



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Statistical Digest of Rural England

Population

This document is part of the larger compendium publication the [Statistical Digest of Rural England](#), a collection of rural statistics on a wide range of social and economic government policy areas.

The Statistical Digest of Rural England is an official statistics publication meaning these statistics have been produced to the high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

More information on the Official Statistics Code of Practice can be found on the [Code of Practice web pages](#).

These statistics allow comparisons between the different rural and urban area classifications. The Rural-Urban Classification is used to distinguish rural and urban areas. The Classification defines areas as rural if they fall outside of settlements with more than 10,000 resident population.

More information on the Rural-Urban Classification can be found on the [Rural-Urban Classification web pages](#).

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

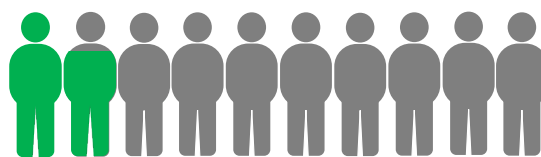
rural.statistics@defra.gov.uk

Last updated: 28th October 2021

Rural population and migration

Mid-year population 2020

- In 2020 the mid-year population estimate (based on Lower Super Output Areas, LSOAs) for England was 56.6 million, of which 9.7 million (17.1 per cent) lived in rural areas and 46.9 million (82.9 per cent) lived in urban areas.
- In 2011 the more detailed Census output area-based rural population was 9.3 million (17.6 per cent) while the mid-year population estimate based on LSOAs was 9.1 million (17.2 per cent). Further explanation can be found in footnote 1
- In comparing population estimates at LSOA level there was an increase in the rural population from 9.1 million in 2011 (LSOA-based) to 9.7 million in 2020 (LSOA-based), however the proportion of the total population has fallen from 17.2 per cent to 17.1 per cent over the same time period, as the urban population has increased at a faster rate.
- Within rural areas, 0.5 million people lived in sparse settings in 2020.



9.7 million people live in rural areas; that is **17%** of England's population

2020 Mid-year population estimates

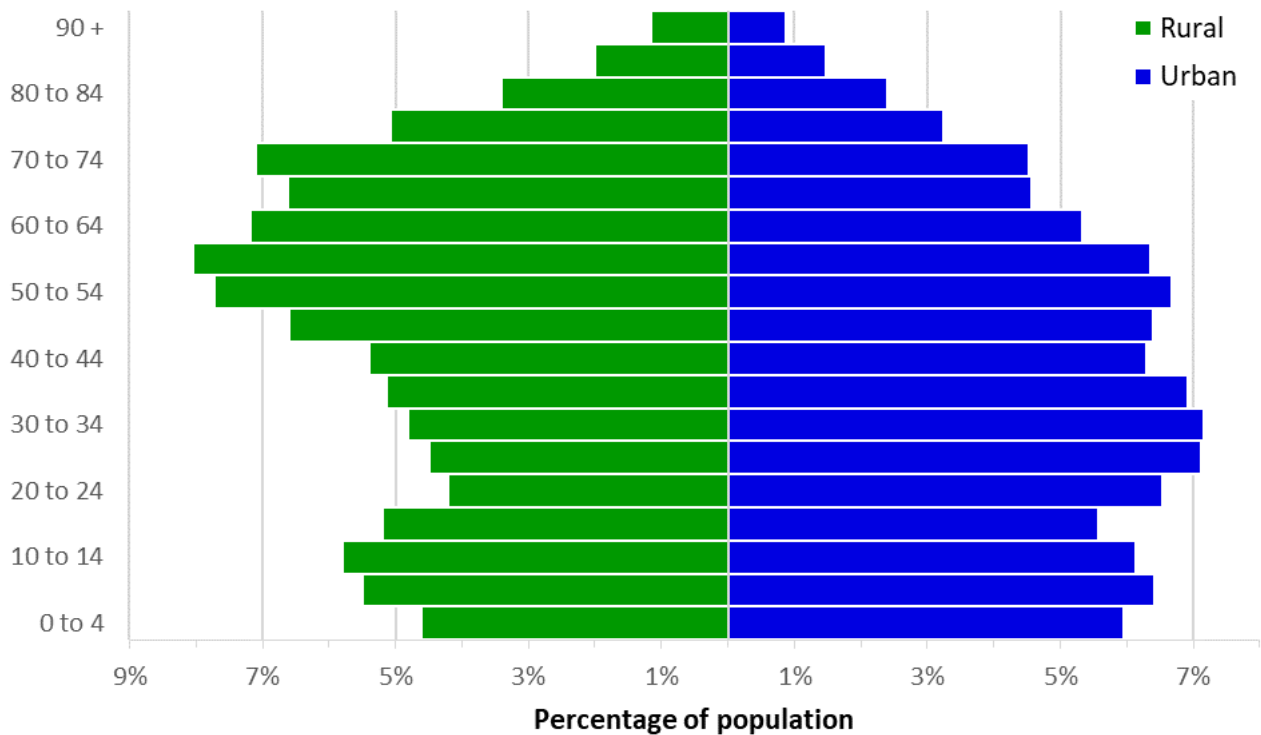
	Population	Proportion (%)
Rural	9,683,300	17.1
Rural Town and Fringe	5,240,300	9.3
- those in a sparse setting	197,600	0.3
Rural Village and Hamlet	4,443,000	7.9
- those in a sparse setting	304,600	0.5
Urban	46,866,800	82.9
Urban Major Conurbation	20,275,900	35.9
Urban Minor Conurbation	2,031,500	3.6
Urban City and Town	24,559,400	43.4
- those in a sparse setting	91,700	0.2
England	56,550,100	100.0

- 9.7 million people, or 17.1 per cent of the population, lived in rural areas in 2020.
- Around 502,200 people, or 0.9 per cent of the population lived in rural settlements in a sparse setting.
- A further table of the mid-year population estimates broken down by detailed rural-urban classification covering 2011 to 2020 is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

Population by age

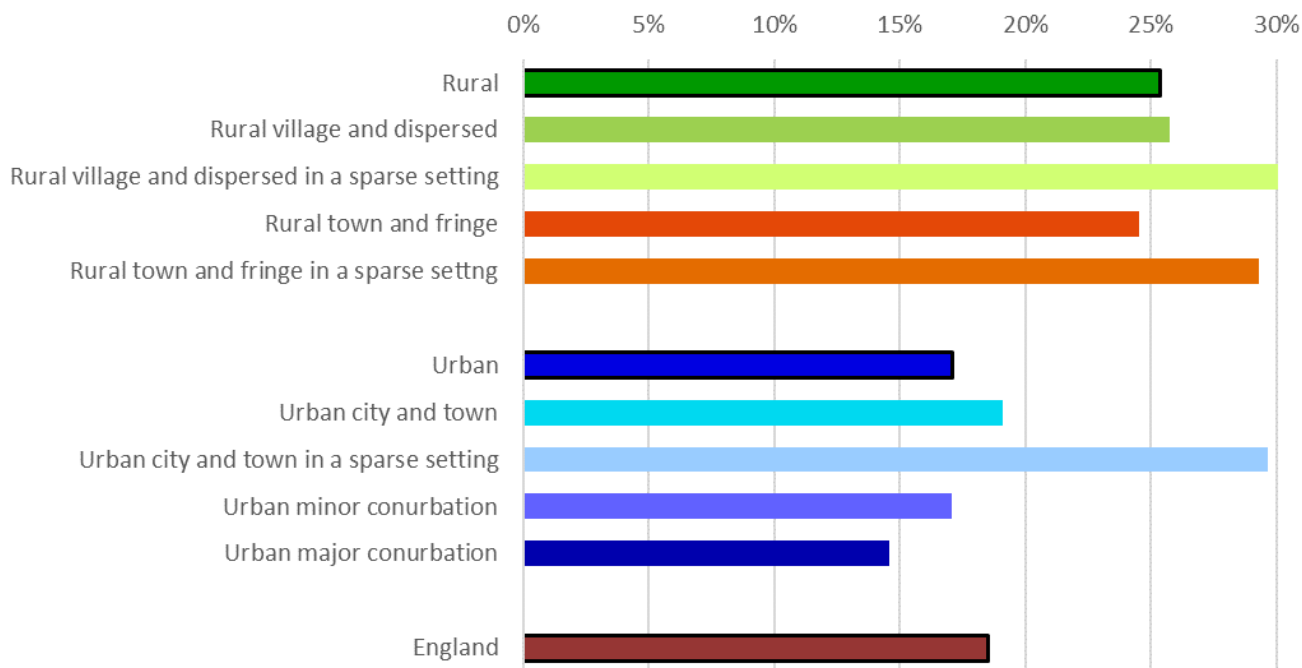
Percentage of population within age bands by rural-urban classification (LSOA) in England, 2020

