

Article

Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021

The religion people connect or identify with (their religious affiliation), whether or not they practise or have belief in it, by age and sex using Census 2021 data.

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1 . Main points

- In 2021, people who identified as “Christian” had the oldest average age of the tick-box response options, 51 years, compared with 40 years for the overall population of England and Wales.
- People who described themselves as “Muslim” had the youngest average age, 27 years, followed by those who reported “No religion”, at 32 years.
- The 22.2 million people who reported "No religion" in 2021 were younger than the overall population of England and Wales; only 8.8% were aged 65 years and over, which compares with 18.6% of the overall population.
- When considering the groups derived from the “Any other religion” write-in response option, the average age ranged from 27 years for the 413 people who identified as “Yazidi” to 61 years for the 235 people who identified as “Brahma Kumari”.
- Females accounted for a higher percentage of people who responded with “Other religion” (56.1%), followed by “Buddhist” (55.7%) and “Christian” (54.6%), compared with the overall population of England and Wales (51.0% females).

2 . The religion question was voluntary

The census introduced a voluntary question on religion in 2001. In the census data, religion refers to a person’s religious affiliation. This is the religion with which they connect or identify, rather than their beliefs or active religious practice.

Percentages are calculated out of the overall population as opposed to out of the population who answered the religion question. This aids comparison across time and between areas, as the percentage of the population who answered the question varied.

In total, 94.0% of the overall population in England and Wales (56.0 million people) chose to answer the religion question in 2021. This is a higher percentage than in 2011, when 92.9% (52.1 million) answered the religion question and 7.1% (4.0 million) chose not to answer.

3 . Religion by age

People who identified as “Christian” had the oldest average age

In 2021, the religious group with the oldest average (median) age, 51 years, was people who described themselves as “Christian”. This is compared with a median age of 40 years for the whole population of England and Wales.

The youngest average age was 27 years, for people who identified as “Muslim”, followed by 32 years for those who reported “No religion”.

The diversity in ages across religious groups increased over time; the difference between the youngest median age (those identifying as “Muslim”) and oldest (those identifying as “Christian”) median age increased from 20 years in 2011 to 24 years in 2021.

Figure 1: The average age of those who identified as “Christian” increased from 45 years in 2011 to 51 years in 2021

Median ages by religion, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

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The median age for each response option either remained the same or increased between 2011 and 2021. The largest increase in median age between 2011 and 2021 was for those who identified as “Buddhist” or “Christian” (with an increase of six years for both), compared with a one-year increase for the overall population of England and Wales (from 39 years in 2011 to 40 years in 2021). People who chose not to answer the religion question were the only group where the median age decreased, from 40 years in 2011 to 37 years in 2021.

4 . Religion by sex

A higher percentage of people who responded with “Other religion” were female compared with the overall population

In 2021, 56.1% of people who responded with “Other religion” were female (195,515). In comparison, females accounted for 51.0% of the overall population of England and Wales. Similarly, there were more females in the population who identified as “Buddhist” (55.7%) and “Christian” (54.6%).

Of the 22.2 million people who reported “No religion” in 2021, 52.9% (11.7 million) were male.

Those who identified as “Sikh” had the most even split of females and males (49.9% and 50.1%, respectively).

5 . Religion by age and sex

People who identified as “Christian” were older than the overall population

Of the 27.5 million people who identified their religion as “Christian” in 2021, 29.0% (7,992,765) were aged 65 years and over, up from 22.3% (7,418,576) in 2011. In comparison, 18.6% of the overall population of England and Wales were aged 65 years and over.

