

Households

The modern-day analysis of the evolution of households can count on a range of sources, the oldest of which is the Population Census. The use of the potential in the census survey has been developed over time, and the figures currently available on households have become very wide-ranging, allowing for their classification according to various characteristics. Nonetheless, the only information that is comparable right from the 1861 census is that relating to the number of households and their size.

Another source of primary importance is the household records held by municipal population registers, which are also the basis for sample surveys on households.

Additional elements for a long term analysis come from the information on marriages, separations and divorces that are the main cause of the formation and division of households. However, these events only refer to a specific moment in the life cycle of a household, and usually refer to the household in the sense of “family nucleus”, formed of a couple with or without children. Over the course of the years life-styles have changed, making a new and in-depth analysis necessary to comprehend the various types of family. Over time, this need has become gradually more apparent to Istat, resulting in the survey on household structure and behaviour in 1983. Later, in the 1990s, the social information available to Istat took a huge step forwards with the launch of the multipurpose survey System on households, providing information on household structure and the most important social issues, in addition to the relationship between the two.

The tables presented in this section contain historical series from various sources and durations: the longest run from the second half of the 19th century and provide census figures on the number and size of households, the details of marriages drawn from the civil status records and those on the number of separations taken from judicial statistics. This last source also provided information on divorces recorded from 1970 onwards, when the law on the annulment and termination of the civil effects of marriage came into force. The historical series relating to some new types of household, however, are more recent and come from social surveys of households.

Households in general population censuses

Population censuses have been conducted regularly every ten years from Italian unification to the present day, with three exceptions: the additional survey in 1936, which took place only five years after the previous census, and the two missing censuses in 1891 and 1941, the first due to organisational and financial reasons and the second due to the second world war.¹

The censuses take households and cohabitations as survey units. In 1861 and 1871 the census survey covered so-called “family hearths”, without distinguishing between households and cohabitations. The 1871 census establishes that “Family [...] is intended as [...] either habitual or precarious domestic cohabitation among people who eat, so to speak, together and who warm themselves at the same fire, or what is known as a hearth. Servants who live with their employer and sleep under his roof, guests, lodgers and similar all come together to form, together with the members of the natural family, the hearth. In the same way, soldiers who live in the same barracks, the pupils in a college, patients in a hospital or hospice, prisoners in a prison etc. are considered to form a single hearth together with their leader and the assistants and staff in the establishment”.

The survey of households was perfected in the 1881 census, and they were divided into “social cohabitations”; furthermore, households living together were given the option of choosing whether to fill out separate or joint forms; people living in furnished rooms, hotels or inns were also permitted to

¹ For further details on the way censuses were performed and their contents, please see: Population.

use a separate form to that of the owner. In 1881 the households present were recorded, formed of the “natural” (those linked by relation or affinity) or “foreign” (guests, lodgers, servants, etc.) members present living under the same roof. In the 1921 census the method of recording households was further improved, specifying that cohabiting households should fill out separate forms for each member. Moreover, “in cases where the head of the household has their own family that lives in the common living areas, two separate forms must be filled out: one for the head’s family and the other for the cohabiting members”.

The 1936 census brought several innovations, the most important of which was the switch to considering resident households, also taking account of members that were resident although temporarily absent and excluding persons temporarily present. This choice was due to the absence of numerous heads of families while in Eastern Africa and the Italian colonies of the time. Furthermore, the concept of a household economic unit was formed, with the following explanation: “a married child who, although living within the paternal household, has a separate domestic economic unit, must be considered as a household in itself and must therefore fill out their own form. If, however, two households do not constitute a separate domestic economic unit they must be included on the same form. Therefore, a single form should be filled out for patriarchal households [...] in which parents and married children with or without their own children live together – forming a single household economic unit – under the authority of the head of the family”. Additional indications are provided on how to record de facto separations, for which the separated spouses had to fill out separate household forms, while “couples that live together as man and wife, although not legally married” were covered by a single form.