Age in years

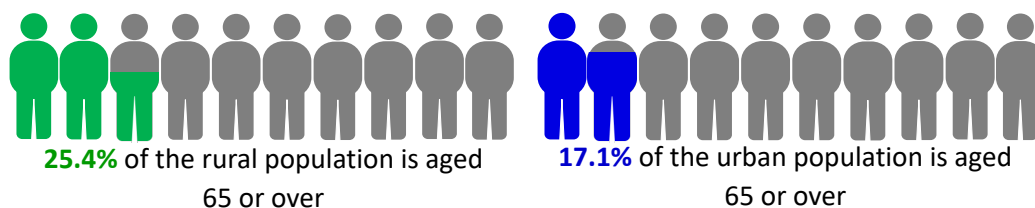


- The population in rural areas has a higher proportion of older people compared with urban areas.
- In 2020, the most prominent age groups in rural areas are *50 to 54* and *55 to 59* with 7.7 per cent and 8.0 per cent of the rural population, respectively, while the most prominent age groups in urban areas are *25 to 29* and *30 to 34* with 7.2 per cent and 7.2 per cent of the urban population, respectively.
- A table of 2020 mid-year population estimates broken down by age band and detailed rural-urban classification is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

Percentage of population aged 65 and over by rural-urban classification (LSOA) in England, 2020



- The rural population has a higher proportion of those aged 65 and over, at 25.4 per cent, compared with the urban population where 17.1 per cent are 65 and over.



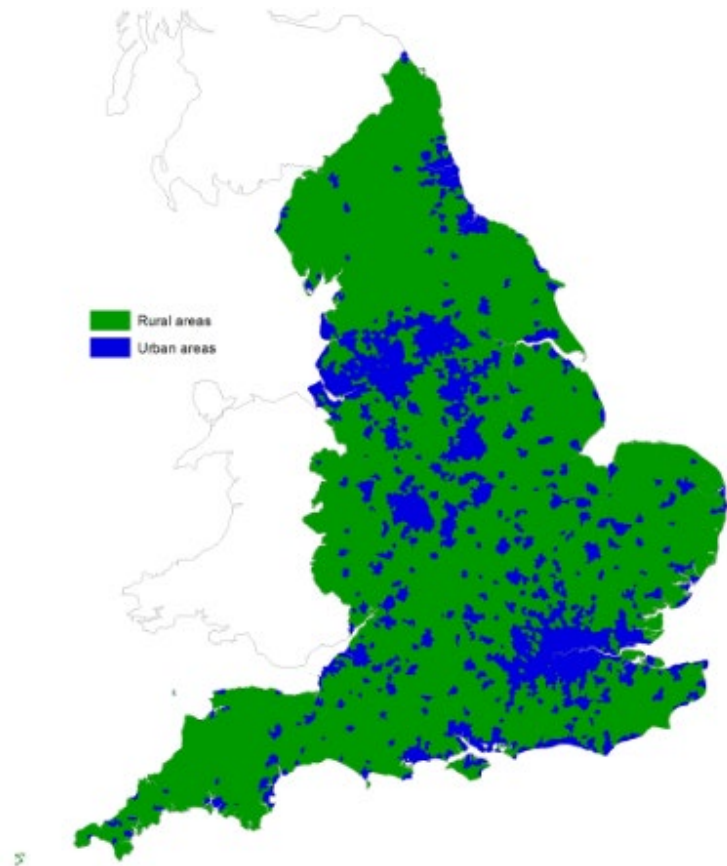
- The population of areas in a sparse setting have the highest proportion of those aged 65 and over, particularly settlements that are rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting which have 30.7 per cent of the population aged 65 and over.

Population aged 65 and over as a percentage of total 2020 mid-year population

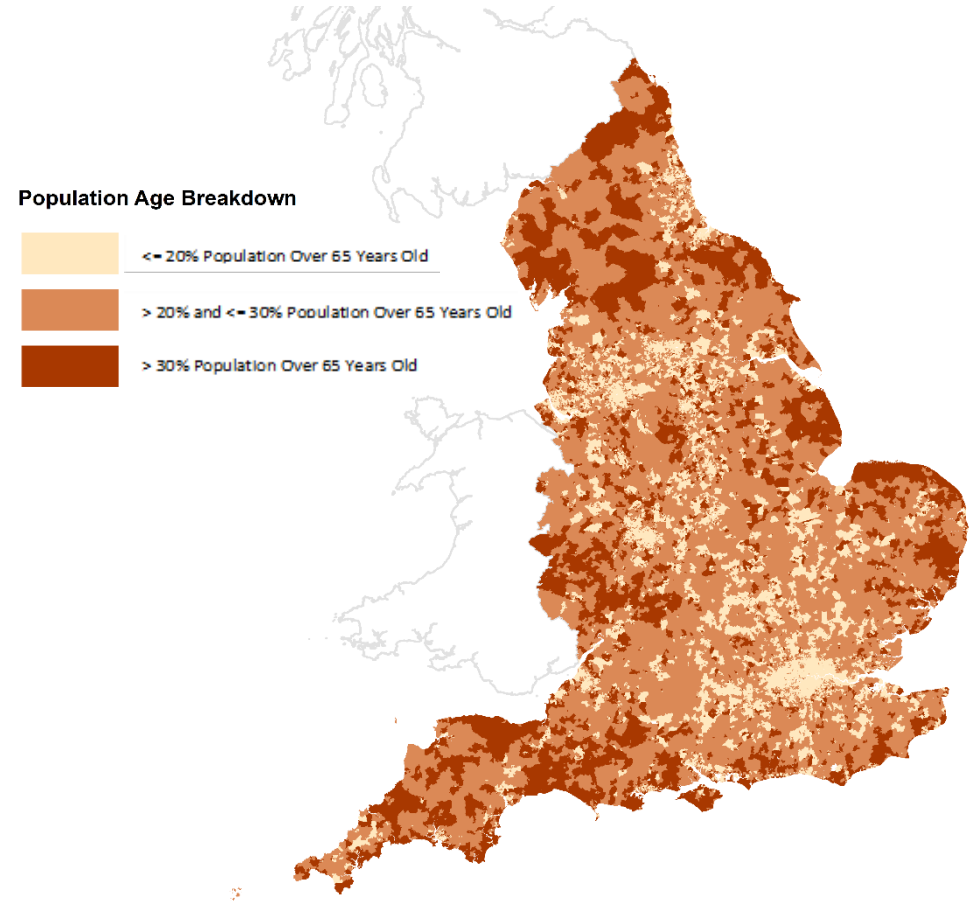
	Population aged 65 and over	Proportion aged 65 and over (%)
Rural	2,454,800	25.4
Rural town and fringe	1,238,200	24.6
- those in a sparse setting	57,900	29.3
Rural village and hamlet	1,065,200	25.7
- those in a sparse setting	93,500	30.7
Urban	8,009,200	17.1
Urban major conurbation	2,958,900	14.6
Urban minor conurbation	346,800	17.1
Urban city and town	4,676,400	19.1
- those in a sparse setting	27,200	29.7
England	10,464,000	18.5

