

Households

The modern-day analysis of the household evolution 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. However the only comparable information from the 1861 census onward is the one on the number of households and their size.

Another source of primary importance is provided by 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 are supplied by the information on marriages, separations and divorces that are the main cause of household formation and split. 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 by a couple with or without children. Along the years life-styles have changed, making a new and in-depth analysis necessary to understand 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 forward with the launch of the Multipurpose Survey System on households, which provides information on the household structure and on the most relevant social issues and their interrelation.

The tables of this section present time series from various sources and with different time coverage: the longest series 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 from judicial statistics. The latter 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 time series on the types of households, however, are more recent and sourced from social surveys on households.

Households in the general population censuses

Population censuses have been regularly carried out every ten years from the Italian unification to the present days. There were only 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 war.¹

Censuses consider a household a survey unit (and single component of the household) and cohabitations (and single persons cohabiting). In 1861 and 1871 the census survey covered the so-called “hearths”, without distinguishing between households and cohabitations. The 1871 census definition provided that “Household [...] 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, 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 household survey was perfected for the 1881 census, and differentiated “social cohabitations”; 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 present households were recorded, they were formed by “natural” (those linked by relation or affinity) or “strangers” (guests, lodgers, servants, etc.) members present and living under the

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

same roof. In the 1921 census the method for recording households was further improved, specifying that cohabiting households should fill out separate forms for each member. Moreover, “in case the head of the household had his own family living in the cohabitation premises, two separate forms had to be filled out: one for the head of the household 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 the households who were in East Africa and other Italian colonies of the time. In addition to that, the household economic unit concept was set up as: “a married son/daughter who, although living with the paternal household, has a separate domestic economic unit, must be considered as a single household and should therefore fill out his/her own form. If, however, two households do not set up a separate domestic economic unit they must be included on the same form. Therefore, a single form should be filled out for patriarchal household in farmhouses [...] 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 husband and wife, although not legally married” were covered by a single form.

A further turning point was in 1951 when the household definition was very precisely set up by the census law. Article 1 of the Presidential Decree no. 981/1951 stated: “A household is composed by the group of people who habitually cohabit (i.e. who cohabit and form a single economic unit, even if regarding food only), 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 temporarily absent, as long as the reason of absence presumes his/her 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 by Law no. 12287/1954, published in the Official Gazette no.64 dated 14 March 1958. Article 2 of the regulation gave the following definition of household: “1. For civil record 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 his/her own needs using his/her own means of subsistence. 3. Domestic workers and similar, tutors, if habitually domiciled with the household, are considered aggregated members”.

This definition remained in use until a new regulation was approved (Presidential Decree no. 229/1989) which provided 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 household concept. Relations of various type and level or affection (to be declared when enrolling in the municipal registry) should 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 (2011).²

Warnings for time series comparisons

- For the changes to the definition of household used in the various censuses, see the text above.
- In contrast to the following censuses, the 1861 and 1871 surveys did not differentiate households and cohabitations. Therefore the number of households, distributed by number and average number of members can be compared since 1881 onwards.

² For a more detailed history of censuses see Mastroluca S., Verrascina M., *L'evoluzione dei contenuti informativi del censimento della popolazione, in "I censimenti dell'Italia unita. Le fonti di stato della popolazione tra il XIX e il XXI secolo", Istat 2012. Annali di statistica, serie XII, vol.2, anno 141, Roma: Istat.*

- Information on the distribution of households by number of members is only available since 1901 onwards.
- Information on the average size of households was only published starting with the 1991 census onwards.
- Figures refer to the present population up until 1931, and the resident population for the following years.

Social surveys on households

In 1983, Istat started the sample survey on structures and household behaviours, with the intention of offering an as much as possible exhaustive description of the structural characteristics of the Italian families and analysing the main social phenomena (participation in training programs and in labour market, access to the health and social services, leisure activities, inter-family networks and reproductive behaviour), also with reference to the family context.

Particular attention was paid in order to set out the most appropriate definition of household. The household based on the civil registry is abandoned, as a result of the findings by a special commission constituted ad hoc. As a survey unit, de facto household was introduced, that is the household as it is at the time of the interview, independently from its administrative-bureaucratic connotation. So it is possible to catch different realities and new family types. The de facto household progressively became the survey unit of all Istat surveys on households, replacing the household based on the civil registry.

For the survey on the structure and family behaviours 28,408 households were surveyed, for a total of 91,458 individuals. The questionnaire was divided into three parts: a general form, with the basic information, in order to outline the characteristics of the family; an individual form, with information on the components; a family form, for information about the family as a whole. Its structure was the prototype for subsequent surveys which were going to be part of the multipurpose survey system.

The first multipurpose household survey was conducted in 1987-1991. The overall design included six cycles of face to face interviews carried out by means of Papi (Paper and pencil interview), in other words, interviews conducted by data collectors using paper questionnaires. Each cycle had a six-month duration and was related to different thematic areas (the same areas later investigated by the multipurpose survey system), while the health conditions were permanently present. Each cycle included a sample of about 23,000 households belonging to about 1,300 municipalities. As part of this survey, a battery of questions was always dedicated to the family composition.

