

Sexual orientation QMI

Quality and methodology information for sexual orientation. Includes strengths and limitations, methods, and data uses and users.

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1 . Output information

- Statistical designation: official statistics in development
- Survey name: Annual Population Survey (APS)
- Frequency: annual
- How compiled: persons dataset
- Geographic coverage: UK
- Sample size in 2024: approximately 85,000 individuals
- Related publications: [Sexual orientation, UK](#)
- Last revised: 9 December 2025

2 . About this Quality and Methodology Information report

This Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data (including the European Statistical System's five dimensions of quality) as well as the methods used to create them.

The information in this report will help you to:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- understand the methods used to create the data
- decide suitable uses for the data
- reduce the risk of misusing the data

3 . Important points

- Our latest bulletin, [Sexual orientation, UK: 2024](#), presents estimates of sexual orientation for 2024 for the first time.
- Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates have been reweighted to more recent population estimates, as described in our [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: December 2024 article](#).
- Annual Population Survey (APS) estimates have not been reweighted in line with the recent LFS reweighting exercise, and therefore remain on population estimates as described in our [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: 2022 article](#); APS estimates of levels should therefore be treated with caution, while estimates of percentages remain more robust.
- The estimates for the reference years 2014 to 2017 presented in [our Sexual orientation, UK: 2018 bulletin](#), the associated datasets and subsequent releases have been revised and differ from previous publications; details about these revisions and other alterations to the data over time can be found in [Section 7: Other information](#).
- Beginning from our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2017](#) release, the title of the bulletin changed from "sexual identity" to "sexual orientation" to align with terminology used in legislation ([Equality Act 2010](#)); sexual orientation is an umbrella concept that encapsulates sexual identity, behaviour and attraction, and it may change over time.
- This release reports on data from a survey question designed to capture sexual identity.
- The measurement of sexual identity 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 currently not measured by the APS.
- Sexual orientation estimates are [official statistics in development](#) that provide annual estimates of the UK household population aged 16 years and over broken down into "heterosexual or straight", "gay or lesbian", "bisexual", or "other", dating back to 2014 for England, Scotland and Wales, and 2012 for Northern Ireland.
- The "other" category captures people who do not consider themselves to fit into the "heterosexual or straight", "bisexual", or "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.
- There is currently no further breakdown of "other" collected in the APS, so no assumptions can be made about the sexual orientation of those responding "other".
- Data in our bulletin are primarily presented in percentage format, although estimates are used where needed to provide scale to the percentages; estimates of the population numbers and measures of quality (to show the levels of [uncertainty](#) associated with survey estimates) are presented in the [dataset](#); users are advised to consult the quality measures when interpreting the estimates.
- The estimates published from 2016 onwards are calculated from the APS; previously, they were calculated using the Integrated Household Survey (IHS).

4 . Quality summary

Overview

At the UK level, sexual orientation estimates are published annually and are broken down by sex, age group, legal partnership status, ethnic group, and English regions and UK countries. In 2019, we published for the first time a multivariate table of sexual orientation by combined age group and sex.

Annual Population Survey (APS) estimates are currently not considered accredited official statistics and are designated as [official statistics in development](#). Official statistics in development are those that are in the testing phase, are not yet fully developed and have not been submitted for assessment to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). They are published to involve customers and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage. Until September 2023, these were called "experimental statistics". Read more about the change in our [Guide to official statistics in development](#).

More information about the APS being classed as official statistics in development can be found in our [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) letter to the Office for Statistics Regulation about the Annual Population Survey](#).

Estimates are published rounded to the nearest thousand, and percentages are also presented alongside the estimates. Estimates based on sample sizes of fewer than three are suppressed in published tables but where appropriate, categories have been collapsed to minimise the need for suppressing data.

Uses and users

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. Users include policymakers in central government departments, local government, public service providers, the LGB population, associated service providers, academics and other research organisations.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths

These data provide users with valuable insight into the changing patterns of sexual orientation (measured via sexual identity) on a consistent basis back to 2014.

The survey estimates are sourced from the APS, which provides robust and representative survey estimates used for labour market statistics, economic statistics, and family and household statistics.

[Confidence intervals](#) and an indication of the size of the [coefficient of variation](#) are presented around the estimates to give users an indication of the reliability of the estimates.

The variable groupings used in the published datasets are based on the [Government Analysis Function harmonised standards](#).

