



June 2026

Family structures in Canada, 1921 to 2024

This fact sheet provides an overview of changes in Canadian family structures using publicly available data from Statistics Canada, including the Census of Population, the 2001, 2011 and 2017 General Social Survey on Families¹ and the Canadian Vital Statistics: Birth Database. The data used in this fact sheet span different time periods, ranging from 1921 to 2024, based on the availability of data. The fact sheet analyzes trends in couple relationships, family composition, household living arrangements, and fertility in Canada.

While the number of census families increased between 2011 and 2021, the proportion of families with children remained stable.²

In 2021, there were 10.3 million census families,³ of which 4.3 million (42%) did not include children and 6 million (58%) included children (see Table 1). While the number of census families with children increased by 6% between 2011 (from 5.6 million) and 2021, their proportion among all census families remained stable (60% in 2011 and 58% in 2021). Most census families with children were couple families with children, accounting for 72% of families with children (or 4.3 million) in 2021. There were also 1.7 million lone-parent families in 2021, representing the remaining 28% of census families with children. In 2011, the proportion of couple families with children (73%) and lone-parent families (27%) were comparable to the 2021 proportions, signaling little change in the census family structure over the course of the decade.

While there was a large increase in the number of common-law couples between 1981 and 2021, these relationships represented only one in four couples in Canada in 2021.⁴

Between 1981 and 2021, the number of couples living in common-law relationships in Canada increased by 447%, far exceeding the 26% increase in married couples over the same period. Despite

¹ Note that the General Social Survey on Families was restructured and renamed as the Survey of Family Transitions.

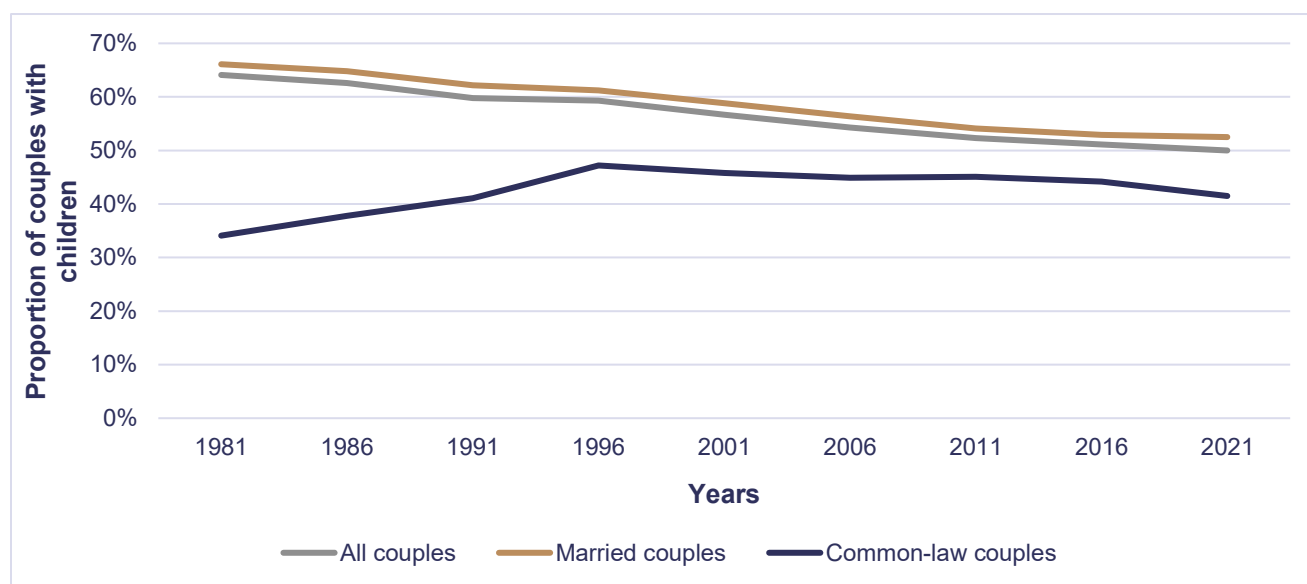
² Data in this section come from Statistics Canada. n.d.-a. [Table 98-10-0123-01 Census family structure, presence of children and average number of persons per census family: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations.](#)

