

Statistical bulletin

Sexual identity, UK: 2016

Experimental Official Statistics on sexual identity in the UK in 2016 by region, sex, age, marital status, ethnicity and National Statistics Socio-economic Classification.

Contact:
Emily Knipe
pop.info@ons.gsi.gov.uk
+44 (0)1329 444661

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Statistician's comment](#)
3. [Things you need to know about this release](#)
4. [The majority of the UK population identifies as heterosexual or straight](#)
5. [Small changes in the percentage identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual in 2016](#)
6. [Males are more likely to identify as gay or lesbian; females are more likely to identify as bisexual](#)
7. [People aged 16 to 24 are more likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual than any other age group](#)
8. [London has the highest percentage of the population who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual](#)
9. [Population identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual are most likely to be single, never married or civil partnered](#)
10. [Links to related statistics](#)
11. [What's changed within this publication?](#)
12. [Quality and methodology](#)

1 . Main points

- In 2016, just over 1 million (2.0%) of the UK population aged 16 and over identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).
- The population aged 16 to 24 were the age group most likely to identify as LGB in 2016 (4.1%).
- More males (2.3%) than females (1.6%) identified themselves as LGB in 2016.
- The population who identified as LGB in 2016 were most likely to be single, never married or civil partnered, at 70.7%.

2 . Statistician's comment

"In 2016, around 2% of the population identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). This has increased from 1.7% in 2015 (a statistically significant increase). London had the largest proportion of the population who identified as LGB (2.7%), which could be associated with a relatively young and diverse population."

Emily Knipe, Population Statistics Division, Office for National Statistics.

Follow Population Statistics Division on Twitter [@PaulVickers_ONS](#)

3 . Things you need to know about this release

Sexual identity is one part of the umbrella concept of "sexual orientation". Sexual identity does not necessarily reflect sexual attraction or sexual behaviour – these are separate concepts that Office for National Statistics (ONS) currently does not measure.

Sexual identity estimates are based on social survey data from the Annual Population Survey (APS). The questions collect information on self perceived sexual identity from the household population aged 16 and over in the UK.

Currently no further breakdown of the category "Other" is collected.

This bulletin presents percentages. Estimates of the population numbers and measures of quality (to show the levels of uncertainty associated with survey estimates) are presented in the [datasets](#). Users are advised to consult the quality measures when interpreting the estimates.

4 . The majority of the UK population identifies as heterosexual or straight

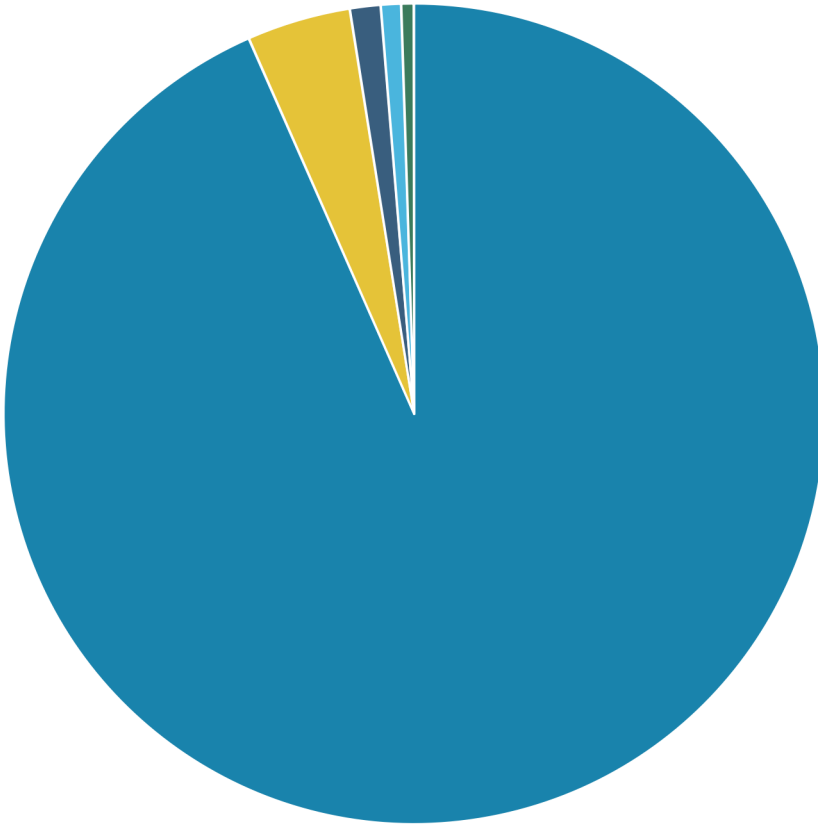
In 2016, estimates from the Annual Population Survey (APS) showed that 93.4% of the UK population identified as heterosexual or straight and 2.0% of the population identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). This comprised of:

- 1.2% identifying as gay or lesbian
- 0.8% identifying as bisexual

A further 0.5% of the population identified themselves as "Other", which means that they did not consider themselves to fit into the heterosexual or straight, bisexual, gay or lesbian categories. A further 4.1% refused, or did not know how to identify themselves.