Limitations

Sexual orientation is an umbrella concept that encompasses sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. The survey question underlying this release is designed to capture sexual identity. An individual could respond differently to questions on either sexual identity, attraction or behaviour. The [sexual orientation harmonised standard](#) has recently been updated to include research by Census. This research suggested that including sexual orientation in the question did not make a material difference to either the response rate or the response distribution. The measurement of sexual identity was identified in the research as the component of sexual orientation most closely related to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. The question was not designed for specific or detailed studies of sexual behaviour or attraction, where a series of more detailed questions and answer categories might be more appropriate.

The APS excludes people living in communal establishments except for those in NHS housing and students in halls of residence (sampled via the private households of their parents). Members of the armed forces are only included in the APS if they live in private accommodation. In Census 2021, 1.7% of the usually resident population of England and Wales were living in communal establishments, the same proportion as in the 2011 Census. An analysis of [how people living communal establishments differ from the household population](#) is available.

Although the APS sample in 2024 was approximately 159,000 individuals, data collected on sexual orientation are only for those aged 16 years or over, and the survey is not completed by proxy (meaning that an individual cannot provide responses on another's behalf). Sexual orientation data for 2024 are based on approximately 85,000 individual responses. Sample sizes are small for some variables, particularly when producing multivariate tables such as sexual orientation by ethnic group, which results in estimates being less reliable in those cases.

The APS does not collect gender identity, nor does it collect further information on those who answered "Other"; no assumptions can be made about the sexual orientation of this group.

Recent improvements

We made two changes to the data in our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2023 bulletin](#). Firstly, the way standard errors were calculated for legal partnership for 2019 onwards were adjusted to better reflect the structure of the survey data. This led to small changes in four of the confidence intervals in Table 4a "Legal partnership status by sexual identity".

Secondly, the socio-economic classification breakdown was removed from the release. In the recent years before 2023, the socio-economic classification breakdown contained a group called "routine and manual" occupations. This group included people who had never worked or were long-term unemployed. We decided that the coverage of this group was too broad to be meaningful to users of our statistics. We are exploring alternative breakdowns for socio-economic classification.

In our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2021 and 2022 bulletin](#), the estimates for 2020 were reweighted using 2022 weights, so these may differ slightly from those previously published for 2020.

Estimates presented in our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2018](#) release and the associated datasets for the reference years 2014 to 2017 were revised. This revision was made to incorporate the re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and APS and to incorporate an improvement made to the sexual orientation variables on the LFS and APS. This improvement has subsequently been applied to estimates calculated for later years. Details about the revisions can be found in [Section 7: Other information](#).

In our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2017 bulletin](#), an additional table was published that broke down sexual orientation estimates by sex and age group at the UK level for the first time.

In 2016, the methodology for producing the sexual orientation estimates was updated in line with the move to using the APS rather than the Integrated Household Survey (IHS); see [Section 7: Other information](#) for further information.

The move to using the APS resulted in the collection of sexual orientation data for some cases that would not have been collected on the IHS.

5 . Quality characteristics of the sexual orientation data

Relevance

This release provides a set of official statistics in development and is published for 2014 to 2024. The published estimates meet the known user needs outlined in [Section 4: Quality summary](#).

Sexual orientation is an umbrella concept that encompasses sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. The question described in the harmonised principle on sexual orientation is based on a substantial body of research and is designed to capture sexual identity. During the Sexual Identity Project that we conducted between 2006 and 2009, we carried out focus groups in which users were consulted and involved in the development of the sexual identity questions.

These estimates are published as [official statistics in development](#). This is because the estimates and the publication may evolve as we continue to establish the user needs and requirements.

We published an additional table showing sexual orientation by sex and age group at the UK level in response to user demand for the first time in our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2017 bulletin](#). Owing to small sample sizes, we do not publish equivalent tables of sexual orientation by sex and age group for English regions and countries of the UK as part of our regular publications. Annual Population Survey (APS) estimates are recommended when making comparisons with estimates for the UK as a whole, or to evaluate change over time, while Census results provide more granular breakdowns for England and Wales.

Users are encouraged to email feedback and suggestions regarding the sexual orientation estimates and publication to the team at pop.info@ons.gov.uk.