³ A census family refers to a married couple with or without children, a common-law couple with or without children, and a one-parent family with at least one child living in the same dwelling. For more information on census families, please consult: [Census family.](#)

⁴ Data in this section are drawn from Statistics Canada. 2022. [State of the union: Canada leads the G7 with nearly one-quarter of couples living common law, driven by Quebec.](#) The Daily.

this rapid growth in common-law unions, marriage remained the predominant type of union in Canada, accounting for more than three-quarters (77%) of unions in 2021 (see Figure 1).⁵ While living in a common-law relationship was historically associated with young adults, older adults aged 55 to 69 are increasingly choosing common-law relationships, up from 13% in 2016 to 16% in 2021. In fact, Canada recorded the highest share of common-law couples among all G7 countries in 2021. This is largely due to the higher proportion of couples living in common-law in Quebec (43%) and Nunavut (52%) compared to the national average (23%) in 2021. In 2021, Nunavut became the first jurisdiction where most couples lived in common-law relationships.

Figure 1. Proportion of couples with children in Canada, by married and common-law relationships, 1981 to 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. 2022. [State of the union: Canada leads the G7 with nearly one-quarter of couples living common law, driven by Quebec](#). *The Daily*.

The proportion of couples living apart from their partners remained stable between 2006 and 2017, ranging from 6% to 9% of all couples.⁶

In 2017, nearly 1.5 million Canadians aged 25 to 64 were in couple relationships where they lived in separate households from their partners. The number of people living apart from their partners increased from 6% of all couples in 2006 to 9% in 2017. This arrangement remained most common among younger adults, accounting for 20% of individuals aged 25 to 34 in 2001 and in 2017. The most common reasons these individuals gave for living apart from their partners in 2017 were circumstances (51%), a choice they made (34%) or that they had never considered living together (15%). These reasons are consistent with findings from 2011 (42%, 32%, and 17%, respectively).

⁵ For more information on marriage trends, please see the JustFacts: [Marriage and Divorce Trends in Canada, 1921 to 2020](#).

⁶ Data in this section are drawn from Statistics Canada. 2019. [Family Matters: Couples who live apart](#). Infographics no. 11-627-X; and Turcotte, M. 2013. [Living apart together](#). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X.

In 2021, lone-parent families accounted for over one-quarter of all couples with children, a 10% increase from 2011.⁷

The number of lone-parent families increased by 10% from 1.5 million in 2011 to 1.7 million in 2021. Despite this increase, the proportion of lone-parent families remained relatively stable, representing 27% of all census families with children in 2011 and 28% in 2021 (see Table 1). While couple families with children continued to represent a larger proportion of all census families with children (73% in 2011 and 72% in 2021), the number of lone-parent families grew at a higher proportional rate (+10%) than couple families with children (+4%) between 2011 and 2021. When looking at children specifically, in 2021, 2.6 million children in census families lived with a lone parent (25%), while 8 million children lived in two-parent families (75%).⁸

In 2011, mother-headed families accounted for 79% (1.2 million) of lone-parent families, while fathers headed the remaining 21% (327,545). This trend continued in 2021, with mothers heading 77% (1.3 million) of lone-parent families. However, the number of male-led lone-parent families increased by 17% between 2001 and 2021 (383,670 in 2021), while the number of female-led lone-parent families increased at a smaller proportional rate (+9%) over the same period.⁹

While the proportion of stepfamilies remained stable between 2011 and 2015, ranging from 12% to 15%, family composition changed.¹⁰

In 2021, just over one in ten couples with children (12%) were stepfamilies, meaning a family with at least one biological or adopted child whose birth preceded the current union (see Table 2). The overall prevalence was similar in 2011 (12%). Similarly, stepfamilies continued to be four times more likely to live in common-law relationships (35% in 2011 and 31% in 2021) as opposed to being married (8% and 7%). The composition of stepfamilies remained stable over the last decade. In 2011, there were 194,010 stepfamilies with children from both partners and/or from the current relationship (38%) and 188,735 in 2021 (37%), while the proportion of stepfamilies with children belonging to only one partner remained largely unchanged (62% and 63%).

