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).
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 2017a
Proportion of children (aged 0-17) living with two cohabiting parentsb

Note: Data for France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxemburg, 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.