

Article

People's living arrangements in England and Wales: Census 2021

This article provides an overview of people's living arrangements. It includes analysis on: their legal partnership status, non-dependent children, people living alone, people with second addresses, and whether people had moved in the year prior to census.

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1 . Main points

- The proportion of people who live in a couple that are cohabiting (not in a marriage or civil partnership) has increased from 20.6% in 2011 to 24.3% in 2021, an increase across all age groups aged under 85 years.
- The proportion of cohabiting couples with an age difference of five years or more fell from 38.5% in 2011 to 33.7% in 2021, the age differences of cohabiting couples are now more similar to those of married couples (31.1% five or more years).
- On Census Day, 4.9 million non-dependent children lived in the parental home, an increase of 14.7% since 2011, the largest percentage point increase was for those aged 25 to 29 years.
- The proportion of people aged 16 to 49 years who live alone has decreased from 9.5% in 2011 to 8.5% in 2021.
- The number of usual residents who stayed at a second parental address for more than 30 days a year was 1.1 million (42.4% more than 2011), 5.0% of people aged under 18 years (620,000) in 2021 and 3.3% (391,000) in 2011.
- For some people, living arrangements in March 2021 may reflect how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected their place of usual residence on Census Day, but this is likely to be marginal in relation to the underlying trends in living arrangements.

2 . Living arrangements of couples

In 2021, the proportion of people aged 16 years and over living in households who are living in a couple (57.8%) remains unchanged since 2011.

The proportion of people living in a couple who were married or in a registered civil partnership (including separated) decreased to 75.7%, from 79.4% in 2011.

Age distribution of usual residents living in a couple

As cohabitation increased, the proportion of people living in couples who were married or in a civil partnership fell among all age groups aged under 85 years, when comparing 2011 with 2021.

The greatest change in the proportion of people living in a couple who were cohabiting was seen in those aged 20 to 34 years, most notably for those aged 25 to 29 years for whom the proportion increased from 56.5% in 2011 to 71.6% in 2021. This reflects the reduction in marriage rates and increase in age at marriage. You can read more about marriage rates and median age at marriage in our [Marriages in England and Wales: 2019 bulletin](#).

Figure 1: The proportion of people living in a couple who were cohabiting has increased across most ages

Proportion of usual residents living in a couple aged 16 years and over in households who are cohabiting, England and Wales, 2011 and 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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Same-sex couples' living arrangements

In 2021, 476,000 people were living in a same-sex couple. Same-sex cohabitation has increased by 1.3% since 2011, whereas opposite-sex cohabitation has increased by 27.6%.

The smaller increase in same-sex cohabitation may reflect the option of same-sex marriage being available following the introduction of same-sex marriage in England and Wales in 2014. The proportion of people who are in a legal partnership with someone of the same sex has almost doubled from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.9% in 2021.

Higher proportions of female same-sex couples living together are in a legal partnership (34.4%) than males (32.2%).

Married or civil partnered people living apart

The proportion of people living in households (aged 16 years and over) who are in a legal partnership but not living in a couple (sometimes referred to as "living apart together") is unchanged since 2011 (3.0% of people aged 16 years who are in a legal partnership), which does not include people who are separated, who live in households.

The proportion of those "living apart together" that have arrived in the UK in the 10 years before Census 2021 was 29.1%, which suggests that people may be "living apart together" with a partner who may be living outside of the UK. This is much higher than the 6.7% who arrived in the previous decade for those who are married or in a civil partnership and living in a couple. Read about what we plan to publish later this year about those living apart together in our [Demography analysis plans](#).

Proportion of people cohabiting by local authority

The age structure of a local authority may have an impact on the prevalence of cohabitating couples. Age-standardised proportions consider the different age structures of local authorities to make them more comparable. The local authorities with the highest age standardised proportions of adults in households who are cohabiting are in the Midlands, Yorkshire and the East of England. In England, the local authority with the highest rate is Bolsover (18.5%). In Wales, it is Gwynedd (16.4%).

The local authorities in England with the lowest age-standardised proportion of people living in a cohabiting couple are mostly in London. The lowest proportion can be found in Harrow with a proportion at 5.9%. The local authorities in Wales with the lowest standardised proportions of people living in a cohabiting couple are Cardiff (12.8%) and Swansea (13.0%).

Figure 2: The local authorities with the lowest age-standardised proportion of cohabiting people are mostly in London

Cohabiting people as an age-standardised proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over in households in each local authority in 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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3 . Non-dependent children in households

In 2021, the total number of non-dependent children was 4.9 million, a 14.7% increase from 4.2 million in 2011.

