

# 1. Labour force participation

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Growth in labour force

Historical overview

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## Growth in labour force

A question on present principal status on the census form enables an analysis of the economic status of all people aged 15 and over into those in the labour force and those outside it. The labour force is comprised of all persons at work, looking for their first job or unemployed, while students, homemakers, retired persons and those unable to work are categorised as being not in the labour force.

The results show that the total in the labour force in April 2016 stood at 2,304,037, an increase of 71,834, or 3.2 per cent, since 2011. This translates into an annual average increase of 0.6 per cent - less than the previous inter-censal period when growth averaged 1.1 per cent per annum

*(Note: The official labour force and unemployment estimates are based on the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). The results in this report differ for methodological reasons from these official estimates. See Appendix 3 for a full explanation.)*

[See web table EZ001](#)

**Table 1.1 Persons aged 15 and over by economic status, 2011-2016**

	2011	2016	Change	% change
At Work	1,807,360	2,006,641	199,281	11.0
Looking for first job	34,166	31,434	-2,732	-8.0
Unemployed	390,677	265,962	-124,715	-31.9
<b>Labour force (A)</b>	<b>2,232,203</b>	<b>2,304,037</b>	<b>71,834</b>	<b>3.2</b>
Student	408,838	427,128	18,290	4.5
Looking after home/family	339,918	305,556	-34,362	-10.1
Retired	457,394	545,407	88,013	19.2
Unable to work	156,993	158,348	1,355	0.9
Other	13,316	14,837	1,521	11.4
<b>Not in the labour force (B)</b>	<b>1,376,459</b>	<b>1,451,276</b>	<b>74,817</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>Population aged 15 and over (=A+B)</b>	<b>3,608,662</b>	<b>3,755,313</b>	<b>146,651</b>	<b>4.1</b>

## Historical overview

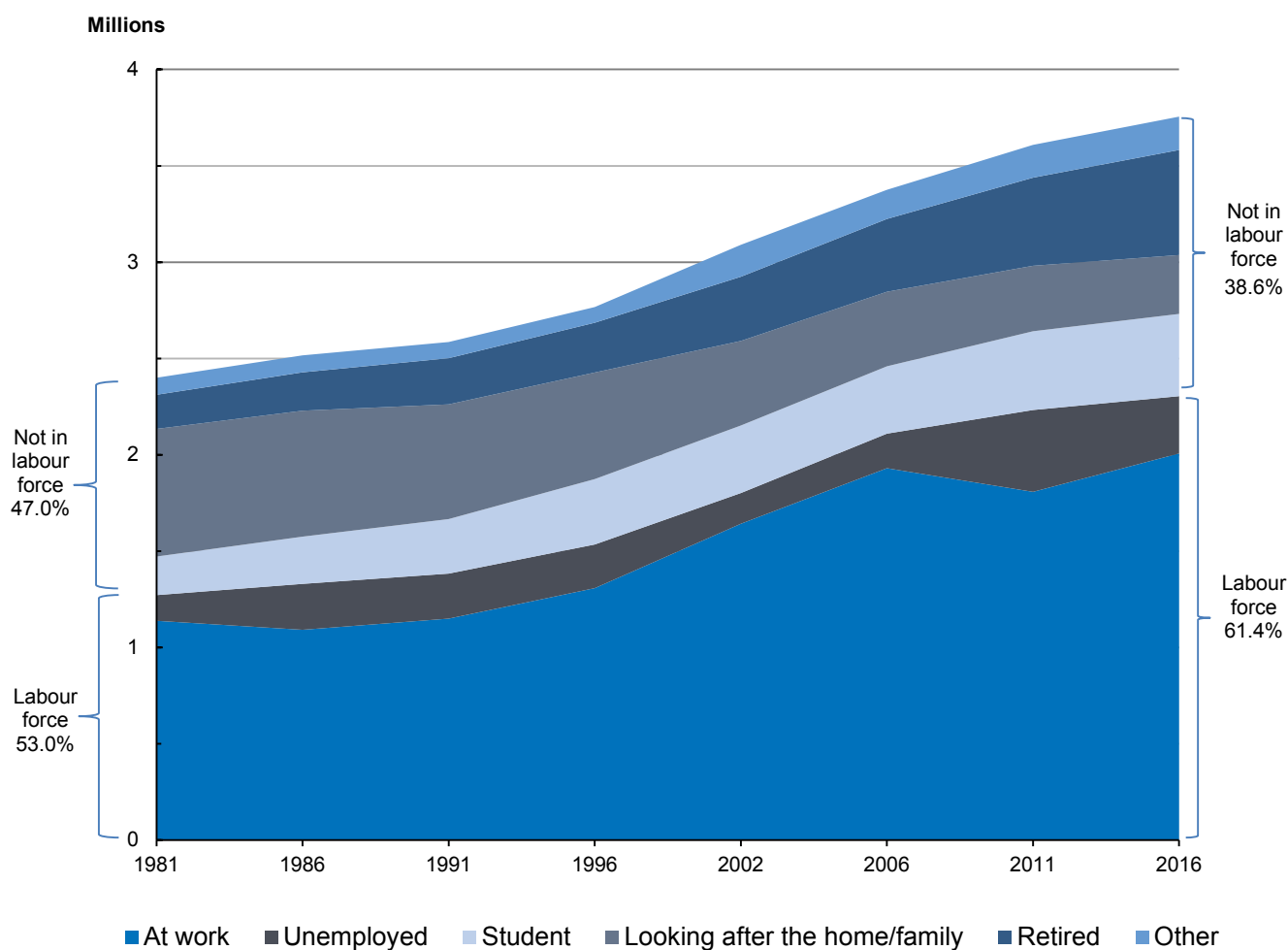
The 15 years from 1981-1996 present a period of slow but steady growth in the labour force averaging 1.3 per cent per year.