A further turning point was reached in 1951 when the definition of household was fixed very precisely by the census law. Article 1 of Presidential Decree no. 981 from 1951 states: “A household is composed of the group of people who habitually cohabit (i.e. who cohabit and form a single economic unit, even if only regarding food), related by marriage, birth, affinity, adoption, affiliation, guardianship or affection, in addition to those who live together with them for reasons of hospitality, service or employment. The household may be composed of a single person either living alone or in another person’s home in simple cohabitation. Several household nucleuses that cohabit but do not live together, i.e. with different domestic economies, form several different households”. The text also specifies that “a person does not cease belonging to a household when they are temporarily absent, as long as the reason for absence presumes their return in the future”.

This definition remained unchanged for the three subsequent censuses and became the basis for the definition of *famiglia anagrafica* (statistical household), acknowledged in Law no. 1228 from 1954, published in the Official Gazette no.64 dated 14 March 1958. Article 2 of the regulation gives the following definition of household: “1. For civil records purposes, household is understood to mean a group of people related by marriage, birth, affinity, adoption, affiliation, guardianship or affection, who live together and are habitually domiciled in the same Municipality, who normally meet their needs by putting all or part of their income from employment or capital in common. 2. A household may also be formed of a single person, who is totally or partially responsible for meeting their own needs using their own means of subsistence. 3. Domestic workers and similar, tutors and similar, if habitually domiciled with the household, are considered aggregated members”.

This definition remained in use until a new regulation was approved (Presidential Decree no. 229 from 1989) which provides the following definition of household in Article 4: “1. For the purposes of civil records, household is understood as a group of people related by marriage, birth, affinity, adoption, guardianship or affection, who live together and are habitually domiciled in the same municipality. 2. A household may be formed of a single person”. The new definition eliminates the economic criteria, while the two criteria of cohabitation and habitual domicile remain at the base of the concept of household. Relations of various type and level or affection (to be declared when enrolling in the municipal registry) must also exist. The definition in the new civil records regulation was adopted by the following population census (1991) and has been maintained up until the most recent census (2001).

Warnings for time series comparisons

- For the changes to the definition of household used in the various censuses, please see above.
- In contrast to the subsequent censuses, the 1861 and 1871 surveys did not distinguish between households and cohabitations. It is therefore only possible to compare the number of households, distributed by number and average number of members, from 1881.
- Information on the distribution of households by number of members is only available from the 1901 census onwards.
- Information on the average size of households was only published from the 1991 census onwards.
- The figures refer to the present population up until 1931, and the resident population for the following years.

Social surveys on households

In 1983, ISTAT launched a sample survey of household structure and behaviour, with the aim of offering as clear a description as possible on the structural features of Italian households and of analysing the main social phenomena (participation in training and the job market, the use of certain social and healthcare services, leisure time, relations between households and reproductive behaviour), also with reference to the context of the household itself.

Particular attention was paid to finding the best possible definition of household. On the basis of the conclusions of a specific study committee, the household as recorded in the population register was abandoned as a unit of measurement in favour of the de facto household, i.e. the household as it appears at the time of the survey, regardless of its administrative features. The survey thereby offered the possibility of capturing a more varied reality with new forms of household. The de facto household has gradually become the unit of measurement for all ISTAT household surveys, in the place of the civil records household.

28,408 households were interviewed for the survey on household structure and behaviour, for a total of 91,458 people. The questionnaire used was divided into three parts: a general form, with essential information outlining the characteristics of the household, an individual form containing information on the individual household members, and a household form for information relating to the household as a whole. This layout formed the prototype for the following surveys that were to become part of the multipurpose survey system.

The first multipurpose survey of households was conducted in the period between 1987-1991. The overall design included six cycles of face-to-face interviews performed using PAPI (Paper and pencil interview) techniques, i.e. interviews conducted by a surveyor using a paper questionnaire. Each cycle lasted for six months and covered different thematic areas (the same areas that would later be the subject of surveys in the multipurpose system), with the exception of health conditions which were always present. Each single cycle required a sample of approximately 23,000 households from approximately 1,300 municipalities. As part of the survey, there was always a series of questions on the composition of the household.

In 1993 the multipurpose survey system on households was launched, divided into seven different social surveys: the annual "Aspects of Daily Life" survey, the quarterly survey on travel and holidays and five surveys conducted by rotation every five years, dedicated to the most important social themes: Health conditions and reliance of health services, Citizens and leisure time, Citizens and safety, Household and social subjects and Use of time. All the surveys cover de facto households resident in Italy and the individuals that compose them, excluding permanent cohabitation members.

