

Article

Housing in England and Wales: 2021 compared with 2011

Housing characteristics at the dwelling level, in England and Wales. Characteristics include dwelling occupancy, shared dwellings, accommodation type, tenure, central heating type and number of bedrooms. We also compare with the 2011 Census, where appropriate.



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Release date:
30 March 2023

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Dwellings in England and Wales](#)
3. [Accommodation type](#)
4. [Tenure](#)
5. [Tenure by accommodation type](#)
6. [Central heating by housing characteristics](#)
7. [Number of bedrooms](#)
8. [Housing in England and Wales data](#)
9. [Glossary](#)
10. [Data sources and quality](#)
11. [Related links](#)
12. [Cite this article](#)

1 . Main points

- In 2021, there were 24.9 million dwellings in England and 1.5 million dwellings in Wales, which has increased by 8.5% in England and 6.0% in Wales since 2011.
- Semi-detached housing was the most common accommodation type in occupied dwellings (31.5% in England and 32.1% in Wales), while flats, maisonettes and apartments were most common in unoccupied dwellings (44.4% in England and 25.4% in Wales).
- In 2021, owned outright was the most common tenure category in both England (32.6%) and Wales (38.0%), which is consistent for Wales since 2011, but has overtaken owned with a mortgage or loan as most common in England.
- Flats, maisonettes and apartments were most common in both private and social-rented dwellings in England, while in Wales terraced dwellings were most common for private rents and semi-detached for social rents.
- Private-rented dwellings in both England and Wales had a higher percentage with no central heating and a lower percentage with mains gas compared with other tenure types.
- Dwellings with three bedrooms were the most common across all English regions and Wales, except for London where dwellings with two bedrooms were more common.

2 . Dwellings in England and Wales

In 2021, there were 26.4 million dwellings in England and Wales, which has increased by 8.4% since 2011 (24.4 million dwellings). This breaks down to 24.9 million dwellings in England and 1.5 million dwellings in Wales, which have increased from 23.0 million and 1.4 million dwellings respectively in 2011.

All English regions saw an increase in the number of dwellings since 2011, but London and the South West saw the largest increases (by 10.7% and 9.6% respectively). The North East saw the smallest increase by 5.9%.

Statistics in this bulletin refer to data on dwellings in England and Wales. A dwelling is a self-contained unit of accommodation that can be unoccupied or occupied comprising of one or more households. For statistics about households see our [Housing, England and Wales: Census 2021 bulletin](#). More information can be found in [Section 10: Data sources and quality](#).

Dwelling occupancy and shared dwellings

The majority of dwellings were occupied in 2021, at 94.0% in England (23.4 million) and 91.8% in Wales (1.3 million). There were 6,265 [shared dwellings](#) in England and 150 in Wales, less than 0.1% of the dwelling stock in either country.

In 2021, there were 1.5 million unoccupied dwellings in England and 120,450 in Wales, making up 6.1% of dwellings in England and 8.2% in Wales. These may have been used by short-term residents or visitors on Census Day. There were more unoccupied dwellings in both England and Wales in 2021, compared with 2011 (4.2% in England and 6.0% in Wales). As Census 2021 was carried out during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some people, for example overseas students or those privately renting, may have moved back in with family members leaving more unoccupied dwellings.

Of the English regions, London had the highest percentage of unoccupied dwellings in 2021 at 8.0% (297,095), while the West Midlands had the lowest percentage at 4.8% (122,630). The largest increase in unoccupied dwellings was in London, rising by 178,644 between 2011 and 2021, from 3.5% to 8.0% of dwellings.

Figure 1: Percentage of unoccupied dwellings for local authorities in England and Wales, 2021

Download the data

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3 . Accommodation type

Data on accommodation type are available for both occupied and unoccupied dwellings in Census 2021. Our method for producing dwelling level estimates is explained in [Section 10: Data sources and quality](#).

In 2021, the most common type of accommodation in both England and Wales was semi-detached dwellings, with 30.6% (7.6 million) in England and 30.9% (453,265) in Wales. These percentages were similar in 2011.

