

SF1.1: Family size and household composition

Definitions and methodology

This indicator considers the composition of private households. A *private household* is either: (a) a single-person household, i.e. a person who lives alone in a separate housing unit or who occupies a separate room in a housing unit but does not form a multi-person household with other occupants of the housing unit; (b) a multi-person household, i.e. a group of two or more people who occupy the whole or part of a housing unit and share resources to cover living expenses. The usual residence serves as the basis for the identification of household membership. Information on people living in “institutional households” such as health care institutions, military barracks, etc., is not included here.

Household types are defined with reference to the number of and relationship between adults in the household and the presence or not of children. The household types used here are:

- Couple households, that is, households with two partnered adults either married or in a civil or registered partnership, or cohabiting. Generally, in most countries, this includes adults in same-sex as well as opposite-sex relationships. Couple households may or may not also contain children.
- Single-parent households, that is, households with only a single adult and at least one child.
- Single person households, that is, households with a single adult living alone.
- ‘Other’ household types, that is, all other types of household. This includes households with several unrelated cohabiting members and households shared by two or more family units. ‘Extended families’ - such as those with three generations living in the same household - are included in this category.

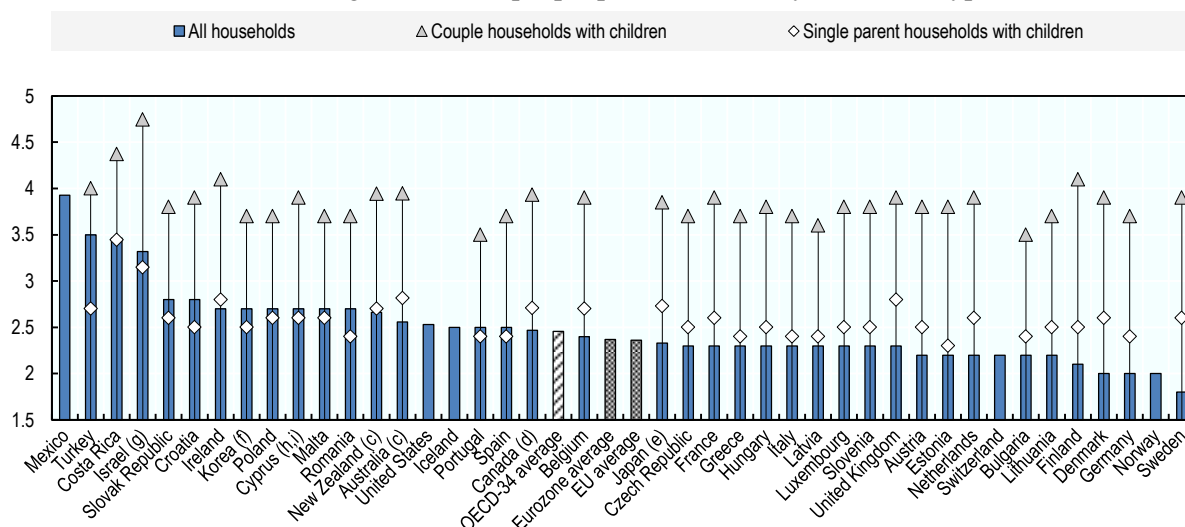
Children are generally defined either as dependent resident children under 25 (Chart SF1.1.A and Table SF1.1.B) or as all children under 25 (Table SF1.1.A), and include both biological children and step- or adopted children. There are, however, several exceptions and deviations from these definitions – see the notes to the Charts and Tables and *data and comparability issues* for more detail.

Key findings

Average household size is calculated as the mean average number of people (adults and children) per household for households of a given type. There are substantial differences across countries in the average size of households, with the average for ‘all households’ ranging from 2.0 people per household in Germany, Norway and Denmark and 1.8 in Sweden to 3.5 in Turkey and almost 4 in Mexico (Chart SF1.1.A). The average size of couple households with children is always larger than the average size of single-parent households – which is not surprising, given that the couple households by definition have an additional adult household member – but in most OECD countries they are *more* than one person larger, on average (Chart SF1.1.A). This reflects the propensity for couple families to have more children than single-parent families.