The "Household and social subjects", one of the five surveys conducted every five years, is the main source of statistics for studying changes in the household and analysing the most important aspects of demographic and social behaviour. Some of the main contents include: household structure and commuters, networks of relations, information support networks, conjugal life and marriage, leaving the household of origin, working careers and social mobility. The survey relies on a two-phase sample with stratification in the first stage (municipalities). The "Household and social subjects" survey was

conducted for the first time in 1998. In 2003, for the second edition, the total number of households reached 19,227, for a total of 49,541 individuals. The surveys were conducted using paper questionnaires in face-to-face interviews and paper questionnaires to be compiled independently by respondents.

The annual multipurpose survey “Aspects of Daily Life” provides each year a set of basic indicators on theme areas which are then in-deep developed in the five-year surveys. Among other things, the survey provides important information on the structure and main changes in household life. The sample used is formed of two stages: the first stage is formed by municipalities, layered according to demographic size, while the second layer is made up of households, extracted randomly from municipal registries. The survey involves a sample of almost 24,000 households every year (for a total of approximately 54,000 individuals) distributed in approximately 850 municipalities. From 1993 to 2003 the survey was conducted in November, while from 2005 it was performed in the January-February period. In 2004 the survey was not performed due to the variation in the survey calendar.

All household members extracted were required to respond to part of the questions in a direct interview and the remaining questions in a self administered questionnaire. In special circumstances where the individual was not available for interview, the information could be provided by another member of their household.

The tables in this section present the figures relating to some of the new household structures from the early 1980s onwards.

Marriages

The figures on marriages are based both on the monthly summary survey of demographic events gathered by the registry office and on the individual marriage data, gathered at municipal level by the local civil records offices.

The monthly summary survey was first conducted in 1862. At the beginning, the statistics on marriages were based “sometimes on the data sent by the ministries of the individual religions and sometimes, on those collected by civil status Officials”² and sent to the prefectures who in turn, through a process that has remained partly unaltered to the present day, forwarded them to a central body aimed at collecting demographic statistics. For the first decades, the latter role was played by the General Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce while since 1926 this role was played by ISTAT. Starting from 1863, in addition to the number of marriages by month of celebration, the distribution of marriages by couple’s civil status was also published, although only on a national level, and – since 1865 – also by age. The first figures relating to the couple’s ability to sign the marriage certificate, a crucial indicator of illiteracy in Italy, were published in 1867.³

The first edition of the individual survey on marriages dates back to 1883. This survey made information on the spouses ever more accurate and more details on marriages were published, as the figures were made available at department level (modern-day regions) and, afterward, by provinces. Over the course of time the survey has also been extended to include information on the demographic characteristics of the couple; for some periods of varying lengths, moreover, information was provided on their religion, consanguinity and their ability to sign the certificate.

Concerning the marriage rite, it should be remembered that during the first years following national unification, marriage was disciplined by the legislation in force in the various States that composed Italy, and a coherent legislative order was not introduced until the first Civil Code of the Kingdom of Italy (1st January 1866). According to the new legislation and until 1929, civil marriage only had legal effects for the couples. The validity of the legal effects of Catholic marriage was recognised following the Lateran Treaty, and the distinction between religious and civil weddings began from 1930 onwards.⁴

² Published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, 1864. *Statistica del Regno d'Italia: popolazione: movimento dello stato civile nell'anno 1863* (Statistics of the Kingdom of Italy: population: civil status flows in 1863). Florence.

³ The figures relating to couples who signed the marriage certificate are presented in: [Education](#).

⁴ Over the course of time, other Christian churches and religions have signed Agreements with the Italian State to regulate the civil effects of marriages celebrated by their own rites. Therefore, from a legal point of view marriage can now be divided into three types: civil marriage, celebrated by a civil records clerk; Catholic marriage with civil effects, celebrated by a Catholic priest; non-Catholic marriage celebrated by the ministers of the other religions admitted by the State. Nonetheless, statistical surveys only distinguish between religious and civil marriages, without specifying the type of religion.

