

# Attitudes to Family Formation in Scotland

November 2022

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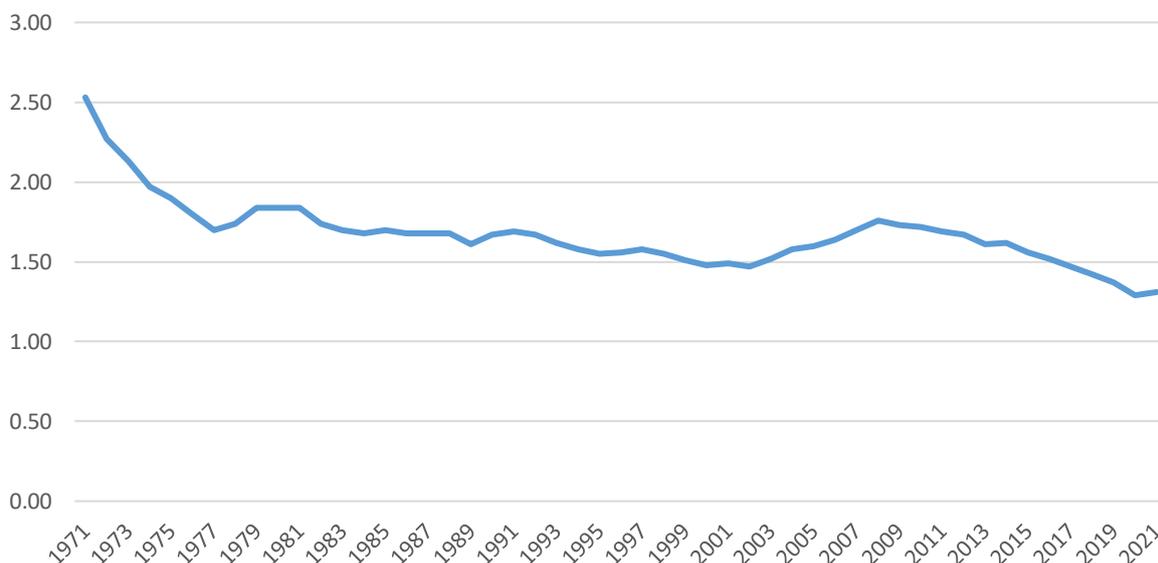
## Introduction

Scotland faces a range of demographic challenges, such as an ageing population and a continued fall in birth rates. These challenges will affect the future age structure of Scotland's population, which is projected to peak in 2028 and thereafter start to decline. This is primarily due to the number of deaths outweighing births, and not enough inward migration to compensate.

In March 2021, the Scottish Government's [Ministerial Population Taskforce](#) published Scotland's first national Population Strategy, entitled '[A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population](#)', in order to focus new work on population change in Scotland. Much of the Strategy focuses on migration – particularly in the aftermath of Brexit - and the need for an immigration system to meet Scotland's needs, alongside trends such as ageing, local depopulation, and falling birth rates.

Scotland's total fertility rate (TFR; the average number of children born to each woman) has fallen from 2.5 in 1971 to 1.7 in 2007, to 1.31 in 2021. This is the second lowest ever recorded, after TFR fell to 1.29 in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Although this is a trend seen in other countries, Scotland has seen a particularly sharp decline and has currently the lowest fertility rate within the UK (for England and Wales, TFR was 1.61 in 2021).<sup>2</sup>

Fertility rates in Scotland 1971 - 2021



As part of the Family Friendly pillar in the Population Strategy, Scottish Government recognises families in all shapes and sizes. Equally, it sets out that it is not for government to make intrusive value judgements on issues relating to having children – emphasising these are of a deeply personal nature. Recognising this the Scottish Government commissioned research with the aim of increasing understanding and

<sup>1</sup> [List of Data Tables | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Births in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

updating the evidence base around some of the drivers, changing norms, and potential barriers people face, which may have shaped the fall in Scotland's birth rate.

## Research Studies

Between Winter 2021 and Summer 2022, two different research studies were commissioned by the Scottish Government in order to gather insights about the attitudes and factors that have an influence on people's decision-making when planning to have a family. The first, a quantitative survey, was carried out over November and December 2021, when 1,144 adults living in Scotland were asked about their ideal and expected family size. Secondly a qualitative study consisting of focus groups and in-depth interviews was commissioned in March 2022 and focused, similarly to the quantitative study, on ideal and expected family size, and the enablers and barriers that prevent people from having their ideal family size.

The studies were commissioned as there was limited Scotland-level evidence available on attitudes towards ideal family size. Prior to these projects the most recent source available on ideal family size was a fertility module commissioned in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) of 2005. A nationally representative sample of child-bearing age (N=781) were asked about their ideals and expectations with regard to childbearing. Respondents said that their average ideal family size in Scotland was 2.48 children. In practice the average number of children reported by respondents at the time asked was 1.24, while the TFR in Scotland in 2005 was 1.62.<sup>3</sup> While it is not possible to make robust direct comparisons between 2005 and 2021 data, the data can help to contextualise the recent findings within this report.

The general objective of both studies was therefore to strengthen the evidence base with updated and reliable data in order to explore the attitudes around having children in Scotland. This mixed-methods approach provides a snapshot of the trends in public attitudes and aims to further our understanding of the low fertility rates that Scotland has been experiencing for decades.

Specific objectives of the research were to:

- Investigate general attitudes around having children in Scotland and their drivers;
- Explore views on the barriers that people may face when planning to have children;
- Explore enablers at the country, societal and family-level to enable people to reach their ideal family size;
- Explore participants' views on their ideal family size, and how this relates to the size of family that they either expect to have or already have;
- Explore how attitudes towards recent trends, such as climate change, delayed parenthood, and Covid-19, relate to decisions to having children; and
- Explore attitudes to and reasons for not having children.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that figure of actual reported children is low compared to the total fertility rate. This can be in part explained because many respondents had not completed their fertile years and may be expected to have further children in the future. It may therefore be more helpful to compare the ideal number of children to the overall total fertility rate across Scotland of 1.62 in 2005.

Detailed analysis of the findings of the quantitative study, and methodology used is provided in Annex A, and a report of the focus groups and interviews (qualitative study) is in Annex B.

With regard to this study, both the quantitative and qualitative research is based on self-reported aspirations, expectations and ideals. Participants underreporting behaviours or opinions that they believe are socially unacceptable or undesirable, represents a social desirability bias that could be present when self-reporting. Also, temporal aspirations and self-reported expectations can change over time and can also be affected by current events, applying a layer of pessimism or optimism that can affect results. Individuals can and will change their mind in regards to life planning decisions, so it is important to bear in mind that this study shows, by design, only a snapshot at a specific point in time.

## **Key findings of both studies**

### Views on ideal family size

As part of the quantitative study, the survey of adults asked questions about the current composition of their households along with a question about participants' expectations and ideal family size. Comparing the actual numbers of children survey participants had with expectations and aspirations provided three measures: current, ideal and expected family size. The mean current family size for all 2021 respondents was 1.69, while the expected number of children reported was 2.02, with an ideal family size of 2.08 children.

In looking at the respondents of a childbearing age (18-49 years old), the difference between ideal and current family size is bigger, with the current number of children reported as 1.22 and the expected number of children reported as 1.72. However the ideal family size for this age group is 1.85, a higher figure than their actual and their expected family sizes. As people expected to have more children than they currently have, their expectations were closer to their ideal number.

The difference between self-reported ideal and expected numbers of children, compared with actual self-reported birth rates, shows that a gap exists between the number of children that people report that they would like to have, and the number they are actually having. This was reflected in the focus group discussions where most participants also reported wanting more children than they would expect to have, basing their considerations on their current financial, relationship and career status.

Sixteen percent of respondents reported that their ideal family size was no children, with 39% of single adults reporting zero as their ideal number of children. When this question was last asked, in 2005, only 7% replied that this was their ideal.<sup>4</sup> It was noted in the qualitative study that Scotland is a place in which the make-up of families has changed, and there is now less stigma associated with those who

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<sup>4</sup> The 2005 sample (n=781) was made up of respondents of child-bearing age.

choose not to have children. Greater social acceptance around families of all shapes and sizes was welcomed. However, it was mentioned that families may still put pressure on couples around their choices, leading to the assumption that they will have children (and more than one).

It is also worth noting that respondents living in larger cities were more likely to not have children (46%) than those living in rural areas (26%). We find evidence in data that childlessness is a more common preference in larger cities or more urbanised areas (36% of respondents in urban and larger cities prefer no children).

### Factors influencing change

Scotland's fertility rate has broadly declined since the 1990s<sup>5</sup>, and as mentioned above, the ideal family size reported among members of the public appears to have also decreased over time. This could mean that people are adjusting their ideals and expectations, and both studies show evidence of the different factors that shape an individual's family formation.

The qualitative study showed that the individual's financial, social and personal situation are key considerations when deciding on their family size. There is, additionally, evidence of attitudinal shifts and expectations around having children, such as people delaying parenthood in favour of an established career – especially for women – and appropriate housing (e.g. a room for each child). Delaying parenthood is seen as a reason why families are becoming smaller as mothers in their mid-thirties and early forties are increasing<sup>6</sup>. Also group discussions identified a more tolerant and respected attitudes towards people who choose not to have children even though it was noted that there is a social expectation that (especially) couples will have children at some point.

Participants in focus groups described also a change in attitudes towards couples having children in same sex relationships with greater acceptance of non-traditional families. Even though our findings suggest a societal change, there are also barriers at play.

### Barriers

In the quantitative survey, respondents who indicated they would not have any, or any more children were asked to give the main reasons why, while participants in focus groups discussed the main barriers they identified as limiting their expectations.

Fifty-three percent of survey respondents said they felt like they were too old to have (more) children, while half of respondents aged 30-39 and 58% of those aged 40-49 were happy with their current family size. Although age was not reported as being a limiting factor in the focus groups, participants identified that people are having their

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<sup>5</sup> Although in 2021 the fertility rate in Scotland was slightly higher than the one in 2020 (1.31 compared to 1.29), this increase is unlikely to show an upward trend and births are still lowest in historical terms.

<sup>6</sup> See Age-specific birth rates, per 1,000 female population, Scotland, 1951 to 2021, National Records of Scotland: [List of Data Tables | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/list-of-data-tables)

first child later in life, which may limit their family size expectations. Another important factor detailed in the quantitative study was relationship status, with 51% of respondents who are single choosing not to have any or more children because they did not have a partner. Respondents who are single were also more likely to not want children at all (17%). This was also echoed in the qualitative study, with many participants stating that it was important to be in a stable relationship before having children.

Financial concerns were cited extensively in all focus groups. Lack of financial resource alone was enough of an issue to make people delay or decide against having children. This is also reflected in the survey as 51% of respondents, who declared themselves to be finding it difficult financially (as worded in the survey question), had no children. The cost of childcare, the inadequacy of maternity leave pay, and home ownership were reported as the main financial worries impacting on people's family size expectations. Not being able to afford having any, or more children was the most prominent reason for limiting family size for adults aged 30-39 years old (34%). This suggests that financial circumstances could act as a deterrent when planning to have any or subsequent children, especially in groups of childbearing age.

Environmental concerns were not widely cited as a decision-making factor among research participants, with only 9% of survey respondents reporting it in terms of their influencing their views on limited their family size. However it was noted that younger people with no children and those in higher socio economic groups expressed more concern. Only 2% of respondents living in remote areas cited such environmental concerns over having (more) children.

Participants in focus groups and interviews reported existence of gendered barriers whereby women may feel more pressure than men to have a successful and stable career before they become parents or have subsequent children. There was a view that women may have concerns that having a family could end their prospects of progression, while this is not a concern for men. This may be one of the reasons for trends of delayed parenthood.

### Enablers

Questions around what would enable people to achieve their ideal family size were not asked in the quantitative survey, so main enablers were identified in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. However, in some sections we use the percentages drawn from the survey to add more information on each enabler.

Participants were asked to comment on what could be better, and make it easier, for people to have the number of children they want. Most suggestions came from participants who were already parents. The analysis revealed three major categories of enablers: financial, workplace related and social.

Financial support was the factor most likely to be mentioned in the focus groups and in-depth interviews. Rapid increases in energy and food prices were mentioned extensively in discussions. Being financially better off was most frequently identified as an enablers to have (more) children. While participants from all categories (all

Social Economic Groups (SEG) and those with/without children) said this was the case, this was most strongly expressed by those in lower SEGs and with no children. Related to financial concerns, participants discussed how an increase in government-funded early learning and childcare provision would also enable people to have children, as childcare was seen as a great expense, especially among those who were already parents. Extending early learning and childcare provision to children under three was also highlighted in the discussions.

Housing was also identified as an enabler to achieve ideal family size in the focus groups. The cost of buying a house was mentioned as a deterrent to starting a family. Government-backed buying schemes were seen by some as supporting people to have their ideal family size. This was also reflected in the survey data with 59% of private tenants reporting not having any children, and 34% of them saying that having no children was their ideal family size. In the case of local authorities and housing association tenants, an increase in social housing and a consequent reduction in waiting lists to access housing was viewed by some focus group participants as a positive enabler. We can see some reflections of this in the survey data, where 45% of local authorities and housing association tenants reported two children as their ideal number while only around 29% reported this as their actual family size.

Workplace adjustments and more flexibility around childcare and work-life balance were identified in focus groups as key elements to help people with their family planning. There were also calls for maternity leave to be more generous in terms of the amount of time during maternity leave when mothers receive full pay. Some focus group participants viewed paternity leave entitlement as being insufficient. It was suggested that entitlement for both maternity and paternity leave should be more consistent across organisations, giving workers the same rights regardless of where they work.

Scotland was recognised by the focus groups as a place that values families and the generous benefits package for families was put as an example of this. Benefits and incentives such as the Baby Box and the Scottish Child Payment were praised although the benefits system was identified as needing to be significantly improved to allow more working parents to access free childcare.

## **Conclusion**

Collectively, the two studies provide new insights on general attitudes to family formation in Scotland, along with how and why these may be changing. The work provides a rich level of data to demonstrate the range of factors which influence individual's decision to start, expand, choose not to have a family. These include financial, housing, personal, and wider societal factors. The findings from these two studies reinforce the complex interactions between these factors. As part of delivering its Population Strategy, the Scottish Government will continue to build evidence where possible to help to better understand the trends and drivers shaping demographic change in Scotland. This will include working with partners including the National Records of Scotland, the independent Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population, and other partners.

## **Annex A – Family Formation Survey Overview (Quantitative Survey)**<sup>7</sup>

### **Introduction**

As one component delivered to update the evidence base in this area, a quantitative survey ran from 18 November 2021 until 3 December 2022, involving the collection of information from a random sample of the adult population in Scotland (total sample size 1,144). Although the sample was representative of and weighted according to the population of Scotland, it should be noted that the sample sizes were small for people living on islands and the youngest age group (18-29). In some instances, responses of these groups were suppressed due to the small sample size. The survey was designed to provide reliable and up-to-date information on the choices, attitudes, and motivations of Scottish adults with regards to family planning.

Participants were asked the following set of questions:

1. How many children do you currently have?
2. Personally, what do you think would be the ideal number of children for you to have had during your lifetime?
3. How many (more) children in total do you think you will end up having during your lifetime?
4. Total number of children expected to have.
5. Which of the following are the main reasons you do not think you will have (any more) children?

Questions on family planning were asked of the full sample, with the exception of some follow-up questions (e.g. regarding reasons for not having any or more children, as this was only asked to respondents who indicated either one of these). Where a question was not asked to the full sample this is highlighted in the report, and where the response rate for the question was low this is not included in the analysis.

With the above taken into account, the specific objectives of the quantitative study were to:

- Establish people's preferences and attitudes on their ideal family size, and how this relates to the size of family that they either already have or expect to have
- Explore whether any demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, relationship status and others, have an effect on these preferences and attitudes
- Identify main reasons for limiting family size – whether that is not having any children, or not having more children

All sub-group comparisons in this report have been tested for statistical significance. Therefore, any comparisons highlighted in the report are statistically significant unless otherwise stated.

