

Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021



HM Government

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Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021

1. Main points

This bulletin is also available in [Welsh \(Cymraeg\) on the ONS website](#).

- On Census Day, 21 March 2021, the size of the usual resident population in England and Wales was 59,597,300 (56,489,800 in England and 3,107,500 in Wales); this was the largest population ever recorded through a census in England and Wales.
- The population of England and Wales grew by more than 3.5 million (6.3%) since the last census in 2011, when it was 56,075,912.
- The population grew in each of the nine regions of England and also grew in Wales; the region with the highest population growth was the East of England, which increased by 8.3% from 2011 (a gain of approximately 488,000 residents).
- There were 30,420,100 women (51.0% of the overall population) and 29,177,200 men (49.0%) in England and Wales.
- There were more people than ever before in the older age groups; the proportion of the population

who were aged 65 years and over was 18.6% (16.4% in 2011).

- There were 24,782,800 households in England and Wales on Census Day; the number of households increased by more than 1.4 million since 2011 (6.1%), when there were 23,366,044 households.

2. Population growth of England and Wales between 2011 and 2021

The usual resident population of England and Wales was 59,597,300 on Census Day, 21 March 2021.

This was the largest population ever recorded through a census in England and Wales. The population increased by more than 3.5 million (6.3%) compared with Census Day 2011, when there were 56,075,912 people in England and Wales.

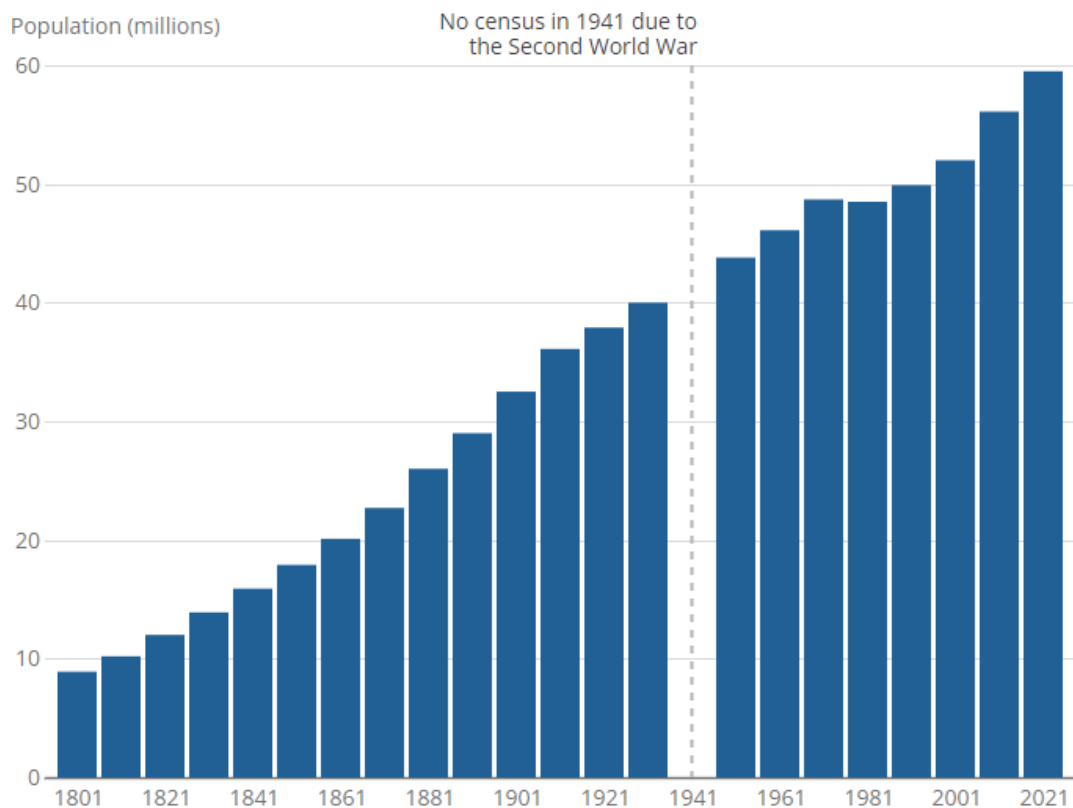
There were 56,489,800 people in England and 3,107,500 people in Wales. In England, the population grew by almost 3.5 million (6.6%) from the 2011 Census population estimate of 53,012,456 people. The rate of growth was considerably lower in Wales, where the population grew by 44,000 (1.4%) from the 2011 Census population estimate of 3,063,456 people.

