

Article

What does the 2011 Census tell us about older people

We take a look at older people aged 65 and over in England and Wales. Analysis includes marital status, living arrangements, housing tenure, economic activity and general health and provision of unpaid care. In 2011, 9.2 million residents were aged 65 and over, an increase of almost 1 million from 2001 with 8.3 million. Results show that just 50% of those aged over 65 reported their health to be “very good” or “good”, compared with 88% of the rest of the population.



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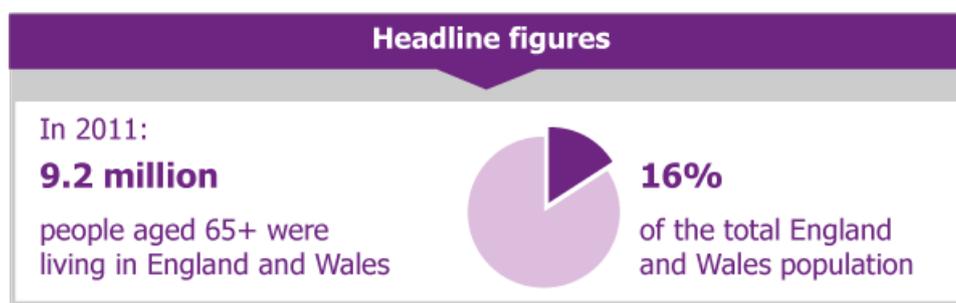
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1. Key points

- In 2011, 9.2 million (16 per cent) usual residents of England and Wales were aged 65 and over, an increase of almost one million from 2001 (8.3 million or 16 per cent).
- 57 per cent (5.3 million) of those aged 65 and over in 2011 were married or in a civil partnership (including those who were separated but still legally married or in a civil partnership); 53 per cent (4.3 million) of those aged 65 and over were married in 2001.
- The proportion of those aged 65 and over who were divorced almost doubled from 5.2 per cent in 2001 to 8.7 per cent in 2011; this compares with a small rise from 8.2 per cent of the 16 and over population in 2001 to 9.0 per cent in 2011.
- In 2011, 56 per cent (5.2 million) of those aged 65 and over were living as a couple, an increase from 52 per cent (4.3 million) in 2001. Those living as married couples increased from 51 per cent to 54 per cent and the proportion living as cohabiting couples almost doubled from 1.6 per cent to 2.8 per cent.
- Just under a third (31 per cent) of those aged 65 and over were living alone in 2011; this was a decrease from 34 per cent in 2001.
- The proportion of the population aged 65 and over who were living in communal establishments declined from 4.5 per cent (374,000) in 2001 to 3.7 per cent (337,000) in 2011.
- 9 out of 10 of those aged 65 and over in England and Wales in 2011 were economically inactive, including 86 per cent who were retired; the remaining 10 per cent were economically active.
- The proportion of the population aged 65-74 who were economically active in 2011 (16 per cent) was almost double the proportion in 2001 (8.7 per cent).
- Half (50 per cent) of all usual residents in England and Wales aged 65 and over living in households reported very good or good health in 2011; this compared to 88 per cent for those aged under 65.
- 14 per cent of older people living in households in England and Wales provided unpaid care in 2011, compared to 12 per cent in 2001. The largest increase in proportion was for those aged 65 and over providing 50 hours or more unpaid care a week: up from 4.3 per cent (341,000) in 2001 to 5.6 per cent (497,000) in 2011.

