

Statistical bulletin

Sexual orientation, UK: 2019

Experimental statistics on sexual orientation in the UK in 2019 by region, sex, age, marital status, ethnicity and socio-economic classification, using data from the Annual Population Survey (APS).

Contact:
Amanda Sharfman and Pamela
Cobb
pop.info@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)1329 444661

Release date:
27 May 2021

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Sexual orientation in the UK](#)
3. [Distribution by sex](#)
4. [Distribution by age](#)
5. [UK countries and English regions](#)
6. [Legal partnership status](#)
7. [Sexual orientation data](#)
8. [Glossary](#)
9. [Measuring the data](#)
10. [Strengths and limitations](#)
11. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- The proportion of the UK population aged 16 years and over identifying as heterosexual or straight decreased from 94.6% in 2018 to 93.7% in 2019.
- An estimated 2.7% of the UK population aged 16 years and over identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019, an increase from 2.2% in 2018.
- Between 2018 and 2019, the number of men identifying as LGB increased from 2.5% to 2.9% and women identifying as LGB increased from 2.0% to 2.5%.
- Younger people (aged 16 to 24 years) were most likely to identify as LGB in 2019 (6.6% of all 16 to 24 year olds, an increase from 4.4% in 2018); older people (aged 65 years and over) also showed an increase in those identifying as LGB, from 0.7% to 1.0% of this age category.
- Between 2018 and 2019, the proportion of people who identified as LGB increased for England (2.7%, up from 2.3%) and Scotland (2.7%, up from 2.0%), however Wales (2.9%) and Northern Ireland (1.3%) remained stable; among English regions, people in London were most likely to identify as LGB (3.8%, an increase from 2.8%).

Statistician's comment

"An estimated 1.4 million people aged 16 and over in the UK identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019 - a statistically significant increase from 1.2 million in 2018 - continuing the trend we have seen over recent years.

"People aged 16 to 24 continue to be the most likely to identify as LGB, however the proportion of older adults identifying as LGB, while much smaller, is also increasing."

Penelope McClure, Population Statistics Division, Office for National Statistics.

Follow Population Statistics Division on Twitter [@RichPereira_ONS](https://twitter.com/RichPereira_ONS)

2 . Sexual orientation in the UK

In 2019, the proportion of the UK population aged 16 years and over identifying as heterosexual or straight decreased from an estimated 94.6% in 2018 to 93.7% in 2019 (an estimated 49.9 million). This represents a continuation of the decreasing trend since 2015, when 95.2% of the population identified themselves as heterosexual or straight (Table 1).

Table 1: Most people in the UK identify as heterosexual or straight
Sexual orientation, UK, 2015 to 2019 (percentage)

Sexual orientation	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Heterosexual or straight	95.2	95.0	95.0	94.6	93.7
Gay or lesbian	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.6
Bisexual	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.1
Other	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.7
Do not know or refuse	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.5	3.0

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the reference tables.
2. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

An estimated 1.4 million people aged 16 years and over (2.7% of the UK population) identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019, an increase from 1.2 million (2.2%) in 2018. The LGB population comprised 1.6% identifying as gay or lesbian and 1.1% as bisexual (Figure 1).

