

Statistical bulletin

Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021

The ethnic groups of usual residents and household ethnic composition in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

- In 2021, 81.7% (48.7 million) of usual residents in England and Wales identified their ethnic group within the high-level "White" category, a decrease from 86.0% (48.2 million) in the 2011 Census.
- As part of the "White" ethnic group, 74.4% (44.4 million) of the total population in England and Wales identified their ethnic group as "English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British", this is a continued decrease from 80.5% (45.1 million) in 2011, and from 87.5% (45.5 million) who identified this way in 2001.
- The next most common high-level ethnic group was "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" accounting for 9.3% (5.5 million) of the overall population, this ethnic group also saw the largest percentage point increase from 2011, up from 7.5% (4.2 million people).
- Across the 19 ethnic groups, the largest percentage point increase was seen in the number of people identifying through the "White: Other White" category (6.2%, 3.7 million in 2021, up from 4.4%, 2.5 million in 2011), this response option allows people to specify their ethnic group through writing it in; the increase may be partly explained by the new search-as-you-type functionality introduced for Census 2021, making it easier for people to self-define when completing the census online.
- Large changes were also seen in the numbers of people identifying their ethnic group as "Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group" (1.6%, 924,000 in 2021, up from 0.6%, 333,000 in 2011), and "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African" (2.5%, 1.5 million in 2021, up from 1.8%, 990,000); both ethnic groups had the option to write in their response.
- In England and Wales, 10.1% (2.5 million) of households consisted of members identifying with two or more different ethnic groups, an increase from 8.7% (2.0 million) in 2011.

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2 . Ethnic groups in England and Wales

The ethnic group question's two stages

Since 1991, the census for England and Wales has included a question about ethnic group.

The ethnic group question has two stages. Firstly, a person identifies through one of the following five high-level ethnic groups:

- "Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh"
- "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African"
- "Mixed or Multiple"
- "White"
- "Other ethnic group"

Secondly, a person identifies through one of the 19 available response options, which include categories with write-in response options. For more information on question structure, see [Section 9: Measuring the data](#).

High-level ethnic groups in England and Wales

"White" remained the largest high-level ethnic group in England and Wales; 81.7% (48.7 million) of usual residents identified this way in 2021, a decrease from 86.0% (48.2 million) in 2011.

Figure 1: The percentage of the population in all high-level ethnic groups, excluding “White”, has increased since 2011

Ethnic group distribution (high-level categories), 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. We have excluded the "White" ethnic group from this chart to make it easier to clearly see the differences for the four high-level ethnic groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.
2. We have presented ethnic group categories alphabetically (except for "Other ethnic group").
3. "Asian Welsh" and "Black Welsh" ethnic groups were included on the census questionnaire in Wales only, these categories were new for 2021.

Download the data

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The largest increases were seen in the number of people who identified their ethnic group within the “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh” category (9.3%, 5.5 million in 2021, up from 7.5%, 4.2 million in 2011) and within “Other ethnic group” (2.1%, 1.3 million people in 2021, up from 1.0%, 564,000 in 2011).

There are many factors that may be contributing to the changing ethnic composition of England and Wales, such as differing patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify between censuses.

The 19 ethnic groups in England and Wales

Within the "White" ethnic group, 74.4% (44.4 million) of usual residents in England and Wales identified their ethnic group as "English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British". This was a decrease from 80.5% (45.1 million) in 2011, and a continued decrease from 2001, when 87.5% (45.5 million) identified as "White: British".

There was a decrease in the number of people identifying their ethnic group as "White: Irish", from 531,000 (0.9%) in 2011 to 507,000 (0.9%) in 2021.

The remaining 17 ethnic groups across the 19 available response options all increased in size, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Ethnic minority groups, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. We have excluded the "White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British" ethnic group from this chart. This is to make it easier to clearly see the differences for the 18 ethnic minority groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.
2. We have presented the five high-level categories alphabetically. The 18 ethnic groups are then presented alphabetically within each high-level ethnic group category. In each case, "other" options are listed last.
3. There was no "Roma" ethnic group tick-box in 2011.

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In 2021, there was a new response option for "Roma" within the high-level "White" ethnic group. Overall, 0.2% (101,000) of usual residents identified this way, with the percentage higher in England (0.2%, 99,000) than in Wales (0.1%, 2,000).

