

Statistical bulletin

# Families and households in the UK: 2016

Trends in living arrangements in the UK including families (with and without dependent children), people living alone and people in shared accommodation, broken down by size and type of household.



Contact:  
Emily Knipe  
pop.info@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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# 1 . Main points

In 2016 there were 18.9 million families in the UK.

There were 12.7 million married or civil partner couple families in the UK in 2016. This was the most common type of family.

Cohabiting couple families were the fastest growing family type between 1996 and 2016, more than doubling from 1.5 million families to 3.3 million families.

In 2016, around 25% of young adults aged 20 to 34 were living with their parents, increasing from 21% in 1996.

In 2016, around 7.7 million people lived alone in the UK, the majority were women.

## 2 . Statistician's quote

"In 2016, married or civil partner couple families remained the most common type of family in the UK although cohabiting couple families were the fastest growing family type over the last 20 years. The growth in cohabiting couple families may be due to couples choosing cohabitation as an alternative or precursor to marriage".

Pamela Cobb, Population Statistics Division, Office for National Statistics.

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## 3 . Things you need to know

A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent, with at least one child, who live at the same address. Children may be dependent or non-dependent.

A household is 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.

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.

The families and households estimates are based on social survey data from the April to June quarter of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) household dataset.

Measures of quality (to show the levels of uncertainty associated with survey estimates) are presented in the [datasets](#). You are advised to consult the quality measures when interpreting the estimates.

Families and households estimates for the reference years 2013, 2014 and 2015 have been revised following the re-weighting of the LFS. The estimates for these years will differ from previous publications.

## 4 . Married or civil partner couple families are the most common family type

In 2016 there were 18.9 million families in the UK (Figure 1).

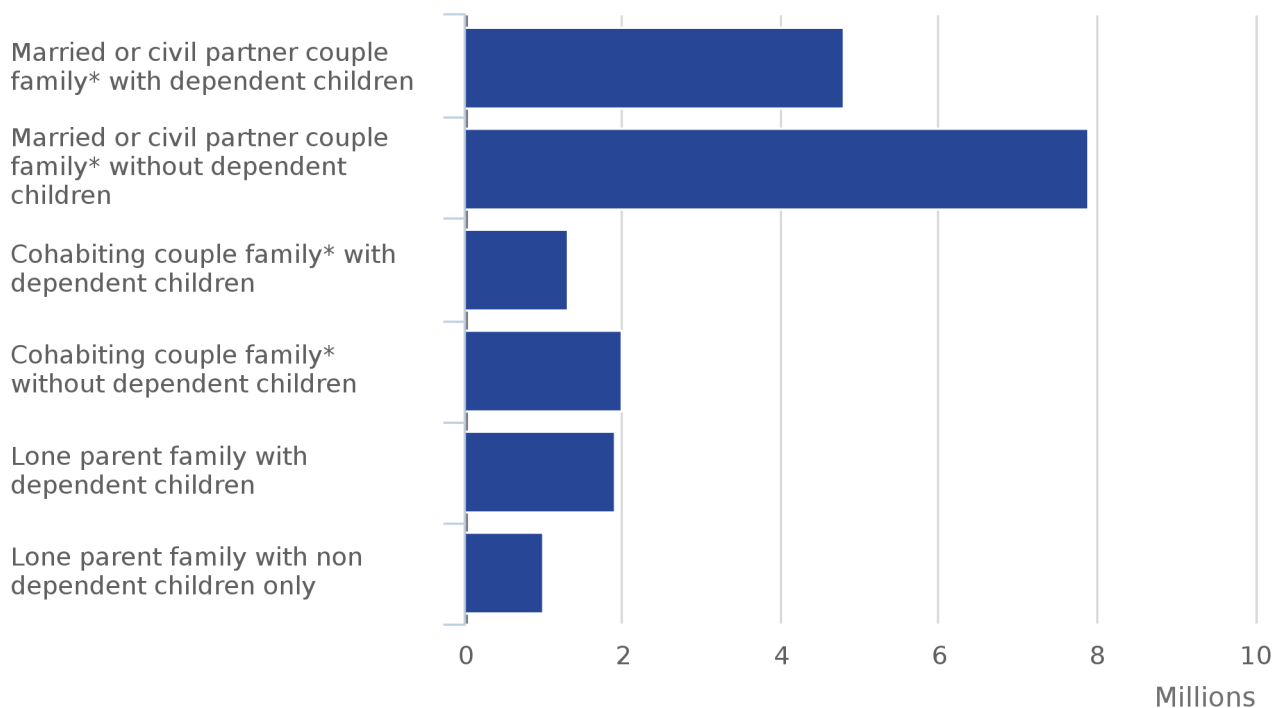
There were 12.7 million married or civil partner couple families in the UK in 2016. This was the most common type of family.