The rate of population growth in England and Wales across the last decade has decreased slightly compared with the rate between 2001 and 2011, when the population grew by 7.8% (4.0 million people).

Since the first census of Great Britain in 1801, the rate of population growth in England and Wales was highest between 1801 and 1911, when the population grew by 13.6% on average each decade. Following this, the rate of population growth up to 2021 has been lower, growing at a rate of between 2.8% and 7.8% in each 10-year period except for 1971 to 1981, when the population declined by 0.5%.

Figure 1: The population has continued to increase in England and Wales

Population 1801 to 2021, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

1. There was no census in 1941, because of the Second World War.
2. Censuses before 1981 recorded population present, rather than usual residents.

3. From 1981, statistics relate to usual residents, which from 2001 onwards include estimates of those not counted.

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Changes in the size of the population are caused by births, deaths, and internal and international migration. Using data on live births and deaths registrations, as well as migration estimates, can provide a more detailed understanding of the components of population change since 2011. These may not align perfectly with census estimates for a number of reasons – see the Strengths and limitations section for further information.

Monthly data show that from April 2011 until the end of March 2021 there were [6.8 million live births](#) and [5.3 million deaths registered](#) in England and Wales. This represents a natural increase of approximately 1.5 million usual residents (42.5% of the total population increase). The remainder of the population growth (approximately 2.0 million usual residents, 57.5% of total population

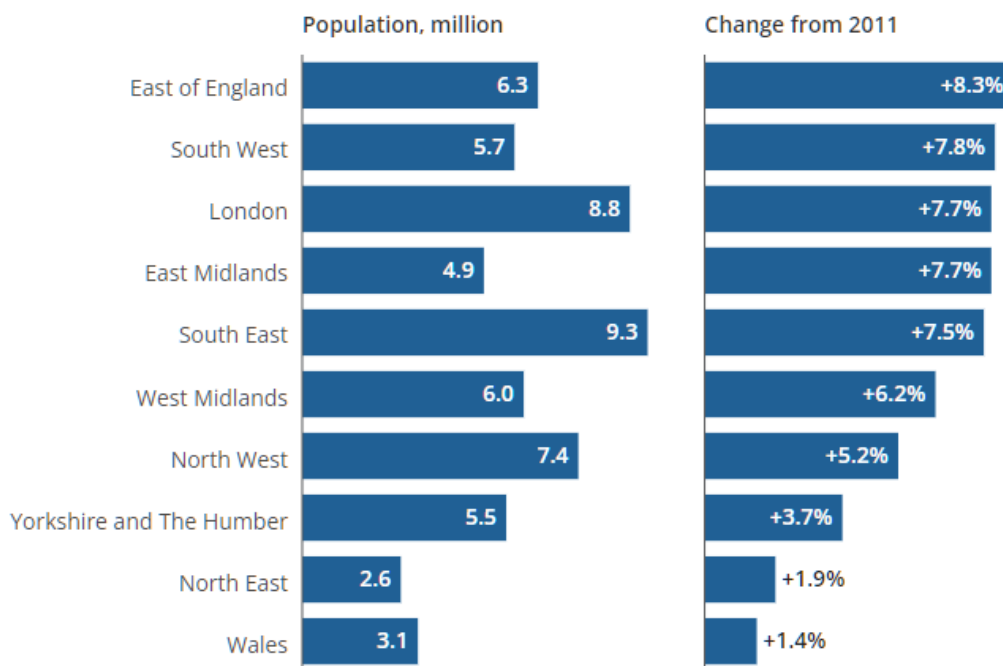
increase) is because of positive net migration into England and Wales.

