

Article

Living arrangements of UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: Census 2021

Analysis of UK armed forces veteran population data from Census 2021, covering communal establishment and household characteristics, household composition and family status.

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1 . Main points

- Of the just over 1.85 million UK armed forces veterans in England and Wales, 36,200 were residents of communal establishments (excluding owners, employees or their relatives); after adjusting the data to account for differences in age, sex and region between the veteran and non-veteran population, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans were residents of communal establishments (1.95% compared with 3.13%).
- Of the 340,355 care home residents, 7.79% were veterans; among all usual residents, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans lived in care homes (1.43% compared with 2.65%), after adjustments.
- Of the 66,645 residents of prisons, detention centres and approved bail and probation premises, 4.86% were veterans; among all usual residents a larger proportion of veterans than non-veterans were recorded in this type of establishment (0.17% compared with 0.13%), after adjustments.
- A higher proportion of the household veteran population (74.68%) than household non-veteran population (64.54%) owned their accommodation outright or with a mortgage; after adjustments, the percentage of veterans in this category was slightly lower than for non-veterans (74.68% compared with 75.53%).
- A smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans lived in a household that was either not self-contained, overcrowded or had no central heating, after adjustments; the opposite was true for those identifying within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" and "Other" ethnic groups.
- Among spouses and partners living with veterans, 9.01% were veterans themselves; among children and stepchildren aged 16 years and over living with veterans, 2.90% were veterans themselves.

2 . Veterans and non-veterans

People who have previously served in the regular or reserve UK armed forces are often known as veterans. In this article we refer to usual residents aged 16 years and over who have served in the UK armed forces as the veteran population. The non-veteran population in this article refers to usual residents in England and Wales aged 16 years and over who have not previously served or are still currently serving in the UK armed forces.

We have not directly measured uncertainty of the estimates as part of this analysis. We would expect uncertainty to be small given the nature of census and [associated published confidence intervals](#) for Census 2021. However, some caution is advised in inferring genuine differences in estimates based on small variations in proportions. Unless otherwise stated, patterns for both England and Wales are similar to that for England and Wales together, as can be seen in our [accompanying datasets](#).

Statistical adjustments

Information about the characteristics of UK armed forces veterans is important for government, local authorities, the NHS and organisations in the voluntary sector that provide services for veterans. However, as outlined in [Characteristics of UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), the veteran population differed substantially to the non-veteran population in relation to age, sex and where they lived. These factors interact with other lifestyle factors. For example, age can be strongly related to whether someone lives in a care home, attends an education establishment, or has dependent children.

It is important to be aware of these differences but also to understand when they are not attributable to the status of having previously served in the UK armed forces and can be explained by the unique structure of the veteran population.

We provide adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, which show what, if any, difference would exist between veterans and non-veterans if the two populations had the same age, sex and regional distribution. In general, adjusted estimates should be used for comparison purposes. Read about our adjusted estimates and the [differing structure of the UK armed forces veterans and non-veteran population](#).

3 . Veterans living in communal establishments

In England and Wales, 22.21% of communal establishments housed at least one UK armed forces veteran (22.35% in England and 20.29% in Wales). Of the 10,295 communal establishments that housed at least one veteran, 9,655 were in England and 640 were in Wales. In England and Wales, 14.36% of communal establishments housed two or more veterans.

Nearly half (46.50%) of the 15,765 communal establishments classed as care homes in England and Wales housed at least one veteran. Nearly three-quarters (72.22%) of the 180 establishments classed as prisons, detention centres or approved bail and probation premises housed at least one veteran. The percentage of hostels and temporary shelters for the homeless that at least one veteran stayed at was 11.71%.

Comparing veterans and non-veterans by whether they lived in a communal establishment.

Figure 1: A larger proportion of younger veterans and smaller proportion of older veterans lived in a communal establishment, compared with non-veterans of the same age

Percentage of UK armed forces veterans and non-veterans that lived in a communal establishment by age, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Veterans aged 80 years and over, particularly males, were less likely than non-veterans of the same age to be living in a communal establishment. Veterans aged 29 years or younger were more likely to live in a communal establishment, particularly educational establishments. These differences remained after adjustments.

A higher proportion of female UK armed forces veterans (3.02%) lived in a communal establishment, compared with males (1.82%). The respective figures for the non-veteran population were similar for both sexes (2.04% and 2.12%).