This is followed by the more recent period (1996-2016) of rapid growth which has seen the labour force increase

by 50.2 per cent over the twenty year period, or 2.1 per cent per annum.

Also well illustrated is the dramatic change in the number of homemakers, which has halved over the 35 year period while the number of students has doubled.

**Figure 1.1 Economic status of persons aged 15 and over, 1981-2016**



## Labour force participation

The percentage of people aged 15 and over who participate in the labour force - as opposed to having another status such as student, retired or homemaker - is known as the labour force participation rate. It is measured as the number in the labour force (at work or unemployed) expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15 and over. For the State as a whole this rate was 61.4 per cent in 2016, down from the 61.9 per cent and 62.5 per cent recorded in 2011 and 2006 respectively. 2011 had marked the first fall in the rate since 1986.

### Male rates down, female rates up

Male participation fell in 2016 to 67.8 per cent (from 69.4% in 2011) bringing it back below 2002 rates following a brief rise to 72.3 per cent in 2006. Female participation on the other hand continued to rise, from 54.6 per cent in 2011 to 55.2 per cent in 2016.

[See web table EZ005](#)

**Table 1.2 Labour market indicators, 1991-2016**

Year	Persons in the labour force	Average annual change	Male participation rate	Female participation rate
	Thousands		Percentage	
1991	1,383	0.8	71.7	35.9
1996	1,534	2.1	70.7	40.7
2002	1,801	2.7	69.9	47.0
2006	2,110	4.0	72.3	52.8
2011	2,232	1.1	69.4	54.6
2016	2,304	0.6	67.8	55.2