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<sup>7</sup> Quantitative study data tables: <https://statistics.gov.scot/data/attitudes-to-family-formation-in-scotland-data-tables>

It should be noted that it is difficult to know whether *ideal* and *expected* family size has fallen in Scotland in more recent years, as data available prior to conducting this survey is outdated and has not been collected at a national level since 2005. The existing data also lacks a nuanced discussion on *why* an individual would like a certain number of children, and how these reasons change through life stages. This emphasises a large research/data gap to be filled by this survey and the focus group study in order to understand attitudes towards family planning and ideal family size in Scotland.

## Key Findings from the Quantitative Study

### Family Formation in Scotland

Table A.1 below shows the average current, expected and ideal number of children in Scotland, as well as a percentage breakdown. The results of the survey showed that people in Scotland are more likely to not have any children currently, or to have two children. A third of respondents reported having no children (32%), followed by those with two children (29%), one child (16%), three children (13%) and four or more children (9%). The average current number of children is 1.69.

The average ideal number of children in Scotland is 2.08. Almost half of respondents reported wanting two children (45%), followed by those who wanted three children (18%). Sixteen percent of respondents did not want any children at all. This is substantially higher than the current average family size of 1.69.

The results show that a third of respondents planned to, or expected to have, two children during their lifetime (33%), followed by respondents who expected to have no children (21%). The least common answer was one child (13%). Even though the majority (77%) of respondents indicated they are not planning to have more or any children, the average expected family size (2.02) is significantly higher than the current average family size (1.69). This shows that family planning expectations amongst respondents compared to their current family size were directed towards expansion.

Table A.1: Current, Expected and Ideal Family Size in Scotland

	Current	Expected	Ideal
<b>Mean</b>			
<b>All (population)</b>	1.69	2.02	2.08
<b>Percent Breakdown</b>			
<b>1 child</b>	16	13	7
<b>2 children</b>	29	33	45
<b>3 children</b>	13	14	18
<b>4+ children</b>	9	18	13
<b>None</b>	32	21	16

## Fertility Gap

The results show that the mean fertility gap in Scotland is 0.39 for ideal-current family size, and 0.06 for ideal-expected family size. Table A.2 summarises the results.

There is a noticeable gap between the current and ideal number of children reported by the respondents, but fertility gap between ideal and expected number of children is very narrow. However, although the ideal-expected gap is closely aligned, breakdown by different sub-groups shows a more complex picture. This is discussed in greater detail in the section below.

Table A.2: Fertility Gap in Scotland (CI 95%)

	Mean	Lower	Upper
<b>Ideal-current Gap</b>	0.39	0.31	0.46
<b>Ideal-expected Gap</b>	0.06	-0.02	0.14

The closest match between ideal-expected family size was for adults who expected to have two children: 76% of these respondents also viewed two children as the ideal number. Sixty-one percent of respondents who expected to have no children said this was the ideal number.

Fertility gap was even higher for respondents who expected to have one child – just under half of them (48%) viewed two children as ideal. Only around a third of respondents (32%) who ideally wanted one child were expecting to achieve their ideal family size.

## Factors Influencing Family Size

Further statistical analysis was conducted to understand the fertility gap between the current, expected and ideal number of children across different groups of respondents. The evidence suggests that a range of factors could shape an individual's ideal or expected family size. Understanding these factors in regard to explaining *how* ideal and expected family sizes are decided upon by individuals is important for informing policy development to ensure that individuals have the opportunity to reach their ideal family size.

The core factors influencing ideal-expected fertility gap identified in the survey were age and relationship status. There was no significant difference in fertility gap between male and female respondents. Employment and income status were not found to be statistically significant factors affecting the fertility gap among respondents.

### 1. Age

The results showed that age was a significant factor affecting the fertility gap. Fertility gap (ideal-expected) appeared to be similar across all age groups, except for the youngest. Around a third of respondents aged 18-29 expected to have two children (31%), which is in line with other age groups (between 32% and 36% of respondents

in the remaining groups expected to have two children). However, respondents in the youngest age group were **significantly** more likely to expect no children at all (43%). Around a third (36%) of the youngest age group reported ideally not having any children.

The mean expected family size for respondents aged 18-29 is 1.27, which is significantly lower than other age groups. For the youngest group, those who preferred having two children expected to have them as often (both 31%), having no fertility gap.

Table A.3: Ideal-expected Fertility Gap and Family Size in Scotland by Age

	Current	Expected	Ideal	Fertility Gap
<b>Age Group</b>				
<b>18-29</b>	0.17	1.27	1.88	0.61
<b>30-39</b>	1.04	1.66	1.77	0.11
<b>40-49</b>	1.60	1.88	1.89	0.01
<b>50-59</b>	1.74	2.02	2.00	-0.02
<b>60-69</b>	1.80	2.06	2.17	0.11
<b>70+</b>	2.15	2.39	2.37	-0.02

## 2. Relationship status

Partnership was another important factor determining expectations of family size and fertility gap. Single people have a significantly higher fertility gap than other groups. The majority of respondents who were single (63%) expected to have no children at all, but only a third (39%) of them viewed this as ideal. The mean ideal-expected fertility gap for this group is 0.78, which is significantly higher than what the total population had experienced (0.06 mean). Table A.4 below provides a breakdown of fertility gap estimates by group.

Table A.4: Ideal-expected Fertility Gap and Family Size in Scotland by Relationship Status

	Current	Expected	Ideal	Fertility Gap
<b>Relationship Status</b>				
<b>Married</b>	1.96	2.30	2.20	-0.10
<b>Living Apart</b>	1.20	1.61	1.72	0.11
<b>Separated/Divorced</b>	1.90	2.19	2.13	-0.06
<b>Widowed</b>	1.76	2.02	2.22	0.20
<b>Single</b>	0.42	0.74	1.52	0.78

Overall, single respondents have a significantly smaller family size (0.42 on average) and a lower expected number of children (0.74 on average) than the total population (1.69 and 2.02 on average). The ideal family size is also somewhat lower for this group - 1.52 compared to 2.08 for the total population on average. Absence of a partner was a third most common reason for limiting family size identified in the survey (discussed in the next section).

Married, separated or divorced adults tended to have smaller fertility gaps compared to other groups. This variance shows that relational circumstances may generate distinct constraints, be it age, health, or any other factors that require further exploration in qualitative studies.

### 3. Gender

No significant differences in fertility gap were found across gender groups. Table A.5 below summarises the results. Men had a slightly smaller fertility gap, but the difference is not significant.

Overall, women were as likely as men to expect two children (34% and 33% respectively) and view this number as the ideal (45% of respondents in both groups). They were also as likely to prefer having no children at all (16% of respondents in both groups). However, it should be noted that men were slightly more likely to expect having no children at all than women (25% compared to 17%), but this difference is not statistically significant.

Table A.5: Ideal-expected Fertility Gap and Family Size in Scotland by Gender

	Current	Expected	Ideal	Fertility Gap
<b>Gender</b>				
<b>Male</b>	1.74	2.08	2.11	0.03
<b>Female</b>	1.66	1.98	2.06	0.08

### Reasons for Limiting Family Size

Respondents who indicated they would not have any or any more children were asked to give reasons why they chose this response option. Table A.6 below presents the five most common reasons for limiting family size.

Table A.6: Reasons for Limiting Family Size in Scotland

	Percentage (%) of adults
<b>Too old to have (more) children</b>	53
<b>Happy with the current number of children</b>	37
<b>Do not have a partner to have (more) children with</b>	12
<b>Cannot afford it</b>	11
<b>Health/medical reasons</b>	10

#### 1. Too old to have (more) children

The results showed that the main reason for limiting family size was age – over half of respondents (53%) said they felt like they were “too old” to have any or more children. It should be noted, however, that the results for the youngest age group are

not included due to a small sample size, and the sample was skewed towards older age groups.

Old age was reported as a factor in limiting family size by the majority of 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, and 70+ year-olds (55%, 65%, 68%, and 66% respectively). That was not the case for respondents aged 30-39, with only 14% indicating old age as a reason for not having any or more children.

## 2. Happy with current number of children

Another major reason for not having any or more children was satisfaction with current family size – 37% of respondents reported being happy with the number of children they already have.

Certain age groups were more or less likely to report this a reason. Half of respondents aged 30-39 and 58% of those aged 40-49 were happy with their current family size. This factor was notably less important for older age groups, with less than half of respondents within those groups stating this as a reason for not having any (more) children.

Relationship status also made a difference. Single people were highly unlikely to report this a reason for not having any or more children (4%). It was also a less prominent factor for widowed respondents, or those who were the surviving partner (21%), than the remaining groups. Nearly half of respondents who were married or in civil partnership (46%), respondents who were living apart together (47%), and those who were separated or divorced (43%) stated this as a reason for not having any (more) children).

## 3. Do not have a partner to have (more) children with

Relationship status did have a notable impact on family planning. Half of single respondents reported choosing not to have any (more) children because they did not have a partner (51%). People who are single were also the most likely group to report never wanting children (17%) when compared to those married/in a civil partnership/ living with a partner; separated/divorced; and widowed/surviving partner.

In addition, those who are single were more likely (12%) than those who were separated/divorced (2%) and widowed/the surviving partner (0%) to consider that having (more) children will have a negative environmental impact. Respondents aged 30-39 were also twice to three times more likely (18%) to report environmental reasons for not having children than other age groups. Respondents aged 60-69 were the least likely group to report it as a reason (3%).

Those experiencing financial difficulties were also more likely to not have a partner to have children with (23% and 17% respectively) compared to those living comfortably (3%) and doing alright (11%).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Participants were asked to self-report their financial circumstances. They were divided in the following groups: those 'living comfortably', those 'doing alright', those 'just about getting by', and those 'finding it difficult'.

#### 4. Cannot afford it

Financial constraints was another prominent factor in limiting family size. Not being able to afford to have (more) children was one of the core reasons given by respondents who were finding it difficult financially (27%), and they were the most likely group to provide this response. They were twice as likely to report not being able to afford (more) children than respondents who found it difficult to get by (13%) and thrice as likely than those who reported doing alright (9%).

Not being able to afford the cost of having (more) children was a prominent reason for respondents aged 30-39 (34%), but less so for older groups.

#### 5. Health/medical reasons

Health and medical circumstances for not having (more) children were an important factor for respondents finding it financially difficult (22%) and just about getting by (15%). They were more likely than those living comfortably (3%) and doing alright (6%) to choose this option.

Health and medical circumstances were more important for younger age groups. It was most important to respondents aged 30-39 (27%), followed by those aged 40-49 (15%). Other age groups were unlikely to report health and medical circumstances as a reason for not having any or more children.

#### 6. Negative impact on the environment

Finally, 9% of respondents stated that having more children would have a negative impact on the environment – which was the reason for them to not have any (more) children. Although environmental concerns were not among the most prominent reasons for limiting family size (listed in Table A.6), there are some notable trends that provide interesting insights.

Respondents aged 30-39 were the most likely group to be concerned with environmental impact. Eighteen per cent of respondents within this age group stated environmental concerns as a reason for not having any (more) children, compared to those aged 40-49 (9%), 50-59 (6%), 60-69 (3%), and 70+ (6%). Overall, environmental reasoning seems to become less important with older age, although it should be noted that it was not possible to obtain sufficient data on respondents aged 18-29 due to the small sample size.

Moreover, compared to those living in mainly rural and urban areas (8% and 6% respectively), respondents living in larger cities were substantially more likely to have environmental concerns as a reason for limiting family size (15%). Although the difference is not statistically significant, only 2% of respondents living in remote areas or the islands reported such environmental concerns over having (more) children.

## **Annex B – Report of Focus Groups and Interviews (Qualitative Study)**

### **Executive summary**

Scotland's population is projected to peak in 2028 and start declining thereafter<sup>9</sup>. As part of the delivery of its Population Strategy, the Scottish Government set out a cross-cutting programme of work focussed on Scotland's distinct long-term demographic challenges.

One objective set out in the 'Family Friendly Nation' section of the Strategy was to improve and update understanding of trends with regards to falling birth rates in Scotland. The Strategy was clear that Scottish Government celebrates families in all shapes and sizes. Equally, it set out that it is not the role of the government to make intrusive value judgements on issues relating to having children – emphasising these are of a deeply personal nature. Nevertheless, the Strategy set out the aim of increasing understanding around some of the drivers and changing norms which may have shaped the fall in Scotland's birth rate from 1.76 in 2008 to 1.31 in 2021 (according to National Records of Scotland).

While it is possible to gauge a flavour of views and attitudes to the above questions through survey data, this research sought to establish a richer and more detailed picture through a (mainly) qualitative approach. A total of fifty-three participants took part in the fieldwork. Six focus group discussions and twenty-three in-depth interviews were conducted between April and July 2022 (Note: prior to fieldwork participants were invited to complete a brief questionnaire, which provided some quantitative data – see Annex 5). Participants were aged between 18 and 45. The sample was recruited to include a mix of gender, Socio Economic Group (SEG), ethnicity, region and rurality. However, it does not aim to be nationally representative, and thus the findings from this report cannot be generalised to any wider population.

Participants were asked a range of questions relating to their views on having children – whether they wanted to or not, and for what reasons. They were also asked about their 'ideal' family size, and what factors may influence their ability to reach (or have already reached) this. Using available evidence, the research was deliberately tailored not to explore one single issue, but instead investigate a system of influences – spanning personal, economic, and societal elements – and how they interact together in decision-making.

The research showed that in this group of participants there is a gap in between ideal and expected family size, which supports previous research literature on the fertility gap (the difference between the number of children people would like to have and the actual number they end up having). The gap between ideal and expected number of children was greater amongst those not currently parents.

Most participants said they wanted children (in the pre-discussion survey only one person said their ideal was not to have children, and one said they were undecided). Over the course of focus groups and interviews some additional indecision about

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<sup>9</sup> NRS, 2022, Projected population of Scotland (Interim) 2020-based  
Available at: [Projected Population of Scotland \(Interim\) 2020-based, Report \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/projected-population-of-scotland-interim-2020-based-report)

wanting children was expressed, mainly among women aged between 30 and 40; however, this was a minority view in the sample.

The majority of participants made their decisions on having children based on their own personal feelings and values. Wider societal issues such as population profile, environment or religion were thought of, but alone would not be sufficient to influence the decision.

Most saw Scotland as a country that values families with children. However, some (mostly lower SEG), thought this was not the case, feeling that levels and availability of social benefits for families with children were limited.

*Some factors affecting decision-making were different for men and women. Women were more likely to discuss thinking about their fertility and having a limited window of opportunity to become pregnant naturally. Women were also more likely to say they experienced pressure to have children than men, and, for those aged over 30, that they could be judged negatively if they did not have children. There was a strong opinion amongst a few women that they were faced with a choice of having a career or children, which was not the case for men.*

Across participants the main barriers to having children in order of influence were: *lack of financial resources; inadequate maternity and paternity entitlement; lack of right housing; need to establish a career; and childcare costs.*

Other influencing factors included: expectations from friends, family and society; family dynamics; having a stable relationship; health and healthcare; world events; and life stage and lifestyle.

The main changes to attitudes towards ideal family size that were identified by participants included: greater social acceptance of not having children; delaying parenthood; smaller families; change in family structure; and cost of living being an increasingly important factor in decision-making.

Key enablers to achieving ideal family size were: financial support; more government-funded childcare; greater access to social benefits; more support for parents in the workplace; improvements in maternity and paternity entitlements; equality of treatment to women who return to work; and support in housing.