Figure 1: Sexual identity, UK, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variance) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets.
2. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

5 . Small changes in the percentage identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual in 2016

One of the largest changes between 2015 and 2016 was the proportion who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). This increased from 1.7% in 2015 to 2.0% in 2016; this was a statistically significant increase.

Table 1: Sexual identity, UK, 2015 and 2016

Sexual Identity	Percentages	
	2015	2016
Heterosexual or straight	93.7	93.4
Gay or lesbian	1.1	1.2
Bisexual	0.6	0.8
Lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB)	1.7	2.0
Other	0.4	0.5
Do not know or refuse	4.1	4.1

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

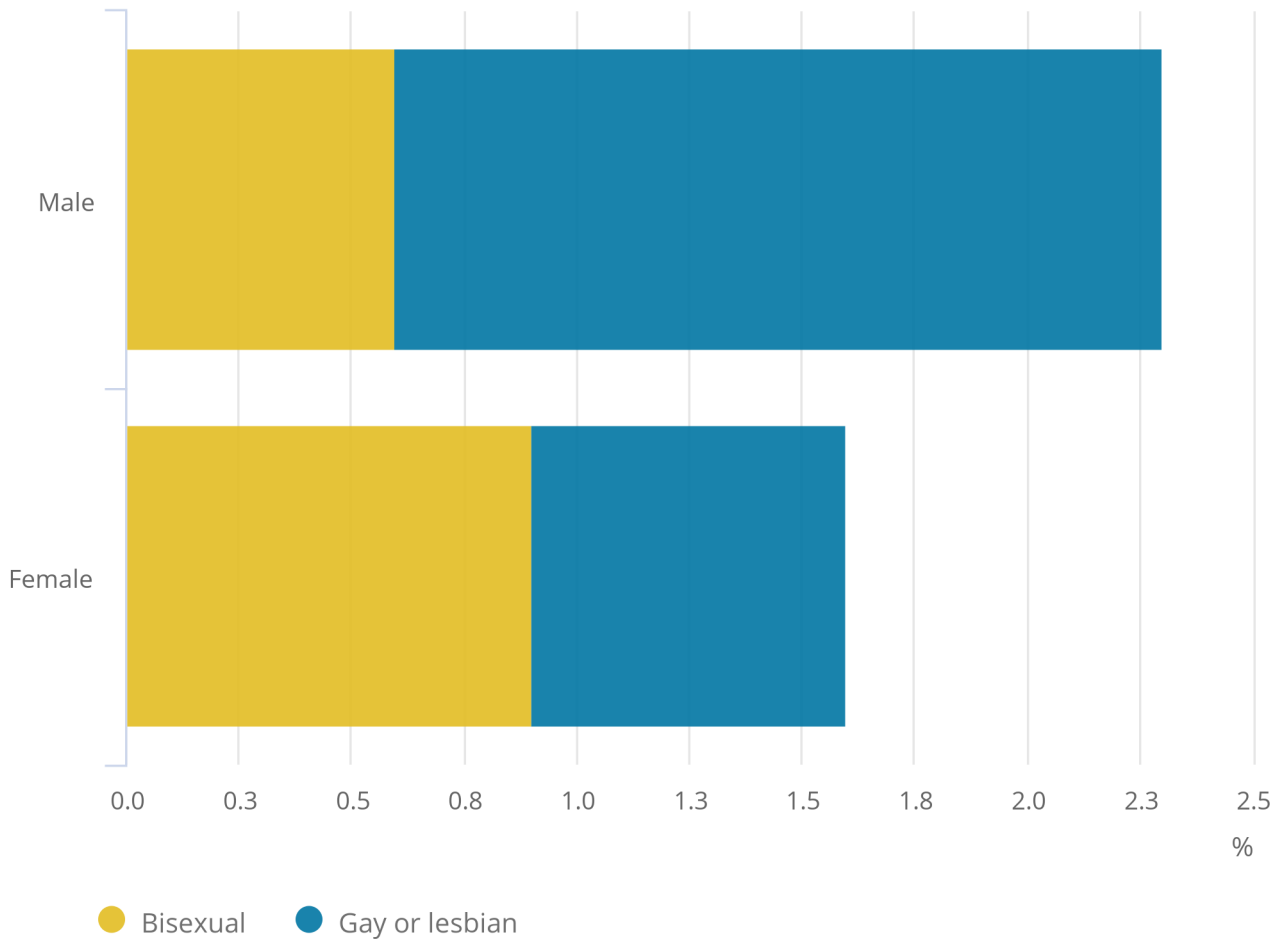
1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variance) for the estimates are displayed within the reference tables.
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6 . Males are more likely to identify as gay or lesbian; females are more likely to identify as bisexual

Around 1.7% of males identified themselves as gay or lesbian in 2016 compared with 0.7% of females. Conversely, 0.9% of females identified themselves as bisexual compared with just 0.6% of males. Overall, a larger proportion of males (2.3%) identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) than females (1.6%), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Sex by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, UK, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

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Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variance) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets.
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7 . People aged 16 to 24 are more likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual than any other age group

In 2016 in the UK, 4.1% of the population aged 16 to 24 identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). This comprised of 1.7% identifying as gay or lesbian and 2.4% identifying as bisexual. The 16 to 24 age group was the only age group to have a larger proportion identifying as bisexual compared with lesbian or gay.