2. Introduction



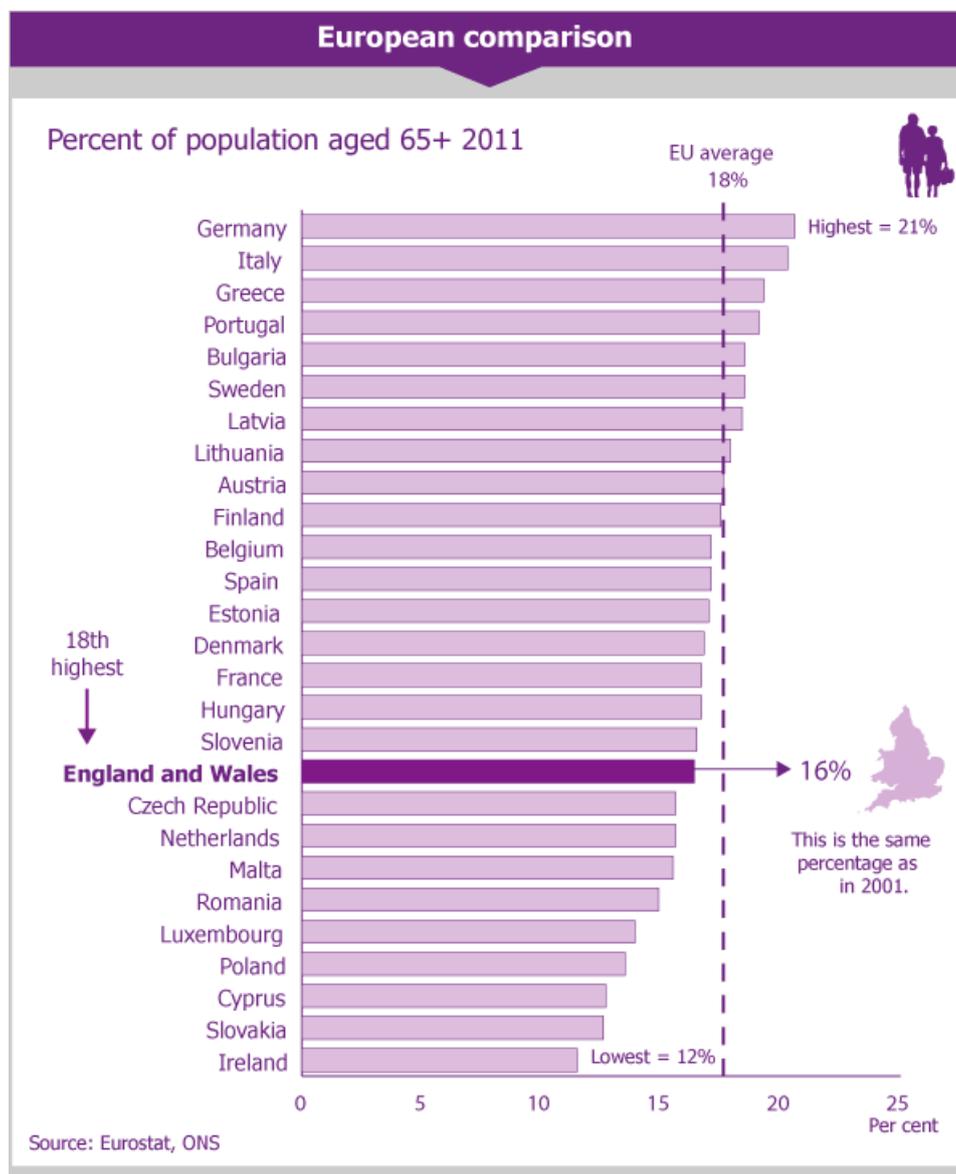
This short story analyses the characteristics of older people (those aged 65 and over) who were usually resident in England and Wales in 2011.

In 2011, 16 per cent (9.2 million) of the population of England and Wales were aged 65 and over; this proportion was the same in 2001 (8.3 million)¹. The median age for the resident population of England and Wales increased from 37 years in 2001 to 39 years in 2011; however the median age for the population aged 65 and over was 74 years in both 2001 and 2011.

The graphic shows the proportion of the population aged 65 and over in England and Wales for 2011 compared to the proportion aged 65 and over in other European Union (EU) countries. Germany and Italy had the most aged populations, with 21 per cent and 20 per cent respectively of their populations aged 65 and over. England and Wales was lower than the EU average of 18 per cent.

This analysis will look at the following characteristics of the population aged 65 and over in 2011:

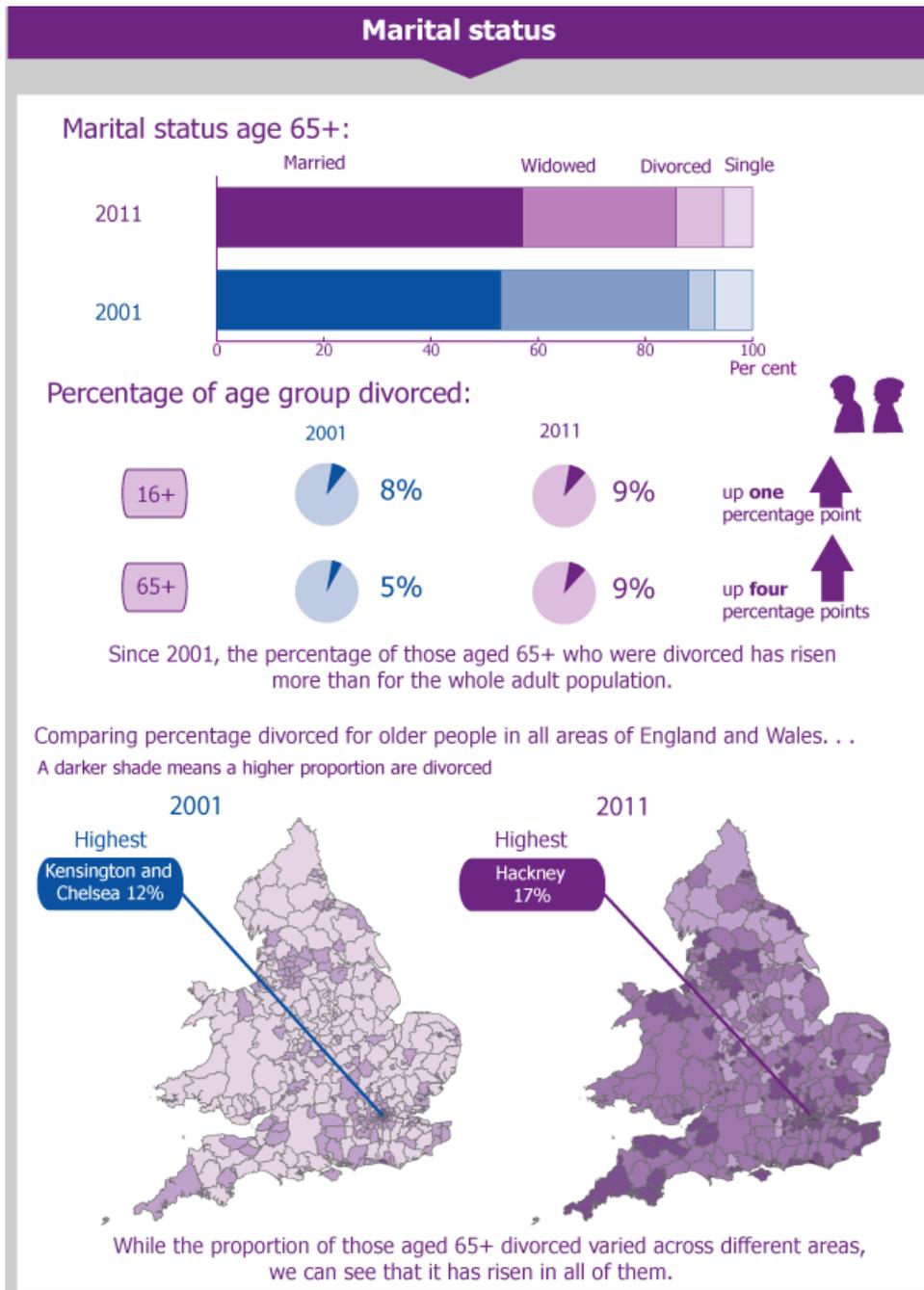
- Marital status
- Living arrangements
- Housing tenure
- Economic activity
- General health and provision of unpaid care



