

SF1.2: Children in Families

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on the distribution of children (aged 0-17) according to the presence and marital status of parents in the household. Children are categorised into three groups according to how many adults that are considered parents also live in the same household:

- *Living with two parents*, where the child lives primarily in a household with two adults that are reported as ‘parents’ of the child, with ‘parents’ generally referring to both biological parents and step- or adoptive-parents. For European countries and a few non-European OECD countries, data allow for further disaggregation between those that live with *two married parents* – that is, with two adults that are considered parents and that are married to each other – and those that live with *two cohabiting parents*, that is, with two parents that are not married to each other. For European countries, ‘married parents’ in principle includes parents in registered partnerships, although actual practice may vary from country to country.
- *Living with a single parent*, where the child lives primarily in a household with only one adult that is reported as a ‘parent’. This can be a biological parent or a step- or adoptive-parent. The household may or may not contain other adults – including grandparents and other adult relatives or unrelated adults – but only one adult can be considered as a parent for the household to be classified as a single parent household.
- *Other*, where the child lives primarily in a household where no adult is considered a parent. This household type covers a variety of possible living arrangements, including the child living with grandparents, other relatives or unrelated adults, as long as none of the adults in the household are reported as a parent of the child.

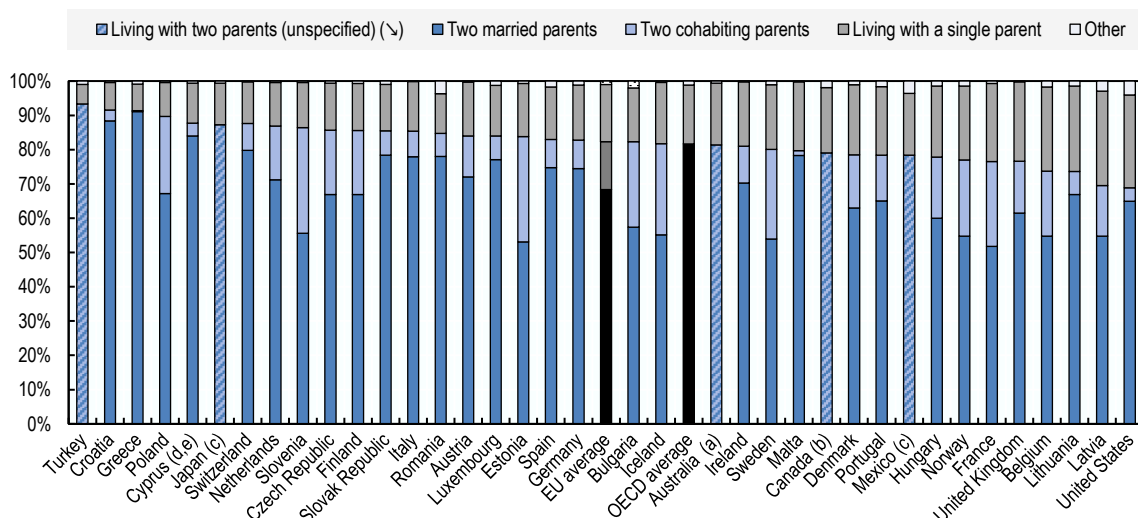
Key findings

Across OECD countries, most children live in households with two parents (Chart SF2.1.A). Rates vary from country-to-country – from less than 70% in Latvia and the United States to as high as 90% in Turkey and Greece – but the proportion of children living in households with two parents is over 80% in most OECD countries. Most remaining children live with a single parent, rather than with no parents. At just under 28%, Latvia has the highest proportion of children living with a single parent. Rates are also high in Belgium, Lithuania, the United Kingdom and the United States, where around one in four children live with a single parent.

Most children that live with two parents also live with parents that are married to each other, and comparatively few live with parents that are cohabiting (Chart SF2.1.A). For example, in Greece, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland and the United States, less than 10% of children live with two cohabiting parents. In Estonia, Iceland, Slovenia and Sweden, more than 25% of children live with cohabiting parents. However, even in these countries, the most common arrangement by far is still “living with two married parents”.

Other relevant indicators: Family size and household composition (SF1.1); Living arrangements of children (SF1.3); Share of births outside marriage (SF2.4); Childlessness (SF2.5); Marriage and Divorce rates (SF3.1) and Cohabitation rate and prevalence other forms of partnerships (SF3.3); and Child poverty (CO2.2).