In 2021, London and the South West were the only English regions where semi-detached dwellings were not the most common accommodation type. In London, 55.9% of dwellings were flats, maisonettes and apartments and 29.6% of dwellings in the South West were detached. This is consistent with 2011, except the most common accommodation type in the South East has changed from detached in 2011 to semi-detached in 2021.

Figure 2: The highest proportion of semi-detached properties were found in the North East

Percentage split of accommodation types for all dwellings, by English region and Wales, 21 March 2021

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London had the largest change in the percentage of flats, maisonettes and apartments increasing to 55.9% of dwellings of this type in 2021 (2.1 million) compared with 51.7% of dwellings in 2011 (1.7 million). The proportion of terraced dwellings has decreased in all English regions and Wales since 2011, with the largest decrease in London from 23.1% (776,432) to 20.5% (759,820) in 2021. Caravans and other mobile or temporary structures were stable, with less than a 1 percentage point change in all English regions and Wales.

Local authority data in England and Wales show:

- the proportion of flats and maisonettes increased by more than 5 percentage points in seven local authorities since 2011, which were all in London; Newham had the largest increase (8.2%) from 46.4% of dwellings in 2011 to 54.6% in 2021
- caravans or other temporary mobile structures were the most consistent accommodation type, with only 12 local authorities changing by more than 1 percentage point; East Lindsey in the East Midlands had the highest number of this type (19,615) out of all local authorities in 2021
- East Lindsey also had the largest changes in detached dwellings, decreasing by 11.2 percentage points since 2011 (50.7% in 2011 to 39.5% in 2021)

Accommodation type by dwelling occupancy

Semi-detached remained the most common accommodation type in occupied dwellings (31.5% in England and 32.1% in Wales). For unoccupied dwellings, the most common accommodation type in England was flats, maisonettes and apartments, at 44.4% (669,115). In Wales, flats, maisonettes and apartments were also the most common type in unoccupied dwellings (25.4%), but the distribution was more spread compared with England, with terraced (25.1%) and detached (24.7%) closely following. The smaller proportion of unoccupied flats, maisonettes and apartments in Wales may be expected as this accommodation type made up a smaller proportion of all dwellings (13.5% in Wales, 23.5% in England).

Figure 3: Semi-detached most common in occupied dwellings, while flats, maisonettes and apartments are most common in unoccupied dwellings

Percentage split of accommodation types for occupied and unoccupied dwellings, by country, England and Wales, 21 March 2021

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Privately-rented dwellings are more likely to be vacant than other tenures, because of higher turnover rates of the privately-rented dwelling stock. Section 4: Tenure by accommodation type provides breakdowns on accommodation type by tenure, which highlights that privately-rented dwellings are more likely to be flats, maisonettes or apartments over other accommodation types.

When looking at the percentage of dwellings in each accommodation type that are unoccupied, 65.9% of caravans or other mobile temporary structures had no usual residents on Census Day in Wales, and 40.6% in England. These may be used by short-term residents or visitors on Census Day, such as caravans used as holiday homes. On Census Day, many caravan sites were shut because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, so respondents who usually lived on such sites may have lived elsewhere. Respondents could still respond to say the caravan park was where they usually lived.

Figure 4: A higher proportion of caravans and other mobile temporary structures are unoccupied than any other accommodation type

Percentage of unoccupied dwellings in each accommodation type, by country, England and Wales, 21 March 2021

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4 . Tenure

Tenure is whether a household rents or owns the accommodation that it occupies. Households that rent their accommodation were asked what type of landlord owns or manages it. This information is not available for unoccupied dwellings as they have no usual residents. For information on producing tenure for shared dwellings, see [Section 10: Data sources and quality](#).

