

Economics  
**IN FOCUS**

December 11, 2025

## Doubling up

by Benjamin Tal [benjamin.tal@cibc.com](mailto:benjamin.tal@cibc.com)

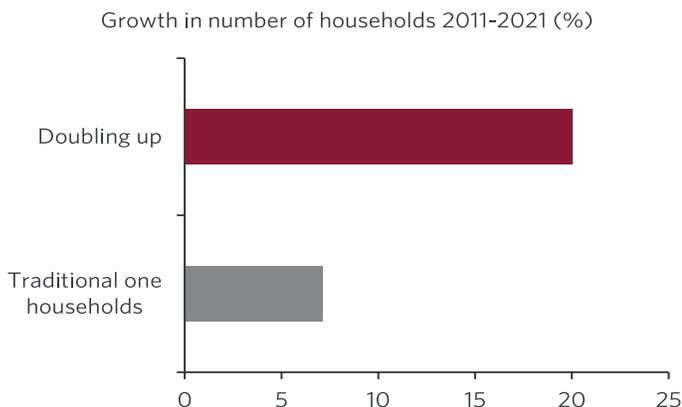
Doubling up, in the context of the housing market, is a situation in which extended relations, multiple “families”, and unrelated persons, reside within the same dwelling. Doubling up is the most common response to deteriorating housing affordability but also can be seen as shadow demand ready to be utilized in an environment of improved affordability.

None of the traditional demand and affordability measures that are used frequently by policymakers incorporate doubling up into the calculation. Census data can be used to estimate the trend and relative size of the doubling up phenomenon.

We suggest that an already high rate of doubling up is even higher than currently reflected in the census because of the undercounting of non-permanent residents (NPRs) and the misallocation of students — both groups with a high propensity to double-up.

The practical implication here is that with the current improvement in affordability due to falling prices/rent, some of this potential demand might be released due to undoubling and might establish a price floor faster than currently anticipated.

**Chart 1: Doubling up arrangements rising fast**



Source: StatCan, CIBC

## Doubling up missing in traditional affordability and demand measures

When it comes to housing policy, the focus is usually on the interaction between housing demand and supply and its impact on affordability. Demand for housing is usually calculated by identifying individuals that leave the parental home and international arrivals (less those who have departed), who in turn become part of new households. The leading financial contributor in these new households is identified as the household maintainer. This matrix does not account for doubling up and basically assumes that the number of families and unattached individuals (adjusted for age) equals the number of households. This of course is not the case.

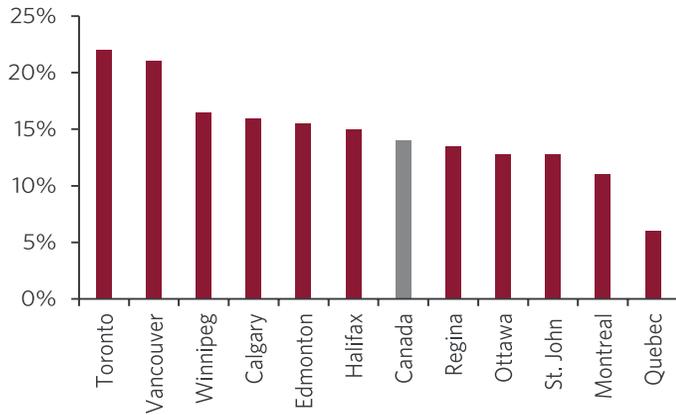
An increase in housing costs depresses household formation rates and heightens competition for new units. Doubling up is perhaps the most significant behavioral response to increased housing costs. Therefore, it's reasonable to assert that traditional housing demand measures underestimate real housing demand.

## How big is the pool of double uppers?

First, using census data, the number of “traditional one households”, while still accounting for 70% of all households, has risen by only 7.2% during the decade ending 2021. At the same time, the number of housing arrangements that can be described as doubling up, has risen by an estimated 20% to reach north of 17% of the population (Chart 1). A more recent Stats Canada survey found that two-or more person non-family households grew by just under 26% between 2018 and 2022, continuing the strong growth momentum.

An alternative measure provided by Lauster and Bergmann suggests that as of 2021, the doubling up rate (defined as the excess share of families and age-adjusted unattached individuals relative to households) was around 13%, with centres such as Toronto and Vancouver seeing a doubling up

