

Statistical bulletin

Families and households in the UK: 2012

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



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1 . Main findings

- In 2012 there were 18.2 million families in the UK. Of these, 12.2 million consisted of a married couple with or without children
- The number of opposite sex cohabiting couple families has increased significantly, from 1.5 million in 1996 to 2.9 million in 2012. The number of dependent children living in opposite sex cohabiting couple families doubled from 0.9 million to 1.8 million over the same period
- In 2012, 38 per cent of married couple families had dependent children, compared with 39 per cent of opposite sex cohabiting couple families
- There were nearly 2.0 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2012, a figure which has grown steadily but significantly from 1.6 million in 1996
- There were 26.4 million households in the UK in 2012. Of these, 29 per cent consisted of only one person and almost 20 per cent consisted of four or more people

2 . 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. Statistics for 2012 are published for the first time today and [minor annual revisions due to survey reweighting have been made to previously published estimates \(42 Kb Excel sheet\)](#).

Statistics for 1996 to 2000, which were previously only available upon request, are also published for the first time today. 1996 is the earliest year for which these data are available on a consistent basis.

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:

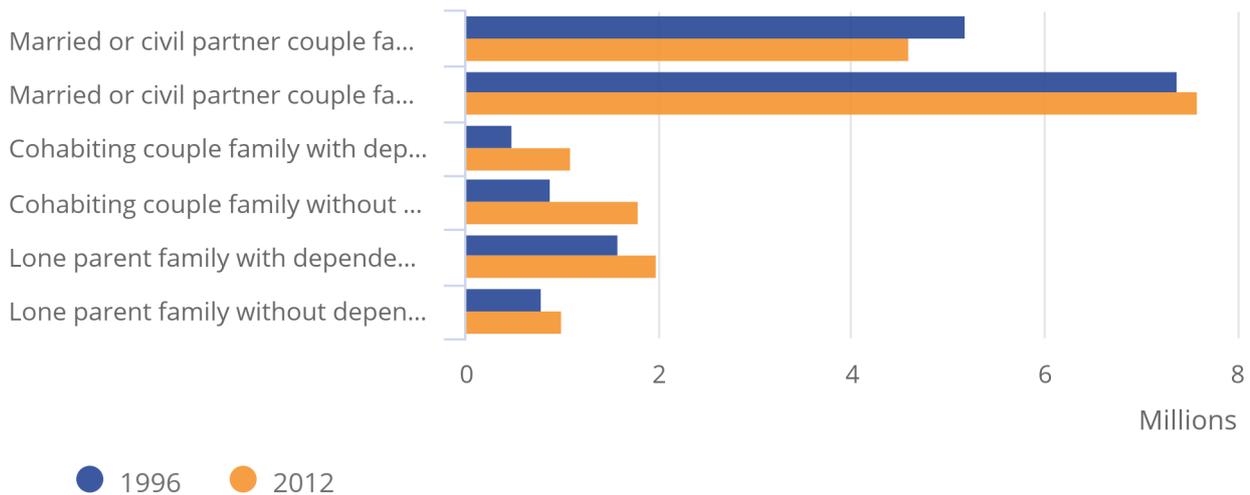
- Policy makers
- MPs
- Journalists
- Charities
- Businesses
- Students
- Researchers and academics
- Members of the general public.

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](#).

3 . Families

Figure 1: Families by family type in the UK, 1996 and 2012

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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.

Figure 1 shows that the most common family type in the UK in both 1996 and 2012 was a married or civil partner couple family without dependent children. There were 7.6 million such families in 2012, an increase of over 200,000 since 1996. The next most common family type was a married or civil partner couple family with dependent children, of which there were 4.6 million in 2012.

This was the only family type to decrease in number since 1996. However, 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, both with and without dependent children.

