

Article

Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021

Insights into disability prevalence in England and Wales in 2021, broken down by age and sex. Main findings are presented at country, regional and local authority level. Additional analyses compare disability prevalence with the 2011 and 2001 Censuses, and examine the relationship between deprivation and disability at a national decile (England) or quintile (Wales) level.



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1 . Main points

- In England, 18.7% of females and 16.5% of males were disabled in 2021, while in Wales 22.3% of females and 19.8% of males were disabled.
- The percentage of disabled males and females whose activities were limited a lot fell between 2011 and 2021, particularly among older age groups; those aged 90 years and over, and limited a lot reduced by more than 22 percentage points in each country.
- The percentage of disabled females increased notably between the ages of 10 to 14 years and 15 to 19 years between 2011 and 2021, rising from 6.8% to 12.2% in England and 7.1% to 13.3% in Wales.
- In the most deprived areas of England, there were higher levels of disability in younger age groups compared with the least deprived areas; for example, 21.6% of 40- to 44-year-olds were disabled in the most deprived areas compared with 8.1% in the least deprived areas.
- Similarly, among 40- to 44-year-olds in Wales, 25.4% of people were disabled in the most deprived areas, compared with 11.1% in the least deprived areas.

The 2021 Census disability question changed compared with 2011 to align more closely with the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#). The potential influence of question changes should be considered when drawing comparisons between years, particularly for older age groups.

2 . Using the data

On Census Day (21 March 2021), people were asked “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 asked. The response options were:

- "yes, a lot"; referred to here as limited a lot
- "yes, a little"; referred to here as limited a little
- "not at all"

In line with the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#), people who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses were considered disabled. Those who stated that they had a condition that did not limit their day-to-day activities or had no condition, were considered non-disabled.

The wording of the question was different in 2021 compared with 2011 and 2001. In comparison with the 2011 question, reference to old age was removed as a visible prompt in 2021 and mental health was added into the question wording. Further detail on the questions asked in 2021, 2011 and 2001 can be found in [Section 11: Question change](#).

Percentages in this article have been age-standardised because of the close relationship between disability and age. Age-standardised percentages (ASPs) account for differences in age structures in the population and are more appropriate than crude percentages when drawing comparisons between sexes, over time and across geographical areas. For further information on age standardisation, see the [Glossary](#).

There were differences in the prevalence of disability in 2021 compared with 2011, as outlined in greater detail throughout this article. Potential contributing factors may include:

- Census 2021 was undertaken during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which may have influenced how people perceived their conditions or illnesses
- the visible prompt “include problems related to old age” was removed in the 2021 questionnaire, which may have reduced the percentage of older people who considered that they had a condition or illness
- reference to mental health conditions or illnesses was included in 2021, which may have contributed to the increase in disability seen in younger age groups

3 . Disability by age and sex in England and Wales, 2021

Analysis exploring disability prevalence in England and Wales is available in the previously released [Disability Topic Summary](#). This revealed that 17.7% of people in England and 21.1% of people in Wales were disabled. Here, we provide further exploration of disability by sex and age.

Figure 1: The percentage of people whose activities were limited a lot increased with age in England

Age-specific percentages of disability by age group and sex, England 2021

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In England, 18.7% of females and 16.5% of males were disabled. Of these, 10.8% of females and 9.4% of males said that they were limited a little by a condition or illness, and 7.8% of females and 7.1% of males said they were limited a lot.

Disability prevalence increased with age (Figure 1). In those aged under 15 years (where responses were most likely to be reported by parents or guardians), a higher percentage of males were disabled compared with females. However, after the ages of 15 to 19 years, a higher percentage of females were disabled. In particular, the percentage of disabled females increased notably between the ages of 10 to 14 years and 15 to 19 years, rising from 6.8% to 12.2% respectively. It then increased to 15.1% at age 20 to 24 years in comparison with 11.2% for males.