Figure 2: After adjustment, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans lived in a communal establishment

Percentage of UK armed forces veterans and non-veterans that lived in a communal establishment, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, usual residents aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Not everyone living in a communal establishment was a resident. Staff, owners and their family members or partners made up 1.58% of veterans living in communal establishments in England and Wales. The remainder were residents (residents or temporary residents with no usual address). There was a similar distribution for non-veterans living in communal establishments.

When we considered residents only aged 16 years and over, non-veterans were still more likely to live in a communal establishment than veterans (residents comprised 1.95% of the UK armed forces veteran population and 2.04% of the non-veteran population). When we adjusted the data to show what, if any, difference would exist between veterans and non-veterans if both groups had the same age, sex and regional profiles, this difference increased (1.95% of veterans compared with 3.13% of non-veterans).

Data on the proportion of veterans and non-veterans living in communal establishments by sex, age and high-level ethnic group can be found in our [accompanying dataset](#). Data at lower-level geographies where feasible can be found in [Create a custom dataset](#).

Residents in communal establishments by type of establishment

The remaining analysis on usual residents that live in communal establishments only includes those who are residents aged 16 years and over and excludes staff or owners of communal establishments and their families.

For the purposes of this analysis, we have grouped communal establishment types as:

- care homes, with and without nursing
- prisons, detention centres and approved bail and probation premises
- hostel or temporary shelters for the homeless
- all other communal establishment types
- not stated

Not everyone detained or serving a prison sentence will be counted as a resident of the communal establishment. Census 2021 only included those awaiting sentence or those sentenced to 12-months or more at these establishments (or those with no other address or person able to complete the census at their other address). These data will also not include those detained in other establishments such as secure medical facilities. Read our [advice for people staying in a prison, probation unit, secure unit, immigration centre or young offender institution](#).

The estimates of those staying in a hostel or temporary shelter for the homeless are not intended as a measure of the homeless population. People staying at these establishments represent a sub-group of people experiencing homelessness only. Read our [Housing quality information for Census 2021 methodology](#) for more information about measuring homelessness in the context of a pandemic.

We provide a more detailed breakdown of communal establishment type in our [accompanying dataset](#).

Veteran communal establishment population and establishment type

Figure 3: Most UK armed forces veterans that were residents in communal establishments lived in care homes

Percentage of the communal establishment resident population aged 16 years and over that were UK armed forces veterans, by establishment type, by country, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Of the 340,355 care home residents in England and Wales, 7.79% were veterans. Of the 66,645 residents in prisons, approved bail and probation premises, 4.86% were veterans (this was slightly higher for Wales at 6.30%). Of the 13,595 residents counted at hostels or temporary shelters for the homeless, 1.88% were veterans. This compares with 3.81% of the usual resident population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales that were veterans.

Veterans and non-veterans by whether they were residents in selected types of communal establishments.

In England and Wales, among all usual residents aged 16 years and over, 1.43% of those that were veterans were recorded as residents in care homes, compared with 0.67% of the non-veteran population. However, tendency to be resident in a care home is associated with both age and sex. After adjustments to show what difference, if any, would exist if non-veterans had the same age, sex and regional profile as veterans, the proportion of veterans resident in care homes was smaller than for non-veterans (1.43 % compared with 2.65%). This pattern was similar in England and Wales but less pronounced in Wales (1.24% compared with 2.12%). Across England and Wales this pattern was true for those aged 80 years and over and those aged under 69 years, but the opposite was true for those aged 70 to 79 years.

In England and Wales, a small number of the usual resident population were recorded at a hostel or temporary shelter for the homeless. Many of those experiencing homelessness will have been counted elsewhere. Among this group, numbers were similar for veterans and non-veterans (0.01% compared with 0.02%), after adjustment. There was no difference in Wales (0.02% for both veterans and non-veterans).

Although the percentages of veterans and non-veterans recorded in prisons in England and Wales were small (0.17% and 0.14%, respectively), there were some differences between the veteran and non-veteran populations that remained, after adjustment. These differences were larger for Wales, which contains one of the largest men's prisons in the UK that also houses detainees from England.

Figure 4: After adjustment, a larger proportion of veterans than non-veterans were residents in prisons, detention centres or approved bail and probation premises among the usual resident population

All usual residents aged 16 years and over by whether they have previously served in the UK armed forces and whether they are residents in prisons, detention centres and approved premises for bail and probation, by country, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

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After adjustments, a larger percentage of veterans than non-veterans aged between 25 and 74 years were recorded as residents in a prison and the largest differences were among those aged 25 to 29 years (0.67% compared with 0.49%) and 35 to 39 years (0.55% compared with 0.43%).

The UK armed forces veteran population that are resident in communal establishments is relatively small (36,200), so analysis of resident characteristics by every type of communal establishment was not feasible. Data by age groups are available in our [accompanying dataset](#).

Types of establishments veterans and non-veterans from the communal establishment population were recorded in.

Veterans were less likely to be residents in communal establishments than non-veterans after adjustments. Among those that were residents of these establishments, veterans and non-veterans differed in the types of establishments they were resident in. Non-veterans were younger and most likely to live in an educational establishment, veterans were older and most likely to reside in care homes. Adjusted estimates at the communal establishment population level account for some of these differences by assuming the same age, sex and regional profile for non-veterans as for veterans.

Figure 5: After adjustment, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans were residents in care homes and a larger proportion were residents in prisons, detention centres or approved bail and probation premises among the communal establishment population

Communal establishment residents aged 16 years and over by establishment management type, previous service in the UK armed forces and country, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The percentage of communal establishment residents within care homes was higher among veterans (73.28%) than non-veterans (32.95%), but after adjustment it was lower (73.28% and 76.56% respectively). This reflects our finding that veterans in the usual resident population are less likely to be residents in a care home than non-veterans after adjustments.

Veterans in the communal establishment population were less likely to have been counted as residents in hostels or temporary shelters for the homeless than non-veterans (0.70% or 255 and 1.40% or 13,340 respectively). This difference decreased (0.70% for veterans and 0.79% for non-veterans) after adjustments, which suggests that if these groups had a similar age, sex and regional profile, both groups would have a similar tendency to be residents in this type of setting.

Reflecting our findings showing a larger proportion of veterans than non-veterans were residents in prisons, detention centres or approved bail and probation premises, 8.95% (3,240) of the communal establishment veteran population were residents in these settings. This compared with 6.66% of the communal establishment non-veteran population, or with 5.77% of that population after adjustment. Data for England are similar, but these differences are larger for Wales (12.78% for veterans, compared with 7.43% for non-veterans, or 7.99% after adjustments).

4 . Veterans living in households by household characteristics

This analysis includes all usual residents aged 16 years and over that lived in households. It looks at the type of home they lived in, whether it was owned or rented, and whether the household was classified as deprived on the census housing dimension of deprivation. A household is classified as deprived if its accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating. The data are presented by country. You can explore the data at lower-level geographies creating a [custom dataset](#).

Of the 47,559,770 usual residents aged 16 years and over living in households, 3.82% (1,816,295) had previously served in the UK armed forces. We have supplied adjusted estimates for our non-veteran household population which show any differences that would exist between veterans and non-veterans if the two groups had a similar age, sex and regional distribution.

The majority of people in the veteran (86.23%) and non-veteran (82.21%) household populations lived in houses of any type. Almost one-third of veterans lived in detached houses (31.24%), compared with one-quarter of non-veterans (25.18%). However, after adjustment, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans lived in this type of accommodation (31.24% compared with 33.34%). The proportions of both populations who lived in caravans was small; veterans were more likely to live in a caravan than non-veterans (0.67% compared with 0.33%), but similar after adjustment (0.67% compared with 0.55%).

Figure 6: UK armed forces veterans differed to non-veterans in relation to accommodation type, after adjustments these differences were much smaller

Percentage of the UK armed forces veteran and non-veteran household population by accommodation type, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

Download the data

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Overall, a higher proportion of the veteran than non-veteran population (74.68% compared with 64.54%) owned their accommodation outright or with a mortgage, though after adjustment the percentage of veterans in this category was slightly lower than for non-veterans (74.68% compared with 75.53%).

Figure 7: UK armed forces veterans differed to non-veterans in relation to home ownership, after adjustments these differences were much smaller

Percentage of the UK armed forces veteran and non-veteran household population by tenure of the household they lived in, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Analysis of UK armed forces veteran status by age, sex and ethnicity, as well as accommodation type, ownership and type of landlord, is available in our [accompanying dataset](#).

Housing deprivation

Figure 8: A smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans overall lived in a deprived household on the census housing dimension of deprivation, but this varied by high-level ethnic group

Percentage of UK armed forces veteran and non-veteran household populations that lived in a household classed as deprived on the census housing dimension of deprivation, by high-level ethnic group, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Overall, a smaller proportion of UK armed forces veterans than non-veterans lived in housing classed as deprived on the census housing deprivation dimension (4.44% compared with 10.54%, or 5.69% after adjustments). However, after adjustments, veterans that identified within the high-level “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh” and “Other” ethnic group categories were more likely than their non-veteran counterparts to live in a household classed as deprived on the housing dimension.

Analysis of UK armed forces veteran status by age, sex and ethnicity, as well as by household deprivation status, is available in our [accompanying dataset](#) along with adjusted estimates.

5 . Veterans by household and family composition

This analysis looks at all usual residents aged 16 years and over who live in a household and the composition of those households and their residents. Analysis focuses on veteran status (any previous service in the UK armed forces) at country level, however lower-level geographies and types of armed forces services can be explored by creating a [custom dataset](#).

Most veterans (92.24%) were the only veteran in the household they lived in, and 7.45% were one of two veterans in a household. The remaining 0.31% were one of three or more veterans in a household. There were large differences between veterans and non-veterans in relation to living arrangements, family status and household composition indicators. We expected these differences on account of the age profile of veterans compared with non-veterans. However, after adjusting to understand whether any differences remained if the two populations had the same age, sex and regional distribution, both populations were similar.

Veterans were more likely to live in a single-person household than non-veterans (23.91% compared with 15.40%) but this difference decreased after adjustments (23.91% compared with 22.32%). Veterans were also much less likely to have children living with them until after adjustments (25.63% compared with 35.47% for non-veterans, or 26.61% after adjustments).

Figure 9: After adjustment, veterans and non-veterans were similar in relation to their living arrangements, household composition and family status

Percentage of UK armed forces veterans and non-veterans by selected categories of living arrangements, family status, child family status and household size, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Notes:

1. Data represent selected categories from four different variables, and categories are not mutually exclusive of each other. Table 2d of our [accompanying dataset](#) provides full categories for all variables.

6 . Spouses, partners, children and stepchildren that lived with veterans

This analysis includes usual residents that lived with UK armed forces veterans. For the purposes of this analysis, an individual is classed as a spouse or partner to a veteran regardless of whether they are also a veteran themselves. Where both parties in the relationship had previously served, both are also classed as spouses.

There were 1,205,410 spouses or partners of veterans living in England and Wales (1,131,280 in England and 74,130 in Wales). Identified spouses and partners were predominantly female (88.93%), and 46.12% were aged 65 years or over.

There were 752,125 children or stepchildren of veterans living in England and Wales (702,855 in England and 49,270 in Wales); 45.02% were female and 54.98% were male.

Of all the children and stepchildren identified, 49.23% were aged 15 years or under, and 26.19% were aged 16 to 24 years. The remaining 24.58% were aged 25 years or over. The majority (58.50%) were dependent children. Most children or stepchildren aged between 25 to 59 years were male.

Figure 10: Spouses or partners of UK armed forces veterans were predominantly female and aged 50 years and over

Percentage of spouses or partners living with UK armed forces veterans by spouse or partner sex and age groups, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Figure 11: Children and stepchildren of, and living with, UK armed forces veterans aged 25 to 59 were more likely to be male than female

Percentage of children and stepchildren of, and living with, UK armed forces veterans by child or stepchild sex and age groups, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Ethnic group

Among spouses and partners of veterans, 95.95% identified within the “White” high-level ethnic group. A further 2.00% identified within the high-level “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh” category, with similar percentages identifying within “Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups”, and “Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African” (0.73% and 0.76% respectively). The remaining 0.55% identified within the high-level “Other ethnic group” category.

Children and stepchildren identified within a more diverse range of high-level ethnic groups. Some 91.05% identified within the “White” high-level ethnic group. A further 3.40% identified within the high-level “Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups”, with 3.10% identifying within the high-level “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh” category. Smaller percentages of children and stepchildren identified within the “Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African” and “Other ethnic group” categories (1.69% and 0.76% respectively).

Previous service in the UK armed forces among spouses, partners, children and stepchildren living with veterans

Figure 12: Spouses and partners of all ages living with UK armed forces veterans were more likely to be veterans than the usually resident population in England and Wales

Percentage of all usual residents and of spouses, partners, children and stepchildren of, and living with, UK armed forces veterans by their age group and whether they have also previously served in the UK armed forces, England and Wales, Census 2021

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Among all spouses and partners identified, 9.01% were veterans themselves (8.99% in England and 9.26% in Wales). Among children and stepchildren identified that were aged 16 years or over, 2.90% were UK armed forces veterans themselves (2.89% in England and 3.03% in Wales), compared with 3.81% of the usual resident population aged 16 years and over.

