



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Estimates of the separated family population statistics

Background information and methodology

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Purpose of the statistics

Context of the statistics

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with those in the previous [Estimates of the separated family population to December 2014](#) publication which was withdrawn in December 2018.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](#).

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. A key indicator relating to this objective is the proportion of separated families with a child maintenance arrangement.

These statistics provide estimates of the following for each year from 2014/15 to 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 child maintenance arrangements of various types. The effectiveness of child maintenance arrangements is beyond the scope of these statistics.

Child maintenance arrangements

An illustrative example showing how separated families might select a child maintenance arrangement is provided on page 5 below. It should be noted that there is no requirement for separated families to have an arrangement, some 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 and can include:

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

Where parents want an arrangement but need help with this, Child Maintenance Options and the CMS can provide support.

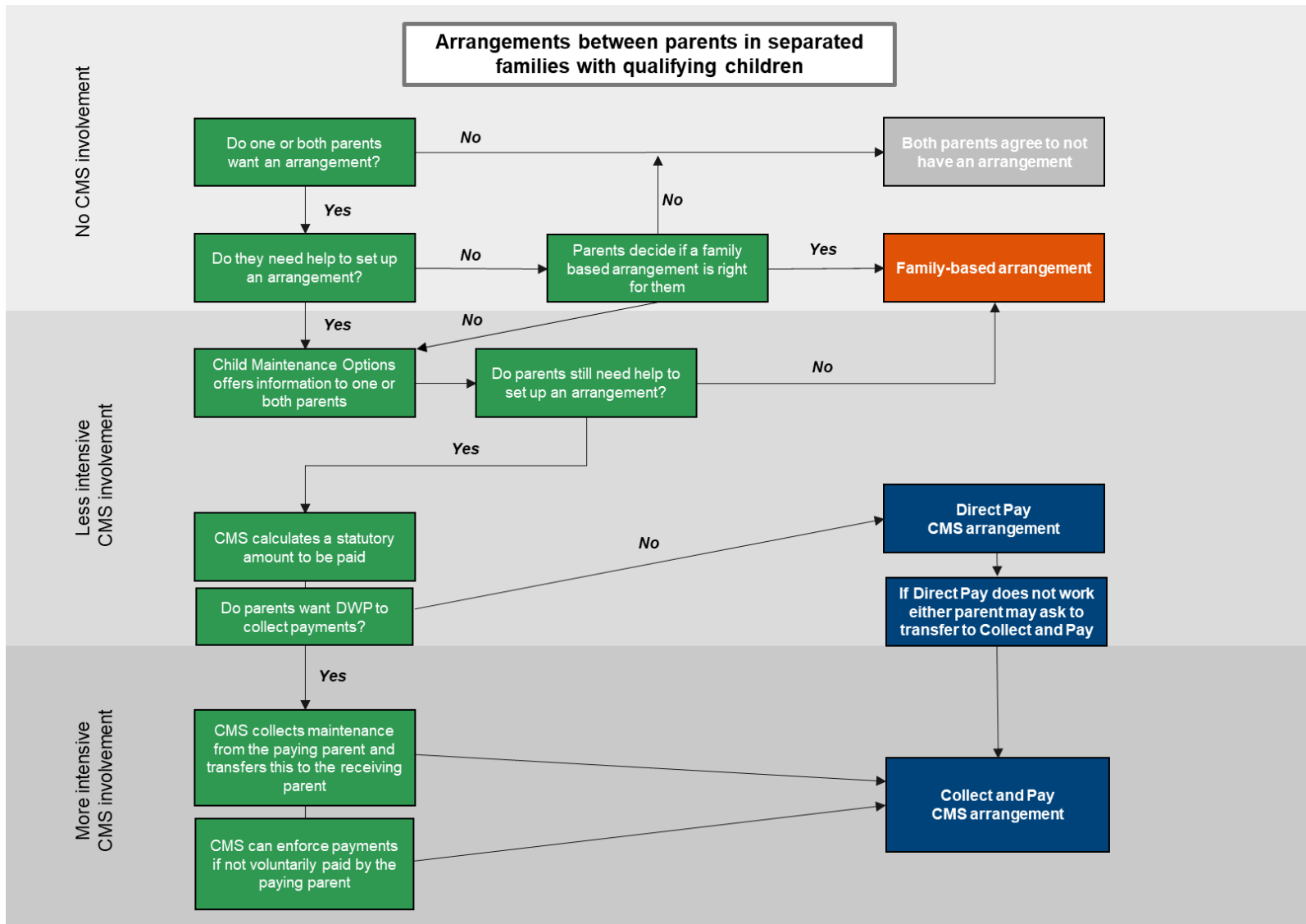
Child Maintenance Options is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements. 80% of people who contacted Child Maintenance Options in May-June 2018 had an arrangement six months later and around a quarter of these had a family-based arrangement.