Disability began to increase in each age group for both males and females from 30 to 34 years. However, among older age groups, the percentage of males and females who were disabled rose considerably after the age of 70 to 74 years. This increase was mainly among those whose activities were limited a lot; 12.2% of females aged 70 to 74 years were limited a lot compared with 47.1% of females aged 90 years and over. For males, 11.4% of those aged 70 to 74 years were limited a lot, compared with 38.3% in those aged 90 years and over.

In England, the percentage of people who indicated that they had a condition that did not limit their day-to-day activities was 6.9% of females and 7.0% of males. Further breakdowns by sex and age in England can be found in the [accompanying datasets \(table 1\)](#).

Figure 2: The percentage of people whose activities were limited a lot increased with age in Wales

Age-specific percentages of disability by age group and sex, Wales 2021

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In Wales, 22.3% of females and 19.8% of males were disabled. The percentage of those who were limited a little was 11.9% for females and 10.3% for males. A higher proportion of females than males indicated that they were limited a lot; 10.4% and 9.5% respectively.

As in England, the percentage of females and males who were disabled increased with age (Figure 2). In those aged under 15 years, a higher percentage of males were disabled compared with females. However, after the ages of 15 to 19 years, a higher percentage of females were disabled. In particular, the percentage of disabled females increased notably between the ages of 10 to 14 years (7.1%) and 15 to 19 years (13.3%).

While the percentage of disabled males increased in every age group after 30 to 34 years, the proportion of disabled females increased in each age group from 25 to 29 years. This followed a rise in disability prevalence for females aged 20 to 24 years (17.9%), not seen for males (13.5%).

After the ages of 70 to 74 years, the prevalence of disability rose considerably for both males and females. This increase was mainly among those whose activities were limited a lot; 16.6% of females aged 70 to 74 years were limited a lot compared with 50.6% of females aged 90 years and over. For males, 15.8% of those aged 70 to 74 years were limited a lot, compared with 41.0% in those aged 90 years and over.

In Wales, the percentage of people who had a condition or illness that did not limit their daily activities was lower compared with England; 6.7% of females and 6.6% of males. Further breakdowns by sex and age in Wales can be found in the [accompanying datasets \(table 1\)](#).

4 . Comparison of disability estimates between 2021 and 2011

In this section, we compare the prevalence of those whose activities were limited a lot, limited a little or non-disabled in 2021 and 2011. While the disability questions in each census had some differences, they remain broadly comparable across the time periods. Drawing these comparisons enables an indication of trends in disability prevalence, which will be influenced both by real changes in the population and the changes in measurement. Further information can be found in [Section 11: Question change](#).

The 2021 Census disability question changed compared with 2011 to align more closely with the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#). The potential influence of question changes should be considered when drawing comparisons between years, particularly for older age groups.

Figure 3: The percentage of people whose activities were limited a lot decreased between 2011 and 2021 for females and males

Age-standardised percentage of females and males who were limited a little or a lot in 2011 and 2021, England

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In England, there was a decrease in the percentage of disabled females and males in 2021 compared with 2011. This decrease was largely among those who were limited a lot; down from 9.2% in 2011 to 7.8% in 2021 in females and from 9.0% to 7.1% in males.

There was an increase in the percentage of females who were limited a little in 2021 compared with 2011 (10.8% and 10.4% respectively; Figure 3). However, there was a small decrease in the percentage of males who were limited a little; 9.4% in 2021 compared with 9.9% in 2011.

Figure 4: The percentage of people whose activities were limited a lot decreased between 2011 and 2021 for females and males

Age-standardised percentage of females and males who were limited a little or a lot in 2011 and 2021, Wales

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In Wales, the percentage of disabled people decreased between 2011 and 2021. This was particularly evident in those who were limited a lot; 12.2% of females in 2011 compared with 10.4% in 2021, and 12.2% of males in 2011 compared with 9.5% in 2021 (Figure 4).