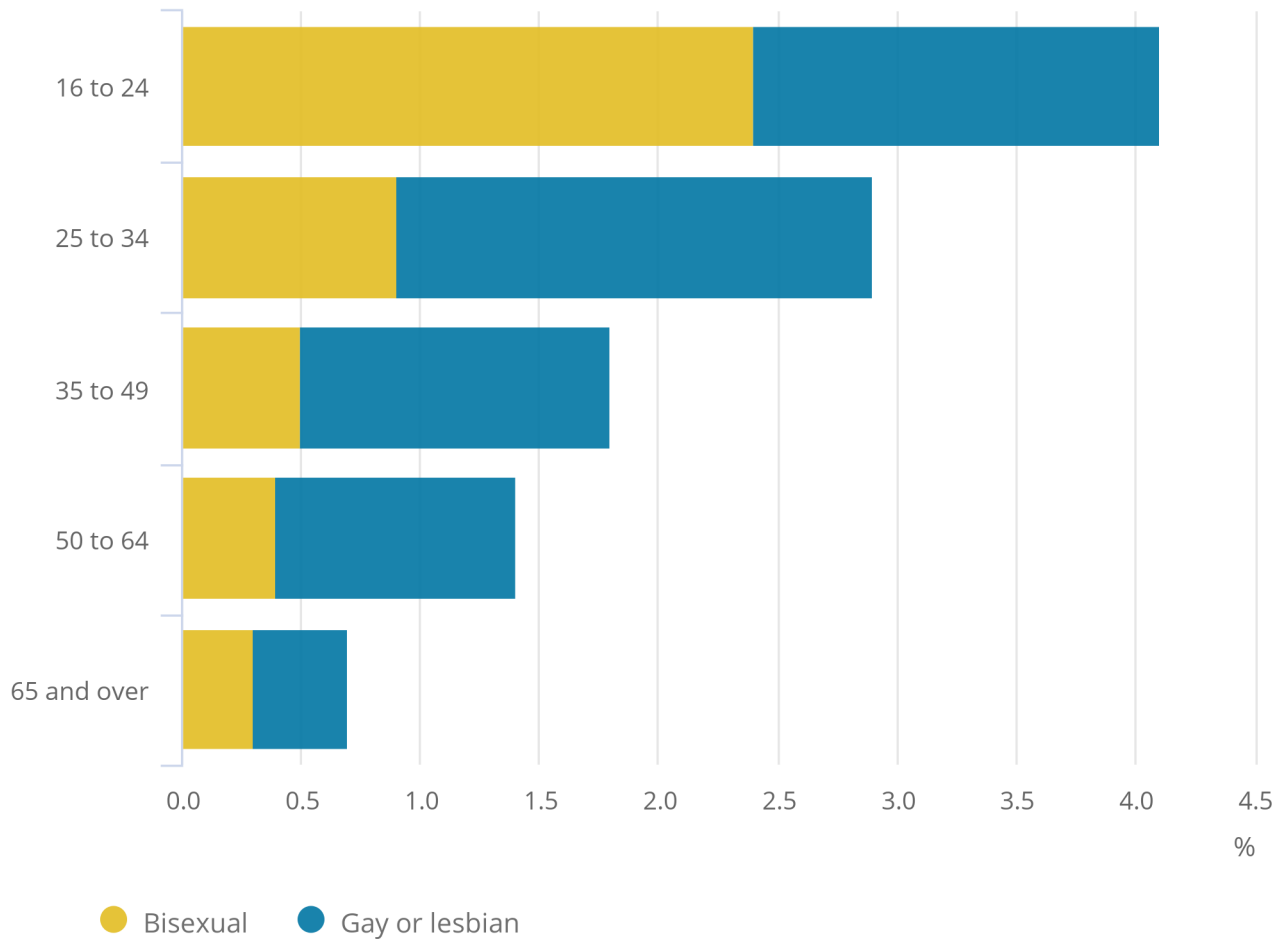
The proportion of those aged 16 to 24 who identified as LGB increased from 3.3% in 2015 to 4.1% in 2016. This was not a statistically significant increase.