Married or civil partner couple families without dependent children were more common than married or civil partner couple families with dependent children at 7.9 million and 4.8 million families respectively.

The second largest family type was the cohabiting couple family at 3.3 million families followed by 2.9 million lone parent families.

**Figure 1: Families by family type, 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. \*Married couple families include both opposite sex and same sex married couples. Cohabiting couple families include both opposite sex and same sex cohabiting couples
2. Families without dependent children have only non-dependent children or no children in the household

The number of families in the UK over the last 20 years has increased by 14% from 16.6 million in 1996 to 18.9 million in 2016. This rise is similar to the growth in the UK population during this 20 year period.

**Table 1: Families: by family type in 1996 and 2016**

UK		Thousands					
Family Type	1996			2016			
	With dependent children	Without dependent children <sup>2</sup>	Total Families	With dependent children	Without dependent children <sup>2</sup>	Total Families	
Married couple family*	5,223	7,418	12,641	4,809	7,873	12,683	
Opposite sex married couple family	5,223	7,418	12,641	4,804	7,849	12,654	
Same sex married couple family	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	24	29	
Civil partner couple family <sup>3</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	10	37	47	
Cohabiting couple family*	540	934	1,474	1,270	1,989	3,259	
Opposite sex cohabiting couple family	539	920	1,459	1,262	1,911	3,172	
Same sex cohabiting couple family	..	15	16	9	78	87	
Lone parent family	1,631	814	2,445	1,871	1,029	2,900	
All families	7,393	9,167	16,560	7,960	10,929	18,889	

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

- \* Married couple families include both opposite sex and same sex married couples. Cohabiting couple families include both opposite sex and same sex cohabiting couples
- Families without dependent children have only non-dependent children or no children in the household
- Civil partnerships were introduced in the UK in December 2005
- Marriages to same sex couples were introduced in England and Wales in March 2014
- .. indicates that estimates are not sufficiently reliable to be published
- Totals may not sum due to rounding
- Some small numbers are likely to be less reliable. The reference tables published alongside this bulletin indicate the statistical robustness of each estimate

The 3 main family types (excluding civil partner couple families) in Table 1 have all increased in number since 1996. The fastest growing family type over the 20 year period was the cohabiting couple family, which doubled from 1.5 million families in 1996 to 3.3 million families in 2016.

There is currently no such thing as common law marriage in UK law, meaning cohabiting couples do not have the same legal rights as married couples. [The Cohabitation Rights bill](#), which addresses the rights of cohabiting couples, is in the early stages of passing through Parliament.

Lone parent families grew by 18.6%, a statistically significant increase; married couple families grew very little (0.3%), not a statistically significant increase, over the 2 decades.

Of the 2.9 million lone parent families in the UK in 2016, the majority (86%) were headed by a female lone parent, the remaining 14% were headed by a male lone parent. These percentages have changed little over the 20 years since 1996. This could be associated with women being more likely to take the main caring responsibilities for any children when a relationship breaks down and therefore becoming lone parents.

Lone parent families can also be the result of the death of a parent or a decision to sole parent from the outset.

In 2016, there were 1.0 million lone parent families that had only non-dependent children (sometimes called adult children). Fathers accounted for 22% of lone parents with non-dependent children, compared with 10% of lone parents with dependent children. Further information about young adults living with their parents can be found in section 6 of this statistical bulletin.