Chart SF1.2.A. **Living arrangements of children, 2017**
 Distribution (%) of children (aged 0-17) by presence and marital status of parents in the household



Note: 'Parents' generally refers to both biological parents and step-, adoptive parents. 'Living with two married parents' refers to situations where a child lives in a household with two adults that are considered parents and these parents are married to each other. 'Living with two cohabiting parents' refers to situations where a child lives in a household with two adults that are considered parents and these parents are not married to each other. 'Living with a single parent' refers to situations where a child lives in a household with only one adult that is considered a parent. 'Other' refers to a situation where the child lives in a household where no adult is considered a parent. For Japan and Mexico, children aged 0-14. Data for Mexico refer to 2010, for Australia to 2012, for Japan and Turkey to 2015, and for Croatia, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland and the United Kingdom refer to 2016.

a. For Australia, 'living with two parents' refers to children living in all types of 'couple' family, including 'intact' couple families (that is, a couple family containing at least one child aged 0-17 years who is the natural or adopted child of both members of the couple, and no child aged 0-17 years who is the step child of either member of the couple), 'step' couple families (that is, a couple family containing one or more children aged 0-17 years, none of whom is the natural or adopted child of both members of the couple, and at least one of whom is the step child of either member of the couple) and 'blended' couple families (that is, a couple family containing two or more children aged 0-17 years, of whom at least one is the natural or adopted child of both members of the couple, and at least one is the step child of either member of the couple). 'Living with a single parent' refers to children living in a one parent families, that is, a family consisting of a lone parent with at least one dependent or non-dependent child (regardless of age) who is also usually resident in the household.

b. For Canada, 'living with two parents' refers to children living in families 'with two parents present'. 'Living with two married parents' refers to those living in two-parent married couple families, and 'living with two cohabiting parents' refers to those living in two-parent common-law couple families. 'Living with one parent' refers to children living in families 'with one parent present'.

c. For Japan and Mexico, proportion among valid cases (i.e. cases with missing information on the presence of parents in the household are excluded from the calculation).

d. 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";

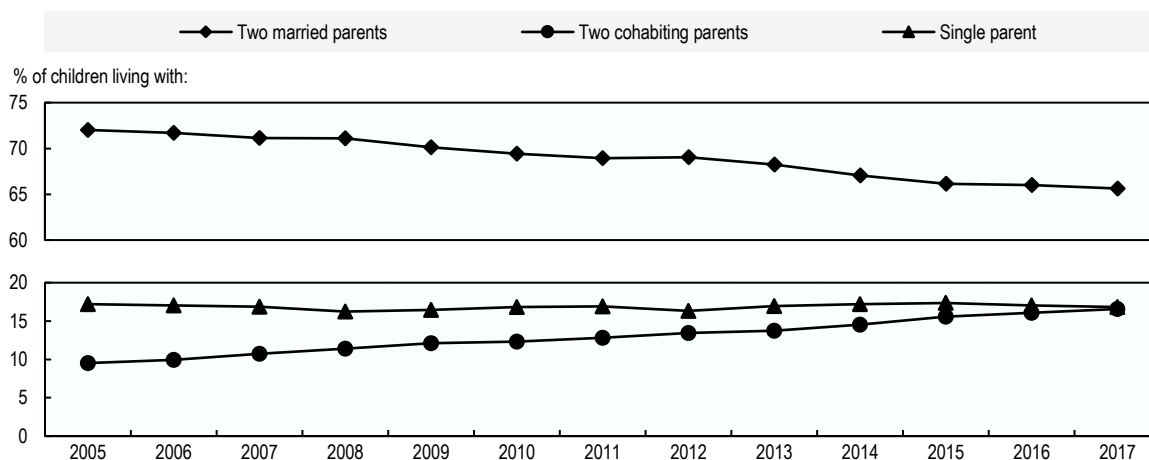
e. Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the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

Sources: [for European countries and Turkey, Eurostat](#); [for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [for Canada, Statistics Canada](#); [for Japan, Statistics Japan](#); [for Mexico, INEGI](#); [for the United States, US Census Bureau](#)

But living with cohabiting parents is becoming increasingly common. Chart SF1.2.B, shows the OECD-16 unweighted average proportion of children living in households with two married parents, with two cohabiting parents, and with a single parent for the years 2005-2017. On average across countries with available data, the proportion of children living with two married parents decreased between 2005 and 2017 – from 72% to 65.6% – while the share of children living in households with a single parent remained fairly stable. The proportion living with two cohabiting parents, however, increased by almost 50%, from 9.5% in 2005 to 16.6% in 2017.