Similar to England, there was an increase in the percentage of females who were limited a little in 2021; up from 11.4% in 2011 to 11.9% in 2021. There was a decrease in the percentage of males who were limited a little (10.8% in 2011 and 10.3% in 2021).

When exploring the changes in disabled people whose activities were limited a lot by age group, there was a significant reduction among older people who were limited a lot. For instance, in England, people aged 90 years and over and limited a lot fell 22.2 percentage points between 2011 and 2021, while in Wales this reduction was 22.9 percentage points. In England, all age groups 75 to 79 years and over saw a fall of more than 10 percentage points, while this was true from the age 70 to 74 years and over in Wales. Data for age groups can be viewed in full in the [accompanying datasets \(2011 and 2021, table 2\)](#). Some potential influences on these results are explored in the following section.

5 . Comparison of disability estimates between 2021, 2011 and 2001

Comparison of estimates over time can be difficult to interpret and care is required when drawing conclusions. While the census disability questions changed in 2001, 2011 and 2021, these changes, as well as other influences in the population, will have affected results to differing extents. Details on changes to disability measurement in 2021, 2011 and 2001 are available in [Section 11: Question change](#).

The disability questions asked in the 2021, 2011 and 2001 Censuses were different. The potential influence of question changes should be considered when drawing comparisons between censuses, particularly for older age groups.

Factors which may have contributed to the observed differences in disability prevalence over time include the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have impacted how people viewed and reported their conditions or illness. [Updated estimates of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by disability status revealed](#) that disabled people were at greater risk of death during the pandemic, which could have led to fewer disabled people in the population. In addition, [excess deaths where the underlying cause of death was not coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) may also have affected the disabled population.

Mental health may have been captured more accurately in the 2021 question, compared with previous years. This could have contributed to the increase in disability seen in the younger age groups. Our report into [Coronavirus and depression in adults](#) found that between January and March 2021, 21.0% of adults experienced some form of depression, and that this was more than double pre-coronavirus levels. Further, this report found that younger adults, particularly women were more likely to experience some form of depression.

For older age groups, the visible prompt in the 2011 Census question “include problems related to old age” was removed in 2021, which may have reduced the proportion of older people who considered that they had a condition or illness. Overall, results for disability in older age groups in 2021 broadly reflect the age patterns found in the Department for Work and Pensions UK [Family Resources Survey](#) (FRS), which reports that 42.0% of people of State Pension age were disabled in the 2020 to 2021 financial year. [Disability free life expectancy at birth in the UK has reduced](#), potentially reducing disability prevalence among older people.

Figure 5: The percentage of females and males with disabilities was higher in 2021 in younger age groups, and lower in older age groups, compared with 2011 and 2001

Age-specific percentage of females and males who were disabled in 2021, 2011 and 2001, England

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In England, there was a decline in the prevalence of disability in males over the three decades; from 19.5% in 2001, 18.9% in 2011 and 16.5% in 2021. For females, there was an initial increase in disability prevalence from 19.0% in 2001 to 19.6% in 2011, decreasing to 18.7% in 2021. The decrease between 2011 and 2021 was larger for males than for females, a 2.4 and 0.9 percentage point difference respectively.

When comparing 2021 with previous years, there were notable differences, particularly in the younger and older age groups. Among some younger age groups, there was an increase in disability prevalence not seen in previous censuses.

For females aged 15 to 19 years, the percentage of disability was 12.2% in 2021; 7.6 percentage points higher than in 2011 and 7.3 percentage points higher than in 2001. This continued into the 20 to 24 years age group, where disability prevalence increased from 5.2% in 2011 to 15.1% in 2021. For males, the increased prevalence of disability in 2021 began at earlier ages; 8.4% of males aged 5 to 9 years were disabled in 2021, compared with 5.0% in 2011 and 5.4% in 2001.