Opposite sex married couple families accounted for 79.1% of all couple families (12.7 million). Opposite sex cohabiting couple families were the next largest type of couple family at 19.8% (3.2 million). Same sex couple families (including civil partner, same sex married and same sex cohabiting couple families) accounted for 1% of all couple families.

The largest number of same sex couple families were same sex cohabiting couple families, 87,000; this was followed by civil partner couple families, 47,000 and same sex married couple families, 29,000.

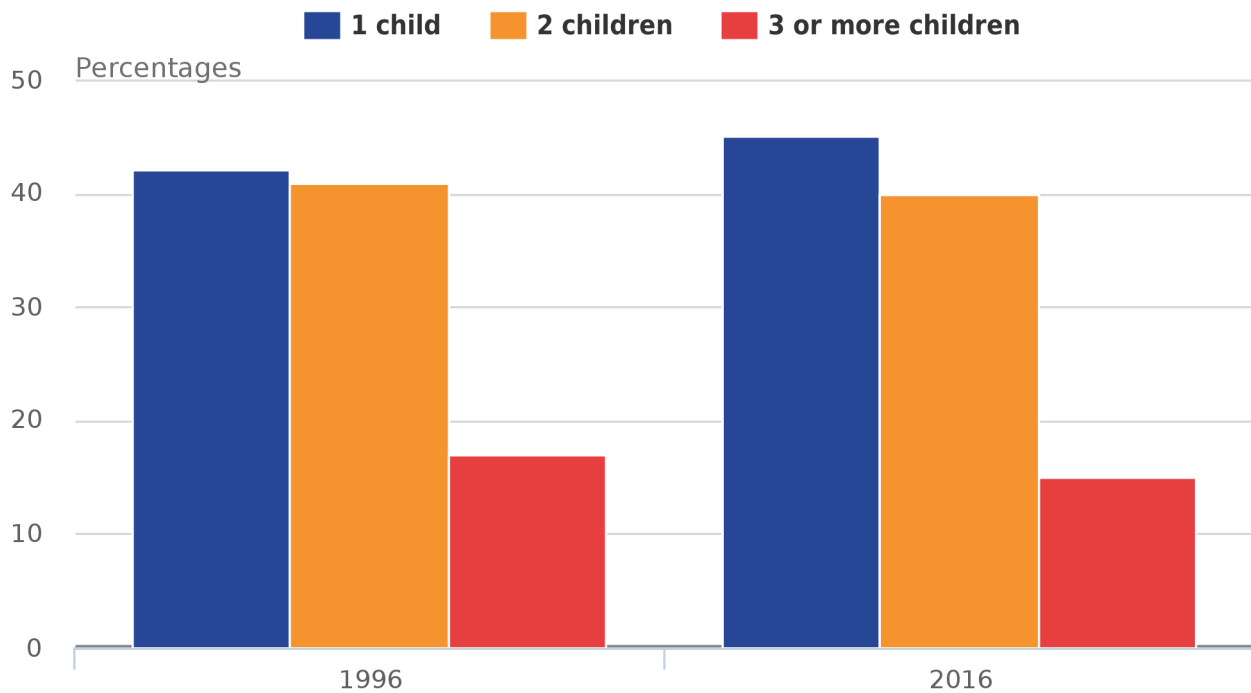
## **5 . Dependent children were most likely to be living in married couple families**

There were 13.9 million dependent children living in families in the UK in 2016, around 714,000 more than a decade earlier. This increase in dependent children is associated with the higher number of [births](#) in the most recent decade (2004 to 2015) compared with the previous decade.

The types of families in which dependent children live have changed greatly. The percentage of dependent children living in cohabiting couple families (including both opposite and same sex couples) increased from 7% in 1996 to 15% by 2016. Dependent children living in a married couple family (including both opposite and same sex couples) fell by 10 percentage points to 63% in 2016. The percentage of dependent children living in lone parent families changed little over the decade; 22% lived in lone parent families in 2016.