If further support is required, parents can ask the CMS to calculate the amount of maintenance to be paid and to manage and collect payments. Arrangements made in this way are called statutory arrangements and the CMS can take enforcement action to ensure payments are made.

During the period covered by these statistics, statutory child maintenance moved from the Child Support Agency (CSA) to the CMS. CSA cases had begun 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 was no requirement for parents to have an arrangement. Not all CSA cases were expected to transfer to CMS.

CSA cases were closed in groups and 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. By December 2018, all the CSA cases with on-going liabilities were closed, and parents who still wanted an arrangement were encouraged to contact Child Maintenance Options for information to set up a statutory arrangement with the CMS or a non-statutory, family-based arrangement.

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



Purpose of the statistics

These statistics are used by various stakeholders within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to measure progress against policy intent. They may also be used to answer Parliamentary Questions and requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

Figures from these statistics are included in the DWP Annual Report and Accounts and are also used to update a key indicator in the [DWP Single Departmental Plan](#): “the percentage of separated families with a child maintenance arrangement”.

These statistics are also intended for use by other interested parties in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and by members of the public.

Definitions and terminology within the statistics

The key definitions and terminology used within these statistics are explained in the table below.

Separated family	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.
Resident parent	The parent who has main day-to-day care of any relevant children and who may potentially be eligible to receive child maintenance. Resident Parents may be associated with more than one separated family.
Non-resident parent	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.
Child maintenance arrangement	There are two main types of child maintenance arrangement: statutory arrangements and non-statutory arrangements (see below). Separated families may have more than one type of arrangement.
Statutory arrangement	Child maintenance arrangements that have been arranged with the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) or its predecessor, the Child Support Agency (CSA).

<p>Non-statutory arrangement</p>	<p>Non-statutory arrangements do not involve the CMS or CSA and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voluntary financial arrangements involving 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 arrangement including shared care arrangements; and • court orders requiring parents to make financial payments.
<p>Financial years</p>	<p>These statistics are provided for each financial year from 2014/15 to 2016/17 (inclusive). The financial year begins on 1st April and ends on 31st March.</p>

Source of the statistics

These statistics are estimates derived from a combination of survey data and administrative data.

The estimates are based primarily on data from the Family Resources Survey.

The Family Resources Survey (FRS) is a continuous survey based on a representative sample of around 19,000 private households in the United Kingdom. The FRS collects information on the income and circumstances of respondents, including the relationships within their households and any child maintenance arrangements they may have.

FRS responses regarding child maintenance arrangements are checked for accuracy against CMS and CSA administrative databases (where permission to do so has been granted).

If a respondent indicates that they have no statutory arrangement but this is contradicted by the administrative data then it is assumed that they have a statutory arrangement and their response is adjusted accordingly. This helps to correct for the under-reporting of statutory arrangements. We assume that non-statutory arrangements are similarly under-reported and also make an adjustment to these. However, this adjustment is not as large, as it is only based on respondents with a compliant statutory arrangement who did not report their arrangement in the survey.

Adjusted FRS data is used to estimate the total number of Resident Parents in separated families, the total number of children in those families and the types of child maintenance arrangements they have, if any.

FRS respondents are assumed to be Resident Parents if:

- their responses indicate that they are the biological or adoptive parent of a child who lives in their household and that child has no other biological or adoptive parents in the household; or
- CMS and CSA administrative data indicate that they had a statutory child maintenance arrangement at the time of their FRS interview.

To obtain whole population estimates the appropriate survey weights are applied to the total numbers of Resident Parents and children identified using the adjusted FRS data.

Estimates relating to Resident Parents are converted into estimates relating to separated families.

This is done based on estimates of the average number of child maintenance arrangements per Receiving Parent obtained from the CMS and CSA administrative data.

Limitations of the statistics

These statistics are estimates and are subject to a number of limitations. The main issues are described separately below.

The Family Resources Survey (FRS) is subject to sampling error.

All survey estimates have a sampling error attached to them, calculated from the variability of the observations in the survey sample. From this, a margin of error (confidence interval) is usually calculated to determine whether the changes observed in survey estimates are statistically significant and are unlikely to result from measurement error. However, because the raw FRS data are subject to further adjustments as part of the methodology described above, we are unable to assess whether year-to-year changes in the estimates are statistically significant. Trends over time, however, will continue to be monitored and assessed.