The Census data on tenure of dwellings in England and Wales show that in 2021:

- overall, 62.4% of occupied dwellings in England and 66.4% in Wales were owned either outright, with a mortgage or loan or shared ownership
- owned outright was the most common category, with 32.6% in England and 38% in Wales
- a higher percentage of dwellings were owned with a mortgage or loan in England (28.8%) compared with Wales (28.1%)
- there was a higher percentage with shared ownership in England compared with Wales (1.0% in England, 0.3% in Wales)
- a lower percentage of dwellings were privately rented (17.0%) and social rented (16.5%) in Wales compared with England (20.4% and 17.1% respectively)
- there is a slightly higher percentage of dwellings that were living rent free in Wales (0.2%) compared with England (0.1%)

Figure 5: There was a higher proportion of occupied dwellings that were owned outright in Wales, compared with England in 2021

Percentage split of tenure for occupied dwellings, by country, England and Wales, 21 March 2021

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By 2021, owned outright overtook owned with a mortgage or loan as the most common tenure type of dwellings in England (32.6% in 2021 and 30.7% in 2011). Owned with a mortgage or loan saw the biggest decrease in both England and Wales in 2021, decreasing by 4.0 percentage points to 28.8% in England and 4.0 percentage points to 28.1% in Wales. Outright ownership was the most common tenure type of dwellings in Wales in both 2011 and 2021, increasing by 2.6 percentage points over the 10-year period. The biggest increases in both England and Wales were found in the percentage of privately-rented dwellings, increasing by 3.7 percentage points to 20.4% in England and 2.9 percentage points to 17.0% in Wales.

Figure 6: Privately-rented dwellings had the biggest increase since 2011

Change in the percentage split of tenure for occupied dwellings, England and Wales, 2011 to 2021

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The percentage of dwellings that were owned outright has increased in Wales and all English regions except London, where it decreased to 20.8% in 2021 from 21.3% in 2011. The largest increase was in the North East, with 32.5% owned outright in 2021 from 28.6% in 2011. Ownership with a mortgage or loan decreased in all English regions and Wales, with the largest decrease being in the North East to 27.8% in 2021 from 33.3%.

Private renting increased in every English region and Wales, with London having the highest increase (29.9% in 2021 compared with 24.8% in 2011), followed by the West Midlands (17.9% in 2021 compared with 13.9% in 2011). The smallest increases were in the South West (19.6% in 2021 compared with 16.9% in 2011) and Wales (17.0% in 2021 compared with 14.1% in 2011). Social renting has decreased slightly in every English region and Wales, but all were 1 percentage point change or below.

It is typical to group together “owned outright”, “owned with a mortgage or loan” and “shared ownership” as owner-occupied. At the local authority level, Rochford in the South East had the highest proportion of owner-occupied dwellings in 2021, with 81.2%, while Tower Hamlets in London has the lowest proportion (25.8%).

The 10 local authorities with the highest proportion of privately-rented dwellings are all in London. Out of the 33 local authorities in London, 27 had a private rent percentage of above 25.0%, while only 4 had less than the national proportion for England (20.4%). City of London had the highest proportion of privately-rented dwellings in 2021 at 48.4%, while the North East Derbyshire in the East Midlands had the lowest proportion with 10.2%. The five local authorities with the highest percentages of socially-rented dwellings were also in London, while the five with the lowest percentages were spread across the North West, East Midlands, East, and South East.

Figure 7: Percentage of occupied dwellings by tenure, by local authority, England and Wales, 2021

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We can compare the tenure percentages in 2011 and 2021 at a local level, which shows:

- the largest change for outright ownership was Tamworth in the West Midlands, increasing to 33.3% in 2021, from 27.8%
- the Isles of Scilly in the South West was the only local authority to have an increase in ownership with a mortgage or loan, increasing to 10.6% in 2021 from 10% in 2011
- North Lincolnshire in Yorkshire and The Humber had the largest decrease in dwellings owned with a mortgage or loan, with 29.5% in 2021 compared with 36.5% in 2011
- City of London has seen the largest increase in the percentage of private-rented dwellings (48.4% in 2021 from 35.9% in 2011), no local authorities had a decrease
- the largest increase in the percentage of socially-rented dwellings was in Kensington and Chelsea in London (27.6% in 2021 up from to 24.9% in 2011), while Nottingham in the East Midlands had the largest decrease (25.5% in 2021, 29.7% in 2011)

5 . Tenure by accommodation type

Census data can be used to compare tenure types in different kinds of accommodation, for occupied dwellings.