3. Population sizes and changes for regions and local authorities

The population grew in each of the nine regions of England, and also in Wales, between 2011 and 2021. The region with the highest population growth was the East of England, which increased by 8.3% from 2011 (a gain of approximately 488,000 people). Next highest were the South West (which grew by 7.8%, a gain of approximately 412,000 people) and London (which grew by 7.7%, a gain of almost 626,000 people).

Figure 2: Population growth was highest in the East of England

Population change, 2011 to 2021, Wales and regions of England



Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Wales had lower population growth compared with all English regions, increasing by 1.4% (a gain of approximately 44,000 people). This is slightly lower than the rate of growth in the North East (1.9%, a gain of approximately 50,000 people), which was the English region with the lowest population growth.

Most local authority areas experienced population increases between 2011 and 2021, although in some areas the population decreased. The areas with the largest population decreases were Kensington and Chelsea (9.6% decrease) and Westminster (6.9% decrease). The areas with the highest rates of population growth were Tower Hamlets (22.1% increase) and Dartford (20.0% increase).

You can find out more about how the population has changed in different local authority areas and how they compare with others across England and Wales in [our interactive article](#).

Population change in certain areas may reflect how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected people's choice of usual residence on Census Day. These changes

might have been temporary for some and more long-lasting for others.

Every census has unique circumstances, and for Census 2021 the data will be particularly important for understanding the population and its characteristics during the coronavirus pandemic. Our [quality and methodology information \(QMI\) report](#) explains what this means for the data. We have already been able to use early census data to inform [our response to the coronavirus pandemic](#) and to support [our humanitarian response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine](#).

[Figure 3: Population change between 2011 and 2021, local authorities in England and Wales](#)

This is an interactive table which can be found on [the ONS website](#).

4. Age and sex of the population

Overall, there were 30,420,100 women (51.0% of the overall population) and 29,177,200 men (49.0%) in England and Wales in 2021. This is similar to 2011, when 50.8% of the population were female and 49.2% were male.

The trend of population ageing has continued, with more people than ever before in the older age groups. Over one-sixth (18.6%, 11.1 million) of the population in 2021 were aged 65 years and over, up from 16.4% (9.2 million) in 2011. The size of the population aged 90 years and over (527,900, 0.9% of the population) has increased since 2011, when 429,017, 0.8%, were aged 90 years and over.

Nearly two-thirds (64.1%) of the population in 2021 (38.2 million) were aged 15 to 64 years. There are more people in this age group compared with 2011 (when 37.0 million people were aged 15 to 64 years), but as a proportion of the overall population there has been a slight decrease in the size of this group (65.9% in 2011).

The remaining 17.4% of the population (10.4 million) were aged under 15 years. There are more people in this age group compared with 2011, however, as a proportion of the overall population, the size of the group has decreased (9.9 million, 17.6%, in 2011).

Figure 4: The trend for population ageing has continued

Age and sex of the population, 2011 to 2021, England and Wales

This is an interactive table which can be found on [the ONS website](#).

The percentage of the population aged 65 years and over was higher in Wales (21.3%) than in England (18.4%) in 2021. The only English region with a larger percentage of the population aged 65 years and over than Wales was the South West (22.3%). This contrasts with London

(11.9%), which was the region with the lowest percentage of the population in this age group.

Across England and Wales, the local authorities with the highest percentages of the population aged 65 years and over were North Norfolk (33.4%) and Rother (32.4%). East Devon had the highest percentage of the population aged 90 years and over (1.9%), followed by Rother (1.8%).

Compared with the other English regions, London had the largest percentage of people aged between 15 and 64 years (70.0%). This was also larger than the percentage of the population aged 15 to 64 years in Wales (62.2%).

The relative size of the population aged under 15 years was higher in England (17.4%) than Wales (16.5%).

Across the English regions, the percentage of the population within this age group ranged from 15.9% in the South West to 18.1% in both London and the West Midlands. The local authorities with the highest percentage of persons aged under 15 years were Barking and Dagenham (24.5%), Slough (23.5%) and Luton (21.9%).

Figure 5: Age structure of the population, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

This is an interactive table which can be found on [the ONS website](#).