Maps showing the geographic relationship between the rural and urban populations at lower super output area level (LSOA) and areas where the percentage of population of over 65-year olds are most concentrated

Lower super output area classification of England (2011)



Percentage of population over the age of 65 years (2020)



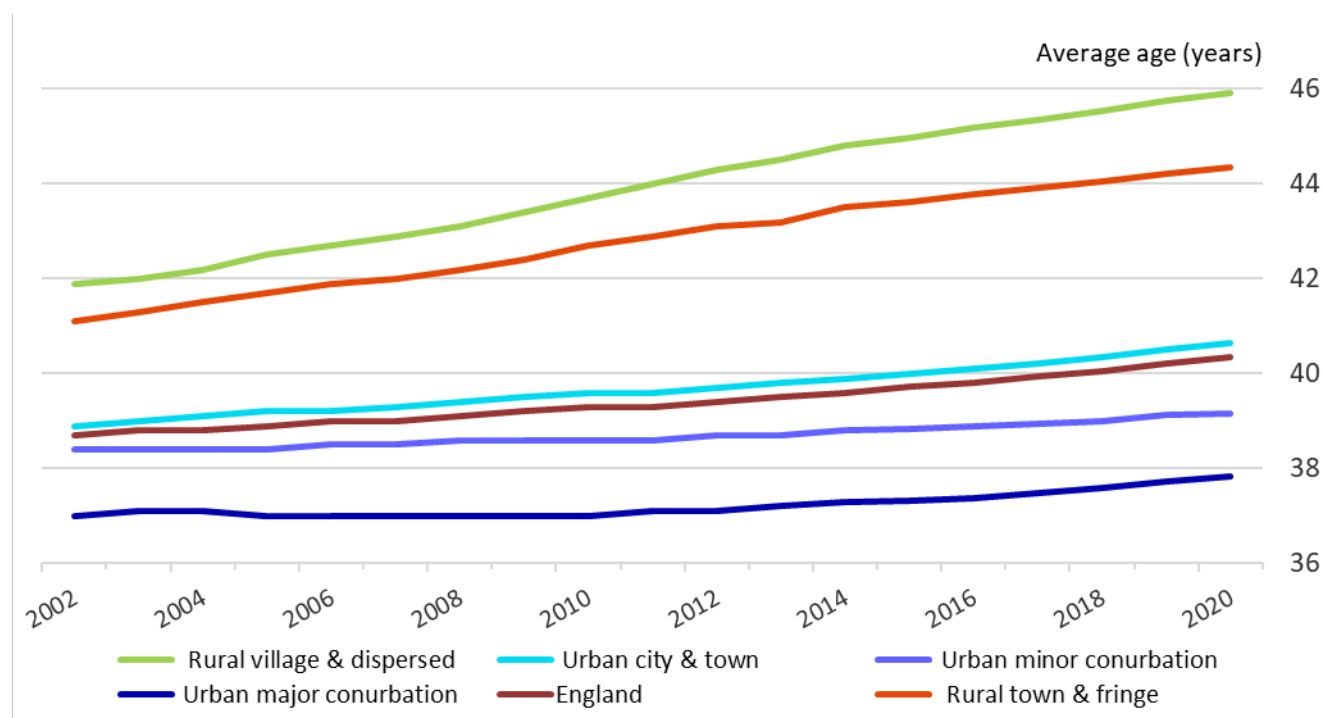
Source: ONS, Defra, RUC2011

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Source: ONS, Defra, Mid-year population estimates for 2020 at LSOA level

Average age of the population

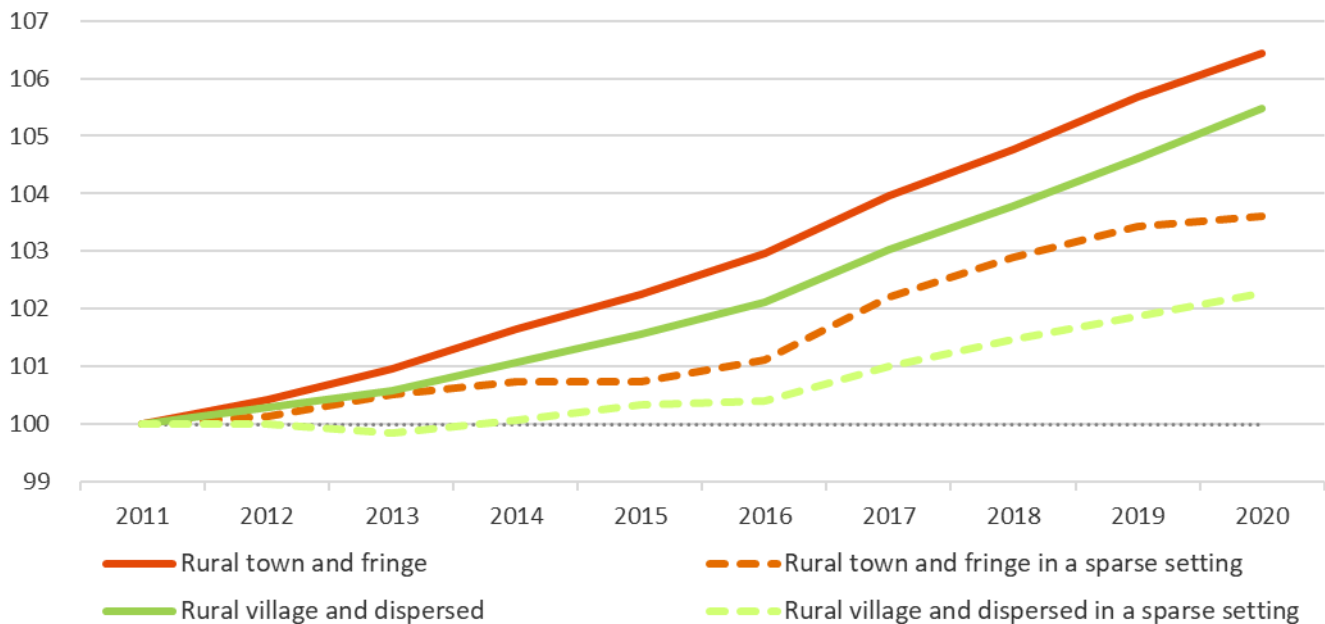
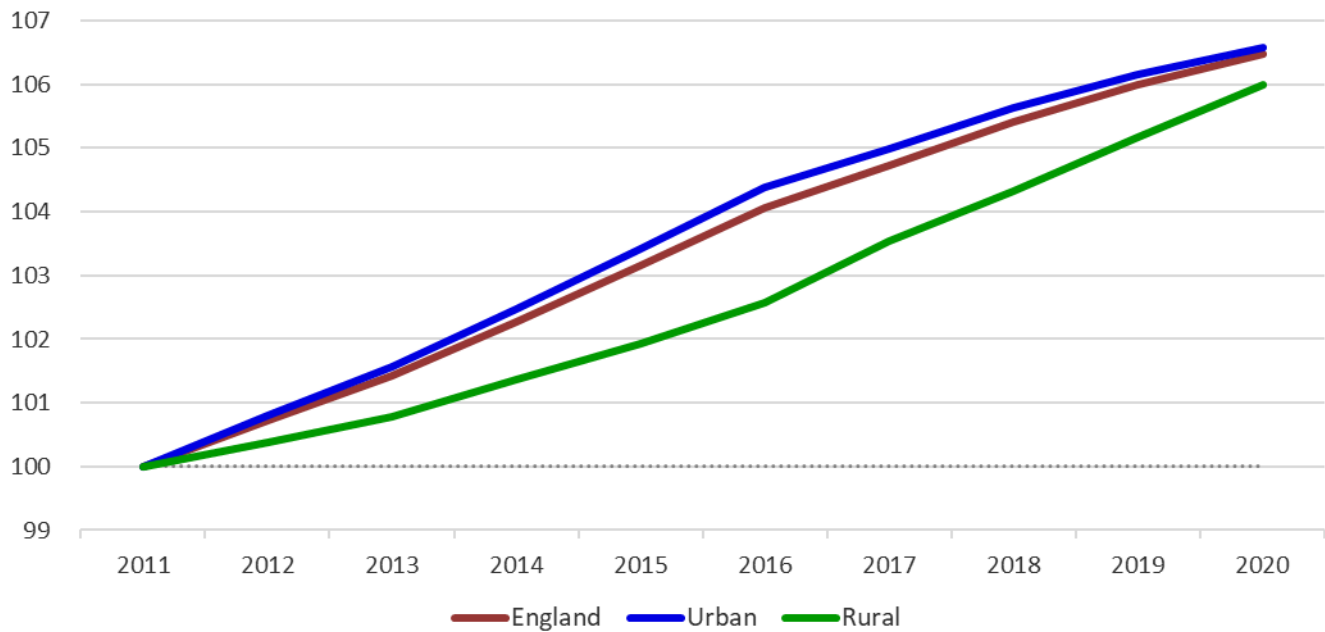
Average age in rural and urban areas in England, 2002 to 2020



