on families. These include (a) foster children and (b) children who live in communal establishments which are not covered by the Labour Force Survey.

5. From 2011 a household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area. Previously a household was defined as a person living alone, or a group of people living at the same address who have the address as their only or main residence and either share one main meal a day or share living accommodation (or both). The aim of the change in definition was to ensure consistency with the definition used in the 2011 Census.
 6. As estimates of the UK's families and households are based on the Labour Force Survey, all estimates produced are subject to sampling variability. Indications of the robustness of the estimates are provided with the [tables \(202.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#).
 7. The 2011 Labour Force Survey dataset was first published on 1 September 2011. It covers the period from April to June 2011. Further information about the quality of the Labour Force Survey can be found in the [Performance and Quality Monitoring Reports](#).
 8. The EU Statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) is the source of the European comparisons in this bulletin. The statistics can be found on the [Eurostat web page Income and Living Conditions](#) and the countries covered are the EU27 countries.
 9. To say that a change is statistically significant means that the change is probably true and unlikely to have occurred by chance. If a change is statistically significant, the confidence intervals around both estimates do not overlap. Further information about the accuracy of these statistics can be found in the [Summary Quality Report \(105.5 Kb Pdf\)](#).
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Statistical contacts

| Name | Phone | Department | Email |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Emily Knipe | +44 (0)1329 447890 | Demographic Analysis Unit | families@ons.gsi.gov.uk |

Next Publication Date:

01 November 2012

Issuing Body:

Office for National Statistics

Media Contact Details:

Telephone: 0845 604 1858
(8.30am-5.30pm Weekdays)

Emergency out of hours (limited service): 07867 906553

Email:

media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk