

Statistical bulletin

# Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021

The number of usual residents aged 5 years and over who provide unpaid care, and how many hours they provide in a typical week, Census 2021 data.



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# 1 . Main points

This page is also available in [Welsh \(Cymraeg\) \(PDF, 355KB\)](#).

- Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) are used throughout this bulletin; they allow for comparison between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure.
- In England and Wales an estimated 5.0 million usual residents aged 5 years and over provided unpaid care in 2021, this is an ASP of 9.0%, a decrease from 11.4% in 2011.
- The proportion of people providing 19 or less hours of unpaid care a week decreased from 7.2% in 2011 to 4.4% in 2021.
- The proportion of people who provided 20 to 49 hours of unpaid care a week increased from 1.5% in 2011 to 1.9% in 2021.
- The proportion of people who provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week increased slightly from 2.7% in 2011 to 2.8% in 2021.
- A larger proportion of people provided any amount of unpaid care in Wales (10.5%) than in England (8.9%) in 2021; in Wales, a larger proportion of people provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week (3.6%, compared with 2.7% in England).

Tell us what you think about this publication by [answering a few questions](#).

## 2 . Unpaid care in England and Wales

Census 2021 asked "Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?". People were asked to exclude anything they did as part of their paid employment. The wording of the question differs from the 2011 Census question, which began "Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others".

Census 2021 was undertaken during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which may also have influenced how people perceived and undertook their provision of unpaid care and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

Percentages in this bulletin have been age-standardised. Health and age are closely related, with older people being more likely to be in poorer health. Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) account for different age structures in populations and are more appropriate than crude percentages when drawing comparisons over time and across areas. The numbers being reported here are the actual number who responded in each category. You can download both age-standardised and non-age standardised datasets.

For further information on how the unpaid care question has changed, see [Section 7: Measuring the data](#). In addition, read more in our [blog Age-standardising data: What does this mean and why does it matter?](#)

### Provision of unpaid care in 2021

In 2021, people answered the question by selecting one of six categories. People could select "No" if they did not provide any unpaid care. In England and Wales, an estimated 51.4 million usual residents aged 5 years and over did not provide unpaid care.

The estimated 5.0 million people who answered "Yes" selected the category which best corresponded to the number of hours of unpaid care they provided in a typical week. Of all usual residents in England and Wales aged 5 years and over, there were an estimated:

- 1.8 million people who provided 9 hours or less of unpaid care a week
- 678,000 people who provided 10 to 19 hours of unpaid care a week
- 483,000 people who provided 20 to 34 hours of unpaid care a week
- 552,000 people who provided 35 to 49 hours of unpaid care a week
- 1.5 million people who provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week

In both England and in Wales, unpaid carers most commonly provided either the lowest amount of unpaid care possible (9 hours or less) or the highest amount of unpaid care possible (50 or more hours).

In England, the majority of unpaid carers provided 9 hours or less unpaid care a week (1.7 million), followed by 50 or more hours unpaid care a week (1.4 million).

In Wales, more people provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week (107,000) than any other category. The second most selected category in Wales was "Provides 9 hours or less unpaid care a week" (96,000).

## Comparing provision of unpaid care in 2011 and 2021

Comparisons between 2011 and 2021 data in this bulletin are made for three broad categories of unpaid care. This is because of differences in the number of categories included in the 2011 and 2021 census questions. Further information about changes to the unpaid care question between 2011 and 2021 can be found in [Section 7: Measuring the data](#).

The age-standardised proportion of usual residents aged 5 years and over who provided any amount of unpaid care in England and Wales decreased from 11.4% in 2011 to 9.0% in 2021. The decrease was driven by the substantial fall in the proportion of people who provided 19 hours or less of unpaid care in a typical week (7.2% in 2011, compared with 4.4% in 2021). However, Figure 1 shows that there was a shift towards people dedicating more hours of their time in a typical week to unpaid care.

### Figure 1: Number of hours of unpaid care provided per week, usual residents aged 5 years and over, age-standardised proportions, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

#### Notes:

1. We have excluded the "provides no unpaid care" category from this chart to make it easier to clearly see the number of hours of unpaid care provided.

#### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Potential explanations for changes in the provision of unpaid care could include:

- coronavirus guidance on reducing travel and limiting visits to people from other households
- unpaid carers who previously shared caring responsibilities may have taken on all aspects of unpaid care because of rules on household mixing during the coronavirus pandemic
- there were a higher number of deaths than expected in the older population [at the beginning of 2021 due to coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and other causes](#); this could have led to a reduction in the need for unpaid care
- changes in the question wording between 2011 and 2021 may have had an impact on the number of people who self-reported as unpaid carers

Read more about quality considerations in [Section 8: Strengths and limitations](#).

## 3 . How provision of unpaid care changed over time within England and Wales

### England and Wales

A larger proportion of usual residents aged 5 years and over provided any amount of unpaid care in Wales (10.5%) than in England (8.9%) in 2021. The proportions have decreased since 2011 (when they were 13.0% and 11.3% respectively). Comparisons between 2011 and 2021 data for the three categories of unpaid care show:

- decreases in the proportions who provided 19 hours or less of unpaid care a week in both England (from 7.2% in 2011 to 4.4% in 2021) and in Wales (from 7.4% in 2011 to 4.7% in 2021)
- increases in the proportions who provided between 20 and 49 hours of unpaid care a week in England (from 1.5% in 2011 to 1.8% in 2021), and in Wales (from 1.9% in 2011 to 2.2% in 2021)
- the proportions of people who provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week remained similar in England (2.7% in 2011, 2.7% in 2021) and in Wales (3.7% in 2011, 3.6% in 2021)

### English regions

In all English regions, there was a smaller proportion of unpaid carers in 2021 compared with 2011. The North East was the region with the largest proportion of people who provided any amount of unpaid care in 2021 (10.1%, compared with 11.8% in 2011). It was also the region with the largest proportion of people providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week, at 3.4% (compared with 3.3% in 2011).

The region with the largest decrease in the proportion of people providing any amount of unpaid care was the West Midlands, with the proportion falling from 12.2% in 2011 to 9.5% in 2021.

By comparison, the region with the smallest proportion of people who provided any amount of unpaid care in 2021 was London (7.8%, a decrease from 10.3% in 2011). London had the lowest regional proportion of people providing 19 or less hours of unpaid care a week (3.8%) and 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week (2.3%).

### Figure 2: A larger age-standardised proportion of usual residents in the North East provided unpaid care in 2021, compared with other English regions

Number of hours of unpaid care provided per week, usual residents aged 5 years and over, age-standardised proportions, 2021, England, Wales and regions of England

#### Notes:

1. We have excluded the “provides no unpaid care” category from this chart to make it easier to clearly see the number of hours of unpaid care provided.

#### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

### Local authorities in England

In England, the five local authorities with the largest proportions of usual residents aged 5 years and over who provided any amount of unpaid care were:

- St. Helens (11.7%)
- Ashfield (11.6%)
- Mansfield (11.5%)
- Knowsley (11.5%)
- Halton (11.3%)

The nine English local authorities with the smallest proportions of people providing any amount of unpaid care were located in the London region, with the smallest proportion living in the City of London (6.3%). The areas outside of London with the smallest proportions of unpaid carers were the South East local authorities of Elmbridge and Hart (both 7.3%).

Looking more closely at the hours of unpaid care provided in a typical week, the largest proportions of people providing 19 hours or less unpaid care a week lived in the Isles of Scilly (5.6%) and Gedling (5.6%). The smallest proportion lived in Newham (2.8%).

A larger proportion of people in Knowsley (2.9%) and Hartlepool (2.9%) provided 20 to 49 hours of unpaid care a week compared with all other English local authorities. The smallest proportion was for the City of London (1.0%).

The largest proportion of people providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week were in Knowsley (4.3%), and the smallest proportion was in the City of London (1.0%).

## Local authorities in Wales

In Wales, the five local authorities with the largest proportions of usual residents aged 5 years and over who provided any amount of unpaid care were:

- Neath Port Talbot (12.3%)
- Caerphilly (11.4%)
- Torfaen (11.4%)
- Blaenau Gwent (11.3%)
- Merthyr Tydfil (11.3%)

By comparison, Gwynedd was the Welsh local authority with the smallest proportion of people providing any amount of unpaid care (8.9%).

Looking more closely at the hours of unpaid care provided in a typical week, the largest proportions of people providing 19 hours or less of unpaid care a week lived in Monmouthshire (5.3%) and Ceredigion (5.3%). The smallest proportion lived in Gwynedd (4.1%).

A larger proportion of people in Neath Port Talbot (2.9%) provided 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week compared with all other Welsh local authorities. The smallest proportion lived in Gwynedd (1.7%).

Neath Port Talbot was also the Welsh local authority with the largest proportion of people providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week (4.5%). The smallest proportion lived in Monmouthshire (2.7%).

Some of the local authorities in Wales with larger proportions of people providing unpaid care are also areas in which larger proportions of people reported having "Bad" or "Very bad" health, or having a disability. For more information, please see our [General health, England and Wales: Census 2021](#) and [Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021 statistical bulletins](#).

The interactive map in Figure 3 shows how the provision of unpaid care varied across local authorities in England and Wales.

## Figure 3: How unpaid care (age-standardised) varied across local authorities in England and Wales, 2021

Number of hours of unpaid care provided per week, usual residents aged 5 years and over, age-standardised proportions, 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

**Download the data**

[.xlsx](#)

## 4 . Future publications

More detailed data and analysis on health, disability and unpaid care will be published in the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. Read more about our [health, disability and unpaid care analysis plans](#) and the [release plans for Census 2021](#) more generally.

## 5 . Unpaid care, England and Wales: data

[Provision of unpaid care, age-standardised proportions](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by the number of hours of unpaid care they provide. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021. Age-standardisation allows for comparisons between populations that may contain proportions of different ages, represented as a percentage.

[Provision of unpaid care](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by the number of hours of unpaid care they provide. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

## 6 . Glossary

### Unpaid care

An unpaid carer may look after, give help or support to anyone who has long-term physical or mental ill-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.

### 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.

# 7 . Measuring the data

## Measuring provision of unpaid care

A question asking about provision of unpaid care was first introduced in the 2001 Census.

There are differences in the wording of the question between the 2011 and 2021 censuses.

In Census 2021 we asked:

"Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?

Exclude anything you do as part of your paid employment"

People answered the 2021 question by selecting from one of six categories:

- No
- Yes, 9 hours a week or less
- Yes, 10 to 19 hours a week
- Yes, 20 to 34 hours a week
- Yes, 35 to 49 hours a week
- Yes, 50 or more hours a week

In the 2011 Census we asked:

"Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either:

- long-term physical or mental ill-health/disability?
- problems related to old age?

Do not count anything you do as part of your paid employment"

People answered the 2011 question by selecting one of four categories:

- No
- Yes, 1 - 19 hours a week
- Yes, 20 - 49 hours a week
- Yes, 50 or more hours a week

## Age-standardised proportions

Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) allow for comparison between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure. The [2013 European Standard Population](#) is used to standardise proportions.

## 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 impact UK-wide population and housing statistics, in terms of both timing and scope.

## Response rate

The person response rate is the number of usual residents for whom individual details were provided on a returned questionnaire, divided by the estimated usual resident population.

The [person response rate](#) for Census 2021 was 97% of the usual resident population of England and Wales, and over 88% in all local authorities. The majority of returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

Read more about question-specific response rates at local authority level in [Section 4 of our Measures showing the quality of census 2021 estimates methodology](#).

## 8 . Strengths and limitations

Quality considerations, along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally, can be found in the [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for [Health, disability and unpaid care quality information for Census 2021](#).

Further information on our quality assurance processes is provided in our [Maximising the quality of Census 2021 population estimates report](#).



## 9 . Related links

### [Health, disability, and unpaid care: Census 2021 in England and Wales](#)

Webpage | Updated 19 January 2023

Data and supporting information about health, disability, and unpaid care from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

### [Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Updated 19 January 2023

Interactive map tool that visualises Census 2021 data on different topics down to a local authority area and neighbourhood level.

### [How your area has changed in 10 years: Census 2021](#)

Digital content article | Updated 19 January 2023

Find out how life changed for people living in different local authority areas in England and Wales.

### [Health, disability and unpaid care quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 19 January 2023

Known quality information affecting health, disability, and unpaid care data from Census 2021 in England and Wales to help users correctly interpret the statistics.

### [Health, disability and unpaid care variables Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 19 January 2023

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about health, disability and unpaid care.

### [Health, disability and unpaid care in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 19 January 2023

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about health, disability and unpaid care in Wales.

## 10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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