

Statistical bulletin

# Families and households in the UK: 2019

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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## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Things you need to know about this release](#)
3. [Northern Ireland had the highest proportion of married or civil partner couples and the lowest proportion of cohabiting couples in 2019](#)
4. [Same-sex married couples are the fastest growing type of same-sex family](#)
5. [London had the highest proportion of lone parent families in the UK in 2019](#)
6. [In 2019, there were 8.2 million people living alone](#)
7. [Multi-family households are the fastest growing household type in the UK, but currently represent the smallest share of households](#)
8. [London had the largest proportion of households made up of two or more unrelated adults in 2019](#)
9. [The majority of families with dependent children were married or civil partner couples](#)
10. [Links to related statistics](#)
11. [Quality and methodology](#)

# 1 . Main points

- In 2019, there were 19.2 million families, an increase of 0.4% on the previous year, with a 6.8% increase over the decade from 2009 to 2019.
- The number of households grew by 0.9% since the previous year to 27.8 million in 2019, an increase of 6.8% over the last 10 years.
- Married or civil partner couples remain the most common family type in 2019, they represent two-thirds of families in the UK; Northern Ireland (72.6%) has the highest proportion of married or civil partner couples and the lowest proportion of cohabiting couples (9.4%).
- There were 2.9 million lone parent families in 2019, which is 14.9% of families in the UK; London has the highest proportion (19.1%), while the South West of England (10.9%) has the lowest.
- The number of people living alone has increased by a fifth over the last 20 years, driven mainly by increases in men aged 45 to 64 years living alone; Scotland has the highest proportion of one-person households at 35.0%, while London has the lowest (23.9%).
- Households containing multiple families (which represents 1.1% of all households) were the fastest growing type of household over the last two decades, having increased by three-quarters to 297,000 households in 2019.

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

The 2018 release of Families and Households in the UK was published on 7 August 2019. It was delayed as a result of the re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey back to 2012. This release adds the 2019 estimates to the previously published 1996 to 2018 dataset, bringing the publication back in line with the annual schedule. For additional analysis on the UK level, [Families and households in the UK: 2018](#) can be referred to.

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.

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

Non-dependent children are those living with their parent(s), and either aged 19 years or over, or aged 16 to 18 years who are not in full-time education or who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household. Non-dependent children are sometimes called adult children.

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 a single family, more than one family, or no families in the case of a group of unrelated people.

[Families and household statistics explained](#) provides further information on the complexities around the definitions and how these relate to situations people might be experiencing. There have recently been legislative changes to marriages and civil partnerships in the UK that will affect future statistics on families and households. Further details of these changes and when they come into effect are also provided in Families and household statistics explained.

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 that the change has occurred by chance. Therefore, statistically significant changes are very likely to reflect real changes in families and household structures.

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

This release contains analysis by UK country and English region for the first time. We encourage users to feed back on whether this additional analysis meets their needs by emailing [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk). The published [region datasets](#) can be found here.

### **3 . Northern Ireland had the highest proportion of married or civil partner couples and the lowest proportion of cohabiting couples in 2019**

In 2019, there were 19.2 million families in the UK, a statistically significant increase of 6.8% over the last decade. The number of families has grown by 0.4% (81,100) since the previous year.

Married and civil partner couple families remained the most common family type in 2019, representing two-thirds of all families (12.8 million). Cohabiting couple families were the second-largest family type at 3.5 million (18.4%), followed by 2.9 million (14.9%) lone parent families.

In the UK over the last 10 years, the proportion of families containing a married or civil partnered couple decreased from 68.6% in 2009 to 66.8% in 2019. Conversely the proportion of families containing a cohabiting couple increased from 15.3% to 18.4%. This reflects the [declining trend seen in the proportion of the population who are married and an increasing trend in the proportion cohabiting](#).