In conclusion, findings point to the complex interaction of multiple factors that shape views on having children. Some of these factors are heavily linked to personal circumstance – such as life-stage, relationships and family dynamics. Other factors, however, were linked to economic and social aspects of life which form an environment conducive to having children – the economy, the workplace, childcare, and housing. It is critical that the decisions of individuals are understood through this system of factors.

## Introduction

In 2021 the Scottish Government published its population strategy, *A Scotland for the Future: the Opportunities and Challenges of Scotland's Changing Population*. It discusses Scotland's demographic trends, their future implications, and a range of actions for delivery across different policy portfolios. The strategy identifies four 'building blocks' for a sustainable population, namely:

- A family friendly nation
- A healthy living society
- An attractive and welcoming country
- A more balanced population.

The strategy highlights Scotland's current record low birth rate and the need to understand the drivers shaping this trend. It sets out that while celebrating families of all shapes and sizes, and while it is always a personal decision whether to have children or not, it is important to understand views and attitudes that may be shaping long-term population change.

Recent research exploring attitudes to childbearing is limited. There is evidence to suggest that a fertility gap exists in Scotland<sup>10</sup>, although evidence is several years out of date.

This research is designed to provide up to date evidence on people's views of having children and on the ideal family size. It uses a mainly qualitative approach: in-depth interviews and focus groups with members of the public.

The overarching aim of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of views of having children, childlessness, attitudes to ideal family size, and barriers and enablers to achieving ideal family size'.

Specific objectives were as follows:

- Investigate general attitudes around having children in Scotland and their drivers
- Explore views on the barriers that people may face when planning to have children
- Explore enablers at the country-, societal- and family-level to enable people to reach their ideal family size
- Explore participants' views on their ideal family size, and how this relates to the size of family that they either expect to have or already have
- Explore how attitudes towards recent trends, such as climate change, delayed parenthood, and Covid-19, relate to decisions to have children
- Explore attitudes to and reasons for not having children.

## Method

Research was conducted between March and June 2022. The research was undertaken using a mainly qualitative approach: in-depth interviews and focus

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<sup>10</sup> Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2006. *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2005*

groups with members of the public. People recruited to the interviews and focus groups were also asked to complete a short online survey. A review of existing evidence preceded the primary research. The process started with an inception meeting with the Research Advisory Group (RAG), the outcomes from which were fully documented in an inception report. Project oversight was led by the Scottish Government Research Advisory Group. Research was undertaken by Progressive Partnership Ltd.

## **Ethics**

The nature of the subject matter has ethical implications as it could have potentially made some participants think of distressing personal events such as stillbirth, the loss of a young child, or experiences of childhood abuse and neglect. In focus group settings, there is a risk that participants may feel obliged to talk about things that they do not wish to share, or that they do not feel they can engage openly. There are a number of ways in which risk was minimised during the recruitment process and fieldwork:

- Recruiters were fully briefed on the nature of the research, target audiences, and the potential sensitivities to be aware of
- Recruiters fed back to the executive team any potential concerns and sensitivities relating to individual participants
- Anyone who had personal issues but wanted to take part in the research was offered the choice of taking part in a one-to-one in-depth interview
- As part of the pre-discussion survey exercise, participants were asked to list any subjects that they would prefer not to discuss so that moderators could avoid prompting them on issues that may cause distress
- Participants were made fully aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time: this is a GDPR requirement and was made clear to participants during recruitment and at the research interview/focus group
- Another potential concern was the term 'family planning' used in the title of the research brief as it has medical connotations that may be off-putting for some people. The phrase "views on having children and their ideal family sizes" was therefore used instead
- Impartiality of language/tone was a key criteria of topic guide design, with questions phrased in a manner to allow participants to feel accepted regardless of how they answer, and to allow responses at a general rather than personal level. Questions were assessed for impartiality by both Progressive and the RAG team

## **Evidence review**

The first stage of the study was a review of existing evidence. Findings from this were used to prioritise the audiences to include in research and to inform the development of focus group and interview topic guides.

The review covered a range of reports sourced from internal research papers provided by the RAG, which provided context and understanding of the existing evidence base. While recent research conducted at a Scotland-level was limited, evidence (referred to above) pointed to the existence of a 'fertility gap' with the

number of children people in Scotland would ideally like to have being lower on average than the number they expected they would have.

The review also explored potential biases that could affect research and should be considered during research design, data collection, and the interpretation of findings. A more detailed account of findings can be seen in Annex 1.

## **Fieldwork**

The following section details the processes undertaken during fieldwork which took place in April through to June 2022.

### Recruitment

Participants for focus groups and in-depth interviews were recruited using a free-found approach whereby recruiters targeted and contacted people by email and telephone who were suitable to participate from their extensive networks, or who knew someone who may be suitable.

A recruitment questionnaire ensured all information required to meet the agreed specification was collected; this included screening out people who had not even considered the subject of having children or who would prefer not to take part due to specific sensitivities around the subject matter. A copy of this can be found at Annex 2.

Participants were given background information on the research which explained its purpose, what their involvement in the study would entail, and the reason for data collection. To encourage participation, an incentive of £40 per participant was offered for taking part in a group or in-depth interview, with a further £25 for completion of a pre-discussion survey (see Annex 4).

### Pre-discussion questionnaire

Prior to the discussions taking place participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire, the aim of which was to gather some quantitative data relating to ideal versus expected family size. The survey comprised eight questions about the number and age of children participants currently had (if any), their ideal family size, and what makes this ideal.

Please note: as noted in the ethics section above, the survey also included a question about any sensitive topic areas participants would prefer not to discuss, to ensure they were not asked about these in their interviews/focus groups. The question was included as part of measures to identify potential vulnerabilities and avoid any potential harm to research participants due to the sensitivity of the research topic and is not included in the analysis of findings.

### Sample profile

In order to ensure good group dynamics and that participants felt comfortable talking openly, focus group composition was based on factors likely to be important in shaping views. Groups were split by Socio Economic Group (SEG), with participants

grouped by higher SEG (ABC1) or lower SEG (C2DE). Where possible participants were also grouped based on whether or not they had children. The research team considered a range of other factors in the recruitment profile including geography, gender, age and ethnicity. Details of the sample are below:

Table B.1: Sample profile

	Number of participants			Number of participants
<b>Parents/ Not parents</b>		<b>Socio-economic group</b>		
<b>Parents</b>	30		Higher SEG (ABC1)	22
<b>Not parents</b>	23		Lower SEG (C2DE)	31
<b>Age</b>		<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Aged 18-25</b>	16		Male	21
<b>Aged 26-45</b>	37		Female	32
<b>Urban/Rural</b>		<b>Ethnicity</b>		
<b>Urban</b>	37		White	43
<b>Small town</b>	7		Minority Ethnic	10
<b>Rural</b>	9			
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>53</b>			

The original plan was to include 51 participants in research (36 in focus group discussions and 15 in in-depth interviews), but overall a sample of 53 was achieved. The sample was recruited from across mainland Scotland and comprised a mix of people from different regions.

### Scope and limitations

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, the attitudes and opinions documented in the research cannot be generalised to the whole population of Scotland.

Participants were screened to ensure that people who had not considered the subject of having children were not included. The aim of this was to ensure that they would be able to answer questions about their decision-making on this topic. This means feedback from people who have not thought about whether or not they want to have children is not included in the findings.

Participants aged between 18 and 45 were included in the research. This age range was selected to target people considering having (more) children, or who have recently been making decisions about whether or not to do so. According to National Records of Scotland (NRS) the average age of mothers in Scotland in 2021 was 31, and the average age of fathers was 33<sup>11</sup>. It should be noted that as some participants were still considering having children, responses to questions about

<sup>11</sup> National Records of Scotland– Vital Events Reference Tables, 2021

ideal and actual family size may be based on intentions rather than definite outcomes for many and may be subject to change.

The sample included a spread across gender, SEG, ethnicity, region and rurality; however, it does not aim to be nationally representative. In particular, recruitment of participants for in-depth interviews was influenced by findings from early fieldwork, with some participant profiles prioritised for recruitment where data suggested experiences merited further exploration. For example, additional interviewing was conducted with minority ethnic mothers, and with parents of three or more children.

The objective of this research was to explore general social and cultural factors and therefore does not focus on personal and/or medical barriers such as infertility and adverse experiences of pregnancy and childbirth (e.g. miscarriage, stillbirth) as this was beyond the remit of this research.

Research took place during a time when the war in Ukraine was ongoing and the costs of living crisis had extensive coverage in the press. These issues may have impacted thinking about having a family as this may have heightened awareness of financial issues and/or global instability.

While qualitative findings provide a snapshot of views among the sample of participants we spoke to only, this type of research facilitates in-depth exploration of complex issues, and provides detailed insight into factors affecting participants' attitudes and decision-making in regards to family size.

### Analysis

All members of the research team were involved in qualitative data analysis to ensure data validity and quality of interpretation. This stage of research began with listening to recordings from interviews and agreeing on key themes. Prevalence of themes and strength of feelings expressed was documented by the research team as they emerged. Patterns, common themes, deviations from patterns and any factors that may explain these were noted, and all members of the project team reviewed, interpreted, and discussed the results of the data analysis before and during reporting.

Thematic analysis is reported by importance. If a point of view was given by one participant only it has not been reported. Where an idea was expressed by two or three people across the research this is described as a view held by 'a few'. 'Some' is used to describe opinions which are mentioned by more than a few participants, but which remain in the minority overall. Where an idea is mentioned regularly across interviews and groups the term 'many' has been used. If an opinion (or agreement with an opinion) is expressed by the majority of participants, the term 'most' has been used in reporting.

Prior to writing this report a presentation was made to the RAG outlining the report structure and emerging dominant themes. The rest of this document reports on those outputs.

## **Main findings**

The following sections report on findings from participants at the time of interviewing. The first section outlines the main results on ideal and expected family size from the pre-discussion survey that participants were asked to complete. The subsequent sections concentrate on the results from the focus groups and in-depth interviews and have been reported around the following topics: main considerations when having children in Scotland, enablers to achieve ideal family size and trends and attitudes on family formation.

### Ideal and expected family size

Research participants were asked to complete a short online survey between recruitment and taking part in interviews/focus groups. The survey consisted of eight questions which asked whether they had children (and, if so, how many and their age(s)); their ideal number of children, if any; and the number of children they expected to have in their lifetime.

As shown in Table 2.1 below, the ideal number of children (on average) across the total sample was 2.6 (ranging between 0 and 6).

Most participants said they wanted children: in the pre-discussion survey only one person said their ideal was not to have children, and one said they were undecided. Over the course of focus groups and interviews some additional indecision was expressed, mainly among women aged between 30 and 40, although this was a minority view in the sample.

During focus group discussions and interviews participants were asked what made their ideal number of children right for them. Reasons were often related people's own experiences of childhood and wanting to recreate these; for example, those from large families often wanted to have a large family themselves.

Those whose ideal was to have several children were likely to say they wanted to create a lively home atmosphere. Those whose ideal was to have one or two children were more likely to talk about making sure they had enough time and attention to dedicate to children.

Family dynamics, such as not wanting to have an only child in case they were lonely and wanting siblings to be fairly close in age, were also considered in discussions around the ideal number of children.

While participants were asked about their ideal, practical concerns and constraints informed thinking for many, ranging from some who considered convenience (such as the number of seats they would need to have in their car) and others whose ideal was based on their current financial, relationship and career status.

The average number of children participants expected to have was slightly lower than the average ideal number at 2.2. For those who were already parents the ideal number of children was on average higher (3.1), than among those without children (1.9). The average gap between ideal and expected number of children was greater

among those who were not currently parents: 12 out of 23 non-parents thought they would have fewer children than the number they would ideally like.

Table B.2: Ideal and expected family size by children/no children – averages shown

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>Total sample</b>	1.1	2.6	2.2	-0.4	53
<b>All parents</b>	2.0	3.1	2.9	-0.3	30
<b>All not parents</b>	0.0	1.9	1.2	-0.7	23

34 participants expected to have the number of children they ideally wanted to, and one had already had more children than their ideal number.

Out of 53 participants eighteen expected to have fewer children than their ideal number, all expecting to have either one or two fewer. This included seven people who, despite ideally wishing to do so, did not think they would have children at all.

While the sample size of 53 does not provide statistically robust data, these results are consistent with findings from the evidence review, which suggested that for many a fertility gap existed between the number of children people expected and wanted to have.

When looking at responses for different demographic groups within the sample, participants' expected number of children (on average) was slightly below their ideal number across almost all demographics, with the exception of those who were already parents and in higher SEGs.

Amongst parents both the ideal and expected number of children was higher among lower SEG than higher SEG participants. There was also a larger *difference* between the ideal and expected number of children (on average) for lower SEG participants. Conversely, among participants who were not parents, higher SEG participants were less likely on average to expect to have their ideal number of children.

Table B.3: Ideal and expected family size by SEG – averages shown

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>ABC1s (all)</b>	1.0	2.1	1.7	-0.4	22
<b>C2DEs (all)</b>	1.3	2.9	2.5	-0.5	31
<b>ABC1s (parents)</b>	1.9	2.4	2.4	0.0	11
<b>C2DEs (parents)</b>	2.1	3.6	3.2	-0.4	19
<b>ABC1s (not parents)</b>	0.0	1.9	1.1	-0.8	11
<b>C2DEs (not parents)</b>	0.0	1.8	1.3	-0.5	12

Women who did not have children were most likely to think they would have fewer children than their ideal number: only two out of 11 thought they would have the number of children they ideally wanted (including one participant whose ideal number of children was 0).

Overall, those aged over 25 were also less likely to expect to reach their ideal number of children than younger participants, particularly among those not currently parents.

The full pre-discussion questionnaire and additional data tables are included in annexes 4 and 5.

### Having children in Scotland: main considerations

There were many ways of thinking about the importance of having children, and people could not easily be grouped by the way they thought. However there were some differences by SEG and whether or not people have children.

Decisions were often influenced by participants' desire to recreate their own childhood experiences. That could relate to family size, economic issues, home ownership, parents' relationships, sibling relationships and many other factors.

It was common for participants to say they thought differently about their first-borns compared to subsequent children. Life stage, career and housing were given more thought by those planning their first child. Issues like childcare and family dynamics played a bigger part in the thought process for parents having subsequent children.

This section of the report describes the most common considerations when making the decision to have or not to have children. It comments on societal considerations, environmental and current affairs and financial considerations.

i. Societal considerations

Thinking about what having or not having children would mean for society was not something that was important for most. Most participants thought about children from a purely personal point of view and what it means to them and their family. Some did think about societal and environmental issues, but those thoughts were generally not strong enough to override a personal and individual choice.

*“To me it’s a personal thing, I would never think about how it affects anything else rather than the individual or the family that decides that they’re going to have kids or not.”* ABC1, no children, woman

*No, I think when it came to our kids, I never really thought of how many I would need to keep the place going. It was kind of I suppose quite selfish, if I’m being honest.”* C2DE, children, man

Higher SEG participants were more likely than those in lower SEG to think about the importance of children to society. Those who did think about this commented on the importance of having a broad population age-range, noting that workforces are needed to support older generations (especially in light of longer life expectancy). A few also commented on interactions between generations as being positive, for example discussing community projects which brought children and older members of society together, such as visits from local school children to care homes for the elderly. Some commented that it was important to keep society going and that would only be possible by having children. A few also touched on younger generations as evolving/developing society and enabling change.

In regard to Scotland as a society, many saw Scotland as a country that values families with children. This perception was based largely on the understanding of the benefits and support that are available, including family allowances, the baby box, learning and childcare and free school meals.

Many felt that society is geared up for families with children, for example in the availability of places designed for children in restaurants, car parks and play parks.

*“There’s a lot of things in place to help people and even things such as a government baby box, everybody is obviously entitled to just get clothes and changing mat. For people who don’t have anything that’s a lot and it really does help a lot of people.”* C2DE, children, woman

*“You’ve got play parks for children... You can go to the beach in Aberdeen and they’ve got a big space for kids – you can go on the little machines, they can play the games – so in general I think in society there is a lot of space and time for kids and for the younger generation.”* ABC1, children, woman

Views about whether children and families are valued in Scotland were better formed among those who had children than those who did not, many of whom were unsure.