Figure 2: A higher proportion of people who identified as “Christian” were older

Interactive population pyramids for “Christian”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

Download the data

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The decrease in the number of people who identified as “Christian” between 2011 and 2021, from 59.3% to 46.2%, was particularly notable in the younger age groups. For example, 1.7 million (5.1%) people who identified as “Christian” were aged 21 to 25 years in 2011; this decreased to 1.1 million (3.9%) people in this age group in 2021. In addition, the people aged 21 to 25 years in 2021 would have been aged 11 to 15 years in 2011, at which time this cohort accounted for 5.5% (1,819,119) of those who identified as “Christian”, compared with 3.9% (1,086,345) in 2021. Therefore, there has been a decrease in both the number of this cohort and the proportion of those within the age group who identified as “Christian” since 2011.

An ageing population for those who identified as “Christian” and fewer people who identified this way in younger age groups are both factors that have contributed to the overall decrease in this group.

Many factors can cause changes in the size of religious groups, including changing age structure, people relocating for work or education, and differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify (or how children's religious affiliation was reported) between censuses.

People who reported “No religion” were younger than the overall population

Only 8.8% of 22.2 million people who reported “No religion” in 2021 were aged 65 years and over (compared with 18.6% of the overall population). Most people who responded this way (91.2%) were aged under 65 years; this is compared with 81.4% of the overall population across England and Wales in this age group.

Figure 3: People who reported “No religion” had a younger age profile compared with the overall population

Interactive population pyramids for those reporting “No religion”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

Download the data

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A higher percentage of people who identified as “Buddhist” were female compared with the overall population

Of the 272,508 people who described themselves as “Buddhist” in 2021, 55.7% were female, compared with 51.0% of the overall population of England and Wales. The percentage of females was even higher for this religious group for those aged 16 to 64 years, at 56.8%.

There was also a higher percentage of people who identified as Buddhist who were aged 16 to 64 years, 77.4%, when compared with the overall population of England and Wales where 62.9% were in this age group. Specifically, people who identified as “Buddhist” had a higher percentage of respondents who were aged 40 to 54 years, 30.8%, compared with 19.6% for the overall population.

Figure 4: People who identified as “Buddhist” were mostly of working age with a higher proportion of females

Interactive population pyramids for “Buddhist”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

Download the data

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A higher percentage of people who identified as “Hindu” were aged 16 to 64 years compared with the overall population

Of the 1.0 million people who identified as “Hindu” in 2021, a higher percentage were aged 16 to 64 years (68.4%) compared with the overall population (62.9%).

In addition, a higher percentage of this population were aged under 16 years (20.3%), when compared with the overall population of England and Wales (18.5%). As such, a smaller percentage of this religious group were aged 65 years and over (11.3%) when compared with the overall population (18.6%).

Figure 5: People who reported their religion as “Hindu” were younger than the overall population

Interactive population pyramids for “Hindu”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

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This religious group has aged since 2011; the higher proportions of the “Hindu” population at around 11 years and 40 years in 2021 echo similar “peaks” ten years earlier at 1 year and 30 years.

The age profile of those who identified as “Jewish” was more evenly distributed than the overall population

Figure 6: People who reported their religion as “Jewish” were consistently distributed between around 25 and 65 years

Interactive population pyramids for “Jewish”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

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There were no substantial changes across age groups between 2011 and 2021, with a natural decline in the older ages. The slightly higher proportion of the group aged around 75 years in 2021 echoes a “peak” at 65 years in 2011, reflecting that this population group has aged since 2011.

People who identified as “Muslim” were the youngest of the tick-box religious groups

Those who identified as “Muslim” had the youngest average (median) age of the tick-box responses, 27 years; this is 13 years younger than the median age of the overall population. This religious group has aged since 2011, when the average age for those identifying this was 25 years.

Of the 3.9 million people who identified as “Muslim” in 2021, 84.5% were aged under 50 years, compared with 62.0% of the overall population of England and Wales.

