Office for National Statistics

Article

Population estimates by ethnic group and religion, England and Wales: 2019

Experimental statistics of population by ethnic group and religion by age and sex at the national and regional level for England and Wales. This builds upon previous research and user feedback. We are publishing these estimates for the first time to provide a more timely picture of the population between censuses and allow for user feedback.

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1 . Main points

- In 2019, the most common ethnic group in England and Wales was White (84.8%), decreasing by 1.2 percentage points since the 2011 Census; the next biggest change from 2011 was within the Other ethnic group which increased by 0.9 percentage points.

- As part of the White ethnic group, an estimated 78.4% of the population in England and Wales identified their ethnic group as White British in 2019, a decrease of just over 2 percentage points since the 2011 Census; Other White increased by nearly 1.5 percentage points to an estimated 5.8%.

- Around half (51.0%) of the population reported their religion as Christian in England and Wales, a decrease of nearly 8.3 percentage points since the 2011 Census; No religion (including not stated), was the second most common response, increasing just over 6.1 percentage points from 32.3% in 2011 to 38.4% in 2019.

- Younger people were more likely than older age groups to report having No religion in 2019, with over half (53.4%) of those aged 20 to 29 years reporting having No religion.

- More women (54.9%) than men (47.4%) reported their religion as Christian; this difference was more pronounced in older age groups, with 71.4% of women aged from 60 to 69 years reporting as Christian compared with 61.3% of men the same age.

- London was the most ethnically and religiously diverse region in England and Wales where the largest ethnic groups were White British (43.4%), Other White (14.6%) and Black African (7.9%); people with a religion other than Christian accounted for over 25% of London's population compared with an estimated 10.6% of the overall population.

As experimental statistics, these estimates will be subject to further testing in terms of quality and ability to meet user needs. Strengths, limitations and quality information is outlined in Section 6 of this article. We invite feedback from users on the suitability of these estimates.

2 . Ethnicity in England and Wales

In 2019, 84.8% of England and Wales' population identified their ethnicity as White, decreasing by 1.2 percentage points since the 2011 Census.
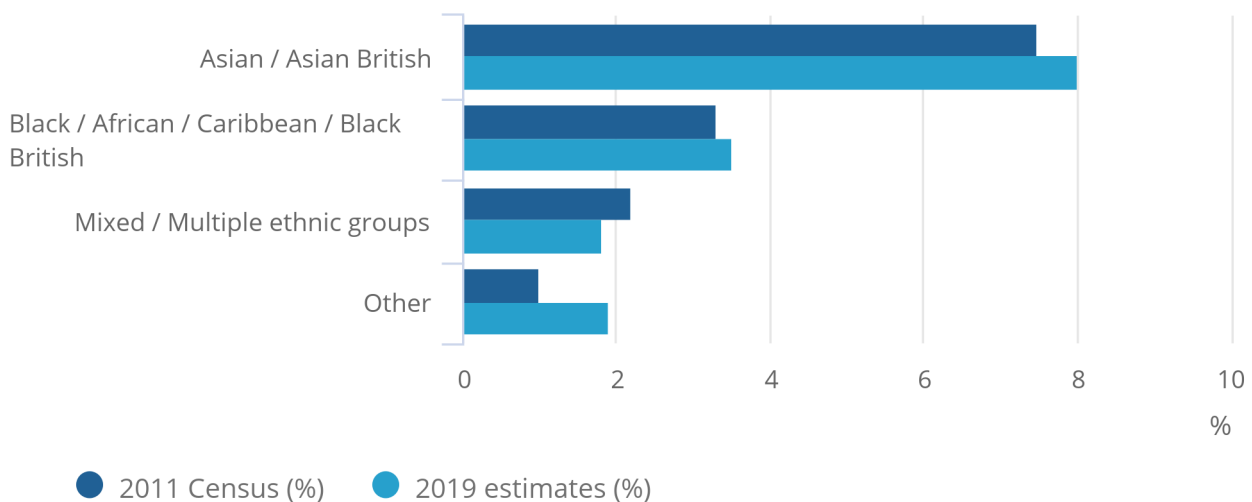
It is not possible to quantify how much of the change between 2019 survey estimates and 2011 Census population estimates reflect true change and how much is because of differences in data collection.