Notes for introduction

1. Some numbers and percentages used throughout this report may not sum due to rounding.
2. Data for England and Wales is from Census 2011; Data for other EU countries are for 2011 and are from Eurostat.
3. The 2011 Census table used in this section is DC1104EW (Residence type by sex by age), the 2001 Census table used in this section is SOO1 (Residence type by sex by age).

3. Marital status



In 2011, 57 per cent (5.3 million) of the age 65 and over population were married or in a civil partnership (including those who are separated but still legally married or in a civil partnership). Those who were widowed or a surviving partner from a civil partnership accounted for 29 per cent (2.7 million), while those who were single (never married or in a civil partnership) constituted 5.5 per cent (509,000) in 2011. The remaining 8.7 per cent (798,000) were divorced or formerly in a civil partnership now dissolved. Between 2001¹ and 2011, the proportions of the population aged 65 and over who were widowed² and single both declined, while married and divorced proportions both increased. These changes relate to increased life expectancy resulting in marriages surviving longer, but also having more chance of ending in divorce.

Overall, the 2011 Census of England and Wales recorded 4.1 million people (9.0 per cent of usual residents aged 16 and over) as divorced²; this was a rise from 3.4 million (8.2 per cent) in 2001. The census data do not allow for inferences to be made about when a person became divorced and instead reflects a single snapshot in time. Census figures for 2011 for the proportion of the 16 and over population who were divorced are consistent with the [rising divorce rate among older people](#). The increase in those aged 65 and over has been greater than for the adult population as a whole, with the proportion who were divorced nearly doubling over the decade, from 5.2 per cent in 2001 to 8.7 per cent in 2011.

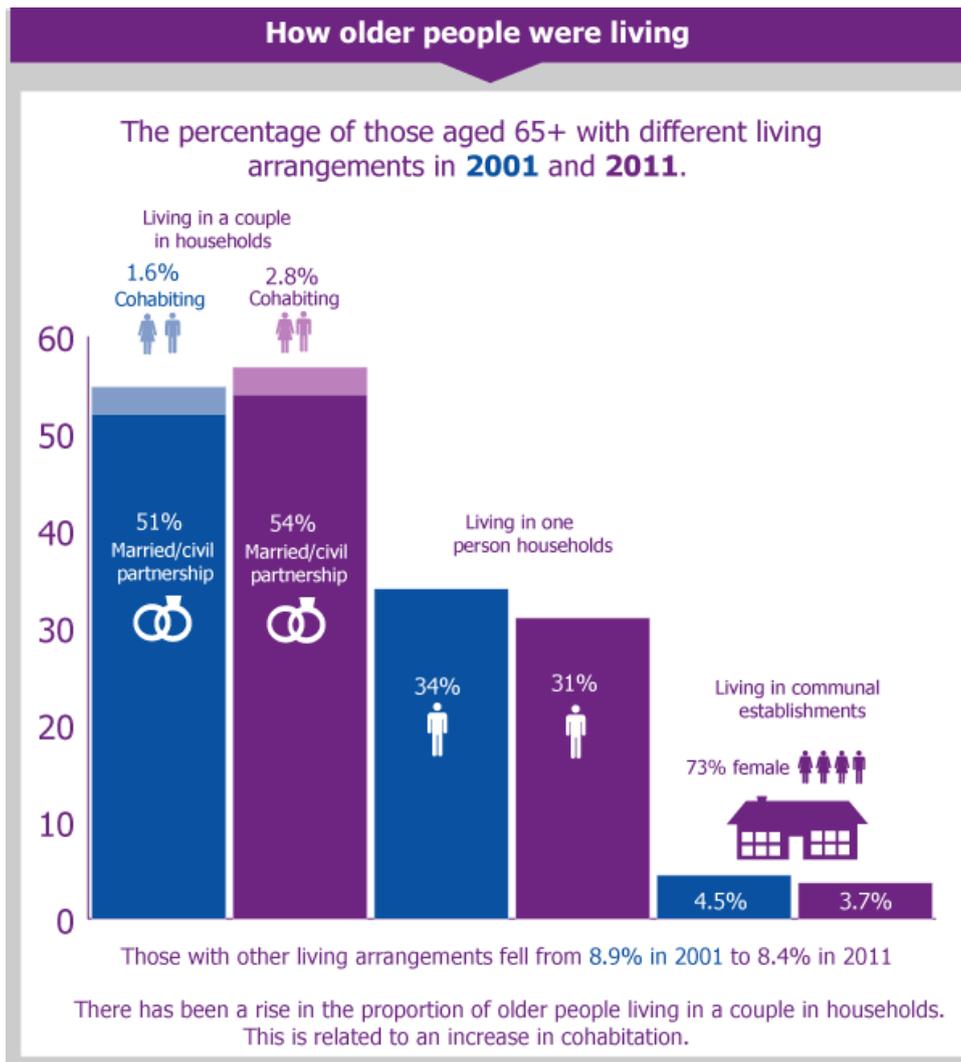
The two maps (using the same scale) show the proportion of the resident population aged 65 and over who were divorced in 2001 and 2011 by local authority (local authorities with highest proportions are labelled). These maps show that in all areas a higher proportion of people aged 65 and over were divorced in 2011. In both years the ten LAs with the highest proportion of those aged 65 and over who were divorced were all in London; higher concentrations were generally found in urban areas.