The setup of the current surveys on marriages is only slightly different from the past: the modern-day surveys still cover the entire population, the municipality is still the territorial base unit of reference and prefectures still act as an intermediate stage in data collection. However, the contents have been extended and the transmission methods have changed. The individual data form now contains numerous information such as spouses' level of education, their professional status, position and branch of economic activity and their demographic characteristics (age, place of birth, place of residence, civil status, citizenship).

The forms are acquired by ISTAT both in paper and electronic format. The paper forms are sent by municipalities to prefectures. Prefectures then sent them to ISTAT regional offices, that check the completeness of the data by comparing them with the monthly summary forms before forwarding them to the central Office for demographic statistics, which lastly prepares them for electronic data capture. Since 1996, ISTAT has developed an online data collection system for demographic information in collaboration with the Association of Italian Municipalities and this process was re-engineered in 2000. The service, known as Istatel, allows for data to be directly transmitted to ISTAT by municipalities and ensures that prefectures (using a specific account) can check the state of the online transmissions. Today the system is used by more than 6,300 municipalities, although not all of them use all the functions available.

Warnings for time series comparisons

- The figures presented refer to the events that took place in the Italian municipalities according to the borders of the time. Rates also are therefore calculated according to the resident population within the same borders.
- On 1st January 1866 the first Civil Code of the Kingdom of Italy came into force. Religious marriages were no longer recognised by the State and the civil rite become compulsory in order to obtain legal effects. Many marriages were anticipated to 1865 to avoid the new legislation, and many couples abandoned civil weddings, the only type of marriage with legal effect, in the following years. This Code came into force in the Province of Rome from 1 February 1871 and in the areas of Veneto and Mantua from 1 September 1871.
- In the period between 1883 and 1892, the classification of marriages by the age of the spouses was changed. To make the data more comparable with the ones from previous and later periods, the figures have been recalculated according to the distribution of spouses by age groups as recorded for the 1878-1879 period.
- As no classification of marriages according to spouses' age was performed in 1887, the distribution was calculated using average values of the years immediately before and after that date, 1886 and 1888 (compare: Istat. 1965. *Annali di Statistica (Statistics Yearbooks)*, vol. 17, series VIII, 382).
- As for all demographic events, marriages were strongly affected by the two World Wars. In particular, the years between 1915 and 1918 saw a fall in the number of weddings, balanced by a subsequent clear recovery from 1919 up to 1925. A similar decrease took place in the 1940-45 period, with a recovery in 1946-1949.
- In 1929 the Lateran Pacts between the State and the Vatican resulted in the recognition of the legal effects of Catholic religious marriages (Law no. 847 dated 27 May 1929 "Application of the Pact dated 11 February 1929 between the Holy See and Italy, relating to marriage").

Separations and divorces

The following Christian churches are admitted and regulated by Italian legislation: marriage by Waldesian rite (Law no. 449 dated 11 August 1984); marriage by Seventh Day Adventist rite (Law no. 516 dated 22 November 1988); marriage by Assemblée di Dio in Italia (Adi) rite (Law no. 517 dated 22 November 1988); marriage by Jewish rite (Article 14 in Law no. 101 dated 8 March 1989); marriage by Christian Evangelical Baptist rite (Article 10 in Law no. 116 dated 12 April 1995); marriage by Evangelical Lutheran rite (Article 13 of Law no. 520 dated 29 November 1995).

In Italy, married couples can end their marriage by legal separation, divorce and annulment. Divorce was introduced in the Italian law in 1970. Prior to that date, in order to end partially the obligations associated with married life, couples could only request legal separation from the Court, which was and still is the competent judicial office.

The information on the process of separation – from the moment of presenting the application to its acceptance – are taken from the surveys performed by the bodies responsible for judicial statistics. These bodies have changed over time: in 1979 and from 1907 to 1935 the surveys were performed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Grace and Justice; from 1880 to 1906 of the General Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce and from 1936 of ISTAT.

These data were transmitted using specific forms on a quarterly basis to the central bodies that provide to revise, process and publish them.

In the post-war period these forms were accurately revised to adapt them to statistical purposes. Their contents were reviewed by ISTAT, in collaboration with the Ministry of Grace and Justice, through a special Commission for Judicial Statistics as specified in the decree that also transfer these surveys' responsibility from the Ministry to ISTAT.

