



# Estimates of the separated family population statistics

Data for April 2014 to March 2017

● Annual

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Great Britain

Official  
experimental

The Department for Work and Pensions' [Single Departmental Plan](#) includes an objective to increase every child's opportunity to succeed by helping separated parents agree effective child maintenance arrangements. This publication provides statistical estimates on separated families and their child maintenance arrangements.

There is no requirement for separated families to have a child maintenance arrangement, families may not want an arrangement, and in some cases an arrangement may not be possible (e.g. if a non-resident parent lives abroad). If parents do want an arrangement they may be able to agree this themselves without the involvement of the Child Maintenance Service (CMS). Arrangements made in this way are called non-statutory or family-based arrangements. Where parents want an arrangement but need help with this, Child Maintenance Options is available to provide support.

Child Maintenance Options is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements. 80% of people who contacted Child Maintenance Options in May-June 2018 had an arrangement six months later and around a quarter of these had a family-based arrangement. If required, parents can ask the CMS to calculate the amount of maintenance to be paid and, if necessary, to help manage and collect payments. Arrangements made this way are called statutory arrangements and the CMS can take enforcement action to ensure payments are made.

This is a new publication in a series of official experimental statistics about the separated family population. These statistics are NOT comparable with those in the previous [Estimates of the separated family population to December 2014](#) publication which was withdrawn in December 2018. The withdrawal of this publication was explained in a separate [statistical notice](#).

## Separated family population

There were an estimated

**2.5 million separated families in Great Britain including 3.9 million children**

## Child maintenance arrangements

**48% of separated families had a child maintenance arrangement**

## Types of child maintenance arrangements

**20% of separated families had a statutory arrangement and 31% had a non-statutory arrangement**

Note: some separated families have both statutory and non-statutory arrangements.

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## What you need to know

**A separated family** is defined as one resident parent, one non-resident parent and any biological or adopted children they have between them who are either under 16 or under 20 and in full-time non-tertiary education.

**A resident parent** is the parent who has main day-to-day care of any relevant children and who may potentially be eligible to receive child maintenance.

**A non-resident parent** is the parent who does not have main day-to-day care of any relevant children and who may potentially be required to pay child maintenance.

There are two main types of **child maintenance arrangement**: statutory arrangements and non-statutory arrangements (see below). An illustrative example showing how separated families might select an arrangement is provided overleaf.

**Statutory child maintenance arrangements** are those which have been arranged with the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) or its predecessor, the Child Support Agency (CSA).

**Non-statutory arrangements** include all other arrangements such as:

- voluntary financial arrangements which involve direct monetary payments between parents where the CMS or CSA have not been involved;
- voluntary non-financial arrangements involving payments in kind;
- other types of arrangements including shared care arrangements; and
- court orders requiring parents to make financial payments.

This publication provides estimates of the following for 2014/15-2016/17: the total number of separated families in Great Britain; the number of children in those families; and the proportion of separated families with a child maintenance arrangement. The effectiveness of child maintenance arrangements is beyond the scope of these statistics.