**Figure 2: Percentage of families with dependent children: by number of dependent children in the family, 1996 and 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

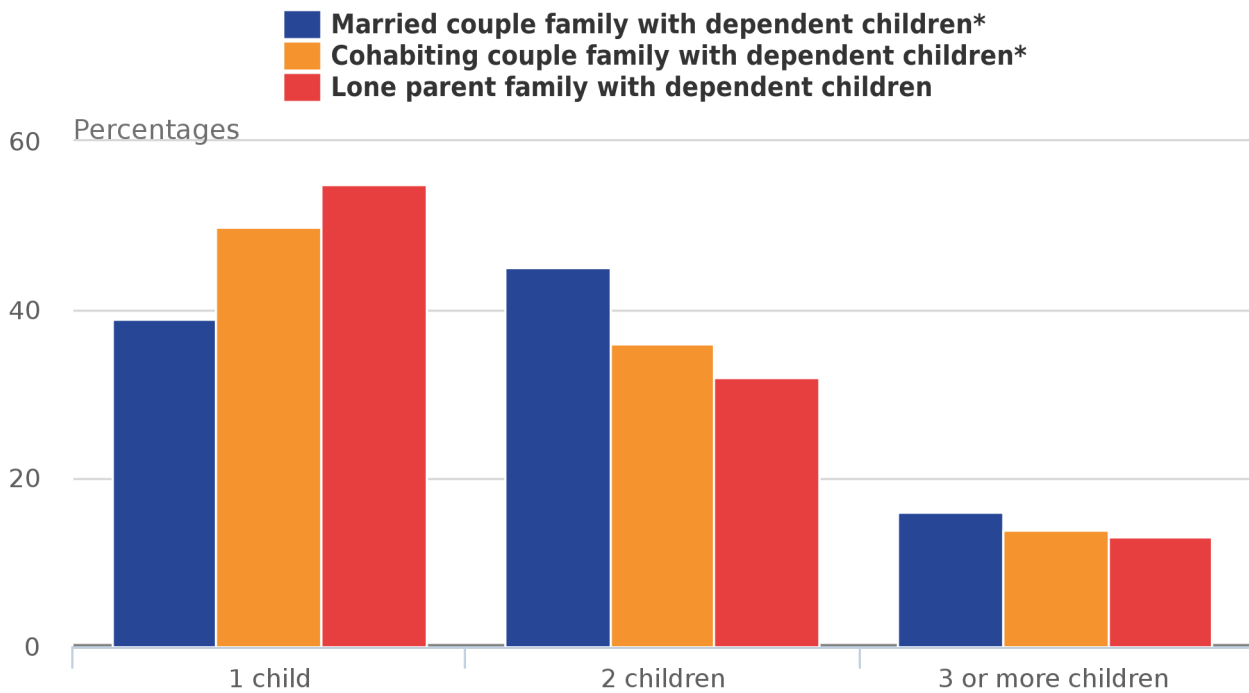
1. Totals may not sum due to rounding

In 2016, of all families with dependent children, 45% had only 1 dependent child in the family at the time of the survey, this compares with 42% in 1996. Around 40% of families with dependent children in 2016 had 2 dependent children and 15% had 3 or more dependent children, this compares with 41% and 17% in 1996 (Figure 2).

The statistics do not necessarily indicate that families who have “only children” are more common. This is partly because some families may have one dependent child, but also other non-dependent (adult) children within or outside of the household. Further, 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 family size can be found in the [Family Size publication](#) and on the number of children women are having in the latest [childbearing release](#).

**Figure 3: Families with dependent children by family type and number of dependent children, 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Less than 1% of dependent children lived in civil partner couple families in 2016. Therefore the percentages are too small to be shown
2. \*Married couple families include both opposite sex and same sex married couples. Cohabiting couple families include both opposite sex and same sex cohabiting couples