In England, flats, maisonettes and apartments made up the largest proportion of both privately-rented dwellings (43.6%) and dwellings in the social rent sector (45%) in 2021. In Wales, terraced dwellings had the highest proportion of private-rented dwellings (33.2%), while semi-detached dwellings had the largest proportion of social-rented dwellings (36.5%).

For owner-occupied dwellings, the largest proportion in England were semi-detached (35.5%), while the largest proportion in Wales were detached (38.1%). Although percentages have slightly changed, all of these findings were also true in the 2011 Census.

Figure 8: Flats, maisonettes and apartments are more common in rented properties, while houses are more common in owned properties

Percentage split of accommodation type by tenure of occupied dwellings, England and Wales,2021

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In London, the housing set-up typically differs from other English regions and Wales, especially because of the large proportion of flats, maisonettes and apartments (55.9% in 2021). It is not surprising that, when breaking down tenure by accommodation type, flats, maisonettes and apartments make up the largest percentage of all tenures. This accommodation type makes up 74.3% of socially-rented accommodation, with privately rented not far behind at 73.2%. While still the largest proportion, there was a far smaller proportion of owner-occupied dwellings that were flats, maisonettes or apartments (31.5%).

Figure 9: Flats, maisonettes and apartments represented over 70% of rented dwellings in London

Percentage split of accommodation type by tenure of occupied dwellings, London,2021

Download the data

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6 . Central heating by housing characteristics

Central heating type by tenure

The distribution of central heating differs slightly between tenures in both England and Wales.

A higher proportion of owner-occupied dwellings used mains gas only as the central heating type in England (78.6%) compared with other tenures, but in Wales the mains gas was most common in social-rented dwellings (74.2%), closely followed by owner occupied (72.4%). Owner-occupied dwellings had a higher proportion of oil only heating type in both England (4.2%) and Wales (9.5%), compared with the rented tenures.

Private-rented dwellings have a higher proportion with no central heating (2.4% in England and 1.8% in Wales), a lower proportion of mains gas (63.7% in England and 66.1% in Wales) and a larger proportion of electric heating (18.2% in England and 12.3% in Wales) than other tenure types.

Social-rented dwellings had a higher proportion of district or communal heat networks (2.8% in England, 1.5% in Wales) and "other central heating" (2.0% in England, 1.5% in Wales) compared with other tenure types. Renewable central heating as a sole source of heating was also most common in social-rented dwellings (0.5% in England and 0.6% in Wales), but when combining all renewable energy (renewable energy alone or alongside another central heating type), owner-occupied dwellings had a higher percentage than other tenures (1.1% in England and 1.2% in Wales). You can explore the type of central heating used by households at a local level using our [Census maps](#).

Central heating type by accommodation type

In both England and Wales in 2021, caravans had the largest proportion of dwellings with no central heating, with 4.1% of caravans having no central heating in England and 7.0% in Wales. The proportion of caravans with no central heating is likely to be higher, but these data are not collected for unoccupied caravans (40.6% in England and 65.9% in Wales). The second-largest proportion with no central heating was found in flats, maisonettes and apartments (2.7% in England and 2.1% in Wales).

All accommodation types used mains gas only as the most common central heating source in England and Wales, except for caravans or other mobile temporary structures where tank or bottled gas was most common (39.1% in England and 47.4% in Wales). Terraced dwellings had the highest proportion with mains gas only used as the central heating type, in both England (82%) and Wales (81.7%). Caravans or other mobile or temporary structures had the lowest proportion using mains gas only (26% in England and 13.4% in Wales).