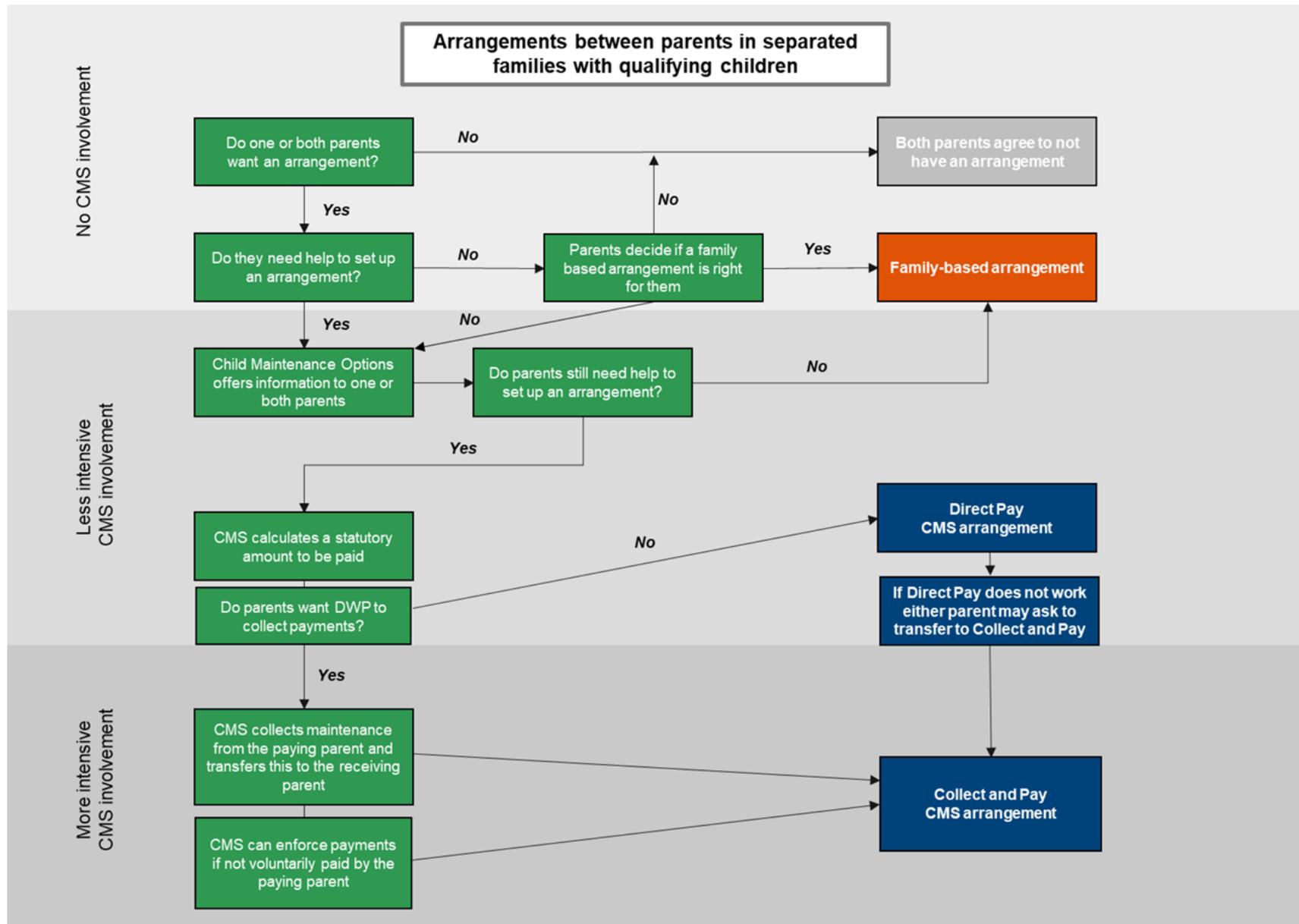
## Support available for separated families

**Child Maintenance Options** is a free service providing impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements. Between May and July 2018, Child Maintenance Options helped parents set up 28,900 child maintenance arrangements and 80% of the people who contacted them had a child maintenance arrangement in place six months later.

**The Child Maintenance Service** (CMS) was introduced in December 2012. It replaced the Child Support Agency (CSA) and is for separated parents who can't arrange child maintenance between themselves. Parents can ask the CMS to calculate the amount of maintenance to be paid and, if necessary, to help manage and collect payments.

Up until the end of December 2018 some families still had a child maintenance arrangement with the CSA. All the CSA cases with on-going liabilities have now closed, with parents having had the option of setting up a statutory arrangement with the CMS or a non-statutory, family-based arrangement.

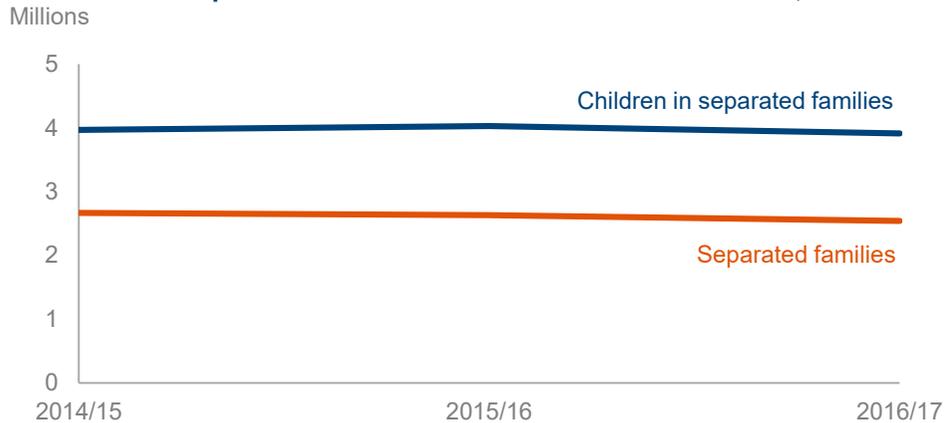
# Child maintenance arrangements between parents in separated families (illustrative example)