Non-dependent children account for over half of the population that are aged 19 to 23 years. The population aged 19 years has the highest proportion of the population who are non-dependent children (60.7%). The proportion of the population that are non-dependent children has increased across all ages from aged 20 to 73 years. Those aged 24 years had the largest percentage point increase (9.2%).

In 2021, there were fewer non-dependent children aged 16 to 18 years compared with 2011. People aged 16 to 18 years may be non-dependent children if they are not in full-time education. Since 2011, the law in England has changed, which means people must remain in education or training until they are aged 18 years. This may be why there has been a decrease in the number of those aged 16 to 18 years who are non-dependent children in 2021.

The increase in non-dependent children at older ages reflects the increasing average age at life milestones, including moving out of a parental home, shown in our [Milestones: journeying into adulthood article](#). The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may have also been a factor in non-dependent children remaining or returning to a parental home.

Figure 3: The proportion of people who are non-dependent children living in a parental household has increased across most ages and peaks at aged 19 years

Non-dependent children as a proportion of usual residents in each age group in England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

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In 2011, 68.0% of non-dependent children lived in a single-family household that did not include dependent children, this increased to 68.8% in 2021. The proportion of those living in a single-family household that also contained dependent children decreased from 26.8% in 2011 to 25.5% in 2021.

Where non-dependent children live

Most local authorities have more non-dependent children in 2021 than in 2011. Only 21 of 331 local authorities have fewer than in 2011. The local authorities with the largest increases in non-dependent children since 2011 are mostly London local authorities, except for Luton. Tower Hamlets had the largest percentage increase since 2011 of 49.1%, this may be partly explained by the increase in population for Tower Hamlets (22.1%). In Wales, the largest percentage increase was in Newport (19.8%).

In England, the local authorities that have seen a percentage decrease in non-dependent children are mainly found in the North of England and Midlands. This may reflect relative availability of affordable property in these areas, or that young adults leave these areas for employment and education. In Wales, the largest percentage decrease was in Merthyr Tydfil (9.3%).

The House Price Index (March 2021) shows that local authorities with the highest percentage increase all have house prices above the England and Wales average, except for Luton, whereas those with the largest percentage decrease all have average house prices below the England and Wales average.

Figure 4: The increase in non-dependent children was highest in mostly London local authorities and lowest in local authorities mainly in Wales and the North East

The percentage change in non-dependent children in each local authority in England and Wales, 2011 to 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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Further analysis of non-dependent children, their characteristics and geographical spread will be included in our release on families. Read about what we plan to publish later this year about families in our [Demography analysis plans](#).

4 . Household size

People who live alone

In 2021, 7.1 million people lived alone in England. In Wales, it was 430,000. The proportion of households where one person lives alone in England was 30.1% in 2021 compared with 30.2% in 2011. In Wales it was 31.9% in 2021 compared with 30.8% in 2011.

London is the region that has seen the largest decrease in proportion of households where one person lives alone, a decrease from 31.6% of households in 2011 to 29.3% in 2021.

Unlike England and Wales, most European countries have seen an increase in the proportion of households containing one person between 2011 and 2021.

Figure 5: The proportion of households in England and Wales where one person lives alone has remained the same, unlike other European countries

Proportion of households containing adults living alone, European countries, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

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In England and Wales, across younger age groups, the number of people aged 16 to 49 years living alone has decreased from 2.5 million to 2.2 million. The proportion of this age group has decreased from 9.5% to 8.5%. This may be linked to people in younger age groups being less likely to live alone because of the affordability of doing so.

Our most recent analysis of [the cost of living alone](#), says that the number of younger people living alone has decreased and they are spending more of their disposable income than two-adult households on rent, mortgages and other housing costs.

The number of people aged 65 years and over living alone in 2021 was 3.3 million, a 14.6% increase since 2011. This change is smaller than the population change for that age group (20.0%). The proportion of the population aged 65 years and over who are living alone has decreased from 31.5% in 2011 to 30.1% in 2021.

Figure 6: The proportion of people living alone has decreased for those aged 25 to 54 years and aged 70 years and over

People living alone as a proportion of usual residents in each age group, England and Wales, 2011 and 2021

Notes:

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The proportion of people living alone who are widowed has decreased from 29.9% to 26.6%. It may have been expected with an ageing population to see a greater proportion of older people living alone. However, at older ages greater numbers of couples combined with improving life expectancy over the decade, and also more households containing non-dependent children has seen proportions fall for those aged 75 to 84 years.

