

Statistical bulletin

# UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: Census 2021

UK armed forces veterans population who have either previously served in the regular forces, reserve forces or both, Census 2021 data.



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# 1 . Main points

- In 2021, 1,853,112 people in England and Wales reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces (3.8% of usual residents aged 16 years and over).
- Of the UK armed forces veterans in England and Wales, 76.3% (1.4 million people) previously served in the regular forces, 19.5% (361,000 people) in the reserve forces, and 4.3% (79,000 people) served in both the regular and reserve forces.
- 37,000 UK armed forces veterans (2.0%) lived in communal establishments and the remainder (slightly over 1.8 million, 98.0%) lived in households.
- There were 1.7 million households (7.0% of all households) with one or more persons who had served in the UK armed forces.
- The local authorities with the highest proportion of veterans included Gosport (12.5%), North Kesteven (10.2%) and Richmondshire (9.5%) in England, and Conwy (5.9%) in Wales.

Help us improve our Census 2021 content by [completing our survey](#).

## 2 . Population who had previously served in the UK armed forces in England and Wales

The 2021 Census in England and Wales was the first to ask people if they had previously served in the UK armed forces. People aged 16 years and over were asked whether they had previously served in the regular or reserve UK armed forces, or both. People currently serving in the UK armed forces and those who had never served were both advised to tick "no".

People who have previously served in the regular or reserve UK armed forces are often known as the veteran population and form part of the armed forces community (along with those who currently serve in the armed forces or Merchant Navy and their families). The question on UK armed forces veterans was added to better meet the needs for service providers and others who support veterans, in line with the [Armed Forces Covenant](#). You can read more about why this question was added in our white paper, [Help Shape Our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales \(PDF, 967KB\)](#), and about our plans for data on the armed forces community more generally on our [armed forces community question development webpage](#).

There were 1,853,112 people who had previously served in the UK armed forces in England and Wales in 2021, 3.8% of the population aged 16 years and over. This is almost 1 in 25 people aged 16 years and over in England and Wales.

Over three-quarters of UK armed forces veterans residing in England and Wales had previously served in the regular armed forces only (1.4 million, 76.3%), while 361,000 (19.5%) had served only in the reserve armed forces. The remaining 79,000 (4.3%) had served in both the regular and the reserve armed forces.

**Figure 1: Almost 1 in 25 people aged 16 years and over in England and Wales was a veteran of the UK armed forces**

**Percentage of the population aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces, 2021, England and Wales**

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Of the UK armed forces veteran population in England and Wales, 98.0% (1,816,299) lived in households and 2.0% (36,813) lived in communal establishments. This is similar to the breakdown for the population as a whole; 98.3% of usual residents in England and Wales lived in households and 1.7% lived in communal establishments.

We also used the answers to this question to calculate the number of households that included one or more veterans. In total, 1,745,078 households in England and Wales had at least one person who had previously served in the UK armed forces in 2021 (7.0% of all households in England and Wales).

Of these households, the vast majority (almost 1.7 million households, 96.0% of all households with at least one veteran) included only one veteran, 70,000 (3.9%) included two veterans, and the remaining 2,000 (0.1%) included three or more veterans.

## 3 . How the UK armed forces veterans population varied across England and Wales

The proportion of UK armed forces veterans was higher in Wales (4.5% of the population aged 16 years and over, 115,000) than it was in England (3.8%, 1.7 million).

Of the UK armed forces veterans population in the two countries, there were similar proportions of those who had served in the regular forces only (76.3% in Wales, 78.7% in England), the reserve forces only (19.3% in Wales, 17.1% in England), and both the regular and reserve forces (4.5% in Wales, 4.2% in England).

Within England, the regions with the highest proportion of veterans were the South West (5.6%, 317,000 people) and the North East (5.0%, 109,000 people). These were also the regions that had the highest percentage of households with at least one veteran (10.1%, 247,000 households in the South West; 8.8%, 104,000 households in the North East).