- In 2020, the average age of the population in rural village and dispersed areas was 45.9 years and in rural town and fringe areas it was 44.3 years, compared with the average for England of 40.3 years.
- The average age was lowest in urban major conurbations at 37.8 years.
- The average age in rural areas was 45.1 years in 2020, 5.7 years older than in urban areas. The gap in average ages between rural and urban areas widened from 3.4 years in 2002.
- The average age in England increased by 1.6 year between 2002 and 2020, but in rural town and fringe areas it increased by 3.2 years and in rural village and dispersed areas by 4.0 years.
- A table of average age broken down by detailed rural-urban classification covering 2002 to 2020 is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

Population change

Index of population change, 2011 to 2020, 2011 = 100

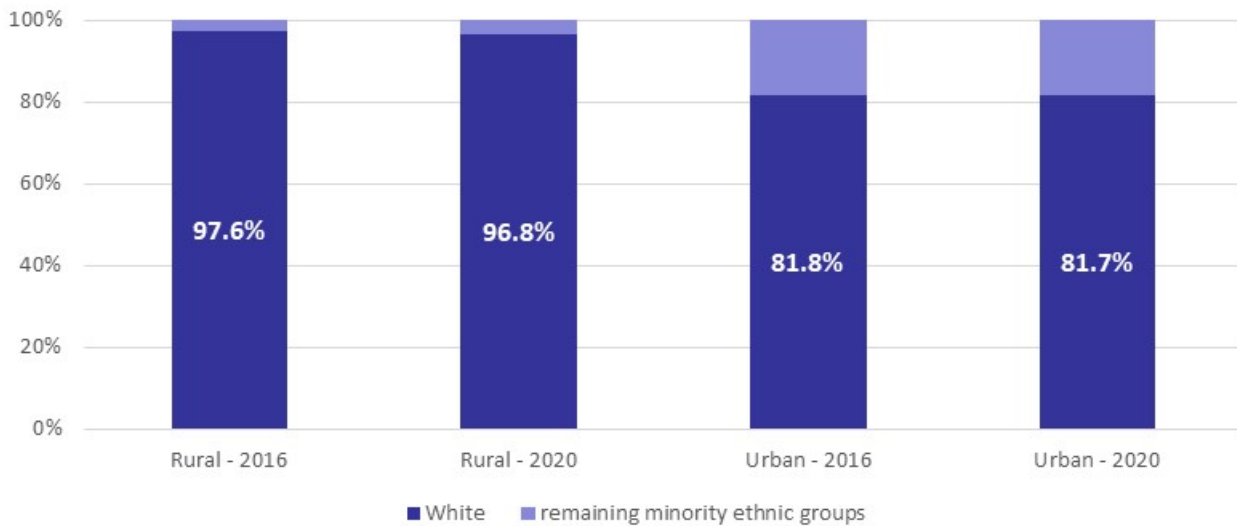


- Both rural and urban areas have seen an increase in overall population between 2011 and 2020. Rural has increased by 6.0 per cent and urban by 6.6 per cent.
- Within rural areas, the greatest rate of population increase was in rural town and fringe areas (6.4 per cent), within urban areas it was in urban major conurbation (7.3 per cent).
- Rural villages and hamlets in sparse settings showed the smallest rate of population increase within rural areas (2.3 per cent), in urban areas it was urban city and town in a sparse setting (1.2 per cent).
- A table of indexed population change broken down by detailed rural-urban classification covering 2011 to 2020 is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

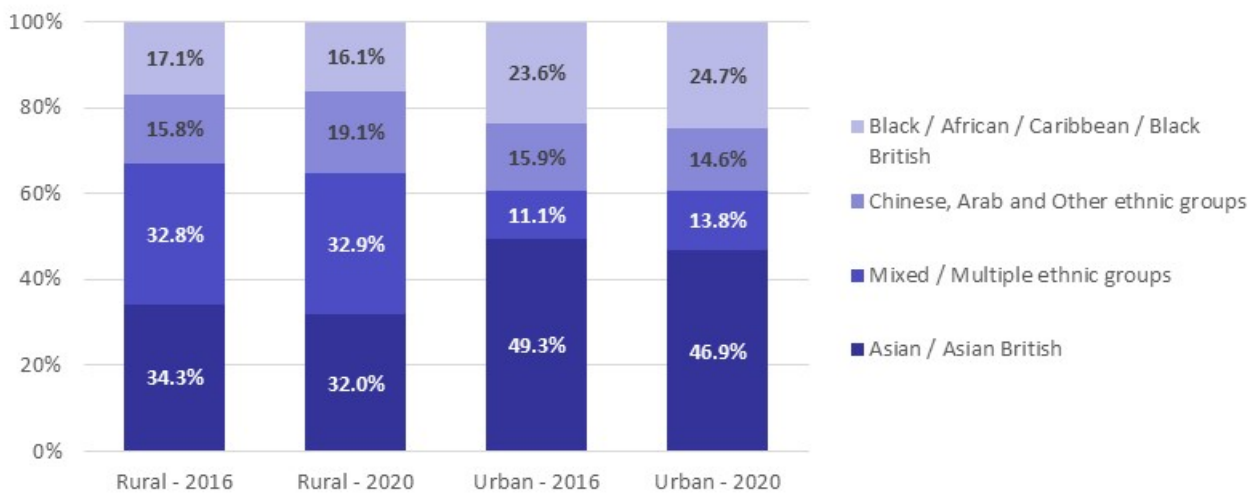
Ethnicity

- Overall, 'white' is the majority ethnic group in both rural and urban areas, however urban areas are more ethnically diverse than rural areas.
- In 2020, the 'white ethnic' group accounted for 96.8 per cent of the rural population, compared with 81.7 per cent in urban areas.
- The proportion of 'minority ethnic' groups has fallen slightly over the last 5 years in both rural and urban areas, falling by 0.8 and 0.1 percentage points respectively since 2016.
- Diversity of 'minority ethnic' groups differs between rural and urban areas. In rural areas the second largest group is the 'Mixed / Multiple ethnic group' while in urban areas it is the 'Asian ethnic' group. The smallest group proportionally in rural areas is the "black, African, Caribbean or black British' group, while in urban areas it is the 'Mixed / Multiple ethnic group'.