In older age groups there were large decreases in the percentage of disabled females and males in 2021 compared with 2011 and 2001. The largest percentage point decrease between 2011 and 2021 was for those aged 85 to 89 years. In this age group, the percentage of females who were disabled declined from 83.9% in 2011 to 56.2% in 2021, and the percentage of males who were disabled decreased from 79.2% in 2011 to 50.7% in 2021. Similarly, when comparing 2001 and 2021 for 85- to 89-year-olds, there was a 19.2 percentage point decrease for females and a 17.9 percentage point decrease for males.

Figure 6: The percentage of females and males with disabilities was higher in 2021 in younger age groups, and lower in older age groups, compared with 2011 and 2001

Age-specific percentage of females and males who were disabled in 2021, 2011 and 2001, Wales

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In Wales, there was a decline in disability prevalence for males, from 24.6% in 2001 to 23.0% in 2011 and 19.8% in 2021. For females, disability prevalence was 23.5% in 2001, remained stable in 2011 (23.6%) and decreased to 22.3% in 2021 (Figure 6).

When comparing disability in 2021 with previous years, there were notable differences, particularly in the younger and older age groups.

For females aged 15 to 19 years, the percentage of disability was 13.3% in 2021, 8.1 percentage points higher than in 2011 and 7.9 percentage points higher than in 2001. This trend continued into the 20- to 24-year age group, where disability prevalence increased substantially, from 6.2% in 2011 to 17.9% in 2021. For males, the increased prevalence of disability in 2021 began at earlier ages; 8.6% of males aged 5 to 9 years were disabled in 2021, compared with 5.6% in 2011 and 6.5% in 2001.

In older age groups, there were large decreases in the percentage of females and males who were disabled in 2021 compared with 2011 and 2001. The largest decrease was for those aged 85 to 89 years. In this age group, the percentage of females with a disability declined from 87.1% in 2011 to 59.4% in 2021 and the percentage of males with a disability decreased from 83.5% in 2011 to 54.2% in 2021. In 2001, the percentage of females with a disability aged 85 to 89 years was 79.8%, a 20.4 percentage point difference. For males, the largest decrease between 2001 and 2021 was for those aged 75 to 79 years, a 21.7 percentage point difference.

6 . Disability at a regional and local authority level, 2021

Figure 7: The North East region had the highest percentage of disabled people, while London had the lowest

Age-standardised percentage of disabled people, English regions and Wales, 2021

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Across the English regions, the North East had the highest percentage of females and males who were disabled; 12.2% of females and 10.7% of males reported their activities being limited a little, and 10.0% of females and 9.4% of males reported being limited a lot. In comparison, London had the lowest proportion of people who reported that their activities were limited a little; 9.1% of females and 8.0% of males. The South East had the lowest proportion of females and males who reported that their activities were limited a lot; 6.5% and 5.9% respectively (Figure 7).

Since 2011, percentages of disability have decreased for males in all regions. London was the region with the biggest decrease; falling from 18.4% in 2011 to 14.6% in 2021 (3.8 percentage points). For females, while the majority of English regions had lower percentages of disability in 2021, the South East and South West had slightly higher percentages of disability compared with 2011; a 0.2 and 0.7 percentage point difference respectively.

Changes in the percentages of disabled people in local authorities in 2011 and 2021 can be explored in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Explore how disability prevalence has changed in your area

Age-standardised percentages of people who were limited a lot, limited a little or non-disabled in local authorities in England and Wales between 2011 and 2021

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The trends shown in the map can also be viewed in the [accompanying datasets](#).

7 . Disability and deprivation, England, 2021

The Index of Multiple Deprivation provides a measure of deprivation across neighbourhoods in England. Further information can be found in the [Glossary](#).

Figure 9: People in the most deprived areas of England were disabled at younger ages compared with those in the least deprived areas

Age-specific percentages of disabled people in each age group in each decile of deprivation, England, 2021

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In England, for both females and males, a higher percentage of people indicated that they were disabled in the most deprived areas (decile 1) compared with the least deprived areas (decile 10). In the most deprived areas, 27.2% of females were disabled, compared with 13.6% in the least deprived areas. Similarly, 24.7% of males in the most deprived areas indicated that they were disabled, compared with 11.7% in the least deprived areas; a 13 percentage point difference.