Figure 1: The Other ethnic group saw the largest increase since the 2011 Census

Ethnic group in England and Wales, 2019 estimates and 2011 Census (excluding White)

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Ethnic group in England and Wales, 2019 estimates and 2011 Census (excluding White)

● 2011 Census (%)　　● 2019 estimates (%)

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2019 population estimates by ethnic group, experimental statistics

Notes:

1. White has been excluded from this chart for greater visual clarity of the differences for the four ethnic groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.

2. It is not possible to quantify how much of the change between the 2011 Census and the estimates reflects true change and how much is because of differences in data collection.

3. Ethnicities have been presented alphabetically (except for Other).

Ethnicity data are often grouped into either 5 or 18 ethnic groups, our method allows us to produce estimates for the 18 ethnic groups providing information on populations which are often masked at the higher-level five ethnic groups.

For example, within the higher-level White ethnic group, an estimated 78.4% of the population identified as White British, with Other White the next most common ethnic group at 5.8% in 2019. In the 2011 Census 80.5% identified as White British and 4.4% as Other White, a decrease of just over 2 percentage points and a rise of nearly 1.5 percentage points, respectively. This is highlighted in the Race Disparity Unit's Ethnicity data research report.

Figure 2: Following White British; Other White, Indian, and Black African were the most common ethnic groups

Ethnic group in England and Wales, 2019 (excluding White British)

Notes:

1. White British has been excluded from this chart for greater visual clarity of the differences for the 17 ethnic groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.

2. The estimate for White Gypsy or Irish traveller is less accurate than other ethnic groups. This is indicated by a larger coefficient of variation (see Section 6 for more information on measuring uncertainty).

3. Ethnicities have been presented alphabetically at the five-category level (except for Other) and then alphabetically within each five-category ethnic group.

Download the data

.xlsx

London was more ethnically diverse than other regions

Those identifying as White British accounted for 43.4% of London's population compared with 78.4% for England and Wales overall.

Excluding White British, the most common ethnic groups in London were Other White (14.6%), Black African (7.9%), and Indian (7.0%).

The North East and Wales had the highest proportion of White British people, an estimated 93.1% and 92.2% respectively. These regions had lower proportions in the Black African, Indian, Other White and Pakistani ethnic groups compared with England and Wales overall.

Age profiles vary between ethnic groups

Age profiles vary between the 18 ethnic groups, highlighting that when these are aggregated into the higher-level, five-ethnic group classification some of the differences between groups are masked.

For example, the Black African, Black Caribbean and Other Black ethnic groups would be aggregated to "Black / African / Caribbean / Black British" at the five-ethnic group classification. Among people who identify as Black African an estimated 38.8% are aged 0 to 19 years, compared with 24.3% of those who identify as Black Caribbean.

Figure 3: The Black African ethnic group had a younger age profile than Black Caribbean

Ethnic group by age group for Black African and Black Caribbean ethnic groups in England and Wales, 2019

Notes:

1. The 80 years and over age group was excluded because the estimates are less accurate, as indicated by the larger coefficients of variation (see section 6 for more information on measuring uncertainty).

2. The 95% confidence intervals highlight the degree of uncertainty around an estimate.

Download the data

.xlsx

3 . Religion in England and Wales

In 2019, an estimated 51.0% of the population reported their religion as Christian, making it the most prevalent religious group in England and Wales. However, numbers identifying as Christian have fallen by 8.3 percentage points since the 2011 Census (when 59.3% identified as Christian).