Larger households

The proportion of households with four or more people in 2021 (19.8%) is almost the same as 2011 (19.9%).

There are some geographical differences. The number of households with four or more people has decreased in Wales. It has increased across all English regions except for the North East. The number of households with four or more people has decreased by 5.0% in Wales, from 245,000 to 232,000, and by 4.3% in the North East, from 194,000 to 185,000. The greatest increase can be seen in London, which has increased by 8.6%.

5 . People with a second address

In 2021, the proportion of usual residents with a second address was 5.3% (3.2 million), slightly higher than 5.2% in 2011 (2.9 million).

The most common type of second addresses (1.1 million) were "another parent or guardian's address". This type has seen the largest increase since 2011, a 42.4% increase from 742,000 in 2011.

In 2011, the "other" category included people with a partner's address. This increased by 17.6% from 673,000 to 792,000 in "other" and "partner's address" combined in 2021. Of these, 37.1% were partner's addresses.

People with a second address that is a student's home address decreased by 8.4% since 2011 to 655,000 in 2021. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may have impacted the number of students living at their parent or guardian's home for the whole academic year.

The 25.5% reduction in people with a second address when working away from home (189,000 in 2021) may reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 7: The largest increase in people with a second address was those with another parent or guardian's address

Usual residents with a second address by address type, England and Wales, 2011 and 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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People with another parent or guardian's address

Most usual residents with a second parental address are aged 0 to 17 years (58.7%), having risen from 52.7% in 2011. The largest increase in people with second parental address is among children, aged 0 to 17 years, which rose by 58.6% from 391,000 in 2011 (3.3% of people aged under 18 years) to 620,000 in 2021 (5.0% of people aged under 18 years).

The number of people aged 18 years and over with a second parental address rose by 24.4% from 351,000 in 2011 to 437,000 in 2021.

The number of children aged under 1 years with a second parental address is the only age group to have seen a percentage decrease since 2011. All other age groups increased by at least 22.4%. The greatest increase was children aged 8 years, an increase of 91.5%.

Figure 8: The largest increases in people with a second parental address are in the younger ages

People with a second parent or guardian's address by single year of age as a proportion of usual residents, 2011 and 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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6 . Households or household members that have moved from their address one year ago

The proportion of households who moved from their address one year ago, either as one household or some members of the household, reduced from 14.0% in 2011 to 12.4% in 2021.

The change is similar across the English regions and Wales. The English region with the highest proportion of households or household members that moved is London (16.6%). In Wales it was 10.4%.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which started a year prior to Census 2021 will have affected people's movement, therefore some caution is advised on interpreting these comparisons.

7 . Couples' age difference

Age disparity across relationship types

Across opposite-sex couples in 2021, most males are older in married couples (68.0%) and cohabiting couples (62.1%).

Proportionally, more females are older in cohabiting couples (26.2%) than married couples (20.6%).

In 2021, 31.1% of married couples have an age difference of five or more years, this is similar to 2011 (31.0%). There is very little change in the distribution of age disparity in married couples in 2011 and 2021. A higher proportion of cohabiting couples have an age difference of five or more years, (33.7%, down from 38.5% in 2011) compared with married couples. In 2021, the distribution of cohabiting couples is more similar to that of married couples than in 2011.

Figure 9: The proportion of opposite-sex marriages with a male that is older is higher compared with opposite-sex cohabiting couples

Age disparity of opposite-sex married and cohabiting couples living in the same household, usual residents aged 16 years and over in England and Wales, 2011 and 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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Higher proportions of same-sex couples in legal partnerships have an age difference of five or more years than opposite-sex married couples. Male couples have larger age differences than females, and civil partnerships have larger age differences than marriages. Of male civil partnerships, 58.3% have an age difference of five or more years, and 47.8% of female civil partnerships have an age difference of five or more years, compared with 50.4% of male marriages and 42.0% female marriages, and 31.1% of opposite-sex marriages.

Figure 10: Couples in opposite-sex marriages have smaller age differences than couples in same-sex legal partnerships

Age disparity of married and same-sex civil partnered couples by sex living in the same household, usual residents aged 16 years and over, 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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Age disparity across age groups

Age disparity of opposite-sex couples (married and cohabiting) is shown in Figure 11 and 12, broken down by the age of the female.

