

Article

Profile of the older population living in England and Wales in 2021 and changes since 2011

Overview of the characteristics of the population aged 65 years and over in 2021 including legal partnership status, living arrangements, ethnicity, religion, health, disability and caring status, and main changes since 2011.

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Notice

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We have removed the sentence “This is in line with an increase in divorce rates at older ages since 2011” from Section 3: Legal partnerships. Divorce data by age are not available for the 2019, 2020, and 2021 data years. It is therefore not possible to compare divorce rates at time points 2011 and 2021.

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1 . Main points

- Men and women aged 65 years and over living in England and Wales in 2021 were more likely to be divorced and less likely to be widowed than in 2011, in line with increases in life expectancy.
- In 2021, 3.3 million people aged 65 years and over were living alone in England and Wales, 36.3% of older women down from 39.2% in 2011 and 22.7% of older men up from 21.8%.
- Across older age groups, both men and women living in a couple were more likely to be in very good or good health than those not living in a couple, regardless of whether those not living in a couple lived with other people.
- The population aged 65 years and over was more ethnically diverse in 2021 than in 2011, with a decrease from 95.5% to 93.6% in the percentage identifying in the high level white ethnic group and increases in the proportions identifying in all other high level ethnic groups.
- While the population aged 65 years and over living in England and Wales is predominantly Christian, the proportion with no religious affiliation has doubled since 2011, reaching 17.5% in 2021.
- In 2021 there were almost 1.2 million unpaid carers aged 65 years and over in England and Wales, just over 1 in 10 of the older population, with almost half of these providing more than 50 hours of unpaid care a week.

2 . Population ageing

Census 2021 results show the population of England and Wales has continued to age since 2011. The number of people aged 65 years and over increased from 9.2 million in 2011 to over 11 million in 2021 and the proportion of people aged 65 years and over rose from 16.4% to 18.6%.

3 . Legal partnerships

In 2021, 58.3% of the population aged 65 years and over in England and Wales were married or in a civil partnership (including those who were separated but still legally married or in a civil partnership). This compares with 46.9% of the population aged 16 and over as a whole.

Same-sex marriages and all civil partnerships accounted for less than 0.3% of legal partnerships of people aged 65 and over:

- 13,935 older adults were in same sex civil partnerships (0.13%)
- 11,895 older adults were in same sex marriages (0.11%)
- 5,960 were in opposite sex civil partnerships (0.05%)

Of people aged 65 years and over, 12.2% were divorced (or in a dissolved civil partnership), 23.1% were widowed (or a surviving partner from a civil partnership) and 6.3% were single (never married or in a civil partnership).

Figure 1: Amongst the population aged 65 years and over, men were more likely to be married and single than women, and women were more likely to be divorced and widowed than men

Legal partnership status of population aged 65 years and over by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

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A higher proportion of men than women aged 65 years and over were married or civil partnered, the differential increasing across age groups. Among people aged 65 to 84 years, men were also more likely to be single than women; however, the differences decreased across older age groups.

In contrast, women were more likely to be widowed than men, with the differential increasing across older age groups. Women were also more likely to be divorced than men, with the biggest differences for ages 65 to 69 years and 70 to 74 years.

Figure 2: Older men and women are less likely to be widowed and more likely to be divorced than in 2011

Percentage point change in legal partnership status of population aged 65 years and over between 2021 and 2011, by five-year age group and sex, England and Wales

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Compared with 2011, the percentages of men and women who were widowed in 2021 were lower across all older age groups, with larger decreases for women than men. Remarriage rates at older ages have also increased since 2011.

The percentages of older men and women who were divorced were higher in 2021 than in 2011, with larger increases for women than men across older age groups.

Lower percentages of women aged 65 to 69 years and men in age groups 65 to 79 years were married or in a civil partnership in 2021 than in 2011. Higher percentages of women aged 70 years and over and men aged 80 years and over were married or civil partnered.

Compared with 2011, percentages of single women aged 65 to 74 years and single men in age groups 65 to 79 years were higher in 2021. There were fewer single women aged 75 years and over and single men aged 80 years and over.

4 . Living arrangements

Living in private households or communal establishments

In 2021, 97.3% of usual residents aged 65 years and over in England and Wales lived in private households, with the remaining 2.7% living in communal establishments. The vast majority (93.0%) lived in care homes.

Compared with 2011, the proportion of older people living in care homes in 2021 has decreased from 3.2% to 2.5% in 2021.