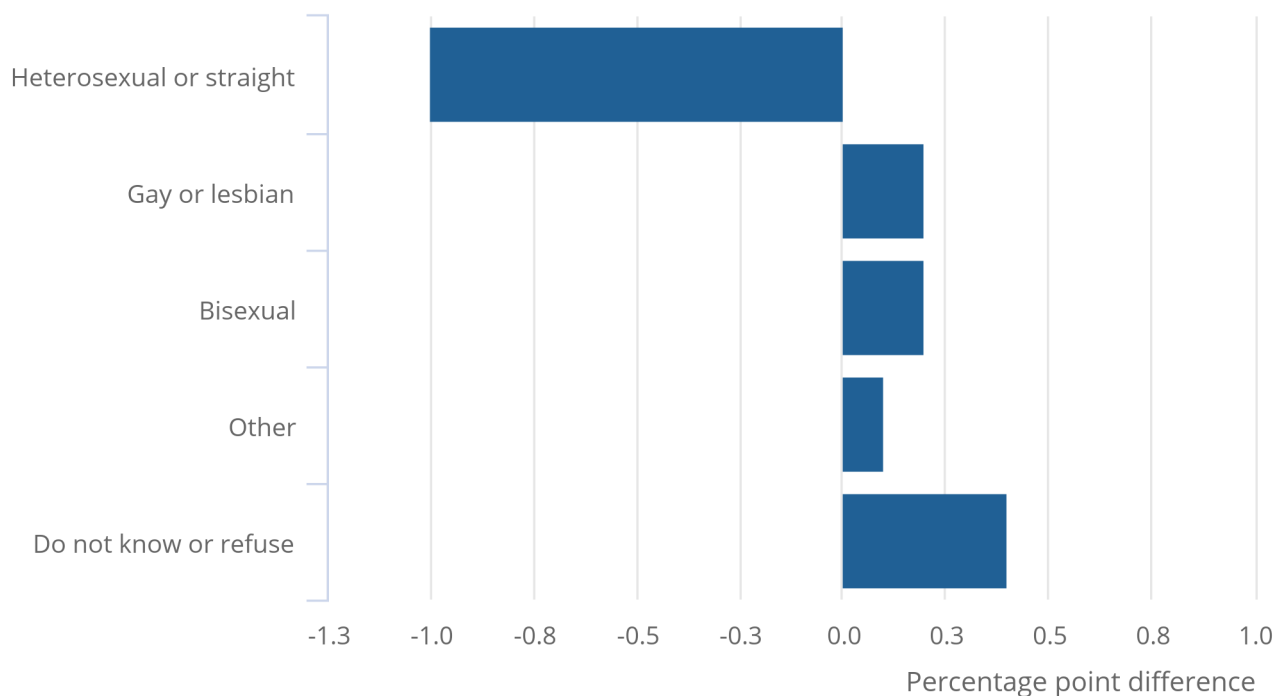
Between 2018 and 2019, there was an increase in those who stated “Don’t know” or refused to answer, from 2.5% to 3.0% (1.6 million).

Figure 1: Compared with 2018, a lower proportion of people identified as heterosexual and a higher proportion identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual in 2019

Change in self-identified sexual orientation, UK, 2018 to 2019

Figure 1: Compared with 2018, a lower proportion of people identified as heterosexual and a higher proportion identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual in 2019

Change in self-identified sexual orientation, UK, 2018 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the reference tables.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