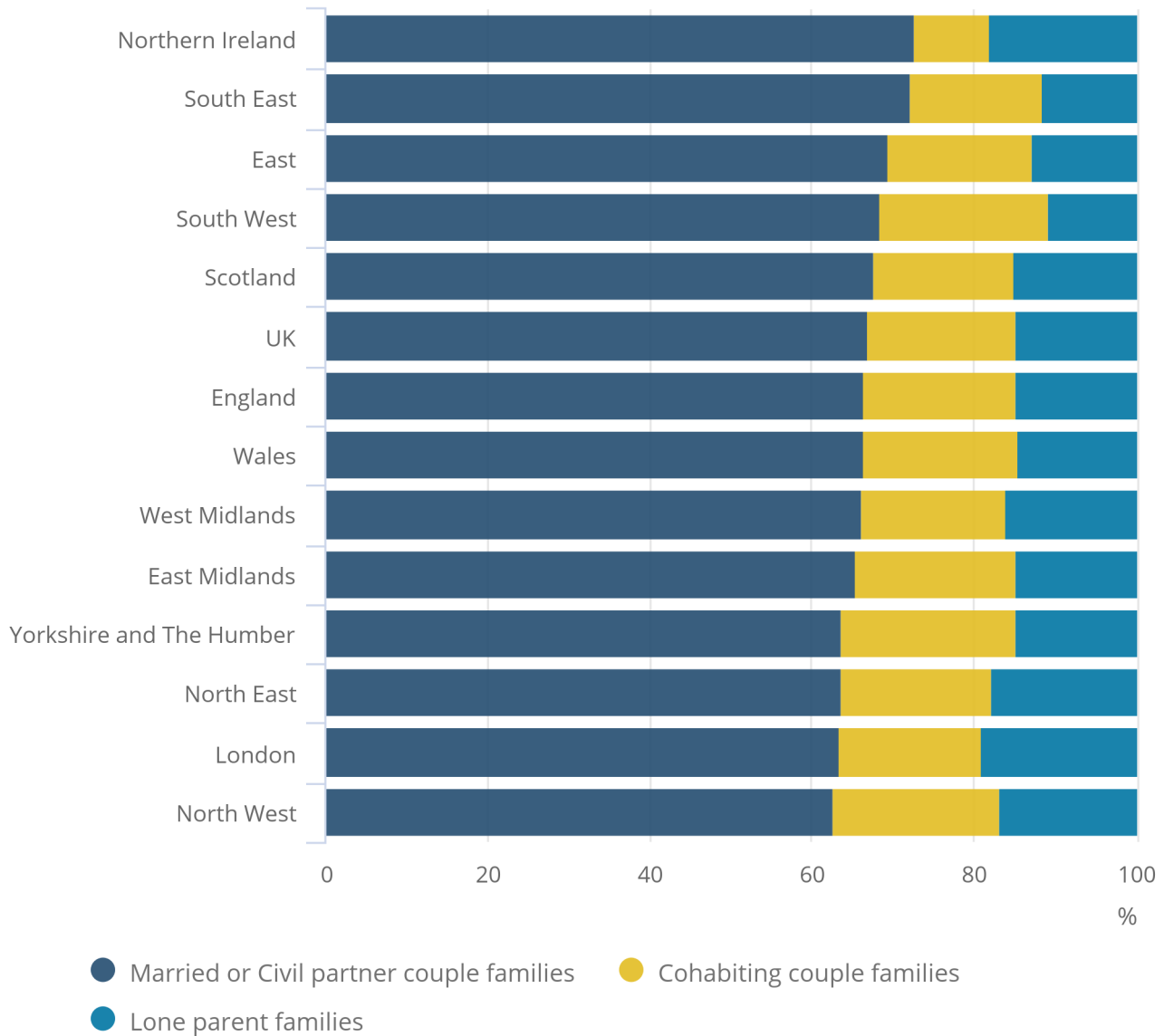
In 2019, the highest proportion of married or civil partner couple families were in Northern Ireland (72.6%) and the South East of England (72.2%). The average for the UK was 66.8% (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Married or civil partner couples were the most common family type in 2019**