Other relevant indicators: Children in Families (SF1.2); Further information on living arrangements of children (SF1.3); Share of births outside marriage (SF2.4); Childlessness (SF2.5); Marriage and divorce rates (SF3.1); Cohabitation rate and prevalence of other forms of partnership (SF3.3) .

Chart SF1.1.A. Average size of households by household type, 2015^a
 Mean average number of people per household, by household type^b



Countries are ranked in descending order according to the mean average number of people per household in all households

a) Data for Korea and Mexico refer to 2010, for Australia, Canada and Costa Rica to 2011, for New Zealand to 2013, for Switzerland to 2014, and for the United States to 2016

b) 'Couple households with children' refer to households with two partnered adults (either married or in a civil or registered partnership, or cohabiting) and at least one child. 'Single parent households with children' are households with a single adult and at least one child. People living in all other types of households, including households with several unrelated cohabiting members and households shared by two or more family units, are not covered in these two categories. 'Children' in this instance are generally defined as dependent resident children under 25, and include both biological children and step- or adopted children, though exact definitions do vary across countries.

c) For Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, 'children' are defined as someone of any age who lives with their parent(s) and as long as they do not have a partner or children of their own living in the same household.

d) For Canada, data refer to persons in 'census families' only. For more detail on census families see the Statistics Canada website (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/concepts/definitions/c-fam>)

e) For Japan, data on 'couple households with children' refer to married couple households with children, only. 'Children' refers to unmarried children under age 20.

f) For Korea, 'children' are defined as all unmarried children regardless of age

g) The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

h) Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to « Cyprus » relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue";

i) Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Sources: [for Australia, 2011 Census of Population and Housing](#); [for Canada, 2011 Census of Canada](#); for Costa Rica, OECD Questionnaire to national authorities; [for European countries, Eurostat based on the European Union Labour Force Survey \(unless otherwise stated\)](#); [for Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, Eurostat based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey \(EU SILC\)](#); [for Israel, Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics based on the Israeli Labour Force Survey](#); [for Japan, 2015 Population Census](#); [for Korea, OECD Family Database on Korea](#); [for Mexico, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010](#); [for New Zealand, 2013 Census of Population and Dwellings](#); [for the United States, U.S. Census Bureau based on the U.S. Current Population Survey](#)

Table SF1.1.A shows the distribution of households across the different household types. *Couple households* (with or without children) are across OECD countries the most frequent type of household. Nevertheless, their relative proportion varies considerably across the OECD from 39% of all households in Latvia and around 41–45% in Estonia, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, to 60% in Spain, 64% in Portugal and almost 67% of all households in Israel. In most OECD countries, around 50% of couple households also include children. In Iceland this rises to just over 60% of couple households, while in Israel almost 70% of couple households also include children. Couple households without children are most frequent in Japan, Finland, Germany and the United States.

Table SF1.1.A. Types of household, 2011^a
 Distribution (%) of households by household type^b

