

Statistical bulletin

Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021

Information on disability in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

- Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) are used throughout this bulletin, with the exception of the data on the number of disabled people within a household; ASPs allow for comparison between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure.
- In England, in 2021, a smaller proportion but larger number of people were disabled (17.7%, 9.8 million), compared with 2011 (19.3%, 9.4 million).
- In Wales, in 2021, a smaller proportion and a smaller number of people were disabled (21.1%, 670,000), compared with 2011 (23.4%, 696,000).
- The English region with the highest proportion of disabled people was the North East (21.2%, 567,000).
- Out of all local authorities across England and Wales, Blackpool (24.7%), Blaenau Gwent (24.6%) and Neath Port Talbot (24.6%) had the highest proportions of disabled people.

2 . Disability, England and Wales

Disability

To identify disability in England and Wales, we asked people "Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?". If they answered yes, a further question "Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?" was presented. The identification of disability differs from the 2011 Census question used, which asked "Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or expected to last, at least 12 months?".

The question changed in order to collect data that more closely aligned with the definition of disability in the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#). The Equality Act defines an individual as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The way we identify disabled people has therefore changed between 2011 and 2021 and this may have had an impact on the number of people identified as disabled. See [Section 8: Measuring the data](#) for more information on the question change.

Census 2021 was undertaken during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which may also have influenced how people perceive their health status and activity limitations and therefore may affect how people chose to respond.

Percentages in this bulletin have been age-standardised. Disability and age are closely related, with older people being more likely to be disabled. Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) account for different age structures in populations and are more appropriate than crude percentages when drawing comparisons over time and across areas. The numbers being reported here are the actual number who responded in each category. You can download both [age-standardised and non-age standardised datasets](#). Read more in our [blog Age-standardising data: What does this mean and why does it matter?](#)

Disability in England and Wales

In 2021, across both England and Wales, the proportion of disabled people was 17.8% (10.4 million). The proportion of people that are disabled has decreased 1.7 percentage points from 2011, when it was 19.5% (10.0 million).

Figure 1: Age-standardised disability, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

3 . How disability varied across England and Wales

Disability in England

In England, the proportion of disabled people decreased between censuses (from 19.3% in 2011 to 17.7% in 2021). However, there was an increase in the number of disabled people (from 9.4 million in 2011 to 9.8 million in 2021).

The proportion of disabled people decreased in every region of England. The region with the highest proportion of disabled people was the North East (21.2%, 567,000), as it had been in 2011 (22.8%, 562,000). In 2021, the North East was followed by the North West (19.8%, 1.4 million) and Yorkshire and The Humber (18.9%, 1.0 million). Meanwhile, London (15.7%, 1.2 million) and the South East (16.1%, 1.5 million) had the lowest proportions of disabled people.

The local authorities with the highest proportions of disabled people in 2021 included Blackpool (24.7%), at 7.0 percentage points above the national estimate for England, and Liverpool (23.8%), at 6.1 percentage points above the national estimate. Conversely, the local authorities with the lowest proportions of disabled people were the City of London (11.8%) and Elmbridge (12.2%).

Although the South East had a relatively low proportion of disabled people, the top four local authorities which had the largest increases in the proportion of disabled people, compared with 2011, were all in the South East. Namely, Gosport (20.0%), Eastbourne (20.3%), Lewes (18.8%) and the Isle of Wight (21.3%). These ranged from an increase of 1.1 to 1.4 percentage points.

The top five local authorities which had the largest decrease in the proportion of disabled people, compared with 2011, were all in London. Namely, Newham (17.5%), Tower Hamlets (20.1%), Brent (14.7%), Hackney (19.2%) and Barking and Dagenham (17.9%). These ranged from a decrease of 5.2 to 7.2 percentage points.

Disability in Wales

As in England, the proportion of the population in Wales who were disabled decreased in 2021 (21.1%, 670,000) compared with 2011 (23.4%, 696,000).

In Wales, the local authorities with the highest proportions of disabled people were Neath Port Talbot (24.6%), Blaenau Gwent (24.6%), and Merthyr Tydfil (24.2%).

In 2011, the same three local authorities had the highest proportions of disabled people in Wales: Merthyr Tydfil (28.8%), Blaenau Gwent (28.4%), and Neath Port Talbot (28.2%). This was higher than any local authority in England in 2011. In each of the three, the proportion of disabled people fell from 2011 to 2021.