By contrast, the proportion of the population aged 65 and over who were single (never married or in a civil partnership) decreased slightly from 6.9 per cent in 2001 to 5.5 per cent in 2011. This proportion varied greatly by local authority: London boroughs had the highest proportions, with more than one in five residents aged 65 and over in a number of London boroughs remaining single.

Notes for marital status

1. Civil partnerships are not included in 2001 Census data as the legal state of civil partnership was only introduced in 2005.
2. In 2011 married includes civil partnerships, divorced includes dissolved civil partnerships, widowed includes surviving partners from civil partnerships, single includes those who have never been married or in a civil partnership.
3. The 2011 Census table used in this section is DC1107 (Marital and civil partnership status by sex by age), the 2001 Census table used in this section is S002 (Marital status by sex by age).

4. Living arrangements



The graphic shows that, of the 9.2 million usually resident population aged 65 and over in 2011, over half (56 per cent or 5.2 million) were living as a couple in a household; this was an increase from 52 per cent (4.3 million) in 2001. Those living as a couple in a household in 2011 included 54 per cent (4.9 million) living as a married couple or in a registered same sex-civil partnership and 2.8 per cent (262,000) living as a cohabiting couple¹; both of these were increases over 2001, but the proportion living in a cohabiting couple almost doubled. A [previous ONS publication](#) highlighted that the 65 and over population had the largest percentage increase in cohabitation of all age groups during the period 1996 to 2012, although the proportion of people in this age group who cohabit remains small. One possible reason for this rise in cohabitation is the increase in the population aged 65 and over in England and Wales who are divorced: 2011 Census data show that the proportion aged 65 and over divorced rose from 5.2 per cent in 2001 to 8.7 per cent in 2011. The previous publication identified that in 2012 over three-fifths of people aged 65 to 74 who were cohabitating were divorced or from dissolved civil partnerships.

Just under a third (31 per cent) of those aged 65 and over were living in one person households in 2011; this was a decrease from 34 per cent in 2001. An interactive map is available showing the distribution of persons living alone [aged 65 and over](#). The increase in older people living as a couple and decrease in those living alone may be due to increased life expectancy, resulting in less people becoming widowed. Another factor may be the decrease in the large number of widows created by the Second World War who are now reaching the end of their lives.

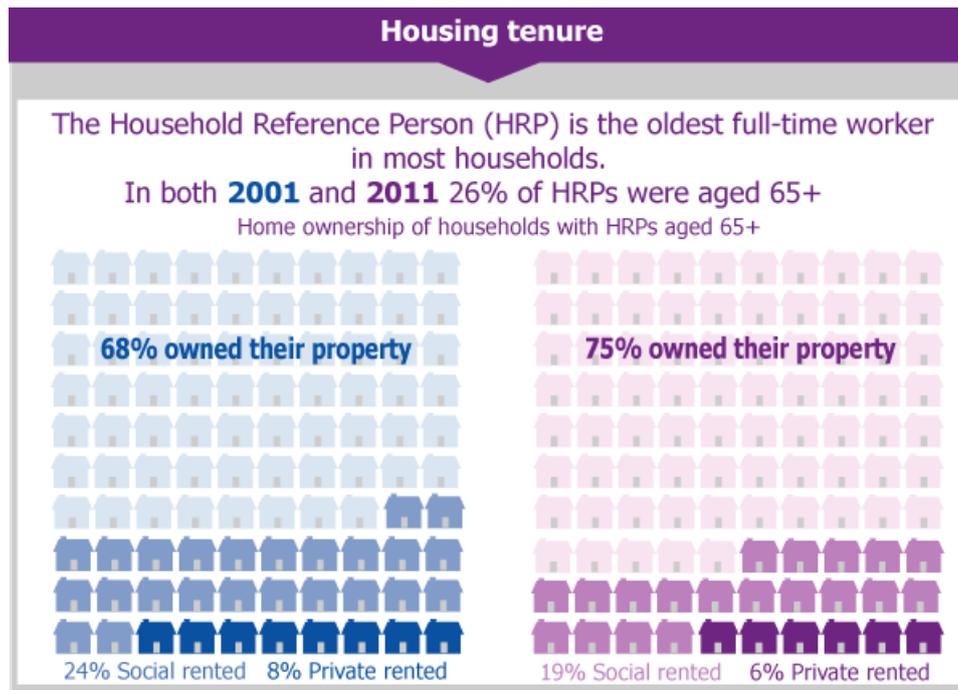
In 2011, of the 9.2 million usually resident population aged 65 and over, the majority (96 per cent or 8.9 million) were living in households. The remaining 3.7 per cent (337,000) were living in communal establishments², a decline from 4.5 per cent (374,000) in 2001. In 2011, those aged 65 and over living in communal establishments accounted for 34 per cent of the total communal population (one million); this was a decrease from 40 per cent in 2001 (when the total communal population was 934,000).