# Separated families and their child maintenance arrangements

There were around 2.5m separated families including 3.9m children in 2016/17

## The number of separated families and children in those families, 2014/15-2016/17

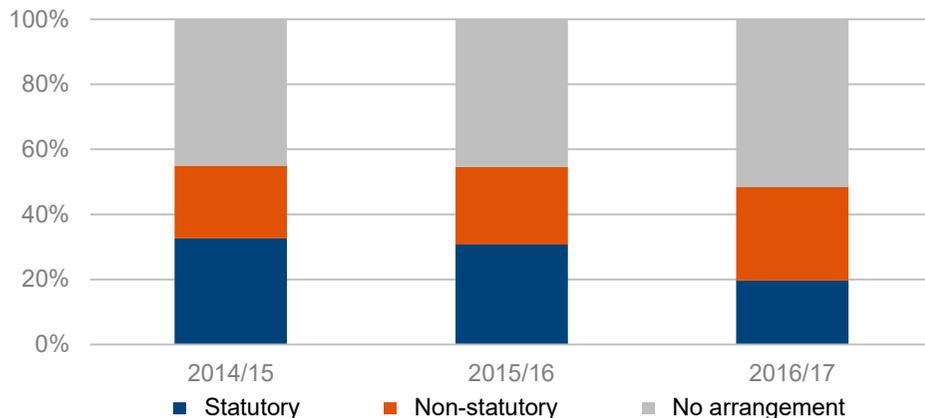


The overall numbers of separated families and children in separated families have remained relatively stable since 2014/15. It is not possible to assess whether any year-to-year changes are statistically significant because these estimates are derived from various data sources (see [Background information and methodology note](#) for more details).

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

Around 48% of separated families had a child maintenance arrangement in 2016/17. This proportion has fallen\* since 2015/16.

## Separated families by child maintenance arrangement type\*\*, 2014/15-2016/17



Between 2014/15 and 2016/17, statutory child maintenance moved from the CSA to the CMS. CSA cases began closing and under CMS more freedom and support was provided to enable parents to choose the arrangement that works best for them. This could be a statutory arrangement or a non-statutory arrangement, and there is no requirement for parents to have an arrangement.

The CSA cases were closed in groups. Those closed first were the simpler cases, such as those with no liability in place. The last cases to close were more complex, such as those where enforcement action was on-going.

Between 2015/16 and 2016/17, in line with policy intent, the proportion of separated families with a statutory arrangement fell and the proportion with a non-statutory arrangement increased. It is not possible to assess whether these changes are statistically significant as the estimates are derived from various data sources (see [Background information and methodology note](#)). Any fall in the proportion with a statutory arrangement may be partly due to the closure of historical CSA cases that were non-compliant or had no ongoing liability.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

\* The statistical significance of this change cannot be assessed as estimates are derived from various sources (see [Background information and methodology note](#)).

\*\* For simplicity, the statutory arrangement group in the chart above includes families who have both statutory and non-statutory arrangements. See accompanying [tables](#) for full

## About these statistics

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority and are new official statistics undergoing development. They have therefore been designated as experimental statistics. We plan to publish these statistics on an annual basis and will explore expanding their scope to help to meet user needs where reliable estimates can be obtained. Users are invited to comment on the development and relevance of these statistics at this stage and can send feedback to:

[cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk).

These GB-level statistics are estimates based primarily on data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS is based on a representative sample of around 19,000 UK households. The FRS is a continuous survey which collects information on the income and circumstances of individuals living in a representative sample of private households in the United Kingdom. FRS respondents are asked about the relationships within their household and any child maintenance arrangements they may have. Their responses are used to determine whether they are members of a separated family, how many children are in that family and the types of child maintenance arrangements that they have, if any. Where appropriate, FRS responses are checked for accuracy against the Department for Work and Pensions' CMS and CSA administrative databases and an adjustment for the under-reporting of statutory and non-statutory arrangements is applied. The FRS does not currently record the reasons for which some separated families have no arrangement.

More information about the methodology used to produce these statistics and its limitations can be found in the accompanying [Background information and methodology note](#).

Figures in this publication are rounded to the nearest 100,000. Percentages are calculated using figures prior to rounding and are rounded to the nearest integer. Totals may not sum due to rounding or missing data.

## Where to find out more

More information about these statistics can be found in the accompanying [Background information and methodology note](#) and [data tables](#).

Statistics on the child maintenance arrangements made by parents who contact Child Maintenance Options can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics>.

Experimental statistics on the statutory child maintenance arrangements administered by the Child Maintenance Service can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>.

Experimental statistics on the Child Support Agency's 1993 and 2003 statutory child maintenance schemes and on Child Support Agency case closure can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-support-agency-quarterly-summary-statistics--2>.

More information about the Child Maintenance Service and Child Support Agency can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/child-maintenance>.

More information about the Family Resources Survey can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/789455/family-resources-survey-2017-18-background-note-methodology.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789455/family-resources-survey-2017-18-background-note-methodology.pdf).