An article to be published later in the year will provide detailed information on older people living in different types of care homes and their characteristics. Read more in our [Ageing analysis plans](#).

Living as a couple

In 2021, most household residents aged 65 years and over (60.7%) in England and Wales were living as a couple, up from 58.6% in 2011. Of these, most (92.7%) were in an opposite-sex marriage (including 0.1% who were separated but still legally married) and 6.5% were cohabiting as an opposite-sex couple.

People in same-sex relationships (civil partnerships, marriage, or cohabiting) made up 0.7% of those aged 65 years and over living as a couple. Relatively few people aged 65 years and over living as a couple were in an opposite-sex civil partnership (5,955, or 0.1%).

Figure 3: The likelihood of living in a couple decreases across older age groups

Percentage of population aged 65 years and over living in a couple, by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Base is residents living in private households.

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Women are less likely to be living in a couple than men in each older age group, this differential increasing across age groups. The majority of people aged 65 years and over not living in a couple are either widowed (54.8%) or divorced (25.6%) and higher proportions of women are widowed or divorced than men across older age groups (see [Section 3: Legal partnerships](#)).

Of adults aged 65 years and over living in households, 1.3% were in a legal partnership but not living as a couple (sometimes referred to as "living apart together") a decrease from 1.6% in 2011.

Living alone

In 2021, 3.3 million people aged 65 years and over were living alone in England and Wales, 30.1 % of the older population. The proportion of older women living alone was lower in 2021 (36.3%) than in 2011 (39.2%). For men, the proportion increased slightly in 2021 (22.7%) compared with 2011 (21.8%).

Figure 4: The likelihood of living alone increases across older age groups, with older women more likely to be living alone than older men

Population aged 65 years and over living alone, by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

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5 . Ethnic group

Here, we focus on the five high level ethnic groups people identify with, as set out in our [Ethnic group by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

In 2021, 93.6% of the population aged 65 years and over living in England and Wales identified in the White ethnic group, 3.8% identified in the Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh ethnic group, and 1.4% in the Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African ethnic group. The remaining 1.2% of people aged 65 years and over identified in the Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups and Other ethnic groups.

Figure 5: More than 9 in 10 older people identified as White in 2021, but the older population has become more ethnically diverse since 2011

Percentage of the population aged 65 years and over by high level ethnic group, 2021 and 2011, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Asian Welsh and Black Welsh were only options in Wales.

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Ethnic diversity reduces with age. The proportion of people identifying with the White ethnic group was:

- 92.7% of people aged 65 to 74 years
- 94.4% of people aged 75 to 84 years
- 95.2% of people aged 85 years and over

The percentage of the population aged 65 years and over identifying as White decreased from 95.5% in 2011 to 93.6% in 2021. The percentage identifying in all other high level ethnic groups increased, with the largest increase seen in the Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh ethnic group, up from 2.6% in 2011 to 3.8% in 2021.

Legal partnerships, living arrangements and ethnic group

Figure 6: For older people, legal partnership status differs between ethnic groups

Legal partnership status of the population aged 65 years and over, by high level ethnic group and sex, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Asian Welsh and Black Welsh were only options in Wales.

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Across most older age groups, higher proportions of women identifying as White were married or civil partnered than women identifying in other ethnic groups. Across all older age groups, higher proportions of men identifying as Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh were married or civil partnered than men identifying in other ethnic groups.

Across all older age groups, the proportion of women who were widowed was highest for women identifying as Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh. Across most older age groups, this was highest for men identifying as White.

Across all older age groups, women and men identifying in the Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African ethnic group or Mixed or multiple ethnic groups were more likely to be divorced, compared with those identifying in other ethnic groups.

Women aged 65 to 89 years who identified as White and men aged 65 to 89 years who identified as Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh were the most likely to be living as a couple.

Women aged 65 to 89 years and men in aged 65 to 84 years who identified in the Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African ethnic group were the least likely to be living in a couple, compared with men and women identifying in other high level ethnic groups.

Figure 7: Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh men and women were least likely to be living alone, while Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh men were the most likely to be living as a couple

Percentage of people aged 65 years and over living as a couple, by high level ethnic groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Asian Welsh and Black Welsh were only options in Wales.
2. The percentage of people living in a couple is the percentage of those aged 65 years and over living in a household, while the percentage of those living alone is the percentage of all usual residents aged 65 years and over.

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Higher proportions of women identifying in the Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African and Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups aged 65 to 79 years lived alone than those identifying as other ethnic groups. From age 80 years, people identifying as White were the most likely to be living alone.