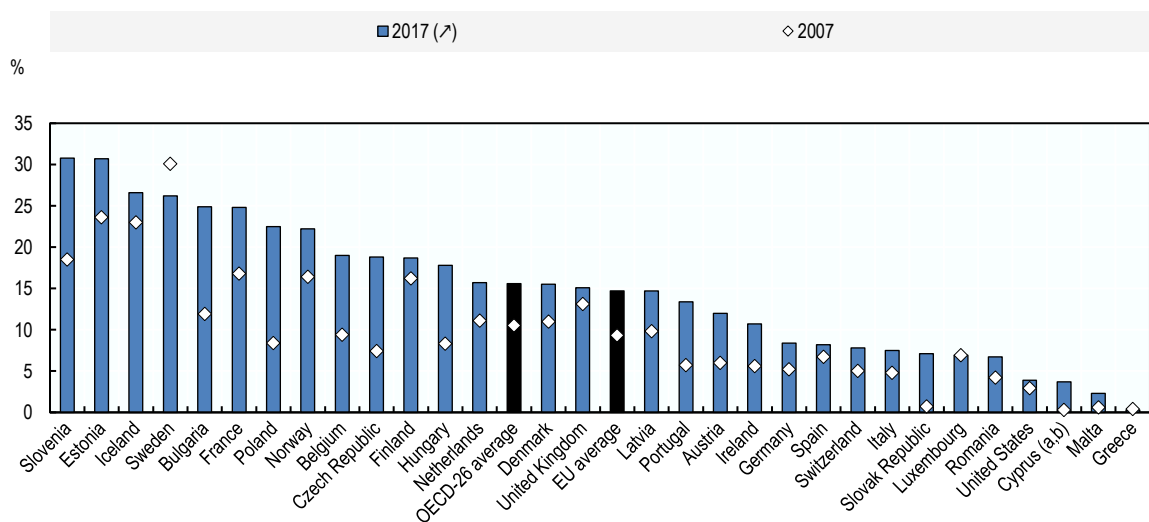
Growth in the number of children living with cohabiting parents can be seen across almost all countries with available data (Chart SF1.2.C). Increases are largest in Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia – where in each case the proportion of children living with two cohabiting parents increased by over ten percentage points between 2007 and 2017 – while most countries saw an increase of at least two or three percentage points over the same period. Only two countries – Greece, and Sweden – saw the share of children living with cohabiting parents decline between 2007 and 2017.

Chart SF1.2.B. Trends in the living arrangements of children, 2005 to 2017
 OECD-16 unweighted average distribution of children (aged 0-17) by presence and marital status of parents in the household



Note: Unweighted average of the 16 OECD countries for which data are available for all years from 2005 to 2017. These 16 countries are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. See note to Chart SF1.2.A
 Source: [Eurostat](#)

Chart SF1.2.C. Trends in children living with cohabiting parents, 2007 and 2017^a
 Proportion of children (aged 0-17) living with two cohabiting parents^b



Note: Data for France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom refer to 2016. See note to Chart SF1.2.A

a. see note d. to Chart SF1.2.A

b. see note e. to Chart SF1.2.A

Source: [for European countries, Eurostat](#); [for the United States, US Census Bureau](#)

Comparability and data issues

The data used in this indicator come from a range of sources, including household surveys (such as EU SILC for European countries) and national censuses (such as the Census of Canada), as well as national statistical offices. Efforts have been made to ensure that definitions are comparable across the various surveys and sources used but it remains possible that variations in survey methodology may impact on results.

The household types used in this indicator are based on criteria that allow for consistent classification across the many possible household situations in which children may live. However, these specific household types may not always match conventional or traditional conceptions of family forms. For example and as noted in *definitions and methodology*, children are generally classified as living with ‘two parents’ if two adults in the household are *considered* or *reported* as parents of the child regardless of whether they are a biological or adoptive parent or a step-parent of the child. Accordingly, the ‘two parent’ households types do not distinguish between children that live in households with both of their biological or adoptive parents, and those that live in households with one biological or adoptive parent and one step-parent. Children are classified as living with a ‘single parent’ if only one adult in the household is reported as a parent of the child. The household may contain other adults (e.g. grandparents and other adult relatives or unrelated adults) as long as they are not themselves considered a ‘parent’ of the given child. As a result, and to the extent that children live in households with only one parent but also other adults, the data used here may not fully align with a more conventional conception of a ‘single parent’ household.

Sources and further reading: OECD (2011) “*Doing Better for Families*”, OECD: Paris (Chapter 1: Families are changing).