

Article

# Sexual orientation: age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021

Sexual orientation by age and sex of usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.



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# 1 . Main points

- The age group most likely to have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (in this article we refer to these groups collectively as LGB+) were those aged 16 to 24 years (6.91%).
- The majority of LGB+ people were aged between 16 and 34 years (57.88%).
- Females were more likely than males to have identified as LGB+ (3.32% compared with 3.00%).
- Males were more likely than females to have identified as gay or lesbian, however females were more likely than males to have identified as bisexual, pansexual, asexual or queer.
- A higher proportion of males (3.02%) in England identified as LGB+ than in Wales (2.65%); the proportion among females, however, was very similar (3.32% for England and 3.33% for Wales).

## 2 . How sexual orientation differed by age

People aged 16 to 24 years (6.91% or 436,000) were the age group most likely to have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (in this article we refer to these groups collectively as LGB+). They were more than twice as likely to have identified as LGB+ than the overall population (3.16% or 1.5 million). The largest sexual orientation group within this age group were the 4.00% (252,000) who identified as bisexual. The proportion of people who identified as LGB+ was highest among the younger age groups (16 to 25 years, then 25 to 34 years). This proportion then decreased with each successive age group.

### Figure 1: Young people were the most likely to have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+)

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who identified as LGB+ by age, England and Wales, 2021

#### Notes:

1. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest five and counts under 10 have been suppressed.
2. Percentages have been calculated using rounded data.

#### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

People aged 16 to 24 years were twice as likely to have identified as bisexual than as gay or lesbian (4.00% compared with 2.11%). However, this was reversed in all other age groups, who were more likely to have identified as gay or lesbian.

### Figure 2: People aged 16 to 24 years were around twice as likely to have identified as bisexual than gay or lesbian

Percentage of usual residents who identified as gay or lesbian or bisexual aged 16 years and over by age, England and Wales, 2021

#### Notes:

1. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest five and counts under 10 have been suppressed.
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Those aged 16 to 24 years were also the most likely to have identified as:

- pansexual (0.49% or 31,000)
- asexual (0.18% or 11,000)
- queer (0.10% or 6,000)
- another sexual orientation (0.05% or 3,000)

The proportion of people who identified as gay or lesbian decreased with each age group, apart from between the 16 to 24 years age group and 25 to 34 years age group, where it increased from 2.11% to 2.59%. The proportion then decreased with each successive age group.

Reflecting the age profile we have described, people who identified as LGB+ tended to be younger than the overall population. More than half of those who identified as LGB+ (57.88% or 889,000) were aged between 16 and 34 years. In contrast, less than a third of the overall population were aged between 16 and 34 years (29.59% or 14.4 million).

### Figure 3: Relative proportions of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+) versus the overall population by age

LGB+ population by age, and overall population by age, usual residents aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, 2021

#### Notes:

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#### Download the data

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Among bisexuals, concentration in younger age groups was even more marked, with 71.05% (443,000) aged between 16 and 34 years.

## 3 . How sexual orientation differed by sex

This section describes the statistics in relation to how people responded to the sex question, where the response categories were female or male.

Females (3.32% or 830,000) were more likely to have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+) than males (3.00% or 706,000). Females (1.76% or 440,000) were more than twice as likely to have identified as bisexual than males (0.78% or 184,000), while males (1.95% or 460,000) were more likely than females (1.15% or 288,000) to have identified as gay or lesbian. Females were also more likely than males to have identified as:

- pansexual (0.27% (67,000) of females, 0.19% (45,000) of males)
- asexual (0.08% (19,000) of females, 0.04% (9,000) of males)
- queer (0.04% (11,000) of females, 0.01% (3,000) of males)

#### **Figure 4: Females were more than twice as likely to have identified as bisexual than males**

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over by sexual orientation and sex, England and Wales, 2021

**Notes:**

1. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest five and counts under 10 have been suppressed.
2. Percentages have been calculated using rounded data.

**Download the data**

[.xlsx](#)

More than two-thirds of people who identified as bisexual were female (70.50% or 440,000). In contrast, three out of five of those who identified as gay or lesbian were male (61.45% or 460,000). Most people who identified as pansexual, asexual, and queer were female.

## **4 . How sexual orientation differed by age and sex**

Among females, those aged 16 to 24 years were the most likely to have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+) (9.38% or 292,000). The proportion of LGB+ females decreased with each successive age group.

Among males, those aged 25 to 34 years were the most likely to have identified as LGB+ (5.09% or 199,000). There was an increase in the proportion of LGB+ males between the 16 to 24 years age group and 25 to 34 years age group (from 4.50% to 5.09%). However, the proportion of LGB+ males then decreased with each successive age group.

Females in the age groups aged up to 34 years were more likely to have identified as LGB+ than males in the same age groups. Among those aged 16 to 24 years, females (9.38% or 292,000) were more than twice as likely to have identified as LGB+ than males (4.50% or 144,000).

#### **Figure 5: Around 1 in 10 females aged 16 to 24 years identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+)**

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who identified as LGB+ by age, England and Wales, 2021

**Notes:**

1. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest five and counts under 10 have been suppressed.
2. Percentages have been calculated using rounded data.

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In the age groups up to 44 years, females were more likely to have identified as bisexual than as gay or lesbian. This is most notable among those aged 16 to 24 years, who were three times as likely to have identified as bisexual (6.17% or 192,000) than as gay or lesbian (2.07% or 64,000).