Out of all accommodation types, it was more common to find electric only as the heating type in flats, maisonettes or apartments (27.1% in England and 22.5% in Wales). Dwellings that used oil only to heat their homes were more likely to be detached than other accommodation types, with 9.4% of detached dwellings using this fuel type in England and 18.8% in Wales.

When combining all renewable energy (renewable energy alone or alongside another central heating type), the highest percentage was found in detached dwellings (2.0% in England and 2.2% in Wales).

7 . Number of bedrooms

The census collects data on the number of bedrooms available at the household level, which allows us to analyse the number of bedrooms in occupied dwellings. For information on how we combine data for shared dwellings, see [Section 10: Data sources and quality](#).

Three-bedroom dwellings were most common, making up 40.0% (9,372,945) of all dwellings in England and 48.0% in Wales (646,240). One-bedroom dwellings were least common (11.6% in England and 7.6% in Wales). Approximately one in five dwellings had four or more bedrooms in both England (21.1%) and Wales (20.6%).

Three-bedroom dwellings were the most common across all regions, except for London where two-bedroom dwellings were most common.

Figure 10: London had the highest proportion of one-bedroom dwellings in 2021

Proportion split of occupied dwellings by number of bedrooms, by English region and Wales, 21 March 2021

Download the data

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Wales had the lowest proportion of one-bedroom dwellings in 2021 across all English regions and Wales (7.6% of its dwelling stock). This was followed by the East Midlands at 8.0%. London had the highest proportion of one-bedroom dwellings at 21.2% and the lowest proportion of three-bedroom dwellings at 29.5% of its occupied dwelling stock.

The local authorities with the highest proportion of one-bedroom dwellings were in London (City of London with 53.4%, Westminster with 36.0%, and Islington with 34.3%). Local authorities with the lowest proportion of one-bedroom dwellings were North Kesteven in the East Midlands (3.4%) and Copeland in the North West (3.8%). Wokingham in the South East had the highest proportion of dwellings with four or more bedrooms at 39.0% of its dwelling stock.

8 . Housing in England and Wales data

[Number of dwellings by housing characteristics in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 30 March 2023

The number of dwellings by dwelling occupancy, shared dwellings, accommodation type, tenure, central heating type and number of bedrooms. Data are available at country, region, local authority, Middle layer Super Output Area and Lower layer Super Output Area in England and Wales, where possible.

9 . Glossary

Dwelling

A dwelling is a self-contained unit of accommodation that may be empty or being lived in, for example houses or flats. They are usually made up of one household, but those with more than one household are shared and called a “shared dwelling”.

If a dwelling has no usual residents living in them, for example they are empty after being sold, these are called “unoccupied dwellings”, but may be used by short-term residents or visitors on Census Day, 21 March 2021, for example holiday homes.

Shared dwelling

A dwelling is shared if:

- there are two or more households at the same address that are not self-contained; this means that not all of the rooms (including the kitchen, bathroom and toilet, if any) are behind a door only that household can use
- households combine to form a shared dwelling that is self-contained

Unshared dwelling

A dwelling is unshared if all rooms in the accommodation, including the kitchen, bathroom and toilet, are behind a door that only the household can use.

Unoccupied dwelling

An unoccupied dwelling refers to a unit of accommodation with no usual residents, although they may be used by short-term residents or visitors on Census Day. They can be recorded as either of the following on Census Day, 21 March 2021:

- second residence, holiday home or vacant home only
- occupied by short-term residents or visitors only

Accommodation type

The type of building or structure used or available for use by one or more household spaces.

This could be:

- the whole house or bungalow
- a flat, maisonette or apartment
- a temporary or mobile structure, such as a caravan

Whole house or bungalow

This property type is not divided into flats or other living accommodation. There are three types of whole houses or bungalows.

- Detached - none of the living accommodation is attached to another property but can be attached to a garage
- Semi-detached - the living accommodation is joined to another house or bungalow by a common wall that they share
- Terraced - a mid-terraced house is located between two other houses and shares two common walls; an end-of-terrace house is part of a terraced development but only shares one common wall

Flats (apartments) and maisonettes

An apartment is another word for a flat. A maisonette is a two-storey flat.