A few commented on Scotland's progressive stance towards supporting families from a less traditional make up such as LGBTQ+. A minority mentioned maternity leave and the time off work that parents get as being a sign of families with children being valued, as well as something that non-parents miss out on.

However, some (mostly lower SEG) felt that families with children were not valued. Reasons given for this view were that levels and availability of social benefits were limited (examples given were benefits being capped at two children, low levels of poverty payments and difficulties finding social housing to accommodate a large family). A few pointed to the difficulties faced by those who are just above the poverty line and do not qualify for financial support.

*"They don't do anything to support families. All of their policies, or the vast majority of their policies, are there to, you'll have to excuse my language, screw us over for as much money as possible to make themselves rich."* C2DE, children, woman

While a minority did not feel Scotland values families with children, this was not described as an influencing factor in attitudes towards having children.

A few said society was changing, and that less value was placed on 'family time' than previously, influenced by a perception that more importance was placed on materialism than families in the media.

*"I don't think it is as much as say back in our parents or grandparents... you don't see a lot of family days and things anymore. Even when I was a kid we used to go to my grandad's every Sunday for a family meal, there's nothing really like that, I dinnae take my children to see their grandad... I think it's 'cause everyone's got social media, so you dinnae have to, you can see pictures of them!"* ABC1, children, woman

A few mentioned the need to have a good social network before having children, saying it takes more than parents to raise children. This included grandparents and other relatives, but also friends and wider communities. Parents said that help with childcare and more general support from these sources made a significant difference to how easy or difficult it was to raise children.

A few reflected on a modern society that was seen as putting children under too much pressure from social media to conform. Social media was described as heightening children's awareness of what others were doing or what they owned, leading to anxiety about their own lives in comparison.

*“It’s the sort of world you’re bringing children into. Even the difference from when I was younger. There’s so much more pressure. Social media, stuff like that. I think there’s so much pressure on children now to have the latest trends, to have the new iPad or the latest jumper and stuff. And I think people can be quite cruel, and I don’t remember it being like that when I was younger. So, I just think it’s a harder world for children to live in now.”* ABC1, no children, woman

## ii. Social Expectations

A social expectation that people would have children was mentioned frequently in the research. Some who had children said that they had been expected by family and friends to have them and the decision *not* to have children was not something they had ever considered. They were more likely to be in lower SEGs and/or minority ethnic backgrounds.

*“I think that just came from the pressures of you know, the elders in the family. And you don’t want to have your kids too late because they’ll be young and you’ll kind of be a bit old.”* ABC1, children, ME, woman

*“Here, women are much more in the sense, like, ‘Okay, my body; I want to pursue my career, I want to do everything,’ whilst back home – (I’m not saying that doesn’t happen) – it’s a very small percentage that it happens, where most of the time, women, if you marry, you just have kids. That’s just it; you’re going to have kids. It’s not a choice whether you want kids or not. So, I think here women have a lot more say on their body than back home.”* C2DE, children, ME, woman

Some parents with one child also described being asked when they would be ‘giving their child a brother or sister’ and feeling there was an expectation that they should have more than one child.

Participants who did not have children often mentioned pressure coming from their parents, who were hoping to become grandparents. One person related that his father had written an autobiography and dedicated a chapter within it to the fact that his son had chosen not to have children, depriving him of the grandchildren he wanted.

A few said they had felt more pressure to have children as their peers started to do so. Others were aware of the expectation in a more general way.

*“You often get made to feel quite guilty. I don’t know if anyone else has had this, but I’ve never been a broody type. I just thought I’m open to children, but I’ll know when I want them when I’m with someone that I love, and I’ll know. But sometimes you feel, obviously they’re not making me feel guilty, but it’s almost like there should be a guilt there or that you’re abnormal for not feeling that want.” ABC1, no children, woman*

*“I get it quite a lot with like “when are you going to give him a sibling?” You know what I mean, or “do you want a little sister?” Like I get that a lot, because he’s obviously five, so that’s what’s kind of going on with me right now, they’re always at me like “when you going to have another baby because he’s at school now”.... we are actually trying for another baby, so it makes me quite upset because obviously I’m kind of struggling at the moment with it. So it annoys me, more than anything.” ABC1, children, woman*

*“I think for quite a lot of people there is an unconscious societal pressure and I probably fall into this as well. Society and the world we live in tells us that it is essential that we have children. People’s biology does that as well, so I suppose that’s probably a big driving factor... I think you’re expected to have kids.” ABC1, no children, man*

iii. Environmental and current affairs considerations

Views on population growth differed, with some perceiving a drop in population while others perceived population figures to be increasing.

*“We’re overpopulated. There’s not enough nursery places, there’s not enough school places, there’s not enough hospitals, dentists. There’s not enough of everything to go round to keep on producing at the rate that people are producing.” ABC1, no children, man*

*“If we keep reproducing, is there actually going to be a sustainable planet there for future generations? And I think we’re producing at a rate that’s not sustainable. So, that concerns me slightly in terms of what is actually there. We’re not doing anything about it just now, so I wouldn’t want to bring a child into a world that’s not going to survive, which I know is quite heavy-hitting, but it is something I think about.” ABC1, no children, man*

Some (mostly in higher SEGs) felt that concerns around the future of the planet were likely to be deterring people from having children. They described concerns over bringing children into a world where the future was uncertain, and contributing to perceived global over-population. This view was more likely to be expressed by those without children and was often also framed in terms of what ‘others’ may take into consideration rather than being important for most participants personally. This alone would not be enough of a reason not to have children for most, but was a strong influence for a few.

A few were dismissive of those for whom climate change was a consideration, saying concerns about the planet were 'far-fetched'.

*"Maybe our kids will be okay, but actually their kids after that, but actually you don't know what the state of play will be, like aside from all the other stuff, like financial stuff or other disruption going on in the world, the actual environmental thing, that's just going to always keep getting worse. You think, well, at some point people will start thinking, "I don't really want to leave people behind knowing that that's what they've got to deal with" kind of thing."* C2DE, no children, woman

*"For people who are inclined that way, which is fair enough, everyone's different, I think a lot of that for the climate change side of thing would be an issue for them. But because I'm personally not that way inclined I couldn't tell you about that."* ABC1, children, man

A few reflected on the impact of world events. War in Ukraine was mentioned as something which contributed to feelings that the world was not a safe place to bring children into.

*"Just like the big, bad world. Everything going on now, it just seems everything's getting worse. It's quite scary for me, having this six-week old wee boy, I think what kind of world is he going to grow up in, you just wonder how bad it's going to be, the way things are going just now."* ABC1, children, woman.

Most did not see the Covid-19 pandemic as an important factor in decision-making about having children. Some mentioned the pandemic as an example of negative pressures that can be placed on children, but this was not a strong deterrent to having children. A similar proportion said that Covid-19 had changed working patterns in favour of parents, making parenting and working more flexible and manageable.

### Personal considerations

#### iv. Influence of age

Participants in their early twenties had typically not given as much consideration to whether or not to have children as older participants. Women in their thirties had often given more thought than others to having children due to biological influences and fertility which focused their attention. Those in their thirties were also often further into developing their careers (more so for higher SEGs) and the thought of fitting children into their lives was higher on their agenda than it was for younger people. Those in higher SEGs were more accepting than those in lower SEGs of having children in their late 30s and their 40s. Those who had not planned their children were more likely to be in their twenties than in their thirties or older.

v. Influence of religion

The subject of religion was rarely mentioned as an influencing factor. A small number of people mentioned the influence of Catholicism on the larger size of their family growing up that had an indirect effect on their thinking now, influencing them to want a large family for its own sake rather than religious convention.

Those who said religion influenced their thinking tended to be from minority ethnic backgrounds. One mentioned the importance of the Islamic belief that finances should not influence the decision to have children. A few women mentioned the influence of being in a Muslim family and it being expected that they would have children. One mentioned that as a Christian, five children would be the ideal to create an overall family size of seven, the number of completion.

*"I'm Muslim, so when you're in a Muslim household, you're supposed to get married and then have a baby. You need to be married before you have sex with somebody. I did it the opposite way; I fell pregnant and got married later on."*  
C2DE, children, ME, woman

*"Well, I'm a Christian, and obviously seven is the number of completion, so if you have five children and then me and their father, that's seven of us. So, that's why I've always had five; I just felt like... Yeah, it's the number of completion, and doing my research as well, I've seen there's so many nice cars that are seven seaters as well."* C2DE, children, ME, woman

*"It does influence it quite a lot. I have grown up in a Christian household and there's a lot of references that you hear from Sunday school and as you get older and start listening to preachings that are very family-orientated, so it's hard to not put God into everything to do with family, in terms of... You know, from marriage, you're quoted scriptures about the man respecting the wife and the wife seeing the husband as their Lord, and then the whole marriage, the man is the head of the household and, you know, the importance of a father figure, and the importance of having a mother there being nurturing, and how the two cohesively can work really well together in terms of raising a family."* C2DE, children, ME, woman

vi. Influence of gender roles

Some factors affecting decision-making were different for men and women. Women were more likely to discuss thinking about their fertility and having a limited window of opportunity to fall pregnant naturally. For some, being physically able to conceive coincided with a time in their lives when they were developing careers, which added a further complication to decision-making. There were some comments that a break could be damaging to career progression, and many women felt it was assumed that it would be women and not men who take time out of their career to have children.

Among women who chose not to have children or who had not yet had them, many felt they were judged as being odd, uncaring, unloving or incomplete, and as needing to justify their situation. This was not the case for most men interviewed. This caused

distress for a few women who were angry about being judged, and stress for a few who did want to have children but had not had them yet.

*“Having a child isn’t everybody’s happy ever after. And I think some people struggle to get their head around that, that maybe some people don’t want to have children. It doesn’t mean that we won’t be happy and content.”* ABC1, no children, woman

*“I’m 42, so I think people just assume that I must be married, and I must have children, so then you say, “oh, no, single” and just like that, “I’ve got a wee Frenchie” and they’re like “oh, just a dog?” And they just don’t think that you wouldn’t want children and why would you not want to be married and why would you not want to have children.”* C2DE, no children, woman

*“I like got married a few years ago, I have been on the receiving end of those sorts of comments, “oh, it’ll be you next”, “oh, when’s that happening?” You know, you’ve got that expectation.”* C2DE, no children, woman

*“I think if it’s a man who doesn’t have any children, “oh, that’s fine, he’s maybe a bit of a Jack the Lad” or he’s maybe walked away or whatever. But I think sometimes if you say like you’re in your 40s, you say, “no, I don’t have any kids” before you’re even able to say, “never really wanted them” or whatever, they go “aw” as if like “oh, poor you.”* C2DE, no children, woman

While a few men felt an expectation from their families to have children, they did not experience the pressure to have children that women did. Many women who were in stable relationships said they regularly face questions about when they were going to have children. Some described these questions as feeling intrusive, considering the subject to be a private matter.

Some men placed importance on having a male child, and for some the arrival of a son marked the end of a need to try for more children. Many men and women wanted to have children of each gender. Some said that legacy and continuing the family line was important to them.

## vii. Health

While the focus of this research was not to investigate health reasons behind choosing to have children, some participants did raise this issue.

Health, mental health, and birth experiences were not mentioned as key factors in decision-making among participants who had not had children. However, some parents (mostly mothers), described negative experiences of giving birth. This made them hesitant about having more children.

Two minority ethnic participants described inequality in the healthcare system, one while giving birth, the other in perinatal mental health. As a result, three more minority ethnic women were recruited and this issue was explored further. While it was not an issue for other participants, this point is worth noting as a potential issue that minority ethnic women face.

*“The information about mental health isn’t aimed at black people after they give birth, or have a miscarriage and stuff like that.” C2DE, children, woman*

*“Because just thinking about it, as a black woman, knowing the health inequalities, is fear that comes to the back of your head when you have children.” C2DE, children, woman*

#### viii. Unplanned pregnancies

A number of parents had unplanned children. Some had not given any thought to having children before becoming pregnant, and others had expected to start a family but later in life. It was more common for unplanned children to be first-borns than subsequent children.

The decision-making process for these participants was accelerated, and once they had decided to go ahead with pregnancies, the main considerations were mostly practical preparations. Living situation was typically a priority. For some this was about deciding what arrangements would be with a partner they were not living with at the time; others focused on moving out of accommodation that was not suitable. Most described looking for information about maternity/paternity entitlements and what to expect during pregnancy. Most also said they had spent time assessing their finances, though some said that their outlook once expecting had been that they would ‘make it work’ rather than any firm planning.

A few had larger families than planned due to multiple births. While these parents talked of the additional struggle that brings in terms of expense and time given to parenting, they were happy to have had multiple births.

#### ix. Relationship and emotions

It was important for many to be in a stable relationship before having children. Parents were more likely than non-parents to say this. The importance of relationships was magnified for some single mothers who had unplanned first children and were contemplating more children.

For a few single women in their 30s who did not have children, relationship status was a key factor in their decision-making. These participants said they would only want to have children if they were in a couple with someone they thought would be a good parent. Some did not expect this to happen because of their age, i.e. they thought they were unlikely to be in a suitable relationship before their fertility declined.

The idea of receiving and giving unconditional love was a strong influencing factor for many. In a few cases the possibility that a child could save a relationship was mentioned as being a driving force to have children.

*“For me as a parent I wouldn’t want to take away from my own child by becoming a single parent to a second child. Or that risk of it happening or whatever else. Whoever wants me to have their kids, they have to really make that pledge and that promise to me and my child. Through marriage and just be 100 percent there for us.”* C2DE, children, woman

A few stressed the importance of wanting to have children, saying that if this was not the case it was likely to have a negative impact on the child. These participants remarked that some people had children without making a considered choice.

A minority mentioned that they did not want to compromise their current lifestyle in order to have children. They associated having children with having a less busy social life, not being able to be as spontaneous, and having less disposable income.

*“I would need to drastically change my life altogether to be able to have a child and maintain the same kind of lifestyle.”* ABC1, no children, man

Life stage was voiced by a few as being important in decision-making. These participants (who tended to be in higher SEGs) said that until milestones such as university/college/travelling/getting a job had all been achieved it was not the right time to have children.

#### x. Family dynamics

Some talked about family dynamics and wanting a family that reflected their experience of having many siblings, of wanting siblings to be fairly close in age and of not wanting to have an only child. These views were more likely to come from parents than non-parents.

Those brought up in large families often wanted to have a large family themselves. They often talked about the comfort and joy of having lots of siblings while they were growing up, and said they wanted to recreate this for their children.

Some participants from minority ethnic backgrounds talked about how important family was to their heritage (African and Asian) and for some there was a cultural expectation to have children soon after getting married. A few from minority ethnic backgrounds commented on the experience of living with relatives when they first got married. They said that this environment had influenced their decision to want a large family.

*“I have a big family, in general, and I’ve always wanted to have a family of my own, one day. I think sometimes when you look at your family you think “I want my family to be like that someday”.* C2DE, children, ME, woman

*“I grew up in a big family ... Even though I’ve only got two other sisters, we grew up with loads of cousins and people around us in the house. Yeah, I’ve just always grown up with loads of family around me, that I’ve just always wanted that for my*

*children. I just want them to be in a house where they have so much fun because there's so many of them and their friends."* C2DE, children, ME, woman

*"So, we want them to grow up together and have someone to play with all the time and be best friends sort of thing throughout the rest of their life. So, it was more of just being a sibling more than anything else, I suppose. It was the main factor of having a second one."* ABC1, children, man

### Financial considerations

The biggest influence on people's decision-making was financial. Financial concerns that were mentioned included having enough money to fund the initial cost of baby equipment (this was a particular concern to those having multiple births), as well as long-term costs of feeding, clothing and looking after children. A few also mentioned wanting to have enough savings to support their children into adulthood, for example helping them to buy a home. Others talked more broadly about struggling to get beyond earning a minimum wage and how this made them concerned about having children. The majority were concerned about immediate and short-term costs. Those who had children were more likely than those who did not to mention finance as an issue to consider. Money was a concern for most participants.