The next most common responses in 2019 were No religion (38.4%), Muslim (5.7%) and Hindu (1.7%). The No religion group (combined with Not stated) increased by just over 6.1 percentage points from 2011.
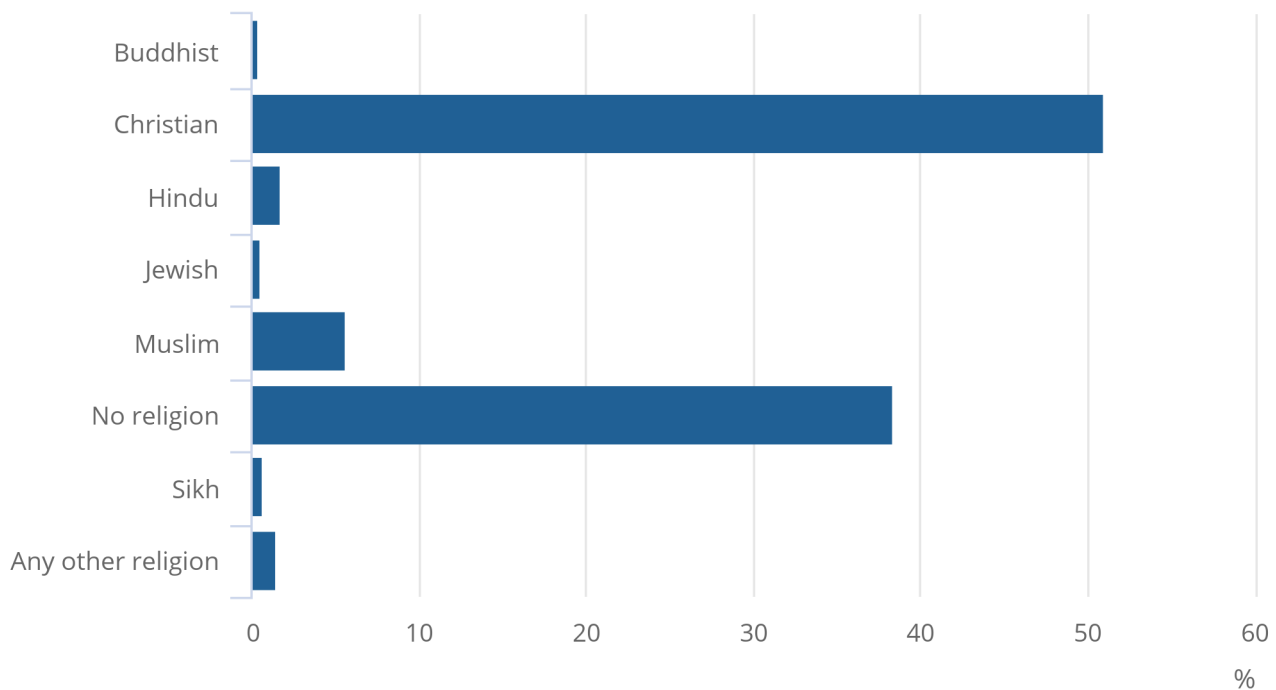
It is not possible to quantify how much of the change between 2019 survey estimates and 2011 Census population estimates reflect true change and how much is because of differences in data collection.

Figure 4: Half of people in England and Wales reported their religion as Christian in 2019

Religious affiliation in England and Wales, 2019

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Religious affiliation in England and Wales, 2019

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2019 population estimates by religion, experimental statistics

Notes:

1. "Not stated" and "No religion" have been combined because of the mode effect on the Annual Population Survey for the religion question. Further information can be found in our glossary.

2. Religions have been presented alphabetically.

London had the lowest percentage of people reporting No religion

The percentage of the population who reported No religion ranged from an estimated 29.0% in London to 47.3% in Wales in 2019.