Stepfamily prevalence also differed by couple type in 2021. Among couples with children, stepfamilies represented a higher proportion of same gender couples (39%) than different gender couples (12%), transgender couples (16%) and non-binary couples (22%).

⁷ Data in this section are drawn from Statistics Canada, n.d.-a., *supra note 2*.

⁸ Statistics Canada, n.d.-b. [Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population](#).

⁹ For additional analysis, see the report on [Income and Economic Well-being of Canadian Lone-parent Families, 2001 to 2021](#).

¹⁰ Data in this section are drawn from Statistics Canada, n.d.-c. [Table 98-10-0124-01 Census family structure including detailed information on stepfamilies, number of children, average number of children and age of youngest child](#) and Statistics Canada, 2022, *supra note 3*.

The number of multigenerational households increased 21% since the early 2000s.¹¹

Multigenerational households, defined as households where three or more generations live together, have increased steadily in Canada over the past two decades. The number of these households rose from 364,505 in 2001 to 441,750 in 2021, representing a 21% increase (see Table 3). This growth outpaced the overall increase in private households over the same period (+12%). Despite these increases, multigenerational households continued to represent a small proportion of private households (3% in 2011 and 2021).¹² By 2021, approximately 2.4 million people lived in multigenerational households, including nearly one in ten children (905,000). While the rise in multigenerational living has occurred alongside higher housing costs and broader cost-of-living pressures, these households were also less likely to experience low income, at 4% compared with 15% among other households in 2020. Cultural and demographic characteristics may also contribute to the prevalence of multigenerational families, as more than half of individuals in these households were racialized (53%), and 41% were born outside Canada in 2021.

While the proportion of young adults who live at home with their parents increased since 2001, it has remained stable since 2016.¹³

Intergenerational living, where adult children aged 20 and older continue to live at home with their parents without grandparents, became increasingly common alongside the rise in multigenerational households. In 2021, this arrangement accounted for 7.1 million people, representing approximately one-fifth (20%) of people living in private households. Intergenerational living was particularly prevalent among young adults aged 20 to 34. While the proportion living with at least one of their parents increased from 31% in 2001, the proportion of young adults living with their parents remained stable between 2016 and 2021 (35%). However, the proportion of young adults living with their parents increased in older age groups; 38% of adults aged 25 to 34 lived with their parents in 2001 compared to the 46% in 2021. Adult children living at home had lower employment rates (ranging from 58% to 69% depending on their age) than those living in other households (66% to 82%). For those aged 20 to 24, the differences in employment (59% of those living at home versus 66% in other households) may be, in part, due to the higher proportion of adult children living at home attending post-secondary education (58% versus 44%). In contrast, parents who were retirement-aged and had adult children living at home in 2021 had higher employment rates (e.g., 58% of parents aged 60 to 64) compared to retirement-aged parents living in other households (49%).

¹¹ Data in this section are drawn from Galbraith, N. and Laflamme, N. 2025a. [Unpacking Canada's multigenerational households: A look at the people who call them home](#). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91F0015M; and Statistics Canada. 2025. [Living under one roof: What the data say about multigenerational households in Canada](#). StatsCan Plus.

¹² Statistics Canada. n.d.-d. [Table 98-10-0138-01 Household type including multigenerational households and structural type of dwelling: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations](#).

¹³ Data in this section are drawn from Galbraith, N. and Laflamme, N. 2025b. [Adulting together: Parents and adult children who co-reside](#). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91F0015M; and Statistics Canada. 2022. [Home alone: More persons living solo than ever before, but roomies the fastest growing household type](#). The Daily.