Men identifying in the Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African and Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups aged 65 years to 84 years were most likely to be living alone. Those identifying in the White groups were the most likely at age 90 years and over.

Both men and women identifying as Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh across all older age groups were the least likely to be living alone.

6 . Religion

For information on religious affiliation, see our [Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

The majority of people aged 65 years or over in England and Wales in 2021 identified as Christian (72.2%). The likelihood increased across older age groups, from 68.4% of people aged 64 to 74 years to 76.1% of people aged 75 to 84 years and 78.4% of people aged 85 years and over. This was also true for those who identified as Jewish, but was reversed for all other religious groups.

Figure 8: Most older people identified as Christian, but the proportion has decreased since 2011

Percentage of the population aged 65 years and over identifying with different religions, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. The question on religion was voluntary. Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the religion question.

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Since 2011, the religious profile of the older population has become more diverse. The percentage of the older population who identified as Christian decreased by 8.2 percentage points, while the percentage identifying as other religious groups increased by 0.2 percentage points.

The largest change has been in the percentage of the older population who reported no religion. It increased from 8.5% in 2011 to 17.5% in 2021, with men more likely to report no religion (21.9%) than women (13.8%).

Figure 9: Older women were more likely to identify as Christian and older men were more likely to report no religious affiliation

Percentage of men and women aged 65 years and over by religious affiliation, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. The question on religion was voluntary. Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the religion question.

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7 . Sexual orientation and gender identity

More than 1 in 200 (0.62%), 68,410 people, of the population in England and Wales aged 65 years and over identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+). This compares with 3.16% of people aged 16 and over.

The likelihood of older people identifying as LGB+ was highest in the 65 to 74 age group (0.84%) and decreased in the 75 to 84 years age group (0.42%) and the 85 years and over age group (0.23%).

Figure 10: Older men were more likely to identify as LGB+ than older women

Percentage of the population aged 65 years and over identifying as LGB+, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. The question on sexual orientation was voluntary. Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the sexual orientation question.

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For the definitions of gender identity and trans, see [Section 11: Glossary](#).

Less than one percent (0.23%) of the population aged 65 years and over in England and Wales identified as trans (25,765 people). This compares with people aged 16 and over (0.54%). Amongst older age groups, the likelihood of identifying as trans was highest in the 65 to 74 years age group (0.25%), decreasing with age.

Figure 11: The likelihood of identifying as trans decreases across older age groups

Percentage of the population aged 65 years and over identifying as trans in 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Trans refers to people whose gender identity is different from their sex registered at birth.
2. The question on gender identity was voluntary. Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the gender identity question.

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8 . Health

In 2021, in England and Wales, 57.7% of all usual residents aged 65 and over reported being in good or very good health, 29.5% in fair health, and 12.8% in bad or very bad health.

Figure 12: The likelihood of being in very good or good health decreases across older age groups

General health of population aged 65 years and over, by five-year age groups, 2021, England and Wales

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Within the population aged 65 and over, the likelihood of being in good or very good health decreases with age, while the likelihood of being in fair, bad, or very bad health increases.

Figure 13: Within the 65 years and over population, women in the youngest age groups were more likely to report very good or good health than men

General health of population aged 65 years and over, by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

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Higher percentages of women aged 65 to 69 years and women aged 70 to 74 years reported being in good or very good health than men in those age groups. Men and women aged 75 to 79 years were equally likely to report good health. The percentages of men in good health aged 80 to 84 years, 85 to 89 years, and 90 years and over were higher than for women in those age groups.

Across older age groups up to the ages of 80 to 84 years, there was no difference in the percentages of men and women reporting bad or very bad health. However, higher percentages of women aged 85 to 89 years and women aged 90 years and over reported being in bad or very bad health than men in those age groups.

Across older age groups, the percentages of women and men reporting very good or good health were higher in 2021 than in 2011. The percentages reporting fair, bad, and very bad health were lower.

For both women and men, the largest decreases in very bad or bad health were for people aged 80 to 84 years.

Figure 14: General health of the older population has improved since 2011

Percentage point change in general health status of population aged 65 years and over between 2011 Census and Census 2021, by five-year age groups and sex, England and Wales

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Legal partnerships, living arrangements and health

Figure 15: Married (or civil partnered) women aged 65 to 84 years and men aged 65 to 89 years, were the most likely to be in very good or good health

General health by legal partnership status of population aged 65 years and over by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

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Married (or civil partnered) women in age groups from 65 to 84 years and men from 65 to 89 years, were the most likely to be in very good or good health compared to those of other legal partnership statuses. From age 85 years for women and 90 years for men, those who have never married were the most likely to be in very good or good health.