People with a religious affiliation other than Christian accounted for over 25% of London's population, compared with an estimated 10.6% of the overall population. Around one in seven people in London (14.3%) were Muslim. This percentage is higher than other regions, with the next most common regions being the West Midlands, Yorkshire and The Humber and North West (with 8.6%, 6.6% and 6.3% Muslim, respectively).
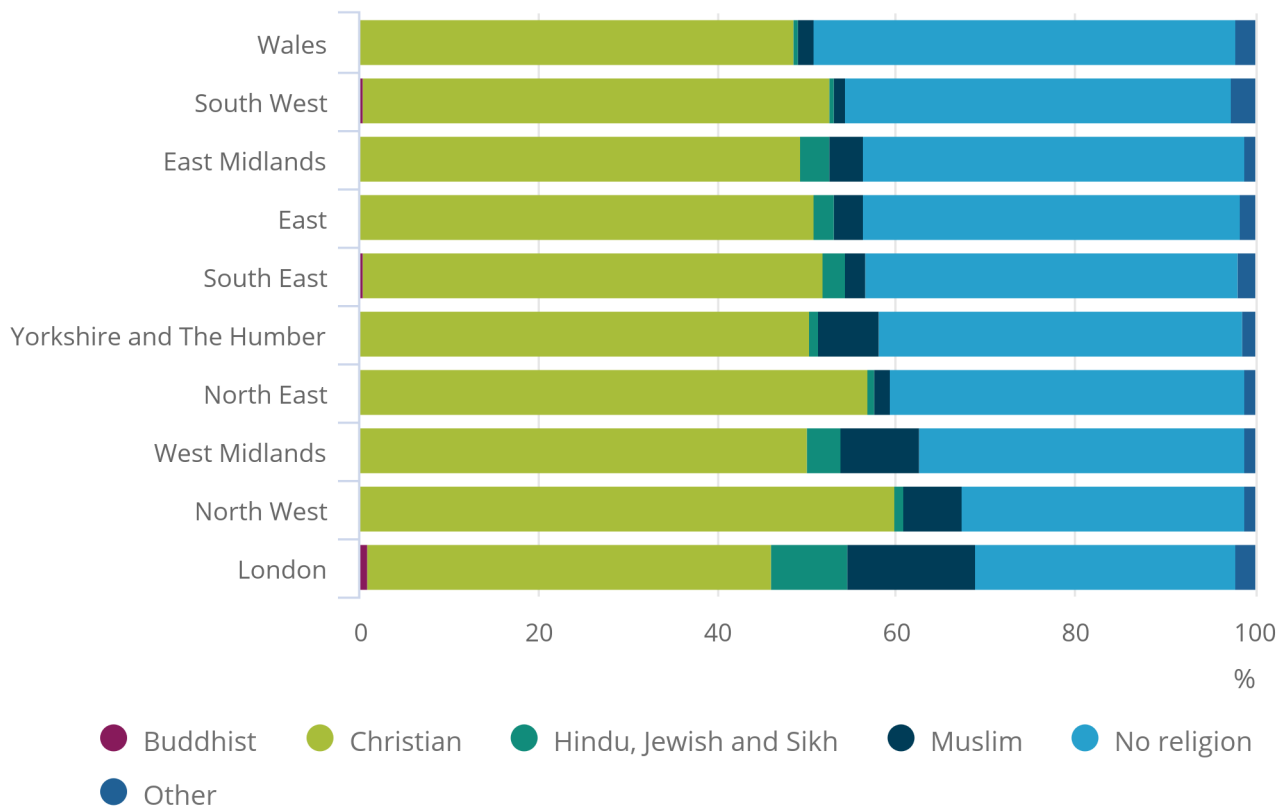
The North East, South West, and Wales were the least religiously diverse regions, with over 95% of their populations Christian or with No religion.

Figure 5: The most religiously diverse region was London

Religious affiliation in England and Wales by region, 2019

Figure 5: The most religiously diverse region was London

Religious affiliation in England and Wales by region, 2019

Legend:
- Buddhist
- Christian
- Hindu, Jewish and Sikh
- Muslim
- No religion
- Other

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2019 population estimates by religion, experimental statistics

Notes:

1. "Not stated" and "No religion" have been combined because of the mode effect on the Annual Population Survey for the religion question. Further information can be found in our glossary.

2. The Hindu, Jewish and Sikh groups are combined because the estimates are less accurate, as indicated by the larger coefficients of variation in the accompanying dataset (information on assessing quality of these estimates can be found in Section 6).

3. The accompanying dataset includes 95% confidence intervals highlighting the degree of uncertainty around each estimate. confidence interval.