Chart 2: Doubling up rate by city 2021



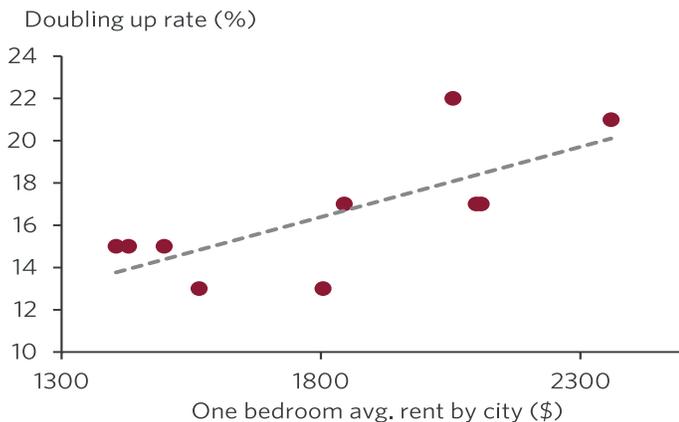
Source: Lauster and Bergmann, CIBC

rate north of 20% (Chart 2). Their estimate also suggests that the ratio of actual to age-expected households has been falling for the past few decades — mostly in BC and Ontario— suggesting a rising doubling up rate.

### Actually it's even larger

Those numbers are large — but they might actually be even larger. As we have noted in previous research, there is evidence, drawn from Statistics Canada's own data, that housing demand, measured as growth in household formation, has likely been materially understated in the census. This has arisen as a result of two primary factors — the application of the "usual residence" of students, and the undercount of NPRs. The former is due to the fact that the census counts university or college students that return or intend to return to their parents' homes in the year, but doesn't count on campus or off campus housing where they reside most of the time. International students and other NPRs are supposed to complete the census, but are dramatically undercounted. Factors include confusion with the

Chart 3: High positive correlation between doubling up and rents



Source: Lauster and Bergmann, StatCan, CIBC

"parental home" reference in "usual place of residence" when parents live abroad. Those two groups naturally have a high propensity to double up, and therefore undercounting them means under estimating the actual doubling up rate.

### Doubling up and affordability

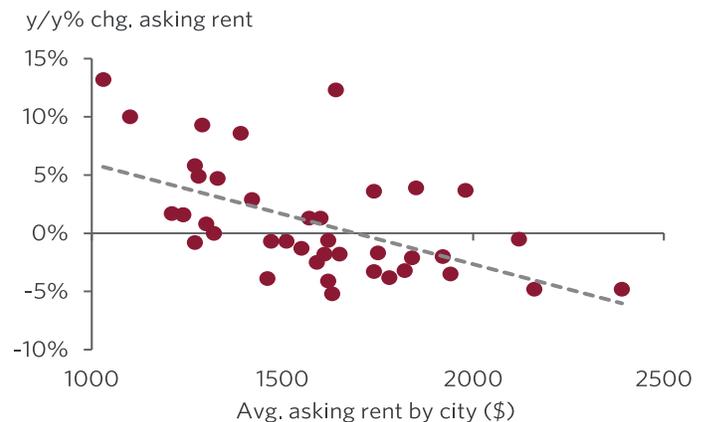
Granted, while some "doubling up" is voluntary, and not primarily financially motivated, most doubling up is linked to housing affordability. Prevailing rents and doubling up rates are tightly linked (Chart 3).

Affordability is generally measured through the ratio of shelter costs to household income. That measure of course doesn't account for the implications of doubling up. People adapt to higher housing costs by sharing resources and doubling-up in dwellings. Accordingly, doubling up can make housing appear more affordable, but also represents a hardship.

Further hardship is demonstrated in the allocation of non-market housing, where providers generally do not offer leases to doubled-up households. Households and tenants who do share non-market homes with others run the risk of losing their benefits. Those in market housing tend to have less secure tenancy.

Household formation among non-family individuals is highly sensitive to changes in income and price. Any improvement in affordability can potentially increase the number of newly created low-income households even if it means spending a higher percentage of their income on housing. Such an outcome is not captured by commonly used metrics. In fact, as illustrated in Chart 4, there is a clear negative correlation between rental cost and rental inflation, with the recent decline in asking rents being more prominent in high-rent centers — the same centers that experience high doubling up rates. Those centers will be the first to feel the potential impact of a decline in doubling up rates through higher demand — mainly in the low-end of their rental spectrum.

Chart 4: Negative correlation between rent cost and rent inflation



Source: StatCan, CIBC

Bottom line: Failing to account for the impact of doubling up and de-doubling leads to an underestimation and misinterpretation of the current housing shortage. Measuring doubling up is necessary in order to better understand housing hardship related to shortages and affordability, and the latent demand released with improved affordability. As for the here and now, the economic impact of the current softening in housing costs should reduce doubling-up in many cities. This in turn could absorb new affordable supply coming to the market, reducing the pressure on vacancy rates, while potentially establishing a floor for rent of units that are at the more affordable end of the rental market.

\*Note: This article used data obtained from Integrated Trade and Economics.