Surveys on this subject have changed little over time, and the modern-day survey on separations, launched in 1969, still requires the figures to be provided on a quarterly basis by courts which, just as in the past, fill out part of the survey form while the remaining part is compiled by the couple.

In contrast to what has happened in recent years for other civil law statistics, the subject has not been passed from ISTAT to the Ministry of Justice due to its interest for both judicial and social aspects. Rather, the work has been shared between the two bodies, also in consideration of their different institutional role, with ISTAT representing a scientific and statistical body and the Ministry of Justice responsible for management control and planning the distribution of ministerial resources.

The survey on divorce (the dissolution and termination of the civil effects of marriage) began in 1971, when Law no. 898 dated 1 December 1970 came into force, disciplining the cases of dissolution of marriage contracted only by civil rite and the termination of its legal effects in the case of celebration by religious rite.⁵ The law, confirmed by popular referendum in May 1974, was later modified regarding the economic provisions in favour of the weaker spouse, by Law no. 436 dated 1 August 1978 and by Law no. 74 dated 6 March 1987 for other aspects.

The surveys on separations and divorces are conducted by ISTAT at the 165 civil courts in Italy, using the paper forms Istat M.252 for separations and Istat M.253 for divorces, with reference to every single procedure closed from a legal point of view in the year of observation.

Over the years the questionnaires for the two surveys have undergone some variations due to both the changes in the regulations and the need to adapt to new information requirements, leading to the inclusion of some socio-demographic questions in addition to the judicial and legal aspects (date of listing for trial, date of sentencing, the spouse presenting the application for separation or divorce); the economic provisions made (presence/absence of support assigned to the spouse and/or children, its amount, the party responsible); the gender, age and custody assigned for minors and, lastly, some information on the marriage (date, rite, property regime, number of children born during the marriage). The forms are compiled by the clerk of court and sent to ISTAT each quarter. The figures are acquired directly from the trial dossier, while the socio-demographic information, if not present in the dossier, are requested from the couple or their lawyers.

It should be noted that legal separation only modifies the marriage bond without annulling it, resulting in the temporary suspension of obligations. Italian law allows for two types of separation: consensual or judicial. While judicial separation takes place in pre-trial proceedings and is concluded with a sentence, consensual separation comes under voluntary jurisdiction proceedings. The effects of the marriage are only dissolved when a divorce sentence is passed, with the exception of certain obligations regarding property and duties to children.⁶ Separation, in contrast to divorce, also has a temporary nature allowing for reconciliation and termination of the effects of the separation itself. By agreement the couple may annul the effects of the separation sentence without the judge's intervention by making a declaration or through unequivocal behaviour considered incompatible with

⁵ The term divorce was never mentioned by Law no. 898 of 1970, which refers instead to "dissolution of marriage" (if celebrated by civil rite) or "termination of the civil effects" (if the marriage was celebrated by religious rite).

⁶ Civil marriage and "*concordatorio*" religious marriages may also be declared null. "*Concordatorio*" marriages, i.e. those celebrated by religious rite, registered on the civil status registries and recognised by the State, are disciplined by Law no. 121 dated 25 March 1985 (ratified by the agreement signed in Rome on 18 February 1984 between the Republic of Italy and the Holy See, in modification of the Lateran Pact dated 11 February 1929).

the state of separation.

Warnings for time series comparisons

- Due to the war and the consequent difficulties caused to the functioning of the various judicial offices, it has not been possible to reconstruct the series for the period between 1942-1946.
- The current survey on separations began in 1969, while the survey on divorces (Dissolution and termination of the civil effects of marriage) began in 1971, after the came into force of the Law no. 898 dated 1 December 1970 (Discipline of the dissolution of marriage).
- In 1975 the reform of Family Law⁷ resulted in a profound innovation in the concept of judicial separation, which is no longer based on the fault of a spouse but on the objective recognition of the existence of facts that make the continuation of the cohabitation intolerable or the education of the children seriously threatened.⁸ When Law no. 74 dated 1987 was introduced, the number of years of separation necessary before applying for divorce was reduced from five to three.

⁷ Law no. 151 dated 19 May 1975.

⁸ Any violation of the obligations of marriage may constitute, only on request of one or both of the spouses, grounds for an accessory sentence declaring which of the spouses caused the separation.