

Statistical bulletin

National identity, England and Wales: Census 2021

The national identity of usual residents in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

- In 2021, 90.3% (53.8 million) of usual residents identified with at least one UK national identity (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, and Cornish); this is a slight decrease from 92.0% (51.6 million) in 2011.
- People who identified with at least one UK and one non-UK identity accounted for 2.0% of the overall population (1.2 million people) in 2021; this is an increase from 0.9% (492,000) in 2011.
- Those selecting a non-UK identity only accounted for 9.7% of the overall population (5.8 million people), which is an increase from 8.0% of the population (4.5 million people) in 2011.
- Among those who described a non-UK national identity, the most common response was those describing "Polish" only as their identity (1.0%, 593,000); "Polish" only was also the most common response in 2011 (1.1%, 593,000).
- "Romanian" only was the second most commonly reported non-UK national identity, increasing to 0.8% (477,000) in 2021 from 0.1% (73,000) in 2011, which is the largest increase for any non-UK national identity.
- Other common non-UK identities include "Indian" only (0.6%, 380,000), "Irish" only (0.5%, 300,000), and "Italian" only (0.5%, 287,000).

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2 . National identities in England and Wales

The census question on national identity was introduced in 2011 because of increased interest in "national" consciousness and a demand for people to be able to acknowledge their national identity. The question allows respondents to select all identities that apply. The term "only" is used throughout the article to refer to respondents classified with a single national identity.

Overall, 90.3% of the population (53.8 million people) in England and Wales identified with at least one UK national identity (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, and Cornish). This is a slight decrease since 2011, when 92.0% of the population (51.6 million people) identified this way.

People who identified at least one UK and one non-UK identity accounted for 2.0% of the overall population (1.2 million people); this is an increase from 0.9% (492,000) in 2011.

Those selecting a non-UK identity only accounted for 9.7% of the overall population (5.8 million people), which is an increase from 8.0% of the population (4.5 million people) in 2011.

"British", "English" or "Welsh" only identities

More than half of the usual resident population (54.8%, 32.7 million) chose a "British" only national identity in 2021, which is a rise of 35.8 percentage points from 19.1% (10.7 million) in 2011. The opposite trend was seen for the "English" only identity. This fell by 42.8 percentage points, from 57.7% (32.4 million) in 2011 to 14.9% (8.9 million) in 2021.

While the increase in number of usual residents describing their national identity as "British" and the fall in the number describing their national identity as "English" may partly reflect true change, it is most likely to be a result of the changes to the question structure where "British" became the top response option in 2021 for England only.

When added together, the number of people describing their national identity as either "English" only or "British" only decreased from 76.8% (43.0 million) in 2011 to 69.7% (41.6 million) in 2021.

In Wales, "Welsh" remained the first response option for the national identity question, as in 2011. The number of people choosing "British" only as their national identity also rose in Wales from 16.9% (519,000) in 2011 to 18.5% (574,000) in 2021. This coincided with a decrease in those choosing "Welsh" only to describe their national identity (55.2%, or 1.7 million, which is down from 57.5%, or 1.8 million, in 2011).

Figure 1: The most common response option was the selection of only a "British" national identity

National identities, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. While the increase in the number of usual residents describing their national identity as "British" and the fall in the number describing their national identity as "English" may partly reflect true change, it is most likely to be a result of the changes to the question structure where "British" became the top response option in 2021 for England only.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Changes in other UK identities

The other UK identities remained more stable across usual residents in England and Wales, although there were still some changes between 2011 and 2021, including that:

- the percentage choosing both "English" and "British" as their national identity rose to 13.6% (8.1 million) from 8.7% (4.9 million)
- the percentage choosing a "Welsh" only identity declined to 3.2% (1.9 million) from 3.7% (2.1 million)
- the percentage choosing a "Scottish" only identity declined to 0.4% (244,000) from 0.8% (435,000)

3 . English identity in England, Welsh identity in Wales, and Cornish identity in Cornwall

English identity in England

In England:

- 15.3% of people selected an "English" only identity (a decrease from 60.4% in 2011)
- 56.8% of people selected a "British" only identity (an increase from 19.2% in 2011)
- 72.1% of people (40.7 million) selected either an "English" only or "British" only identity (a decrease from 79.6%, or 42.2 million, in 2011)
- 14.3% of people selected both "English" and "British" identity (an increase from 9.1% in 2011)

While the increase in the number of usual residents describing their national identity as "British" and the fall in the number describing their national identity as "English" may partly reflect true change, it is most likely to be a result of the changes to the question structure where "British" became the top response option in 2021 for England only.

Welsh identity in Wales

In Wales:

- 55.2% of people selected a "Welsh" only identity (a decrease from 57.5% in 2011)
- 18.5% of people selected a "British" only identity (an increase from 16.9% in 2011)
- 8.1% of people selected both "Welsh" and "British" identities, with no other identities (an increase from 7.1% in 2011)

Cornish identity in Cornwall

People who wanted to record an identity other than the UK nations listed as tick-box response options could write in other identities. Those wanting to record their national identity as Cornish were supported in doing so by the [search-as-you-type functionality](#), which included spellings of the identity in the Cornish language as well as English.