## Contacts:

Avery Shenfeld  
[avery.shenfeld@cibc.com](mailto:avery.shenfeld@cibc.com)

Benjamin Tal  
[benjamin.tal@cibc.com](mailto:benjamin.tal@cibc.com)

Andrew Grantham  
[andrew.grantham@cibc.com](mailto:andrew.grantham@cibc.com)

Ali Jaffery  
[ali.jaffery@cibc.com](mailto:ali.jaffery@cibc.com)

Katherine Judge  
[katherine.judge@cibc.com](mailto:katherine.judge@cibc.com)

CIBC Capital Markets  
PO Box 500  
161 Bay Street, Brookfield Place  
Toronto, Canada, M5J 2S8  
[Bloomberg @ CIBC](#)

[economics.cibccm.com](http://economics.cibccm.com)

CIBC Capital Markets is a trademark brand name under which Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce ("CIBC"), its subsidiaries and affiliates (including, without limitation, CIBC World Markets Inc., CIBC World Markets Corp. and CIBC Capital Markets (Europe) S.A.) provide different products and services to our customers around the world. Products and/or services offered by CIBC include corporate lending services, foreign exchange, money market instruments, structured notes, interest rate products and OTC derivatives. CIBC's Foreign Exchange Disclosure Statement relating to guidelines contained in the FX Global Code can be found at [www.cibccm.com/fxdisclosure](http://www.cibccm.com/fxdisclosure). Other products and services, such as exchange-traded equity and equity options, fixed income securities and futures execution of Canadian securities, are offered through directly or indirectly held subsidiaries of CIBC as indicated below.

### Distribution

This report is written by the economics team at CIBC Capital Markets and is not the product of a CIBC Capital Markets research department. This report is issued and approved for distribution: (a) in Canada, by CIBC World Markets Inc., a member of the Canadian Investment Regulatory Organization, the Toronto Stock Exchange, the TSX Venture Exchange and a Member of the Canadian Investor Protection Fund; and (b) in the United States, by either: (i) CIBC World Markets Inc. for distribution only to U.S. Major Institutional Investors ("MII") (as such term is defined in SEC Rule 15a-6) or (ii) CIBC World Markets Corp., a member of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. U.S. MIIs receiving this report from CIBC World Markets Inc. (the Canadian broker-dealer) are required to effect transactions (other than negotiating their terms) in securities discussed in the report through CIBC World Markets Corp. (the U.S. broker-dealer).

This report is provided, for informational purposes only, to institutional investor and retail clients of CIBC World Markets Inc. in Canada and does not constitute an offer or solicitation to buy or sell any securities discussed herein, including (without limitation) in any jurisdiction where such offer or solicitation would be prohibited.

The distribution of this report in the United Kingdom is being made only to, or directed only at, persons falling within one or more of the exemptions from the financial promotion regime in section 21 of the UK Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (as amended) ("FSMA") including, without limitation, to the following:

- authorised firms under FSMA and certain other investment professionals falling within article 19 of the FSMA (Financial Promotion) Order 2005 ("FPO") and directors, officers and employees acting for such entities in relation to investment;
- high value entities falling within article 49 FPO and directors, officers and employees acting for such entities in relation to investment; and
- persons who receive this presentation outside the United Kingdom.

The distribution of this report to any other person in the United Kingdom is unauthorised and may contravene FSMA. No person falling outside such categories should treat this report as constituting a promotion to them or rely or act on it for any purposes whatsoever. This report is distributed solely to eligible counterparties or professional clients and not retail clients as defined in point (8) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 2017/565 as it forms part of UK domestic law by virtue of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

For all other jurisdictions, this report is distributed solely to institutional clients and not retail clients as defined by the applicable securities legislation and regulation to which CIBC Capital Markets may be subject in any jurisdiction.

### Miscellaneous

This report does not take into account the investment objectives, financial situation or specific needs of any particular client of CIBC. Before making an investment decision on the basis of any information contained in this report, the recipient should consider whether such information is appropriate given the recipient's particular investment needs, objectives and financial circumstances. CIBC suggests that, prior to acting on any information contained herein, you contact one of our client advisers in your jurisdiction to discuss your particular circumstances. Since the levels and bases of taxation can change, any reference in this report to the impact of taxation should not be construed as offering tax advice; as with any transaction having potential tax implications, clients should consult with their own tax advisors. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results.

The information and any statistical data contained herein were obtained from sources that we believe to be reliable, but we do not represent that they are accurate or complete, and they should not be relied upon as such. All estimates and opinions expressed herein constitute judgments as of the date of this report and are subject to change without notice.

This report may provide addresses of, or contain hyperlinks to, Internet web sites. CIBC has not reviewed the linked Internet web site of any third party and takes no responsibility for the contents thereof. Each such address or hyperlink is provided solely for the recipient's convenience and information, and the content of linked third-party web sites is not in any way incorporated into this document. Recipients who choose to access such third-party web sites or follow such hyperlinks do so at their own risk.

Unauthorized use, distribution, duplication or disclosure without the prior written permission of CIBC World Markets Inc. is prohibited by law and may result in prosecution.

CIBC Capital Markets and the CIBC Logo Design are trademarks of CIBC, used under license.