Table 1: Families in the UK: by family type in 1996 and 2012

Family type	Thousands					
	1996			2012		
	With dependent children	Without dependent children ¹	Total families	With dependent children	Without dependent children ¹	Total families
Married couple family	5,223	7,418	12,641	4,610	7,575	12,185
Civil partner couple family ²	N/A	N/A	N/A	6	60	66
Opposite sex cohabiting couple family	539	920	1,459	1,131	1,761	2,893
Same sex cohabiting couple family	..	15	16	6	64	69
Lone parent family	1,631	814	2,445	1,986	989	2,975
All families	7,393	9,167	16,560	7,739	10,449	18,188

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. .. indicates that estimates are not sufficiently reliable to be published.
4. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Table 1 shows that the total number of families in the UK has increased by 10 per cent since 1996, faster than growth in the UK population during this period. This is due to a slight fall in the average number of people in a family.

The number of married couple families decreased by 457,000 between 1996 and 2012, to 12.2 million in 2012. 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 1996 and 2012, from 1.5 million to 2.9 million.

In 2012 there were an estimated 69,000 families consisting of a same sex cohabiting couple and 66,000 consisting of a civil partnered couple, the latter having steadily increased since the introduction of civil partnerships in the UK in December 2005.

In 2012, 38 per cent of married couple families had dependent children living in the household compared with 39 per cent of opposite sex cohabiting couple families. However these similar percentages mask differences between these two groups: Married women of childbearing age are more likely to give birth than cohabiting women of the same age¹.

However, married women tend to be older on average than their cohabiting counterparts so children may be older and have left home. Cohabiting couples are more likely to be in younger age groups for childbearing. These two competing factors of age and likelihood of childbearing mean that a very similar percentage of married couples and opposite sex cohabiting couples have dependent children living in the household.

A much lower percentage of civil partner couple families and same sex cohabiting couple families had dependent children in 2012. However this percentage is much higher for lone parent families at 67 per cent, mainly because it is not possible to be a lone parent without at least one child in the household.

Notes for families

1. Population Trends article "[Fertility and partnership status in the last two decades](#)".

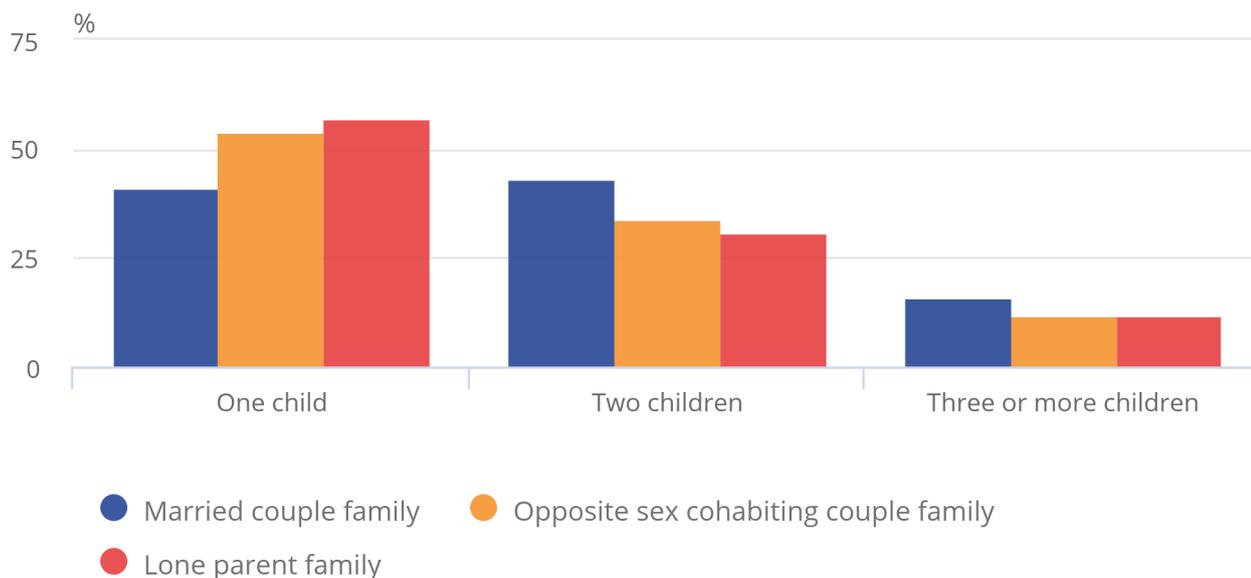
4 . Lone parents

There were nearly 2.0 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2012, a figure which has grown significantly from 1.6 million in 1996. Lone parents with dependent children represented 26 per cent of all families with dependent children in 2012, an increase of four percentage points since 1996.