3 . Distribution by sex

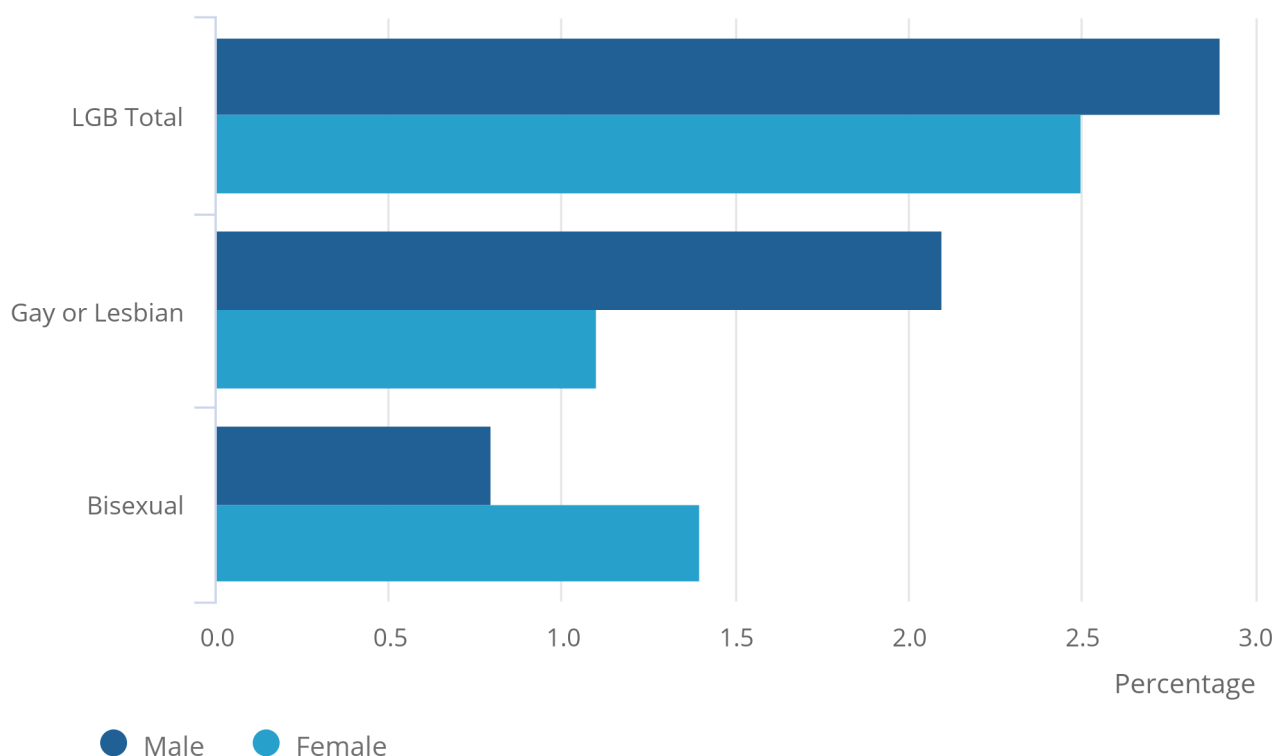
In 2019, the proportion of men identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) increased from 2.5% to 2.9% (754,000) and women identifying as LGB rose from 2.0% to 2.5% (677,000) (see Figure 2). Men (2.1%) were almost twice as likely than women (1.1%) to identify as gay or lesbian. Conversely, women (1.4%) were more likely than men (0.8%) to identify as bisexual. This represents a continuation of trends observed since 2014.

Figure 2: Men are more likely to identify as gay or lesbian, while women are more likely to identify as bisexual

Lesbian, gay or bisexual population by sex, UK, 2019

Figure 2: Men are more likely to identify as gay or lesbian, while women are more likely to identify as bisexual

Lesbian, gay or bisexual population by sex, UK, 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the reference tables.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

4 . Distribution by age

Of all age groups, younger people (aged 16 to 24 years) were most likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019 (an estimated 459,000, or 6.6% of 16 to 24 year olds, an increase from 4.4% in 2018). People aged 16 to 24 years who identify as LGB continue to be more likely to identify as bisexual than as lesbian or gay. However, for other age groups it is more common to identify as lesbian or gay than bisexual.

The proportion of the UK population identifying as LGB in 2019 decreased with each consecutive age group. A greater proportion of the LGB population are aged 16 to 24 years compared with the population as a whole, with almost one-third of people identifying as LGB falling into this age group (Figure 3). Possible reasons for this pattern are that younger people could be more likely to explore their sexuality, combined with more social acceptability of different sexual identities and the expression of these today.

However, for the first time, older people (aged 65 years and over) also showed an increase in those identifying as LGB. This rose from 0.7% in 2018 to 1.0% in 2019 of this age category (120,000, from a population of 12.0 million).

Figure 3: Younger people are more likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) than older age groups

Lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population by age and sex, UK, 2019 and UK population by age and sex, 2019

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

[Download the data](#)

5 . UK countries and English regions

Between 2018 and 2019, the estimated proportion of people who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) increased for England (2.7%, up from 2.3%) and Scotland (2.7%, up from 2.0%). Wales (2.9%) and Northern Ireland (1.3%) remained stable. The overall UK proportion in 2019 was 2.7%, which has increased from 2.2% in 2018.

In 2019, the proportion of people within each English region identifying as LGB ranged from 3.8% in London to 2.1% in the east of England (Figure 4). Of the nine regions, only London showed a statistically significant difference in the proportion of people identifying as LGB to the other regions, which may be partly explained by the younger age structure of the London population.

