Article

Quarterly update on population and migration statistics: November 2026

Improvements to how we estimate UK population and migration, providing an update on our progress and plans.

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Release date:
16 November 2026

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Overview

This update provides information on the recent improvements and plans to deliver high-quality, independent population statistics that underpin the UK's most critical economic and societal decisions and inform the public. Each edition will highlight improvements delivered, explain progress against our public commitments and set out our priorities for the next quarter.

Today (16 November 2026), alongside this update, we have published our Population statistics system plan that brings together our existing plans across the population statistics system into a single document covering interdependent improvements across our outputs. The plan sets out 21 key deliverables over two years, up to March 2029, describing improvements we will deliver alongside the publication of our regular statistical releases. It builds on the objectives for population statistics previously set out as part of our Economic statistics plan in 2025.

This is the first iteration of our Population statistics system plan where it aligns work that is already under way with the Improving population estimates plan published in July and our Migration statistics strategy published today. The migration strategy sets out our vision for developing international migration statistics in the short term (2026 to 2028), medium term (2029 to 2031) and long term (2032 to 2033).

The aim of the Population statistics system plan is to make improvements across the full statistical process. This includes higher quality data sources, new and refined methods and processes, and improved channels for dissemination, all of which will be informed by engagement with our users. This quarterly update series will provide a consistent way for users to track decisions and progress against the plan, understand how developments affect the statistics they use and the challenges, and engage with future work.

2 . Population estimates

After publishing a suite of information in summer 2026 on mid-year population estimates (MYEs), as outlined in the previous quarterly update, we received a letter from the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), confirming their continued accredited official statistics status, as we had fulfilled the imminent requirements. Work is continuing towards the recommendations identified within their compliance review and our improvement plan.

- We are looking at improving the age and sex alignment between Long-term international migration, LTIM headline estimates and the local authority level LTIM used in our population estimates.
- We continue to engage with users of population estimates through a range of meetings and collaboration opportunities, such as the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) meetings and in our series of webinars; if you would like to provide feedback on our population estimates or find out more about opportunities to engage with us about the development of population estimates, email pop.info@ons.gov.uk
- We are continuing to make progress on understanding the differences between MYEs for school-age children and the Department for Education's (DfE) English school census; as part of this workplan, we are engaging with the Welsh Government and Greater London Authority as part of addressing this recommendation.
- We are focusing on improving internal migration estimates as they are a crucial part of making improvements for MYEs; this work is still in the research stage with plans to publish a research update by summer 2027.

Work is also continuing on a small number of characteristics using administrative data, building on our work to consistently and reliably index and link data assets.

Our current priorities for research are ethnic group, country of birth and veteran status (service in the UK armed forces). Administrative data already play a fundamental role in the population statistics system. More effective use of administrative data is enabling us to make the improvements to the quality, frequency and range of population statistics. Working with data suppliers with the aim to establish a regular annual feed is a priority.

3 . Population projections

On 22 October 2026, we held a discussion with users of subnational population projections (SNPPs) for England to discuss the timing and prioritisation of future projections outputs, progress on redeveloping the SNPP system, and users' views on the products that would best support local decision-making. We are grateful to all stakeholders for sharing their views and contributing to our understanding of what is required of subnational projections.

The outcome of this was that, on balance, it is preferable for us to continue to redevelop the SNPP system to enable the production of 2026-based SNPPs in 2028, as set out in the Population statistics system plan, and to continue to consider how local population projections that incorporate housing plans could be produced in future.

While this means that for some users there will be a continued need to use the 2022-based SNPPs and their variant projections, this is preferable to issuing one or more interim projections, which could delay the SNPP redevelopment. We agreed to continue to provide updates on the progress of SNPP redevelopment in this quarterly update and in other established communications with users of population projections.

4 . Migration

We have published a Migration statistics strategy, which outlines how we will deliver over the short term (2026 to 2028), medium term (2029 to 2031) and long term (after 2031).

Our primary purpose is to provide high-quality international migration statistics that are relevant and impactful, meet important user needs and underpin accurate population estimates. This includes a dual focus on international migration flows and migrant population estimates: recognising that understanding "who is here" is as critical as "who arrives and leaves".

We will also focus on:

- greater data access and linkage of administrative data, leading to improvements in our national and local-level international migration estimates, as well as additional insights into the characteristics and outcomes of international migrants
- a broader range of international migration flow estimates: for example, developing estimates of international migrants who move residence for less than 12 months (temporary mobility)
- estimates that support the plan to improve population estimates in England and Wales, including estimates of the resident migrant population in the UK and high-quality local authority level flows data
- migration-related outputs from Census 2031, providing us with a detailed picture of the population resident in the UK
- transparent and accessible communication: for example, sharing our data and information on the improved Office for National Statistics (ONS) website and exploiting new technology to disseminate our statistics

On 26 November 2026, we will publish our next Long-term international migration, provisional release; it will include estimates up to the end of June 2026. Years ending September and December 2025 will have their first standard revisions and will remain provisional as a result of a short-term delay in our data supply.