Percentage of families by family type in each region of England and UK constituent countries

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Percentage of families by family type in each region of England and UK constituent countries



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. Married couple families include both opposite-sex and same-sex married couples.
2. Cohabiting couple families include both opposite-sex and same-sex cohabiting couples.
3. Percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Northern Ireland had the lowest proportion of cohabiting couple families in 2019 at 9.4% (49,500), while the average for the UK was 18.4%. Over the five years up to 2019, the South West (16.7% in 2014 to 20.6% in 2019) and the North West of England (17.2% to 20.5%) saw the largest increases in the proportion of cohabiting couple families.

## **4 . Same-sex married couples are the fastest growing type of same-sex family**

In 2019 there were 212,000 same-sex families in the UK, having increased by 40.0% since 2015. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 legalized same-sex marriage in England and Wales from 13 March 2014 and from 16 December 2014 in Scotland.

Same-sex cohabiting couples remain the most common type of same-sex couple family, accounting for just over half of same-sex families in 2019. However, the proportion of same-sex cohabiting couples has decreased from 59.6% in 2015 to 51.6% in 2019, driven by the growing number of same-sex married couple families (Figure 2). It should be noted these analyses are based on small numbers therefore estimates are more prone to greater annual fluctuation.

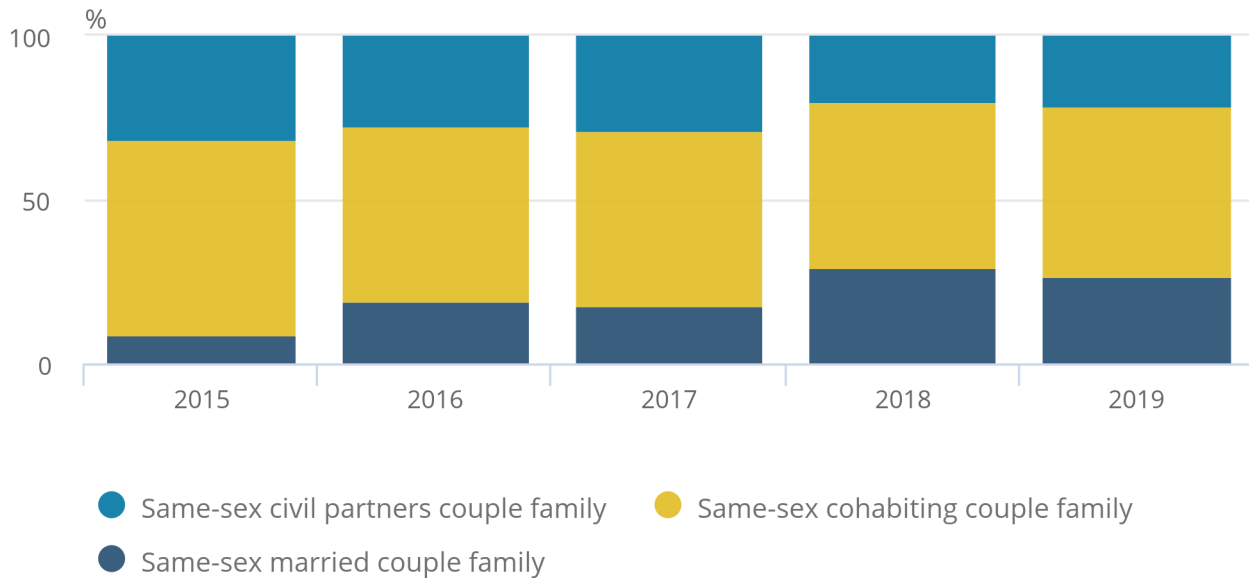
[Families and household statistics explained](#) provides further information on the legislative changes to marriages and civil partnerships in the UK, which will affect future statistics on families and households.