In 2012, women accounted for 91 per cent of lone parents with dependent children and men the remaining 9 per cent. These percentages have changed little since 1996. Women are more likely to take the main caring responsibilities for any children when relationships break down, and therefore become lone parents.

Figure 2: Families with dependent children by family type and number of dependent children, UK, 2012

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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 2012. Therefore percentages for these families are not sufficiently robust to be published.

Figure 2 shows that 57 per cent of lone parents with dependent children have only one child, higher than both other family types. Further, only 12 per cent of lone parents have three or more children. Conversely, married couples with dependent children have more children on average than other family types, and only 41 per cent have only one dependent child. These patterns are likely to reflect the stability of parental partnerships and whether there is a partner living in the household.

5 . Dependent children

Dependent children are those living with their parent(s) and either (a) aged under 16, or (b) aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding children aged 16 to 18 who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household. There were 13.3 million dependent children living in families in the UK in 2012, slightly fewer than in 1996, despite the generally increasing number of births each year since 2001.

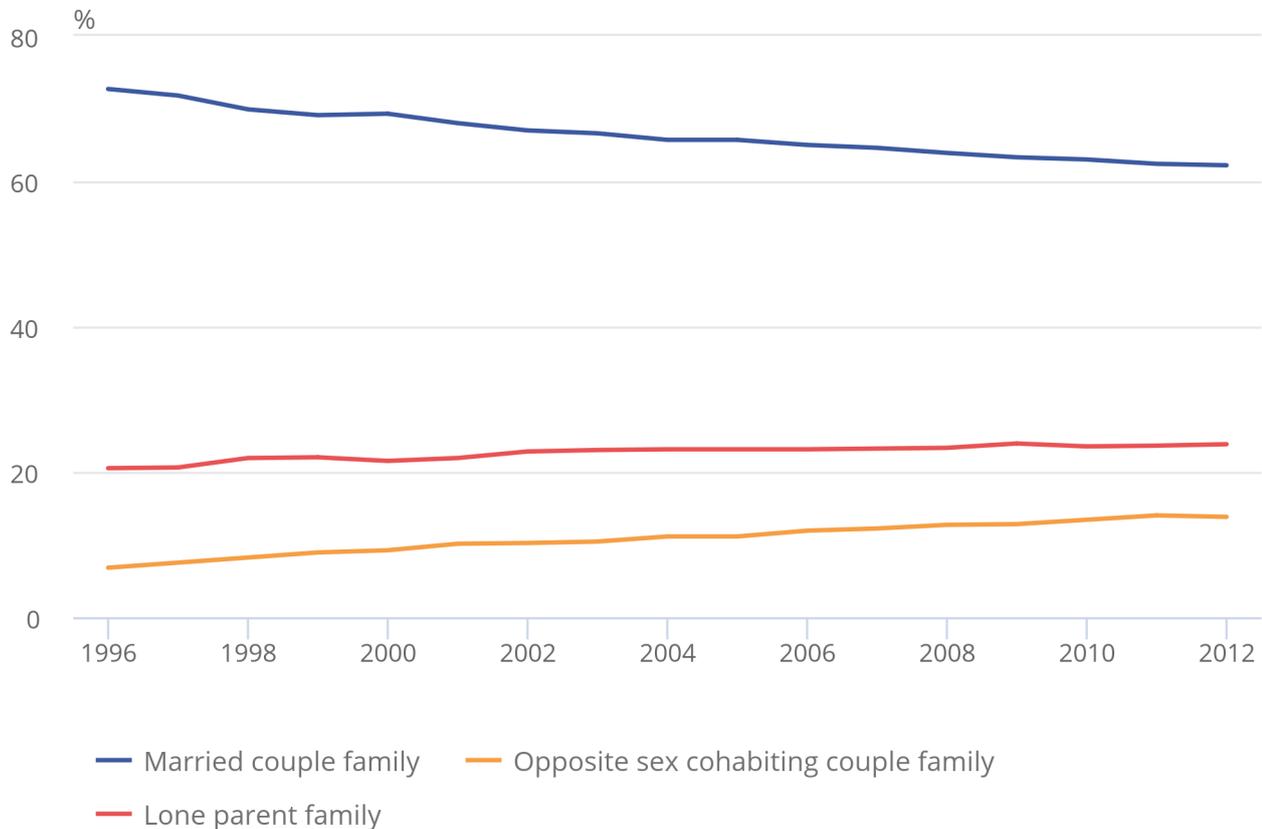
Although the total number of children aged under five has increased between 1996 and 2012, the total number of children aged five to 16 has decreased, leading to a slight decrease overall in the total number of dependent children over this period.

