

Statistical bulletin

Travel to work, England and Wales: Census 2021

Method of travel and distance travelled to work, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

- Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change; the national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the travel to work topic.
- Take care when using these data for planning and policy purposes.
- Census 2021 estimates that 8.7 million (31.2%) usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment in England and Wales worked mainly at or from home in the week before Census Day, 21 March 2021.
- Just over 19.1 million usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment (68.8%) gave a method other than “at or from home”.
- The most selected mode of travel to work was driving a car or a van (45.1%, 12.5 million of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment).

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2 . Working mainly at or from home

In 2021, 27.8 million usual residents aged 16 years and over were in employment during the week leading up to Census Day, 21 March 2021.

On the Census 2021 form, people who were in employment or temporarily away from work in the week before Census Day were asked "How do you usually travel to work?". People were asked to select one mode of transport that they used for the longest part, by distance, of their usual journey to work.

In total, there were an estimated 8.7 million people in England and Wales who worked mainly at, or from, their homes. This figure was 31.2% of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment.

Similar proportions, around 30%, worked mainly at or from home in 2021 in England (31.5%) and in Wales (25.6%). In England, the regional percentages of people who worked mainly at or from home ranged from 24.8% in the North East to 42.1% in London.

Across England, the largest percentages of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment who worked mainly at or from home lived in the City of London (67.3%) and Richmond upon Thames (58.8%) local authorities, whereas the lowest proportion lived in Boston (10.6%). In Wales, the percentage working mainly at or from home ranged from 14.0% in Blaenau Gwent to 36.1% in Cardiff.

The differences in working from home at the country, regional and local authority level may be partly explained by variations in employment within occupations and industries. Find more information about how people were employed in our [Industry and occupation bulletin](#).

Figure 1: The percentage of people working mainly at or from home varied across England and Wales

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment who were working mainly at or from home, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Notes:

1. At the time of Census 2021, UK government guidance and lockdown restrictions resulted in unprecedented changes to travel behaviour and patterns. It is not clear if furloughed respondents followed guidance as intended.
2. Take care when interpreting areas below regional level since high concentrations of furloughed respondents may have affected the data.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the UK government had introduced furlough measures to ensure those who could not work were able to remain in employment. Furlough includes people on the Self Employment Income Support (SEIS) and Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) income support schemes. When completing the Census 2021 form, people on furlough were advised to say that they were temporarily away from work, as were those who were quarantining or self-isolating because of the pandemic. People on furlough had specific guidance to help them respond; read more about this in [Travel to work quality information for Census 2021](#). People who were temporarily away from work were included in the economically active population. Find more information about the economically active population in our [Economic activity status bulletin](#).

3 . Method of travel to work

Just over 19.1 million usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment (68.8%) did not work mainly at or from home. They instead specified the main mode of transport they used to reach their place of employment. It is likely that restrictions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic contributed to changes in the way people travelled to work, including fewer people using public transport. Read more in the [Strengths and limitations section](#).

In England and Wales, out of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment:

- 12.5 million people travelled to work by driving a car or van (45.1% of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment)
- 1.1 million travelled as passengers in a car or van (3.9%)

The estimated percentage who drove a car or van to work was greater in Wales (56.5%, 773,000) than in England (44.5%, 11.8 million). Across English regions, the percentage who travelled to work by driving a car or van ranged from 20.6% in London to 53.2% in the East Midlands. The largest percentage within English local authorities was 64.0% in Cannock Chase, closely followed by Bolsover (63.9%) and South Holland (63.9%). In Wales, the largest percentage was 68.5% in Blaenau Gwent.

Figure 2: Over two-fifths of people who travelled to work mainly travelled by driving a car or van

Method used to travel to work, usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. At the time of Census 2021, UK government guidance and lockdown restrictions resulted in unprecedented changes to travel behaviour and patterns. It is not clear if furloughed respondents followed guidance as intended.
2. We have excluded the "Work mainly at or from home" category from this chart to make it easier to clearly see the methods used to travel to work.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

In England and Wales, 5.5 million usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled to work by a main method other than as a driver or a passenger of a car or van (19.8%). After driving a car or van, the next selected mode of travel to work was on foot (2.1 million, 7.6%). The remaining responses for method of travel to work were:

- almost 1.2 million people (4.2%) travelled by bus, minibus or coach
- 569,000 (2.0%) travelled by bicycle
- 529,000 (1.9%) travelled by train
- 505,000 (1.8%) travelled by underground, metro, light rail, or tram
- 200,000 (0.7%) travelled by taxi
- 129,000 (0.5%) travelled by motorcycle, scooter or moped
- 286,000 (1.0%) travelled by another method of travel to work

A similar percentage of people travelled to work on foot in England (7.6%) and in Wales (7.1%). Within England, a larger percentage of people in the South West travelled to work on foot (9.2%) compared with other regions.

Compared with other English regions, a larger percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment living in London:

- travelled by underground, metro, light rail or tram (9.9%, compared with less than 1% in other English regions)
- travelled by bus, minibus or coach (8.9%, compared with less than 5% in other English regions)
- travelled by train (5.3%, compared with less than 3% in other English regions)

4 . Distance travelled to work

Respondents aged 16 years and over who were in employment and stated that their main place of work was a workplace or a depot were asked for their workplace address, from which we calculated the distance they travelled to work.

In England and Wales, 15.1 million people travelled to a workplace or depot (54.3% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment). In addition to the 8.7 million people who worked mainly at or from home (31.2%), a further 4.0 million people worked mainly at an offshore installation, in no fixed place, or outside the UK (14.4%).