Women aged 65 to 79 years and men aged 65 to 84 years who were living on their own were more likely to be in very bad or bad health than those living with other people, with bigger differentials for men than women. This reverses from the age of 80 years for women and 85 years for men, with people living alone in better health.

Figure 16: Women aged 65 to 79 years and men aged 65 to 84 years living on their own were more likely to be in very bad or bad health than those living with other people

General health of population aged 65 years and over of those living alone, and living in a couple, by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. The percentage of people living as a couple is the percentage of people aged 65 years and over living in a household, while the percentage of those living alone is the percentage of all usual residents aged 65 years and over.

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Who you live with seems to make a difference. People aged 65 to 89 years living as a couple are more likely to be in very good or good health than those not living as a couple, regardless of whether those not living as a couple live with other people.

9 . Disability

For the definition of disabled, see [Section 11: Glossary](#).

For people over the age of 65 years, the likelihood of having a disability increases with age.

Women are more likely to have a disability than men in all older age groups, with the gap increasing with age.

Figure 17: Disabled older women were more likely to be limited a lot in their day-to-day activities than men

Percentage of older men and women who are disabled and whose day-to-day activities are limited a lot or a little, by five-year age groups and sex, 2021, England and Wales

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Men and women across older ages groups were less likely to have a disability in 2021 than 2011, with similar levels of decrease for both sexes in each age group.

The largest differences were for the oldest age groups, with 87.1% of females and 81.6% of males aged 85 years and over in England and Wales were classed as disabled in 2011, compared with 60.5% of females and 53.7% of males aged 85 and over in 2021.

The removal of the prompt in 2021 that appeared in the 2011 Census question to “include problems related to old age” may have contributed to this decrease. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may also have had an impact. For more information, see our [Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

10 . Carers

In 2021, there were almost 1.2 million unpaid carers aged 65 years and over in England and Wales, just over 1 in 10 of the older population.

Higher percentages of women aged 65 to 74 years were unpaid carers than men. Around the same percentage of women and men were providing unpaid care at ages 75 to 79 years. At 80 years and over, a higher percentage of men than women were carers. For more information, see our [Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

Figure 18: Within the 65 years and over population, women in the youngest age groups were more likely to be carers than men

Percentage of population aged 65 years and over providing unpaid care, by hours, by five-year age

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Amongst carers, women aged 65 to 79 years were more likely to be providing 50 hours of care or more a week than men, with women aged 75 to 79 years being the most likely (5.7%). Men aged 80 years and over are more likely to be providing 50 hours of care than women, with men aged 85 to 89 years the most likely (7.5%).

A lower proportion of people aged 65 years and over were providing unpaid care in 2021, compared with 2011. Older male carers decreased from 15.3% in 2011 to 10.7%. Female carers decreased from 13.6% to 10.5%. Decreases in the percentages of people providing unpaid care were also seen in younger age groups. For more information, see our [Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

The overall percentage of people aged 65 years and over providing care decreased. However, the percentage of the older population providing 50 hours or more of unpaid care remained at a similar level (5%), meaning that over half a million older people were providing this level of care in 2021.

The decreases in older carers between the 2011 and 2021 censuses may have been influenced by Census 2021 data being collected during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and changes in question wording since 2011. For more detail, please see Section 2 of our [Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

Figure 19: Older carers providing 20 or more hours of care a week were more likely to be in bad or very bad health than carers providing fewer hours

Number of hours of unpaid care provided by carers aged 65 years and over in bad or very bad health, by five-year age groups, 2021, England and Wales

11 . Glossary

Census Day

Census 2021 was conducted on 21 March. At this time, coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown restrictions were still in place in England and Wales. The coronavirus pandemic may have affected estimates of disability prevalence and general health because of changes in people's perceptions and increased death rates during this period (see our [Updated estimates of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by disability status article](#)).

Disability

In Census 2021, people who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses were considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the Government Statistical Service harmonised standard for measuring disability, and is in line with the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#). This requires that a person has a physical or mental impairment, and that the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities. Therefore, people reporting conditions that limited their day-to-day activities a little or a lot were classified as disabled.

People who had no long-term physical or mental health conditions, or who had conditions that did not limit their day-to-day activities, were classified as non-disabled. Details on changes to questions between 2001, 2011, and 2021 are given in [Section 11: Question change of our Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

Ethnic group and high level ethnic group

The ethnic group that the person completing the census feels they belong to. This could be based on their culture, family background, identity, or physical appearance.