The three largest increases since 2011 were seen in the number of people identifying through:

- "White: Other White" (6.2%, 3.7 million in 2021, up from 4.4%, 2.5 million in 2011)
- "Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group" (1.6%, 924,000 in 2021, up from 0.6%, 333,000 in 2011)
- "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African" (2.5%, 1.5 million in 2021, up from 1.8%, 990,000 in 2011).

These were three of the six available response options that allowed people to specify their ethnic group through writing it in. In part, the increases seen to these ethnic groups may be explained by the new [Search-as-you-type functionality for Census 2021](#), making it easier for people to self-define when completing the census online.

3 . Detailed ethnic group classification

Census 2021 provides insights into 287 ethnic groups

The write-in functionality has enabled us to produce a detailed ethnic group classification in our [Ethnic group \(detailed\) in England and Wales dataset](#), providing insight for 287 ethnic groups. Further information on how write-in responses are included in the detailed classification for the ethnic group, national identity, language and religion questions can be found in our blog post [How am I represented in Census 2021 data?](#)

This section focuses on the three write-in response options that saw the largest change since 2011, as highlighted towards the end of [Section 2: Ethnic groups in England and Wales](#).

Ethnic groups within the "White: Other White" ethnic group

The largest ethnic groups specified within "White: Other White" included "White: Polish", with 614,000 (1.0%) of the overall population identifying this way, and "White: Romanian", with 343,000 people (0.6%) identifying this way.

Ethnic groups within the "Other ethnic group"

The number of people choosing to specify their ethnic group through the "Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group" write-in response option (924,000, 1.6%) almost tripled since 2011 (333,000, 0.6%). The largest ethnic groups within the "Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group" write-in response option for England and Wales included "Sikh" (77,000, 0.1%), "Hispanic or Latin American" (76,000, 0.1%) and "Kurdish" (76,000, 0.1%).

Ethnic group is multi-dimensional and complex, as such identities highlighted here may appear multiple times in the detailed classification. For example, 23,000 people identified their ethnic group as "Sikh" within the high-level "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh".

Ethnicity is multi-dimensional and subjective, with various ways in which a person may choose to define their ethnic group. This may include common ancestry, elements of culture, identity, religion, language and physical appearance. It is generally accepted that ethnic group does include all these aspects, and others, in combination.

Within Census 2021, people were also asked in a separate voluntary question whether they had religious affiliation. People who describe their ethnicity as Sikh may have also chosen to describe their religion as Sikh, or may have identified through just one or the other, or neither. The number of people in England and Wales who identified as "Sikh" through the religion question was 524,000, (0.9%). Find further information on religious affiliation in our [Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021 bulletin](#).

There are further analyses planned that consider how the variables of ethnic group, national identity, language and religion interact. For more information, please see our [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion analysis plans](#).

Ethnic groups within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African" ethnic group

The new write-in response option for "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African" has allowed insights into specific African backgrounds. The largest ethnic groups specified within this write-in included "Nigerian" (271,000, 0.5%), "Somali" (151,000, 0.3%) and "Ghanaian" (113,000, 0.2%).

4 . How ethnic composition varied across England and Wales

England and Wales

In England the percentage of the population who identified within:

- the "Asian, or Asian British" ethnic groups was 9.6% (5.4 million)
- "Black, Black British, Caribbean or African" was 4.2% (2.4 million)
- "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups" was 3.0% (1.7 million)
- "White" ethnic groups was 81.0% (45.8 million)
- "Other ethnic groups" was 2.2% (1.2 million)

In Wales the percentage of the population who identified within:

- the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" ethnic groups was 2.9% (89,000)
- "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" was 0.9% (28,000)
- "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups" was 1.6% (49,000)
- "White" ethnic groups was 93.8% (2.9 million)
- "Other ethnic groups" was 0.9% (26,000)

Regions of England

London remains the most ethnically diverse region of England and saw an 8.1 percentage point decrease of people who identified as "White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British" (36.8%, 3.2 million in 2021, down from 44.9%, 3.7 million in 2011). In other regions, the percentages identifying their ethnic group this way ranged between 71.8% (4.3 million) in the West Midlands to 90.6% (2.4 million) in the North East.

Local Authorities

Local authority statistics provide further insight into where ethnic groups tend to be concentrated within England and Wales.

Figure 3: Population by ethnic group, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

5 . Ethnic groups within households

Census 2021 provides insights into ethnic group composition within the 17.3 million households that had more than one person living in them (69.8% of 24.8 million occupied households). A further 30.2% (7.5 million) of households were occupied by one person.