Ethnic groups as a percentage of population in rural and urban areas, England, 2016 and 2020



Detail for all minority ethnic group population in rural and urban areas, England, 2016 & 2020



- Ethnic diversity decreases the more sparsely populated the area is. In 2020 ‘minority ethnic’ groups accounted for 1.5 per cent of those in rural areas in a sparse setting.
- Tables detailing ethnic groups in rural and urban areas in 2016 and 2020, and a more detailed rural-urban breakdown for 2020 are available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

Source: Office for National Statistics, Labour Force Survey, via Annual Business Inquiry (abi2@ons.gov.uk)

Population at local authority level

Often statistics are compiled at local authority level when that is the geography of the original data, in which case the rural urban classification for local authorities is used, as defined by April 2020 Local Authority boundaries.

This is different from looking at the population using the more detailed rural-urban classification as it is based on whole local authorities. The whole population in an authority will be attributed to the class assigned to the authority. So an authority that is Mainly Rural or Largely Rural and hence classed as Predominantly Rural will have the whole population counted as being in a Predominantly Rural area, even those living in an urban settlement within that authority, while all those living in a rural area but within an authority classed as Urban with Significant Rural or Predominantly Urban will not be counted in the Predominantly Rural figure.

- In 2020, 12.0 million people lived in a Predominantly Rural area, 21.3 per cent of the England population.
- 53 per cent of the population in Predominantly Rural areas are over the age of 44, which is the which is 1 per cent higher than in 2019.
- In comparison, 41 per cent of the population in Predominantly Urban areas are over the age of 44, which is 1 per cent higher than in 2019 as well.
- The population in Predominantly Rural areas has increased by 6.4 per cent between 2011 and 2020, compared with 6.5 per cent for England as a whole and 6.6 per cent in Predominantly Urban areas.
- However, it is longer-term comparisons that highlight significant shifts in the age structure. Comparisons have been made between 2001 and 2015 to show this.
- Predominantly Rural areas have proportionately seen large falls in the population aged 30 to 39 and higher proportional increases in the older population between 2001 and 2015.
- The population aged 65 and over increased by 37 per cent in Predominantly Rural areas between 2001 and 2015, compared with 17 per cent in Predominantly Urban areas.
- Between 2001 and 2015 Predominantly Rural areas have seen an increase of 7 per cent in infants (0 to 4-year olds) compared with a 22 per cent increase in Predominantly Urban areas.

2020 Local Authority District mid-year population estimates

	Population	Proportion (%)
Mainly Rural	4,729,000	8.4
Largely Rural	7,291,000	12.9
Urban with Significant Rural	7,181,000	12.7
Urban City and Town	14,836,000	26.2
Urban Minor Conurbation	2,229,000	3.9
Urban Major Conurbation	20,284,000	35.9
Predominantly Rural	12,019,000	21.3
Predominantly Urban	37,350,000	66.0
England	56,550,000	100.0

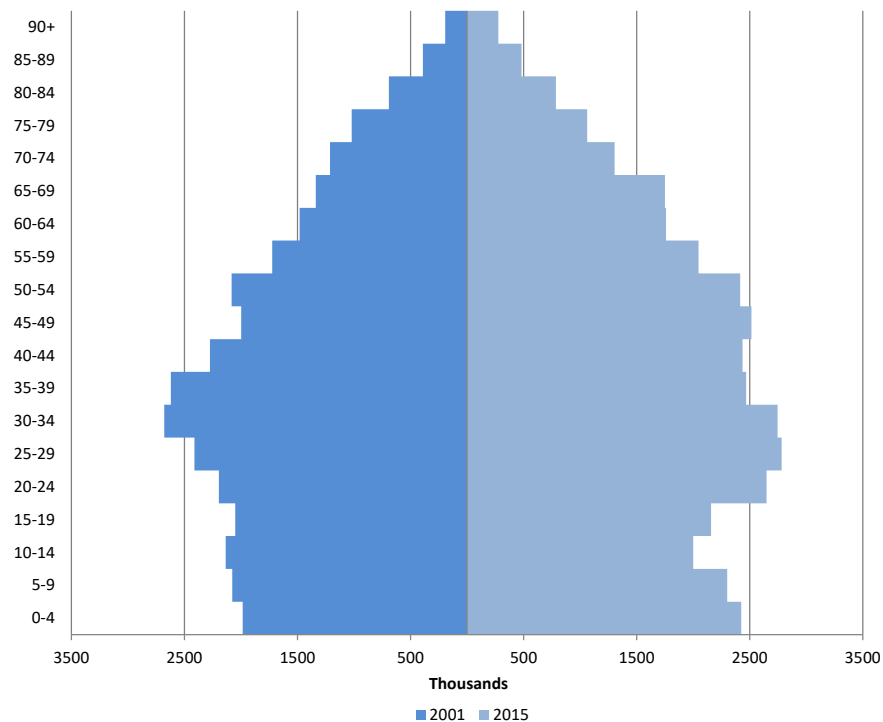
- Further tables broken down by detailed local authority rural-urban classification covering 2011 to 2020 and broken down by age band for 2020 are available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

The charts below show longer-term changes in the populations for Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas, by age band, comparing 2001 and 2015.

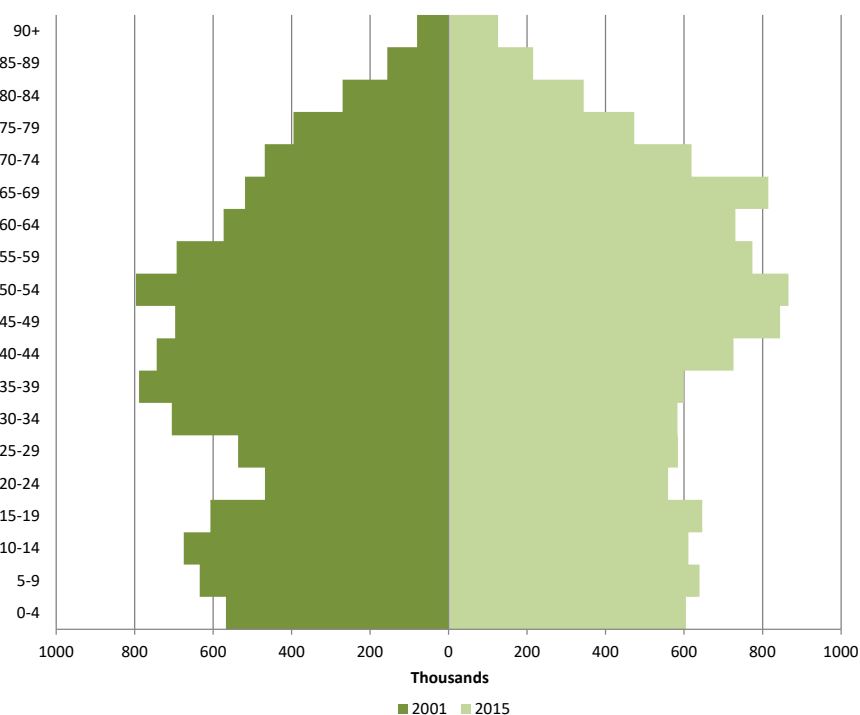
Population in Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas by age bands, 2001 and 2015, England