Lack of financial resource was enough of an issue alone to make people delay or decide against having children. Conversely, a windfall of money would be enough for some to increase their likelihood of having (more) children.

Issues related to the economics of having a family and reported in this section include maternity leave, home ownership, career and childcare.

*"Money is always the biggest driver, and I know it's the biggest driver for me at the moment because I've always been in low-income jobs, you know, when you're earning a living wage for years upon years, you kind of sit there and think to yourself, can I really afford to do more?"* C2DE, no children, man

*"I guess the financial thing is linked to everything else, because if you can't financially bring a child... Like I couldn't give up my work and spend time with a child. So, I would need to go straight back to work as soon as I could, and then, obviously, what's the point?"* ABC1, no children, woman

### xi. Maternity and paternity leave

Maternity leave entitlements were often considered in decision-making around having children and when to have them. However, this was less likely to be the case among people who had given less consideration to whether or not they want to have children. Many felt that the amount of time on full or close to full salary was too short, and statutory maternity pay was also thought to be too low by some. This was discussed in most detail by parents, but was also mentioned by those who did not have children.

Maternity leave entitlements were an issue for those in both higher and lower SEGs. It was a very strong influencer for women, more so than men. A few women described how they had calculated the affordability of having a child in light of the maternity leave they would get.

Maternity leave was also of particular concern to a few single parents who said that statutory maternity pay was not enough to live on, on a single wage.

*"I just wanted to have a little bit of savings aside just to make sure the mortgage was paid and like I say, we could support ourselves from, obviously... In my work you get paid for three months and then you would go into the statutory maternity pay. So, it was just to make sure that we could live off of that." ABC1, children, woman*

A few mentioned the inadequacy and inequality of paternity leave. For many fathers it meant having just two weeks off which was thought by both men and women not to be long enough for the father to bond and adjust to a new baby. Women thought it was not a long enough period to provide support. Some who worked in corporate settings had longer leave and could share maternity/paternity leave with their partners. Those working in small companies or doing manual work said they were not likely to have any more than two weeks off.

A few noted that support for mothers was not built into society, seeing limited paternity leave in most workplaces as an example of this. One participant said her doctor had told her it would take six to eight weeks to recover physically after a 'normal' pregnancy, during which time they should rest. She noted that two week paternity leave allowances meant that many women may have to do without support for most of that time, and that there was no provision for those without a partner.

#### xii. Home ownership/stability

For many, financial stability was linked to housing and the home environment. This was translated by some (especially in higher SEGs) as the need to own a large home before having children. It was important for some that each child has their own bedroom. For others, the priority was to move out of a smaller living space such as a flat. Not all were focussed on home ownership: for some (usually lower SEGs) it was about having stability and not being vulnerable to eviction.

*"House would be another one, you know, we're fortunate, it's a three bed house with a garden and a garage and drive and that, in a nice area, and it's in the nice school, so these are all factors I think for people." ABC1, no children, man*

*"I think probably a cross between finances and a house because when we had our first, we only had a two-bedroom flat. It was big enough for the three of us; but when our second kid came and there was four of us, it was like, "Okay, at some point, this is going to be too small." And, you have to then think, "Wait, do I have the finances to get something bigger?" and "How am I going to get them?" and all that kind of stuff. And then, obviously, you've taken into account childcare and all*

*the other things that can affect your finances, so that was probably one of the biggest things for us.” C2DE, children, woman*

For a few, providing a positive home environment for a child meant living in an area where they felt their children could live safely. Access to facilities such as parks was mentioned by these participants, but also the importance of living in areas where rates of crime and social disorder were low.

*“The area that I lived in. It’s not the best area to live in, and we moved from the worst area in the area to one of the better areas. That made a big difference actually, having neighbours around you that didn’t smoke weed constantly and didn’t break things and steal tyres off your car. I know it sounds like really silly, wee things, but it’s all those wee things, things like they’ll just open their front door and chuck their rubbish into your garden because they don’t care.” C2DE, children, woman*

*“There’s a park just like 150 yards down the road for my kids to play in, and there’s a wee local shop that doesn’t get held up at gun point every other weekend. It’s nice to have that security.” C2DE, children, woman*

Some minority ethnic respondents claimed that having a large house where children do not share bedrooms was not their expectation or experience. A few minority ethnic participants commented that housing location was the most important factor for them, and in particular, living close to family and community networks. Location was more important than property size or tenure.

### xiii. Career

Having an established career or good job was important, and a precursor to having children for many.

Working women talked about how a career break due to having children would mean they would need to be careful not to lose the position they had spent years building up in their workplace. There was a strong opinion amongst a few women that having a child could mark the end of career progression. Some felt it was a case of having to make a choice between having a career or children. This was particularly true of ABC1 women who were not parents.

Men did not voice concern about having to take a career break, but many were concerned about the need to get a good job before having a child in order to feel financially stable. A few (lower SEG) men talked about the long hours they worked and needing to have a job that allowed them family time before having children.

*“For me I always wanted children. But I think in society for a woman I feel you almost need to choose but it’s kind of either you have a family, or you focus on your career. You can’t kind of have both.” ABC1, children, woman*

“Jobs. I mean my job at the moment, the hours aren’t very sociable for a family, you know, I start in the morning, sometimes I can get in after 10 o’clock at night. You know, you’re out all day and it’s not a 9 till 5.” C2DE, no children, man

#### xiv. Childcare

Many talked about the cost of childcare. This was of more importance to parents than non-parents. However, it influenced the thinking of non-parents who were aware of friends spending large amounts of their income on childcare. It was of importance to those in lower SEGs because their pay would only just cover the cost of childcare, but it impacted on those in higher SEGs who were working full time as well. Childcare was also of particular concern to those who did not have a close support network around them. Childcare costs were seen as a potential barrier to having children for many.

*“I know friends of mine who, her and husband, have got really good jobs. They are, I would say, both of them over 50k in salary, and they’re just burnt out because they’re having to obviously work more to provide for childcare. And that builds resentment in society, because I see that they resent people who have ended up with a child, and they don’t have to pay for childcare.”* ABC1, no children, woman

*“I tried to go back to college when my wee boy was a couple of years old, but unfortunately because myself and my partner, we both worked so we’d get a good income, we weren’t getting any support from the college or anything for childcare and we physically couldn’t pay for that when I was going to drop my job, I’d be a full time student. It was coming to about £1000 a month for childcare and we were like “we can’t do that and pay for a house and everything else on top of it”. So I always wanted to do nursing or midwifery and I just, it’ll not be any time soon I’ll be able to do that now.”* ABC1, children, woman

Women were particularly focused on the issue of childcare and a few mentioned that it is women rather than men who take on the biggest share of responsibility for organising this.

*“I feel like it does automatically always fall to the women in terms of organising childcare and stressing about that sort of things, you know. I don’t think your partner or anything means it. It just automatically is sort of assumed that it would be down to you to sort it out.”* C2DE, children, woman

## Enablers to achieve family size

As seen in the previous sections, there were many factors which influenced participants' views on family size. Towards the end of the interviews and group discussions, participants were asked to comment on what could be better and make it easier for people to have the number of children they wanted. Reflecting a sample which included a majority who had or wanted to have children, suggestions were primarily focused on enablers that would allow people to have (more) children.

To a large degree, comments focused on things that could help overcome the barriers they had identified when discussing their decision-making process. The following section reports on enablers in in order of popularity:

- Economic constraints and enablers
- Government-funded childcare
- Benefits
- Housing
- Social enablers

### i. Economic

Economic factors were the most important consideration when discussing planning a family. Unsurprisingly, financial support was the factor most likely to be mentioned when participants were asked what would make having the ideal family size easier. This issue was of concern to many. It impacted participants from different socio-economic groups, and affected those with and without children.

Many made comments on the current state of the economy and how that was set to get worse. The general cost of living, fuel, and food were main concerns. There were also comments on inflated housing costs making it harder for people to buy property, impacting people's desire to have children.

A few participants mentioned that economic hardship meant that some families had to choose whether to 'heat or eat'. Some described just managing financially, but not being able to absorb unexpected costs. Others talked about only just managing to afford after school activities such as swimming and gymnastics.

The view that economic hardship is set to last and that this is likely to have a negative impact on the number of births in the future was expressed by several participants. Finances were expected to play an ever-increasing role in decisions about family planning.

*"I think we're marching into a horrific recession right now. Cost of living is through the roof. We're getting told there's going to be another increase in the cost of gas and electricity in the winter, bills going up another £900. People can't afford that and unless there's a big political change, it's not going to happen."* ABC1, no children, man

*"When you're looking on the TV and you're seeing it on the news, that people are having to choose between having gas and heating or feeding their kids. I think that's putting people off. Because they think, if I can't heat my home and feed my child, why would I have a child? I can't afford those basic necessities that a child needs. That we all need. I think it's just, yeah, it's like everything. I think it all boils down to money and finances."* ABC1, children, woman

*"Even just things like the North Coast 500, I'd love to be able to do that. But the cost of fuel is just too high. Even since yesterday, I had to put a new tyre on my car. It was like £75 for a tyre, so it's even these small things that just eat away at everything that you've got. Whereas, if you didn't have the problems of constantly having the money, money, money, money, you'd be able to do all the things you actually wanted to do."* C2DE, children, woman

A lower cost of living and having more money were most frequently identified as enablers to have (more) children. While participants from all categories (all SEGs and those with/without children) said this was the case, this was most strongly expressed by those in lower SEGs and with no children.

ii. Government-funded childcare

More government-funded childcare was the second most frequently mentioned issue that could enable people to have the ideal family size. Parents were slightly more likely than non-parents to mention this, and it was of particular importance to those in lower SEGs.

A few of those who were working felt penalised by the cost of childcare. These participants said it felt unjust that they were paying for childcare while contributing to the economy, but that others who were not working (and were therefore seen as being able to look after their children themselves) qualified for free childcare. A few mothers described counting down until their children were three and qualified for government-funded early learning and childcare. This included one participant who described 'wishing their toddler's life away' waiting for them to turn three. The most common view in the context of childcare was that an increase in government-funded early learning and childcare generally would support people to have children.

*“You literally... you count down until they are three, when you put your child into a private nursery. You cannot wait for that funding. ABC1, children, woman I don't feel particularly poor, I'm definitely not rich, but actually weighing it up, is it worth having kids if I've got to pay all that childcare out? But then I can't do my job in less hours. So you know, like people having to give up their career or whatever over potentially having kids because you think what's the point in spending all that money on childcare for somebody else to watch the kid? And I think that's really sad.” C2DE, no children, woman*

*“If you don't work for instance, you get funded hours to a private nursery when your child turns two. But when you work, if you have to wait until they are three. And that completely baffles me and really does wind me up. I think... I remember when my son went back to nursery, he was three full days. I think I was over 600 pounds, 650 pounds a month. Yet, there was kids in his nursery with parents that didn't work, and they were getting dropped off, and you'd overhear conversations that they were just away to clean their house. And I'm away to work so that I can pay for the nursery.” ABC1, children, woman*

A few specifically mentioned the need for government-funded childcare for children under the age of three. One mentioned the need to have free childcare across the whole of the year and out of school term-time. One participant proposed the idea of having a general caring allowance that could be spent in private nurseries or with relatives and friends.

*“This is very, very optimistic, but you get caring allowance. So, if you have, for example, you've got a couple and the husband takes care of the wife or the wife takes care blah blah blah, if you had some sort of babysitting allowance that I could pay my gran or my mum, that would be fantastic, do you know what I mean? If you've got a parent at home, you turn around and go well, I can get babysitting allowance and that will subsidise you for missing out on a Friday, something daft like that, because sometimes grandparents are taking a lot of flak to help with families.” ABC1, children, man*

*“Because obviously, up until the child's three, you don't get any childcare... And most people have to go back to work after a few months. So, I think if there was something from like before a child was three.” ABC1, children, woman*

### iii. Social security

A few from lower SEGs who had children recognised the government support that is already there and commented on how much difference that makes. However, others called for more benefits to be made available.

*“The government is quite good with support by giving us money for kids. If I didn't have that, I would be on my bum completely.” C2DE, children, woman*

*“Even though you do get support – which is amazing; not every country gives that kind of support that the UK does give mums and children; honestly, it's amazing –*

*but it's still not enough. It's really not enough. Because yes, you can use it and buy milk, buy diapers, buy wipes; maybe, okay, mums, you have phone bills, pay your bills; you're still broke. You don't have anything left."* C2DE, children, woman

*"Benefits for children do make a difference. My husband is working six days a week. We have food on the table the house is beautiful, and I can be with the kids at weekends. We are not struggling but we can't do what we want. The third I got no benefit but got another payment when we moved to Scotland. The benefits we get are good in Scotland. I don't have to pay for nursery and the school meals are free for the 10 year old."* C2DE, children, woman

A few described themselves as caught between earning too little to live without anxiety but earning too much to qualify for benefits, and felt that access to benefits should be increased. Others simply suggested an increase in benefits overall. One thought an increase in child benefit would support people to have the family size they wanted. Another said that there should be more support for parents of multiple births. One participant suggested a government-backed scheme that would support organisations to employ parents would be helpful. They felt this type of scheme would remove some of the pressures that working parents have when they have to take time off to look after their children.

*"More support for the working class. I find that we're in this sort of middle bracket, where you earn too much to receive any help, but your wage isn't enough to sort of... And, there's nothing for us stuck in the middle, if you like."* C2DE, children, woman

*"Obviously, I get child benefit and then you get a reduced rate for number two and in my case I get a reduced rate for number three. But we were saying, like going back to the nursery. You don't get any additional help when you have twins or multiples. You know, you don't get that... When you try for a baby, you're pregnant, you can't help if there's one, two, or three. You're trying for a baby and it's absolutely amazing having twins. I absolutely love it. But from that financial standpoint you have got so many worries as I say, because everything is double the cost."* ABC1, children, woman

*"I think more consideration from the government, like financial help for the parents and financial help for the companies who do employ people who are parents would be very, very much appreciated, because it would make things so much easier. You won't end up feeling bad about having to call in sick; you won't feel bad about putting your child to nursery for like full six hours from the time that they're a year old, because you can afford it, and you know they're well looked after."* C2DE, children, woman

#### iv. Housing

Issues connected to housing and home ownership were frequently mentioned. Many of the suggestions about support needed for housing were linked to the factors participants had talked about affecting their decision-making.

v. Social housing

Improvements to social housing was the issue most talked about in this context. This tended to be discussed more by those in lower SEGs but was also commented on by higher SEG participants. The main thing participants felt would help would be an increase in social housing. They also commented on the long waiting list and councils' intransigence in the application of rules. This included some feedback social housing policies should recognise the need for separate bedrooms before the age of ten.

*"The housing market needs to change, we're actually looking for a bigger place, we had to get a new sofa bed to increase the room, so we could get room for the twins. Trying to get a new house is impossible, trying to get a bigger place, or trying to get an exchange... everything's pushed back with the Covid. [We are] unlikely to get a new home until the boys are 10, children are sharing rooms but as now have a daughter wouldn't want to do this indefinitely."* C2DE, children, man

*"I think housing as well is a big thing... the housing market here [Edinburgh] has went crazy in terms of actually buying a property and renting, so on both sides it's very unaffordable now for a lot of people. Social housing I know here is quite a long waiting list if you are waiting on houses from the council so I think that could definitely be a concern... having some sort of support in terms of affordable housing – I know there's a lot of government schemes and a lot that's already being done but I think especially in Edinburgh at the moment it's quite scary."* C2DE, children, woman

*"I've seen people having to really heavily exaggerate something just so that they can actually get that attention, and get that help, and get that assistance for whatever they need. I think that's the one thing that I would love to see happen, just that collaboration with different councils together."* C2DE, children, woman

vi. House buying schemes

The cost of buying a house was mentioned by some (mostly in higher SEGs) as a barrier to having children. House prices were described as having spiraled, making it difficult for young people to get on the property ladder. Participants mentioned the benefit of having a government-backed scheme similar to Right to Buy and how that would help enable people to have their ideal family size.