Figure 7: People who identified as “Muslim” had a younger age profile compared with the overall population

Interactive population pyramids for “Muslim”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

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It is important to note that the proportion of the overall population who identified as “Muslim” increased from 4.9% (2.7 million) in 2011 to 6.5% (3.9 million) in 2021. Therefore, some of the proportional changes in the age distribution do not represent an absolute decrease in the number of people in these age groups. For example, those aged 25 to 34 years accounted for 20.1% of this population in 2011, which decreased to 16.6% of this same cohort in 2021, when they are aged 35 to 44 years. While the percentage has decreased, the number of people increased from 547,100 in 2011 to 642,855 in 2021.

More people who described their religion as “Sikh” were aged 16 to 64 years compared with the overall population

Of the 524,140 people who identified as “Sikh” in 2021, 67.3% were aged 16 to 64 years compared with 62.9% of the overall population of England and Wales. Similarly, a higher percentage of this religious group were aged under 16 years (20.5%) compared with the overall population (18.5%). As a result, a smaller percentage were aged 65 years and over (12.2%), compared with the overall population (18.6%).

Figure 8: A higher percentage of people who identified as “Sikh” were aged 29 to 49 years compared with the overall population

Interactive population pyramids for “Sikh”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

Download the data

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This religious group has aged since 2011; the percentage of those aged 65 years and over has increased by 3.0 percentage points since 2011 (when it was 8.3%).

A higher percentage of people who reported “Other religion” were female

In 2021, 56.1% (195,515) of those who responded with “Other religion” were female, which was the highest percentage across the tick-box response options. Comparatively, females accounted for 51.0% of the overall population of England and Wales.

Figure 9: More females than males responded with “Other religion”

Interactive population pyramids for “Other religion”, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

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Of those who reported "Other religion", 78.6% were aged 16 to 64 years compared with 62.9% of the overall population. A smaller percentage of people who identified this way were aged 65 years and over (11.8%) and aged under 16 years (9.6%) when compared with the overall population (18.6% and 18.5%, respectively).

Age-sex profiles for the larger groups among those who wrote in a religion within the "Any other religion, write-in" response option are included in [Section 7](#).

The age and sex profile of people who did not answer the religion question is similar to the profile of the overall population

Overall, the age and sex profile for those who chose not to answer the question is consistent with the overall population. A higher proportion of this group are aged around 20 years. This reflects an adjustment made to improve the estimation of students living at their term-time address, which slightly increased the proportion of "Not answered". Read about this adjustment in our [Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion quality information for Census 2021](#) methodology.

Figure 10: The age and sex profile of those who did not to answer the religion question is similar to the overall population

Interactive population pyramids for "Not answered", England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 100 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. 2011 data used are from [CT0291_2011](#).
3. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
4. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.

Download the data

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Between 2011 and 2021, the percentage of people who chose not to answer the religion question decreased by 1.1 percentage points (380,954), from 7.1% to 6.0%.

The largest change was among those aged 0 to 4 years, from 331,772 children in 2011 to 242,610 in 2021.

6 . Differing age and sex profiles for religious groups across England and Wales

Local authorities in Wales with the youngest average ages also have the highest levels of religious diversity in Wales

In Wales, Cardiff had the lowest average (median) age; 34 years compared with 42 years for the overall population of Wales. Cardiff also had the highest percentage of people who described their religion as “Hindu”, “Jewish”, “Muslim” and “Sikh”, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of population who responded as “Hindu”, “Jewish”, “Muslim” or “Sikh” in Wales and Cardiff, 2021

Religion Wales Cardiff

Hindu	0.39	1.50
Jewish	0.07	0.19
Muslim	2.15	9.29
Sikh	0.13	0.42

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

It is important to note that, as well as varying age profiles, there are other factors that may contribute to religious diversity of an area. For example, people may relocate for work or education, or to be close to friends or family.

London was both the youngest and most religiously diverse region in England

London was the youngest region of England in 2021, with a median age of 35 years, compared with 40 years across England overall. It remained the most religiously diverse region in England, with over a quarter (25.3%) of all usual residents reporting a religion other than “Christian”. As seen in [Section 4](#), most religious groups, other than “Christian”, have a younger age profile than the overall population.

