

Statistical bulletin

Sexual orientation, UK: 2021 and 2022

Sexual orientation in the UK in 2021 and 2022 by region, sex, age, legal partnership status, ethnic group and socio-economic classification, using data from the Annual Population Survey (APS). Experimental Statistics.

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1 . Main points

- In 2022, 93.4% of the UK household population aged 16 years and over identified as heterosexual or straight, down from 95.0% in 2017.
- An estimated 3.3% of the UK population aged 16 years and over identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2022, a continued increase from 2.1% in 2017.
- The proportion of men identifying as LGB was 3.8% in 2022, up from 2.4% in 2017; the proportion of women who identified as LGB was 3.0%, an increase from 1.8% in 2017.
- The proportion of women aged 16 to 24 years identifying as LGB increased to 10.6% in 2022; the proportion of men aged 16 to 24 years identifying as LGB was 7.9%.
- Those identifying as heterosexual or straight were most likely to be married (46.4%) in 2022, while for those identifying as LGB, the majority had never married or entered a civil partnership (72.0% of those identifying as lesbian or gay and 82.9% of those identifying as bisexual, respectively).

Information on comparisons between estimates of sexual orientation on the APS and Census 2021 is available in [Section 6: Comparing APS estimates with Census 2021](#).

2 . Sexual orientation in the UK

In 2022, the proportion of the UK household population aged 16 years and over identifying as heterosexual or straight was 93.4%. The proportion has declined over the five years since 2017 when 95.0% identified as heterosexual or straight.

The decrease in those identifying as heterosexual or straight may be attributed to more people exploring their sexual identity in combination with changing societal attitudes towards different groups and the expression of these today. Recent results from the [British Social Attitudes Survey \(PDF, 655KB\)](#) support the view that societal attitudes are changing in favour of diversity in sexual identity.

Five-year comparisons are used in this bulletin rather than year-on-year comparisons as the APS data on sexual identity typically vary between years because of sample variability, and comparing across a longer timescale allows us to more clearly identify trends in the data.

Table 1: Most people in the UK identified as heterosexual or straight
Sexual orientation, UK, 2017 to 2022 (percentage)

Sexual orientation	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Heterosexual or straight	95.0	94.6	93.7	93.6	93.4	93.4
Gay or lesbian	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.8
Bisexual	0.8	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.5
Other	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.6
Do not know or refuse	2.3	2.5	3.0	2.6	3.0	2.7

Source: Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. Variability in year-on-year estimates may be present because of low sample sizes for some groups, resulting in increased variation of confidence intervals associated with the estimates.
2. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding.

An estimated 1.8 million people aged 16 years and over (3.3% of the UK population) identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2022, an increase from 1.1 million (2.1%) in 2017. Of those identifying as LGB in 2022, 55.1% identified as gay or lesbian and 44.9% as bisexual (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Compared with 2017, a lower proportion of people identified as heterosexual and a higher proportion identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, in 2022

Change in self-identified sexual orientation, UK, 2017 to 2022

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
2. Totals may not sum because of rounding.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

3 . Distribution by sex

In 2022, women were less likely than men to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), with an estimated proportion of 3.0%, or 817,000 (Figure 2). The proportion of men identifying as LGB was estimated to be 3.8%, or 986,000.

Men (2.7%) were more than twice as likely to identify as gay or lesbian than women (1.1%), whereas women (1.9%) were more likely to identify as bisexual than men (1.1%). This continues a trend seen since 2014.

Figure 2: Men were more likely to identify as gay or lesbian, while women were more likely to identify as bisexual

Lesbian, gay or bisexual population by sex, UK, 2022

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
2. Totals may not sum because of rounding.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

4 . Distribution by age

In 2022, younger people were most likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). For those aged 16 to 24 years, almost 1 in 10 (9.2% or 630,000 individuals) identified as LGB (Figure 3).

These proportions decrease as the age of the population increases, with the proportion of individuals aged 65 years and over identifying as LGB estimated to be 0.7% (85,000); this proportion has remained broadly stable in recent years and the 2022 estimate is similar to 2017.