## Figure 2: Same-sex cohabiting couples remain the most common type of same-sex families

Change in same-sex couple family distributions, UK, 2015 to 2019

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Change in same-sex couple family distributions, UK, 2015 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

## 5 . London had the highest proportion of lone parent families in the UK in 2019

In 2019, 14.9% of the families in the UK were lone parent families (2.9 million). Over the last 10 years this number has not changed significantly, but between 1999 and 2019 there has been a statistically significant increase of 14.5%.

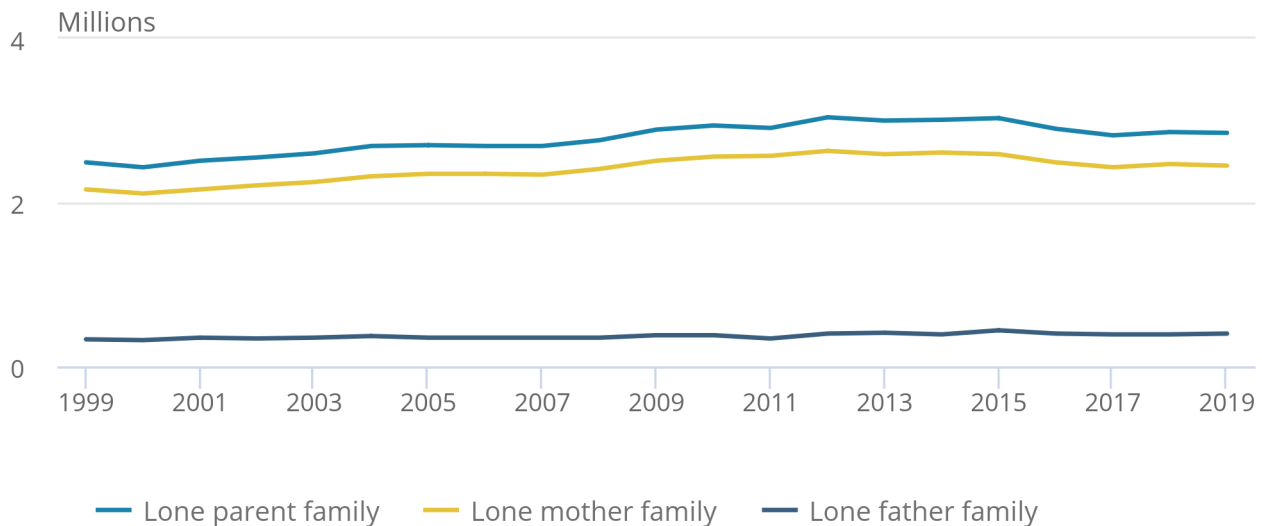
Lone parent mothers remained the most common type of lone parents in 2019, accounting for 86% of this family type. However, from 1999 to 2019 the number of lone parent fathers has grown by 22%, while the number of lone parent mothers also increased but at a slower rate (13.4%). These increases are both statistically significant (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The number of lone parent fathers has grown at a faster rate than lone parent mothers between 1999 and 2019**

Number of lone parent families by sex, UK, 1999 to 2019

Figure 3: The number of lone parent fathers has grown at a faster rate than lone parent mothers between 1999 and 2019

Number of lone parent families by sex, UK, 1999 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Over the last decade to 2019, the number of lone parents with non-dependent children has increased by 17.5%, while the number of lone parents with dependent children has decreased by 9.8%. These changes are both statistically significant.

Reasons for the decrease in lone parent families with dependents may include:

- more lone parents could be re-partnering
- the number of births has been declining
- [more women have been postponing childbearing to later years](#)
- there have been [fewer teenage pregnancies](#)

While the increase in lone parents with non-dependent children is likely to be partly driven by the ageing of children who previously were dependents in lone parent families, it could also be as a result of increases in separation at older ages as well as an increasing trend of young adults living with parents.