The proportion of the population who identified as LGB declined with each consecutive age group (Figure 3). Older age groups were more likely to identify as heterosexual or straight in 2016. Only 0.7% of the population aged 65 and over identified as LGB, whereas for 25 to 34 year olds this was 2.9%.

One reason for this pattern may be that younger people could be more likely to explore their sexuality, combined with more social acceptability of sexual identities today and the ability to express these.

Figure 3: Age by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, UK, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

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Notes:

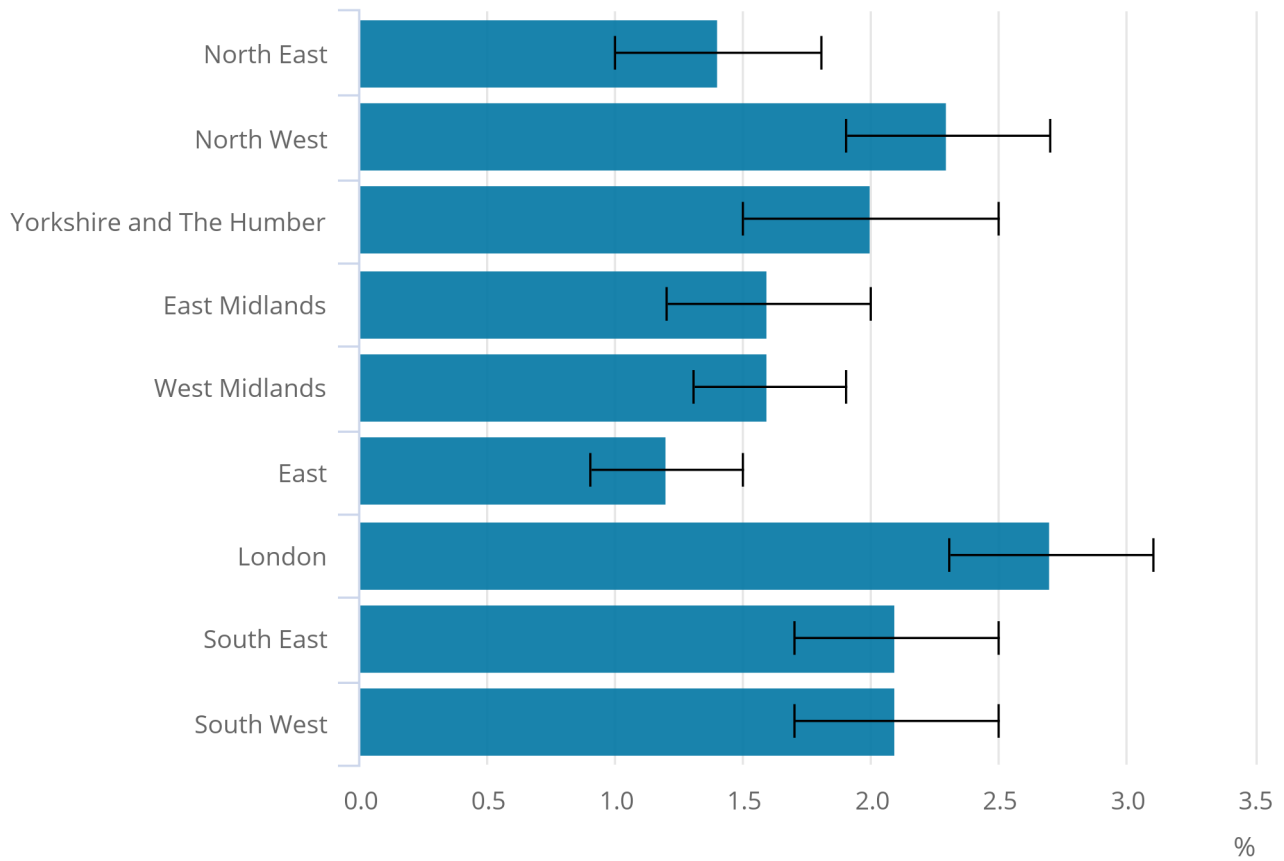
1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variance) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

8 . London has the highest percentage of the population who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual

In 2016, around 2.7% of the population in London identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), the highest proportion of any English region. This could be explained by the younger age structure or the diversity of the population of London. The North West had the second highest proportion of the population identifying as LGB, at 2.3%. In contrast the East of England had the lowest proportion, where just 1.2% of the population identified as LGB. This could be associated with an older age structure of the population. The [median age of the population](#) of London in 2016 was 34.8 years, compared with the East of England where 41.5 years was the median age.