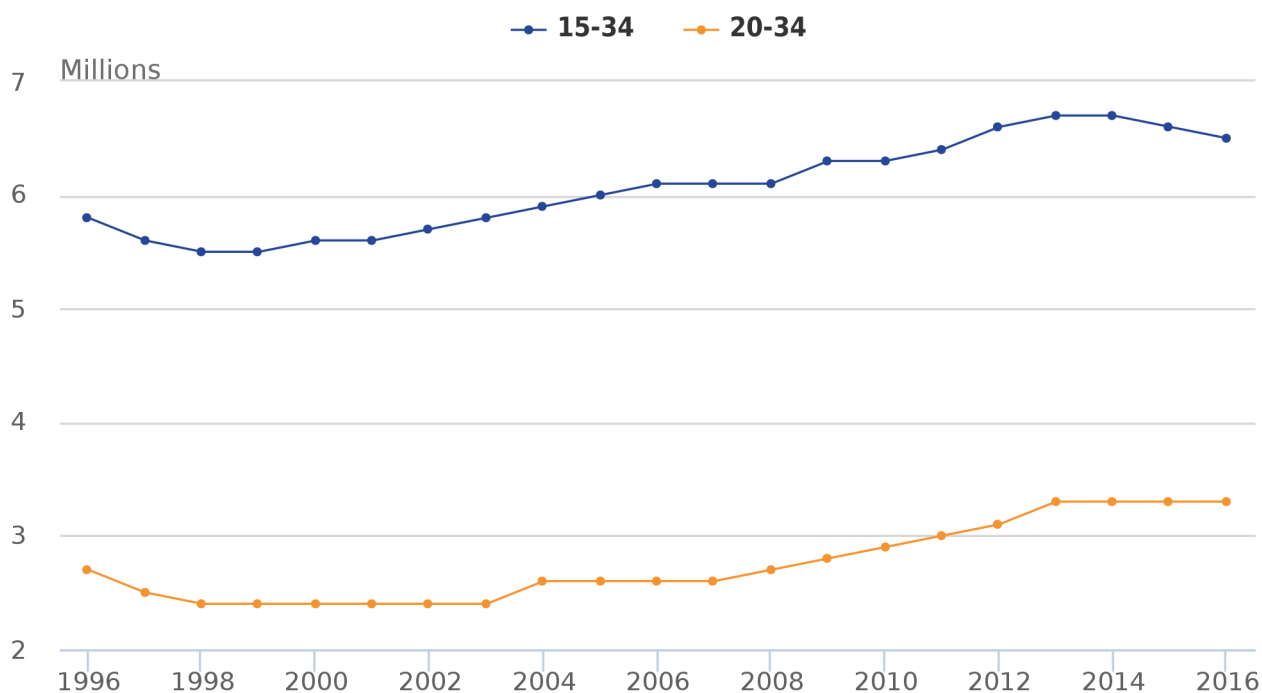
In 2016, of all lone parents with dependent children, 55% had only 1 child, higher than both other family types shown in Figure 3. Further, only 13% of lone parents had 3 or more children. Conversely, married couples with dependent children had more children on average than other family types and only 39% had only 1 dependent child. These patterns are likely to reflect the stability of parental partnerships, as well as the fact that people often marry after having a child and then have further children within marriage; this is demonstrated in the [registration status at birth statistics](#).

## 6 . Percentages of young adults living with their parents have been growing

In 1996, around 5.8 million 15 to 34 year olds in the UK lived with their parents; this increased to a peak of 6.7 million in 2014 and remained around 6.5 million in 2016 (Figure 4). Although the total population aged 15 to 34 in the UK has increased over the time period, the percentage living with their parents has risen from 36% in 1996 to 39% in 2016.

**Figure 4: Young adults living with their parents, 1996 to 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Once a person either lives with a partner or has a child, they are considered to have formed their own family and are no longer counted as being part of their parents' family even if they still live in the same household. Therefore such people are deemed to be not living with their parents here
2. The term "Parent" could include grandparents, step-parents or foster parents
3. Students living in halls of residence during term-time and living with their parents outside term-time are counted as not living with their parents here

A large percentage of 15 to 19 year olds would be expected to be living with their parents; the number of young adults living with their parents decreases with age. Looking at 20 to 34 year olds, the number living with their parents has increased from 2.7 million in 1996 to 3.3 million in 2013 and has since remained at 3.3 million. The percentage living with their parents has risen from 21% in 1996 to 25% in 2016.