These differences were greatest for those who were limited in their activities a lot. In the most deprived areas, 14.1% of females were limited a lot, compared with 4.5% in the least deprived areas; a 9.6 percentage point difference. Similarly, 13.0% of males in the most deprived areas were limited a lot, compared with 3.9% in the least deprived areas of England. There was a smaller decrease for females and males who were limited a little between the most and least deprived areas; a 3.9 percentage point difference for each sex.

In the most deprived areas, a higher percentage of people were disabled at younger ages compared with the least deprived areas (Figure 9). For example, in the most deprived areas, 21.6% of 40- to 44-year-olds were disabled. In the least deprived areas, it was not until age 70 to 74 years where percentages of disability reached this level (decile 10: 21.3%).

There was a short-term increase in the percentage of people with a disability aged 20 to 24 years. Disability rose at least 1.3 percentage points in all deciles between ages 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 years. With the exception of decile 1, disability then reduced for all other deciles by 0.7 percentage points to 2 percentage points in the age group 25 to 29 years. This trend was not seen to the same extent in Welsh deprivation quintiles.

8 . Disability and deprivation, Wales, 2021

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation provides a measure of deprivation across neighbourhoods in Wales. Further information can be found in the [Glossary](#).

Figure 10: Age-specific percentages of disabled people in each age group in each quintile of deprivation, Wales, 2021

Age-specific percentages of disabled people in each age group in each quintile of deprivation, Wales, 2021

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In Wales, for both females and males, there was a higher percentage of those who indicated that they were disabled in the most deprived areas (quintile 1) compared with the least deprived areas (quintile 5). In the most deprived areas, 29.7% of females were disabled, compared with 17.0% in the least deprived areas. Similarly, 26.7% of males in the most deprived areas indicated that they were disabled, compared with 14.8% in the least deprived areas; an 11.9 percentage point difference.

The difference between the most and least deprived areas was greatest when examining those whose activities were limited a lot. In the most deprived areas, 16.0% of females were limited a lot, compared with 6.8% in the least deprived areas; a 9.2 percentage point difference. Similarly, 14.6% of males in the most deprived areas were limited a lot, compared with 6.1% in the least deprived areas. There was a smaller difference for disabled males and females who were limited a little, between the most and least deprived areas; a 3.5 percentage point difference for females and a 3.3 percentage point difference for males.

In the most deprived areas, a higher percentage of people were disabled at younger ages compared with the least deprived areas (Figure 10). For example, in the most deprived areas of Wales, 25.4% of the 40 to 44 years age group had a disability, compared with 11.1% in the least deprived areas. In the least deprived areas, it was not until the 65 to 69 years age group where percentages of disability reached close to this level (quintile 5: 23.9%). This was particularly evident in younger age groups; in the most deprived areas 19.8% of 20- to 24-year-olds had a disability. In the least deprived areas, it was not until the 60 to 64 years age group where the percentage of people with a disability approached these levels (20.9 % in the 60 to 64 years age group).

9 . Disability by age, sex and deprivation datasets

[Disability in England and Wales, 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 8 February 2023

Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by long-term health problems or disabilities, sex, age and level of deprivation. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Disability in England and Wales, 2011](#)

Dataset | Released 8 February 2023

Census 2011 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by long-term health problems or disabilities, sex and age. The estimates are as at Census Day, 27 March 2011.

[Disability in England and Wales, 2001](#)

Dataset | Released 8 February 2023

Census 2001 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by long-term health problems or disabilities, sex and age. The estimates are as at Census Day, 29 April 2001.

10 . Glossary

Age-standardised and age-specific percentages

Age-standardised percentages (ASPs) allow for a fairer comparison in health outcomes between populations living in different areas and over time, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure. Further information is available in this [blog about the benefits of using age standardised measures for health](#).