Figure 4: English region by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

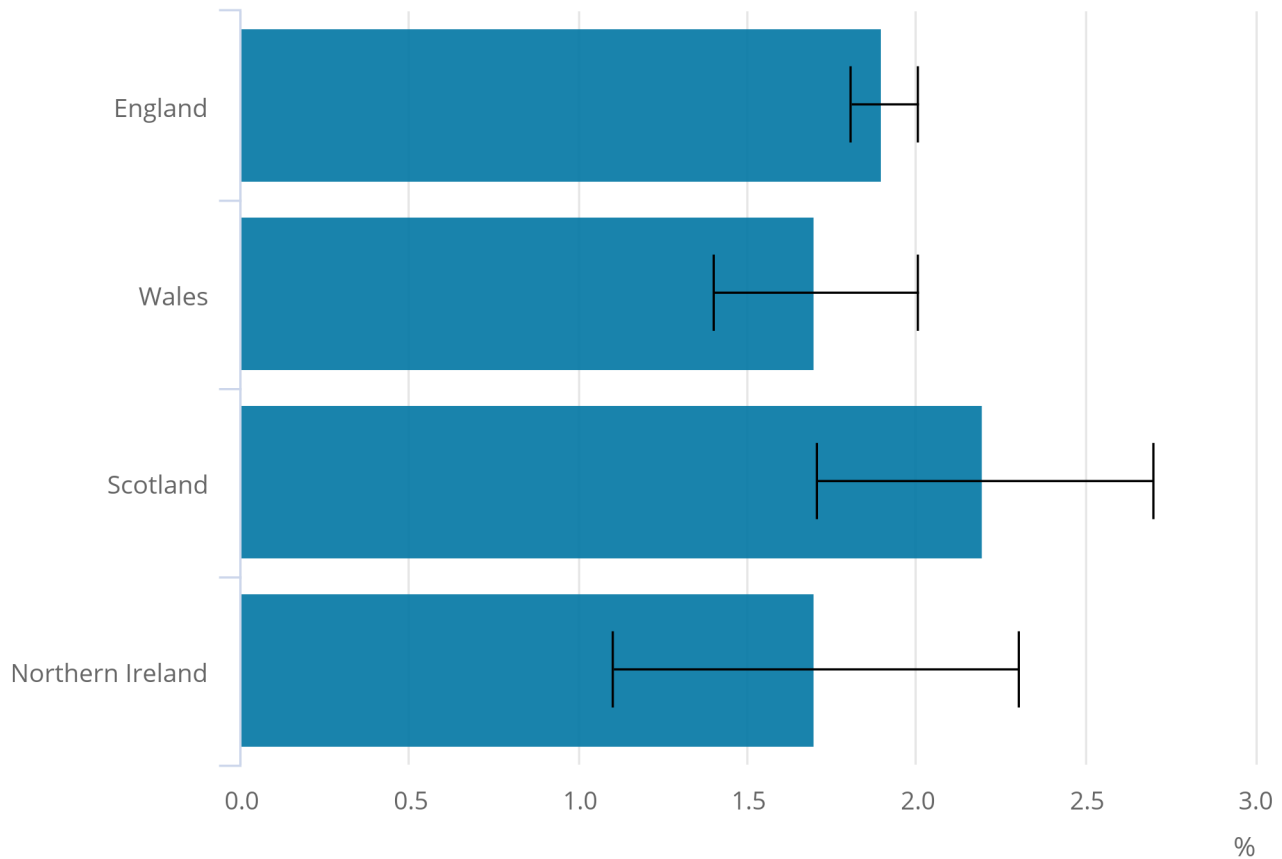
Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variance) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets.

Figure 5: UK country by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

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Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variance) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets.

In 2016, Scotland had the largest proportion of the population identifying as LGB, with 2.2%. This comprised of 1.2% identifying as gay or lesbian, and 1.0% as bisexual. Scotland had the largest proportion of the population identifying as bisexual compared with the other UK countries, but for the proportion identifying as gay or lesbian, England had the same proportion as Scotland, at 1.2%.

The proportion of the population identifying as LGB in Scotland increased from 1.6% in 2015 to 2.2% in 2016. This was not a statistically significant increase.

9 . Population identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual are most likely to be single, never married or civil partnered