Looking in more detail at multiple-person households, in 59.7% (14.8 million) of total households in England and Wales, all household members identified with the same ethnic group. This was a decrease from 61.1% (14.3 million households) in 2011.

In 10.1% (2.5 million) of households in England and Wales, two or more ethnic groups were represented. This is an increase from 2011 (8.7%, 2.0 million).

Census 2021 provides further insight into three combinations of ethnic group identification and relationships, within households where members report different ethnic groups:

- "Ethnic groups differ within partnerships" (5.7%, 1.4 million households with more than one person)
- "Ethnic groups differ between generations but not within partnerships" (1.8%, 436,000)
- any other combination of multiple ethnic identities between household members with other types of relationship, including those who are not related, such as friends (2.6%, 649,000)

Ethnic groups within households across England and Wales

In England, 10.4% of total households were multiple-ethnic group households (2.4 million households), compared with 5.3% in Wales (71,000 households). Within English regions, the percentage of multiple-ethnic group households ranged between 4.1% of total households in the North East (48,000 households) and 22.3% (763,000 households) in London.

The interactive tool displays data on how ethnic group composition within households varies at a local level.

Figure 4: The percentage of households containing multiple ethnic groups varies by local authority

Household ethnic composition, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

6 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on ethnicity will be published in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. Read more about our [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion analysis plans](#) and the [Release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

7 . Ethnic group data

[Ethnic group in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by ethnic group. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Ethnic group \(detailed\) in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by ethnic group. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Multiple-ethnic group in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by the diversity in ethnic group of household members in different relationships. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

8 . Glossary

Ethnic group

The ethnic group that the person completing the census feels they belong to. This could be based on their culture, family background, identity or physical appearance.

Respondents could choose one out of 19 tick-box response categories, including write-in response options.

High-level ethnic group

This refers to the first stage of the two-stage ethnic group question. High-level groups refer to the first stage where the respondent identifies through one of the following options:

- "Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh"
- "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African"
- "Mixed or Multiple"
- "White"
- "Other ethnic group"

Multiple ethnic groups in households

Classifies households by whether members identify as having the same or different ethnic groups.

If multiple ethnic groups are present, this identifies whether they differ between generations or partnerships within the household.

Usual resident

A usual resident is anyone who on Census Day, 21 March 2021 was in the UK and had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for a period of 12 months or more, or had a permanent UK address and was outside the UK and intended to be outside the UK for less than 12 months.

9 . Measuring the data

Reference date

The census provides estimates of the characteristics of all people and households in England and Wales on Census Day, 21 March 2021. It is carried out every 10 years and gives us the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales.

We are responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales, but will also release outputs for the UK in partnership with the Welsh Government, the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The census in Northern Ireland was also conducted on 21 March 2021, whereas Scotland's census was moved to 20 March 2022. All UK census offices are working closely together to understand how this difference in reference dates will impact UK-wide population and housing statistics, in terms of both timing and scope.

Response rate

The person response rate is the number of usual residents for whom individual details were provided on a returned questionnaire, divided by the estimated usual resident population.

The person response rate for Census 2021 was 97% of the usual resident population of England and Wales, and over 88% in all local authorities. Most returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

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

Ethnic group question

To see the ethnic group question on the household, individual and Welsh questionnaires, visit our [Census 2021 paper questionnaires page](#).

Ethnic groups in the detailed ethnic group classification

An ethnic group will be shown in the detailed classification if the number of people who identified with the group within a write-in response option are large enough to disaggregate from other ethnic groups. For this reason, some ethnic groups appear in multiple high-level categories. Where the number of people identifying with an ethnic group are small enough for individuals to be identified, an ethnic group will be aggregated with other ethnic groups in the same write-in response option.

10 . Strengths and limitations

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021, more generally, can be found in the [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion](#).

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

11 . Related links

[Ethnic group tick-box prioritisation report for Census 2021 in England and Wales](#)

Article | Released 26 June 2020

Assessment in preparation for Census 2021

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Updated 29 November 2022

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

[Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 29 November 2022

Known quality information affecting ethnic group, national identity, language and religion data from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

[Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion variables Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 28 November 2022

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about ethnic group, national identity, language and religion.

[Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Bulletin | Released 29 November 2022

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion in Wales.

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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