By contrast, London had both the lowest proportion of UK armed forces veterans (1.4%, 101,000 people) and the lowest proportion of households with at least one veteran (2.8%, 96,000 households).

### Figure 2: The South West had the highest proportion of UK armed forces veterans

#### Percentage of the population aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces, 2021, England, Wales and regions of England

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Across England and Wales, the local authorities with the highest proportion of veterans include Gosport (12.5%), North Kesteven (10.2%) and Richmondshire (9.5%). The local authorities with the highest proportion of households with at least one veteran were very similar; Gosport (21.2%) and North Kesteven (17.8%) were first and second, and Fareham was third (16.7%).

In Wales, Conwy was the local authority with both the highest proportion of veterans (5.9%) and the highest proportion of households with at least one veteran (10.2%). Pembrokeshire was second highest for proportion of veterans (5.7%), and the Isle of Anglesey was second highest for proportion of households with at least one veteran (9.9%). These local authorities all contain or are located near military establishments, suggesting that UK armed forces veterans tend to stay in the same areas after they have left service.

The local authorities with the highest proportion of people who had served in the reserve armed forces only were North Tyneside (1.5%), Northumberland (1.3%) and South Tyneside (1.3%), all in the North East of England.

### Figure 3: The areas with the highest proportion of UK armed forces veterans tended to be near existing armed forces bases

#### Percentage of the population aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

## 4 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on UK armed forces veterans will be published in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. This will enable breakdowns of the UK armed forces veterans population by other census variables, such as age, health and labour market characteristics. Read more about our [UK armed forces veterans analysis plans](#) and the [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

## 5 . UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: data

### [Previously served in the UK armed forces](#)

Dataset | Released 10 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by whether or not they have previously served in the UK armed forces. This does not include people who are currently serving in the UK armed forces. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

### [Number of people in household who have previously served in UK armed forces](#)

Dataset | Released 10 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by the number of people in the household who have previously served in the UK armed forces. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

### [Population who have previously served in UK armed forces in communal establishments and in households](#)

Dataset | Released 10 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales who have previously served in the UK armed forces by whether they reside in communal establishments and in households. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

### [Household Reference Person indicator of previous service in UK armed forces](#)

Dataset | Released 10 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by whether or not the Household Reference Person has previously served in the UK armed forces. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

## 6 . Glossary

### UK armed forces veteran

People who have previously served in the UK armed forces. This includes those who have served for at least one day in the UK armed forces, either regular, reserves, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.

## 7 . 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.

We are also working together to understand how differences in the UK censuses affect our ability to produce harmonised statistics on UK armed forces veterans across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. A question relating to previous service in the UK armed forces was asked on the 2022 Census in Scotland. The census in Northern Ireland did not ask a question about previous service in the UK armed forces but NISRA are exploring administrative sources to understand their veteran population. An estimate for Great Britain may be produced with the relevant caveats.

### 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.

## 8 . Strengths and limitations

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally are provided in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the [specific quality considerations for UK armed forces veterans](#).

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

## 9 . Related links

### [Census map](#)

Interactive content | Released 2 November 2022

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

### [UK armed forces veterans quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 10 November 2022

Quality information about the UK armed forces veterans data from Census 2021 in England and Wales to help users correctly interpret them.

### [UK armed forces veterans variables Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 9 November 2022

Lists variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about UK armed forces veterans.

### [Armed forces community \(veterans\) question development for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 27 January 2021

Information on how we researched, developed and tested the Census 2021 question on the armed forces veterans community, including extra detail on the definitions of the main terms.

### [Harmonised standard for previous UK armed forces service](#)

Methodology | Released 16 March 2022

Detail on how the measurement of previous UK armed forces service has been made more comparable, consistent and coherent.

### [Census 2011: Working age UK armed forces veterans residing in England and Wales](#)

Bulletin | Released 27 September 2018

Estimates the size and characteristics of UK armed forces veterans (16 to 64 years of age), linking armed forces leavers' data with data from the 2011 England and Wales Census.

## 10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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