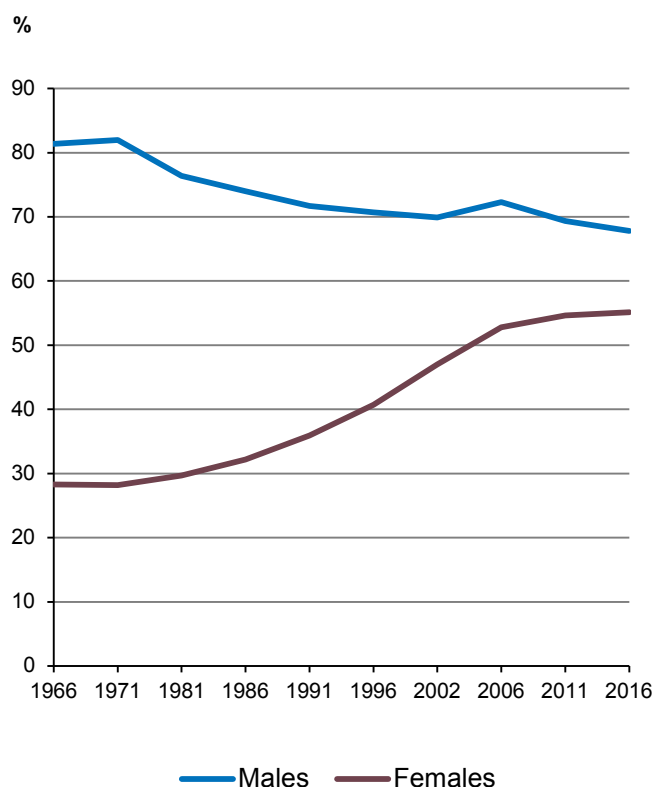
## Narrowing the gap

Figure 1.2 tracks the change in male and female participation rates over the past 50 years.

Female participation has been increasing since 1981. In 2016, the difference in rates between males and females was at its lowest ever at 12.7 percentage points. The absolute number of females at work in 2016 was 929,967, compared with 1,076,674 males, a gap of 146,707.

Male participation on the other hand declined throughout the 1970s and 80s before settling at around 70 per cent for the past twenty years (at 67.8% in 2016). The lower male rates in recent times are due partly to the male population living longer and so a smaller proportion of males are available for work.

**Figure 1.2 Participation rates for males and females, 1966-2016**



## Fewer young people...

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 present labour force participation rates by five year age groups for males and females respectively in 2011 and 2016. As illustrated in the graphs there were falls in participation, for both sexes, in the age group 15 to 29, with the largest fall occurring among those aged 15-24, while the 25-29 age group showed a small decrease.

## ..more females

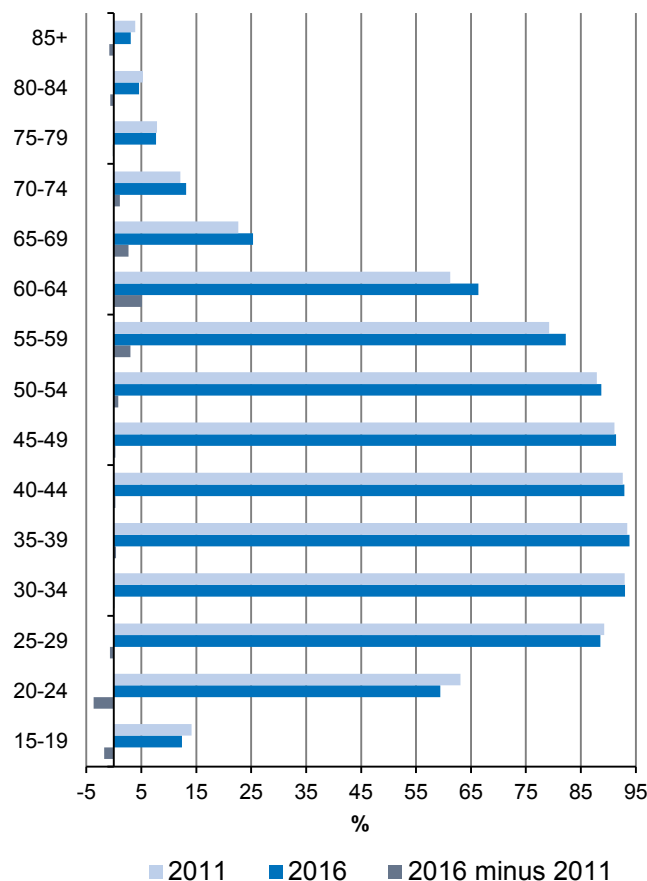
Male participation in the 30-54 age groups remained steady in the most recent inter-censal period. Female participation for the same age group showed increases and also notable gains in the 55-64 age group.

