

Statistical bulletin

Children in families in England and Wales: Census 2021

Dependent children in households including in step-families and blended families, multi-generational households, and households with three or more children.



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1 . Main points

- In 2021, 12.6 million dependent children lived in households; they were more likely to live in cohabiting couple (not in a marriage or civil partnership) families in 2021 (16.2%) than in 2011 (14.2%), more likely to live in privately rented households in 2021 (23.6%) than in 2011 (19.1%), and more likely to live in multi-generational households in 2021 (5.4%) than in 2011 (4.5%).
- In 2021, there were 781,000 step-families; 547,000 (70.0%) contained dependent children, 51.6% of step-families with dependent children in households of five people or fewer were blended (see [Section 3: Glossary](#)), and most step-parents were male (81.6%).
- In 2021, 8.8% (1.1 million) of dependent children lived in step-families, a decrease from 2011 (9.7%, 1.2 million); they were 3.5 times more likely to live in a cohabiting couple family (48.6%) than those living in non step-families (13.3%).
- Of all dependent children living in a step-family, 12.6% reported staying at a second parent or guardian's address for more than 30 days a year, a similar proportion to 12.8% of dependent children living in a lone parent family (not a step-family).
- Three-quarters (76.1%, 402,000) of multi-generational family households contained dependent children; of those with dependent children, one-third (34.2%) were overcrowded compared with 10.0% of other households with dependent children.
- In 2021, 1.2 million households contained three or more dependent children; when compared with households with one or two dependent children they were more likely to contain no employed adults (19.8% compared with 11.9%), to contain one or more disabled people (33.4% compared with 25.4%), or to be overcrowded (25.7% compared with 8.6%).

2 . Children in families data

[Step-families, blended families and dependent children: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2024

Step-families and blended families, dependent children living in step-families, and households where an additional child stays for more than 30 days a year.

[Dependent children by family type and age: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2024

Dependent children by family type and single year of age in each local authority.

[Household characteristics of dependent children: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2024

Household characteristics of dependent children, including the tenure of the household, overcrowding, and the number of adults employed in the household.

[Households containing dependent children: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2024

Households broken down by the number of dependent children, including overcrowded households, the number of disabled people, and the number of employed adults.

[Multi-generational family households: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2024

Dependent children living in multi-generational family households and overcrowding of multi-generational family households.

3 . Glossary

Step-family

In this release, a step-family in Census 2021 is a family of any size containing one or more step-parent or step-sibling relationships. This includes both couple families and lone parent families. In families living in households of five people or fewer, families containing a parent with a child or children and a partner (spouse, civil partner or partner), where the partner is not the child's parent, are also defined as step-families.

This definition of a step-family differs to that of 2011 Census. For further details, see [Section 4: Measuring the data](#).

Step-family household

A step-family household contains one step-family and no other families.

Blended family

A blended family is a step-family which contains a couple and at least two children. At least one child in the family must have a parental relationship with both members of the couple, and the other child or children must have a step-parent relationship with one member of the couple.

For example, a blended family would include a couple with Child 1 who is the child of one member of the couple and the step-child of the other member of the couple, and Child 2 who is the child of both members of the couple.

Couple family

A family containing a couple who are cohabiting, married, or civil partnered.

Dependent child

A dependent child is a person aged 0 to 15 years in a household, or a person aged 16 to 18 years who is in full-time education and lives in a family with their parent, parents, grandparent or grandparents. It does not include any person aged 16 to 18 years who has a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Family

A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child who lives in the same household. Children can be dependent or non-dependent. A family can have a mixture of dependent and non-dependent children. All families have a Family Reference Person (FRP).

Multi-generational family household

A multi-generational family household is a household where people from across more than two generations of the same extended family live together. This includes households with grandparents and grandchildren, regardless of whether the intervening generation also live in the household.

Occupancy rating for bedrooms

Whether a household's accommodation is overcrowded, ideally occupied or under-occupied. This is calculated by comparing the number of bedrooms the household requires with the number of available bedrooms.