In 2021, 40.7% of London’s population identified as “Christian”, which is a decrease of 8.0 percentage points from 2011. This is a smaller decrease in people identifying this way than the 13.1 percentage point decrease seen across the whole of England (to 46.3% in 2021). The median age for people who identified as “Christian” in London is 10 years younger, at 41 years, compared with the median age for this religious group across England (51 years). This will have influenced the smaller decrease in the percentage of London’s population who identified as “Christian”, with more people who identified this way remaining in the population.

Croydon was the local authority in London with the highest percentage of the population who identified as “Christian” (48.9%, 190,880). Croydon also had a higher average (median) age, 37 years, than London as a whole, which was 35 years.

The North East of England had an older-than-average population and was one of the least religiously diverse regions

The average (median) age in the North East of England, 43 years, was higher than the average age across England, which was 40 years. The North East and the South West of England were also the least religiously diverse regions, with 4.2% and 3.2%, respectively, selecting a religion other than “Christian”. This compares with 11.0% across the whole of England.

While the North East had an older age profile than the remaining regions of England, it also saw a larger increase in the percentage of the population who reported “No religion” (16.6 percentage points, compared with the overall increase of 11.9 percentage points across England). This increase in “No religion” in an older regional population contrasts with the younger age profile of those reporting “No religion” among the overall population of England and Wales (see [Section 6](#)).

7 . Age and sex insights from the detailed religion classification

The groups shown so far all correspond to the tick-box responses for the religion question. A person could also identify their religion through the "Any other religion, write in" response option. In 2021, 404,927 people (0.7% of the overall population of England and Wales) wrote in a response that did not map to any of the tick-box options.

This write-in functionality meant we can produce a detailed classification providing insights for 57 groups. Read about how write-in responses are included in the detailed classification for the ethnic group, national identity, language and religion questions in our [How am I represented in Census 2021 data?](#) blog.

Greater variation in average age across “write-in” responses when compared with tick-box responses

Figure 11: The average age of “write-in” groups ranged from 27 to 61 years

Median ages of the detailed religion classification “write-in” groups, England and Wales, 2021

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Among those who wrote in a religious group, people who described themselves as “Yazidi” (413 people) had the youngest average (median) age, at 27 years. This was 13 years younger than the median age of the overall population of England and Wales (40 years).

People who identified as “Brahma Kumari” had the oldest median age, at 61 years. This is very small group (235), accounting for less than 0.01% of the population. Among the larger religious “write-in” groups, “Spiritualist” (33,134) had the oldest median age, 54 years, which was 14 years older than the overall population.

Among those who wrote in a non-religious group, the “Agnostic” group (32,114 people) had the lowest median age, 31 years, in contrast to 58 years for “Free thinkers”. While “Free thinkers” had the highest median age, there were only 305 people who identified this way, accounting for less than 0.01% of the population. The next highest median age was 56 years for “Humanist” (10,246 people).

The percentages of males and females within the “write-in” groups varied widely

The percentages of females and males within the “write-in” groups showed greater variation than across the tick-box responses. Notably, those who identified as “Pagan” were 62.0% female and 38.0% male, compared with the overall population, which is 51.0% female and 49.0% male. Among the non-religious groups, those who identified as “Atheist” were 30.8% female and 69.2% male.

Age and sex profiles from the religion detailed classification

Choose from the following list to find out more about the age and sex of people in “write-in” groups.