(scales in the charts differ and so are not directly comparable. The 2011 rural urban classification has been applied to both years to enable comparison)

Predominantly Rural areas :



Predominantly Urban areas:



A table broken down by broad local authority rural-urban classification and age bands for both 2001 and 2015 and the change between the two years is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

Population in Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas by age bands, 2001 and 2015, England
 (scales in the charts differ and so are not directly comparable. The 2011 rural urban classification has been applied to both years to enable comparison)

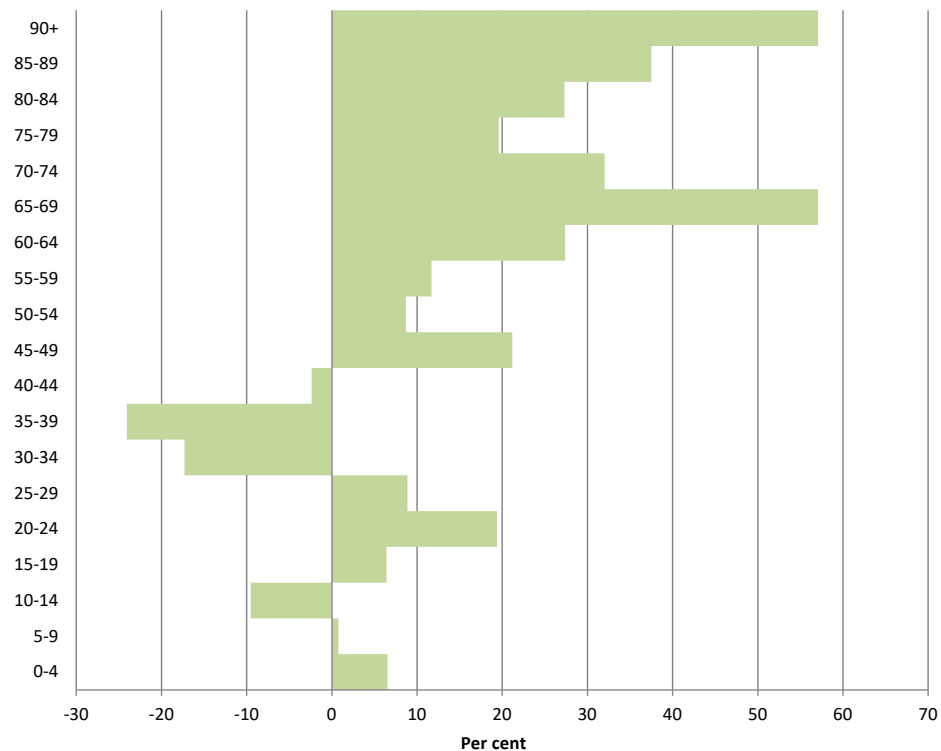


A table broken down by broad local authority rural-urban classification and age bands for both 2001 and 2015 and the change between the two years is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

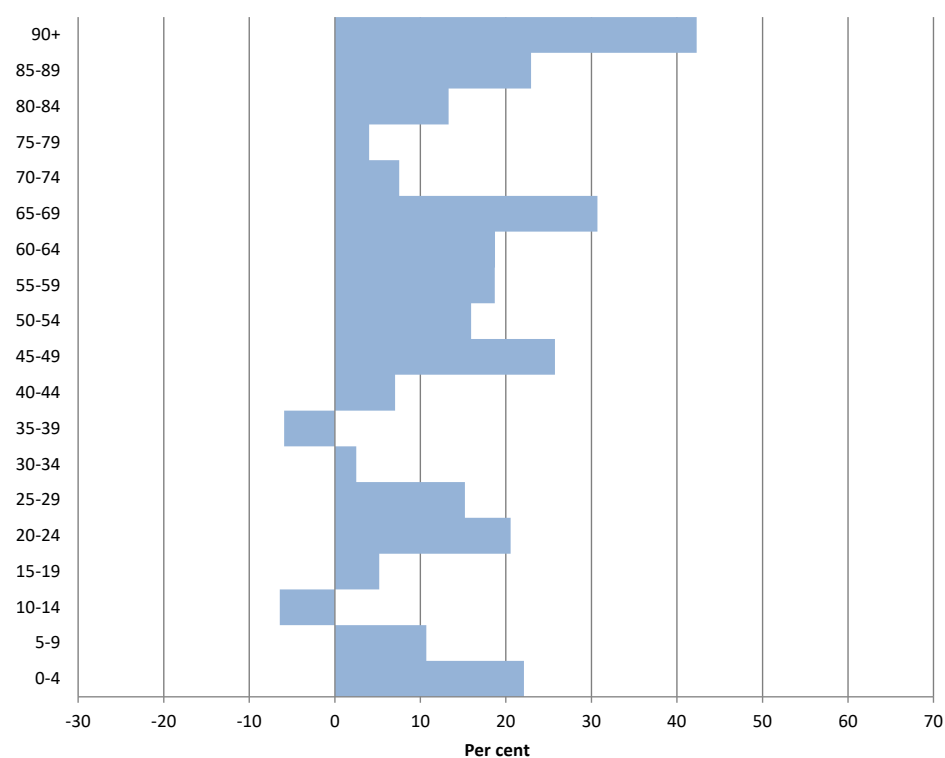
Percentage change in population in Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas by age bands, between 2001 and 2015, England

(scales in the charts differ and so are not directly comparable. The 2011 rural urban classification has been applied to both years to enable comparison)

Predominantly Rural areas:



Predominantly Urban areas:



A table broken down by broad local authority rural-urban classification and age bands for both 2001 and 2015 and the change between the two years is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

