

Statistical bulletin

Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021

Household size, household composition, household deprivation status, and people's marital and civil partnership status, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

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- In 2021, there were 24.8 million households in England and Wales, up 6.1% from 23.4 million in 2011.
- Of the 59.6 million usual residents in England and Wales in 2021, 58.6 million (98.3%) lived in households and 1.0 million (1.7%) lived in communal establishments.
- The average household size in England and Wales in 2021 was 2.4 people per household, the same as in 2011; the areas with the highest average household size were Newham, Slough and Redbridge (all 3.0 residents per household).
- Over half of households in England and Wales (51.7%, 12.8 million) were deprived in at least one dimension or measure of household deprivation; this number has decreased since 2011, when it was 57.6% (13.5 million).
- Overall, 63.0% of households (15.6 million households) were single family households, 30.2% (7.5 million) were one person households and 6.8% (1.7 million) were multiple family or other household types.
- Since 2011, the percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who were married or in civil partnerships has decreased, from 46.8% in 2011 to 44.6% in 2021.
- The percentage who were never married and never been in a civil partnership has increased, from 34.6% in 2011 to 37.9% in 2021.

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2 . Household size

There were 24,783,199 households with at least one usual resident in England and Wales on 21 March 2021. This was an increase of more than 1.4 million (6.1%) from 23,366,044 households in 2011.

There were 58,555,851 usual residents (98.3%) who lived in households. The remaining 1,041,691 usual residents (1.7%) lived in communal establishments. This is similar to 2011, when 98.2% lived in households and 1.8% in communal establishments. More detail on communal establishments will be published later, as part of the Housing topic summary.

Dividing the overall number of usual residents in households by the overall number of households gives the average household size. In 2021, this was 2.4 residents per household (2.4 residents per household in England and 2.3 residents per household in Wales). This is unchanged since 2011, when there were also 2.4 residents per household on average.

For the regions in England, the largest households on average were in London (2.5 residents per household) and the smallest households were in the North East (2.2 residents per household).

The local authorities in England with the highest average household size were Newham, Slough and Redbridge (all 3.0 residents per household). In Wales, they were Cardiff and Newport (both 2.4 residents per household).

The local authorities in England with the lowest average household size were the City of London (1.7 residents per household) and North Norfolk (2.1 residents per household). In Wales, it was Conwy (2.2 residents per household).

The distribution of household size within an area provides an even more detailed understanding, beyond average household size.

Figure 1: The majority of households contained fewer than three people

Household size, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

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3 . Household deprivation

Households in England and Wales were also classified in terms of dimensions of deprivation, based on selected household characteristics. Specifically, households were considered to be deprived if they met one or more of the following four dimensions of deprivation:

- employment: where any member of a household, who is not a full-time student, is either unemployed or long-term sick
- education: no person in the household has at least five or more GCSE passes (grade A* to C or grade 4 and above) or equivalent qualifications, and no person aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student
- health and disability: any person in the household has general health that is “bad” or “very bad” or is identified as disabled
- housing: the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, with an occupancy rating of negative 1 or less (implying that it has one fewer room or bedroom required for the number of occupants), or is in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating

Overall, 51.7% of households in England and Wales in 2021 (12.8 million) were deprived in at least one of these dimensions (51.6% of households in England and 54.1% of households in Wales). The number of households deprived in at least one dimension has decreased since 2011, when it was 13.5 million (57.6%).

In 2021, 33.5% (8.3 million) households in England and Wales were deprived in one dimension, 14.3% (3.5 million) were deprived in two dimensions, 3.7% (929,000) were deprived in three dimensions and 0.2% (57,000) were deprived in all four dimensions. The remaining 48.3% (12.0 million) were not deprived in any dimension.

The North East was the region of England in which the highest proportion of households were deprived in at least one dimension (54.6%, 641,000). By contrast, the region with the highest proportion of households that were not deprived in any dimension was the South East (52%, 2.0 million).

The local authorities with the highest proportion of households deprived in at least one dimension included Barking and Dagenham (62.4%) and Sandwell (62.1%) in England, and Blaenau Gwent (61.7%) and Merthyr Tydfil (59.8%) in Wales. Those with the highest proportion of households deprived in all four dimensions included Camden and Westminster (both 0.7%) in England, and Cardiff, Newport and Merthyr Tydfil (all 0.3%) in Wales.

In contrast, the English local authorities with the highest proportion of households that were not deprived in any dimension included Elmbridge (61.9%), Wokingham (61.5%) and Richmond upon Thames (61.0%). In Wales, the local authorities with the highest proportion of households not deprived in any dimension were Monmouthshire (51.7%) and the Vale of Glamorgan (51.0%).

Figure 2: Household deprivation was highest in the North East and lowest in the South East

Households deprived in at least one dimension, 2011 and 2021, England, Wales and regions of England

Download the data

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Household deprivation is a complex topic, and the data here simply show how many households were deprived in any of the four stated dimensions available from the census. This repeats an equivalent release from the 2011 Census. Detailed information on the stated dimensions will be published in upcoming topic releases and with the release of multivariate data.

4 . Household composition

Responses to the census are used to calculate household composition, which refers to the relationship between household members. For example, a household might consist of a family, of unrelated adults living together, or it might just be one person living alone.