Figure 12: The age-sex composition of “write-in” groups varies greatly

Population pyramids from the religion detailed classification, England and Wales, 2021

Notes:

1. People aged 85 years and over have been grouped together to protect the confidentiality of individuals' data.
2. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest 5, and counts under 10 are not included.
3. Percentages have been calculated out of the overall population of this religious group, using rounded data.
4. Some groups had too few people to be included. Get information on the remaining 29 groups in the accompanying dataset.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

The age-sex profiles of the larger religious “write-in” groups influenced the composition of the high-level “Other religion” group (348,334) (see [Section 5](#)). For example, the age-sex profile of those who described themselves as “Pagan” (73,733), the largest of these groups, shows a higher percentage of females than males and a higher percentage of people of working age (16 to 64 years), as does the high-level “Other religion” group. This can mask the age-sex profiles of smaller groups, such as “Alevi” (25,672) or “Jain” (24,991); the “Jain” age-sex profile, for example, is much closer to the overall population of England and Wales.

8 . Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021 data

[Religion by age and sex in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 30 January 2023

Census 2021 data: religion, by age, sex, and age and sex, national to local authority.

[Detailed religion by age and sex in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 30 January 2023

Census 2021 data: religion, detailed (57), by age, sex, and age and sex.

9 . Future publications

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

10 . Glossary

Religion

The religion people connect or identify with (their religious affiliation), whether or not they practise or have belief in it.

This question was voluntary, and the variable includes people who answered the question, including “No religion”, alongside those who chose not to answer this question.

This variable classifies responses into the eight tick-box response options. Write-in responses are classified by their “parent” religious affiliation, including “No religion”, where applicable.

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.

Median age

The median age is the middle value when all the ages are arranged in order from youngest to oldest. Ages used are the age at last birthday, at 21 March 2021 (in whole years).

11 . Data sources and quality

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](#).

Religion question

To see the religion question on the household, individual and Welsh questionnaires, visit our [Census 2021 paper questionnaires page](#).

Religious groups in the detailed religion classification

The counts for religious groups identified in our [Religion \(detailed\) in England and Wales](#) dataset are a representation of those who chose to write in their religion. Some people may have chosen to describe a denomination of one of the tick-box responses (for example, Catholic as a denomination of Christian or Orthodox as a denomination of Jewish) through the "Any other religion" write-in response option.

2011 Religion data

In 2011, an error in the processing of census data led to the number of usual residents in the “Religion not stated” category being overestimated by a total of 62,000 for the following three local authorities combined: Camden, Islington, and Tower Hamlets.

In February 2015, we published corrected figures for estimates based on the tick-box classification. However, it could not be corrected for the detailed religion classification because the processing and relationships with other output variables are so complex.

For this reason, only apply comparisons for these three local authorities to the tick-box classification, using the corrected figures set out in our [2011 Census products: Issues and corrections notice](#).

For this publication, where corrected figures for the tick-box classification from the 2011 Census are available, they have been used. Where they are not (for single year of age by sex), we have used data from the [CT0291_2011](#) commissioned table.

Quality

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021, more generally, can be found in the [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion](#).

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

12 . Related links

[Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion: Census 2021 in England and Wales](#)

Topic summary | Released 29 November 2022

Data and supporting information about ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion from Census 2021 in England and Wales. These publications are part of the topic summaries and will include: datasets, statistical bulletins and supporting information. It includes univariate data (one variable only) down to Output Area (OA) level, where possible. Multivariate data (more than one variable) will be released in early 2023.

[Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 29 November 2022

Quality information affecting ethnic group, national identity, language and religion data from Census 2021 in England and Wales to help users correctly interpret them.

[Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion variables Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Last updated 5 December 2022

Variables used in Census 2021 data, includes languages, national identity, ethnic group, multiple religions in household and main language.

[Population estimates by ethnic group and religion, England and Wales: 2019](#)

Article | Released 16 December 2021

Experimental statistics of population by ethnic group and religion by age and sex at the national and regional level for England and Wales.

[Ethnic group by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 23 January 2023

Information from Census 2021 on the sex and age characteristics of ethnic groups and how this has changed since 2011 in England and Wales.

[Ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Bulletin | Released 29 November 2022

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about ethnic group, national identity, language, and religion in Wales.

13 . Cite this article

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