The only regions in England to show a statistically significant change since 2018 were London (from 2.8% to 3.8%) and the south east (from 2.2% to 2.9%).

Figure 4: In 2019, a lower proportion of people in Northern Ireland identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) than in other UK countries and a higher proportion did so in London than in other English regions

UK constituent countries and English regions by lesbian, gay or bisexual population, 2019

Notes:

1. Confidence intervals are presented on the chart to give an estimated range of values within which the actual value is likely to fall 95% of the time.
2. Figures for Northern Ireland are based on relatively small sample sizes, which produce less reliable estimates. Further information on estimates of the population numbers and measures of quality (to show the levels of uncertainty associated with survey estimates) are presented in the datasets which accompany this release.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

[Download the data](#)

6 . Legal partnership status

Among those identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019, more than two-thirds (68.8%) were single, meaning that they had never married or entered into a civil partnership. This is double the proportion of those who identified as heterosexual or straight and had never entered into a legal partnership (34.4%). A possible reason for this difference is the younger age structure of the LGB population combined with the increase in the [average age of marriage](#).

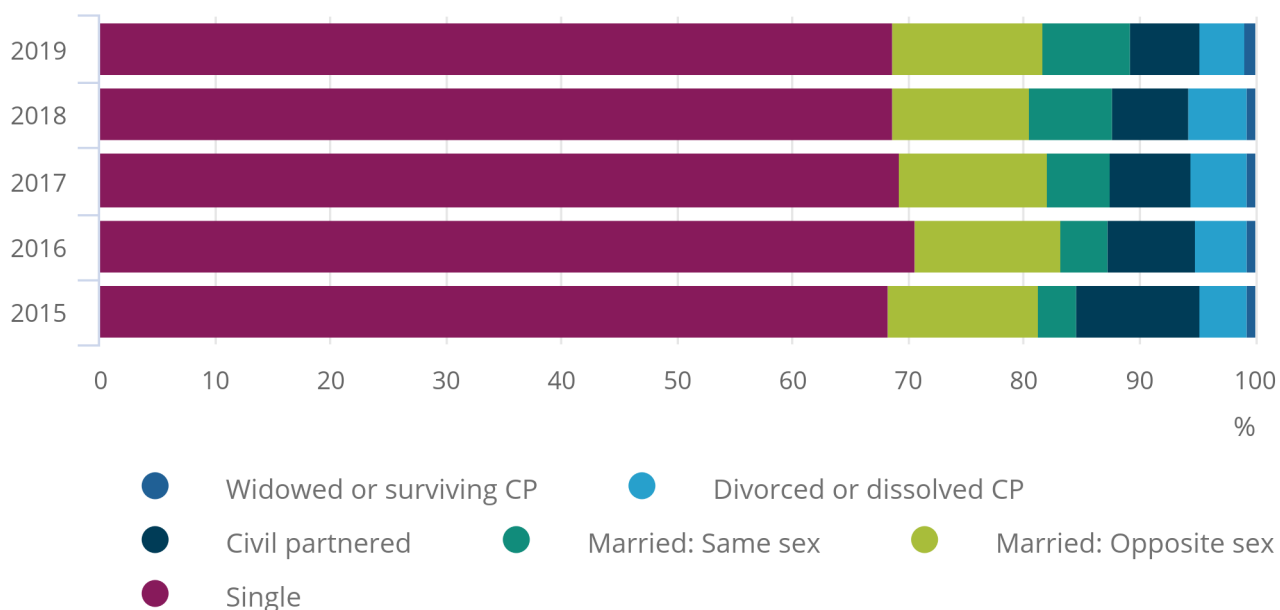
Furthermore, legal unions for same-sex couples have only become available relatively recently; civil partnerships were introduced for same-sex couples in the UK in December 2005, and same-sex marriage has been available in England, Wales and Scotland since 2014 and in Northern Ireland from 2020.