There are some limitations regarding the way FRS questions are asked.

Changes were made in 2016/17 to the routing and wording of the questions relating to child maintenance. Prior to this there was no routing between the detailed relationship questions and the reporting of children for child maintenance purposes. This meant that some respondents who were potentially eligible for a child maintenance arrangement were subsequently recorded as having no eligible child rather than no arrangement and not routed to the more detailed questions. This may have introduced some inaccuracy in our reporting of the number and types of arrangements prior to 2016/17.

There are some issues regarding FRS response accuracy.

The general approach taken is to assume that responses about family circumstances and child maintenance arrangements are accurate, unless contradicted by the existence of a relevant statutory arrangement in the CMS and CSA administrative databases (see above). However, if respondents state that they have a child

maintenance arrangement then this is assumed to be the case, regardless of whether a relevant statutory arrangement can be found in the administrative data. Adjustments have also been made to correct for the assumed under-reporting of non-statutory arrangements (see above).

Some FRS respondents refuse permission to link their responses to DWP administrative data.

It is therefore not possible to check all responses for accuracy against the CMS and CSA administrative data. It is assumed that the under-reporting of statutory arrangements amongst people who do not provide permission to link their responses is the same as it is for those who do.

Some relevant CMS and CSA administrative records may not have been matched to the FRS responses, even when permission to link the records has been provided.

This is because a very small proportion of the potentially relevant administrative records do not include the National Insurance number details that are necessary for data linking.

Resident Parents can be associated with more than one separated family. However, there is limited data on the number of separated families associated with the Resident Parents identified.

To convert estimates relating to Resident Parents into estimates relating to separated families, a scaling factor is applied. This scaling factor is equal to the average number of live statutory arrangements associated with all of the Resident Parents in the CMS and CSA administrative databases who had a statutory arrangement. Due to a lack of data on non-statutory arrangements, the scaling factor is only based on statutory cases. It is assumed that the scaling factor can be applied to all of the Resident Parents identified using the adjusted FRS data, regardless of the type(s) of child maintenance arrangement(s) they have (if any). It is also assumed that all separated families associated with a given Resident Parent are covered by the same type(s) of child maintenance arrangement(s).

Comparisons between the statistics

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](#).

Estimates of the number of separated families with a statutory child maintenance arrangement derived from these statistics should not be compared against caseload estimates in the [Child Maintenance Service statistics](#) and [Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary Statistics](#) publications. The estimates in those publications are based on administrative data, whilst these statistics are estimates based on survey

data which excludes some household types and is subject to sampling error (see above). Also the publications mentioned above provide quarterly caseload figures, whilst these estimates are based on survey responses at a point in time.

Revisions to the statistics

These statistics are estimates derived using an experimental methodology which will continue to be reviewed and, if feasible, improved. Any future revisions will be clearly indicated and explained in the relevant publication.

The current estimates are based primarily on data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), which is not routinely revised. Where appropriate, the FRS data has been checked for accuracy against the Department for Work and Pensions' Child Maintenance Service (CMS) and Child Support Agency (CSA) administrative databases and adjusted accordingly (see above). The CMS and CSA caseload databases used are not routinely updated.

Data confidentiality and rounding

There is no risk of inferring a person's identity from these statistics. Figures 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.

Status of the statistics

Experimental 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.

Quality Statement

These statistics are estimates based on an experimental methodology. The methodology and its limitations have been explained above. While developing the methodology, findings were compared against other data sources including the Understanding Society survey and CMS and CSA administrative databases to confirm their credibility.

The estimates are based primarily on data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). Information about the reliability of the FRS is provided in the [FRS Background information and methodology note](#).

Where appropriate, the FRS data has been checked for accuracy against the Department for Work and Pensions' CMS and CSA administrative databases and adjusted accordingly (see above). Information about the reliability of CMS administrative data is provided in the Child Maintenance Service statistics [Background information and methodology note](#). Information about the reliability of CSA administrative data is provided in the Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary Statistics [Background Quality Report](#).

Feedback

We welcome feedback

You can provide feedback on these statistics by emailing cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk

Useful links

The statistical release and data tables for these statistics can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/separated-families-population-statistics-for-2014-to-2015-2015-to-2016-and-2016-to-2017>

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

<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 at:

<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 at:

<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 at: <https://www.gov.uk/child-maintenance>.

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

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789455/family-resources-survey-2017-18-background-note-methodology.pdf.

The DWP Single Departmental Plan includes an indicator based on these statistics (the proportion of separated families with a child maintenance arrangement) and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-work-and-pensions-single-departmental-plan>.