4. Religions have been presented alphabetically.

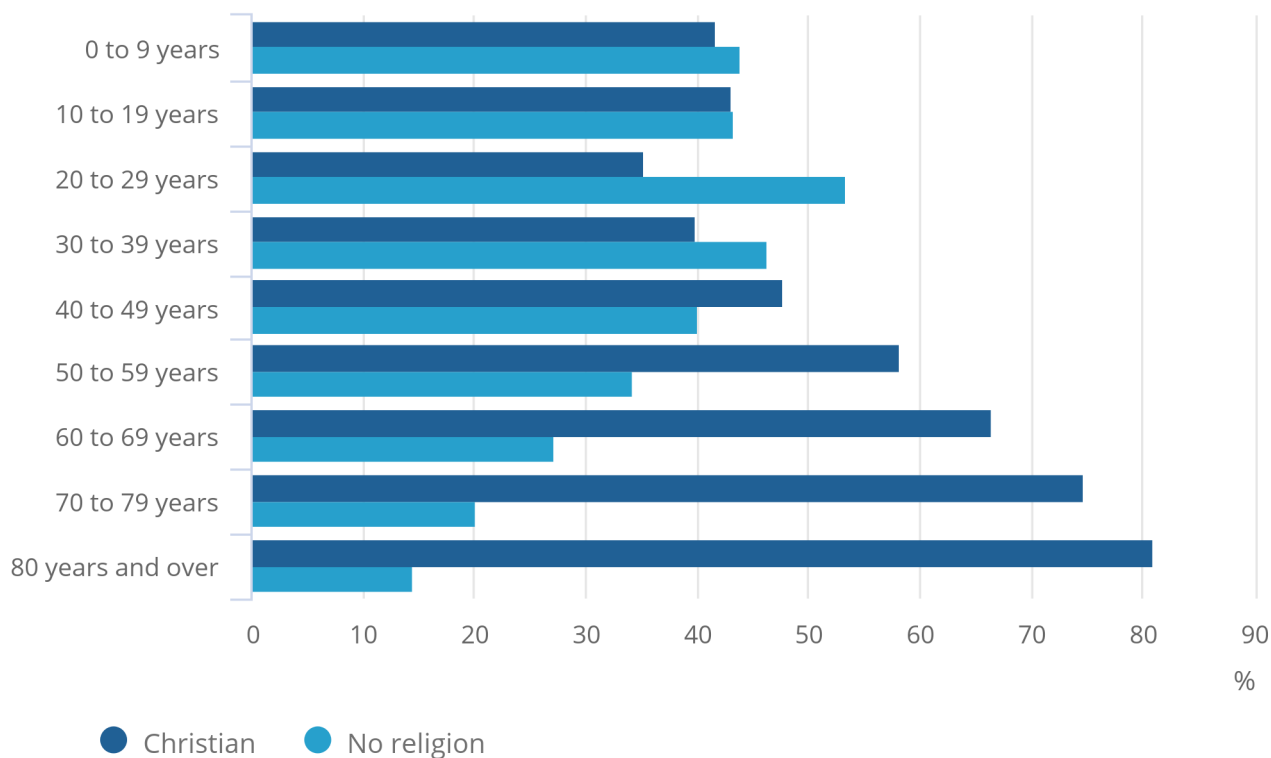## No religion was more commonly reported in younger age groups

No religion was the most common response for those aged between 0 and 39 years, whereas Christian was the most common religious affiliation for those aged 40 years and over.

Figure 6: Over half of those aged from 20 to 29 years reported No religion

Religious affiliation of Christian and No religion in England and Wales by age group, 2019

Figure 6: Over half of those aged from 20 to 29 years reported No religion

Religious affiliation of Christian and No religion in England and Wales by age group, 2019

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2019 population estimates by religion, experimental statistics

Notes:

1. "Not stated" and "No religion" have been combined because of the mode effect on the Annual Population Survey for the religion question. Further information can be found in our glossary.

2. Religions have been presented alphabetically.

In addition, there was a higher percentage of younger people among Muslims when compared with the overall population in England and Wales; an estimated 9.7% of those aged 0 to 19 years were Muslim, compared with 5.7% of the overall population.

Women were more likely to be Christian than men

A higher percentage of women reported their religion as Christian compared with men (54.9% compared with 47.4%). This difference was most noticeable for those aged from 40 to 79 years; 71.4% of women aged 60 to 69 years were Christian, compared with 61.3% of men the same age.

Comparatively, a higher percentage of men reported No religion (42.1% compared with 34.9% of women).