	Couple households:			Single parent households:			Single person households	Other household types
	Total	With children	Without children	Total	Single mother households	Single father households		
Australia (c)	56.95	31.03	25.92	10.45	..	..	23.90	8.70
Austria	50.11	23.14	26.98	6.62	5.71	0.91	36.29	6.98
Belgium	53.19	24.80	28.39	7.72	6.33	1.39	34.06	5.03
Canada (d)	56.01	26.46	29.54	10.33	..	..	27.58	6.09
Chile	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Czech Republic	47.92	22.19	25.73	8.32	6.81	1.51	32.53	11.23
Denmark	50.13	22.22	27.91	6.23	5.19	1.04	37.48	6.16
Estonia	43.68	21.02	22.66	8.55	7.79	0.76	39.94	7.83
Finland	49.43	20.50	28.93	5.54	0.00	5.54	41.01	4.03
France	54.12	25.63	28.49	7.28	6.10	1.18	33.79	4.81
Germany	51.71	20.57	31.15	5.49	4.72	0.77	37.27	5.52
Greece	58.46	27.87	30.59	4.23	3.55	0.68	25.68	11.63
Hungary	50.78	24.52	26.26	8.26	7.22	1.04	32.08	8.88
Iceland	48.36	29.61	18.75	9.03	7.98	1.06	31.13	4.61
Ireland	57.18	32.70	24.47	8.82	7.81	1.01	23.68	10.32
Israel (e,k)	66.60	44.90	21.70	5.70	..	..	27.80	..
Italy	54.92	27.09	27.83	5.39	4.47	0.92	31.08	8.61
Japan (f)	46.77	16.62	30.15	2.63	2.36	0.27	34.45	16.16
Korea (g)	52.40	36.99	15.41	9.20	7.19	2.01	23.90	14.50
Latvia	39.38	19.89	19.49	11.50	9.97	1.53	34.42	14.71
Luxembourg	49.98	27.11	22.86	5.87	4.99	0.88	33.34	10.82
Mexico (h)	58.58	49.96	8.61	10.26	..	..	7.56	23.60
Netherlands	56.36	25.73	30.63	5.55	4.65	0.90	36.38	1.71
New Zealand (c)	57.05	28.93	28.13	11.23	..	..	23.54	8.18
Norway	48.50	25.35	23.15	7.25	5.63	1.61	39.58	4.68
Poland	52.58	28.90	23.69	7.73	6.74	0.99	24.04	15.65
Portugal	63.56	31.29	32.28	6.10	5.35	0.75	21.44	8.90
Slovak Republic	41.47	23.17	18.31	6.48	5.48	1.01	25.33	26.71
Slovenia	45.37	23.16	22.21	7.95	6.72	1.23	32.76	13.93
Spain	60.27	30.38	29.89	5.92	4.56	1.36	23.19	10.62
Sweden	52.14	24.27	27.87	6.62	5.07	1.56	36.22	5.02
Switzerland	55.58	24.97	30.61	4.40	3.76	0.64	36.98	3.04
Turkey	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
United Kingdom	50.76	22.39	28.38	8.54	7.54	1.00	30.58	10.12
United States (i)	48.42	20.21	28.21	9.56	7.17	2.39	26.74	15.29
OECD-32 average (j)	51.94	..	..	7.47	..	..	30.56	9.81
Costa Rica	52.44	38.15	14.29	10.55	9.49	1.06	11.27	25.74
Bulgaria	52.25	23.67	28.59	4.69	3.71	0.99	30.79	12.27
Croatia	56.30	29.80	26.50	4.94	4.12	0.82	24.56	14.19
Cyprus (l,m)	65.36	34.61	30.75	4.78	4.29	0.49	20.76	9.10
Lithuania	49.47	26.04	23.43	9.64	8.30	1.34	31.67	9.21
Malta	61.98	33.33	28.65	6.16	5.28	0.88	22.64	9.21
Romania	54.51	27.02	27.49	5.67	4.27	1.40	25.98	13.84
EU average	52.62	25.82	26.80	6.81	5.60	1.21	30.68	9.89
Eurozone average	52.95	26.21	26.74	6.82	5.58	1.24	30.77	9.46