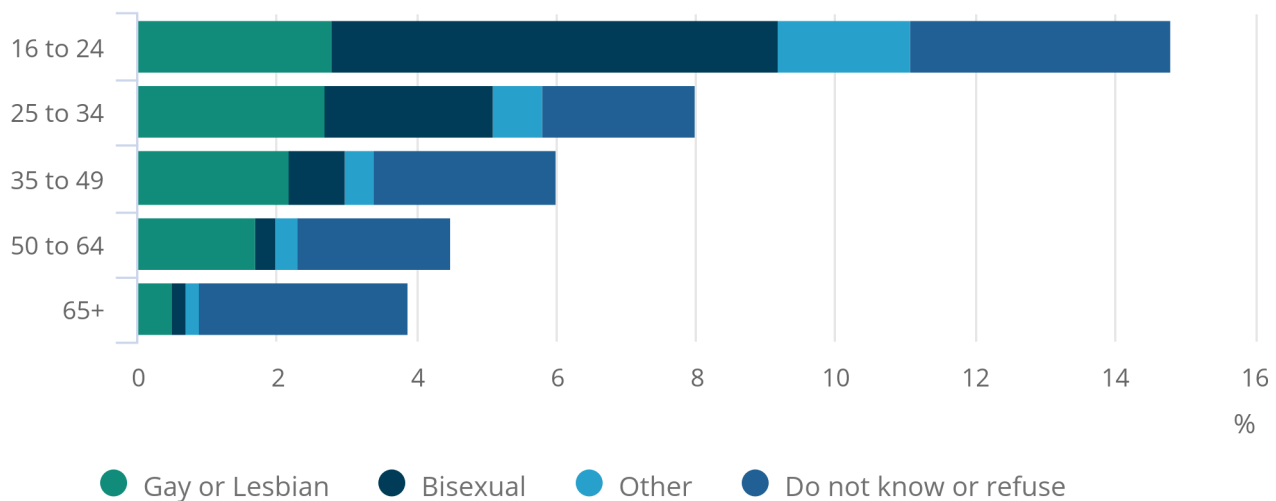
Within the LGB population, the majority of younger people aged 16 to 24 years identify as bisexual (69.2%), whereas for each of the other age groups, the majority identify as gay or lesbian.

Figure 3: Younger people in 2022 were the age group most likely to identify as LGB

Proportion of the population who identified as gay or lesbian, bisexual or other, or responded don't know or refuse, UK, 2022

Figure 3: Younger people in 2022 were the age group most likely to identify as LGB

Proportion of the population who identified as gay or lesbian, bisexual or other, or responded don't know or refuse, UK, 2022



Source: Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
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The proportion of females aged 16 to 24 years who identify as LGB rose to 10.6% (355,000) in 2022; this is more than double the proportion of those aged 16 to 24 years who identified as LGB in 2017 (4.8%, or 167,000). This compares with 7.9% (275,000) of males aged 16 to 24 years identifying as LGB in 2022 (Figure 4).

The proportion of those identifying as LGB decreases with age. For those aged 65 years and over, women are less likely than men to identify as LGB, with only 0.5% (31,000) of women identifying as LGB in this age group compared with 0.9% (54,000) of men.

Figure 4: Females aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to identify as LGB than males or other age groups

Lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population by age and sex, UK, 2017 and 2022

Notes:

1. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
2. Totals may not sum because of rounding.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

5 . Legal partnership status

In 2022, the most common legal partnership status among those identifying as heterosexual or straight was married (46.4%, or 23.3 million). The second most common legal partnership status was never having entered either a marriage or a civil partnership (36.6%, or 18.4 million).

Of those identifying as gay or lesbian, in 2022 the majority had never entered either a marriage or a civil partnership (72.0%, or 716,000), with the second largest proportion in a same-sex marriage (15.1%, or 150,000) (Figure 5). Only 5.9% (59,000) of those who identified as gay or lesbian were in a civil partnership, which is a considerable decrease since 2017 where 10.6% (75,000) of those who identified as gay or lesbian were in a civil partnership.

