

# UK Cohabitation Statistics 2026

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Cohabiting couples are the fastest-growing family type in the UK — 3.5 million families in 2024, or 17.7% of all families. Yet not one of them has an automatic right to inherit from their partner, because common-law marriage does not exist in England and Wales.

<b>3.5m</b> cohabiting-couple families (2024)	<b>17.7%</b> of all UK families
<b>£0</b> automatic inheritance for cohabitants	<b>Fastest</b> growing family type

## What the data shows

The ONS confirms cohabiting couples are the fastest-growing family type, rising from 3.1 million families in 2014 to 3.5 million in 2024. Marriage still accounts for the largest share of families at 65.1%, but that share is shrinking as more couples live together without marrying.

The legal reality has not kept pace with this social shift. A surviving cohabitant inherits nothing automatically under the intestacy rules and must rely on a will, joint ownership, or a claim under the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975. With millions of couples affected, the gap between how people live and what the law assumes is one of the biggest risks in UK estate planning.

## Key takeaways

- Cohabiting-couple families rose to 3.5 million in 2024 (17.7% of all families).
- Cohabitation is the fastest-growing family type in the UK.
- Cohabiting partners have no automatic inheritance rights — there is no common-law marriage.
- A will or joint ownership is the only reliable protection for an unmarried partner.

## Sources

- ONS — Families and households in the UK: 2024 (published July 2025)
- ONS — Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements
- Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975 — [legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk)

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