Figure 5: People identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) are most likely to have a marital status of single (never married or civil partnered)

Lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population by legal marital status, UK, 2015 to 2019

Figure 5: People identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) are most likely to have a marital status of single (never married or civil partnered)

Lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population by legal marital status, UK, 2015 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. The Marriages (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 made provision for the marriage of same sex couples in England and Wales from 29th March 2014 onwards. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 made provision for the marriage of same sex couples in Scotland from 31 December 2014 onwards. The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 made provisions for the marriage of same-sex couples and civil partnerships of opposite sex couples from 13 January 2020 onwards.
2. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 made provision for civil partnerships of same sex couples in the UK and was amended to make provision for civil partnerships of opposite sex couples in England and Wales from 31 December 2019 onwards.
3. Single is defined as never married or civil partnered. Married includes separated.
4. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the reference tables.
5. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

7 . Sexual orientation data

[Sexual orientation, UK](#)

Dataset | Released 27 May 2021

Sexual orientation in the UK from 2012 to 2019 by region, sex, age, marital status, ethnicity and National Statistics Socio-economic Classification.

8 . Glossary

Sexual orientation

"Sexual orientation" is an umbrella term that encompasses sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. The Annual Population Survey (APS) question informing the statistics in this publication is designed to capture sexual identity. The question was not designed for specific or detailed studies of sexual attraction or behaviour where a series of more detailed questions and answer categories might be more appropriate.

Sexual identity

The [measurement of sexual identity \(PDF 116KB\)](#) has been identified as the component of sexual orientation most closely related to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. Sexual identity does not necessarily reflect sexual attraction and/or sexual behaviour, which are separate concepts not currently measured by the Annual Population Survey (APS). Sexual identity may change over time.

Sexual orientation categorised as “other”

The “other” category captures people who do not consider themselves to fit into the heterosexual or straight, bisexual, gay, or lesbian categories. It might also include people who responded “other” for different reasons such as those who did not understand the terminology or who are against categorisation.

9 . Measuring the data

Sexual orientation estimates are based on data from the Annual Population Survey (APS), which collects information on self-perceived sexual identity from the household population aged 16 years and over in the UK. The household population excludes people living in communal establishments, with the exception of those in NHS housing and students in halls of residence (sampled via the private households of their parents).

Revision

The adjustment to the estimates for 2014 to 2017, to remove the artificially increased number of “don’t know or refuse” responses to interviews carried out by field interviewers using a mobile phone, has also been applied to the estimates for 2018 and 2019. Further information on these revisions is available in the [Sexual Orientation Quality and Methodology Information](#).

More detailed information on the sexual identity question and design of the APS is available in the [Labour Force Survey user guide](#).

Change of terminology

In 2019 (publication of the 2017 data), the terminology in this release changed from “sexual identity” to “sexual orientation” to align with legislation ([Equality Act 2010](#)); please see the Glossary for definitions.

Although the terminology changed, the data source and methodology used to produce the estimates were not changed and remained consistent with previous years.

10 . Strengths and limitations

Sexual orientation estimates have a number of uses, both direct and indirect, informing policy decisions at a national level. The estimates are mainly used to provide evidence and to inform the monitoring of the [Equality Act 2010](#), alongside providing estimates of the lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population for service providers.

This bulletin presents the sexual orientation estimates as percentages. Estimates of the population numbers and measures of quality (to show the levels of uncertainty associated with survey estimates) are presented in the datasets. We advise users to consult the quality measures when interpreting the estimates because some estimates are based on a relatively small sample. As a result, these estimates are subject to uncertainty particularly when making comparisons, such as changes from one year to another. In this bulletin, such comparisons are [statistically significant](#) unless otherwise stated. This means that there is likely to have been a real change in the underlying population proportions and that the difference we are observing is unlikely to be a result of chance.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Sexual Orientation Quality and Methodology Information](#).

11 . Related links

[Annual Population Survey user guide \(PDF, 689KB\)](#)

User guide | Released 2019

Further information on the Annual Population Survey (APS).

[Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people say they experience a lower quality of life](#)

Article | Released 5 July 2017

Analysis exploring the relationship between sexual identity and well-being.