

SF3: Living arrangements of children

Definitions and methodology

Trends in partnership formation and dissolution have changed over the last decades, and this has not missed its effect on the living arrangements of children. As a result, the likelihood that children grow up in a household wherein both their natural parents live has declined.

This indicator cast light on the extent to which children live with both their parents, only their mother or father, or otherwise. For the EU countries, the *European Labour Force Survey* is used to estimate the proportion of children under age 15 who live with their parents (Eurostat, 2007); available data for other OECD countries is not exactly comparable as it generally concerns children up to age 17. The data do not facilitate the separate identification of biological vis-à-vis adoptive parents or married vis-à-vis cohabiting parents (SF9).

This indicator also considers the proportion of children living in 'original' or in 'reconstituted' families. There is limited information on this topic, but *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children 2005/2006*, has some data for children aged 11, 13 or 15 (see Currie *et al.*, 2008). These young adolescents were asked whether they lived in one or two homes (and two families) and whom they lived with most of the time. The data presented concern the proportions of children who reported they were living primarily with both parents, within a single-parent family, a step-family, or within some other arrangement (for example, within a foster home or with non-parental family members). More complete information for all children from 0 to 17 has been collected through separate questionnaires sent to countries by the OECD, but results have only become available for a limited number of countries.

Key findings

In all OECD countries, the large majority of children (84% on average) live together with both their father and mother (Table SF3.1). There is, however, considerable cross-national variation with 95% of children living with both parents in Finland while this is only 65% in Belgium. In 17 countries, the proportion of children living in a household where neither father or mother was present is very low at less than 1%; SF2 showed that in the EU one out of six children live with one of their parents and Table SF3.1 shows that most of them live with their mother only (14% of children on average in the EU), with 2% of children live with their father only. The proportion of children living with their mother only is over 20% in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Other relevant indicators: Family size and household composition (SF1); Children in Families (SF2); Share of births outside marriage (SF6); Childlessness (SF7); Marriage and Divorce rates (SF8) and Cohabitation rate and prevalence other forms of partnerships (SF9); and Child poverty (CO8).

Table SF3.1: Distribution of children aged 0-14 by living arrangements, 2007¹

% of children living in the different situation

	Both father and mother are in the same household	The father and mother are not in the same household	The father of the youngster is in the same household	The mother of the youngster is in the same household
Austria	86.6	0.5	0.9	12.1
Belgium	65.0	4.4	11.0	19.5
Bulgaria	85.2	1.6	2.0	11.1
Czech Republic	80.8	0.6	1.2	17.4
Cyprus^{2,3}				
Denmark⁴	81.3	1.4	2.0	15.3
Germany	82.0	0.0	1.7	16.3
Estonia	66.8	6.7	1.1	25.4
Finland	95.2	0.2	0.4	4.1
France	79.5	0.6	2.9	17.0
Greece	93.6	0.2	0.8	5.4
Hungary	82.0	1.0	1.3	15.7
Italy	92.1	0.1	1.0	6.8
Latvia	64.9	2.7	2.2	30.2
Lithuania	72.4	2.0	4.7	21.0
Luxembourg	91.5	0.7	0.7	7.1
Malta	90.0	0.5	0.6	9.0
Japan⁴	87.7	0.0	1.7	10.6
Mexico⁴	87.1	0.0	1.6	11.3
Netherlands	87.4	0.1	1.3	11.2
Poland	82.0	1.1	1.0	15.8
Portugal	86.6	1.8	1.0	10.5
Romania	88.9	1.9	1.4	7.7
Slovenia	87.7	0.9	0.8	10.5
Slovakia	86.4	0.5	1.2	12.0
Spain	91.5	0.7	0.6	7.2
Sweden⁴	78.0	0.0	4.0	18.0
Switzerland⁴	84.7	0.1	2.3	12.9
Turkey	91.5	0.7	0.6	7.2
United Kingdom	68.9	1.1	2.4	27.6
United States⁴	70.7	3.5	3.2	22.6
OECD - 23	84.1	0.8	1.9	13.1

¹ year: 2000 for Switzerland; 2005 for Mexico and Sweden; 2007 for EU countries and the United States.