London contained the largest proportion of lone parent families compared with the other regions in the UK in 2019 (19.1%), followed by Northern Ireland (18.0%), the North East (17.8%) and North West of England (16.7%). Regions in the South of England had the lowest proportion of lone parent families (around 11%), see Figure 1.

Over the last five years, Wales experienced the largest change in the proportion of lone parent families compared with the other regions in the UK. There was a statistically significant decrease of 15.8% from 156,000 in 2014 to 131,000 families in 2019.

## 6 . In 2019, there were 8.2 million people living alone

In 2019, the number of households in the UK grew by 249,000 (0.9%) from the previous year to 27.8 million. This increase was statistically significant.

The number of people living alone has increased by a fifth over the last 20 years, from 6.8 million in 1999 to 8.2 million in 2019, a statistically significant increase. The majority of this increase is driven by the growth in the numbers of men living alone (72.1%), predominantly aged 45 to 64 years. This could be because of the following:

- higher proportions of men than women never marry
- men tend to marry at older ages than women and marry women younger than themselves
- partnership dissolution, leading to men living alone while women may live with any children from the relationship

More information on the characteristics of those people living alone can be found in our article [The cost of living alone](#).

London contained the lowest proportion of one-person households compared with the other UK regions in 2019. Fewer than one-quarter of households in London contained somebody living alone compared with the UK average of 29.5%. In contrast, Scotland had the highest proportion of one-person households at 35.0%. This may reflect regional differences in housing affordability.

### Figure 4: London had the lowest proportion of one-person households in 2019

[Download the data](#)

Over the last five years, the South West of England (23.2%), Northern Ireland (22.5%) and Wales (22.1%) experienced the largest increases in the number of one-person households. These increases were statistically significant.

Of all one-person households in the UK, just under half (49.1%) contained somebody aged 65 years and over. London had the lowest proportion aged 65 years and over at 38.3%, compared with other regions in the UK. While the highest proportions of one-person households aged 65 years and over were in the West Midlands (54.7%) and the South West of England (54.6%).



## **7 . Multi-family households are the fastest growing household type in the UK, but currently represent the smallest share of households**

Multi-family households (consisting of two or more families) were the fastest growing household type over the last two decades to 2019. They grew by three-quarters from 170,000 in 1999 to 297,000 households in 2019, a statistically significant increase. However, they represented a very small proportion of all household types in 2019 (1.1%), see Figure 5.

Families in these households may be unrelated, for example two couples house-sharing alone or one or more couples with other adults, or may be related in some way, for example, a couple with their child and their partner.

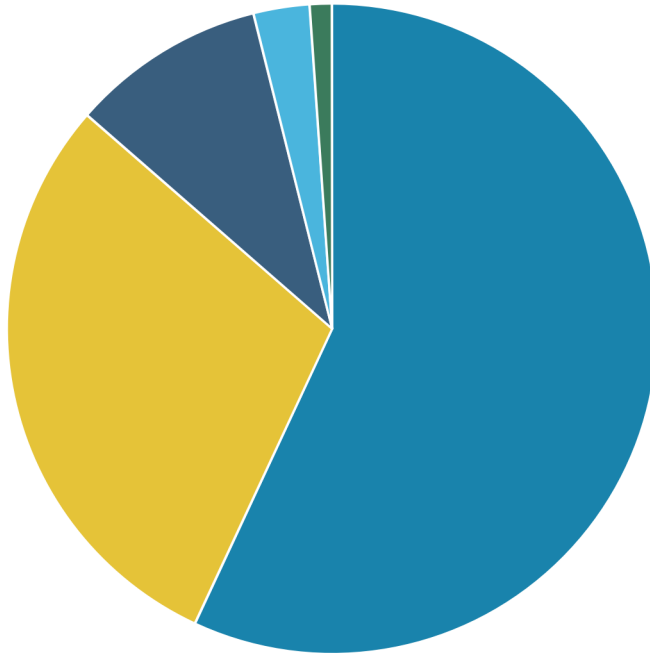
The growth in the number of multi-family households could reflect a growth in multigenerational families choosing to live together, or out of necessity because of reasons such as housing affordability, childcare responsibilities and caring for older relatives.

