

# When It Comes to Family Structure, the U.S. Is a Laggard

by Anna Sutherland and W. Bradford Wilcox September 24, 2015

## Highlights

- When it comes to family structure, the U.S. is an outlier among wealthy nations—and not in a good way.
- 69 percent of U.S. kids live in two-parents families, vs. 89 percent in Italy and 94 percent in Jordan.

When it comes to family structure, the United States is a laggard. As Nicholas Zill [documented in this space](#) in February, almost seven in ten kids in the United States live in two-parent families. New international data from the recently released [World Family Map Report](#) indicate that in this area, the U.S. is an outlier among wealthy nations—but not in a good way. Out of 41 countries with available data on this measure, we place a disappointing 32nd, well below Canada, Australia, and the European nations under examination.

Children are most apt to live with two parents (who could be biological parents, adoptive parents, or stepparents) in Asia and the Middle East, as the below figure illustrates. According to the data available for the specific countries examined in these regions, more than 80 percent of children in Asia and the Middle East live with two parents, ranging from 85 percent in the Philippines and Indonesia to 94 percent in Jordan.

Similarly, about 80 percent of children in European countries—from 76 percent in the United Kingdom to 89 percent in Italy and Poland—live in two-parent households. In the Americas, two-parent households are somewhat less prevalent: between 62 percent (Colombia) and 78 percent (Canada) of children are part of two-parent homes. The two-parent pattern is more mixed in sub-Saharan Africa, ranging widely from 36 percent in South Africa to 78 percent in Nigeria. Some of the children living with two parents are in households that also include extended family, as noted above.

In much of Central/South America and sub-Saharan Africa, children have higher odds of living with either one or neither of their parents than children in other regions. Between 12 percent (Nigeria) and 43 percent (South Africa) of children in these regions live with a single parent, and between 4 percent (Argentina) and 20 percent (South Africa and Uganda) of them live in homes without either of their parents. Among the South American countries in this study, Colombia had the highest percentage of children living without either of their parents: 11 percent. The high percentage of South African children living with one parent or without either parent—43 percent and 20 percent, respectively—reflects the legacy of AIDS, which left many children orphaned, and of apartheid, which produced high rates of labor migration.

Finally, in North America, Oceania, and Europe, a substantial minority—about one-fifth—of children live in single-parent households, and less than 6 percent of kids live in households without at least one of their parents. In Eastern Europe, 11 to 15 percent of children live with a lone parent. In these regions, the United States (27 percent), the United Kingdom (24 percent), and New Zealand (24 percent) exhibit particularly high levels of single parenthood. Many European countries have projected that the proportion of children living with single parents will grow through 2030.

*This post includes text adapted from the [2015 World Family Map Report](#), which was sponsored by Child Trends and the Social Trends Institute and cosponsored by the Institute for Family Studies.*

Source: World Family Map Report, 2015. See [here](#) for full information on the source for each country. Note: Countries marked with an asterisk (\*) did not measure the percentage of children who live with no parents. Parents include biological, adoptive, and step-parents.

## Where Children Are Most and Least Likely to Live With Two Parents, 2000–2014

Percentage of children living with...

■ 2 Parents ■ 1 Parent ■ 0 Parents