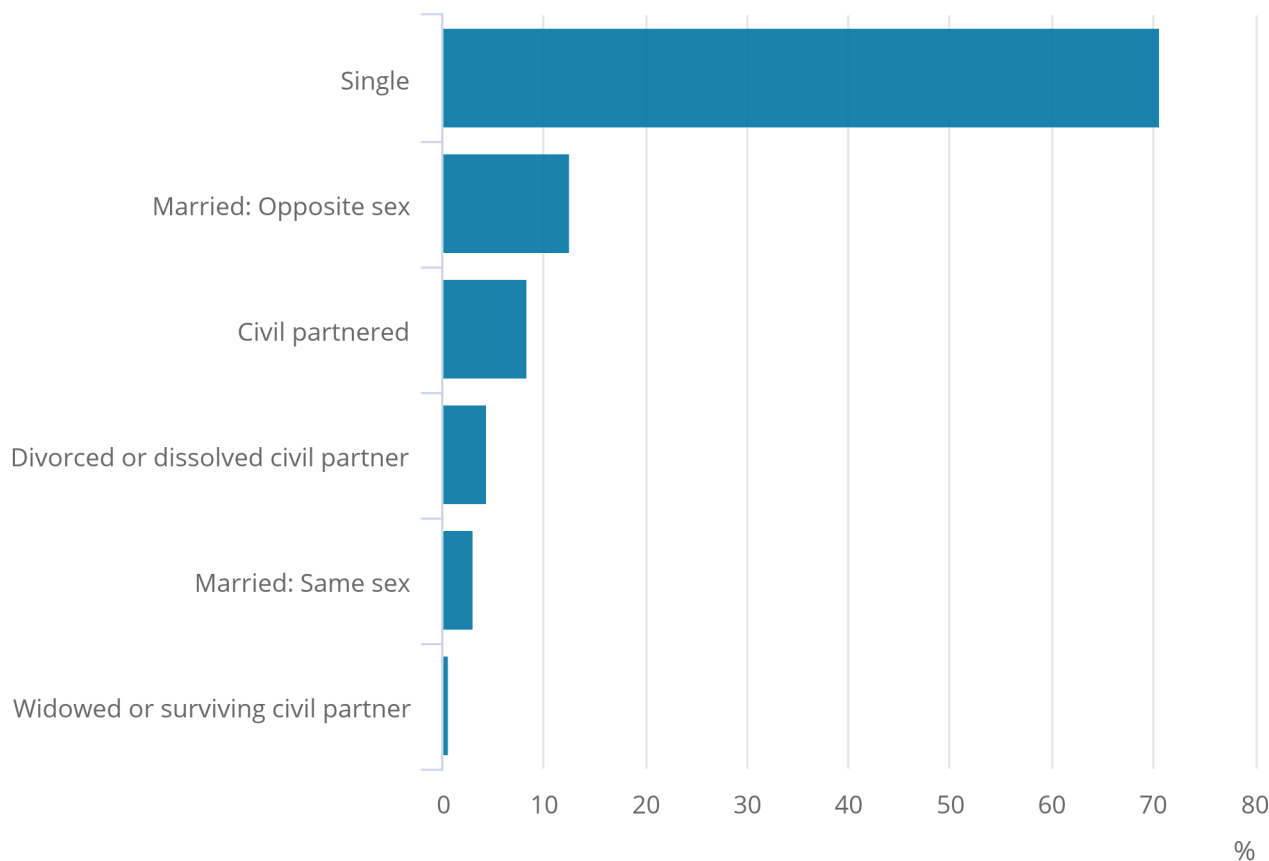
In 2016, the population identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) were most likely to be single, never married or never civil partnered (70.7%). This could be associated with:

- the young age structure of the population that identify themselves as LGB
- legal unions available to same-sex couples are relatively new

Those who had a legal marital status of single may be in same-sex cohabiting couples. In the UK, [0.5% of families](#) were same-sex cohabiting couple families in 2016.

Figure 6: Lesbian, gay and bisexual population by legal marital status, UK, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

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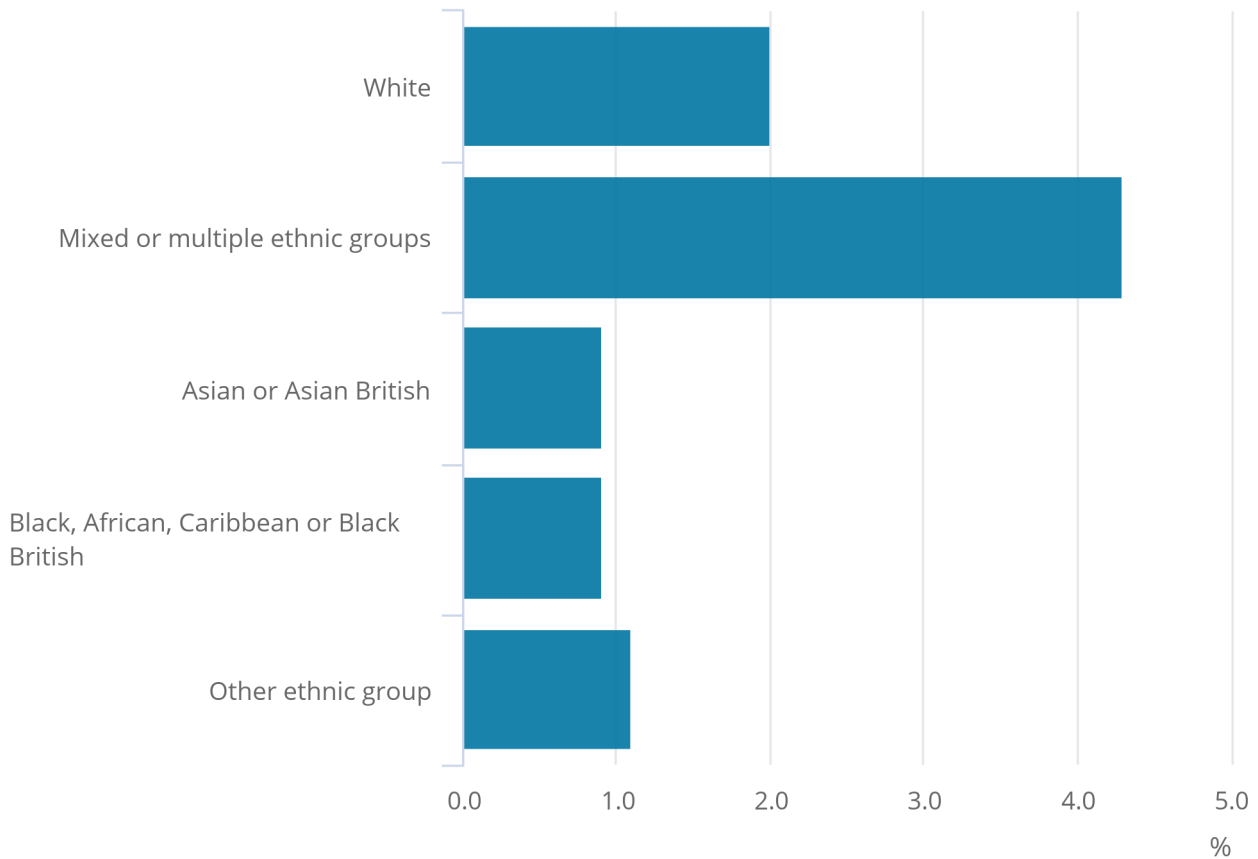
Notes:

1. Single, never married or civil partnered.
2. Married includes separated.
3. The Marriages (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 made provision for the marriage of same-sex couples in England and Wales from 29 March 2014 onwards.
4. Civil Partnerships were introduced in England and Wales in December 2005. Includes separated.

Of the remaining LGB population, 12.6% were in opposite-sex marriages, consisting mainly of those who identified as bisexual, 11.5% were in same-sex marriages or civil partnerships, 4.5% were divorced or had a dissolved civil partnership and 0.7% were widowed or a surviving civil partner.

Figure 7: Ethnicity by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, UK, 2016

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Source: Office for National Statistics

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Notes:

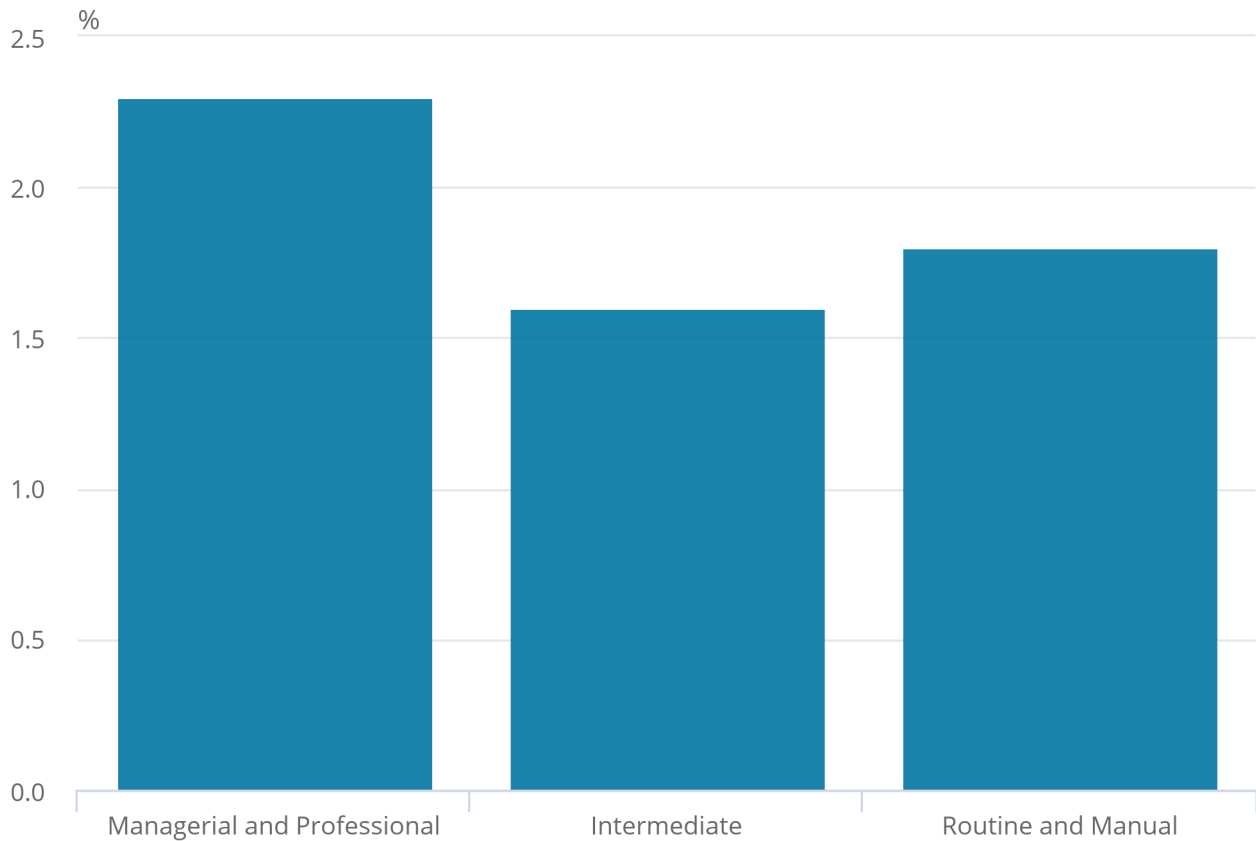
1. 0.1% of respondents to the Annual Population Survey did not have an ethnicity recorded, and of this percentage, 0.7% of those identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