## Figure 5: Couple households remain the most common household type in 2019

Percentage of households, by household type, UK, 2019

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Percentage of households, by household type, UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

#### Notes:

1. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

London contained the highest proportion of multi-family households (2.0%), compared with the rest of the UK. Over the last five years up to 2019, the North East of England showed the largest decrease in multi-family households (0.8% to 0.2% in 2019), while the North West showed the largest increase (0.9% to 1.5% in 2019) in this household type.

## **8 . London had the largest proportion of households made up of two or more unrelated adults in 2019**

There were 787,000 households made up of two or more unrelated adults in 2019, which represents a small proportion (2.8%) of all household types (Figure 6). The number of these households has not changed significantly in the last 20 years.

These households do not contain a couple or a parent living with their child, but typically are groups of friends or students, but can also include two siblings for example.

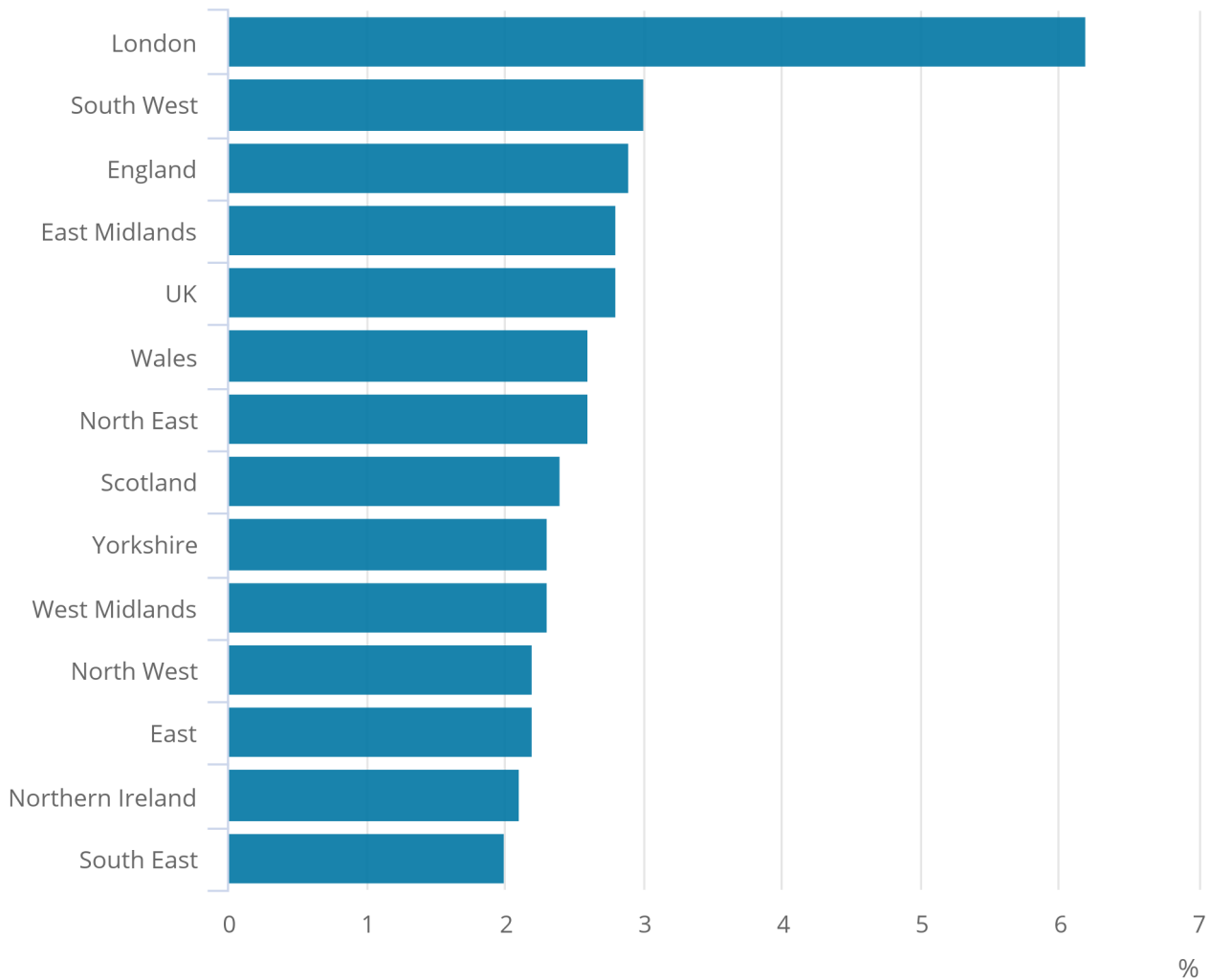
London contained the highest proportion of two or more unrelated adult households compared to the rest of the UK in 2019, at 6.2% (206,000) compared with the UK average of 2.8%. The South East of England showed a statistically significant decrease of 25.1% in the five years up to 2019, falling from 99,000 to 74,000 in 2019.

