

Statistical bulletin

Sexual orientation, England and Wales: Census 2021

The sexual orientation of usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

- The census question on sexual orientation was a voluntary question asked of those aged 16 years and over.
- In total, 44.9 million people (92.5% of the population aged 16 years and over) answered the question.
- Around 43.4 million people (89.4%) identified as straight or heterosexual.
- Around 1.5 million people (3.2%) identified with an LGB+ orientation (“Gay or Lesbian”, “Bisexual” or “Other sexual orientation”).
- The remaining 3.6 million people (7.5%) did not answer the question.

2 . Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is an umbrella term covering sexual identity, attraction, and behaviour. For an individual respondent, these may not be the same. For example, someone in an opposite-sex relationship may also experience same-sex attraction, and vice versa. This means the statistics should be interpreted purely as showing how people responded to the question, rather than being about whom they are attracted to or their actual relationships.

The question on sexual orientation was new for Census 2021. We have previously collected data on sexual orientation through the Annual Population Survey (APS), but including the question on the census questionnaire enables a much more detailed understanding of sexual orientation in England and Wales. The data will meet the needs for better quality information on the LGB+ population (“gay or lesbian”, “bisexual” or “other sexual orientation”) for monitoring and supporting anti-discrimination duties under the Equality Act 2010.

The question was voluntary and was only asked of people aged 16 years and over. People were asked “Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?”. The different sexual orientations that people could choose from included:

- straight or heterosexual
- gay or lesbian
- bisexual
- other sexual orientation

If they selected “Other sexual orientation”, they were asked to write in the sexual orientation with which they identified.

In total, 44.9 million people answered the question (92.5% of the population aged 16 years and over).

Figure 1: Sexual orientation, 2021, England and Wales

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

In total:

- 43.4 million people (89.4% of the population aged 16 years and over) identified as straight or heterosexual
- 748,000 (1.5%), described themselves as gay or lesbian
- 624,000 (1.3%) described themselves as bisexual
- 165,000 (0.3%) selected “Other sexual orientation”

The overall number of people in England and Wales who identified with an LGB+ orientation was therefore 1.5 million (3.2% of the population aged 16 years and over).

Of those who selected “Other sexual orientation”, the most common write-in responses included:

- pansexual (112,000, 0.23%)
- asexual (28,000, 0.06%)
- queer (15,000, 0.03%)

Another 10,000 (0.02%) wrote in a different sexual orientation.

The remaining 3.6 million people aged 16 years and over (7.5%) did not answer the question on sexual orientation.

Data and analysis showing sexual orientation by age and by sex will be published on 25 January, enabling a more detailed understanding of different identities.

3 . How sexual orientation varied across England and Wales

Census 2021 data reveal how sexual orientation varied across England and Wales. As the question was voluntary, please be aware of differences in response rates when comparing between different areas.

The data showed few differences between the two nations with respect to sexual orientation. England and Wales had very similar proportions of people who identified as:

- straight or heterosexual (89.4% of the population aged 16 years and above in both England and Wales)
- gay or lesbian (1.5% in both England and Wales)
- bisexual (1.3% in England, 1.2% in Wales)
- any other sexual orientation (0.3% in both England and Wales)

The percentage who did not provide an answer was also very similar (7.5% in England, 7.6% in Wales).

The English region with the highest proportion of people who identified with a LGB+ orientation (“gay or lesbian”, “bisexual”, or “other sexual orientation”) was London (4.3%). In London, 2.2% described their sexual orientation as gay or lesbian, 1.5% described their sexual orientation as bisexual, and 0.5% wrote in a different orientation.

Table 1: Sexual orientation, 2021, England, Wales and regions of England

| Area Name | Straight or Heterosexual (percent) | Gay or Lesbian (percent) | Bisexual (percent) | Pansexual (percent) | Asexual (percent) | Queer (percent) | All other sexual orientations (percent) |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| England | 89.37 | 1.54 | 1.29 | 0.23 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| Wales | 89.42 | 1.49 | 1.24 | 0.18 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| North East | 91.03 | 1.56 | 1.19 | 0.18 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| North West | 90.12 | 1.69 | 1.22 | 0.20 | 0.05 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| Yorkshire and The Humber | 89.75 | 1.43 | 1.31 | 0.22 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| East Midlands | 89.77 | 1.28 | 1.25 | 0.21 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| West Midlands | 89.91 | 1.21 | 1.06 | 0.20 | 0.05 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| East of England | 90.18 | 1.21 | 1.14 | 0.21 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| London | 86.19 | 2.23 | 1.52 | 0.37 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.04 |
| South East | 89.84 | 1.48 | 1.29 | 0.22 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| South West | 89.51 | 1.43 | 1.43 | 0.22 | 0.07 | 0.03 | 0.02 |

Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

Notes

1. Percentages are calculated from the total usual resident population aged 16 years and over. Because this question is voluntary, percentages do not total 100 percent, as “Not Answered” has been excluded from this table.

The local authority with the largest LGB+ population among those aged 16 years and over was Brighton and Hove (10.7%). Seven of the other local authorities in the top 10 were in London, with the largest LGB+ populations in the City of London (10.3%), Lambeth (8.3%), and Southwark (8.1%). In Wales, the local authorities with the largest LGB+ populations were Cardiff (5.3%), Ceredigion (4.9%), and Swansea (3.4%).

Figure 2: Sexual orientation, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

4 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on sexual orientation will be published in the coming months alongside the release of multivariate data. Our first analysis article, which will explore sexual orientation by age and sex, is due to be published on 25 January.

Read more about our [sexual orientation and gender identity analysis plans](#) and our [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

5 . Sexual orientation, England and Wales: data

[Sexual orientation](#)

Dataset | Released 6 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales by sexual orientation.

[Sexual orientation \(detailed\)](#)

Dataset | Released 6 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales by sexual orientation.

6 . Glossary

LGB+

An abbreviation used to refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other minority sexual orientations (for example, asexual).

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is an umbrella term covering sexual identity, attraction, and behaviour. For an individual respondent, these may not be the same. For example, someone in an opposite-sex relationship may also experience same-sex attraction, and vice versa. This means the statistics should be interpreted purely as showing how people responded to the question, rather than being about whom they are attracted to or their actual relationships.

We have not provided glossary entries for individual sexual orientation categories. This is because individual respondents may have differing perspectives on the exact meaning.

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

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

Response rate

The overall [person response rate](#) for the census 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](#).

8 . 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 report \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the [Sexual orientation and gender identity 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](#).

9 . Related links

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Updated 06 January 2023

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

[Sexual orientation and gender identity quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 06 January 2023

Known quality information affecting sexual orientation and gender identity data from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

[Sexual orientation and gender identity variables, Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 04 January 2023

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about sexual orientation and gender identity.

[Sexual orientation and gender identity in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 06 January 2023

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about sexual orientation and gender identity in Wales.

[Sexual orientation, UK: 2020](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 22 May 2022

Experimental Statistics on sexual orientation in the UK in 2020, using data from the Annual Population Survey.

10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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