In 2011, of the population aged 65 and over living in communal establishments, 5.3 per cent (18,000) were aged 65-69; over half were aged 85 and over (58 per cent or 194,000). Comparisons with 2001 show that the proportion of older people living in communal establishments who were aged 65-84 decreased from 46 per cent to 42 per cent, while those aged 85 and over increased from 54 per cent to 58 per cent. This suggests that the age at which people move into communal establishments may have increased. In 2011, nearly three quarters of residents aged 65 and over living in communal establishments were female (73 per cent or 245,000). This is likely to relate to the longer life expectancy of females (82.6 years) compared to males (78.7 years) in England and Wales shown in [Interim life tables, 2009-2011](#). More detailed information on types of communal establishments and age of residents is due to be published in future census releases.

Notes for living arrangements

1. Cohabitation is considered to be living with a partner (opposite or same sex), but not married to or in a civil partnership with them. It includes people who may still be legally married or in a civil partnership but who are now living with a new partner.
2. A communal establishment is an establishment providing managed residential accommodation. 'Managed' in this context means full-time or part-time supervision of the accommodation. Communal establishments include sheltered accommodation units, hotels, guest houses, B&Bs and inns and pubs, and all accommodation provided solely for students (during term-time). More information is available in the 2011 [Housing tenure](#).
3. In this graphic those with 'Other living arrangements' includes people in the household population who are not living alone or as a couple (for example siblings, those living with a child or an elderly parent). This category also includes unrelated persons sharing a household (such as flat or house sharing).
4. The 2011 Census tables used in this section are DC1108 (Living arrangements by sex by age) and DC1104 (Residence type by sex by age), the 2001 Census table used in this section is S004 (Living arrangements by sex by age).

5. Housing tenure



A previous [Census 2011 publication](#) identified 23.4 million households in England and Wales; of the 23.4 million household reference persons (HRPs)¹, 26 per cent (6.1 million) were aged 65 and over; in 2001 this was 26 per cent (5.6 million). The concept of a 'Household Reference Person' (HRP) was introduced for the 2001 Census, replacing the traditional concept of a "Head of Household", to allow the production of statistics for a whole household based on the characteristics of one person. The HRP is chosen based on their age and economic activity, and is the oldest full-time worker in most households. Where nobody works full-time, other economic activity statuses are used¹.

In 2011, the majority of households with a HRP aged 65 and over were owner occupied (75 per cent or 4.6 million); this increased from 68 per cent (4.2 million) in 2001. A previous report on home ownership among households in England and Wales reported an overall decline in [home ownership](#) over the same period (from 69 per cent to 64 per cent). However, there was an increase of 826,000 in the number of households that owned their homes outright (without a mortgage). The increase in outright ownership could be due to the ageing population, with older people having paid off their mortgages. The report also highlighted that areas with a high proportion of households owning their homes outright also had high proportions of people aged 60 and above.

The remaining 25 per cent of households with a HRP aged 65 and over in 2011 were living in rented accommodation; this had decreased over the previous decade: social renting fell from 24 per cent (1.3 million) in 2001 to 19 per cent (1.1 million) in 2011; private renting fell from 7.6 per cent (426,000) to 6.5 per cent (395,000) over the same period.

Notes for housing tenure

1. The concept of a household reference person (HRP) was introduced in the 2001 Census (in common with other government surveys in 2001/2) to replace the traditional concept of the 'head of the household'. HRPs provide an individual person within a household to act as a reference point for producing further derived statistics and for characterising a whole household according to characteristics of the chosen reference person. For a person living alone, it follows that this person is the HRP. If a household contains only one family (with or without ungrouped individuals) then the HRP is the same as the family reference person (FRP). For families in which there is generational divide between family members that cannot be determined (Other related family), there is no FRP. Members of these families are treated the same as ungrouped individuals. If there is more than one family in a household the HRP is chosen from among the FRPs using the same criteria used to choose the FRP. This means the HRP will be selected from the FRPs on the basis of their economic activity, in the priority order:

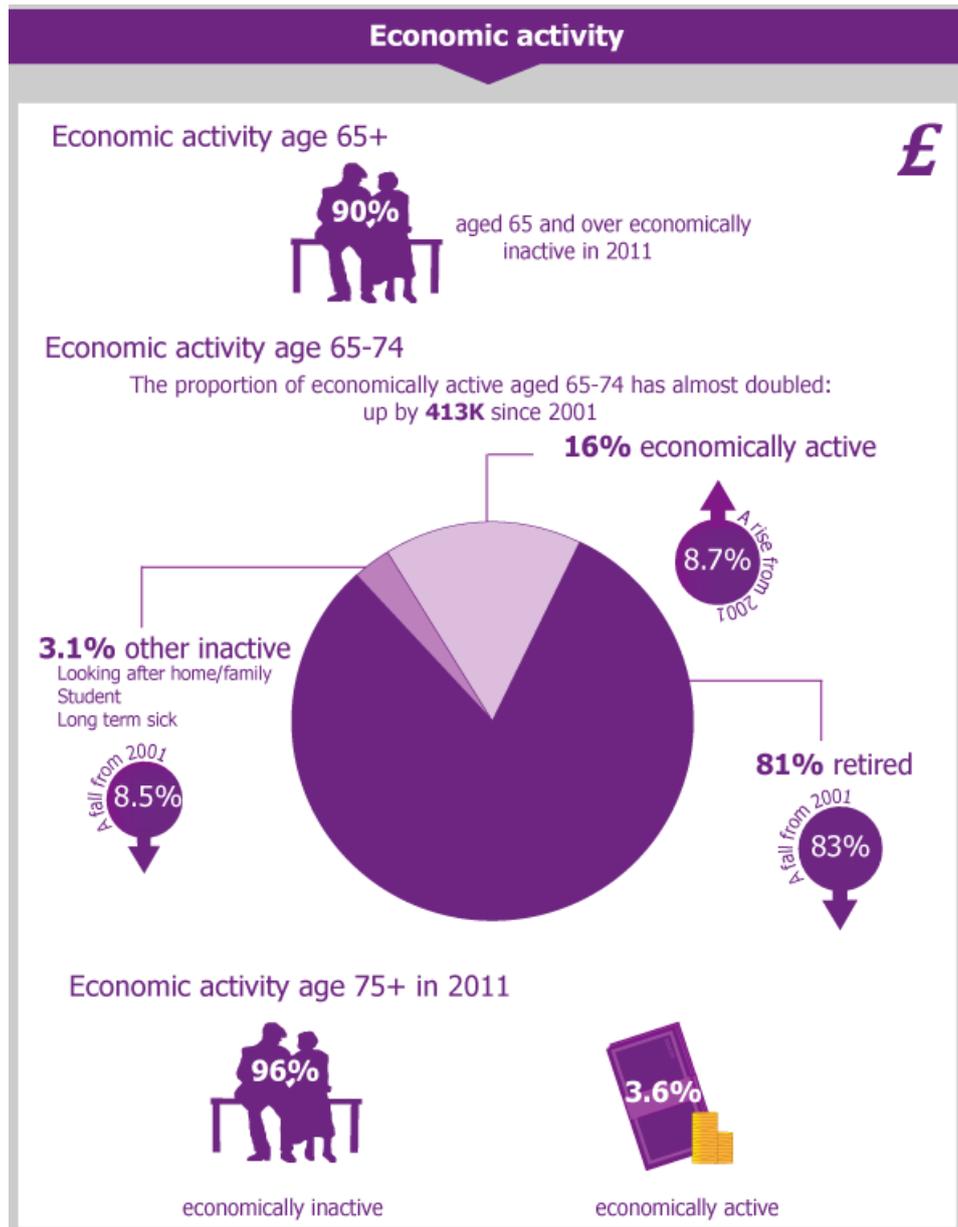
Economically active, employed, full-time, non-student Economically active, employed, full-time, student
Economically active, employed, part-time, non-student Economically active, employed, part-time, student
Economically active, unemployed, non-student Economically active, unemployed, student Economically
inactive, retired Economically inactive, other

If some or all FRPs have the same economic activity, the HRP is the eldest of the FRPs. If some or all are the same age, the HRP is the first of the FRPs from the order in which they were listed on the questionnaire.

If a household is made up entirely of any combination of ungrouped individuals and other related families, the HRP is chosen from among all people in the household, using the same criteria used to choose between FRPs. Students at their non term-time address and short-term migrants cannot be the HRP.

2. The 2011 Census table used in this section are KS105EW (Household composition) and QS404EW (HRP aged 65 and over); 2001 Census table used are C1213 (Tenure by number of rooms and accommodation type by sex by age).

6. Economic activity



The graphic shows that 9 out of 10 residents (90 per cent) of England and Wales aged 65 and over were economically inactive¹ in 2011. This included 86 per cent who were retired and 3.6 per cent 'Other inactive' (looking after home or family, long term sick or disabled, or economically inactive students). The remaining 10 per cent were economically active; the majority of these were working.

Within this age group, the economic activity of those aged 65-74 in 2011 has been focused on to enable comparison with equivalent data for 2001. The majority of those aged 65-74 were retired in 2011 (81 per cent), a decrease of two percentage points since 2001 (83 per cent). The remaining economically inactive population² aged 65-74 in 2011 accounted for 3.1 per cent, less than half the proportion accounted for by this category in 2001 (8.5 per cent).