In England and Wales:

- 0.2% of the population (100,000) selected either the "Cornish" only identity or chose "Cornish" in combination with "British" (an increase from 0.1%, or 66,000, in 2011)

In Cornwall:

- 14.0% (80,000) of the population selected a "Cornish" only identity (an increase from 9.9%, or 53,000, in 2011)
- 1.6% (9,000) of the population selected "Cornish" in combination with a "British" identity (an increase from 1.0%, or 5,000, in 2011)

Outside of Cornwall:

- 11,000 people (0.02% of usual residents) selected either a "Cornish" only identity or a "Cornish" identity in combination with "British" (an increase from 8,000 people, or 0.01%, in 2011)

4 . Non-UK identities

The write-in response option enabled people to report a non-UK national identity. [Search-as-you-type functionality](#) was used on the online questionnaire to make it easier for respondents to self-define their national identity.

All non-UK identities

Overall, 11.7% of the population in England and Wales (7.0 million people) specified a national identity as "Other" (either by itself or with at least one UK identity), which is an increase from 8.8% (5.0 million) in 2011. The percentage of the population who specified their national identity this way was higher in England (12.0%) than it was in Wales (5.4%).

Of the 7.0 million people who specified their national identity through "Other", 1.1 million people (1.9% of the overall population) also specified at least one UK identity. This is an increase from 2011, where 452,000 people (0.8% of the population) specified a non-UK identity and at least one UK identity.

Specific non-UK identities

There was also a rise in the percentage of the population who specified only a non-UK identity. This rose to 9.7% (5.8 million) in England and Wales in 2021, up from 8.0% (4.5 million) in 2011. Again, this was higher in England (10.0%) than it was in Wales (4.2%).

Data for people specifying a non-UK national identity only show increases in most non-UK identities between 2011 and 2021.

Figure 2: Polish remains the most specified non-UK national identity in 2021

Top 10 non-UK only national identities of usual residents, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Aggregated national identities have been excluded from this ranking as these are combinations of national identities where fewer people identified this way.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Out of all those who selected only a non-UK national identity, the most common response was "Polish" only (1.0%, 593,000). This was also the most common response in 2011 (when 1.1%, or 593,000, selected a "Polish" only identity).

The largest increase was for those who chose a "Romanian" only identity, which rose to 0.8% (477,000) in 2021 from 0.1% (73,000) in 2011. This made Romanian the second most common non-UK identity, up from sixteenth in 2011. Census 2021 data on [international migration](#) and [language](#) show similar between-census increases in the Romanian population and those who have Romanian as a main language. These increases are likely driven by working restrictions for Romanian citizens being lifted in 2014.

In 2011, the second most common non-UK only identity was "Irish", at 0.6% (349,000). The 2021 data show a decrease to 0.5% (300,000), making it the fourth most common. The decline of almost 50,000 was the greatest decrease for any non-UK identity.

This release provides data on specific non-UK only identities. In this release, the results are shown for those who identified only with non-UK identities. Future analyses will focus in more detail on those who selected specific non-UK national identities in combination with at least one UK identity. For further information, please see [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion analysis plans](#).

5 . How national identity varied across England and Wales

In 2021, in England:

- 88.0% of usual residents (49.7 million) reported one or more UK identity only
- 2.0% (1.2 million) reported at least one UK and one non-UK identity
- 10.0% (5.6 million) reported a non-UK identity only

In 2021, in Wales:

- 94.6% of usual residents (2.9 million) reported one or more UK identity only
- 1.2% (37,000) reported at least one UK and one non-UK identity
- 4.2% (132,000) reported a non-UK identity only

The interactive map explores how national identity varies across the UK down to a local authority level.

Figure 3: National identity, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Download the data

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6 . Future publications

We will publish more detailed data and analysis on national identity in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. Read more about our [ethnic group, nationality, language and religion analysis plans](#) and the [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

7 . National identity, England and Wales: data

[National identity - UK](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their national identity.

[National identity \(detailed\)](#)

Dataset | Released 29 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their national identity.

8 . Glossary

National identity

Someone's national identity is a self-determined assessment of their own identity; it could be the country or countries where they feel they belong or think of as home. It is not dependent on ethnic group or citizenship.

Respondents could select more than one national identity.

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 affect UK-wide population and housing statistics, in terms of both timing and scope.

Response rate

The overall 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.

10 . Strengths and limitations

The increase since the 2011 Census in people identifying as "British" and the fall in people identifying as "English" may partly reflect true changes in self-perception. It is also likely to reflect that "British" replaced "English" as the first response option listed on the questionnaire in England. Read more about the specific quality considerations for [ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion](#).

Other 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](#).

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

11 . Related links

[Census map](#)

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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