The types of families in which dependent children live have changed significantly. Figure 3 shows that 62 per cent of dependent children lived in a married couple family in 2012, a decrease from 73 per cent in 1996.

Over the same period, the percentage of dependent children living in opposite sex cohabiting couple families increased by seven percentage points to 14 per cent, and those living in lone parent families increased by three percentage points to 24 per cent.

Figure 3: Percentage of dependent children in the UK: by family type, 1996 to 2012

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Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

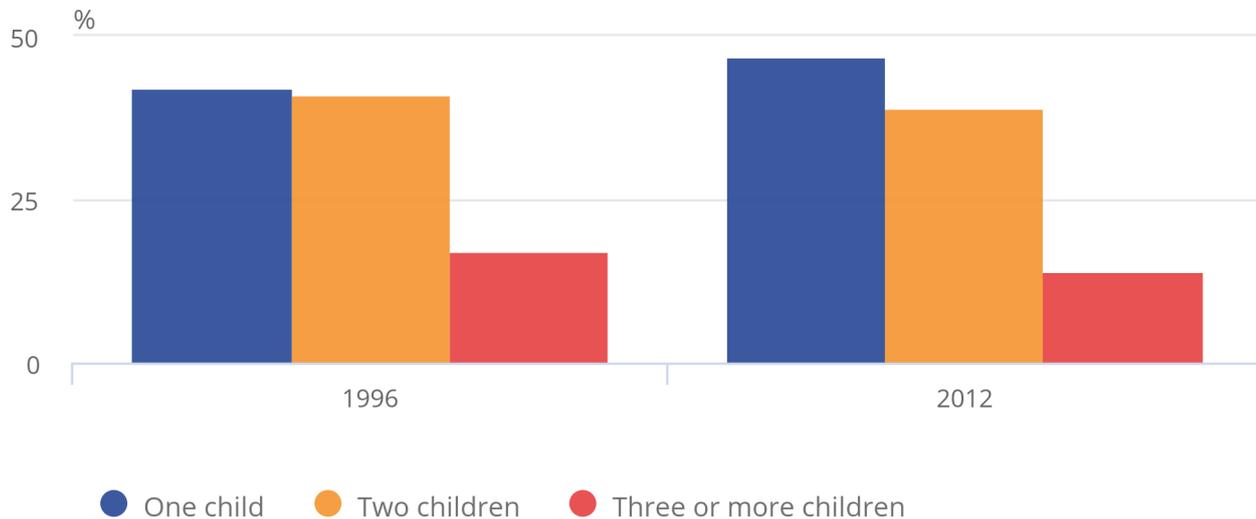
1. Less than 1 per cent of dependent children lived in civil partner or same sex cohabiting couple families in 2012. Therefore percentages for these families are not sufficiently robust to be published.

Figure 4 shows that in 2012, 47 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 five percentage points since 1996. In 2012, 39 per cent of families with dependent children had two dependent children and 14 per cent had three or more dependent children.

The statistics do not necessarily indicate that the proportion of only children is increasing. This is partly because some families may have one dependent child, as well as other non-dependent (adult) children in 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 only children can be found in the [summary of statistics available about only children](#).