The proportion of those aged 65-74 who were economically active in 2011 (16 per cent) was almost double that in 2001 (8.7 per cent), a rise in those economically active of 413 thousand people over the decade. The increased proportion of those aged 65-74 economically active reflects the larger number of older people who had continued to work beyond age 65.

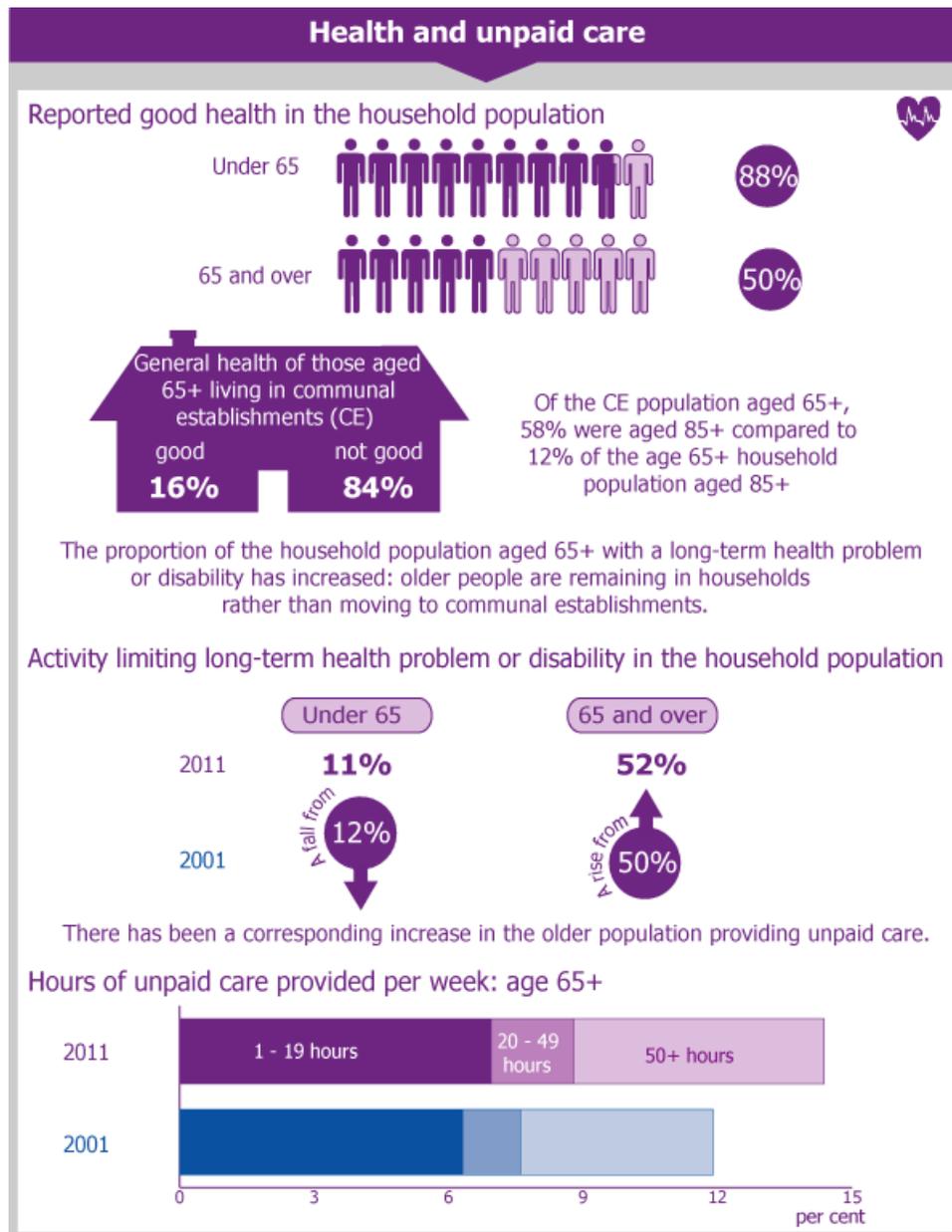
2011 Census data also allows analysis of the economic activity of those aged 75 and over. While 96 percent of this age group were economically inactive, a further 3.6 per cent (158 thousand) remained economically active.

A 2012 [ONS publication](#) highlighted that people are working longer than they used to; key factors may be increased life expectancy, the removal of [compulsory retirement age](#), the increase in flexible working patterns, and economic pressures leading to rising living costs. This trend is likely to continue, as the age for women's state pension eligibility increases to align with men by 2018.

Notes for economic activity

1. Economic activity relates to whether or not a person who was aged 16 and over was working or looking for work in the week before census. Rather than a simple indicator of whether or not someone was currently in employment, it provides a measure of whether or not a person was an active participant in the labour market.
2. The 'remaining economically inactive population' includes those who were not active participants in the labour market (excluding the retired population). This includes the economic activity categories: looking after home or family, long term sick or disabled, economically inactive students.
3. The 2011 Census table used in this section is DC6208EW (Economic activity by country of birth by sex by age (regional)) and 2001 Census table used is SO28 (Sex and age by economic activity).