*“The cost of everything’s going up, but wages aren’t going up to match that. So, it’s going to be even harder for people to afford to have children or take time out of work or give up on careers, get on the property ladder. And there’s not enough council houses to go round, so even with people with overcrowding and points and whatever the criteria is, they aren’t going to be able to get them soon, let alone normal people that just want a council house to have a family and do what your parents did. My family were brought up in a council house.”* ABC1, no children, woman

*“But I think money is a huge factor. I think finance is a huge factor in having kids. My friend openly told me the other day, “I would have another, but I can’t afford to”. And that’s what you hear quite a lot. Especially around my age. Because most people around 31, they’re still trying to get on the property ladder.”* ABC1, children, woman

*“I was going to say, some people are maybe having kids older because it’s so much to buy a house and if people are wanting to get a house for security and things, it takes so long to save up a deposit, but the Help to Buy schemes and all the schemes that are out there are obviously helping families to start sooner now which is a great thing.”* ABC1, children, man

Other issues mentioned connected to housing included one call for an increase in building of low carbon houses. A few mentioned not just the need to increase the amount of housing but to ensure all the necessary infrastructure was developed alongside.

#### vii. Workplace enablers

Support in the workplace was thought to be one of the factors that could help people to have their ideal family size. Comments made in this context focused on maternity and paternity leave, creating a flexible work environment in which parents, and in particular mothers, were supported; and removing discrimination against mothers in the workplace.

#### Maternity/paternity leave

As noted in the previous section, many thought current entitlements were not good enough. Improvements to both were suggested to support parents.

An increase in the time mothers can take off on full (or closer to full) pay, and an increase in the level of statutory pay was suggested. Some who were paid three months full pay and then received statutory maternity pay stressed this was not enough to live on.

Increasing paternity leave was thought to be another factor that would encourage couples to have the number of children they wanted.

Paternity leave of two weeks (as previously reported) was seen as too short: two weeks was not long enough for fathers to bond with their child or to support their partners.

Participants felt that entitlements should be more consistent across organisations, and that an increase in understanding and availability of shared paternity and maternity leave would encourage take-up of this type of leave. A few also called for parents to be given enough leave to be able to take time off together.

Two participants called for maternity leave to be based on a percentage of salary rather than a universal amount. Calls for improvements in maternity and paternity care were voiced by participants across all SEGs and by both parents and non-parents.

*“Some people are getting three months full pay or six months full pay, but there’s a lot of people that don’t get that. Even when they’re sick, you don’t get paid for the first number of days potentially. So, probably trying to encourage workplaces to change their policies. I know that’s a very difficult thing to do but trying to encourage them somehow to support people would be a good step in the right direction.”* ABC1, children, woman

*“I felt like I missed out on loads of stuff because you’re straight back to work, or it feels like you’re straight back to work. So, you’re kind of back to whatever the job is you’ve got, and then, you’re missing a lot of stuff in the house and all that kind of stuff. So, you miss a lot, and then all the pressure’s obviously on your wife because they’re in the house for the full six months or a year, depending on what they take.”* C2DE, children, man

*“Maternity pay is definitely a substantial difference to the sort of income that you’re used to if you work full time prior to it. I think if I hadn’t had as much support from family – I don’t know if it’s an experience that would have been as comfortable. With the cost of living crisis that’s going on at the moment it definitely will be a factor for many families or single women expecting, it definitely will be something to think about for them... In an ideal world as much full pay as possible before dropping down to that statutory level, but the statutory should even be a percentage of your salary, or sort of capped if you’re on a higher salary.”* C2DE, children, woman

### Flexibility in the workplace

Many felt there was need for an increase in flexibility in the workplace. This was a particular issue for parents who had experienced a lack of flexibility when needing time off for childcare, often working part time or being in a male dominated industry (e.g. firefighting) where parenting was not given much consideration and flexible work shifts were not an option.

*“My shifts are pretty much set. We don’t get any of that at all, so it was definitely my wife. It was a case of, “Well, I can’t get it,” so she went... Not so much part time, but she cut her hour rate down so that we would get to have things like two or three days in nursery, and then she would spend the other two days...looking after the kids. So, there was no kind of flexibility for me to say why don’t I work...I don’t know.”* C2DE, children, man

*"I think when I had my first son, obviously all those years ago, and I remember when I was coming back after maternity leave, and I could only actually get three days in a private nursery, and obviously I worked Monday to Friday at the time. I had a real, real fight on my hands to try and reduce my hours. I just felt like you're sort of penalised in a way, and it was almost like you were just an inconvenience then because you couldn't do the five days. But, I had absolutely no other option."*  
C2DE, children, woman

Many saw increased working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic as a benefit and hoped this would continue. Home working had allowed parents to fit in childcare duties around work, and had normalised working from home in workplaces where this may not have been considered before. Participants suggested the government could support employers to (continue to) be more flexible, although there were no ideas on exactly what form that support would take.

*"In terms of flexible working, the cost of living is rising and we have to work, both parents have to work and the thing with work can be more flexible, it just started to be more flexible now, that could be more supported by the government as well and I just feel that that would make it easier, it already has made it easier for many."*  
ABC1, children, woman

*"I would say since Covid, since the pandemic and all these companies finally realising that they don't need offices. If you work in pensions or finance, you can do your job from home. I think they have then seen that you can alter your work-life balance. If you're customer-facing and have to deal with them 9-5, that will pose an issue. When you're an analyst like myself, or a test manager like my wife, you can be flexible when you work. Since the pandemic, it has opened up a brand-new way of working and having a flexible lifestyle. The work-life balance thing that gets spoken about these days."* ABC1, no children, man

Some noted that more could be done to prevent discrimination against mothers returning to work after having a child. Such forms of discrimination included being sidelined and responsibilities being removed.

A few called for a better work-life balance and a four-day week was mentioned as a possible way to achieve this.

*"Well, "you can't be relied on because you need time off because your kids aren't well. You can't be relied on because you have a pregnancy brain, and you can't do this, and you can't do that." There's a whole lot of that. It's really bad. I guess it depends which industry as well you work in. For me, it's bad."* C2DE, children, woman working in care industry

*"I feel like people spend too much time working. That makes it really difficult for families to be families. If there was an ideal situation where there weren't as much pressures on you know like making money. And like all these societal pressures of having to work from nine to five. Having to do this. Having to do that."* C2DE, children, woman

One participant suggested the government should help support women into qualifications that could help them “work their way out of the poverty trap”, particularly single mothers.

viii. Social enablers

Various elements of support were mentioned that fell into a general category of social enablers. Collectively the elements formed a fairly large number of comments, though only a few participants mentioned each one. Some mentioned having support groups for mothers, culturally-specific support groups for parents and more information on available support.

*“When you have a baby and you go to like baby and mother, baby classes and stuff like that. I think there should be more funding to be able to provide cultural ones. Not just your basic whatever. Because there are practices that Islamic families do for their babies. Hindu families do for their babies. I think if there was more of a support network and we didn’t have to just do this stuff at home, it would kind of feel like we’re more integrated into wider society.”* C2DE, children, ME, woman

*“Support groups and getting to interact with people, there’s loads of families from different backgrounds, cultures and things like that, interacting with different families, if you have any issues, questions things like that.”* C2DE, children, woman

Changing attitudes were felt to be widespread, that can make being a parent more difficult. Examples that would counter those widespread ideas included:

- Promoting a greater acceptance of families with a less traditional makeup such as members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Working to counter a perceived pressure on women to be ‘super-mums’ with careers, perfect children and a perfect body shape (post giving birth)
- Reducing children’s exposure to consumerist pressures
- Re-instilling what was described as traditional family values associated with previous generations, in which children were seen as having fewer possessions, and being more respectful to adults
- A few called for greater social cohesion and more involvement from friends and neighbours in bringing up children
- Improving health equality for minority ethnic women was mentioned by two participants

Most of these elements were mentioned by a few participants each, usually without a clear idea of how to achieve them, but with a sense that doing so would help to make society an easier place for parents to thrive.

## Family formation trends and attitudes

Participants were asked about changes in attitudes towards having children, childlessness and family size. The following section reports on perceived attitudinal shifts and expectations around having children, and how these are experienced.

### i. Acceptance of the choice not to have children

Most agreed that acceptance of the choice not to have children was growing. This was something that was mentioned by some when discussing the importance of having children at the start of groups. It was confirmed by most participants when asked directly about this towards the end of interviews/focus groups.

*“If a woman or a man wanted a child themselves, that’s more acceptable as well, but I think it’s also more acceptable not to have a family, I think that you see that, that’s much more popular today than it was sixty years ago.”* ABC1, no children, man

*“There’s a lot more choice now for women, where we have a lot more control of our fertility and our sexual health and our like family planning. That kind of adds to the control of women being able to say, I don’t want kids, I want to abort this child, I want to have kids at this point, or whatever. I think that that’s very beneficial. It’s progressive.”* C2DE, children, woman

Many had said that having children had individual rather than societal importance. In keeping with that, not having children was described as a private decision that should remain in the realm of the individual or couple. As a result, participants, including those who felt strongly that parenthood was an important and enriching experience, reported respecting the choice not to have children.

The growing acceptance of not having children was considered by some as part of a wider societal trend of acceptance of differences/plurality in society and ‘you do you’ culture.

*“You should be able to do what you want and without anyone judging it, whether you want to have a baby at 15 or 34, it’s completely up to you and I don’t feel like anybody, whether you want to be married or do it yourself, it’s completely up to you, not what’s expected of you in society, just you do what you want to.”* ABC1, no children, woman

Whilst the decision not to have children was seen as increasingly accepted, it was noted that this was more likely to be the case among younger people than older generations.

Older people in society were reported as often thinking it was normal/natural to have children. Participants commented that many older people held an assumption that people would want to become parents, and that choosing not to do so was abnormal and a curiosity.

ii. Delayed parenthood

When asked how attitudes to families and having children had changed over time, many mentioned delayed parenthood as a trend. This view was commonly held across different demographic groups.

A few said this was linked to people wanting to complete higher education courses, or travel, before having children. Some also associated delayed parenthood with a desire to achieve stability (primarily financial stability) before starting a family. This was seen as more difficult, and requiring more time, than for previous generations, due to a more challenging economic outlook.

Delayed parenthood was linked by participants to another trend: that both partners worked in most couples. It was also mentioned that the timing of pregnancies was critical, as career interruptions can be potentially damaging to a woman's career. This was felt to be a reason behind women increasingly delaying parenthood

*"Some people are maybe having kids older because it's so much to buy a house and if people are wanting to get a house for security and things, it takes so long to save up a deposit, but the help to buy schemes and all the schemes that are out there are obviously helping families to start sooner now." ABC1, children, man*

*"Now some people are choosing to have kids a bit later, they want to make sure that they've reached somewhere, maybe reached their goals." C2DE, children, woman*

*"I know you need to be with certain companies for a certain amount of time to qualify for maternity leave and earn the money and things like that. So, if people are planning on having kids they will need to be with a company for a year, two years, and get that under their belt to then earn six months or nine months kind of thing. So, again, it's just another factor." ABC1, children, man*

In contrast, a few participants said that more people were having children at a young age (late teens/early twenties). Lower SEG participants were more likely to comment on this than others. Some felt these parents had not given enough consideration to starting a family, and some disapproval towards younger parents was noted.

*"I feel like a lot more young people are having kids. Skyrocketing basically. C2DE, no children, man*

*"I work with a lot of young girls in our job, like there's a lot of beauty therapists and things, and it is a very crazy thing that all of a sudden now they seem to think that if they're not getting on with their boyfriends or if they're all falling out, it's time to have a baby and that kind of thing.... you just want to say to them, "just stop and think, like don't jump into it and think that that's going to be like the plaster that's going to fix your situation." C2DE, no children, woman*

### iii. Families getting smaller

Many said parents were having fewer children than in previous generations. This was often discussed alongside delayed parenthood. Those delaying starting a family were seen as less able to have a large family due to biological factors. Many also considered the high cost of having children to be both the reason for delaying starting a family, and the reason for having fewer children.

Having children was described as more expensive than for previous generations because parents were expected to spend more on goods and activities. Several commented that children were increasingly expected to have separate bedrooms rather than share; to have new clothing, footwear, toys, make-up and technology items; to take part in a number of out of school activities; and to have expensive/elaborate parties. People also said that social media leads to people feeling pressure to spend more, as the things parents buy for their children is more visible.

*“Back in the day – my wife’s grandparents were both one of seven and eight. As years have gone by, it went down to four, three. There are people happy just having one child. Being able to have one, that would be great.”* ABC1, no children, man

*“I feel like now every mum is trying to compete with each other... I feel like now society is like so much about showing off... I feel like society’s creating like the pressure of parents to live up to that, whereas I feel like that needs to change because people just can’t afford it and it’s only going to get worse if you have girls getting their nails done for their tenth birthday, make-up parties... Like I feel like you’d be made to be the bad parent when your kid would hate you because you’re not doing what everybody else is doing.”* C2DE, no children, woman

*“When I was a kid, I shared a room with my sister right up until we were well into secondary school, and there was no problem, no issues. But now, people look at you like you’re an alien if you say your kids share a bedroom. They have to have a bedroom and a playroom and an extra... There’s all these rooms, and it’s like, ‘What?’”* ABC1, no children, woman

### iv. Non-traditional family structures

Many participants commented that the makeup of families had changed compared to those typically seen by their parents or grandparents, moving away from a traditional family with one mother, one father, and a child or children. The term ‘family’ meant different things to different participants, from household units of a partner and pets, to extended families of relatives across several households. As noted in relation to delayed parenthood, ‘stay at home mums’ were no longer considered to be the norm, and participants also commented that having children when not married was now widely accepted, as were single parent families. A few also mentioned a change in attitudes towards couples having children in same sex relationships, with greater acceptance of this also noted. Many who did not have children described their household as a family.

*“Back in the day the mom was at home with the children, the dad was out working and that was just normal. Whereas the way things are now both parents have to work to be able to keep things going with the cost of living rising, and it's going to rise even more so, you can't not work. So, families are, you know, both parents are working, from that point of view I think it's just become more acceptable to have less children and keep it more manageable.” ABC1, children, woman*

*“Decades ago, it was sort of the done thing that you would get married and have a child and the husband would go to work and you would be staying at home with the children. I guess it's changed in the sense now that not everyone is married before they have children – I know that always wasn't the case, but I think a lot more people are having children without getting married than before. Like I touched on before the individual wants and needs of women have changed over time. A lot of my friends do have children but a lot of them don't want to, I think it's just become more acceptable to not want to go down that traditional route of getting married, having kids and that being your sole purpose in society.” C2DE, children, woman*

Changes to old traditional family models were predominantly considered to be positive, with many expressing the view that individuals should be free to build any type of family they wanted. A few were concerned about a loss of 'family values' associated with traditional families in previous generations, such as greater respect for elders and eating meals together as a family unit, visiting grandparents and parents at weekends and spending time with family members.

v. Perceived increase of gendered pressure

Alongside the pressure to have children, some women described pressures related to being a mother associated with modern day living. These included an expectation on mothers that they should 'snap back' to their pre-pregnancy physique quickly after giving birth, an expectation that organising and accommodating childcare needs would fall to mothers rather than fathers, and increasing pressure to provide children with parties, activities and belongings, with social media often seen as a source of these pressures.