To calculate ASPs, the process for health, disability and unpaid care is the same. Disability is given as an example here.

An age specific percentage is first calculated for each age group:

$$M_k = (d_k \text{ divided by } p_k) \text{ multiplied by } 100$$

where:

M_k = percentage of disabled people in age group k

d_k = the number of disabled people in age group k

p_k = Census 2021 population in age group k

k = age group

The age-standardised percentage of disabled people is that which would have occurred if the observed age-specific percentage of disability had applied in the European Standard Population (ESP).

thus:

Age-standardised percentage =

$$\left\{ \sum P_k m_k \right\} \text{ divided by } \sum P_k$$

where:

P_k = ESP in age group k

m_k = observed disability percentage in age group k (the age specific percentage)

k = age group

The 2013 European Standard Population is used to standardise percentages. This is a hypothetical population and assumes that the age structure is the same in both sexes, therefore allowing comparisons to be made between the sexes as well as between geographical areas and over time. The standard populations are listed in Annex F of the [Revision of the European Standard Population: Report of Eurostat's task force and Revised European Standard Population: 2013 ESP](#). Further details on [our use of the 2013 European Standard Population](#) are available.

Census Day

In 2021, the census was conducted on 21 March. At this time, most of the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown restrictions were still in place in England and Wales. The pandemic may have impacted estimates of disability prevalence because of changes in people's perceptions and increased death rates during this period (see [updated estimates of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by disability status](#)).

Decile and quintile

One of a number of equal groups into which a population can be divided according to the distribution of values of a particular variable, in this case deprivation. In England, there are 10 deciles of deprivation, of which decile 1 is the most deprived and decile 10 is the least deprived. In Wales, there are 5 quintiles of deprivation, of which quintile 1 is the most deprived and quintile 5 is the least deprived.

Disability

In Census 2021, people who assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses were considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the Government Statistical Service harmonised standard for measuring disability and is in line with 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. 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. Details on changes to questions between 2001, 2011 and 2021 are given in [Section 11: Question change](#).

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)

National deciles and quintiles of area deprivation are created through ranking small geographical populations known as Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) based on their deprivation score from most to least deprived and grouping them into 10 (deciles) or 5 (quintiles) divisions based on the subsequent ranking. The IMD and WIMD are created using separate indicators, and thus should not be compared.

IMD and WIMD are scores based on the area as a whole, and not everyone within a LSOA necessarily experiences the same level or type of deprivation. For example, some unemployed individuals live in less deprived LSOAs, while some higher-income individuals live in more deprived LSOAs. Similarly, deciles are a broad grouping and the levels of deprivation and the underlying factors determining the LSOA-level deprivation score will vary within the decile. Those LSOAs at the higher and lower end of each specific decile may vary considerably from each other.

We have used the 2019 IMD and WIMD because this is the most up-to-date version at the time of publishing. A consultation to update the English IMD has been completed, and a response published (see [Indices future: Updating the English Indices of Deprivation consultation](#)). There are currently no dates agreed for an update to the English or Welsh IMD. The 2019 IMD and WIMD use Census 2011 geographical boundaries; 1,031 LSOAs that were present in 2011 have either split into separate LSOAs or have been combined with other LSOAs in 2021, representing 3.1% of all LSOAs in 2021. In order to overcome this, the ONS methodology team mapped Census 2021 LSOAs to their equivalent LSOA based on 2011 boundaries. This was then used to assign a national deprivation decile or quintile, based on 2019 scores.

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.