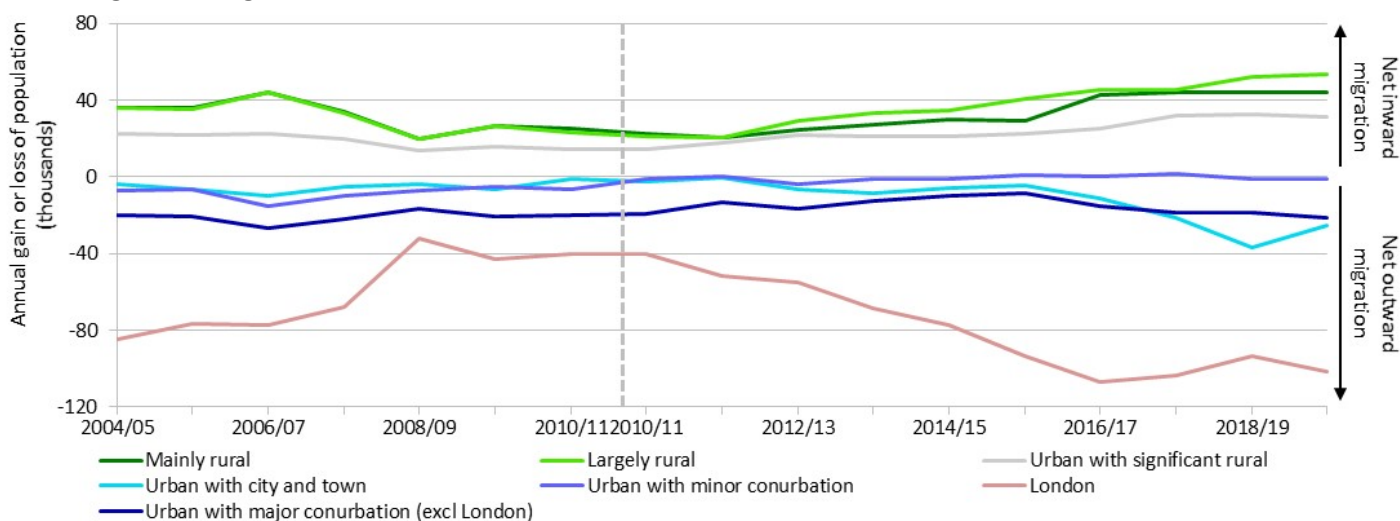
Internal migration

In the analysis presented below internal migration refers to population migration occurring between local authorities within the UK and the outcome is shown for local authorities in England, including the results of migration to and from the rest of the UK. Migration between the same class of authority will have no net effect on the population for that class and is excluded.

As the analysis is using data for local authority areas, it does not distinguish the type of settlement a migrant has moved to. So, in the case of migration to an authority classed as a Predominantly Rural area this could be migration to an urban settlement within that authority. Similarly, migration to an authority classed as a Predominantly Urban area could be migration to a rural settlement within that Predominantly Urban area.

The latest migration analysis is for the year to June 30th 2020 so is mostly for the period prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Internal migration, England, 2004/05 to 2019/20



Note: The RUC01 for Local Authorities has been applied to all data up to 2009/10. Data for 2010/11 has been classified using both RUC01 and RUC11 to show the comparison. From 2011/12 onwards the RUC11 for Local Authorities has been applied.

- Between 2004/05 and 2008/09 the general trend for internal migration in England was for net migration to Predominantly Rural areas and net migration from Predominantly Urban areas, although the extent of net migration to Predominantly Rural areas was falling.
- Since 2008/09 there has been an increase in the rate of net migration to Predominantly Rural areas.
- For 2019/20 in Predominantly Rural areas there was net internal migration inwards of 97,500 people. Within that Largely Rural areas saw net internal migration inwards of 53,600 people and Mainly Rural areas saw net internal migration inwards of 43,900 in 2019/20 (which would include migration between these two categories).
- In contrast, for Predominantly Urban areas there was net internal migration outwards of 149,100. This included net internal migration outwards from London of 101,400 (including to other Predominantly Urban areas).
- A table of internal migration figures broken down by detailed local authority rural-urban classification covering 2004/05 to 2019/20 is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#).

The table below provides a matrix of the internal (within UK) migration movements between the different classes of authority in 2019/20.

Internal (within UK) migration between different classes of authority, 2019/20

Outward	Inward				Total outwards	Net migration
	Predominantly Rural	Urban with Significant Rural	Predominantly Urban	Rest of the UK		
Predominantly Rural		64.9	240.8	23.8	329.4	97.5
Urban with Significant Rural	81.1		184.1	16.6	281.9	31.3
Predominantly Urban	325.4	235.4		70.5	631.3	-149.1
Rest of the UK	20.4	12.9	57.4		90.7	20.3
Total inwards	426.9	313.2	482.2	110.9		0.0

Note: excludes migration within the same class of authority

Net internal (within UK) migration between Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas and other classes of authority

	thousands		thousands
Urban with Significant Rural	16.3	Predominantly Rural	-84.6
Predominantly Urban	84.6	Urban with Significant Rural	-51.3
Rest of the UK	-3.4	Rest of the UK	-13.2
Net migration for Predominantly Rural areas	97.5	Net migration for Predominantly Urban areas	-149.1

- In 2019/20 Predominantly Rural areas saw net migration from Predominantly Urban areas of 84,600 people (325,400 inwards less 240,800 outwards), and from Urban with Significant Rural areas of 16,300 people (81,100 inwards less 64,900 outwards). There was a net outward migration from Predominantly Rural areas to the rest of the UK of 3,400 people (20,400 inwards less 23,800 outwards).
- Net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas in 2019/20 increased the Predominantly Rural population by 0.8 per cent, compared with a 0.4 per cent increase in 2010/11.
- Net outward migration from Predominantly Urban areas in 2019/20 reduced the Predominantly Urban population by 0.4 per cent, compared with a 0.2 per cent reduction in 2010/11.

Notes: Internal migration is defined as residential moves between local authorities. Moves within a single local authority are excluded, as are international moves into or out of the UK. These statistics are based on a combination of administrative data and represent the best available source of information on internal migration. Further information on the data sources and methods, and their limitations, is available via the ONS internal migration methodology webpage (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/population-and-migration/internal-migration-methodology/index.html).

Source: Defra analysis of ONS data - Annual internal Migration within the United Kingdom to June 2020.

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/migrationwithintheuk/datasets/internalmigrationbyoriginanddestinationlocalauthoritiessexandsingleyearofagedetailedestimatesdataset

Internal migration by age

- For some years there has been net internal migration (within the UK) inwards to Predominantly Rural areas. This has been the case across all age bands except for 17 to 20-year olds. In 2019/20 within the overall net internal migration to Predominantly Rural areas of 97,500, there was net internal migration outwards of 17 to 20 years olds of 34,100.
- Net outward migration of 17 to 20 years olds can be anticipated as these are the ages when students are most likely to move from home for higher education, with the likelihood that higher education establishments will be mostly found in the more urban areas.