The same differences between men and women were not seen for the remaining six religious groups.

4 . Ethnic group and religion data

Population estimates by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2019
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Experimental statistics for population estimates by ethnic group broken down into age and sex at a national regional level for England and Wales.

Population estimates by religion, England and Wales: 2019
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Experimental statistics for population estimates by religion broken down into age and sex at a national regional level for England and Wales.

5 . Glossary

Ethnic group

The self-reported ethnic group of the individual, according to their own perceived ethnic group and cultural background.

Religion

The self-reported religious affiliation of the individual. This is a measure of how a person connects or identifies with a religion, rather than of their beliefs or active religious practice.

No religion

For these population estimates by religion "Not stated" has been combined with "No religion". Approximately 7% of respondents chose not to respond to the religion question on the 2011 Census as this is a voluntary question, these responses are recorded as "Not stated". While this is a possible response in the Annual Population Survey (APS), because of a difference in the mode of data collection it is only available if a spontaneous refusal is given by the respondent, which means it is present for a much smaller proportion of respondents (around 0.25% at the England and Wales level). It is also important to note that the APS is a voluntary survey, so there may be differential response rates.

Experimental statistics

Experimental Statistics are a subset of newly developed or innovative official statistics that are undergoing evaluation. Experimental Statistics are developed under the guidance of the Head of Profession for Statistics. They are published to involve users and stakeholders at an early stage in assessing their suitability and quality. Experimental Statistics are, by definition, also official statistics.

These estimates are Experimental Statistics, developed following research into a method for producing population estimates by ethnic group and religion combining APS and census data published in 2017 and 2019.

Statistical significance

Differences highlighted in this article have considered the confidence intervals, where statistically significant differences have been determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals.

6 . Data sources and quality

A detailed explanation and worked example of the method used to produce the estimates can be found in our 2017 research report on population estimates by characteristics. The method uses a combination of the following three data sources:

Three-year-pooled Annual Population Survey

The Annual Population Survey (APS) is UK's largest continuous household survey, comprising the Labour Force Survey supplemented by sample boosts in England, Wales and Scotland to ensure small areas are sufficiently sampled. The three-year-pooled dataset was designed to provide more robust analysis that is not always possible using the single-year APS. Specifically, the dataset used for the 2019 population estimates by ethnic group and religion combine data across the years January 2017 to December 2019.

The dataset contains a sample size of around 550,000 respondents. The APS is weighted to the UK population totals to be representative of the whole household population. The APS is a household survey and so does not cover most people living in communal establishments.

2011 Census

The census is a survey that happens every 10 years and gives us a picture of all the people and households in England and Wales. The 2011 Census provides estimates of the resident population in households and communal establishments for the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

Mid-year population estimates

Mid-year Population estimates for the UK (MYEs) are official statistics that are based on census data and are updated annually to account for estimates of population change each year, including natural change (births minus deaths) and net migration (the difference between long-term moves into and out of the UK or local areas). The estimates cover the entire usually resident population, whether resident in households or communal establishments.

Strengths

Through the combination of the three data sources; the estimates are consistent with the standard MYEs, which are existing National Statistics with supporting quality information.

2011 Census data are incorporated into the methodology to capture the population living in both household and communal establishments, allowing these estimates capture population groups, which are often missed on estimates created from survey data alone. The method therefore accounts for the differing ethnic distributions of the communal and household population.

Through using the three-year-pooled APS over the single year dataset, we can establish larger sample sizes, therefore smaller variability in the estimates and increased accuracy.

Estimates by ethnic group and religion are more timely than the standard source of the 2011 Census.

Estimates are in line with recommendations from the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Ethnicity harmonised standard and GSS Religion harmonised standard.

Limitations

The methodology assumes that the proportions of the population groups within England and Wales living in households and communal establishments remain unchanged since the 2011 Census.

The method also assumes that the communal establishment population will have different characteristics to the household population, but these characteristics will have changed since the 2011 Census in a similar way to those of the household population.

The uncertainty caused by these assumptions cannot be easily quantified and it is not possible to explore the potential impact of these assumptions until 2021 census data are available.