11 . Question change

In 2021, people were asked "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 asked. The three response options were:

- “yes, a lot”
- “yes, a little”
- “not at all”

Combining responses to these two questions enabled identification of disabled people who are either limited a little, or limited a lot in their day-to-day activities. It also enabled identification of a non-disabled group who had no conditions or illnesses and a non-disabled group who had a condition or illness that did not limit their day-to-day activities. This aligns with the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) definition of disability, which requires that an impairment has an adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

In 2011, people were asked “Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? Include problems related to old age”. The three response options were:

- “yes, limited a lot”
- “yes, limited a little”
- “no”

In 2001, people were asked “Do you have any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities or the work you can do? Include problems related to old age”. The two response options were:

- “yes”
- “no”

Caution should be taken when examining trends of disability over time, because of the question changes. Nonetheless, comparison with previous censuses, when appropriately caveated, can be useful for policymakers, and as such are included in this release.

To allow comparisons between 2021 and 2011, we compared those who answered “no” in 2011 with those considered as non-disabled in 2021.

To allow comparisons between 2021, 2011 and 2001, we combined the “limited a lot” and “limited a little” response options in 2021 and 2011, and compared these with the “yes” response option in 2001.

The wording of the question was changed in 2021 to more closely align with the Equality Act (2010) and the [Government Statistical Service’s harmonised standard](#). Further, reference to mental health was included and the visible prompt “include problems related to old age” was removed. Information on steps taken to consult on question changes can be found in [Health and unpaid care question development for Census 2021](#).

12 . Data sources and quality

The census provides the most detailed picture of the entire population, with the same core questions asked to everybody across England and Wales. Census results can be more reliable than survey results based on a sample of the population, because the whole population is included. The UK Statistics Authority has assigned [National Statistics](#) status to Census 2021 outputs, providing assurance that these statistics are of the highest quality and value to users.

Census 2021 achieved a very high response rate of 97%. We ensure the census results reflect the whole population by using statistical methods to estimate the number and characteristics of people who were not recorded on a census response. This means that the census statistics are estimates rather than simple counts of responses, so they have some statistical [uncertainty](#) associated with them. We take numerous steps to minimise possible sources of error.

Additionally, we apply [statistical disclosure control](#) to protect the confidentiality of census respondents. Differences in the methods used for statistical disclosure control may result in minor differences in data totals between census products. As we round all figures individually, table totals may not sum exactly. Age-standardised and age-specific percentages were calculated based on these rounded numbers.

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](#).

13 . Related links

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

Statistical bulletins and datasets | Released 19 January 2023

Information on census health results in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.

[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.

[Updated estimates of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by disability status, England: 24 January 2020 to 9 March 2022](#)

Article | Released 9 May 2022

Estimates of differences in coronavirus (COVID-19) mortality risk by self-reported disability status for deaths occurring up to 9 March 2022, using linked data from the Office for National Statistics' Public Health Data Asset.

[Excess deaths in England and Wales: March 2020 to June 2022](#)

Article | Released 20 September 2022

Number of excess deaths, including deaths due to coronavirus (COVID-19) and due to other causes. Including breakdowns by age, sex and geography.

[Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: January to March 2021](#)

Article | Released 5 May 2021

Analysis of the proportion of the British adult population experiencing some form of depression in early 2021, by age, sex and other characteristics. Includes comparisons with 2020 and pre-coronavirus estimates.

[Family Resources Survey: financial year 2020 to 2021](#)

Article | Released 31 March 2022

Results from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) for the financial year 2020 to 2021, providing information on income and circumstances of UK households (Department for Work and Pensions).

[Health state life expectancies, UK: 2018 to 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 4 March 2022

The number of years people are expected to spend in different health states in constituent countries and local areas of the UK.

[Health state life expectancies by national deprivation deciles, England: 2018 to 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 April 2022

Life expectancy and years expected to live in "Good" health and "Disability-free" using national indices of deprivation to measure socioeconomic inequalities in England.

[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.

[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.

[Quality and methodology information Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Updated 28 November 2022

Details the data strengths, limitations, uses, users and methods used for Census 2021, England and Wales.

[How we assured the quality of the 2021 Census estimates](#)

Methodology | Released 7 November 2022

Details the methodology for the validation of the Census 2021 population estimates.

14 . Cite this article

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