Of those travelling to a workplace or depot, 9.8 million people (35.4% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment) travelled short distances to work (less than 10 kilometres). Looking in more detail within this group:

- 3.1 million people travelled less than 2 kilometres (11.0% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment)
- 3.5 million people travelled at least 2 kilometres to less than 5 kilometres (12.6%)
- 3.3 million people travelled at least 5 kilometres to less than 10 kilometres (11.8%)

Among the remaining 5.3 million people (19.0% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment) who travelled longer distances to work (10 kilometres and over):

- 2.9 million travelled at least 10 kilometres to less than 20 kilometres (10.5% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment)
- 1.1 million travelled at least 20 kilometres to less than 30 kilometres (4.1%)
- 470,000 travelled at least 30 kilometres to less than 40 kilometres (1.7%)
- 359,000 travelled at least 40 kilometres to less than 60 kilometres (1.3%)
- 383,000 travelled 60 kilometres and over (1.4%)

A larger percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled both shorter distances (less than 10 kilometres) and longer (10 kilometres and over) distances to work in Wales (36.3% and 24.2%, respectively) than in England (35.4% and 18.7%, respectively).

Figure 3: The majority of people who travelled to work travelled less than 10 kilometres

Distance travelled to work, usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. At the time of Census 2021, UK government guidance and lockdown restrictions resulted in unprecedented changes to travel behaviour patterns. It is not clear if furloughed respondents followed guidance as intended.
2. We have excluded the “Work mainly at or from home” and “Works at an offshore installation, no fixed place or outside the UK” categories from this chart to make it easier to clearly see the distances travelled to work.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Among the English regions, the North West (40.7%) and Yorkshire and The Humber (40.7%) had the largest percentages of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment who travelled short distances to work (less than 10 kilometres). Over a fifth of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled long distances (10 kilometres or more) to work in the English regions of the East Midlands (22.5%), the East of England (22.3%), the North East (20.9%), and the West Midlands (20.3%).

Within Wales, the local authorities with the largest percentages travelling short distances (less than 10 kilometres) were Swansea (46.7%) and Wrexham (46.3%), whereas the local authorities with the largest percentages travelling long distances (10 kilometres or more) were Blaenau Gwent (32.5%) and Carmarthenshire (32.2%). Within England, the local authority with the largest percentage travelling short distances (less than 10 kilometres) was Kingston upon Hull (61.1%), whereas the area with the largest percentage travelling long distances (10 kilometres or more) was Breckland (35.0%).

5 . Travel to work data

[Method used to travel to work](#)

Dataset | Released 8 December 2022

Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment the week before the census in England and Wales by their method used to travel to work (2001 specification). The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Distance travelled to work](#)

Dataset | Released 8 December 2022

Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment the week before the census in England and Wales by the distance they travelled to work. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

6 . Glossary

Method used to travel to work

A person's place of work and their method of travel to work. This is the 2001 method of producing travel to work variables.

"Work mainly from home" applies to someone who indicated their place of work as their home address and travelled to work by driving a car or van, for example visiting clients.

Distance travelled to work

The distance, in kilometres, between a person's residential postcode and their workplace postcode measured in a straight line. A distance travelled of 0.1km indicates that the workplace postcode is the same as the residential postcode. Distances over 1200km are treated as invalid, and an imputed or estimated value is added.

"Work mainly at or from home" is made up of those that ticked either the 'Mainly work at or from home' box for the address of workplace question, or the "Work mainly at or from home" box for the method of travel to work question.

"Other" includes no fixed place of work, working on an offshore installation and working outside of the UK.

Distance is calculated as the straight line distance between the enumeration postcode and the workplace postcode.

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.

In employment

People aged 16 years and over are in employment if, between 15 March and 21 March 2021, they were an employee or self-employed.

The census definition differs from the International Labour Organization definition used on the Labour Force Survey, so estimates are not directly comparable.

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.

Labour market data mainly refer to respondents' activity in the last seven days; this refers to 15 to 21 March 2021. In the unemployment and economically inactive groups, the four weeks a person has been looking for a job in are from 21 February to 21 March 2021, and they must be able to start a job in the next two weeks, 21 March to 4 April 2021.

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.

Read more about question-specific response rates at local authority level in Section 4 of our [measures showing the quality of census 2021 estimates](#).

8 . Strengths and limitations

Labour market quality information

Census 2021 took place during a period of rapid change. We gave extra guidance to help people on furlough answer the census questions about work. However, we are unable to determine how furloughed people followed the guidance. Take care when using these data for planning purposes. Read more about specific quality considerations in our [Labour market quality information for Census 2021 methodology](#).

Labour market definitions

As the census uses different labour market definitions from those that the Labour Force Survey uses, the estimates differ between these two sources. You can find further information in our [Comparing Census 2021 and Labour Force Survey estimates of the labour market, England and Wales: March 2021 article](#).

General

You can find the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#).

Quality assurance

Details of the quality assurance processes that we used for Census 2021 are available in our [How we assured the quality of Census 2021 estimates methodology](#).

You can also read about our quality assurance processes in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#).

2001 travel to work specification

Census 2021 travel to work data use the 2001 travel to work specification, which is a method consistent with variables from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. Compared with the [2011 specification](#), Census 2021 data do not include figures for people who work from home but use other transport for their employment. As a result, home-working figures may be higher than the 2011 variable because of definitional differences.

9 . Related links

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Updated 8 December 2022

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

[Travel to work quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 8 December 2022

Known quality information affecting travel to work data from Census 2021 in England and Wales to help users correctly interpret them.

[Economic activity status, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 December 2022

People in and out of work covering employment, unemployment, hours worked and ever done any paid work, Census 2021 data.

[Industry and occupation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 December 2022

Industry, occupation and social grades, Census 2021 data.

[Travel to work variables: Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 8 December 2022

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about travel to work.

[Labour market and travel to work in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 December 2022

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about labour market and travel to work.

10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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