LGB+ females tended to be younger than LGB+ males. Almost two-thirds of LGB+ females (65.75% or 546,000) were aged 16 to 34 years. In contrast, slightly under half of LGB+ males (48.63% or 343,000) were aged 16 to 34 years. Both LGB+ females and LGB+ males tended to be younger than the overall female and male population.

### **Figure 6: Females identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+) tended to be younger than LGB+ males**

LGB+ population by age and sex and overall population by age, England and Wales, 2021

**Notes:**

1. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest five and counts under 10 have been suppressed.
2. Percentages have been calculated using rounded data.

[Download the data](#)

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## **5 . How sexual orientation age and sex breakdowns varied across England and Wales**

There was a higher proportion of lesbian, gay, bisexual or other minority sexual orientation (LGB+) males in England (3.02% or 673,000) than in Wales (2.65% or 33,000). The proportion of LGB+ females in England (3.32% or 787,000) and Wales (3.33% or 44,000) was, however, very similar.

### **Figure 7: There was a higher proportion of males identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation (LGB+) in England than in Wales**

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who identified as LGB+ by age and country, England and Wales, 2021

**Notes:**

1. To ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the data, population counts have been rounded to the nearest five and counts under 10 have been suppressed.
2. Percentages have been calculated using rounded data.

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

In each of the younger age groups (those aged up to 44 years), Wales had a higher proportion of people identifying as LGB+ than England. This was reversed in each of the groups aged 45 years and over, with the higher proportions being in England.

In line with England and Wales as a whole, people aged 16 to 24 years were the most likely to have identified as LGB+ in most local authorities, with the proportion decreasing in each successive age group. In a minority of local authorities, people aged 25 to 34 years were the most likely to have identified as LGB+. Lambeth was the only local authority where those aged 35 to 44 years were the most likely to have identified as LGB+.

In England and Wales, 6.91% of people aged 16 to 24 years identified as LGB+. Local authorities with a relatively high proportion of people aged 16 to 24 years who identified as LGB+ tended to have one or more universities. Those with the highest proportions were:

- Ceredigion (15.82%)
- Brighton and Hove (15.58%)
- Norwich (14.76%)
- Cambridge (14.57%)
- Lincoln (14.44%)

In England and Wales, 0.37% of people aged 75 years and over identified as LGB+. Most London local authorities had a relatively high proportion of people aged 75 years and over who identified as LGB+. Those with the highest proportions were:

- Westminster and City of London (local authorities have been combined) (2.36%)
- Hammersmith and Fulham (2.24%)
- Kensington and Chelsea (2.21%)
- Camden (2.06%)
- Islington (1.77%)

Outside of London, the local authorities with the highest proportion of people aged 75 years and over who identified as LGB+ were Brighton and Hove (2.28%), Cambridge (1.45%), and Rushmoor (1.02%).

Males were more likely to have identified as LGB+ than females in almost all London local authorities. This difference is most notable in Lambeth, where males (11.16%) were twice as likely as females (5.57%) to have identified as LGB+.

Outside of London, most local authorities had a higher proportion of females than males who identified as LGB+. Local authorities where the difference was most notable tended to have one or more universities. Those with the largest difference were:

- Lincoln (7.66% of females; 4.98% of males)
- Norwich (8.56% of females; 6.04% of males)
- York (6.61% of females; 4.38% of males)
- Ceredigion (5.90% of females; 3.78% of males)
- Oxford (7.94% of females; 5.82% of males)

## 6 . Sexual orientation by age and sex, England and Wales data

### [Sexual orientation \(4 categories\) by age](#)

Dataset | Released 25 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales by sexual orientation and by age. It contains the same data as the 9 category dataset, but with some of the sexual orientation categories combined.

### [Sexual orientation \(9 categories\) by age](#)

Dataset | Released 25 January 2023

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

### [Sexual orientation \(4 categories\) by sex](#)

Dataset | Released 25 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales by sexual orientation and by sex. It contains the same data as the 9 category dataset, but with some of the sexual orientation categories combined.

### [Sexual orientation \(9 categories\) by sex](#)

Dataset | Released 25 January 2023

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

### [Sexual orientation \(4 categories\) by age and sex](#)

Dataset | Released 25 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales by sexual orientation, by age and by sex. It contains the same data as the 9 category dataset, but with some of the sexual orientation categories combined.

### [Sexual orientation \(9 categories\) by age and sex](#)

Dataset | Released 25 January 2023

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

## 7 . Glossary

### LGB+

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

## Sexual orientation

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

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

## Usual resident

A usual resident is anyone who on Census Day, 21 March 2021, was in the UK and had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for a period of 12 months or more or had a permanent UK address.

# 8 . Data sources and quality

## Sexual orientation

The question on sexual orientation was new for Census 2021. It was voluntary and was only asked of people aged 16 years and over.

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

## 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.



## Quality

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

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

Additionally, we apply statistical disclosure control to protect the confidentiality of census respondents. Differences in the methods used for statistical disclosure control may result in minor differences in data totals between census products.

Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021, are more generally provided in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for sexual orientation and gender identity in our [Sexual orientation and gender identity quality information for Census 2021 methodology](#). Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates methodology](#).

## 9 . Related links

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

Methodology | Released 6 January 2023

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

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

Supporting information | Released 15 December 2022

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

[Sexual orientation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 6 January 2023

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

## 10 . Cite this article

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