Across England and Wales, the data show that 63.0% of households (15.6 million) were single family households, 30.2% (7.5 million) were one person households and 6.8% (1.7 million) were other household types, including households where multiple families lived together and households where unrelated adults lived together. This is similar to 2011, when 62.6% were single family households, 30.2% were one person households and 7.1% were other household types.

The most common types of single family household included those with a married or civil partnership couple with dependent children (3.5 million, 14.3% of all households) and those with a married or civil partnership couple with no children (2.6 million, 10.4%). The greatest increase was for single family households with a cohabiting couple with non-dependent children, a household type that increased by 56.1% across the past decade, from 115,000 (0.5%) in 2011 to 180,000 (0.7%) in 2021.

There were 3.2 million one person households with residents aged 66 years or over (12.9% of all households). The remaining 4.3 million (17.3%) one person households in 2021 were for younger people.

Finally, for other household types, there were 656,000 households (2.6%) in which multiple families lived together with dependent children, a proportion that has remained the same since 2011, when there were 602,000 such households (2.6%). There were 1.0 million (4.2%) other types of household in 2021, for example, full-time students.

Figure 3: Household composition, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

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5 . Legal partnership status

Same-sex marriage was legalised in 2014 and opposite-sex civil partnerships were legalised in 2019. The questions on marriage and civil partnerships were updated for 2021 to reflect this.

The results for 2021 show that, as in 2011, the largest group was those people who reported that they were married or in a civil partnership, at 21.7 million (44.6% of all usual residents aged 16 years and over). While the number of people in marriage or civil partnerships has risen by about 380,000 since 2011 (from 21.3 million), this was a decrease as a proportion of all usual residents aged 16 years and over (from 46.8%).

Of the 21.6 million people who were married (44.4% of all usual residents aged 16 years and over), 0.6% of individuals (134,000) were in same-sex couples, compared with 99.4% (21.4 million) in opposite-sex couples. A total of 103,000 people (0.2%) reported that they were in civil partnerships, of whom 65% (67,000) were in same-sex couples, compared with 35% (36,000) in opposite-sex couples.

The percentage of people who had never married and never registered a civil partnership increased by 3.3 percentage points from 34.6% (15.7 million) in 2011 to 37.9% (18.4 million) in 2021. The number of people who were divorced or whose civil partnership had been dissolved also rose, from 4.1 million (9.0%) in 2011 to 4.4 million (9.1%) in 2021.

Finally, there were declines in the proportion of people who were widowed or the surviving partner of a civil partnership, from 3.2 million (7.0%) in 2011 to 3.0 million (6.1%) in 2021, and in those who were separated but still legally married or in a civil partnership, from 1.2 million (2.6%) in 2011 to 1.1 million (2.2%) in 2021.

Figure 4: The percentage of the population who have never entered a legal partnership has increased since 2011

Legal partnership status, usual residents aged 16 years and over, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Marriages of same-sex couples have been possible in England and Wales from 29 March 2014.
2. The first civil partnerships (CPs) between opposite-sex couples took place in England and Wales on 31 December 2019.

Download the data

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6 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on households will be published in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. Read more about our [demography analysis plans](#) and the [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

7 . Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: data

[Number of usual residents in households and communal establishments](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by whether they resided in households and communal establishments. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Legal partnership status](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their legal partnership status. The estimates are at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Household size](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify all household spaces in England and Wales by household size. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Household composition](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by the relationships between household members (household composition). The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Living arrangements](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in households in England and Wales by their living arrangements. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Households by deprivation dimensions](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by four dimensions of deprivation: Employment, education, health and disability, and household overcrowding. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

8 . Glossary

Dependent child

A dependent child is a person aged 0 to 15 years in a household or a person aged 16 to 18 years who is in full-time education and lives in a family with their parent, parents, grandparent or grandparents. It does not include any person aged 16 to 18 years who has a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Family

A family is a group of people who are either:

- married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children (the children do not need to belong to both members of the couple)
- a lone parent with children
- a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with grandchildren but where the parents of those grandchildren are not present
- a single or couple grandparent with grandchildren but where the parents of those grandchildren are not present

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 or sitting room, or dining area

This includes:

- sheltered accommodation units in an establishment where 50% or more have their own kitchens (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 will include 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.

Household composition

Households according to the relationships between members.

One-family households are classified by:

- the number of dependent children
- family type (married, civil partnership or cohabiting couple family, or lone parent family)

Other households are classified by:

- the number of people
- the number of dependent children
- whether the household consists only of students or only of people aged 66 years and over

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 revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

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

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.

9 . Measuring the data

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 gives us 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 impact 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.

Further information on question-specific response rates will be published in a separate report later this year.

10 . Strengths and limitations

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](#). Read more about the [specific quality considerations for demography and migration](#).

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

11 . Related links

[International migration, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 2 November 2022

Census 2021 data about international migration in England and Wales.

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Released 2 November 2022

Interactive map tool that visualises Census 2021 data on different topics down to a local authority area and neighbourhood level.

[Demography and migration quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 2 November 2022

Known quality information affecting demography, migration and international migration data from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

[Census 2021 dictionary](#)

Supporting information | Released 28 October 2022

Variables, definitions and classifications to help when using Census 2021 data.

[Demography and migration in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Headline release | Released 2 November 2022

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about demography and migration in Wales.

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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