7. General health and provision of unpaid care



Half (50 per cent) of all usual residents in England and Wales aged 65 and over living in households (8.9 million) reported very good or good health in 2011¹; this compared to 88 per cent for those aged under 65. Over a third (35 per cent) of those aged 65 and over reported fair health, and 15 per cent reported that their general health was bad or very bad. These levels may vary locally as a result of different economic and social characteristics. By contrast 84 per cent (283,000) of those aged 65 and over living in communal establishments (337,000) did not report good health; 37 per cent (124,000) reported bad or very bad health. The difference in general health relates to the older age structure of the communal establishment population. Of the population aged 65 and over living in communal establishments, 58 per cent were aged 85 and over; 12 per cent of the household population aged 65 and over were aged 85 and over.

A direct comparison of general health status between 2011 and 2001 is not possible because the question on general health in 2011 included a greater number of response options (five) compared with 2001 (three). However, some comparative analysis has been carried out [using univariate data](#). This comparison showed that the general pattern of better health in London and the South East region, and worse health in the Northern regions in 2001, was maintained in 2011. This may in part reflect the age structures of the different regions; age standardised estimates will be published by ONS later in 2013.

Just over half (52 per cent or 4.6 million) of those aged 65 and over living in households in 2011 reported having a long term health problem or disability which limited their daily activities². As might be expected, those aged 65 and over had higher levels of activity limitation than younger age groups: 11 per cent of those aged under 65 reported having a long term health problem or disability which limited their daily activities¹.

The proportion of those aged 65 and over living in households with a long term health problem or disability which limited their daily activity increased from 50 per cent in 2001 to 52 per cent in 2011. This may relate to older people being more likely to remain in the household population rather than moving into communal establishments: the communal establishment population decreased from 4.5 per cent to 3.7 per cent over the same period.

In 2011, 14 per cent (1.3 million) of the household population aged 65 and over provided unpaid care (this includes: looking after a partner, older parent, or adult child); this included 6.9 per cent who provided 1-19 hours unpaid care a week, 1.8 per cent who provided 20-49 hours of unpaid care a week, and 5.6 per cent who provided 50 hours or more unpaid care a week.

Comparisons with 2001 showed that there was a two percentage point increase in the proportion of older people providing unpaid care between 2001 and 2011. In 2001, 12 per cent (945,000) of usual residents aged 65 and over provided unpaid care: 6.3 per cent provided 1-19 hours unpaid care and 1.3 per cent provided 20-49 hours. The largest percentage point increase was seen for those providing 50 hours or more unpaid care a week: an increase from 4.3 per cent (341,000) in 2001 to 5.6 per cent (497,000) in 2011. This increase in unpaid care provision by older people may relate to providing care for a spouse or elderly parent in the home, as life expectancy continues to rise. There is also growing evidence of the adverse impact on health for those [providing unpaid care](#).

Notes for general health and provision of unpaid care

1. 2011 Census categories for general health have been aggregated: 'Good health' includes response options 'very good' and 'good'; 'not good health' includes response options 'fair', 'bad' and 'very bad'.
2. The question in 2001 and 2011 on long term health problem or disability were different, in 2001 the two options were (not limited and limited). In 2011 the three options were (not limited, limited a little, limited a lot), therefore the options of limited a little and limited a lot were combined.
3. The 2011 Census tables used in this section are DC3301EW (Provision of unpaid care by general health by sex by age), DC3302EW (Long-term health problem or disability by sex by age) and DC3204EW (General health by ethnic group by sex by age). The 2001 Census tables used are CAS025 (Health by age by unpaid care) and SO16 (Sex and age by general health by limiting long-term illness).

8. Background notes

1. Univariate 2011 Census data are available via the [Neighbourhood Statistics](#) website. Relevant table numbers are provided in all download files within this publication. Multivariate data are available via the [Nomis](#) website.
2. Further information on future releases is available online in the [2011 Census Prospectus](#).
3. ONS has ensured that the data collected meet users' needs via an extensive [2011 Census outputs consultation](#) process in order to ensure that the 2011 Census outputs will be of increased use in the planning of housing, education, health and transport services in future years.
4. ONS is responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales. Simultaneous but separate censuses took place in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These were run by the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) respectively.
5. A person's place of usual residence is in most cases the address at which they stay the majority of the time. For many people this will be their permanent or family home. If a member of the services did not have

a permanent or family address at which they are usually resident, they were recorded as usually resident at their base address.

6. All key terms used in this publication are explained in the [2011 Census glossary](#). Information on the [2011 Census geography products for England and Wales](#) is also available.
7. All census population estimates were extensively quality assured, using other national and local sources of information for comparison and review by a series of quality assurance panels. An extensive range of [quality assurance, evaluation and methodology](#) papers were published alongside the first release in July 2012 and have been updated in this release, including a [Quality and Methodology \(QMI\) document](#).
8. The census developed the coverage assessment and adjustment methodology to address the problem of undercounting. It was used for both usual residents and short-term residents. The coverage assessment and adjustment methodology involved the use of standard statistical techniques, similar to those used by many other countries, for measuring the level of undercount in the census and providing an assessment of characteristics of individuals and households. ONS adjusted the 2011 Census counts to include estimates of people and households not counted.
9. The 2011 Census achieved its overall target response rate of 94 per cent of the usually resident population of England and Wales, and over 80 per cent in all local and unitary authorities. The population estimate for England and Wales of 56.1 million is estimated with 95 per cent confidence to be accurate to within +/- 85,000 (0.15 per cent).
10. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk