

Article

Somali populations, England and Wales: Census 2021

Exploring the education, employment, health, housing, language and country of birth of residents who identified as Somali in England and Wales using Census 2021 data.

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1 . Main points

- In Census 2021, 176,645 people identified themselves as Somali (0.3% of the usual resident population of England and Wales).
- Those who identified as Somali had a younger age profile; 48.2% were aged under 21 years, compared with 24.2% of the England and Wales population.
- Of those who identified as Somali, 66.2% reported having "Very good health" compared with 48.4% of the England and Wales population; this is likely because of the younger age profile of those who identified as Somali.
- Of those who identified as Somali, 21.7% were students, compared with 7.3% of the England and Wales population; this is likely because of the younger age profile of those who identified as Somali.
- Of those who identified as Somali, 72.0% lived in social rented housing; this is over four times higher than the percentage of the England and Wales population (16.6%).
- Of those who identified as Somali, 58.8% were living in overcrowded accommodation; this is nearly eight times higher than the percentage of the England and Wales population (8.4%).

In this article we refer to people who identified as Somali as those who stated their ethnic group, national identity, or both as Somali on Census 2021. This could have been through one of the write-in responses to the ethnic group or national identity questions

2 . People who identified as Somali in Census 2021

In Census 2021, 176,645 usual residents in England and Wales identified their ethnic group, national identity, or both as Somali (0.3% of the population). This has increased by 78.5% from 2011 Census, when the number of usual residents in England and Wales who identified their ethnic group, national identity or both as Somali was 98,937 (0.2% of the population).

The number of usual residents in England and Wales who identified their ethnic group as Somali increased by 230% from 2011 Census to Census 2021. This was an increase from 45,475 (0.1% of usual residents) in 2011 to 150,090 (0.3% of usual residents) in 2021. In Census 2021 an African write-in box was included on the ethnic group question and included search-as-you-type functionality in the online questionnaire that presented a drop-down list of suggestions (including Somali) based on the text being typed.

The number of people who identified their national identity as Somali decreased by 82.7%; this was a decrease from 42,555 (0.1% of usual residents) in 2011 to 7,360 (0.01% of usual residents) in 2021.

The number of people who identified both their ethnic group and national identity as Somali increased by 76%; this was an increase from 10,907 (0.02%) in 2011 to 19,195 (0.03% of usual residents) in 2021.

Figure 1: Most people who identified as Somali did so through the ethnic group question

Percentage of those who identified as Somali through ethnic group, national identity or both, England and Wales, Census 2021

Notes:

1. Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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The doughnut chart in Figure 1 shows that 85.0% of people identified as Somali through the ethnic group question, 4.2% through national identity, and 10.9% through both.

Most of those who identified as Somali lived in England, with 174,410 residents in England identifying as Somali (0.3% of the population), compared with 2,235 people in Wales (0.1% of the population).

Figure 2: Most people who identified as Somali were clustered in London

Percentage of those who identified as Somali in each Lower Tier Local Authority (LTLA), England and Wales, Census 2021

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The map in Figure 2 shows that those who identified as Somali were clustered around London and other large cities, with 62.4% clustered in London.

Out of the 10 Lower Tier Local Authorities (LTLA) with the largest percentages of individuals who identified as Somali, 7 were in London (6.6% of those who identified as Somali lived in Brent).

Outside of London, LTLAs with higher percentages of residents who identified as Somali included Birmingham (11.3%), Bristol (4.4%), Manchester (4.0%) and Leicester (3.8%). In Wales, the highest percentages of residents who identified as Somali were in Cardiff (1.0%) and Newport (0.2%).

3 . Sex and age

Sex

There were more females who identified as Somali in England and Wales (53.9%) compared with males (46.1%). This difference was larger than in the overall population of England and Wales (51.0% female and 49.0% male).

Age

Figure 3: People who identified as Somali were generally younger when compared with the overall population of England and Wales

Percentage of people who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales at each year of age split by sex, England and Wales, Census 2021

Notes:

1. Those who were aged 100 years and over have been grouped together because of statistical disclosure.
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 each group, using rounded data.

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The population pyramid in Figure 3 shows that those who identified as Somali were younger than the overall population of England and Wales. Somali residents aged under 21 years accounted for nearly half (48.2%) of the population, compared with 24.2% of the England and Wales population. Somali residents aged under 11 years accounted for just over a fifth (21.3%) of the population, compared with 12.6% in the England and Wales population. The distribution of those who identified as Somali across age bands was similar across males and females.

4 . Languages

Main language

For main language, we looked at individuals who were aged 4 years and over.

The most common main language for those who identified as Somali was English (English or Welsh in Wales) at 67.8%.

In England and Wales, 61,830 usual residents (0.1%) reported that their main language was Somali. Some 76.5% of these people also identified their ethnic group or national identity (or both) as Somali. Somali was the second most common language for those who identified as Somali, at 28.6%.

Among those who said Somali was their main language:

- 59.6% lived in London
- 61.5% were female (38.5% male)
- 61.9% were aged 30 to 59 years

English language proficiency

For those who identified as Somali in England and Wales, and who reported that they spoke a main language other than English (English or Welsh in Wales):

- 74.0% said they could speak English "Very well" or "Well"
- 21.8% said they "Cannot speak English well"
- 4.2% said they "Cannot speak English"

Females who identified as Somali and who reported they spoke a main language other than English (English or Welsh in Wales) were less likely to say they could speak English "Very well" or "Well" (68.1%), compared with males (83.2%).

Figure 4: People who identified as Somali and said they could not speak English tended to be older

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and reported they spoke a main language other than English (English or Welsh in Wales) in each age group by English language proficiency, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 4 shows that younger Somali residents whose main language was not English were the most likely to say they could speak English “Very well” or “Well”, with the highest percentages among those aged 10 to 24 years (91.3%). Older Somali residents whose main language was not English were the most likely to say they could not speak English, with almost half (49.0%) of responses being from those aged 70 years and over.

5 . Country of birth

For those who identified as Somali, 43.5% were born in England and 43.1% were born in Somalia. Wales was the ninth most common country of birth at 0.5%. In contrast, for the total usual resident population of England and Wales, England was the most common country of birth at 77.3%, followed by Wales at 4.5%.

For those who identified as Somali in Wales, the majority were born in Somalia (55.5%), with the second most popular country of birth being Wales at 32.8% (70.9% for the overall Wales population).

In England and Wales, females who identified as Somali were more likely to have been born in Somalia (46.9%) compared with males (38.8%). Whereas males who identified as Somali were more likely to have been born in England (47.2%) compared with females (40.4%).

Somali individuals born in England tended to be younger, with 83.8% being aged 0 to 19 years. In comparison, Somali residents born in Somalia tended to be older, with 58.0% being aged 30 to 54 years.

6 . Health and disability

Health

Of those who identified as Somali, 66.2% reported having "Very good health", compared with 48.4% of the England and Wales population; this is likely because of the younger age profile of those who identified as Somali.

Figure 5: People who identified as Somali more commonly reported “Bad” or “Very bad” health at older ages compared with the population of England and Wales

Percentage of those who identified as Somali in each age group by reported health category, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 5 shows that those aged 10 to 44 years who identified as Somali in England and Wales were slightly more likely to report having "Very good health or good health" (94.1%), compared with the population of England and Wales in the same age bracket (91.0%). Also, for those aged 60 to 85 years and over who identified as Somali, there was a higher report of "Bad or very bad health" (22.4%), compared with the same age bracket for the population of England and Wales (12.0%).

Disability

Fewer residents who identified as Somali reported being disabled (9%), compared with England and Wales overall (17.5%); this is likely because of the younger age profile of those who identified as Somali, as disability rates tend to increase with age. The rates of disability between those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales were similar in older ages, except for those aged 60 to 74 years. Those aged 60 to 74 years who identified as Somali were more likely to be disabled (36.1%), compared with the population of England and Wales in the same age bracket (26.8%).

Unpaid care

For unpaid care, we looked at individuals who were aged 5 years and over.

The percentages of the population providing unpaid care were similar for both those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales overall, with 6.2% of those who identified as Somali providing unpaid care, compared with 8.9% of the England and Wales population.

7 . Employment

Employment status

For employment, we looked at individuals who were aged 16 to 64 years. Where we refer to "employed", this means an employee of a company or person.

Figure 6: People who identified as Somali were more likely to be economically inactive or unemployed than the overall population of England and Wales

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales aged 16 to 64 years in each employment status, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 6 shows that, compared with the population of England and Wales, those who identified as Somali were:

- less likely to be employed (34.1%, compared with 59.6% of the England and Wales population) or self-employed (8.5%, compared with 11.3% of the England and Wales population)
- more likely to be unemployed (10.3%, compared with 4.4% of the England and Wales population)
- more likely to be economically inactive (47.1%, compared with 24.7% of the England and Wales population); the most common reason for inactivity was being a student (21.7%, compared with 7.3% of the England and Wales population)

The differences in employment status between those who identified as Somali and the England and Wales population were similar when comparing by sex. However, when looking at reasons for economic inactivity, females who identified as Somali were more likely to report "Looking after home or family" (20.3%) compared with males who identified as Somali (3.1%). This difference was larger than for the overall population of England and Wales (9.7% for females and 1.9% for males).

Those who identified as Somali and said their main language was Somali were more likely to be economically inactive because they were "Looking after home or looking after family" (20.9%), compared with all those who identified as Somali (12.7%); they were also less likely to be economically inactive because they were students (8.8%), compared with all those who identified as Somali (21.7%).

Occupation

Figure 7: The most common occupations held by those who identified as Somali were "Caring, leisure and other service occupations" and "Elementary occupations"

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales aged 16 to 64 years in each occupation type, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 7 shows that the most common occupations held by those who identified as Somali and were employed in England and Wales were "Caring, leisure and other service occupations" (such as teaching assistants and home carers) and "Elementary occupations" (such as postal workers and waiters) at 22.1% of those who identified as Somali for each category. This compares with 9.4% and 10.5%, respectively, for the overall population in England and Wales. In comparison, the most common occupations held by residents of England and Wales were "Professional occupations" (such as doctors and teachers), held by 20.4% of the overall population, compared with 13.3% of those who identified as Somali.

In England and Wales, "Professional occupations" were the most common for both female (22.4%) and male (18.6%) residents. However, among those who identified as Somali, there were differences in the most common occupations between males and females. For females who identified as Somali, "Caring, leisure and other service occupations" were most common at 36.9%, followed by "Elementary occupations" at 18.9%. For males who identified as Somali, the most common occupations were "Process, plant and machine operatives" (such as construction operatives and scaffolders) at 28.2%, and "Elementary occupations" at 25.4%.

Employed Somali individuals who said their main language was Somali were less likely to be in "Professional occupations" (6.6%) compared with all those who identified as Somali (13.3%). They were also more likely to hold "Elementary occupations" (30.2%) and more likely to be in "Process, plant and machine operative" occupations (20.3%), compared with all those who identified as Somali (22.1% and 14.6%, respectively).

8 . Housing

This analysis looks at the percentages of people in households, rather than the percentage of households, and looks at the composition of those households and their residents. There were 174,955 usual residents who identified as Somali living in 43,357 households.

Tenure

Tenure is whether a household rents or owns their accommodation.

Figure 8: The majority of those who identified as Somali lived in social rented accommodation

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales in each tenure category, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 8 shows that people who identified as Somali in England and Wales were most commonly in households living in socially rented accommodation (72.0%), at a level much higher than the overall population (16.6%). The second most common tenure for those who identified as Somali was private rented or living rent free (24.2%), again at a level higher than the overall population (20.7%).

Levels of home ownership were low among those who identified as Somali (1.7% owned with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership, and 2.1% owned outright). In contrast, in England and Wales overall, residents were most likely to be in households that owned their accommodation with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership (35.6%) or owned outright (27.1%).

Accommodation type

Figure 9: Almost half of people who identified as Somali lived in flats, maisonettes or apartments

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales in each accommodation type, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 9 shows that almost half of those who identified as Somali in England and Wales lived in flats, maisonettes or apartments (49.0%), compared with 16.6% in the overall population of England and Wales. Those who identified as Somali were less likely to live in a whole house or bungalow (50.8%), compared with the overall population (83.1%).

Living arrangements

The most common living arrangement of households with occupants who identified as Somali and residents of England and Wales overall was "Single family couple household, with dependent children" (37.7% compared with 31.5%, respectively).

The second most common living arrangement of households with occupants who identified as Somali was "Single family lone parent household" (31.8%). Females who identified as Somali were more likely to be in "Single family lone parent households" (36.6%), compared with males who identified as Somali (26.1%). This sex difference matches the pattern for "Single family lone parent households" in England and Wales overall (14.8% of females, compared with 9.9% of males).

Occupancy rating for bedrooms

The occupancy rating for bedrooms provides a measure of whether accommodation is overcrowded or under-occupied.

Figure 10: Those who identified as Somali were more likely to live in overcrowded accommodation than the population of England and Wales.

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and the overall population of England and Wales by bedroom occupancy rating, England and Wales, Census 2021

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The bar chart in Figure 10 shows that those who identified as Somali in England and Wales were more likely to live in accommodation that was overcrowded (58.7%), compared with the overall population of England and Wales (7.4%).

Unrelated residents in Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)

The percentage of individuals in England and Wales living in a house of multiple occupancy (HMO) was low across both those who identified as Somali and the overall population, though levels were lower among those who identified as Somali (0.7%), compared with the overall population (1.3%).

Homelessness

The percentage of individuals in England and Wales counted at a homeless shelter and who identified as Somali was 0.07%, compared with 0.02% of the England and Wales population. Individuals counted at a homeless shelter are classified under communal establishments and not as a household resident, and do not make up the entire homeless group.

9 . Education

Highest level qualification

In Census 2021, residents aged 16 years and over were asked to record the qualifications they had achieved.

Those who identified as Somali had higher levels of "No qualifications" (26.9%) compared with the England and Wales population (18.2%), and lower levels of "Level 4 qualifications" (23.9%) compared with the England and Wales population (33.8%).

Figure 11: Number of "Level 4" qualifications were similar among those who identified as Somali and the overall population of England and Wales at younger ages

Percentage of those who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales aged 16 years and over in each age category by highest qualification, England and Wales, Census 2021

Download the data

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The bar charts in Figure 11 show that those aged 16 to 29 years who identified as Somali and the population of England and Wales aged 16 to 29 years had similar levels of "Level 4 and above qualifications" (including Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor's degree, or post-graduate qualifications). This was 27.6% for those who identified as Somali, and 30.3% in the England and Wales population.

For those aged 16 to 29 years, the rates of "No Qualifications" were also similar, at 9.9% for those who identified as Somali and 9.8% for England and Wales. A large difference appears when looking at those aged 30 years and above: 40.7% of those who identified as Somali aged 30 years and above had "No Qualifications", compared with 20.4% in the England and Wales population.

Female residents who identified as Somali were more likely to report having "No qualifications" (29.7%), compared with male residents who identified as Somali (23.3%). This difference was larger than for the England and Wales population (19.2% of female residents and 17.1% of male residents).

10 . Somali population data

[Somali populations by age and sex in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 4 October 2023

Somali populations by how they identified as Somali (by ethnic group, national identity, or both) and age and sex breakdowns across different geographical areas.

[Somali populations by language in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 4 October 2023

Somali populations by language and English language proficiency, with age and sex breakdowns across different geographical areas.

[Somali populations by education in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 4 October 2023

Somali populations by highest qualification, with age and sex breakdowns across different geographical areas.

[Somali populations by labour market breakdowns in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 4 October 2023

Somali populations by economic status and occupation, with age and sex breakdowns across different geographical areas.

[Somali populations by housing in England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 4 October 2023

Somali populations by accommodation type, households of multiple occupancy, bedroom occupancy rating and tenure, with age and sex breakdowns across different geographical areas.

For the full list of available datasets, please see our [accompanying dataset page](#).

11 . Glossary

Somali

Recorded by the person completing the census. Respondents could choose to self-identify as Somali through their ethnic group, national identity, or both. To do this, respondents had to identify through a write-in box, which, for the ethnic group question, included search-as-you-type functionality in the online questionnaire, presenting a drop-down list of suggestions based on the text being typed.

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

Ethnic group

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.

National identity

Someone's national identity is a self-determined assessment of their own identity, it could be the country or countries where they feel they belong or think of as home. It is not dependent on ethnic group or citizenship.

Respondents could select more than one national identity.

Sex

This is the sex recorded by the person completing the census. The options were "Female" and "Male".