Accuracy and reliability

The estimates are sourced from the APS, which provides robust and representative survey estimates used for labour market statistics, economic statistics, and family and household statistics. [Sampling and non-sampling error](#), along with information on measuring error, can be found in our [Labour Force Survey Background and Methodology User Guide \(PDF, 1.5MB\)](#)

For users to gain an understanding of the level of accuracy of the sexual orientation estimates, the estimates in the datasets are presented with [confidence intervals](#) and an indication of the size of the [coefficient of variation](#). In the bulletin, where changes over time are described as an increase or a decrease, it means the change is "[statistically significant](#)". This means that a statistical test has shown that there is likely to have been a real change in the population and that the difference we are observing is unlikely to be a result of chance.

Coherence and comparability

We publish sexual orientation estimates for the UK and its constituent countries to meet user needs, as described in the ["Relevance" subsection](#) of this report.

We explored the different experiences of other international organisations when collecting data on sexual orientation in our 2008 [Review of international organisations' experiences of administering questions on sexual identity/orientation report \(PDF, 230KB\)](#).

Sexual identity estimates have been published previously for 2010 to 2014. These estimates were derived from [our Integrated Household Survey \(IHS\)](#) and then the APS using IHS methodologies. In 2016, estimates were published for 2012 to 2015 derived from the APS using APS methodologies. [Our spreadsheet showing differences between selected sexual identity estimates from the IHS and the APS](#) is available. More detail regarding the change from the IHS to the APS can be found in [Section 7: Other information](#).

In 2020 further adjustments were made to the estimates for the reference years 2014 to 2017, meaning a consistent time series for the UK is now available back to 2014 rather than 2012. Details about revisions to the estimates presented in our [Sexual orientation, UK: 2018 bulletin](#) and the associated datasets can be found in [Section 7: Other information](#).

It may be necessary to make future revisions to the sexual orientation estimates to reflect occasional or post-census revisions to the national mid-year population estimates, which will also have an effect on the weighting used for the APS. This is in line with the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) revision policy for population statistics \(PDF, 54KB\)](#).

[Estimates of sexual orientation for England and Wales from Census 2021](#) have been published and [quality information](#) is available for these estimates.

There are differences between the survey and census-based estimates because of differences in the question asked, including the available response options, and the larger number of responses to the census question overall. The method of delivery can also affect engagement. For example, it is a legal requirement to complete Census 2021, though the sexual orientation question was voluntary. This may yield different results to a voluntary survey. Additionally, it was possible to provide a proxy response on someone else's behalf on the census, while proxy responses are not permitted for the question on sexual identity on the APS. More information can be found in [Sexual orientation question development for Census 2021](#).

In terms of their use, APS data cover the UK with its four constituent countries, whereas Census 2021 results are for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Census in Scotland took place a year later in 2022 and included a sexual orientation question for the first time. As such, it is not possible to interpolate sexual orientation data for Scotland in 2021, and UK-level Census 2021 sexual orientation estimates are not available for comparison.

Five-year comparisons are used in this bulletin rather than year-on-year comparisons as the APS data on sexual identity typically vary between years because of sample variability, and comparing across a longer timescale allows us to more clearly identify trends in the data.

Accessibility and clarity

Our recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV and Excel. Our website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances, other software may be used or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on our website but not produced by us, or referenced on our website but stored elsewhere, may vary. Please refer to our [accessibility statement](#) for more information.

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to our [terms and conditions \(for data on the website\)](#).

Timeliness and punctuality

Sexual orientation estimates for the UK are published annually. For a particular reference year, they usually become available around 10 months after the end of that reference year, although recently timings have varied because of the publication of [Census 2021](#). The latest release was published on 9 December 2025.

The time lag and the publication date for sexual orientation estimates are influenced by the availability of the APS persons dataset and the time required to process the data and calculate the estimates. The feasibility of producing statistical releases earlier is regularly reviewed.

For more details on related releases, [our release calendar](#) provides up to 12 months' notice of release dates. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for it explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Concepts and definitions

The statistics comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Sexual orientation is an umbrella concept that encapsulates sexual identity, behaviour and attraction. The APS collects data on sexual identity. In 2006, we established the Sexual Identity Project to meet user requirements for information on sexual identity. The aim of this was to address a lack of sufficient and reliable sources of data on sexual orientation, which was identified in [our cross-government review of equality data](#).

The Sexual Identity Project had three main objectives: question development, question testing, and implementation and guidance. The project was concluded with the sexual identity question being added to the IHS in 2009. The measurement of sexual identity was identified in the research as the component of sexual orientation most closely related to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. The question was not designed for specific or detailed studies of sexual behaviour or attraction, where a series of more detailed questions and answer categories might be more appropriate. [Sexual identity guidance and project documentation](#) are available.