This pattern for spouses is true for all age groups. Children and stepchildren of UK armed forces veterans were more likely to be a veteran than the whole usual resident population if they were aged 64 years or younger, but this was not reflected in older age groups who are generally less likely to have living parents.

7 . Future publications

Read more about our [UK armed forces veterans analysis plans](#) and the [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

8 . UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: data

[Where UK armed forces veterans lived: usual residents, aged 16 years and over by whether they have previously served in the UK armed forces, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 16 June 2023

Where UK armed forces veterans lived, communal establishment and household characteristics, with adjusted estimates for the non-veteran population, Census 2021.

[Who UK armed forces veterans lived with: \[household residents by household composition and family status, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 16 June 2023

Who UK armed forces veterans lived with, including household residents by household composition and family status from Census 2021.

[Create a custom dataset](#)

Interactive content | Released 28 March 2023

Flexible datasets where you can choose and change the area type, coverage and variables for Census 2021 data, and create custom datasets yourself.

9 . Glossary

Accommodation type

The type of building or structure used by or available to an individual or household. These could include: a whole house or bungalow (detached, semi-detached, or terraced), a flat, maisonette or apartment, or a temporary or mobile structure such as a caravan.

Child family status

Identifies whether a person is living in a family with a child in it and defines the type of family based on the relationship of the parent couple. Categories include:

- in a household and has children (in a lone parent family, married couple family, civil partnership family or cohabiting couple family)
- in a household and does not have children or is a child within a family
- living in a communal establishment

Communal establishment

A managed communal establishment is a place that provides managed full-time or part-time supervision of residential accommodation.

Examples include university halls of residence, care homes, hospitals and hospices, hotels, guest houses and bed and breakfasts, prisons and other secure facilities, Single Living Accommodation (SLA) in military bases, staff accommodation and religious establishments.

A usual resident of a communal establishment is someone who lives there, someone who works and lives there, or someone who is a family member of staff that works and lives there.

Communal establishment types

On the census, managers were asked what type of communal establishment they managed, and a full list of response options are available in our [Census 2021 dictionary](#).

For the purposes of this analysis, we have grouped communal establishment types as:

- care homes, with and without nursing
- prisons, detention centres and approved bail and probation premises
- hostel or temporary shelters for the homeless
- all other communal establishment types
- not stated

Care homes in this analysis included the following response categories:

- Medical and care establishment: Local Authority: Care home with nursing
- Medical and care establishment: Local Authority: Care home without nursing
- Medical and care establishment: Other: Care home with nursing
- Medical and care establishment: Other: Care home without nursing

Prisons, detention centres and approved hostels for bail and probation included:

- Other establishment: Prison service
- Other establishment: Approved premises (probation or bail hostel)
- Other establishment: Detention centres and other detention

Hostel or temporary shelter for the homeless included only one response category:

- Other establishment: Hostel or temporary shelter for the homeless

"Not stated" was kept as a separate category.

"All other communal establishment types" included [all other categories from the Census 2021 dictionary](#).

Ethnic group and high-level ethnic group

These terms refer to the ethnic group that the person completing the census feels they belong to. This could be based on their culture, family background, identity or physical appearance.

Respondents could choose 1 out of 19 tick-box response categories, including write-in response options.

High-level ethnic group refers to the first stage of the two-stage ethnic group question.

High-level groups refer to the first stage where the respondent identifies through one of the following options:

- "Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh"
- "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African"
- "Mixed or Multiple"
- "White"
- "Other ethnic group"

Family

A family is a group of people who are either:

- a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children (the children do not need to belong to both members of the couple)
- a lone parent with children
- a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with grandchildren, but where the parents of those grandchildren are not present
- a single or couple grandparent with grandchildren, but where the parents of those grandchildren are not present

Family status

Indicates whether a person is considered to be in a family or not, and the place a person holds within that family. Categories included:

- in a household: not in a family
- in a household: in a couple family (as a member of the couple or a dependent or non-dependent child of one or both members of the couple)
- in a household: in a lone parent family (as a parent or a dependent or non-dependent child of the parent)
- living in a communal establishment

Household

A household is defined as one person living alone or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and a living room or dining area. This includes all sheltered accommodation units in an establishment and all people living in caravans on any type of site that is their usual residence.