Figure 4: Percentage of families with dependent children: by number of dependent children in the family, UK, 1996 and 2012

Figure 4: Percentage of families with dependent children: by number of dependent children in the family, UK, 1996 and 2012



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

6 . Household size

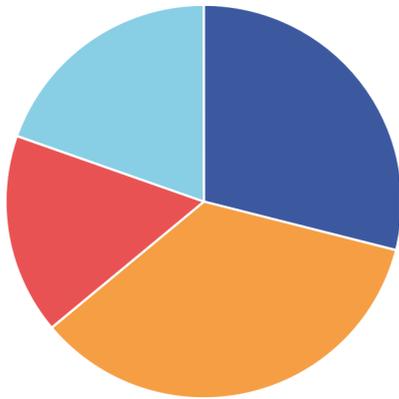
A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area. A household can consist of more than one family, or no families in the case of a group of unrelated people.

There were 26.4 million households in the UK in 2012. The number of households has increased by 11 per cent since 1996, faster than growth in the UK population during this period. This is due to the trend towards smaller household sizes: the proportion of households containing four or more people decreased from 21.6 per cent in 1996 to 19.6 per cent in 2012, while the proportion of households containing one person increased from 27.8 to 29.0 per cent, or by 1.0 million to 7.6 million, over the same period.

A different source, the General Lifestyle Survey, which provides a longer time series, 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 2012.

Figure 5: Percentage of households in the UK by household size in 2012

Figure 5: Percentage of households in the UK by household size in 2012



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

Household size in 2012 is shown in Figure 5. The percentage of UK households which contain one person (29.0 per cent) is similar to the European average¹ of 30.5 per cent. In 2012, 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 and Scotland had the lowest at 2.2.

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 2010 and can be found on the [Eurostat web page Income and Living Conditions](#).

7 . Household type

Table 2: Households in the UK: by household type in 1996 and 2012

							Millions
Year	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	
2012	7.6	14.8	2.8	0.8	0.3	26.4	

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

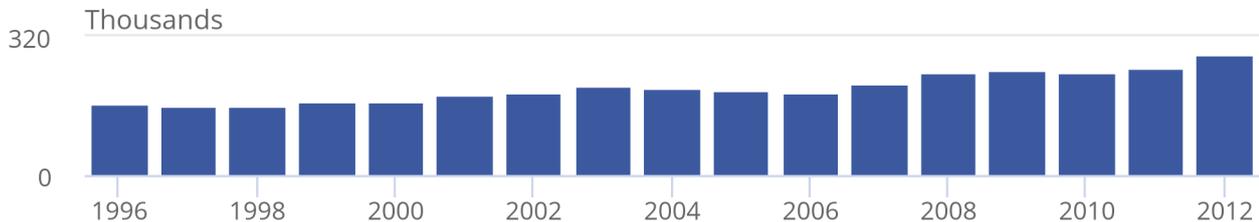
Table 2 shows that the most common household type in 2012 was one family consisting of a couple with or without children. There were 14.8 million such households, an increase from 13.9 million households in 1996. Despite this increase in absolute numbers, there is a reduction in the proportion of all households of this type, from 58 per cent of all households in 1996 to 56 per cent in 2012.

The next most common household type was one person households, of which there were 7.6 million in 2012. UK households containing one lone parent family increased from 2.3 million in 1996 to 2.8 million in 2012.

Households containing two or more families were the fastest growing household type, increasing by two thirds from 167,000 households in 1996 to 281,000 households in 2012. Despite this rise, multi-family households still only represented a very small proportion (1 per cent) of all households in 2012. Figure 6 shows that steady growth was observed between 1996 and 2006. However since 2006 the rise appears to have accelerated. 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.

Figure 6: Multi-family households in the UK, 1996 to 2012

Figure 6: Multi-family households in the UK, 1996 to 2012



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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 average¹; only two countries (Ireland and Norway) have 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 countries².

Notes for household type

1. The EU Statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) is the source of the European comparisons. The statistics are for 2010 and can be found [on the Eurostat web page Income and Living Conditions](#).
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.](#)

8 . Living alone

In 2012, 7.6 million people in UK households lived alone, of which 4.2 million were aged 16 to 64. Of those in this age group, the majority (58 per cent) were male. One possible reason for this is that at every age a higher proportion of men than women never marry; 62 per cent of men aged 16 to 64 living alone have never married compared with 49 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 men¹.