5. Population and land area

There were 395 residents per square kilometre in England and Wales in 2021. This is about the same as 2.8 residents per football pitch-sized area of land. It compares with 371 residents per square kilometre in 2011 and 251 residents per square kilometre a century ago in 1921.

However, population density varied by area. In England, the population density was 434 residents per square kilometre, compared with 150 residents per square kilometre in Wales (increasing from 407 and 148 residents per square kilometre, respectively, in 2011). Regional statistics explain this difference. In particular, much of the difference between the two nations can be attributed to the very high population density of the London region (5,598 residents per square kilometre), which is more than 14 times the average in England and Wales, and more than 37 times the average in Wales alone. The least densely populated region in England, the South West (239 residents per square kilometre), also had a higher population density than Wales.

The 20 most densely populated local authorities across the two nations were all London boroughs, with Tower Hamlets (15,695 residents per square kilometre), Islington (14,578 residents per square kilometre) and Hackney (13,611 residents per square kilometre) topping the list. In Wales, the most densely populated local authority was Cardiff (2,572 residents per square kilometre).

The least densely populated local authorities were Eden (in the North West of England) and Powys (in Wales), which both had 26 residents per square kilometre on average. Other local authorities with low population densities included Ryedale (36 residents per square kilometre) and Richmondshire (38 residents per square kilometre).

Figure 6: Population density, 2021 and changes since 2011, local authorities in England and Wales

This is an interactive table which can be found on [the ONS website](#).

6. Number of households

The census also allows us to estimate the number of households in England and Wales. As per our Glossary definition, a household must have at least one usual resident.

There were 24,782,800 households in England and Wales on Census Day. This was a 6.1% increase (1.4 million more households) on the 23,366,044 households in 2011.

The growth in the number of households in England (6.2%) was higher than in Wales (3.4%). Every region of England experienced a rise in the number of households between 2011 and 2021. The regions with the largest percentage increases were the East of England (8.5%) and the South West (8.1%). Local authorities with notably high increases in households were Tower Hamlets (19.0%), Uttlesford (18.2%) and Bedford (17.4%).

Only 12 local authorities experienced a drop in the number of households between 2011 and 2021. Mirroring the trend with the changes in population size, the local authorities with the largest decreases in the number of

households since 2011 were Kensington and Chelsea (14.8%) and Westminster (10.4%).

Figure 7: Changes in the number of households between 2011 and 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

This is an interactive table which can be found on [the ONS website](#).

7. Future publications

This bulletin has reported rounded population and household estimates for local authorities in England and Wales. For a more detailed look at the results in Wales only, read our [bulletin on the rounded population and household estimates in Wales](#).

Unrounded population and household estimates are due to be published in autumn 2022. This will also include a breakdown of the population by single year of age, rather than banded age groups.

Read about other data and analysis that will be available from Census 2021 in our [release plans](#).

8. Population and household estimates, England and Wales: data

[Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 28 June 2022

Census 2021 rounded population and household estimates for local authorities in England and Wales, by sex and five-year age group.

[Population and household estimates, Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 28 June 2022

Datasets providing Census 2021 rounded population and household estimates for local authorities in Wales, by sex and five-year age group.

9. Glossary

Age

A person's age on Census Day, 21 March 2021 in England and Wales. Infants aged under 1 year are classified as 0 years of age.

Household

A household is:

- 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

A household must have at least one usual resident at the address. A group of short-term residents living together or a group of visitors staying at an address is not classified as a household.

Local Authority

The general term for a body administering local government services.

In England, local government is administered by either single tier or two-tier local authorities. The single tier authorities comprise unitary authorities, metropolitan districts, and London boroughs, though some services such as transport planning are carried out by the Greater London Authority. The two-tier authorities elsewhere comprise counties and non-metropolitan districts. In Wales, there are single tier unitary authorities.

Population density

This is the number of people who live within an area per square kilometre. One square kilometre is equal to 100 hectares.

Sex

This is the sex recorded by the person completing the census. The options were “Female” and “Male”.

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.