As the average age of mothers at childbirth continued to increase in 2022, the lowest fertility rate was recorded.¹⁴

Over the last century, the average census family size in Canada declined steadily from 4.2 persons in 1931 to 2.9 persons in 2021, reflecting a long-term shift toward smaller families.¹⁵ Alongside declining family sizes, there have been changes in the fertility rate. Canada's fertility rate has generally declined for the last 15 years, reaching a new all-time low of 1.25 children per woman in 2024. In contrast, the fertility rate was 3.48 children per woman in 1921 (see Figure 2). This decline accelerated recently, dropping 7% between 2021 and 2022, the largest single-year decrease observed since the baby bust of 1971-1972 (-8%). Not all populations experienced this national decline, however. Fertility rates in 2024 remained higher than the national rate (1.25) in Nunavut (2.34), the Northwest Territories (1.39), Quebec (1.34) and the Prairie provinces (1.41 in Alberta, 1.58 in Saskatchewan and 1.50 in Manitoba), largely reflecting the demographic patterns of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

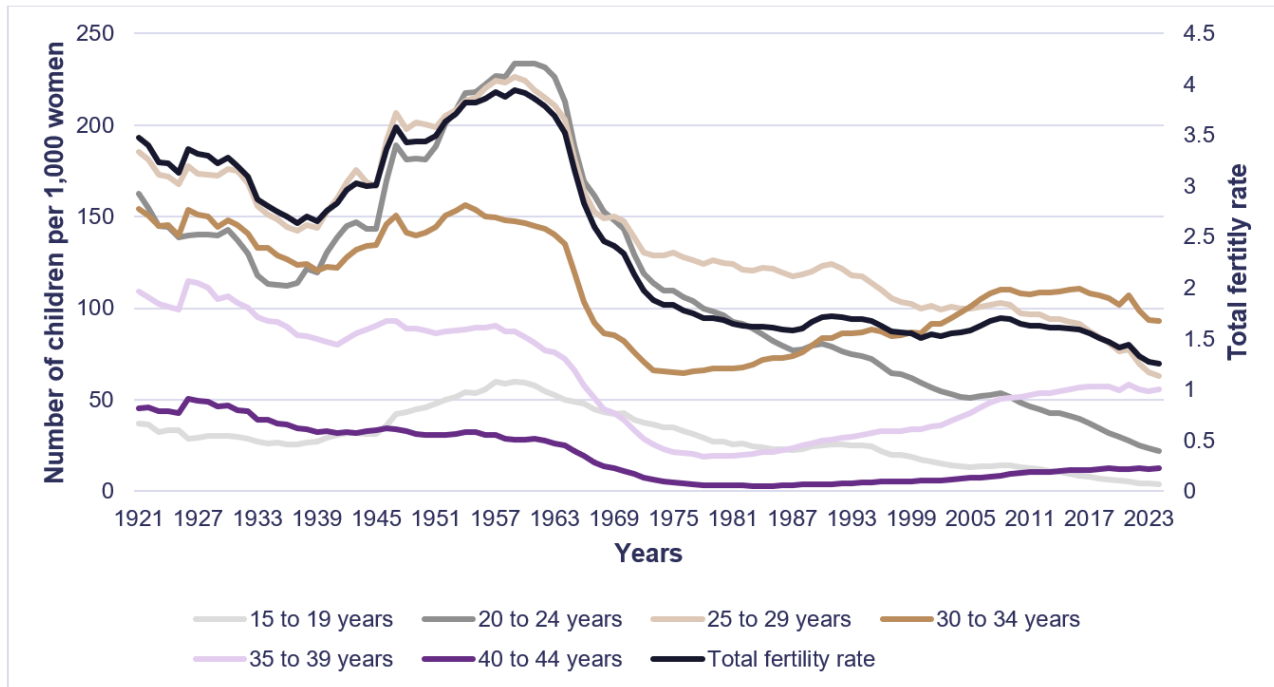
In 2022, the average age of mothers at childbirth increased from 26.8 years in 1977 to 31.6 years, while the average age of fathers rose from 30.1 years in 1974 to 34.4 years. At the same time, the proportion of babies born to teenage mothers aged 15 to 19 declined from 6% in 1993 to 1% in 2023. This shift toward older parenthood coincided with changes in birth outcomes. The rate of premature births increased from 7% to 8% between 1993 and 2023, the highest level observed in 50 years. Childlessness also increased, with the proportion of women aged 50 and older with no biological children rising from 14% in 2001 to 17% in 2022. One reason for the rise in childlessness is people's choice; in 2022, one-third (34%) of people aged 15 to 49 did not intend to have any children.¹⁶

