

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 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

¹ For further details on the way censuses were performed and their contents, please see: [Population](#).

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.