- a) Data for Korea and the United States refer to 2010, for New Zealand to 2013, and for Japan to 2015
- b) 'Children' in this instance are generally defined as resident children under 25, and include both biological children and step- or adopted children, with any resident children over aged 25 or over treated as a non-dependent 'adult' child, though exact definitions do vary across countries. 'Couple households' are households with two adults in a couple (either married or in a civil or registered partnership, or cohabiting), with 'couple households with children' defined as those that contain two adults in a couple and at least one child (under age 25), and 'couple households without children' those that contain two adults in a couple and either no children (under age 25) or 'adult' children (age 25 or over) only. Generally, as of the 2011 round of the population and housing census, 'couples' include adults in same-sex as well as opposite-sex relationships. 'Single parent households' are households with a single adult and at least one child (under age 25). 'Single person' households are households with a single person living alone. 'Other household types' covers all other types of households, including households with several unrelated cohabiting members and households shared by two or more family units. Households with three-generations living in the same household are included in this category.
- c) For Australia and New Zealand, 'children' are defined as someone of any age who lives with their parent(s) and as long as they do not have a partner or children of their own living in the same household.
- d) For Canada, 'single parent households' covers all single-parent households regardless of age of children. However, the definition of 'children' used for 'couple households with/without children' continues to conform with that given in note b) above (i.e. for 'couple households', 'children' are defined as resident children under 25)
- e) For Israel, no distinction between 'single person households' and 'other' household types.
- f) For Japan, 'couple households' refers to married couple households. 'Children' refers to unmarried children under age 20.
- g) For Korea, 'children' refers to all unmarried children of any age.
- h) For Mexico, 'children' refers to children of any age.
- i) For the United States, 'children' refer to 'own children' (that is, children of the 'head of household') under age 18, only. 'Couple households' refer to households where the head of household is part of an (opposite-sex) married couple only (i.e. unmarried couples, plus also same-sex married-couples, are excluded), and 'couple households with children' refer to married couple households where the couple has at least one own child under age 18. 'Single parent households' refer to households where the head of household has at least one own child under age 18 but no spouse present. In both cases the household may or may not contain other adults.
- j) The OECD-32 average excludes Israel
- k) See note g) to Chart SF1.1.A
- l) See note h) to Chart SF1.1.A
- m) See note i) to Chart SF1.1.A

Sources: [for Australia, 2011 Census of Population and Housing](#); [for Canada, 2011 Census of Canada](#); for Costa Rica, OECD Questionnaire to national authorities; [for European countries, European Union 2011 Population and Housing Census](#); [for Israel, Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics based on the Israeli Labour Force Survey](#); [for Japan, 2015 Population Census](#); [for Korea, OECD Family Database on Korea](#); [for Mexico, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010](#); [for New Zealand, 2013 Census of Population and Dwellings](#); [for the United States, U.S. Census Bureau](#).

At about 5-10% of all households, *single-parent households* constitute a considerably minority of households in most OECD countries. There is, however, considerable cross-national variation in the share of households that are single-parent households: in Latvia and New Zealand, for example, more than 11% of households are single-parent households, whereas in Japan the proportion is less than 3%.

The proportion of *single-person households* is affected by both the propensity of young adults to leave the parental home and the tendency of elderly people to live in with their children or enter a house for the elderly (or other institution). Single-person households constitute around 40% of households in Estonia, Finland, and Norway. By contrast, this proportion is around 20% in Portugal and less than 10% in Mexico.

Other types of private households are generally uncommon in the OECD except in Latvia, Korea, Poland, Japan and the United States – where they constitute around 15% of all households – and Mexico and the Slovak Republic, where 'other' types of household form around 25% of all households.

Table SF1.1.B measures the proportion of households with 0, 1, 2, and 3 and more children. Mexico has the lowest proportion of childless households (at 41.3%) and, together with Turkey, the highest proportion of households with three or more children (at 14.4% and 13.8% of households, respectively). In all countries, childless households are most frequent, with the proportion of households with one or two children averaging about 15% and 13%, respectively, and the proportion with three children averaging about 5%. The proportion of household with at least one child not yet 6 years of age is generally around 10-13%, and is highest in Turkey at 25%.