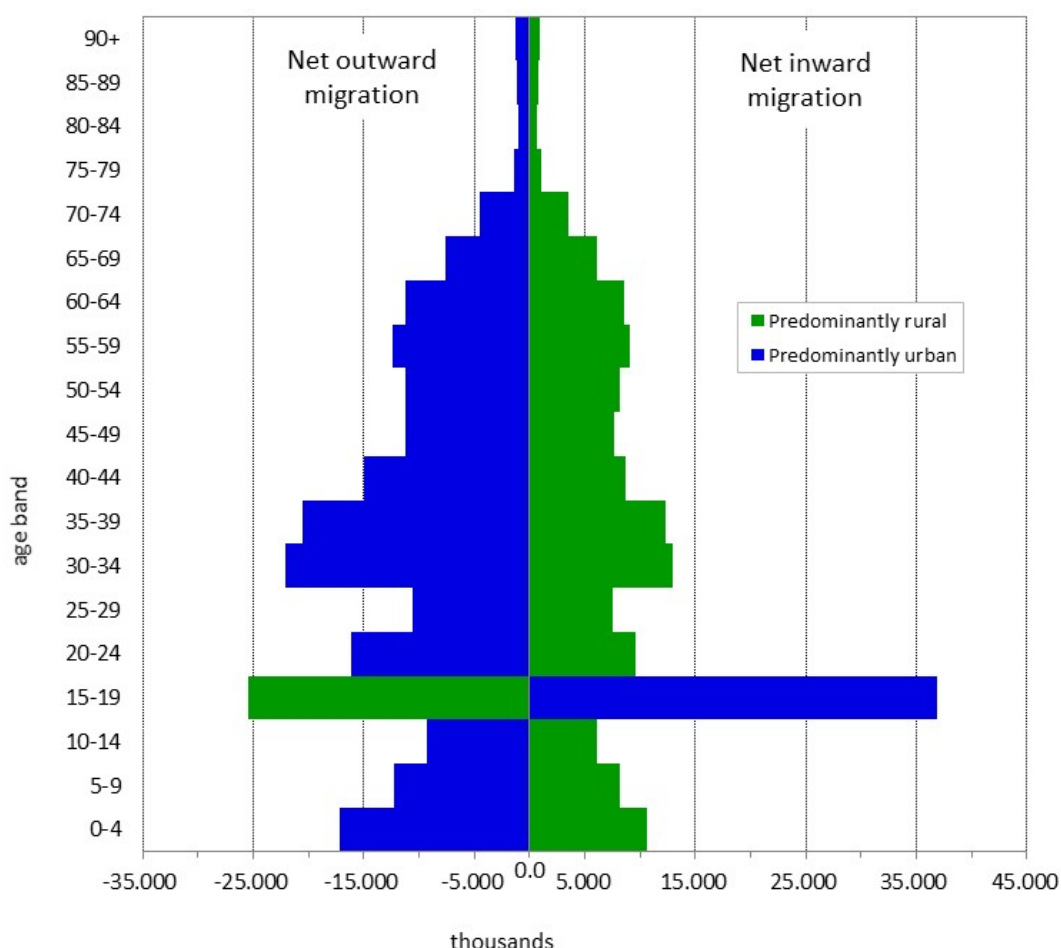


In 2019/20 net migration of 17 to 20-year olds = 34,100

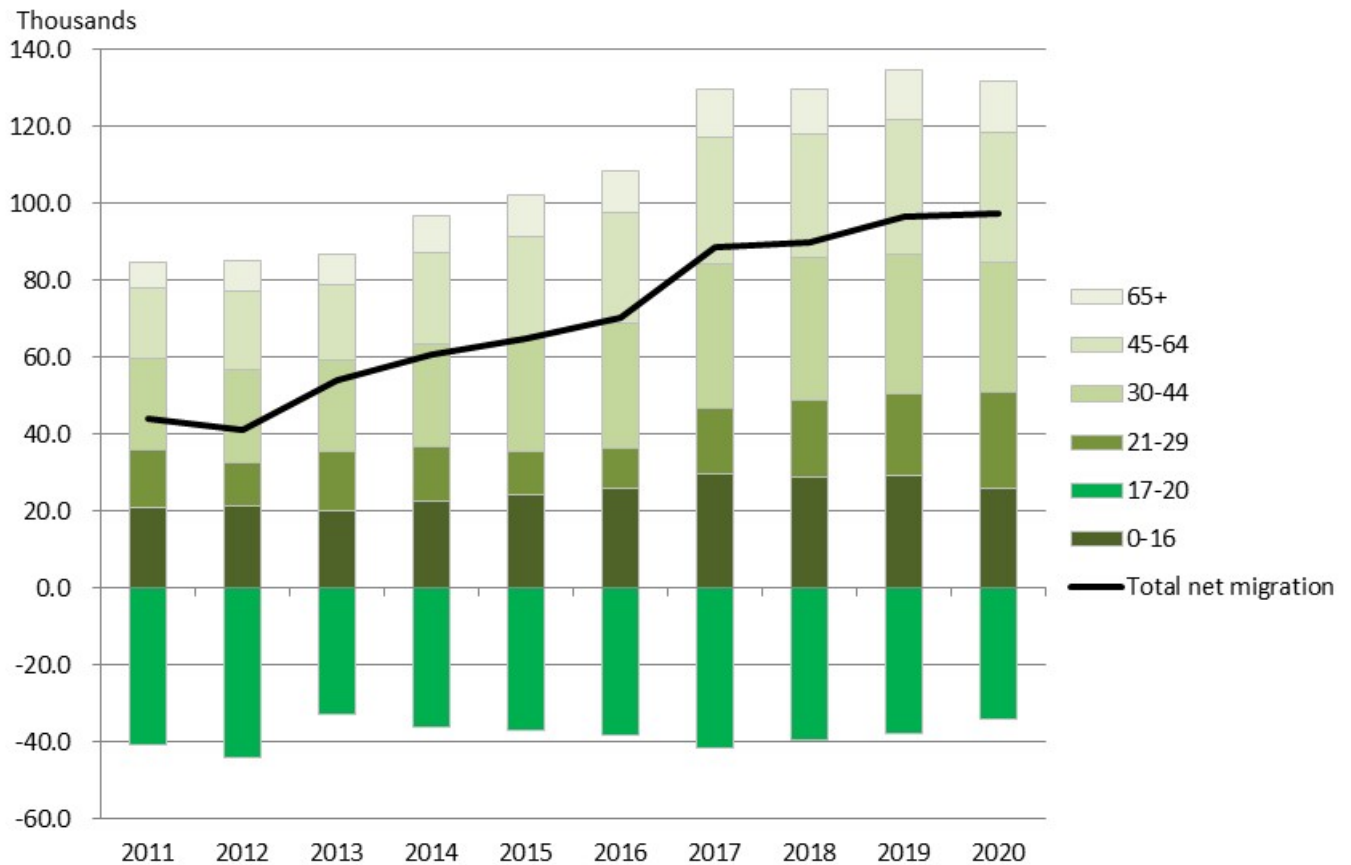


- The pattern of inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas has been consistent from at least 2011 onwards (the earliest year currently analysed by age band).

Net internal (within the UK) migration for Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas, by age band, mid-year 2020, England



Net internal migration (within UK) to Predominantly Rural areas by age bands, mid-year 2011 to mid-year 2020, England



- Breaking the migration patterns down to equal 5-year age bands, in 2019/20 there was net outward migration for 15 to 19-year olds from Predominantly Rural areas of 25,400 which would include, as above, students moving elsewhere for higher education. For the 20 to 24-year old age bracket the pattern of movement reverts to net inward migration of 9,600 to Predominantly Rural areas. There was net inward migration for 25 to 29-year olds of around 7,500.
- The largest net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas for adults occurred for 30 to 34-year olds (13,000 people) and 35 to 39-year olds (12,300 people). Net inward migration for the age bands from 40 to 44-year olds - 65 to 69-year olds, was between 6,100 and 9,100 people for each five-year age band.
- Migration occurred between Predominantly Rural areas and Urban with Significant Rural areas and the rest of the UK, but the largest net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas was from Predominantly Urban areas. Not surprisingly, the opposite migration patterns were therefore seen for Predominantly Urban areas. Indeed, for most age bands the equivalent opposite net migration was greater, reflecting migration also occurring between Predominantly Urban areas and Urban with Significant Rural areas and the rest of the UK.
- A table of internal migration figures for rural areas broken down by broad age bands covering 2011 to 2020 is available in the [rural living supplementary data tables](#). A table using more detailed age bands is also available broken down by broad local authority rural-urban classification for 2020.

Notes: Internal migration is defined as residential moves between local authorities. Moves within a single local authority are excluded, as are international moves into or out of the UK. These statistics are based on a combination of administrative data and represent the best available source of information on internal migration. Further information on the data sources and methods, and

their limitations, is available via the ONS internal migration methodology webpage (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/population-and-migration/internal-migration-methodology/index.html)

Source: Defra analysis of ONS data - Annual internal Migration within the United Kingdom to June 2020.

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/migrationwithintheuk/datasets/internalmigrationbyoriginanddestinationlocalauthoritiessexandsingleyearofagedetailedestimatesdataset