*"I get quite a lot of, "you look amazing for having twins". You think, "well what does that mean?" I feel like there's people... they say things to try and make you feel better. But then that kind of feeds into that pressure of a woman should snap back. And that's like, well we're not, our bodies have been stretched and they've been through hell and back. Do you know? I don't understand... I think there is a huge thing and obviously seeing lots of constantly... It's like a celebrity will have a baby. Next minute they're doing a weight loss DVD. And you're thinking, "oh gosh, should I be doing that?""* ABC1, children, woman

*"It's almost like the society is founded on the fact that mothers raise the child, like, I would say alone, in quotation marks. Because obviously, you're not technically alone. But that experience falls on us and therefore we're already creating an imbalance between the family unit or the relationship on its own. Because then the father is pressured to go and provide and protect. And the woman is pressured to stay at home and do that duty. Already there's that disparity."* C2DE, children, woman

*"That's one of my pet hates, like you go online, and do you know what I really hate? It's when you go on and it's been a birthday or something and they've got like every single thing that they've bought, and they lay it all out...."* ABC1, children, woman

Pressures around motherhood were described in tandem with pressures to have successful careers, particularly among higher SEG participants. Achieving both was described as difficult, particularly as some said time off work to have a child could have a negative impact on their careers. These competing pressures led to feelings of inadequacy among women who were parents and were cited as a deterrent among those who were not.

*"I've seen this thing online actually. I don't know if you've seen it. It's like a quote and it says, "The world wants mothers to work as if they have no children but raise children as if they have no job."* C2DE, children, woman

*"I think it clashes with the view of women being everything they possibly can be. It's almost like we're being encouraged to be the best career woman, the best wife, the best mum and also that woman that's keeping up with appearances and off in Barbados with her friends. And I think it's been great for us to be presented with more opportunities, but it's also felt almost like people that want to just live a quiet life and not have all that, it's almost like, 'What are you doing? Make something of yourself.' I just think there's a lot of pressure from different angles as well as opportunity. There's positive and negative there."* ABC1, no children, woman

vi. Family formation depending on financial considerations

A desire to be financially secure before starting a family was thought to be a relatively recent idea and not one that participants' grandparents or (in some cases) parents considered.

Many commented that continuing increases in the cost of living were likely to make having children increasingly difficult for those wishing to be parents. Uncertainty about financial security, and increasing expenses not met by wage increases, were commented on and were expected to mean many people may not be able to afford to have children in the future, and that family sizes would be likely to decrease.

*“With the current economic crisis... I wouldn’t want to be having kids right now. I think that we... If it doesn’t get better in the next five years, I think it’ll be horrifically bad for folk and if you’re bringing up kids in that, that’s almost cruel. You’ve got plenty of kids... The amount of kids that are having to go to foodbanks, that’s just not fair on them.”* ABC1, no children, man

*“I think family size might stay small. I think it will generally stay between... the average size will be between two and three kids. I don’t really see it going that much higher. Especially if the rate of inflation and economy stays the way it is going.”* C2DE, children, woman

## Conclusions and main lessons

Research findings for this group of participants support the theory of the fertility gap. Participants were clear that they consider decision-making around whether or not to have children and what their ideal family should look like to be highly personal and it is essential that any policies recognise the right of individuals to determine the size of their family.

There are many factors involved in the decision to have children that are highly personal, such as:

- Expectations from friends, family and society
- Family dynamics
- Life-stage
- Having a stable relationship
- World events
- Lifestyle
- Relationships

The Scottish Government is limited in its ability to influence some factors mentioned such as acceptance of less traditional family makeup, pressure to be a super mum, pressures of consumerism and social cohesion, all of which play a role in decisions on ideal family size.

While Scotland is recognised as a country that values families, for those who do want more children government (across devolved and reserved policy areas) could make it easier by focusing on:

- More generous family benefits
- Extending funded early learning and childcare provision
- Increasing access to benefits that some working parents are not entitled to
- More flexible working rights for parents
- More generous and gender-equitable parental leave
- Equality of treatment to women who return to the workplace after having children
- Equitable access to high quality healthcare
- More support for Help to Buy schemes.
- Social housing policies that recognise the need for separate bedrooms before the age of ten
- Improvements to housing benefit schemes

## **Annex 1 - Evidence Review**

The first stage of the study was a review of existing evidence. Findings from this were used to prioritise the audiences to include in research and to inform the development of focus group and interview topic guides. This stage provided a clear steer on where there were gaps in understanding of the topic, which helped focus the following stages of primary research. It was also used to inform the selection of groups for inclusion in the subsequent stages of qualitative research.

This stage of research took place in the last week of March 2022. The approach was as follows:

- The RAG provided a range of reports sourced from internal research papers. This was to serve as establishing a baseline of understanding for Progressive rather than informing the RAG. The research team summarised these as confirmation of understanding.
- The RAG team suggested desk-based research with a focus on participant biases. A number of potential biases and limitations relevant to undertaking research were highlighted in the review including social desirability bias, temporal validity and projected decision-making, and selection/participant bias.
- Identification of these potential issues allowed for steps to be taken to mitigate their possible effects and ensure they were considered in the interpretation of findings.
- In addition to this the research team conducted a media trawl of websites used by parents and articles written on family planning. While this was not representative of wider public views it provided some interesting insights into the social commentary and issues that might influence decision-making.
- The abstract, executive summary, conclusions or initial information from documents and articles were reviewed and prioritised, based on the extent to which the evidence addressed the research objectives.
- Quality of evidence was considered for the inclusion of reports in the review. All were recent and relate directly to the objectives.

The full evidence review has been provided to the RAG separately. A summary of outcomes is outlined below.

### **Avoiding bias in research**

- A number of potential biases and limitations relevant to undertaking research were highlighted in the review including social desirability bias, temporal validity and projected decision-making, and selection/participant bias.
- Identification of these potential issues allowed for steps to be taken to mitigate their possible effects and ensured they were considered in the interpretation of findings.
- A number of steps to overcome limitations/biases were outlined in the document, including stringent recruitment processes, clear definition of the

scope of research and impartiality of language/tone in topic guide design and in moderation/interviewing.

- All of the biases and limitations of research identified were be considered in the research design, mitigating actions taken to limit their impact, and acknowledgement of any potential impacts included in interpretation and reporting of findings.

### **Internal research papers**

- All the data reviewed supports the observations of a fall in populations figures.
- Factors influencing fertility highlighted by research papers examined included parent's family plans, relationship status, education and economic/job status and prospects.
- Wider macro-economic conditions, intergenerational values and cultural/social/religious norms were also found to play a part.
- Differences in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) across age groups and Socio economic groups were noted with TFR consistently highest for most deprived groups (from 2005-2020).
- All of the influencing factors identified were considered in research design.

### **Media review**

- Newspaper articles suggest that cost of living appears to be a major barrier for GenZ and Millennials who would love to have children but give lack of affordability as a major reason.
- Age, cost and lifestyle changes are key considerations according to YouGov.
- The review suggests there are positive decisions made about not having a family and restricting family size.
- There is an assumption across some parenting websites that having multiple children is a given and that once a first born arrives there is pressure to have more.
- All of the influencing factors identified were considered in research design. This included ensuring recruitment included: people aged 18 to 25 who have a desire to have a family, people aged 18 to 25 who have no desire to have a family, and parents of single children who have decided against having any more.

## **Annex 2 - Recruitment Questionnaire**

Job No: 10854

### Classification

Age		Gender		Location	
18 to 25	1	Male	1	Edinburgh & Lothians	1
26 to 29	2	Female	2	Glasgow	2
30 to 40	3			Aberdeen	3
41 to 45	4			Inverness	4
46+	5 – CLOSE			Other	5
Occupation of chief wage earner		Social Class		Marital Status	
Position		AB	1	Single	1
_____		C1	2	Married/co-habiting	2
–		C2	3	Separated/divorced	3
Industry		DE	4	Widowed	4
_____					

RECRUIT MIX OF AGE, GENDER, SOCIAL CLASS

### Interviewer's Declaration

I declare that I have carried out this interview in full, in accordance with the instructions and briefing material from Progressive Partnership Ltd.

Interviewer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Method of Recruitment

Face to face  Telephone

## Respondent Details

Name:	Address:
Email Address	
Phone:	Postcode:

START TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

*Introduction: Good morning/afternoon I am..... from Progressive, an independent research company, who is carrying out group discussions with people in your area.*

*We are conducting research looking to understand people's views on having children, their ideal family sizes, and how these views might have changed over time. This research is being conducted on behalf of the Scottish Government's Population Programme, which as part of its work, seeks to explore – through a variety of research and analysis - how attitudes and individual choices could be shaping long term trends, like demographic change, into the future.*

*This will involve taking part in a discussion with an experienced researcher from Progressive. We are keen to gain a wide variety of opinions and would be very interested to hear your views. This is purely for social research purposes and is not related to commercial activity in any way. Would you be interested in taking part?*

*Outcome:*

	CODE	ROUTE
Yes	1	Continue
No	2	CLOSE

*Before I start, I just need to give you a few details about the research.*

*The first stage of the research involves gathering some preliminary information about you such as age and gender, and also some initial questions about if you have or want to have children. This information is needed because we have been asked to speak to specific target audiences.. No personal information about you will be provided to any other third parties.*

*At this moment I just need to ask a few profiling questions to find out about you, as we want to invite a broad spectrum of people who live in the area.*

*The discussions are happening on \_\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_\_ and would last approximately 75mins. As a thank you for your time you would receive £40 + £25 for completing an online survey in advance of the group discussion / in-depth.*

*I have a copy of Progressive's privacy statement if you would like to read it.*

<p>Group 1 – Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> May @ 6pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social grades ABC1</li> <li>- Dependent children under 16</li> <li>- Mix of gender</li> <li>- Mix of age (all 45 or younger)</li> <li>- Mix of urban/rural</li> </ul>	<p>Group 2 – Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> May @ 7.30pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social grades C2DE</li> <li>- Dependent children under 16</li> <li>- Mix of gender</li> <li>- Mix of age (all 45 or younger)</li> <li>- Mix of urban/rural</li> </ul>
<p>Group 3 – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May @ 6pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social grades ABC1</li> <li>- No children</li> <li>- Females</li> <li>- Aged 30 to 40</li> <li>- Mix of urban/rural</li> </ul>	<p>Group 4 – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May @ 7.30pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social grades C2DE</li> <li>- No children</li> <li>- Females</li> <li>- Aged 30 to 40</li> <li>- Mix of urban/rural</li> </ul>
<p>Group 5 – Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May @ 6pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social grades ABC1</li> <li>- Mix of children/no children</li> <li>- Mix of gender</li> <li>- Aged 18-25</li> <li>- Mix of urban/rural</li> </ul>	<p>Group 6 – Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May @ 7.30pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social grades C2DE</li> <li>- Mix of children/no children</li> <li>- Mix of gender</li> <li>- Aged 18-25</li> <li>- Mix of urban/rural</li> </ul>
<p>In-depth interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 to be with men who have no children and are aged between 30 – 40. A mix of SEG.</li> <li>- 9 to be with women and men who fall into the profile of groups 1/2/5/6 and who are not comfortable taking part in focus groups</li> <li>- Must include women and men who fall into lower SEG and have 3 or more children in groups 6 &amp; 2</li> <li>- Must include a mix of those who do want to have (more/any) in groups across the sample</li> <li>- 6-8 people from minority ethnic backgrounds</li> </ul>	

SQ1 - Do you or does any of your close family or friends work in any of the following industries?		
Advertising	1	CLOSE
Marketing	2	CLOSE
Public Relations	3	CLOSE
Market Research	4	CLOSE
Scottish Government	5	CLOSE
None of the above	6	Q1a

Q1 - Do you have any dependent children aged 16 or under living at home?		
Yes, I have children living at home	1	Go to Q1
Yes, I have children, but they have grown up and left the family home	2	CLOSE
No kids	3	Go to Q2

Q2 – Thinking now about having children, which of the following statements do you MOST agree with?		
I have children and my family is complete	1	Go to Q3
I have children and hope to have more	2	Go to Q3
I have thought about having children, and hope to have them one day	3	Go to Q3
I don't think I'll have children	4	Go to Q3
I do not want children	5	Go to Q3
I have given absolutely no thought to having children at all, I'm too young to think about that	6	CLOSE

Q3 – Thinking now about in an ideal world and if you had no constraints to have (any/more) children, How would you describe your desire to have a(nother) child		
Strong desire to have	1	
Desire to have	2	
Not sure	3	
Desire not to have	4	
Strong desire not to have	5	

Q4 - Which of the following best describes where you currently live?		
City or large town centre	1	Urban
Outskirts of city or town/suburbs	2	
Small town	3	
Village or hamlet	4	Rural
Countryside	5	
Remote rural area	6	
Other	7	
Prefer not to say	8	

Q5 – Which of these groups do you consider you belong to?		
White		
Scottish	1	
Other British	2	
Irish	3	
Any other white background, please specify	4	
Mixed		
Any mixed background, please specify	5	
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British		
Indian	6	
Pakistani	7	
Bangladeshi	8	
Chinese	9	
Any other Asian background, please specify	10	
Black, Black Scottish or Black British		
Caribbean	11	
African	12	
Any other Black background, please specify	13	
Other Ethnic Background		
Any other background, please specify	14	
Prefer not to say	15	
Don't know	16	

Q6 - Have you ever attended a group discussion or taken part in a market research study recently?		
Yes	1	Q7 & Q8
No	2	Recruit

Q7 - How long ago did you attend this group discussion?		
In last 6 months	1	
In last 6-12 months	2	
More than 12 months ago	3	

Q8 - What was the subject matter?		

*If subject similar to this topic, close and do not invite*

Q9 - Which of the following statements do you agree with?		
I enjoy going out and meeting people	1	MUST CODE ALL 3 TO QUALIFY
I would describe myself as outgoing and enjoy chatting to people even if I don't know them well	2	
I am not afraid to express my opinions in front of a group of people	3	
I am a bit shy and get embarrassed easily	4	CLOSE

**\*\*Anyone that codes 4 please consider for an in-depth interview\*\***

Q10 - And finally, the group discussion/in-depth interview you have been recruited to take part in may/will be video and/or audio recorded. The session and/or recordings may be seen/heard by people who are employed by the client only to pursue the aims of the study and/or for training purposes.

You have the right to withdraw from the session at any time, for any reason. By agreeing to participate you are giving your consent for the session to be recorded and for the recording to be kept until the completion of the project. The recording will be destroyed within 1 month of the end of the project.

I agree to continue and participate	1	Recruit
I do not agree to continue and withdraw from the study	2	Thank and Close

**RECRUITER NOTE:**

PLEASE ENSURE THE RESPONDENT IS COMFORTABLE WITH PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH VIA ONLINE VIDEO (USING ZOOM PLATFORM). THIS INVOLVES HAVING ACCESS TO:

- INTERNET
- PC/LAPTOP/TABLET/MOBILE PHONE THAT HAS VIDEO AND AUDIO CAPABILITIES (e.g. built in microphone and camera or webcam)
- Please also make sure that respondent has an appropriate place they can take part (i.e. a quiet area within their house, respondents shouldn't be sitting in a car or a pub for example).

ALL INCENTIVES WILL BE PAID VIA AYDA. RESPONDENTS SHOULD BE COMFORTABLE WITH GIVING PROGRESSIVE THEIR E-MAIL ADDRESS AND SHARING THEIR BANK DETAILS WITH AYDA.

RESPONDENT CONSENT WILL BE ASKED FOR AGAIN WHEN THEY REGISTER WITH AYDA, BEFORE THE SESSION BEGINS.