Respondents could choose 1 out of 19 tick-box response categories, including write-in response options. High level ethnic group refers to the first stage of the two-stage ethnic group question. In the first stage the respondent identifies as one of the following options:

- Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh
- Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African
- Mixed or Multiple
- White
- Other ethnic group

Gender identity

Gender identity refers to a person's sense of their own gender, whether male, female, or another category, such as non-binary. This may or may not be the same as their sex registered at birth.

General health

A person's assessment of the general state of their health from very good to very bad. This assessment is not based on a person's health over any specified period of time.

Household

A household is defined as one person living alone or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room, or dining area.

This includes all sheltered accommodation units in an establishment (irrespective of whether there are other communal facilities), and all people living in caravans on any type of site that is their usual residence. This includes anyone who has no other usual residence elsewhere in the UK.

A household must contain at least one person whose place of usual residence is at the address. A group of short-term residents living together is not classified as a household, and neither is a group of people at an address where only visitors are staying.

Legal partnership status

Legal partnership status classifies a person according to their legal marital or registered civil partnership status on Census Day, 21 March 2021. It is the same as the 2011 Census variable "Marital status", but has been updated for Census 2021 to reflect the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019, which made provision for the extension of civil partnerships to couples who are not of the same sex.

In Census 2021 results, "single" refers only to someone who has never been married or in a registered civil partnership.

LGB+

An abbreviation used to refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other minority sexual orientations (for example, asexual).

Religion

The religion people connect or identify with (their religious affiliation), whether or not they practise or have belief in it.

This question was voluntary, and the variable includes people who answered the question, including "No religion", alongside people who chose not to answer this question. This variable classifies responses into the eight tick-box response options. Write-in responses are classified by their "parent" religious affiliation, including "No religion", where applicable.

Sex

This is the sex recorded by the person completing the census. The options were "Female" and "Male".

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is an umbrella term covering sexual identity, attraction, and behaviour. For an individual respondent, these may not be the same. For example, someone in an opposite-sex relationship may also experience same-sex attraction, and vice versa. This means the statistics should be interpreted purely as showing how people responded to the question, rather than being about whom they are attracted to or their actual relationships.

We have not provided glossary entries for individual sexual orientation categories. This is because individual respondents may have differing perspectives on the exact meaning.

Trans

An umbrella term used to refer to people whose gender identity is different from their sex registered at birth. This includes people who identify as a trans man, trans woman, non-binary, or with another minority gender identity.

Unpaid care

A person is a provider of unpaid care if they look after, or give help or support to, anyone because of long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age. This does not include any activities as part of paid employment. No distinction is made about whether any care that a person provides is within their own household or outside the household.

The wording of the question was changed in 2021 and used the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised standard for unpaid care](#). Information on steps taken to consult on question changes can be found in our [Health and unpaid care question development for Census 2021 report](#).

Usual resident

A usual resident is anyone who, on Census Day, 21 March 2021, was in the UK and had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for a period of 12 months or more, or had a permanent UK address and was outside the UK and intended to be outside the UK for less than 12 months.

For a full glossary of terms, please see our [Census 2021 dictionary](#).

12 . Data sources and quality

Reference date

The census provides estimates of the characteristics of all people and households in England and Wales on Census Day, 21 March 2021. It is carried out every 10 years and provides the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales.

We are responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales, but will also release outputs for the UK in partnership with the Welsh Government, the National Records of Scotland (NRS), and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The census in Northern Ireland was also conducted on 21 March 2021, whereas Scotland's census was moved to 20 March 2022. All UK census offices are working closely together to understand how this difference in reference dates will affect the UK-wide population and housing statistics in terms of both timing and scope.

Response rate

The person response rate is the number of usual residents for whom individual details were provided on a returned questionnaire, divided by the estimated usual resident population.

The person response rate for Census 2021 was 97% of the usual resident population of England and Wales and over 88% in all local authorities. Most returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

Read more about question-specific response rates at local authority level in Section 4 of our [Measures showing the quality of Census 2021 estimates methodology](#).

Ethnic group question

To see the ethnic group question on the household, individual, and Welsh questionnaires, visit our [Census 2021 paper questionnaires page](#).