## ....more elderly

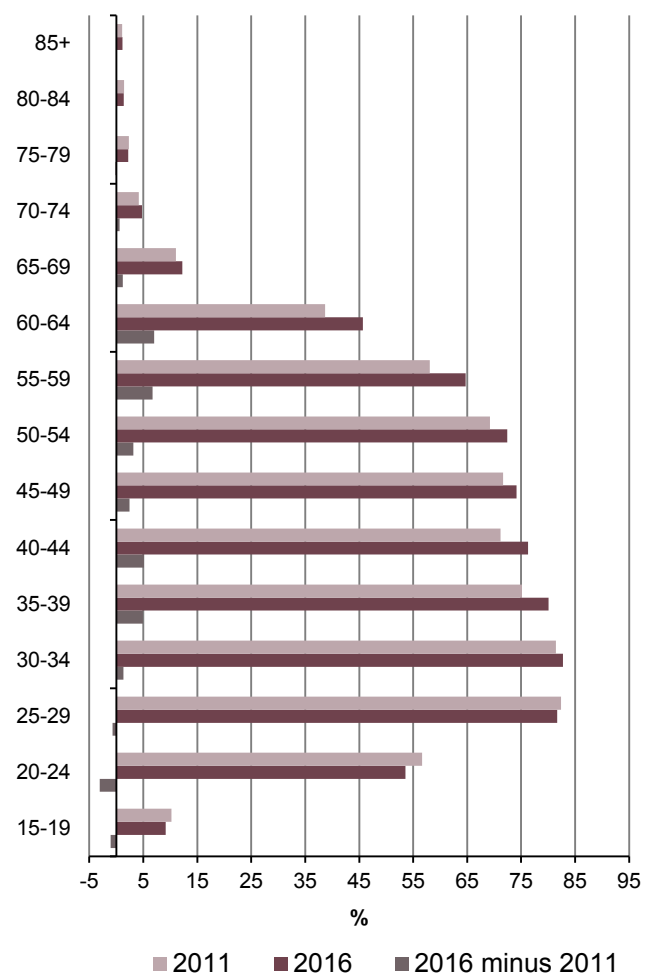
For males, the 55-74 age group showed increases in the labour force participation rate while small decreases were recorded in the over 75s. This is similar to the female participation rates for these age groups with the exception of the over 85s, which recorded a very small increase.

[See web table EZ005](#)

**Figure 1.3 Participation rates for males by age, 2011 and 2016**



**Figure 1.4 Participation rates for females by age, 2011 and 2016**



*It's a fact!*

**67.8%**

The labour force participation rate for males in 2016

**55.2%**

The labour force participation rate for females in 2016

## Participation across the administrative counties

In April 2016 Fingal had the highest labour force participation rate in the State at 66.9 per cent, followed by Dublin City (64.7%) and Meath (64.2%). The lowest rates were recorded in Cork City (55.2%), Donegal (57.3%) and Mayo (57.7%).

### Male participation rates

While male labour force participation fell overall (69.4% in 2011 to 67.8% in 2016) it grew in 2 of the 31 administrative areas, namely Dublin City and Cork City. The growth was largest in Dublin City where it grew by 2.0 percentage points (from 68.2% in 2011 to 70.2% in 2016).

The largest recorded fall in male labour force participation rates was in Laois and Roscommon, both fell by 3.3 points (to 68.6% and 64.5% respectively) in 2016.

### *It's a fact!*

**73.2%**

The male participation rate in the labour force in Fingal

**3.3**

The decrease in the male participation rate in the labour force in Laois between 2011 and 2016

**Figure 1.5 Male labour force participation rates by county, 2011 and 2016**



## Female participation rates

Over the five years to April 2016, female labour force participation rates increased in 24 administrative areas. The growth was largest in Dublin City, where the female participation rate increased from 56.9 per cent in 2011 to 59.4 per cent in 2016 (an increase of 2.6 points).

While Fingal recorded the largest overall female participation rate, at 60.9 per cent, this represented a fall of 0.8 points on 2011 when it was 61.7 per cent.

Factors like an ageing population and increased participation in third level education would contribute to falls in labour force participation rates.

[See web table EZ005](#)

### *It's a fact!*

**49.6%**

The female participation rate in the labour force in Cork City, the lowest in the country

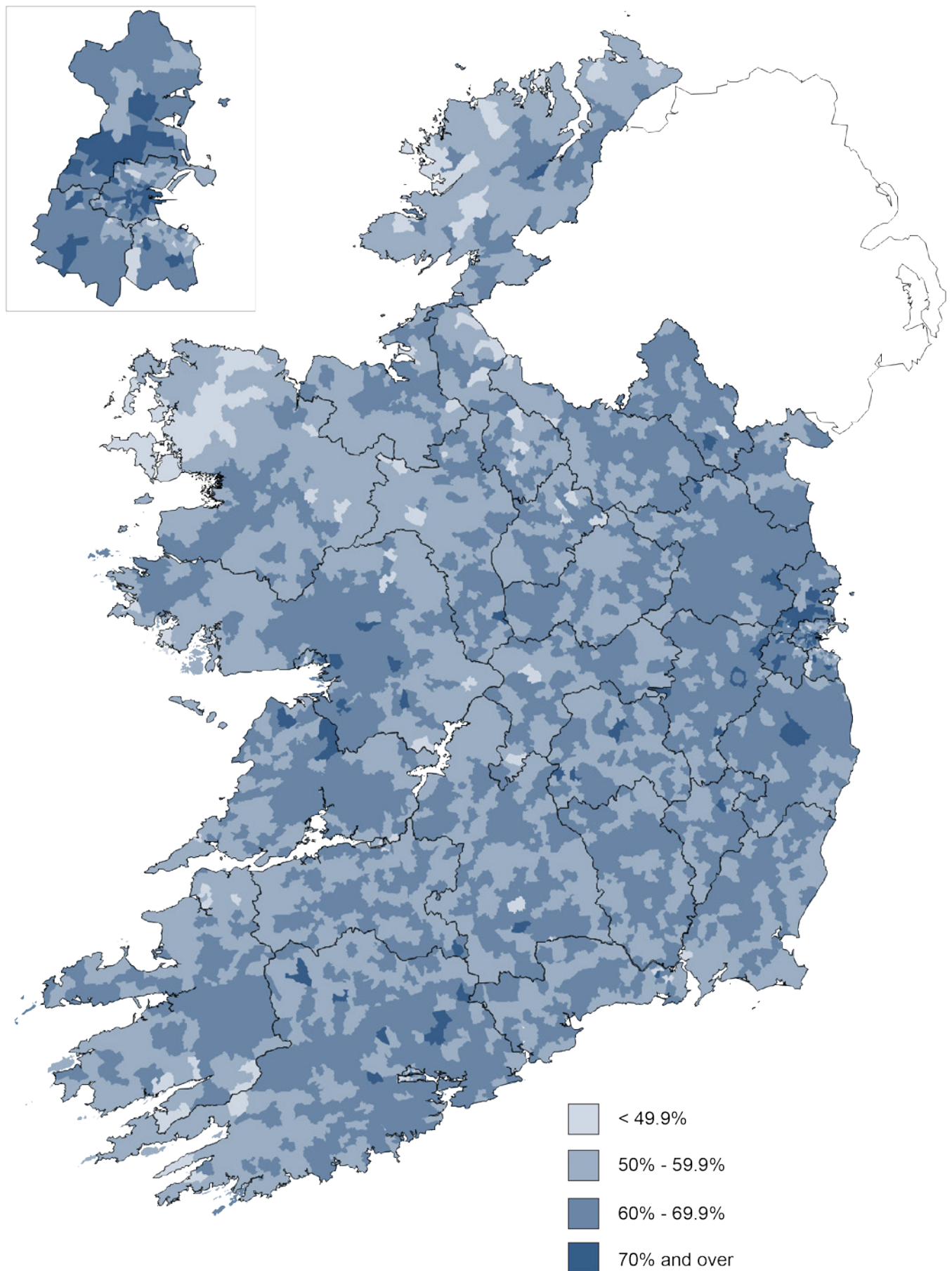
**2.6**

The increase in the female participation rate in the labour force in Dublin City between 2011 and 2016

**Figure 1.6 Female labour force participation rates by county, 2011 and 2016**



**Map 1.1 Labour force participation rates by electoral division, 2016**





## Not in the labour force

The number of people outside the labour force, namely students, those looking after the home or family, retired persons and those unable to work due to disability, increased by 5.4 per cent, (74,817) between 2011 and 2016.

### Retirement

The largest contributor to the increase in those outside the labour force was the growing numbers of retired people which increased by 19.2 per cent, from 457,394 to 545,407 over the five years. Increasing female participation in the workforce, particularly since 1981, may have contributed to a greater number of retired women in 2016, as illustrated in Figure 1.7.

### Students on the increase

The number of male and female students increased by similar amounts between 2011 and 2016. Male students increased by 9,851 while female students increased by 8,439 over the five years.

### Minding the kids

The number of women looking after the home or family as their principal status has been falling since 1981 with the most recent inter-censal period showing a decline of 11.5 per cent. The number of men with this status rose by 15.0 per cent in the latest inter-censal period, although at 20,747 they represented only 6.8 per cent of all homemakers.

## *It's a fact!*

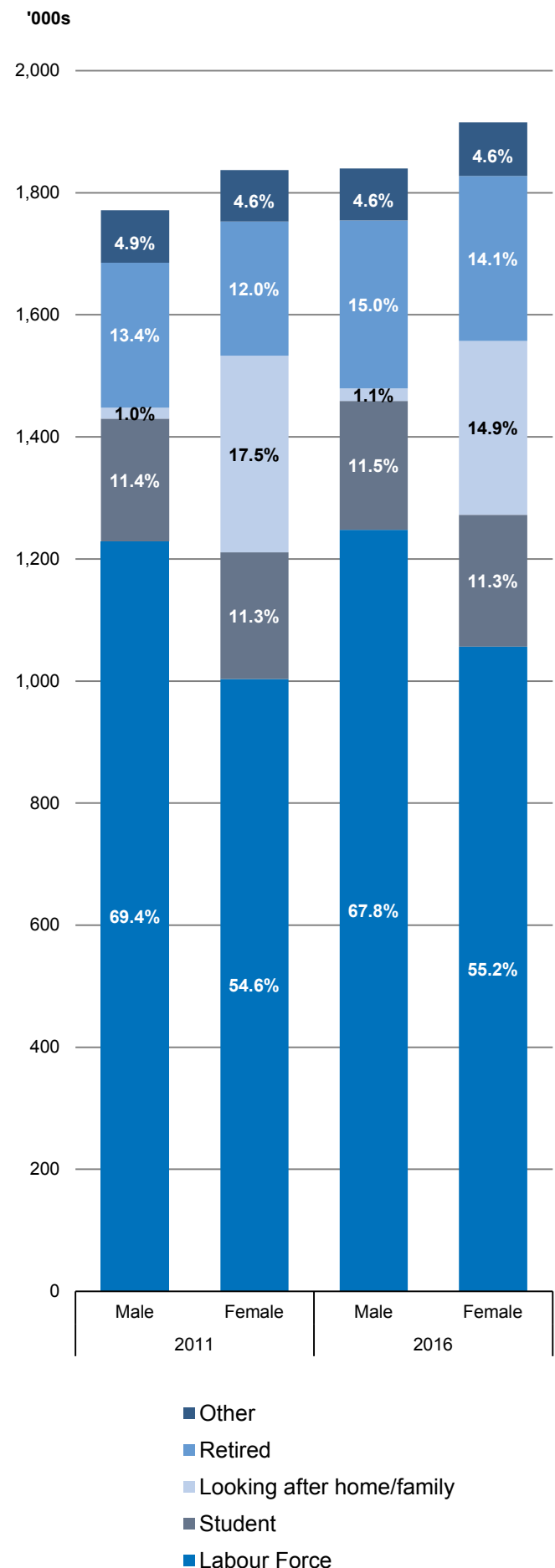
**19.2%**

The percentage increase in retired people between 2011 and 2016

**4.5%**

The percentage increase in students between 2011 and 2016

**Figure 1.7 Economic status by sex, 2011 and 2016**



## Back to school....

The drop in labour force participation for those in the 15-24 age group is complemented by increases in education participation for both males and females.

**Figure 1.8 Principal economic status of 15-24 year olds, 2006-2016**