Accuracy of the statistics: estimating and reporting uncertainty

The method is designed to be as accurate as possible given practical considerations such as time and cost constraints.

Estimates of the population by ethnic group and religion have been derived from the three-year-pooled APS. Results derived from surveys are always estimates, not precise figures. As the number of people in the sample gets smaller, the variability of estimates that can be made from that sample get larger.

If the sample size of an estimate is less than three, then the estimate is suppressed. Additionally, we assess each estimate's critical value (or coefficient of variance (CV)) and colour code the estimates in the data available to be downloaded. If the critical value exceeds a score of 20% this indicated that there is too much variance in the data to constitute a reliable estimate.

The CV is the ration between the standard error of the estimate and the estimate itself and it gives indication of the variability and accuracy of the estimate. The following outlines the bounds used to suppress or colour code the accuracy of the estimates.

Understanding the co-efficient of variation for population estimates by ethnic group and religion

- If the CV is less than or equal to 5%, the estimate is precise.

- If the CV greater than 5% and less than or equal to 10%, the estimate is reasonably precise.

- If the CV is greater than 10% and less than or equal to 20%, the estimate is considered acceptable.

- If the CV is greater than 20% or unavailable, the estimate is not reliable.

We also use 95% confidence intervals to highlight the degree of uncertainty around the estimates. Confidence intervals use the standard error to derive a range in which we can be 95% confident that the true value is likely to lie.

7 . Future developments

These estimates have been produced to meet a strong user need for more up-to-date and timely population estimates by ethnic group and religion between censuses and as we move away from the 2021 Census.

Previous research highlighted the [limitations of using this method for producing estimates at Local or Unitary Authority level](#) because of the APS sample size. Subsequent feedback highlighted an immediate value to users of estimates at national and regional level with the additional granularity of the 18-group ethnic group classification, in line with the [GSS harmonised standard for ethnicity](#), as well as age and sex demographic breakdowns for both ethnic group and religion estimates.

The estimates also include additional quality information, including confidence intervals and covariance, to ensure users are aware of the estimates' quality and limitations and can make qualified use of them. For information and guidance on the quality information please see [Section 6](#).

Because of the strong user need for estimates by ethnic group, various estimates have been produced both within and outside of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), including the [ETHPOP](#) ethnic populations projections produced at the University of Leeds. We have therefore published a [Review into the current evidence base for population estimates by ethnic group](#) for estimates produced by the ONS. This considers the strengths and limitations of the different estimates and provides recommendations as to which estimates should be used for what purpose. It also provides details of how these estimates sit alongside the publication of Census 2021 data next year and wider transformation work including research into admin-based population estimates by ethnic group.

We plan to further develop the estimates in 2022 as Census 2021 data become available, with the aim of removing the Experimental Statistics label in 2023. For example, we will use Census 2021 data in calculating the communal establishment proportions when producing the estimates going forward. Removing the Experimental Statistics label will depend on the outcome of quality research using Census 2021 and feedback from this publication, alongside additional stakeholder engagement via our assurance panels. We then plan to request that the Office for Statistics Regulation assess whether the statistics comply with the [Code of Practice](#) so that they can be designated as National Statistics.

Feedback

As experimental statistics, these estimates will be subject to further testing in terms of quality and ability to meet user needs and may be subject to modification and further evaluation.

We invite feedback from users on the estimates, particularly regarding whether:

- estimates at national and regional level are of value to users

- the demographic breakdowns, notably the age groupings, meet user need

- the quality information provides the information required to make informed use of them

- the format of the datasets meets user need

Please email EILR@ons.gov.uk with your feedback.

8 . Related links

Review of the current evidence base for population estimates by ethnic group: December 2021
Article | Released 16 December 2021
Evaluation of the current evidence base for population estimates by ethnic group produced by the Office for National Statistics.

Research Report on population estimates by ethnic group and religion
Article | Released 4 December 2019
Research work on a method for producing population estimates by ethnic group and religion between censuses by combining Annual Population Survey (APS) and census data.

Research report on population estimates by ethnic group
Methodology | Released 25 August 2017
Research work on a simple method for producing population estimates by country of birth, nationality and ethnic group.