Age bands

A person's age on Census Day, 21 March 2021, in England and Wales. Infants aged under 1 year are classified as aged 0 years.

Main language

A person's first or preferred language.

Respondents could tick English (or English or Welsh in Wales) or write in another option, including British Sign Language.

English language proficiency

How well people whose main language is not English (English or Welsh in Wales) speak English.

Country of birth

Country of birth is the country in which a person was born. This is different to nationality, which is the country or countries where a person can have a legal status, although they may not reside in that country.

Health

A person's assessment of the general state of their health from very good to very bad. This assessment is not based on a person's health over any specified period of time.

Disability

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

Unpaid care

An unpaid carer may look after, give help or support to anyone who has long-term physical or mental health conditions, illness or problems related to old age.

This does not include any activities as part of paid employment.

This help can be within or outside of the carer's household.

Employment status

People aged 16 years and over are considered economically active if, between 15 March and 21 March 2021, they were:

- in employment (an employee or self-employed)
- unemployed, but looking for work and could start within two weeks
- unemployed, but waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted

It is a measure of whether or not a person was an active participant in the labour market during this period. Economically inactive people are those aged 16 years and over who did not have a job between 15 March to 21 March 2021 and had not looked for work between 22 February to 21 March 2021 or could not start work within two weeks.

The census definition differs from the International Labour Organization definition used on the Labour Force Survey, so estimates are not directly comparable.

Occupation

Classifies what people aged 16 years and over do as their main job. Their job title or details of activities they do in their job and any supervisory or management responsibilities form this classification. This information is used to code responses to an occupation using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020.

It classifies people who were in employment between 15 March and 21 March 2021 by the SOC code that represents their current occupation.

Tenure

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

Owner-occupied accommodation can be:

- owned outright, which is where the household owns all of the accommodation
- owned with a mortgage or loan
- part-owned on a shared ownership scheme

Rented accommodation can be:

- private rented, for example, rented through a private landlord or letting agent
- social rented through a local council or housing association

Accommodation type

The type of building or structure used or available by an individual or household.

This could be:

- the whole house or bungalow
- a flat, maisonette or apartment
- a temporary or mobile structure, such as a caravan

More information about accommodation types

Whole house or bungalow: this property type is not divided into flats or other living accommodation.

Flats (apartments) and maisonettes: an apartment is another word for a flat. A maisonette is a two-storey flat.

Occupancy rating

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

1. adult couple
2. any remaining adult (aged 21 years or over)
3. two males (aged 10 to 20 years)
4. one male (aged 10 to 20 years) and one male (aged 9 years or under), if there are an odd number of males in the household aged 10 to 20 years
5. one male aged 10 to 20 years if there are no males aged 0 to 9 years to pair with him
6. repeat steps 3 to 5 for females
7. two children (aged 9 years or under) regardless of sex
8. any remaining child (aged 9 years or under)

An occupancy rating of:

- negative 1 or less implies that a household's accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required (overcrowded)
- plus 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

House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO)

A dwelling where unrelated tenants rent their home from a private landlord is an HMO if both of the following apply:

- at least three unrelated individuals live there, forming more than one household
- toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities are shared with other tenants

A small HMO is shared by three or four unrelated tenants. A large HMO is shared by five or more unrelated tenants.

Highest level qualification

The highest level of qualification is derived from the question asking people to indicate all qualifications held, or their nearest equivalent.

This may include foreign qualifications where they were matched to the closest UK equivalent.

12 . Data sources and quality

Comparisons with 2011

In both 2011 Census and Census 2021, respondents could choose to use write-in response options to identify their ethnic group or national identity as Somali. In 2021, in response to consultation and respondent research, search-as-you-type functionality was added for these write-in response options in the online questionnaire, which presented a drop-down list of suggestions (including African and Somali) based on the text being typed.

13 . Related links

[Small populations, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 September 2023

Statistics about small population groups, defined by ethnic group, religion, national identity, main language, or country of birth, Census 2021 data.

[Small Population - 2021 Census](#)

Datasets

Small population tables providing census data for usual residents in specific population groups.

[Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion analysis plans](#)

Web page | Last updated 19 July 2023

Web page detailing the analysis we plan to publish on the topics of ethnic group, national identity, language and religion.

[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.

14 . Cite this article

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