Young males were more likely than young females to be living with their parents in 2016. Around 44% of males aged 15 to 34 were living with their parents and 31% of males aged 20 to 34 were living with their parents. This compared with 34% of females aged 15 to 34 and only 20% of females aged 20 to 34. Larger numbers of young adults tending to stay at home for longer may be explained by them staying in education and training for longer, delaying leaving the parental home as they formalise relationships and have children at older ages and also as it has become more expensive to rent or buy a home. This is explored further in our [Visual.ONS article](#).

## 7 . Average household size remains stable over the decade to 2016

There were 27.1 million households in the UK in 2016. The number of households has increased by 7% since 2006, similar to the growth in the UK population during this period. As a result average household size has remained at 2.4 people over the decade.

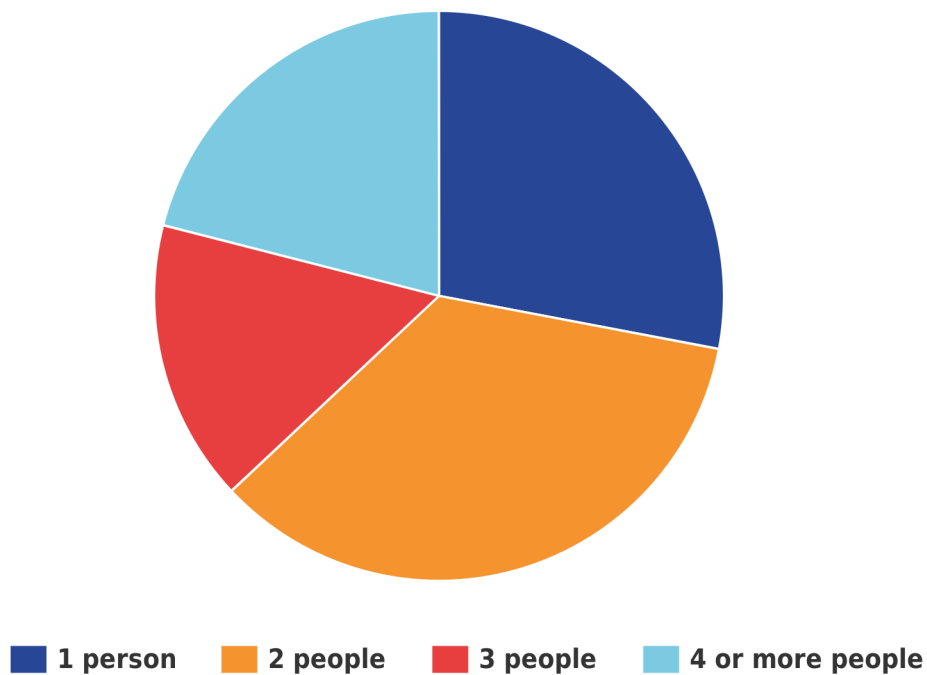


In 2016, around 28% of households contained one person. Although this has not changed much over the last decade, another source, the [General Lifestyle Survey](#), which provides a longer time series, shows that 17% of households in Great Britain contained one person in 1971. Although not directly comparable, this suggests that the proportion of one person households has increased considerably since the early 1970s.

In the UK in 2016, households were most likely to contain 2 people (35%) while 16% of households contained 3 people and 21% of households contained 4 or more people (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Percentage of households by household size in 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Table 2 shows that the most common household type in 2016 was one family consisting of a couple with or without children. There were 15.5 million such households, an increase from 14.5 million in 2006 and 13.9 million in 1996. Despite this increase in absolute numbers, there has been little change in the proportion of all households of this type, remaining at 57% of all households in 2016 compared with 58% of all households in 1996.

The next most common household type was one person households, of which there were 7.7 million in 2016. UK households containing one lone parent family increased from 2.3 million in 1996 to 2.7 million in 2016.