Some of the local authorities in Wales with larger proportions of people reporting a disability are also areas in which larger proportions of people provided unpaid care. For more information, please see our [Unpaid care, England and Wales: 2021 statistical bulletin](#).

The local authorities with the lowest proportion of disabled people were Monmouthshire (17.7%), Gwynedd (18.1%), and Powys (18.1%).

All local authorities in Wales saw a decrease in the proportion of people reporting a disability in 2021. The top four local authorities which had the largest decrease in the proportion of disabled people, compared with 2011, were Merthyr Tydfil (24.2%), Blaenau Gwent (24.6%), Caerphilly (23.6%), and Rhondda Cynon Taf (23.8%).

Figure 2: How disability (age-standardised) varied across local authorities in England and Wales, 2021

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

4 . The number of households where at least one person was identified as disabled

There were 24.8 million households across England and Wales in 2021, up 6.1% from 23.4 million in 2011.

We collected information on the number of household members that were disabled. It is not possible to age standardise at a household level, therefore, the proportions reported in this section are not standardised.

In England, the census data on disability within households show that:

- in 68.0% (15.9 million) of households, no people are disabled
- 25.4% (6.0 million) of households include one disabled member
- in the remaining 6.6% (1.6 million) of households, two or more people are disabled within the household

Households with two or more disabled people ranged from 5.1% (175,000) in London to 7.8% (92,000) in the North East.

The English local authorities with the highest proportion of two or more disabled people within a household were East Lindsey (10.3%), Bolsover (9.6%), and Knowsley (9.5%).

In Wales, the census data on disability within households show that:

- in 62.1% (837,000) of households, no people are disabled
- 29.5% (397,000) of households include one disabled member
- in the remaining 8.4% (114,000) of households, two or more people are disabled within the household

The Welsh local authorities with the highest proportion of two or more disabled people within a household were, Neath Port Talbot (10.4%), Caerphilly (10.2%), and Rhondda Cynon Taf (9.8%). Out of the top seven local authorities with the highest proportion of two or more disabled people within a household, six of them were within Wales.

Figure 3: How disability within households varied across local authorities in England and Wales, 2021

Notes:

1. Household level data are not age-standardised.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

5 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on health, disability and unpaid care will be published in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. Read more about our [health, disability and unpaid care analysis plans](#) and the [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

6 . Disability, England and Wales: data

[Disability](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by long-term health problems or disabilities. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Disability, age-standardised proportions](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by long-term health problems or disabilities. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021. Age-standardisation allows for comparisons between populations that may contain proportions of different ages.

[Number of disabled people in household](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by the number of disabled people in the household. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

7 . Glossary

Disability

People who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses are considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the [harmonised standard for measuring disability](#) and is in line with the Equality Act (2010).

Number of disabled people in household

The number of people in a household who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses and are considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the harmonised standard for measuring disability and is in line with the Equality Act (2010).

Usual resident

For Census 2021, a usual resident of the UK is anyone who, on Census Day, 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.

8 . Measuring the data

Age-standardised proportions

Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) allow for fairer comparison between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure. The [2013 European Standard Population](#) is used to standardise proportions.

Question change

Census 2021 asked usual residents to report if they had a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness, lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, and whether it limited their day-to-day activities "a little", "a lot" or "not at all". This is set out in more detail in our [Health and unpaid care question development for Census 2021](#) report.

Census 2011 asked usual residents whether their day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months.

The questions differed so that we could collect data that more closely aligned with the definition of disability in the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#). This requires that a person has a physical or mental impairment, and that the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Therefore, those reporting conditions that limited their day-to-day activities a little or a lot were classified as disabled under the Equality Act (2010). People who had no long-term physical or mental health conditions, or who had conditions that did not limit their day-to-day activities were classified as non-disabled under the Equality Act (2010).

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 [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.

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

9 . Strengths and limitations

Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally, can be found in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the [Health, disability and unpaid care quality information for Census 2021](#).

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

10 . Related links

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Updated 19 January 2023

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

[Health, disability and unpaid care quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 19 January 2023

Known quality information affecting health, disability and unpaid care data from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

[Health, disability and unpaid care variables, Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 19 January 2023

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about health, disability and unpaid care.

[Health, disability and unpaid care in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Bulletin | Released 19 January 2023

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about health, disability and unpaid care in Wales.

[How your area has changed in 10 years: Census 2021](#)

Digital content article | Updated 19 January 2023

Find out how life changed for people living in different local authority areas in England and Wales.

11 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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