CONTACT DETAILS IF RESPONDENT ASKS:

- Progressive Partnership
- Elise Livingstone [elise.livingstone@progressivepartnership.co.uk](mailto:elise.livingstone@progressivepartnership.co.uk)

Thank and close  
Check and classify

END TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Annex 3 - Sample**

**Table 3.1: Sample achieved in focus groups**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Composition</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>1</b>	10/05/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- SEG ABC1</li><li>- Dependent children under 16</li><li>- Mix of gender</li><li>- Mix of age (all 45 or younger)</li><li>- Mix of urban/rural</li></ul>	5
<b>2</b>	10/05/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- SEG C2DE</li><li>- Dependent children under 16</li><li>- Mix of gender</li><li>- Mix of age (all 45 or younger)</li><li>- Mix of urban/rural</li></ul>	5
<b>3</b>	12/05/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- SEG ABC1</li><li>- No children</li><li>- Females</li><li>- Aged 30 to 40</li><li>- Mix of urban/rural</li></ul>	5
<b>4</b>	12/05/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- SEG C2DE</li><li>- No children</li><li>- Females</li><li>- Aged 30 to 40</li><li>- Mix of urban/rural</li></ul>	6
<b>5</b>	17/05/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- SEG ABC1</li><li>- Mix of children/no children</li><li>- Mix of gender</li><li>- Aged 18-25</li><li>- Mix of urban/rural</li></ul>	5
<b>6</b>	17/05/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- SEG C2DE</li><li>- Mix of children/no children</li><li>- Mix of gender</li><li>- Aged 18-25</li><li>- Mix of urban/rural</li></ul>	4

Table 3.2: Sample achieved through in-depth interviews

Age	Gender	SEG	Children	Number	
30 – 40	Male	Mix	No	6	3 x ABC1, 3 x C2DE
43	Female	ABC1	Yes	1	Replacement - focus group 1
38	Female	C2DE	Yes	1	Replacement - focus group 2
27	Female	C2DE	Yes	1	Replacement - focus group 6
29	Male	ABC1	No	1	Replacement - focus group 5
21	Female	C2DE	Yes	1	Replacement - focus group 6
38	Male	C2DE	Yes	1	To increase participants with 3+ children
29	Male	C2DE	Yes	1	To increase participants with 3+ children
23	Female	C2DE	Yes	1	To increase participants with 3+ children
21	Female	C2DE	Yes	1	To increase participants with 3+ children
22 – 29	Female	C2DE	Yes	5	Minority ethnic participants additional to groups
25	Female	ABC1	Yes	1	Additional to group 2
29	Male	C2DE	Yes	1	Additional to group 6

## **ANNEX 4 - PRE-DISCUSSION QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Introduction**

We are conducting research looking to understand people's views on having children, their ideal family sizes, and how these views might have changed over time. This research is being conducted on behalf of the Scottish Government's Population Programme, which as part of its work, seeks to explore – through a variety of research - how attitudes and individual choices could be shaping long term trends, like demographic change, into the future.

Thank you for your time and help with this project. We are keen to gain a wide variety of opinions, there are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested to hear your views. Before taking part in your focus group/interview we would like to know a little more about you. Please complete this short survey to help us do this. It will take less than 5 minutes to complete.

Please complete the survey at least one day before your focus group or interview. If completed an additional £25 will be added to your focus group/interview payment once you have taken part, as a thank you for your time.

The survey includes collecting information about you, such as your name, and whether or not you have any children, but you do not have to answer these questions if you prefer not to. No personal data will be provided to the Scottish Government's Population Programme team, or any other third party.

Progressive Partnership is an independent research company. Progressive works in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

If you would like to read Progressive's privacy policy, please visit our website: [Progressive Partnership Privacy Policy](#). If you have any questions about the research, please contact Elise Livingstone at Progressive at: [elise.livingstone@progressivepartnership.co.uk](mailto:elise.livingstone@progressivepartnership.co.uk).

SQ1: Are you happy to continue with the survey?

	CODE
Yes	1
No	2

ASK ALL

Q1. Please type in your full name below

Name -----

ASK ALL

Q2. How many children do you have? *Please include all children (including stepchildren or adopted children), whether or not they currently live with you.*

SINGLE CODE/NORMAL	Codes
0	1
1	2
2	3
3	4
4	5
5	6
More than 5 (please specify)	7
Prefer not to say	8

ASK IF Q2 = CODES (2~7)

Q3. How old are your children?

*Please type in the number of children of each age group you have below, using a number (e.g. 2 not two).*

MULTICODE/NORMAL	
Under 5 years old	
5 to 8 years old	
9 to 12 years old	
13 to 17 years old	
18-25 years old	
Over 25	
Prefer not to say	

ASK ALL

Q4. What do you think would be the ideal number of children for you personally to have had during your lifetime? *Please type your answer below*

---

Q5. What makes this number your ideal? *Please type your answer below*

---

ASK ALL

Q6. And how many more {TEXT SUBSTITUTION – respondent to see word ‘more’ only IF Q2 > 0} children in total do you think you will end up having during your lifetime? *Please type your answer below*

---

ASK ALL

Q7. We are interested to know a little more about what influenced your ideal family size and if the ideal family size is different from the number of children you think you will have during your lifetime, what would you say is the main reason(s) for that difference? *Please type your answer below*

---

ASK ALL

Q8. Thank you for taking part in this research project. The aim of research is to find out more about people's views on ideal family size and if views change over time. The next stage will be a focus group or interview where you will be asked more questions on this topic.

We are keen to gain a wide variety of opinions and would be very interested to hear your views, but please remember that we only ask you to share what you are comfortable with. If there is anything relating to this topic that you would rather not discuss and would like to let us know about this before we speak to you, please use the box below to tell us and we will ensure you are not asked about this.

*Please type your answer below or leave blank if you have nothing to add. Please only include as much detail as you feel comfortable with.*

---

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We look forward to talking with you soon.

Please note: you have the right to access the information you have provided in this survey, and to withdraw consent to process this information after taking part. Click [here](#) for details of how to withdraw consent.

## **Annex 5 - Pre Discussion Survey Data**

**Table 5.1: Ideal and expected family size by children/no children – averages shown**

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>Total sample</b>	1.1	2.6	2.2	-0.4	53
<b>All parents</b>	2.0	3.1	2.9	-0.3	30
<b>All not parents</b>	0.0	1.9	1.2	-0.7	23

**Table 5.2: Ideal and expected family size by SEG – averages shown**

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>ABC1s (all)</b>	1.0	2.1	1.7	-0.4	22
<b>C2DEs (all)</b>	1.3	2.9	2.5	-0.5	31
<b>ABC1s (parents)</b>	1.9	2.4	2.4	0.0	11
<b>C2DEs (parents)</b>	2.1	3.6	3.2	-0.4	19
<b>ABC1s (not parents)</b>	0.0	1.9	1.1	-0.8	11
<b>C2DEs (not parents)</b>	0.0	1.8	1.3	-0.5	12

**Table 5.3: Ideal and expected family size by gender – averages shown**

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>Men (all)</b>	1.0	2.6	2.3	-0.3	21
<b>Women (all)</b>	1.2	2.6	2.1	-0.5	32
<b>Men (parents)</b>	2.3	3.0	2.6	-0.4	9
<b>Women (parents)</b>	1.9	3.2	3.0	-0.2	21
<b>Men (not parents)</b>	0.0	2.3	2.1	-0.2	12
<b>Women (not parents)</b>	0.0	1.5	0.3	-1.2	11

Table 5.4: Ideal and expected family size by age – averages shown

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>18-25 (all)</b>	1.0	2.4	2.3	-0.1	16
<b>25-45 (all)</b>	1.2	2.7	2.1	-0.6	37
<b>18-25 (parents)</b>	1.8	2.6	2.4	-0.1	9
<b>25-45 (parents)</b>	2.1	3.4	3.0	-0.3	21
<b>18-25 (not parents)</b>	0.0	2.1	2.0	-0.1	7
<b>25-45 (not parents)</b>	0.0	1.8	0.9	-0.9	16

Table 5.5: Ideal and expected family size by urban/rural – averages shown

	<b>Current number of children</b>	<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Expected number of children</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Base size</b>
<b>Urban (all)</b>	1.2	2.7	2.3	-0.4	37
<b>Small town (all)</b>	1.4	2.7	2.4	-0.3	7
<b>Rural (all)</b>	0.8	1.9	1.2	-0.7	9

## **Annex 6 - Topic Guide**

Another version was also used it followed all of the prompts below but was framed for those with no children

### **Introductions (5 mins)**

- Welcome to the session.
- Introduction by moderator to group and explanation of Market Research Society Code of Conduct (i.e., researchers will respect the rights, wellbeing, opinions of research participants, and findings will be presented to our client impartially).
- We are conducting this research on behalf of the Scottish Government as part of its Population Programme. The aim of the research is to understand people's views on having children, their ideal family sizes and whether these views change over time. Whatever your views and experiences may be, there are no right or wrong answers and we really appreciate you sharing those with us today.
- Completely confidential – whatever you say will only be used for the purposes of the research project.
- Anonymous – names are not attached. We pull all findings together and report it back on a group basis.
- Zoom – the discussion will be recorded, so we don't have to take notes. It will only be used for the purposes of this research project.
- Explanation of rules of engagement of discussion - take part
  - not a test
  - no right or wrong answers
  - just interested in your own views
  - REASSURE: only share what you are comfortable sharing
- Reiterate GDPR rules if required: Withdraw at any time, only share what you are comfortable with

### **Respondent introductions and warm up (10 mins)**

Introduction to respondents:

Name

Where are you currently living?

Who lives with you at home? (Number and age of children)

### **General views (10 mins)**

Overall, how important do you think having children is to society at large?

- (P) Continuing the population
- (P) what about things like having a range of ages and diversity across the population as a whole
- (P) Future work forces/support for older generations in old age etc.
- (P) Different generations working together
- Any negatives for society at large?
- (P) Over population
- (P) Climate emergency issues

And how important do you think it is to people individually?

- Does our society value families? In what way if yes what way if no?

How important are these things to you as a group?

- Probe on reasons for importance/lack of importance
- (P) Creating legacy/passing on family names and values/creating unit with partner
- (P) Experience of having and raising children/giving and receiving unconditional love/want to nurture and shape a life
- (P) Like children or babies
- (P) Desire to recreate positive family experiences/create a different family dynamic to that experienced personally
- (P) Influenced by partners' desire for children/parents wishing to be grandparents
- (P) Other social pressures/expectations

To what extent do you see being a parent as part of your identity?

### Deciding to have children (15-20 mins)

What factors do you think influence people to plan to have children?

- How important were these factors for you personally?

Do you think people's views on having children change over time?

- Why/why not?
- Probe on reasons for any changes
- (P) External factors? (partners' wishes/peers having children/becoming more financially stable etc.)
- (P) Internal factors? (changes in feelings/'body clock')

Is that something you have experienced?

- When did feelings/views about having children change?

What are the key concerns if any, that you think people have prior to having children?

- (P) Concerns about finances/housing/childcare
- (P) Concerns about career
- (P) Concerns about identity
- (P) Concerns about aptitude as a parent
- (P) Concerns about impact on relationships – partner, family, friends

Was this different for your first and then subsequent children?

[If not mentioned spontaneously] What were your key concerns?

- (P) What was of most concern?
- (P) What overcame those concerns?

To what extent did you discuss plans to have children with a partner/partners?

- Did their views change how you felt about having children?

- Did your views change how they felt about having children?

To what extent, if any, did cultural or faith driven beliefs influence you decision(s)?

### Barriers and enablers (30 mins)

Do you plan to have more children?

- Why/why not?

Has the number of children you planned to have changed over time?

- Why/why not?

How many children would you have in an ideal world?

- What makes that the ideal number?

Probe on differences between ideal and likely/expected family size: why the difference?

What is putting/would put you off having more children?

- (P) Concerns about finances/housing
- (P) Concerns about childcare
- (P) Concerns about career
- (P) Concerns about impact on relationships – other children, partner, family, friends
- (P) Negative experiences/impacts experienced in having or raising current family
- (P) Concerns about the future
- (P) Happy with current family size

Ask those who cited finance as a concern:

- What if you had a sudden windfall of money, how would that impact on your thinking?

What could make it easier for you to consider having more children? Who could help and how?

- (P) Financial support/information (benefits / budgeting info / free activities/transport/other for children)
- (P) Support with housing
- (P) Support with childcare
- (P) Family planning support / support during pregnancy / parenting support
- (P) Workplace changes (maternity/paternity policies / Flexible working & WFH policies etc.)

What is the one thing you think would make the most difference to people in allowing them to have the number of children they would ideally want to have?

### Trends and attitudes (10-15 mins)

How do you think attitudes towards having children have changed in recent times?

- Have these changes been for better/worse? In what ways?
- Is it more acceptable to not have children now or not? Why/why not? Is that a good or bad thing?
- How do you see things going in the future?

Do you think the factors affecting decision-making have changed?

- Probe in turn on
  - climate change/over replacing
  - Covid-19
  - delayed parenthood

If not discussed spontaneously during group: have any of these factors affected your decisions to have/have more/avoid having children?

### Building a better future (10 mins)

[Okay in summary and on the back of everything we have been chatting about let's talk about a better future:]

What would a world look like where it's easier for people to have the number of children they would like?

- What would be different?
- How could people be supported to have their ideal number of children?

### To end

Anything else that has not been discussed on this topic that you would like to mention?

THANK AND CLOSE

## **Annex 7 - Technical Notes**

1. Desk research formed the first stage of the study. The primary data was collected by an online questionnaire pre-discussion followed by group discussions and in-depth interviews.
2. The target group for this research study was those aged 18 to 45 who have given thought to having children.
3. In total, there were 6 group discussions and 15 in-depth interviews, group discussion lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and in-depth interviews approximately 30 minutes. Each group will contained approximately 6 participants.
4. Group discussions and interviews took place online using Zoom platform.
5. Respondents were recruited by telephone by Progressive's skilled in-house team of qualitative recruiters. These recruiters worked to predetermined quota controls to ensure that the final sample reflected the requirements of the project. All respondents were screened to ensure that they had not participated in a group discussion or in-depth interview relating to a similar subject in the last 6 months prior to recruitment.
6. An incentive of £40 compensated respondents for their time during the discussion and £25 was given for completing the pre-discussion survey.
7. Each recruiter's work was validated as per the requirements of the international standard ISO 20252. Therefore, all respondents were subject to validation, between recruitment and the date of the group discussion or in-depth interview, or on the day of the group discussion/in-depth interview. Validation involved respondents completing a short questionnaire asking pertinent profiling questions, and checking that they have not participated in similar research in the past 6 months.
8. All research projects undertaken by Progressive comply fully with the requirements of ISO 20252, the UK GDPR and the MRS Code of Conduct.

## **Reporting**

9. The outputs from the project included:
  - A PowerPoint report of findings from desk research
  - Top-line findings reported in PowerPoint
  - A Word report of overall findings
10. Anonymous verbatim comments are included in reporting.
11. Please note that, due to the small sample sizes involved and the methods of respondent selection, qualitative research findings do not provide statistically robust data. However, this type of research facilitates valid and extremely valuable consumer insight and understanding.

## References

National Records of Scotland (2019), Scotland's Population – The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends, 165<sup>th</sup> edition

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National Records Scotland (2021), [Vital Events - List of Data Tables.](#)

National Records Scotland (2022), [Births Time Series Data](#)

National Records Scotland (2022), [Projected Population of Scotland \(Interim\) 2020-based, Report](#)

Scottish Government (no date), [Ministerial Population Taskforce](#)

Scottish Government (2021), '[A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population](#)'

## Acronyms

CI: Confidence Interval

SEG: Socio-Economic Group

SSAS: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

TFR: Total Fertility Rate

## Related links

Quantitative study data tables: <https://statistics.gov.scot/data/attitudes-to-family-formation-in-scotland-data-tables>

Linked data: <https://statistics.gov.scot/data/attitudes-to-family-formation-in-scotland-linked-data>



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