Table SF1.1.B. Households by number of children, 2015^a

Distribution of households by number of children^b, and proportion of households with at least one child under age six

	Proportion of households with:				Proportion (%) of households with children under 6
	0 children	1 child	2 children	3 or more children	
Australia	..	..	..	..	..
Austria	74.07	12.81	9.72	3.39	9.98
Belgium	67.43	13.85	12.72	6.01	12.78
Canada	..	..	..	..	..
Chile	..	..	..	..	..
Czech Republic	68.37	14.75	14.10	2.78	13.20
Denmark	70.55	12.43	12.32	4.69	11.39
Estonia	68.77	16.18	10.99	4.06	13.66
Finland	77.61	9.34	8.74	4.32	9.56
France	68.36	13.36	12.65	5.63	12.66
Germany	78.17	11.32	8.04	2.47	8.23
Greece	73.42	12.69	11.06	2.82	8.06
Hungary	70.78	14.74	10.23	4.25	10.66
Iceland	..	..	..	..	..
Ireland	58.47	14.78	15.61	11.14	18.66
Israel	..	..	..	..	..
Italy	69.94	15.45	12.17	2.43	10.26
Japan (c)	76.96	10.90	9.49	2.66	8.66
Korea	..	..	..	..	..
Latvia	68.50	18.07	10.69	2.74	12.97
Luxembourg	66.13	14.54	14.75	4.58	11.79
Mexico (d)	41.32	23.75	20.53	14.38	..
Netherlands	71.23	11.24	12.74	4.78	10.50
New Zealand (e)	66.99	13.32	12.81	6.88	..
Norway (f)	71.64	12.68	11.08	4.60	..
Poland	61.61	18.47	15.16	4.76	15.02
Portugal	63.80	21.39	12.66	2.15	11.59
Slovak Republic	62.81	17.27	15.23	4.69	13.68
Slovenia	69.80	14.05	12.81	3.34	11.57
Spain	66.02	17.64	13.53	2.81	12.43
Sweden	78.37	8.47	9.89	3.27	9.36
Switzerland	..	..	..	..	..
Turkey	45.69	20.79	19.73	13.79	25.38
United Kingdom	68.45	13.77	12.62	5.15	14.95
United States (f)	66.61	14.15	12.00	7.24	..
OECD-32 average	67.57	14.72	12.65	5.07	..
Costa Rica	30.29	23.08	24.61	22.02	26.30
Bulgaria	74.72	14.85	9.05	1.38	8.09
Croatia	64.93	15.32	14.43	5.33	11.67
Cyprus (g,h)	61.10	16.48	15.90	6.48	14.38
Lithuania	69.97	16.57	10.48	2.99	11.10
Malta	63.05	18.04	14.54	4.30	13.42
Romania	65.12	18.56	12.63	3.69	10.71
EU average	68.63	14.87	12.34	4.16	11.87
Eurozone average	68.35	15.00	12.37	4.27	11.96

- a) Data for Mexico and the United States to 2010, for Norway to 2011, and for New Zealand to 2013
- b) 'Children' in this instance are generally defined here as dependent resident children under 25, and include both biological children and step- or adopted children or any other children in the household, though exact definitions do vary across countries.
- c) For Japan, 'children' refers to all unmarried children aged under 18, only.
- d) For Mexico, 'children' refers to children aged under 15, only
- e) For New Zealand, 'children' refers to dependent children aged under 18 and not employed full-time
- f) For Norway and the United States, 'children' refers to all people aged under 18, only.
- g) See note g) to Chart SF1.1.A
- h) See note h) to Chart SF1.1.A

Sources: [for European countries, Eurostat based on the European Union Labour Force Survey \(unless otherwise stated\)](#); for Japan, Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2015 (Households by number of children) and 2015 Population Census (Households with children under age 6); [for Mexico, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010](#); [for New Zealand, 2013 Census of Population and Dwellings](#); [for Norway, Statistics Norway](#); [for the United States, U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Comparability and data issues

Population and Housing Censuses are the most complete source of information on population and family composition. Censuses are generally carried out every five or ten years, providing information of population characteristics and household composition on a regular basis. In order to guarantee comparability of data, the United Nations Statistical Division (UN, 1997) and Eurostat (Eurostat, 1999) deliver a set of recommendations on definitions regarding household structure. Most OECD and EU countries completed their last census in the early 2010s but in some countries (such as Japan and New Zealand) data have been collected more recently.

