

The People of Britain

Who are the British?

British people live in the UK. They are people who live in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. British people can also either be English, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish (from Northern Ireland only).

The British are said to be reserved in manners, dress and speech. They are famous for their politeness, self-

discipline and especially for their sense of humour. British people have a strong sense of humour which sometimes can be hard for foreigners to understand.

Britain is a country of mixed cultures. London has the largest non-white population of any European city and over 250 languages are spoken there. Therefore not all British people are White or Christians.

What is Family life like in Britain?

Changing Values and Norms of the British Family

The family in Britain is changing. The once typical British family headed by two parents has undergone substantial changes during the twentieth century. In particular there has been a rise in the number of single-person households, which increased from 18 to 29 per cent of all households between 1971 and 2002. By the year 2020, it is estimated that there will be more single people than married people. Fifty years ago this would have been socially unacceptable in Britain.

In the past, people got married and stayed married. Divorce was very difficult, expensive and took a long time. Today, people's views on marriage are changing. Many couples, mostly in their twenties or thirties, live together (cohabit) without getting married. Only about 60%

of these couples will eventually get married.

In the past, people married before they had children, but now about 40% of children in Britain are born to unmarried (cohabiting) parents. In 2000, around a quarter of unmarried people between the ages of 16 and 59 were cohabiting in Great Britain. Cohabiting couples are also starting families without first being married. Before 1960 this was very unusual, but in 2001 around 23 per cent of births in the UK were to cohabiting couples.

People are generally getting married at a later age now and many women do not want to have children immediately. They prefer to concentrate on their jobs

and put off having a baby until late thirties.

The number of single-parent families is increasing. This is mainly due

to more marriages ending in divorce, but some women are also choosing to have children as lone parents without being married.

Social Class System in Britain

Britain was once a class-ridden society. Today, multiculturalism and a changing economy are gradually eroding the British class system, but some features of the system still remain.

What is Class?

Sociologists define social class as the grouping of people by occupations. Doctors and lawyers and university teachers are given more status than unskilled labourers. The different positions represent different levels of power, influence and money. In days gone by your class would affect your chances of getting an education, a job, etc. and it would also affect the people who you could socialise with and marry. Today this type of thing is all-but-gone with the high-profile exception of the Royal family.

The British Social Class System

The British society has often been considered to be divided into three main groups of classes:

- ◆ **the Upper Class**
Often people with inherited wealth. Includes some of the oldest families, with many of them being titled aristocrats.
- ◆ **the Middle Class**
The majority of the population of Britain. They include industrialists, professionals, business people and shop owners.
- ◆ **Lower or Working Class**
People who are agricultural, mine and factory workers.

The British Class System today

BRITAIN'S traditional social divisions of working, middle and upper class have been replaced by seven new groups.

They range from the poorest, the Precariat, to Emergent Service Workers, Traditional Working Class, New Affluent Workers, Technical Middle Class and Established Middle Class. And at the top of the pile is the Elite.

1. THE ELITE

Percentage of population: Six

Average age: 57

Most privileged group with savings of more than £140,000 and top university education. Their income is £89,000 and their home is worth an average of £325,000. They enjoy the theatre, art galleries, museums and jazz.

2. ESTABLISHED MIDDLE CLASS

Percentage of population: 25

Average age: 46

Second wealthiest and largest group, with household income of £47,000 a year, a house worth £177,000 and savings of £26,000. A quarter of the population fall within its ranks and it might be seen as the comfortably-off bulwark of British society.

3. TECHNICAL MIDDLE CLASS

Percentage of population: Six

Average age: 52

Prosperous but with little interest in social or cultural events. It makes up only six per cent of the population but is prosperous – earning around £38,000, with excellent household savings of £66,000 and houses worth an average of £163,000.

4. NEW AFFLUENT WORKERS

Percentage of population: 15

Average age: 44

Young group on moderate incomes, owning homes worth £129,000 with small savings. They prefer playing and watching sport, computer games and social networking to traditional pastimes. Few have been to university but most work in private sector.

5. TRADITIONAL WORKING CLASS

Percentage of population: 14

Average age: 66

Oldest group, with house values of £127,000 but with incomes of only £13,000. There are few graduates and traditional working class jobs like lorry drivers, cleaners and electricians are over-represented as are menial white-collar jobs like secretaries.

6. EMERGENT SERVICE WORKERS

Percentage of population: 19

Average age: 34

New, young urban group with modest household income of £21,000, likely to rent and only having modest savings. They work usually in the service sector, for example, bar work, chefs, customer service occupations and call centre workers.

7. THE PRECARIAT

Percentage of population: 15

Average age: 50

The poorest class, with a household income of only £8,000, negligible savings, and likely to rent. Most deprived on all measures including social and cultural. They represent 15 per cent of the population and tend to be located in old industrial areas.