The number of bedrooms the household requires is calculated according to the Bedroom Standard, where the following should have their own bedroom:

- adult couple
- any remaining adult (aged 21 years or over)
- two males (aged 10 to 20 years)
- one male (aged 10 to 20 years) and one male (aged 9 years or under), if there is an odd number of males aged 10 to 20 years
- one male aged 10 to 20 years if there are no males aged 0 to 9 years to pair with him
- two females (aged 10 to 20 years)
- one female (aged 10 to 20 years) and one female (aged 9 years or under), if there is an odd number of females aged 10 to 20 years
- one female aged 10 to 20 years if there are no females aged 0 to 9 years to pair with her
- two children (aged 9 years or under) regardless of sex
- any remaining child (aged 9 years or under)

An occupancy rating of:

- negative 1 or less implies that a household's accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required (overcrowded)
- positive 1 or more implies that a household's accommodation has more bedrooms than required (under-occupied)
- 0 suggests that a household's accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms

Number of disabled people in the household

The number of people in a household who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses and are considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the harmonised standard for measuring disability and is in line with the Equality Act (2010).

Number of employed adults in the household

An adult is a person who is not a dependent child. A person aged 16 years and over is defined as employed (or in employment) if in the week before the census they carried out at least one hour's paid work, either as an employee or self-employed.

This also includes:

- any other form of paid work
- being away from work ill
- on maternity leave
- on holiday
- temporarily "laid off"

Tenure type

Whether a household owns or rents the accommodation that it occupies.

Owner-occupied accommodation can be:

- owned outright, in which the household owns all of the accommodation
- with a mortgage or loan
- part-owned on a shared ownership scheme

Rented accommodation can be:

- private rented, for example, rented through a private landlord or letting agent
- social rented through a local council or housing association

This information is not available for household spaces with no usual residents.

4 . Measuring the data

Reference date

Census 2021 provides estimates of the characteristics of all people and households in England and Wales on Census Day, 21 March 2021. The census is carried out every 10 years and gives us the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales.

We are responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales but will also release outputs for the UK in partnership with Welsh Government, the National Records of Scotland (NRS), and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The census in Northern Ireland was also conducted on 21 March 2021, whereas Scotland's census was moved to 20 March 2022. All UK census offices are working closely together to understand how this difference in reference dates will affect the UK-wide population and housing statistics, in terms of both timing and scope.

Response rate

The person response rate is the number of usual residents for whom individual details were provided on a returned questionnaire, divided by the estimated usual resident population.

The person response rate for Census 2021 was 97% of the usual resident population of England and Wales, and over 88% in all local authorities. Most returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

Quality of Census 2021

Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally, are provided in our [Quality and methodology information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). For more information about the specific quality considerations for demography and migration, see our [Demography and migration quality information for Census 2021 methodology](#).

For further information on our quality assurance processes, see our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#).

Differing Census 2021 and 2011 Census methodologies to identify step-families

Census figures relating to family and household composition draw on the “relationship matrix” on the census questionnaire, which records how members of the household are related to each other.

In Census 2021, these data contain the full set of relationships between the first five people in a household. In 2011 Census a full set of relationships was recorded for the first six people. Where a household contains more than five people in 2021 or more than six people in 2011, the data for the “additional” members of the household cover only a subset of those relationships. For example, in 2021, Person 5 on the household response will have relationships with each of Persons 1 to 4 recorded, while Person 7 will only have relationships with Persons 1 and 6 reflected in the data.

Because few households have more than five people in England and Wales in 2021, we would expect few families or households to change their categorisation because of these missing relationships. However, step-families are more affected than most family types.

The methodology used to identify step-families in 2011 Census included families where a parent had a partner (spouse, civil partner or partner) who was not the parent of one or more of their children. This release adopts the same methodology for households of five people or fewer (including usual residents, short term residents and students with a different term-time address) with complete relationships. In addition, it includes families of any size that include step-parent or step-sibling relationships. This allows lone step-parents to be identified in 2021, unlike 2011 where the parent needed to live in a couple.

The 2011 Census tables published in this release are created using the same methodology for comparability. They are not comparable with previously published 2011 Census tables about step-families.

Estimating blended families

A blended family is a step-family where at least one child has two parents (neither a step-parent) in the family. Because of missing relationships in larger households, blended families can only be identified in households of five people or fewer (including usual residents, short-term residents and students with a different term-time address). Because blended families tend to be larger, excluding households of six or more is expected to lead to a substantial undercount of blended families. Analysis can only be carried out on families in households of five people or fewer.

5 . Related links

[Families in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 10 May 2023

Change since 2011 and geography of family types: lone parent; multi-generational; same-sex couple; multi-family households; and children with a second parental address.

[Overcrowding and under-occupancy by household characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 25 August 2023

Variations in occupancy rating for bedrooms by tenure, accommodation type, family composition and other household characteristics in households with usual residents.

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Updated 31 May 2023

Interactive map tool that visualises Census 2021 data on different topics down to a local authority area and neighborhood level.

6 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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