5 . Births and deaths

In June 2026, we asked users of our births statistics to provide feedback on our regular releases. We received responses from users in central government, academia and the charity sector.

These provided positive feedback on our new tidy data formats and suggestions to expand our provision of total fertility rates (TFRs) to include TFR for fathers, by Index of Multiple Deprivation, and by birth order, which we are currently investigating feasibility for.

We also received positive feedback on our expanded geographical area provision for TFR in our parents' country of birth dataset – from 30 regions and countries to 90 – which we are looking to apply more widely throughout the dataset.

Following the release of the mid-2025 population estimates, the annual births and deaths releases were republished using these new population denominators to produce mortality and fertility rates. Annual suicides and estimates of deaths of people experiencing homelessness were also published in October 2026 using the latest population estimates.

We have also published updated analysis on the impact of death certification reform (DCR) on our mortality statistics. Our How death certification reform is shaping mortality data blog summarises the findings and what they mean for mortality statistics.

6 . Census

In March 2027, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will run a large-scale Census Test across England and Wales to help prepare for Census 2031.

In our blog, A chance to shape Census 2031, Mary Gregory explains that, like a scientific experiment, the test will try different approaches in different places. By asking selected households and students to complete a questionnaire, we can learn what works best to encourage responses, what needs improving and which methods to rule out.

On 8 December 2026, we will publish the outputs from our Census 2031 topic consultation, including full, topic-level evaluation reports and our updated assessment of the content for Census 2031 in England and Wales. Topic-level reports will include proposed next steps for each topic.

7 . Recent updates

August 2026

We published UK armed forces veteran statistics for England and Wales, research update: 2023.

September 2026

We held our The population in numbers – what's changing? webinar on the population estimates, including methods used, latest trends and plans for improvements.

We published our Admin-based household estimates for local authorities in England and Wales from 2021 to 2023 research update.

We held a webinar on internal migration estimates that covered current methods and plans for improvements.

We presented joint sessions with colleagues from National Records of Scotland, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and the Welsh Government on Census 2031 at the British Society for Population Studies (BSPS) conference and the Royal Statistical Society conference.

October 2026

Following on from the mid-2025 population estimates for England and Wales, we published our Mid-2025 UK population estimates bulletin.

Alongside our official death statistics for 2025, we published official statistics in development to demonstrate the methods. We also hosted a webinar on births and deaths, which included gathering feedback on the new methods.

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) held a roundtable with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and devolved governments to discuss the Census 2031 accreditation process.

We published as official statistics in development UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales: 2024 and 2025.

November 2026

We published an update on methods for producing annual population estimates by ethnic group.

We published a research update on population estimates by country of birth for England and Wales: 2026.

We published Admin-based household estimates by size for local authorities in England and Wales: 2021.

We published the Migration strategy.

We published the Population statistics system plan.

8 . Future developments

These are some of the main future deliverables over the next 12 months. Please use the Office for National Statistics (ONS) release calendar for more information on all pre-announced statistics.

Winter 2026 to 2027

- The UK Statistics Authority's annual update on the future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales is being published.
- On 26 November 2026, we will publish our next Long-term international migration, provisional release; it will include estimates up to the end of June 2026.
- We will publish our Provisional population estimate for the UK: mid-2026.
- On 1 December 2026, we will publish our Population estimates by output areas, electoral, health and other geographies, England and Wales: mid-2025.
- We will publish the results of our analysis of Census topic consultation responses on 8 December 2026, which will include information on the topics we plan to develop further for Census 2031 in England and Wales.
- The Migration Statistics User Forum will be held on 10 December 2026 and will give users an opportunity to hear from producers of migration statistics and be involved in discussion sessions between users and producers.
- We will publish our Reason for migration, international students update: December 2026 on 18 December 2026.
- We will publish our Sexual orientation, UK: 2025 bulletin in early 2027.
- We will host a Household Statistics webinar on 27 January 2027 following the release of Admin-based household estimates by size for local authorities in England and Wales: 2021.

Spring 2027

- We will publish updates on long-term international migration and population estimates.
- We plan to publish an update on our research to improve our internal migration estimates, which forms an important part of our plan to improve our population estimates.

Summer 2027

- We aim to publish an update on research progress on new methods for internal migration at the local authority level, confirming a timeline for implementation.
- We will publish mid-2026 population estimates for England and Wales and will inform users of any improvements to methods in advance.
- We will hold a first annual population, census and social statistics user event, covering work across the population statistics system.

Winter 2027

- We will publish an update for users on development and testing of our subnational projections systems, and confirm a timetable for future publications.
- We will publish a workplan outlining the planned process to inform future choices beyond Census 2031.

9 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 11 August 2026, ONS website, article, Quarterly update on population and migration statistics: November 2026