The majority of those identifying as bisexual had never entered either a marriage or a civil partnership (82.9%, or 671,000), which is an increase from 66.0% (or 263,000) in 2017. This increase may be related to more than half of the people in 2022 who identify as bisexual being aged 16 to 24 years (53.9%), and people in this age group are less likely to be in a legal partnership.

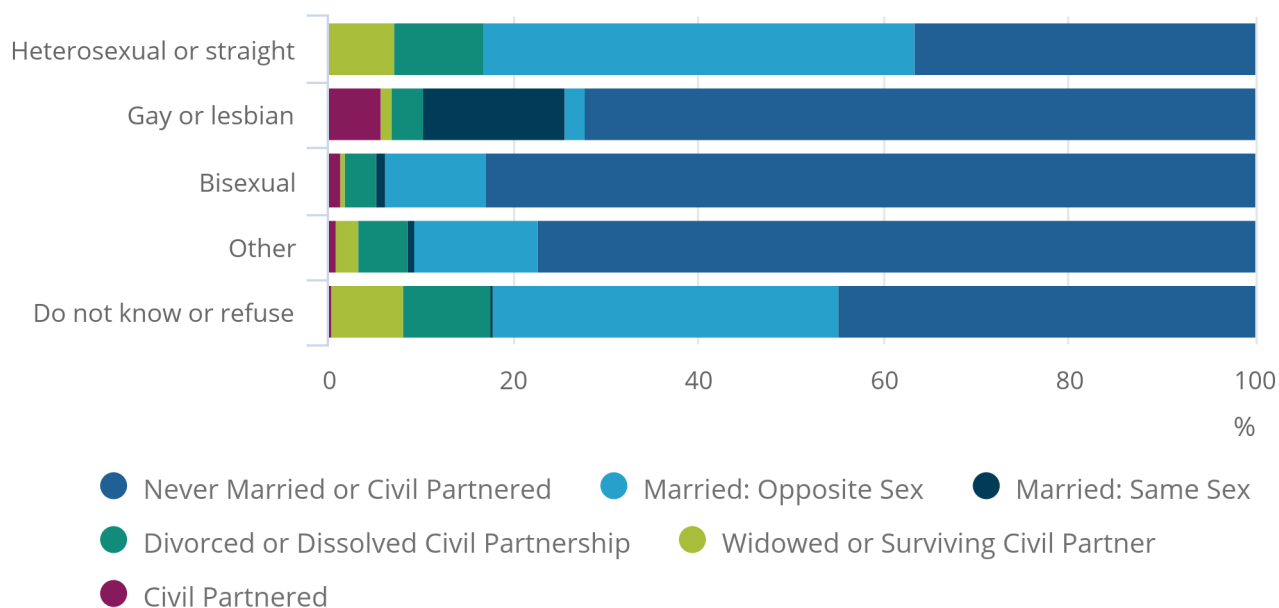
Marriage for same-sex couples has only become available relatively recently compared with civil partnerships, which were introduced for same-sex couples in December 2005. This, alongside the introduction of converting a civil partnership into a marriage, may be a possible reason for the increase of those in same-sex marriage and the decline in civil partnerships among those who identify as gay or lesbian.

Figure 5: People who identified as LGB were most likely to have a legal partnership status of never married or civil partnered

Population by legal partnership status, UK, 2022

Figure 5: People who identified as LGB were most likely to have a legal partnership status of never married or civil partnered

Population by legal partnership status, UK, 2022



Source: Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. 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. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 made provision for the marriage of same-sex couples in Scotland from 31 December 2014 onwards. The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 made provisions for the marriage of same-sex couples and civil partnerships of opposite-sex couples from 13 January 2020 onwards.
2. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 made provision for civil partnerships of same-sex couples in the UK and was amended to make provision for civil partnerships of opposite-sex couples in England and Wales from 31 December 2019 onwards.
3. Quality measures (including confidence intervals and coefficient of variation) for the estimates are displayed within the datasets which accompany this release.
4. Totals may not sum because of rounding.

6 . Comparing APS estimates with Census 2021

The estimates in this bulletin are based on data from the Annual Population Survey (APS). A voluntary question on sexual orientation was included for the first time in Census 2021.

There are differences between the survey and census-based estimates because of differences in the question asked, including the available response options, and the larger number of responses to the census question overall. The method of delivery can also affect engagement, for example, it being a legal requirement to complete the census, albeit that the sexual orientation question was voluntary, may yield different results to a voluntary survey. Additionally, it was possible to provide a proxy response on someone else's behalf on the census, while proxy responses are not permitted for the question on sexual identity on the APS. More information can be found in [Sexual orientation question development for Census 2021](#).

APS data cover the UK with its four constituent countries, whereas census results currently only exist for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A comprehensive appraisal of census data against APS data is anticipated once data from all four countries are available.

7 . Sexual orientation data

[Sexual orientation, UK](#)

Dataset | Released 27 September 2023

Experimental statistics on sexual orientation in the UK in 2021 and 2022 by region, sex, age, legal partnership status, ethnic group and socio-economic classification, using data from the Annual Population Survey (APS).

8 . Glossary

Sexual orientation

“Sexual orientation” is an umbrella term that encompasses sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. The Annual Population Survey (APS) question informing the statistics in this publication is designed to capture sexual identity. The question was not designed for specific or detailed studies of sexual attraction or behaviour where a series of more detailed questions and answer categories might be more appropriate.

Sexual identity

The measurement of sexual identity, as explained in [our guide for researchers on sexual identity \(PDF, 116KB\)](#), has been identified as the component of sexual orientation most closely related to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. Sexual identity does not necessarily reflect sexual attraction and/or sexual behaviour, which are separate concepts not currently measured by the Annual Population Survey (APS). Sexual identity may change over time.

Sexual orientation categorised as “other”

The “other” category captures people who do not consider themselves to fit into the heterosexual or straight, bisexual, gay, or lesbian categories. It might also include people who responded “other” for different reasons such as those who did not understand the terminology or who are against categorisation.

9 . Measuring the data

Sexual orientation estimates are based on data from the Annual Population Survey (APS), which collects information on self-reported sexual identity from the household population aged 16 years and over in the UK. The household population excludes people living in communal establishments, with the exception of those in NHS housing and students in halls of residence (sampled via the private households of their parents).

Revision

The adjustment to the estimates for 2014 to 2017, to remove the artificially increased number of “don’t know or refuse” responses to interviews carried out by field interviewers using a mobile phone, has been applied to the estimates for 2017 to 2021. Further information on these revisions is available in the [Sexual orientation Quality and Methodology Information](#).

More detailed information on the sexual identity question and design of the APS is available in the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) user guide](#).

Change of terminology

In 2019 (publication of the 2017 data), the terminology in this release changed from “sexual identity” to “sexual orientation” to align with legislation ([Equality Act 2010](#)); please see [Section 8: Glossary](#) for definitions.

Although the terminology changed, the data source and methodology used to produce the estimates were not changed and remained consistent with previous years.

10 . Strengths and limitations

Sexual orientation estimates have a number of uses, both direct and indirect, informing policy decisions at a national level. The estimates are mainly used to provide evidence and to inform the monitoring of the [Equality Act 2010](#), alongside providing estimates of the lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population for service providers.

This bulletin primarily presents the sexual orientation estimates as 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. We advise users to consult the quality measures when interpreting the estimates because some estimates are based on a relatively small sample. As a result, these estimates are subject to uncertainty particularly when making comparisons, such as changes from one year to another. In this bulletin, such comparisons are [statistically significant](#) unless otherwise stated. This means that there is likely to have been a real change in the underlying population proportions and that the difference we are observing is unlikely to be a result of chance.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Sexual orientation Quality and Methodology Information](#).

11 . Related links

[Annual Population Survey user guide \(PDF, 689KB\)](#)

User guide | Released 2022

Further information on the Annual Population Survey (APS).

[Sexual orientation](#)

Dataset | Released 6 January 2023

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales by sexual orientation. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[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 16 May 2023

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

[Sexual orientation and gender identity in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 6 January 2023

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about sexual orientation and gender identity in Wales.

[Sexual orientation question development for Census 2021](#)

Article

How we researched, developed and tested the Census 2021 question on sexual orientation.

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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