The resulting question from the Sexual Identity Project underlies the harmonised standard on sexual orientation and is part of a set of [harmonised standards](#), which are published by the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

The variable groupings used in the datasets have been based on our harmonised standards.

Geography

Sexual orientation estimates are produced by us for the UK, its constituent countries and English regions.

Sexual orientation estimates for geographies lower than UK countries and English regions are not produced routinely. However, a [research article](#) was published in April 2017, which looked at the feasibility of using a three-year pooled APS dataset to produce sub-national estimates. This exercise was repeated again in 2020 to produce [ad-hoc research](#) using the 2016 to 2018 pooled APS data. We will continue to monitor sample sizes at the sub-national level to assess whether these estimates will be robust enough to publish sub-national level data in the future.

Estimates of [sexual orientation at local authority level](#) are available from Census 2021.

Output quality

The cross-tabulations contained in the published datasets are selected to ensure the estimates are of the highest quality, accurate and robust. In some cases, the categories that have been selected will have been collapsed to ensure the data are robust while maintaining their usefulness.

Estimates and percentages in the reference tables are accompanied by both confidence intervals and coefficients of variation, which inform users about the level of uncertainty around an estimate or percentage.

6 . Methods used to produce the sexual orientation data

Main data sources

The Annual Population Survey (APS) persons dataset is used in the production of these estimates. The APS persons dataset differs from the household dataset in the way that the weighting is applied to the sample. The household dataset ensures that the weight given to each member of a household is the same. The persons dataset, which is more commonly used for information on the labour market or individual characteristics, includes only individual weights, which usually differ between members of a household.

The APS is a continuous household survey, covering the UK, as described in our [APS User Guide \(PDF, 811KB\)](#). The APS is not a stand-alone survey; it uses data combined from two waves of the main [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#), supplemented by a local sample boost. It covers people in private households, NHS accommodation and students in halls of residence whose parents live in the UK. Such students are included through proxy interviews with their parents, although sexual orientation data are not collected by proxy. Members of the armed forces are only included in the APS if they live in private accommodation.

The main purpose of the survey is to provide information on the UK labour market, but it includes data on various other demographic and social variables. The survey does not cover people who live in communal establishments such as prisons and nursing homes (in England and Wales this is 1.7% of the population). The overall sample size of the survey in 2024 was approximately 159,000 respondents. However, the sample size for the sexual orientation question was lower (approximately 85,000). This is because it is only asked to respondents aged 16 and over and cannot be answered by proxy. Datasets consist of 12 months of survey data.

Previously, sexual orientation estimates were based on data from the Integrated Household Survey (IHS). More detail regarding the change from the IHS to the APS can be found in [Section 7: Other information](#).

How we analyse the data

The sexual orientation estimates are calculated using the weighted survey estimates from the APS for the UK.

Weighted sexual orientation estimates from the APS are cross-tabulated with social, demographic and geographic variables. These include age group, sex, age group by sex, legal partnership status, ethnic group, and English regions and UK countries.

Estimates based on sample sizes of fewer than three are suppressed in published tables, but the tables have been designed to minimise the need for suppression (for example, by providing age groups or collapsing ethnic group categories).

The sexual orientation weighted estimates, relating to the household population aged 16 and over, are published rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are also presented alongside the estimates, rounded to the nearest one decimal place. The percentages were calculated using unrounded estimates.

How we quality assure the data

Once the APS dataset used in the production of the sexual orientation estimates is received, quality assurance is carried out. The quality assurance assesses whether the estimates of sexual orientation and various cross-tabulations look plausible by comparing with previous years and by looking for anomalies in the data. Basic checks include ensuring age, sex, and other breakdowns sum to match their totals.

If any substantial issues are found, these are referred back to our Social Surveys Division for validation and correction.

How we disseminate the data

Sexual orientation, UK estimates are available online from 2014 to 2024.

Links from [our release calendar](#) make the release date and location of each new set of estimates clear. The estimates can be downloaded free of charge in Microsoft Excel format and are available from [our Sexual orientation, UK previous releases page](#). A statistical or headline-only bulletin accompanies each publication. The underlying data for the charts and tables in the bulletin can be downloaded. Supporting documentation is also available on the release pages.