¹⁴ Unless otherwise specified, data in this section are from Statistics Canada. 2024. [Births and stillbirths, 2023](#). The Daily; and Provencher, C. and Galbraith, N. 2024. [Fertility in Canada, 1921 to 2022](#). Statistics Canada Catalogue no 91F0015M.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. 2022. [A portrait of Canada's families in 2021](#). Infographics no. 11-627-M.

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. 2023. [Family Matters: To have kids or not to have kids: That is the question!](#) Infographics Catalogue no. 11-627-M.

Figure 2. Fertility rate by age group and total fertility rate, Canada, 1921 to 2024



Notes: When the age of the mother was unknown, it was prorated using observed distribution. The data from 2017 exclude Yukon and mothers aged 45 years and older.

Source: Provencher, C. and Galbraith, N. [Fertility in Canada, 1921 to 2022](#). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91F0015M; and Statistics Canada. n.d.-e. [Fertility indicators, provinces and territories: Interactive dashboard](#). Catalogue no 71-607-X.

Annex A: Data Tables

Table 1. Census family structure with children, Canada, 2011 and 2021

Census family structure	2021		2011	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Census families	10,262,925	100%	9,389,695	100%
Census families with children	5,976,755	58%	5,637,130	60%
Total, couple families with children	4,290,415	72%	4,109,290	73%
Married couple families with children	3,481,770	81%	3,402,740	83%
Common-law couple families with children	808,640	19%	706,560	17%
Total, lone-parent families	1,686,340	28%	1,527,840	27%
Headed by a woman	1,302,670	77%	1,200,295	79%
Headed by a man	383,670	23%	327,545	21%

Source: Statistics Canada. n.d.-a. [Census family structure, presence of children and average number of persons per census family: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations.](#)

Table 2. Census family structure on stepfamilies, by married and common-law relationship, Canada, 2011 and 2021

Type of stepfamily	2021		2011	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total, married and common-law couple stepfamilies	503,475	100%	508,705	100%
Total, simple stepfamilies ¹	314,740	63%	314,690	62%
Total, complex stepfamilies ²	188,735	37%	194,010	38%
Total, married couple stepfamilies	252,945	50%	261,015	51%
Married couple families in simple stepfamilies ¹	156,120	62%	153,010	59%
Married couple families in complex stepfamilies ²	96,825	38%	108,005	41%
Total, common-law couple stepfamilies	250,530	50%	247,690	49%
Common-law couple families in simple stepfamilies ¹	158,620	63%	161,680	65%
Common-law couple families in complex stepfamilies ²	91,910	37%	86,005	35%

Notes: (1) Simple stepfamilies refer to stepfamilies with no step or half siblings, meaning that all children are the biological or adopted children of only one spouse or partner in the couple. (2) Complex stepfamilies are stepfamilies with at least one step or half sibling, where there is at least one child from each spouse or partner in the couple, or there is at least one child of one of the spouses and partners and at least one child of both spouses or partners.

Source: Statistics Canada. n.d.-c. [Table 98-10-0124-01 Census family structure including detailed information on stepfamilies, number of children, average number of children and age of youngest child.](#)

Table 3. Multigenerational households, Canada, 2011, 2016 and 2021

		Total, household types	Multigenerational households
2021	Number	14,978,940	441,750
	Percentage	100%	3%
2016	Number	14,072,080	406,645
	Percentage	100%	3%
2011	Number	13,320,615	364,505
	Percentage	100%	3%

Source: Statistics Canada. n.d.-d. [Table 98-10-0138-01 Household type including multigenerational households and structural type of dwelling: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations.](#)