The age disparity of opposite-sex married couples shows a larger age disparity between those aged 35 to 64 years. While it is complex to project the consequences of this it may have implications for future levels of widowhood and also retirement. This is smaller at younger ages (aged 25 to 34 years) and older ages (aged 65 years and over) where more couples are closer in age. Male life expectancy is lower than females', while this gap is reducing, females in married couples with a larger positive age disparity (where male is older) are more likely to be widowed. For those aged 16 to 24 years, just 0.5% are in opposite-sex married couples. As the age group is based on age of female, this increases the proportion of couples in the youngest age group where males are older.

Figure 11: Females aged 35 to 64 years in opposite sex marriages have larger age differences compared with other age groups

Age disparity of opposite-sex married couples living in the same household, broken down by age of the female, usual residents aged 16 years and over, 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.
3. Disclosure control processes have been applied to these datasets, "c" is used to denote data that has been removed to meet disclosure control requirements.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Age disparity of opposite-sex cohabiting couples broken down by age of the female show the younger couples are closer in age. Older age groups have larger age differences within the couple.

As the age grouping is based on the age of the female, this increases the proportion of couples in the older age groups where the female is older.

Figure 12: Younger opposite-sex cohabiting couples have smaller age differences

Age disparity of opposite-sex cohabiting couples living in the same household, broken down by age of the female, usual residents aged 16 years and over, 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.
3. Disclosure control processes have been applied to these datasets, "c" is used to denote data that has been removed to meet disclosure control requirements.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Age disparity has been calculated using census data available for couples living in the same household. For opposite-sex couples, it is calculated by subtracting the females age from the males. For same-sex couples, age difference is calculated by subtracting the younger partners age from the older partner's age. The same method (age difference) is used for both opposite and same-sex couples for comparison (Figure 10). Calculations are based on each individual's single year of age on Census Day, 21st March 2021.

8 . Future publications

This article gives a high-level summary of the living arrangements of people in England and Wales. Further analysis will be released in upcoming articles that will provide more detailed breakdowns of the concepts covered in this article. Read more about our 2023 plans for census demography analysis in our [Demography analysis plans](#)

9 . Living arrangements data

[Number of usual residents in households and communal establishments](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by whether they resided in households and communal establishments. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Living arrangements](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

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

[Household composition](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify households in England and Wales by the relationships between household members (household composition). The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Legal partnership status](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their legal partnership status. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Household size](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify all household spaces in England and Wales by household size. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

10 . Glossary

Age-standardised proportion

Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) allow for fairer 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.

Dependent child

A dependent child is a person aged 0 to 15 years in a household or a person aged 16 to 18 years who is in full-time education and lives in a family with their parent, parents, grandparent or grandparents. It does not include any person aged 16 to 18 years who has a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Non-dependent child

A non-dependent child is a person living with their parent(s) and who is either aged 19 years or over and has no spouse, partner or child living in the household, or aged 16 to 18 years and who is not in full-time education and has no spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Household

A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room or sitting room, or dining area.

This includes all sheltered accommodation units in an establishment (irrespective of whether there are other communal facilities), and all people living in caravans on any type of site that is their usual residence; this will include anyone who has no other usual residence elsewhere in the UK.

A household must contain at least one person whose place of usual residence is at the address. A group of short-term residents living together is not classified as a household, and neither is a group of people at an address where only visitors are staying.

Household composition

Households according to the relationships between members.

One-family households are classified by: the number of dependent children, and the family type (married, civil partnership or cohabiting couple family, or lone parent family).

Other households are classified by:

- the number of people
- the number of dependent children
- whether the household consists only of students or only of people aged 66 years and over

Legal partnership status

Classifies a person according to their legal marital or registered civil partnership status on Census Day, 21 March 2021.

It is the same as the 2011 Census variable "Marital status" but has been updated for Census 2021 to reflect the revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

In Census 2021 results, "single" refers only to someone who has never been married or in a registered civil partnership.

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.

11 . Data sources and quality

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. Most returns (89%) were received online. The response rate exceeded our target of 94% overall and 80% in all local authorities.

Further information on question-specific response rates will be published in a separate report later this year.

Quality of Census 2021

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 more generally are provided in our [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for demography and migration in our [Demography and migration 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](#).

12 . Related links

[Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 2 November 2022

Summary of household size, household composition, household deprivation status, and people's marital and civil partnership status, Census 2021 data.

[Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 28 June 2022

Census 2021 rounded population and household estimates for local authorities in England and Wales, by sex and five-year age group.

[People with second addresses, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 January 2023

Summary of people who use second addresses in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.

[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.

13 . Cite this article

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