Other data not published on the website are available on request by emailing pop.info@ons.gov.uk. Metadata describing the limitations of the data for more detailed tables are provided with each individual request. Most queries can be answered from the website datasets or supporting methods documents. Any additional enquires regarding the sexual orientation data can be made by emailing pop.info@ons.gov.uk.

How we review the data

It may be necessary to make future revisions to the sexual orientation estimates to reflect occasional or post-census revisions to the national mid-year population estimates, which will also have an effect on the weighting used for the APS. This is in line with the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) revision policy for population statistics](#).

7 . Other information

Moving from the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) to the Annual Population Survey (APS)

In 2016, the methodology for producing the sexual orientation estimates was updated and applied to estimates back to 2012. This is because the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) datasets from 2015 onwards were discontinued; IHS questions were removed from the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) in January 2014 and IHS variables were added to the Annual Population Survey (APS) persons datasets for the survey months January to December 2014 (IHS specific methodologies were still applied). This is also because of the integration of the IHS variables into the APS persons datasets from 2015 onwards (variables have also been incorporated onto historical APS persons datasets for 2012 to 2014 to enable the creation of estimates on a comparable basis).

The integration of the IHS variables into the APS means that the sexual identity variables are now subject to a different processing methodology (including imputation and calculation of weights). Methodology details are available for the [IHS](#) and [APS \(PDF, 811KB\)](#).

Moving from the IHS to the APS has had only a small effect on the estimates; this is because most cases sampled on the IHS were drawn from the APS originally. The APS methodology means that some cases that would not have had their sexual identity collected on the IHS will have their sexual identity collected on the APS (for example, persons who are first interviewed in a later wave than the household was first selected for interview). The weighting methodology used on the APS differs to the IHS for the cases that it selects for weighting. This improvement has led to the removal of the "non-response" category in the datasets.

The weighting that is applied for the sexual identity variable and cross tabulations differs to the weighting that would normally be applied to the APS persons dataset. The weighting differs because:

- of the combining of cases from Wales and Scotland
- of the age filtering of cases (only age 16 years and over)
- only those cases who answered the sexual identity questions are used in the weighting

The sexual identity variables were successfully integrated into the APS back to the year 2012.

Improvements to the data in previous releases

The estimates presented in [our Sexual Orientation: UK, 2018 bulletin](#), along with the associated datasets for the reference years 2014 to 2017, have been revised and now differ from publications released prior to the release of the 2018 estimates in 2020. The estimates were revised for two reasons. The first reason is to incorporate the re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and APS, and the second reason is to incorporate an improvement made to the sexual orientation variables on the LFS and APS.

The improvement was made as a result of the detection of an issue in the data collection process relating to the sexual identity question. This issue resulted in an artificially increased number of "don't know or refuse" responses to interviews carried out by field interviewers using a mobile phone. In the past, the number of these interviews was very small, but over time this has increased to try to improve overall LFS response rates. To adjust for this quality issue, cases were removed where the interview was carried out by a field interviewer with a mobile phone. After removing these cases, we have re-weighted the responses to take into account the smaller sample size and associated weighting.

We have made this adjustment for the years 2014 to 2019. Because the variable used to identify field interviews carried out by mobile phone is not available for the sexual orientation data prior to 2014, estimates for the years 2012 and 2013 are no longer available in the published data. A comparable time series of estimates is therefore now available back to 2014.

This applies to estimates for the UK, England, Wales and Scotland only. Because Northern Ireland field interviews are all carried out face to face, sexual orientation data for Northern Ireland are unaffected by this. Estimates for Northern Ireland from 2012 to 2017 differ from previously published figures as they have been revised following the re-weighting of the APS, but they have not been subject to any further changes. As previously, a comparable time series of estimates for Northern Ireland is therefore available back to 2012.

A solution was implemented at the point of data collection in January 2020, but because of the wave-based design of the survey, this does not fully eliminate the presence of cases affected by this from the sexual orientation estimates until 2022. Therefore, in production of estimates for 2020 the adjustment was applied. For 2021 only the data for Waves 3 and 4 (where respondents had been on the survey since before 2020) needed to be adjusted. Data for 2022 onwards do not need to be adjusted.

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

Useful links

[Sexual orientation data tables](#)

[Sexual orientation, UK statistical bulletins](#)

[Annual Population Survey \(APS\) user guidance \(PDF, 811KB\)](#)

[Sexual identity guidance and project documentation](#)

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

[Sexual orientation and gender identity quality information for Census 2021](#)

8 . Cite this methodology

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