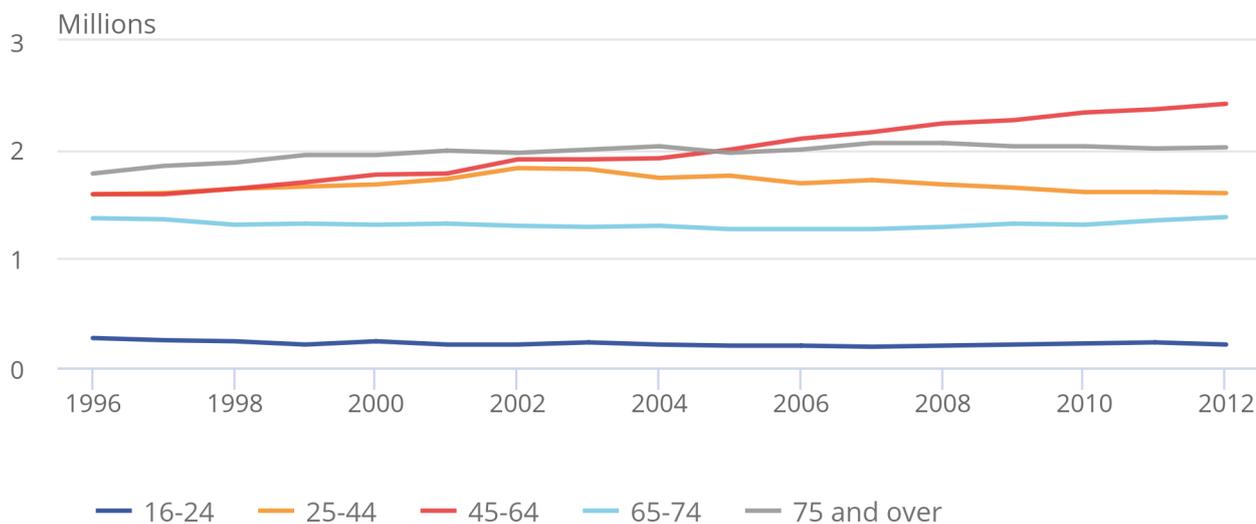
By the age of 65 most women have been married², and husbands are typically older than their wives. These two factors accentuate the gap in life expectancy between husbands and wives, and mean that more wives than husbands become widowed.

Figure 7 shows the trends in the number of people living alone by age group between 1996 and 2012. The largest change is in the 45 to 64 age group, where the number of people living alone increased by 53 per cent between 1996 and 2012. 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 started to enter 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 79 per cent in 1996 to 69 per cent in 2012), and a rise in the percentage of those aged 45 to 64 who have never married, or are divorced (from 16 per cent in 1996 to 28 per cent in 2012).

Figure 7: People living alone in the UK: by age group, 1996 to 2012

Figure 7: People living alone in the UK: by age group, 1996 to 2012



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes for living alone

1. Further information about the marital status of the whole population in England and Wales (not just those living alone) can be found in the [population estimates by marital status](#) .
2. Statistics showing the proportion of men and women ever married by certain ages is available on the [ONS website](#).

9. Further information

The following have been published:

- [a short story about cohabitation](#)
- [data tables on families and households \(412.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)
- [a description of the minor revisions made to previously published estimates due to survey reweighting for 2010 and 2011 \(42 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

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 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.

Further information about [young adults living with their parents](#) is 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.

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.

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10. 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.gov.uk (preferred) or call +44 (0)1329 444022 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 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. 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.
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 \(412.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#).
7. The 2012 Labour Force Survey dataset was first published on 29 August 2012. It covers the period from April to June 2012. Further information about the quality of the Labour Force Survey can be found in the [Performance and Quality Monitoring Reports](#).
8. Results from the 2011 Census have not yet been incorporated into any weighting for the Labour Force Survey.
9. 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](#).
10. 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](#).
11. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
12. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

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