10. 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. The majority of returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

Parliamentary requirements

This bulletin was shared with the relevant Ministers in both the UK Government and Welsh Government on Monday 27 June, to meet the requirements within Section 4 of the Census Act 1920 that census returns are to be printed and laid before Parliament. This was agreed by the National Statistician.

11. Strengths and limitations

Strengths

The census provides the most detailed picture possible of the entire population, with the same core questions asked to everybody across England and Wales.

The Office for Statistics Regulation has independently assessed the census estimates and checked compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The UK Statistics Authority assigned [National Statistics](#) designation to Census 2021 outputs, providing assurance that these statistics are of the highest quality and value to users.

We undertook a rigorous and comprehensive quality assurance process, including comparing against the widest range of alternative and complementary data sources ever. In addition, for the first time, we invited local authorities to review provisional census estimates, drawing upon their local expertise, in parallel to our own quality assurance checks. Detailed information is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates](#) report.

Census estimates are important for understanding the accuracy of other population estimates. For example, [mid-year population estimates \(MYEs\)](#) are based on the most recent census and adjusted for live births, deaths, and migration, but the potential for error in MYEs increases over time between censuses. We are also developing [admin-based population estimates \(ABPEs\)](#), which use administrative data sources rather than being based on census estimates. Reports comparing the Census 2021 population estimates with the latest MYEs and ABPEs, including explanations for any differences, are planned for publication later this year.

Our very high response rate and extensive online collection has ensured that we have collected extremely high-quality data about the population and its characteristics on Census Day. It was particularly important to understand how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected, and continues to affect, our population in a variety of ways (for example, health impacts, working from home). Census data and our ongoing transformation of our social statistics system will

help us to both understand and to measure population change more effectively than ever before.

Limitations and mitigations

The first results from Census 2021 provide early rounded population and household estimates for England and Wales; figures may not add exactly because of this rounding. Unrounded figures will be released in autumn 2022. Figures may differ slightly in future releases because of the impact of removing rounding and applying further statistical processes. Unrounded historical census data are used for all comparisons with previous censuses.

Census statistics are estimates rather than counts, and therefore have measures of uncertainty associated with them. We take numerous steps to minimise possible sources of error, as described in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may have affected some people's choice of usual residence on Census Day, for example, students and in some urban areas. These changes might have been temporary for

some and more long-lasting for others. We discuss what this means for the data in our [QMI report](#).

No census is perfect – some people are inevitably missed or counted twice. Our Census Coverage Survey (CCS) enables us to estimate how many people have been missed or double-counted. We also have processes that check for and resolve multiple responses, allowing us to adjust the census counts accordingly. More information is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates](#) report.

As with all self-completion questionnaires, some forms will have contained incorrect, incomplete, or missing information about a person or household. We used editing and imputation strategies to correct inconsistencies and missing information. Further information will be provided in a more detailed report later this year.

[National Statistics status for Census 2021](#)

These National Statistics have been independently assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. They have been produced by following the standards set out in the [Code](#)

[of Practice for Statistics](#) and [the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#).

This means that they:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and easily accessible
- are produced based on appropriate data and methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Date of most recent full assessment: June 2022

12. Related links

[Population and household estimates, Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 28 June 2022

Bulletin outlining the first results from Census 2021 for Wales only.

[How the population changed where you live: Census 2021](#)

Digital content article | Released 28 June 2022

Interactive scrolly-telling article visualising the first results from Census 2021 in England and Wales at a local level.

[Play the Census 2021 map game](#)

Online game | Released 28 June 2022

Online game based on Census 2021 data, which challenges players to make their way across a map of England and Wales by correctly guessing facts about neighbouring local authorities.

[Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 28 June 2022

Details the strengths, limitations, uses, users and methods for Census 2021, England and Wales.

[Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates](#)

Methodology | Released 28 June 2022

How we maximised the quality of Census 2021 population estimates during the processing and quality assurance of the final statistics.

[Local authority comparison tool](#)

Methodology | Released 28 June 2022

An interactive tool to compare local authorities in England and Wales using age-sex estimates and quality assurance information.

[Census 2021 first release information in accessible formats](#)

Web page

To help you get information about the Census 2021 results, we have produced information in some accessible formats.