Despite harmonisation by both the United Nations Statistical division and Eurostat, comparability of census data can be hampered by different data collection methods. For example, in the absence of a full national Census, data for Germany and the Netherlands are based on a combination of registers and sampled surveys. In order to enhance comparability, countries are recommended to use the place of usual residence as the basis of household membership. Administrative information on the place of residence is the most comparable source of data. Differences in how respondents to censuses or surveys consider their "usual" residence, or differences in the rules applied by statistical offices to define the usual residence, may also raise comparability issues. The recent increase in non-traditional living arrangements, such as the increase in cohabitation, or adults living apart together (i.e. partners spending some days and nights together but who are registered at different addresses) have increased the number of cases in which adults and/or children are recorded for more than one residence.

When accounting for children of separated parents there is a risk of double counting, as they may be counted as a member of the household of both parents. When partners continue to have their own dwellings they complete a separate form for their residency. Without any kind of other control, the number of single-person households, sole-parent families or step families may be over-estimated. For example, Toulemon (2008) estimates that between 4% and 6% of adults in France live in two dwellings and 6.4% of children have more than one dwelling. Accounting for this, the proportion of children not living with both parents falls from a biased estimate of 19.7% to 17.9%.

Comparability of the different household types included in Chart SF1.1.A and Table SF1.1.A is also hampered by the fact that the classification of 'couples' and particularly 'children' is not always the same across data sources. In some cases (e.g. Japan and the United States), for instance, 'couple households' refer to married couple households only, and do not include unmarried cohabiting couples regardless of whether or not they have children. This is likely to lead to an underestimation of the number of couple households relative to other countries. In others (e.g. Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United States), the definition of 'children' differs from that used in most countries. In Australia, Canada (single-parent households only), Korea, Mexico and New Zealand, there is no strict age restriction placed on the definition of children. This is likely to lead to an inflated number of households containing children (i.e. 'couple households with children' and 'single parent households') relative to other countries, and an underestimation of the number of households without children (e.g. 'couple households without children') too. In Japan and the United States, the definition of children is more restrictive – for

these two countries, ‘children’ refers to children under age 18 only. All else equal, this is likely to lead to an underestimation of the number of households containing children and an overestimation of the number without children, relative to most other countries. Lastly, even when age definitions are similar, other criteria for the classification of children may continue to differ. In many national censuses, for example, all children living at home and not yet 25 years of age are classified as ‘children’, but in the European Union Labour Force Survey data used for some countries in Chart SF1.1.A and Table SF1.1.B. only *non-employed* children from age 14 to 24 are considered children.

Sources and further reading: Andersson, G., T. Noack, and A. Seierstad (2004), “The Demographics of Same-Sex “Marriages” in Norway and Sweden”, in Digoix M., and P. Festy (eds.), *Same-sex Couples, Same-sex Partnerships and homosexual Marriage*. A focus on cross-national differences, Document de Travail 124, INED, http://www.ined.fr/fichier/t_publication/1035/publi_pdf1_124.pdf; Digoix M., P. Festy, and B. Garnier (2004), “What if same-sex couples exist in France after all?”, in Digoix M., and P. Festy (eds.), opus cited. Eurostat (2004), *Documentation of the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Census in the EU, EFTA and Candidate Countries, Part I, II and III*, Population and social conditions 3/2004/F/01, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>; Eurostat (2005), *Household and family characteristics of population. Eurostat Metadata in SDDS format. Summary Methodology*, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/cens_nhou_sm1.htm. UN Statistics Division (1997), *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, United Nations Statistical Division, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/principles/default.htm>; Eurostat (1999) *Guidelines and Table programme for the Community Programme of Population and Housing Censuses in 2001*, Eurostat Working Paper, 3/1999/E/10, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>; and, Toulemon L. (2008), “Two-home family situations of children and adults, observation and consequences for describing family patterns in France”, 35th CSEIS Seminar, *New Family Relationships and Living Arrangements-Demands for Change in Social Statistics*.