In 2016, the Annual Population Survey found that 4.3% of the population who described their ethnicity as “Mixed or multiple ethnic groups” identified themselves as LGB. More than half of them (2.4%) identified themselves as bisexual compared with those who identified as gay or lesbian (1.9%). This was the highest percentage seen among the different ethnic groups, as shown in Figure 8.

The proportion of the “Mixed or multiple ethnic group” population who identified as LGB increased from 2.5% in 2015 to 4.3% in 2016, which was not a statistically significant increase.

Figure 8: National Statistics Socio-economic Classification by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, UK, 2016

Figure 8: National Statistics Socio-economic Classification by gay or lesbian and bisexual population, UK, 2016



Source: Office for National Statistics

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Routine and Manual includes the “Never worked and long-term unemployed” category.
2. Examples of jobs for each category are: Routine and Manual: Labourers, bar staff. Intermediate: Bank staff, paramedics. Managerial and Professional: Doctors, Lawyers.

Figure 9 shows that those in managerial and professional occupations were more likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) compared with those in intermediate or routine and manual occupations.

10 . Links to related statistics

For more detailed statistics see our [datasets](#).

For further information on the Annual Population Survey see the [user guide](#).

For further information on the Sexual Identity Project see the [project page](#).

For previous Integrated Household Survey (IHS) publications (including sexual identity estimates) see the [release page](#).

For a piece of analysis looking at sexual identity and wellbeing see [ONS visual](#).

11 . What's changed within this publication?

The estimates and quality measures referring to the years 2012 to 2015 have been revised following the reweighting of the Annual Population Survey (APS) in 2017. The changes to the percentages are minimal. The largest change to an estimate was seen in 2015 for the 16 to 24 age group who identified as heterosexual or straight, which decreased by around 21,000.

12 . Quality and methodology

1. In 2006 we established a sexual identity project to meet user requirements for information on sexual identity and to address a gap in the lack of sufficient and reliable sources of data on sexual orientation, which was identified in the ONS-led cross-government [Review of Equality Data](#).

The project was concluded with the sexual identity question being added to the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) in 2009. [Sexual identity guidance and project documentation is available](#).

We are currently taking forward a [research and testing plan](#) to help determine how and whether to meet user need for sexual identity information identified as part of the 2021 Census topic consultation. This plan includes work to develop statistics from ONS social surveys and to investigate the feasibility of producing sexual identity estimates at lower levels of geography.

2. Sexual identity estimates were previously produced from the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), the IHS questions were removed from the Living Costs and Food Survey in 2014. The IHS variables (including sexual identity) were added to the Annual Population Survey (APS) in 2014 but they were still subject to IHS methodologies. The IHS variables were fully integrated into the APS in 2015 and are now subject to APS methodologies. A consistent back series from 2012 and a comparison of the estimates produced from the IHS and the APS are available.
3. The sexual identity question is asked of respondents aged 16 years and over; it is not asked by proxy. Proxy interviews are defined as those where answers are supplied by a third party, who is usually a member of the respondent's household.
4. The sexual identity question is asked in both face-to-face and telephone interviews, at first personal contact. During the face-to-face interviews, adults were asked; "Which of the options on this show card best describes how you think of yourself?" For telephone interviews, a slightly different way of collecting the information was used: "I will now read out a list of terms people sometimes use to describe how they think of themselves". The list is read out to respondents twice. On the second reading, the respondent has to say "stop" when an appropriate term they identified with is read out. In both modes, the order in which the terms appeared, or are read out, is unique for each household's respondent to ensure confidentiality.

The "Other" option on the question is included to address the fact that not all people will consider they fall in the first three categories, that is, heterosexual or straight, gay or lesbian or bisexual.

5. The Sexual identity [Quality and Methodology Information report](#) contains important information on:
 - the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
 - uses and users of the data
 - how the output was created
 - the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data
6. We publish sexual identity estimates for the UK and constituent countries only. In April 2017 we published research findings from an experimental method to produce [sub-national sexual identity estimates](#).
7. The [revisions policy](#) for population statistics is available.