**Table 2: Households: by household type in 1996, 2006 and 2016**

UK							Millions
	One person households	One family household: couple*	One family household: lone parent	Two or more unrelated adults	Multi-family households	All households	
1996	6.6	13.9	2.3	0.7	0.2	23.7	
2006	7.3	14.5	2.6	0.8	0.2	25.4	
2016	7.7	15.5	2.7	0.9	0.3	27.1	

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

- \*Households where there is one family and one individual for example a married couple with their daughter and a lodger or a married couple with one elderly parent are classified as a one family household: couple
- One family household: couple and one family household: lone parent, can contain dependent and non-dependent children

Households containing 2 or more families (multi-family households) were the fastest growing household type over the decade to 2016, increasing by 66% from 194,000 households in 2006 to 323,000 households in 2016. This increase is statistically significant. Families in these households may be unrelated, or may be related in some way, for example, a married couple with their son and his girlfriend.

Changes in the number of multi-family households may be because of older couples moving in with their adult child and their family, young adults who are partnered or lone parents, remaining or returning to their parent's household and unrelated families sharing a household. Despite this rise, which was also seen using the [2011 Census results](#), multi-family households still only represented a very small proportion (1.2%) of all households in 2016.

## 8 . More women than men live alone in the UK

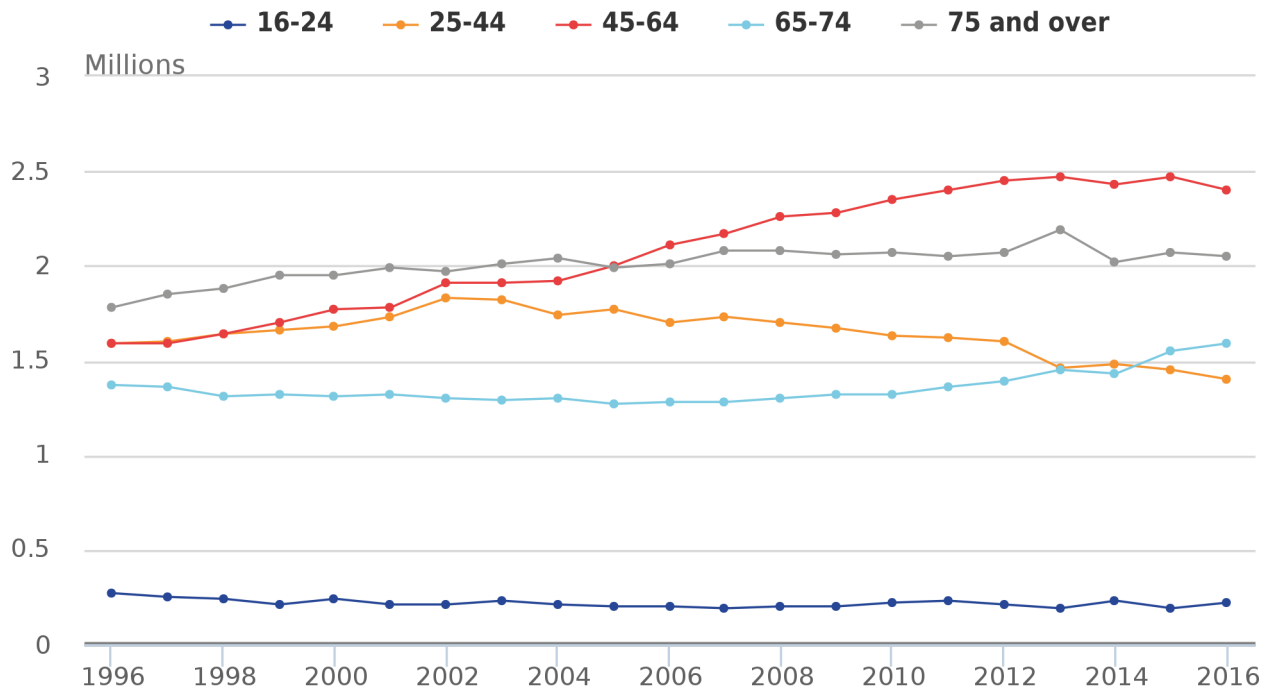
Of the 7.7 million one person households in the UK, 54.2% of them in 2016 contained one woman and 45.8% of them contained one man.