In 1993, the multipurpose survey system on households was launched, organized as seven different social surveys: the annual survey "Aspects of daily life", the quarterly survey "Trips and holidays" and, in rotation, five thematic surveys carried out every five years, dedicated to issues of social relevance: "Health conditions and use of health services", "Citizens and leisure", "Citizens' safety", "Household and social subjects" and "Time use". De facto households residing in Italy and individuals who compose them were the target of all surveys. Cohabitations were excluded from these surveys,

The survey "Aspects of daily life" annually provides a set of basic social indicators on key thematic areas, developed and deepened in the five-yearly surveys. The survey provides, among other things, important information about the structure and the main changes occurring in family life. The survey design requires a two-stage sampling with stratification of primary sampling units, municipalities, stratified by population size; households are the second stage units, sampled randomly from registry lists. The survey includes a sample of approximately 24,000 households per year (for a total of approximately 54,000 individuals) distributed in about 850 municipalities. From 1993 to 2003 data collection was carried out during November. The survey was not carried out in 2004, because of the variation in the survey calendar. Since 2005, data collection is carried out during February.

All components of the sampled households answer questions by direct interview and questions by self-administered questionnaire. If the individual is not available, for special reasons, information can be provided by another component.

Data of new family types, since the early eighties, are shown in table 3.2.

The survey "Household and social subjects" 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, family networks, information support networks, conjugal life and marriage, leaving the household of origin, working careers and social mobility. The survey relies on a two-stage sampling with stratification of primary sampling units, (municipalities). The survey on "Household and social subjects" was conducted for the first time in 1998. In 2009, for the

third edition, the total number of households reached the number of 17,788, and a total of 43,850 individuals. The surveys were conducted using paper questionnaires in face-to-face interviews and paper questionnaires to be compiled independently by respondents.

Marriages

The figures on marriages are based both on the monthly summary survey of demographic events collected by the registry office and on the individual marriage data, gathered at municipal level by the local civil registry 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 religious ministries and sometimes, on those collected by Civil Registrars”³ 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, this role was played by the General Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce while since 1926 has been 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 1867.⁴

The first edition of the individual survey on marriages dates back to 1883. This survey provided more accurate information on the spouses and published it in a more detailed way. Data were made available at department level (modern-day regions) and, afterward, at provincial level. Over time the survey has also been extended to include information on the demographic characteristics of the couple. During some periods, 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 started in 1930.⁵

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 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 in electronic format. As a matter of fact, since 1996, ISTAT has developed an online data collection system for demographic information in collaboration with the Association of the 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 almost all the municipalities, although not all of them use all the functions available. The

³ 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.

⁴ The figures relating to couples who signed the marriage certificate are presented in: [Education](#).

⁵ By the time passing, 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 registrar; the 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 following Christian churches are admitted and regulated by the Italian legislation (by means of agreements): marriage by Waldesian rite (Law no. 449 dated 11 August 1984); marriage by the Seventh Day Adventist rite (Law no. 516 dated 22 November 1988); marriage by Assemblies of God in Italy (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); marriage by the Orthodox Church - Holy Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Exarchate for Southern Europe (Article 9 in Law no. 126 dated 30 July 2012); marriage by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Article 14 in Law no. 127 dated 30 July 2012); marriage by the Apostolic Church in Italy (Article 13 in Law no. 128 dated 30 July 2012).

acquisition of data by paper forms (sent by municipalities to Prefectures and then to Istat which lastly prepares them for electronic data capture) is today residual.

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 are 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. As to increase data comparability with previous and later periods, the figures were recalculated according to the spouses' distribution 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 the 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").
- The Law 25 March 1985, n. 121: "Ratifying and implementing the agreement resulting from an additional protocol, signed in Rome on 18 February 1984 that modified the Lateran Pacts between the State and the Vatican".

Separations and divorces

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 by the Court, which was 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.⁶ 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 courts⁷ 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.

More recently, the Decree-law n. 132 of 12 September 2014 introduced important innovations concerning separation and consensual divorce, introducing: extra-judicial agreements of separation or divorce assisted by lawyers⁸ in case of minor children or over 18 when not self-sufficient, or in case of agreements concerning the properties of the spouses (ex art. 6); extrajudicial agreements of separation or divorce directly before the Civil registrar (ex art. 12). Therefore, Istat had to set up a new information flow (in addition to the traditional one) to acquire the new extra-judicial agreements data from the Civil Registry of Municipalities⁹.

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.¹⁰ 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 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 Law¹¹ 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

⁶ 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).

⁷ Since 13 September 2013, according to the legislative decree 155 of 2012 on the reorganization of the ordinary courts, the number of courts has been reduced from 165 to 140.

⁸ The lawyer is obliged to transmit, within ten days, a certified copy of the agreement together with the due certifications, to the civil registrar of the municipality where the marriage was transcribed.

⁹ Data collected according to the new flow are not yet available.

¹⁰ Civil marriage and "concordatario" religious marriages may also be declared null. "Concordatario" 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).

¹¹ Law no. 151 dated 19 May 1975.

of the existence of facts that make the continuation of the cohabitation intolerable or the education of the children seriously threatened.¹² 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.

- Decree-law 12 September 2014, no. 132, “Misure urgenti di degiurisdizionalizzazione ed altri interventi per la definizione dell’arretrato in materia di processo civile”(Urgent measures of diversion is conditional and other interventions for the definition of the backlog in civil process), converted with modifications into Law 10 November 2014, no. 162, introduced important innovations concerning separation and consensual divorce providing, in particular, two new procedures, alternatives to the Civil Court process.
- With the so-called Law about Short Divorce (Law 6 May 2015, no. 55) time to apply for a divorce was reduced from three years to twelve months in case of judicial separations and to six months in case of consensual separations (also in case of transformation from judicial to consensual).

¹² 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.