Tenure

Whether a household owns or rents the accommodation that it occupies.

Owner-occupied accommodation can be:

- owned outright, which is where the household owns all of the accommodation
- owned with a mortgage or loan
- part owned on a shared ownership scheme

Rented accommodation can be:

- private rented, for example, rented through a private landlord or letting agent
- social rented through a local council or housing association
- lives rent free, which is where the household does not own the accommodation and does not pay rent to live there, for example living in a relative or friend's property or live-in carers or nannies

This information is not available for household spaces with no usual residents.

Type of central heating

Central heating is a heating system used to heat multiple rooms in a building by circulating air or heated water through pipes to radiators or vents. Single or multiple fuel sources can fuel these systems. Central heating systems that are unused or not working are still considered. No information was collected for unoccupied dwellings.

Number of bedrooms

The number of bedrooms available for use in a household's accommodation. This number is not available for unoccupied dwellings.

10 . Data sources and quality

Producing census data at the dwelling level

Statistics in this article refer to data on dwellings in England and Wales, which differs to households in two ways. Firstly, households in shared dwellings would be counted separately in household level data but as one in dwellings level data. Secondly, vacant dwellings would be counted in dwellings level data but not in household level data.

For shared dwellings, that have more than one household questionnaire completed we take a different approach for each topic.

For accommodation type, the most common accommodation type is used if this is one type, if not a prioritisation order is used as per the responses ordered on the [Census 2021 paper questionnaires \(Household Question H7\)](#).

For tenure, the following prioritisation order is used:

1. Owned outright
2. Owned with a mortgage or loan
3. Shared ownership
4. Rented from a council or local authority
5. Other social rented, such as a housing association
6. Private rented through a private landlord or letting agency
7. Private rented through an employer of a household member
8. Private rented through a relative or friend of household member
9. Other forms of private rent
10. Lives rent free

For central heating type, if there are different responses from households in the same dwelling, they are classified as either “Two or more types (including renewable energy)” or “Two or more types (not including renewable energy)”, depending on the responses.

For number of bedrooms, as the census questionnaire asks “How many bedrooms are available for use only by this household”, we add together the number of bedrooms for each household to arrive at a figure for the dwelling.

Some housing characteristics in this article are only available for occupied dwellings with usual residents, as they are answered on the household questionnaire and cannot be assessed from outside the property, for example tenure, central heating type and number of bedrooms.

Shared dwellings

In Census 2021 improvements to the address frame have been made. The data sources used to construct this frame provided a more accurate listing of multiple household spaces within the same building; for example, specific units within houses of multiple occupation or converted flats within property. This allowed us to address census initial contact letters to these units and follow up any non-response as necessary. This has meant that the resultant data are more often counted as distinct households within separate dwellings, better reflecting their living arrangements.

Social rent grouping

In this analysis, we do not separate social rent into “housing association, housing co-operative, charitable trust, registered social landlord” and “council or local authority” as it is evident in the data that there is respondent error in identifying the type of landlord. This is particularly clear in results for areas which have no local authority housing stock, but there are households responding as having a “council or local authority” landlord type. Estimates are likely to be accurate when the social rent category is combined.

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 overall person response rate for the census 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](#).

Quality

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021, more generally, can be found in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#).

11 . Related links

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

Bulletin | Released 5 January 2023

Household level data on housing from Census 2021 in England and Wales. This publication is part of the topic summaries and will include datasets and statistical bulletins. It includes univariate data (one variable only) down to Output Area (OA) level, where possible. Variables include Accommodation type, tenure, rooms and bedrooms, central heating and car or van availability.

[Dwelling stock by tenure, UK](#)

Dataset | Released 9 June 2022

The number of dwellings in the UK, and dwelling stock data by tenure for the UK's constituent countries, where available.

12 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 30 March 2023, ONS website, article, [Housing in England and Wales: 2021 compared with 2011](#)