Ethnic groups in the detailed ethnic group classification

An ethnic group will be shown in the detailed classification if the number of people who identified with the group within a write-in response option are large enough to disaggregate from other ethnic groups. For this reason, some ethnic groups appear in multiple high level categories. Where the number of people identifying with an ethnic group is small enough for individuals to be identified, an ethnic group will be aggregated with other ethnic groups in the same write-in response option.

Gender identity

The question on gender identity was new for Census 2021. It was voluntary and was only asked of people aged 16 years and over. Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the gender identity question.

In total, 45.7 million people answered the gender identity question (94.0% of the population aged 16 years and over and 93.0% of the population aged 65 years and over).

Religion question

The question on religion was voluntary. Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the religion question.

In total, 94.0% of the overall population in England and Wales (56.0 million people) chose to answer the religion question in 2021. This is a higher percentage than in 2011, when 92.9% (52.1 million) answered the religion question and 7.1% (4.0 million) chose not to answer.

To see the religion question on the household, individual, and Welsh questionnaires, visit our [Census 2021 paper questionnaires page](#).

Religious groups in the detailed religion classification

The counts for religious groups identified in our [Religion \(detailed\) in England and Wales dataset](#) are a representation of people who chose to write in their religion. Some people may have chosen to describe a denomination of one of the tick-box responses (for example, Catholic as a denomination of Christian or Orthodox as a denomination of Jewish) through the "Any other religion" write-in response option.

2011 religion data

In 2011, an error in the processing of census data led to the number of usual residents in the "Religion not stated" category being overestimated by a total of 62,000 for the following three local authorities combined:

- Camden
- Islington
- Tower Hamlets

In February 2015, we published corrected figures for estimates based on the tick-box classification. However, it could not be corrected for the detailed religion classification, because the processing and relationships with other output variables are so complex.

For this reason, only apply comparisons for these three local authorities to the tick-box classification, using the corrected figures set out in our [2011 Census products: Issues and corrections notice](#).

For this publication, where corrected figures for the tick-box classification from the 2011 Census are available, they have been used. Where they are not (for single year of age by sex), we have used data from the [CT0291_2011 commissioned table](#).

Sexual orientation

The question on sexual orientation was new for Census 2021. It was voluntary and was only asked of people aged 16 years and over.

Percentages are calculated out of the overall population, as opposed to out of the population who answered the sexual orientation question.

In total, 44.9 million people answered the sexual orientation question (92.5% of the population aged 16 years and over and 91.2% of people aged 65 years and over).

Quality

The census provides the most detailed picture of the entire population, with the same core questions asked to everybody across England and Wales. Census results can be more reliable than survey results based on a sample of the population, because the whole population is included. The UK Statistics Authority has assigned National Statistics status to Census 2021 outputs, providing assurance that these statistics are of the highest quality and value to users. Census 2021 achieved a very high response rate of 97%. We ensure the census results reflect the whole population by using statistical methods to estimate the number and characteristics of people who were not recorded on a census response. This means that the census statistics are estimates, rather than simple counts of responses, so they have some statistical uncertainty associated with them. We take steps to minimise possible sources of error.

Additionally, we apply statistical disclosure control to protect the confidentiality of census respondents. Differences in the methods used for statistical disclosure control may result in minor differences in data totals between census products. Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally, are provided in our [Quality and methodology information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). We also have specific methodologies for [Demography and migration quality information](#), [Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion quality information](#), [Health, disability and unpaid care quality information](#), and [Sexual orientation and gender identity quality information](#).

Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates report](#).

13 . Related links

[Gender identity: age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 25 January 2023

Gender identity by age and sex of usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.

[General health by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 24 February 2023

Insights into general health in England and Wales in 2021, broken down by age and sex and presented at country, regional and local authority level. Additional analyses compare general health with the 2011 Census and examine the relationship between deprivation and health at a national decile (England) or quintile (Wales) level.

[Marriage and civil partnership status in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 22 February 2023

Details adults' legal partnership status, including: changes over time; where groups of each legal partnership status live; education; ethnicity; and, religion.

[People's living arrangements in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 9 February 2023

This article provides an overview of people's living arrangements. It includes analysis on: their legal partnership status, non-dependent children, people living alone, people with second addresses, and whether people had moved in the year prior to census.

[Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 30 January 2023

The religion people connect or identify with (their religious affiliation), whether or not they practise or have belief in it, by age and sex using Census 2021 data.

[Sexual orientation: age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 25 January 2023

Sexual orientation by age and sex of usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.

14 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS) released 3 April 2023, ONS website, article, [Profile of the older population living in England and Wales in 2021 and changes since 2011](#)