A household must contain at least one person whose place of usual residence is at the address. A group of short-term residents living together is not classified as a household, and neither is a group of people at an address where only visitors are staying.

Housing deprivation

The census dimension of housing deprivation is one of four dimensions of deprivation used to classify the deprivation status of households. A household is classified as deprived on the housing dimension if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

Living arrangements

This classification combines responses to the Census 2021 question on marital and civil partnership status with information about whether or not a person is living in a couple. This topic is only applicable to people in households.

Living arrangements differ from marital and civil partnership status because cohabiting takes priority over other categories. For example, if a person is divorced and cohabiting, then in results for living arrangements they are classified as cohabiting.

Occupancy rating for bedrooms

Whether a household's accommodation is overcrowded, ideally occupied or under-occupied. This is calculated by comparing the number of bedrooms the household requires to the number of available bedrooms.

The number of bedrooms the household requires is calculated according to the Bedroom Standard, where the following should have their own bedroom: adult couple, any remaining adult aged 21 years or over, two males or two females aged 20 years or under, two children aged 9 years or under regardless of sex, any remaining child.

An occupancy rating of:

- -1 or less implies that a household's accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required (overcrowded)
- +1 or more implies that a household's accommodation has more bedrooms than required (under-occupied)
- 0 suggests that a household's accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms

Tenure

Whether a household owns or rents the accommodation that it occupies.

Owner-occupied accommodation can be owned outright where the household owns all of the accommodation, owned with a mortgage or loan, and part-owned on a shared ownership scheme.

Rented accommodation can be private rented through a private landlord or letting agent, and social rented through a local council or housing association.

UK armed forces veteran

People who have previously served in the UK armed forces. This includes those who have served for at least one day in HM's Armed Forces, either regular or reserves, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations. It does not include those who have left and since re-entered the regular or reserve UK armed forces, those who have only served in foreign armed forces, or those who have served in the UK armed forces and are currently living outside of England and Wales.

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.

For a full glossary of terms, please see [Census 2021 dictionary](#).

10 . Data sources and quality

Census 2021 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%. Item non-response rates can also be found in our [Measures showing the quality of Census 2021 estimates methodology](#). 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.

We have not directly measured uncertainty of the estimates as part of this analysis. We would expect uncertainty to be small given the nature of census and [associated published confidence intervals](#) for Census 2021. However, some caution is advised in inferring genuine differences in estimates based on small variations in proportions.

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. All counts in this article have been rounded to the nearest five.

Census 2021 asked the question about previous service in the UK armed forces for the first time. [Previously published estimates in the Ministry of Defence's Census 2011: Working age UK armed forces veterans residing in England and Wales publication](#) relate to the working age veteran population and are not directly comparable. As expected and in line with mortality data, Census 2021 estimates for UK armed forces veterans in older age groups are lower than estimates derived in 2017 using the [Annual Population Survey](#).

We are working to understand how differences in the UK censuses affect our ability to produce harmonised statistics on UK armed forces veterans across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. A question relating to previous service in the UK armed forces was asked on the 2022 Census in Scotland. The census in Northern Ireland did not ask a question about previous service in the UK armed forces, but Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency are exploring administrative sources to understand their veteran population. An estimate for Great Britain may be produced with the relevant caveats.

Quality

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally are provided in our [Quality and methodology information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for [UK armed forces veterans](#).

Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#) and in our [Census Quality Survey agreement rates, England and Wales: Census 2021 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\) dataset](#).

11 . Related links

[Characteristics of UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 3 February 2023

Census 2021 data about the characteristics of UK armed forces veterans and comparison to the non-veteran population.

[UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: Census 2021.](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 10 November 2022

UK armed forces veteran population who have either previously served in the regular forces, reserve forces or both, Census 2021 data.

[UK armed forces veterans in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 10 November 2022

Census 2021 data about UK Armed Forces veterans in Wales.

[UK armed forces veterans quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 10 November 2022

A summary of the quality assurance processes used to generate the census estimates, as well as quality considerations to be aware of when interpreting the data.

[Armed forces community \(veterans\) question development for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 27 January 2021

Information on how we researched, developed, and tested the Census 2021 question on the armed forces veteran community, including extra detail on the definitions of key terms.

[Harmonised standard for previous UK armed forces service](#)

Methodology | Released 16 March 2022

Detail on how the measurement of previous UK armed forces service has been made more comparable, consistent, and coherent.

12 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 16 June 2023, ONS website, article, [Living arrangements of UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)