² 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".

³ 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.

⁴ Age to children 0 to 17.

Sources: ELFS, 2007 except for Denmark, Japan, Sweden and Switzerland which concerns national responses to a separate OECD questionnaire; Mexico: Conteo de Poblacion y Vivienda, 2005 (INEGI); and, United States: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Table SF3.2 reports the proportion of young adolescents living primarily with both their parents, with one parent, or in a step family. 75% of children not yet 15 live with both their parents, while almost one child out six lives in a sole-parent family. The proportion of children living in step families varies from only 1% in Turkey to 14-15% in Estonia and the United-States. The share of children living in such families is less than 5% in Ireland, Southern European countries (Greece, Italy and Spain), Poland, and the Slovak Republic. By contrast, more than 10% of children declare to live in reconstituted families in

Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, England and the United States. For countries where data concern children 0 to 17, the proportion of children living in step families is lower than for children 0 to 15.

Table SF3.2: Living arrangements of young adolescents, 2005/2006¹

% of adolescents of age 11, 13 or 15 living in with

	Both parents	Step family	Sole parents	Other
Austria	76	8	14	1
Belgium (Flemish speaking)	74	10	14	1
Belgium (French speaking)	67	14	17	2
Bulgaria	81	4	13	2
Canada	69	11	18	3
Czech Republic	70	12	16	2
Denmark	66	13	19	3
Denmark²	73	8	17	1
Estonia	65	15	18	2
Finland	71	13	16	1
France	73	11	14	1
Germany	74	9	15	1
Greece	86	3	11	1
Hungary	74	9	16	2
Iceland	70	12	15	2
Ireland	81	5	13	2
Italy	87	3	9	1
Latvia	64	10	23	3
Lithuania	71	8	19	3
Luxembourg	76	8	14	2
Mexico	73	6	21	0
Netherlands	80	7	12	1
Norway	73	10	16	2
Poland	83	3	12	1
Portugal	82	6	10	2
Romania	58	2	37	3
Slovakia	84	5	11	0
Slovenia	84	4	10	1
Spain	84	4	11	1
Sweden	73	12	14	1
Sweden²	69	9	21	1
Switzerland	79	8	12	1
Turkey	85	1	11	3
United Kingdom (England only)	70	12	16	1
United States	57	14	24	4
United States²	62	7	25	5
OECD average	75	9	14	2

¹These are the proportions living "primarily" with each family arrangement. "Other" includes foster homes or non-parental family members

² Data from questionnaire as sent directly to countries, children 0 to 17 (this contributes to differences with the HBSC-results).

Sources: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) 2005/2006. For school-aged children ages 11, 13 or 15, or spate questionnaire as indicated; Mexico: Encuesta Nacional de la Dinamica Demografica 2006.

Comparability and data issues

Indicators SF1 and SF2 already reported difficulties with identifying the different forms of living arrangements because of their transitory nature and because children can (report to) share more than one dwelling. Double-counting may lead to some over-estimation of those living in a sole-parent family and/or step families. Some parents may also be reluctant to declare that their child is also “usually living” with their former partner (Table SF3.1). This issue is at least partly addressed by asking children directly on their living arrangements (in Table SF3.2).

The effective number of children sharing the dwelling of their father in Table SF3.1 may be underestimated as children who “usually” alternate between father’s and mother’s residences are most likely to be counted as living with their mother only.

Sources and further reading: Currie C., S.N Gobhaimn, E. Godeau, C. Roberts, R. Smith, D. Currie, W. Picket, M. Richter, A. Morgan, and V. Barnekow (2008), *Inequalities in Young people's health : Health behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey : international report from the 2005-2006 survey*, Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe; Eurostat (2007), *The European Union Labour Force Survey*, http://circa.europa.eu/irc/dsis/employment/info/data/eu_lfs/.