In 2016, there were 4.0 million people living alone aged 16 to 64; the majority (57.8%) were male. This could be because; higher proportions of men than women never marry, men marry at older ages than women and marry women younger than themselves, and partnership dissolution leading to men living alone while women may live with any children from the relationship. Further studies by academics looking at [living arrangements in mid-life](#) are available.

For those aged 65 to 74 and 75 and over, the pattern is reversed; at these ages the majority of people living alone were female (62.0% and 71.8% respectively). This is partly because there are more women than men in the total population aged 65 and over due to women's higher life expectancy. By the age of 65 most women have been married<sup>1</sup> and husbands are typically older than their wives. These 2 factors accentuate the gap in life expectancy between husbands and wives and mean that more women than men become widowed, which may lead to living alone. In spite of this, the number of widowed women is falling due to life expectancy increasing faster for men compared with [women](#).

**Figure 6: People living alone, by age group, 1996 to 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Those living alone aged 45 to 64 increased by 51% between 1996 and 2016, a statistically significant increase (Figure 6). This is partly due to the increasing population aged 45 to 64 in the UK over this period, as the 1960s baby boom generation have been reaching this age group particularly in the last decade. The increase could also be due to a rise in the proportion of the [population aged 45 to 64 who are divorced or single never married](#).

In contrast, the number living alone in the 25 to 44 age group fell by 12% between 1996 and 2016; this was a statistically significant change. The number living alone in the 16 to 24 age group fluctuated over the 2 decades from 1996 to 2016. The changing patterns of young adults living with their parents are discussed in section 6. In addition, [academic research](#) has illustrated that there has been a shift towards sharing with others outside a family among young adults.

Those aged 65 to 74 living alone saw a statistically significant increase of 16% over the 2 decades. The number living alone aged 75 and over also increased over the decade to 2016, this was by a smaller percentage of 15% which was also a statistically significant change.

#### Notes for More women than men live alone in the UK:

1. Statistics showing the [proportion of men and women ever married by certain ages](#) are available on our website

## 9 . Links to ONS related statistics

For more detailed statistics see our [datasets](#).

For further information on the Labour Force Survey see the [user guide](#).

Further statistics on [marriages \(including marriages of same sex couples\)](#), [divorces](#) and [civil partnerships](#) are available on our website.

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#) provide the estimated population by age group, sex, marital status (single, married, civil partnered, divorced, and widowed) and living arrangements for England and Wales.

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

## 10 . What has changed within this publication?

1. The [Marriages \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) made provision for the marriage of same sex couples in England and Wales from 29 March 2014 onwards. Families and Households in the UK, 2016 contains limited statistics on same sex married couple families. Within the [datasets](#) published alongside this statistical bulletin, same sex married couple families will be reported as a total with “married couple families”. A new table has been provided within the datasets in 2016 which presents a breakdown of married couple families by type.
2. The estimates presented within this bulletin and the associated datasets for the reference years 2013, 2014 and 2015 have been revised following re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The estimates for these years will differ from previous publications. A dataset assessing the impact of the re-weighting to the estimates for these years has been published alongside this release.

## 11 . Quality and Methodology

1. If a change or a difference between estimates is described as “statistically significant”, it means that statistical tests have been carried out to reject the possibility at a given level of significance, in this case 5%, that the change has occurred by chance. Therefore statistically significant changes are very likely to reflect real changes in families and household structures.
2. A small number of 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.
3. Since 2011 a household has been 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 but has no impact on the comparability of the statistics over time.
4. The Families and Households [Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:
  - strengths and limitations of the data
  - the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data, how it compares with related data
  - uses and users
  - how the output was created
5. We publish family and household estimates for the UK only. Requests for additional data or data for alternative geographies can be made by emailing [pop.info@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gsi.gov.uk) or by calling +44 (0)1329 44 4661
6. The [revisions policy](#) for population statistics is available on our website.
7. Details of the [policy governing the release of new data](#) are available from the [UK Statistics Authority](#) website.