**Figure 6: London had double the proportion of households containing two or more unrelated adults than the rest of the regions in the UK**

Percentage of households containing two or more unrelated adults for regions and constituent countries of the UK, 2019

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Percentage of households containing two or more unrelated adults for regions and constituent countries of the UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

## 9 . The majority of families with dependent children were married or civil partner couples

Over the last decade the number of families with dependent children has increased by 4.1%, while the number of families with non-dependent children only has grown more than twice as fast. These both represent statistically significant increases. This reflects the fact fewer people are having children and those that do tend to have fewer children than in the past.

In 2019, married and civil partner couple families accounted for the largest share of families with dependent children (61.4%), followed by lone parent families (22.3%) and cohabiting couples (16.3%).

Between 2009 and 2019, the number of cohabiting couple families with dependent children has increased by more than a quarter. The number of married or civil partner couples with dependent children has increased by 4.8%, and lone parents with dependent children has decreased by 9.8%. These changes are statistically significant.

London contained the highest proportion of families with dependent children in 2019; accounting for half of all families in London, compared with the UK average of 42.0%. Over the last five years the number of families with dependent children in London increased by 9.5% to 1.2 million in 2019, which is statistically significant.

### Figure 7: The South West of England and Scotland had the lowest proportions of households with dependent children

[Download the data](#)

Over the last two decades there has been a 46.3% increase in the number of young people aged 20 to 34 years (non-dependent children) living with their parents, increasing from 2.4 million in 1999 to 3.5 million in 2019. This is equivalent to more than a quarter of young adults of the same age group living with parents in 2019. This number has not changed significantly since 2018.

Larger numbers of young adults tending to stay at home for longer may be explained by staying in education and training for longer, formalising relationships and having children at older ages, and increased costs in renting or buying a home. This is explored further in our article [Why are more young people living with their parents?](#)

## 10 . Links to related statistics

More detailed statistics are available in our families and households [dataset](#).

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

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

[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.

## 11 . Quality and methodology

The [Families and households Quality and Methodology Information](#) report contains important information to help you:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- reduce the risk of misusing data
- to decide suitable uses for the data
- understand the methods used to create the data

It should be noted that the definition of a lone parent does not make any distinction between situations where a child has regular contact and/or partly resides with their other parent and a child who solely resides with and is cared for by one parent.

We publish family and household estimates for the UK and region level. Requests for additional data or data for alternative geographies can be made by emailing [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk) or by calling +44 (0)1329 44 4661. Please note requests for additional data are likely to be charged in line with our [charging policy](#).

The [revisions policy](#) for population statistics is available.

Details of the [policy governing the release of new data](#) are available from the [UK Statistics Authority website](#).