

Census 2021: What to expect and when

Frequently asked questions

census 2021

59,597,300

Usual resident population in England and Wales

Source: Population and household estimates for England and Wales 2021
(English and Welsh)

 Office for National Statistics

Source: Office for National Statistics

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Introduction

This document has been produced to summarise questions and answers raised in the webinars 'What to expect from the 2021 census' run in May and June 2022 by the UK Data Service. With the first release of data and supporting documentation by the Office for National Statistics on 28 June 2022 there is further clarification on some of the issues raised.

Coverage

What was the coverage of the census? Will the first release data have an adjustment for estimated undercount? Will the published data include any estimate of undercount?

The headline figure for coverage was 97% with variance between local authority areas. In the [first results from Census 2021](#) ONS provide estimates for the population and households by local authority in England and Wales by sex and five-year age group. They also provide [methodological guidance on the process for producing population estimates](#) and a [tool to show the actual count, estimates and the last mid-year population](#) estimates by local authority.

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 is a fundamental challenge. Will ONS seek to collect and publish data to fill this gap?

In the methodology report ONS state that:

We recognise the population continues to change and that we need to understand these changes. Using a variety of data sources, we will be providing more frequent, relevant and timely statistics to allow us to understand population change in local areas in 2022 and beyond. The results from Census 2021 will therefore provide an important bridge from the past to the future.

As we release further census statistics, we will publish supporting information to consider the impact the coronavirus pandemic may have had. This will include how the pandemic may have affected data on labour market and travel to work.

Record swapping and statistical disclosure control

Will there still be record swapping/rounding or does the SDC dynamic ‘granularity’ function mean this is no longer needed?

There will be record swapping then cell key perturbation applied through the flexible table builder. Rule based statistical disclosure control will then be applied to assess whether the data can be released.

Dates of release

Can you summarise dates of release by phase? When are we likely to get population data in particular protected characteristics – sex, age, marriage? Where do OA univariate counts fit in this release schedule? Are other aggregations to be generated again e.g. built-up areas? What is the earliest that data on ethnicity and religion will be available? Will demographic data include age and sex breakdowns? Does the census capture information on caring e.g. for dependent children?

You can find the most up to date information on release dates for phase 1 on the [ONS website](#). The second and third phase are documented [here](#). The notes below summarise these as of 6 July.

Geography

How will the new LSOAs be linked to the old ones?

Output areas in July 2022, LSOAs in August 2022 and MSOAs in September 2022. The ONS suggest that changes to OAs will be 5% with less change for LSOAs and MSOAs. In 2011 there were tables provided to help link the 2001 and 2011 geographies.

There are also some changes to local authorities.

Phase 1 – univariate data to output area level (with multivariate data and area profiles to follow)

October to November 2022

- Demography and migration.
- UK armed forces veterans.
- Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion.

November to December 2022

- Education.
- Housing.
- Sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Labour market and travel to work.

December 2022 to January 2023

- Health, disability and unpaid care.

Phase 2 (winter 2022 to early 2023)

- Multivariate data for the usual resident population base.
- Short-term resident population data.

Phase 3 (from spring 2023)

- Alternative population bases.
- Small populations.
- Detailed migration data.
- Origin-destination or 'flow' data.
- Microdata samples

The age and sex breakdowns are defined as part of the demographic characteristics to be released in Phase 1. The other aggregates identified are workplace, workday and out-of-term populations. It is not clear whether built-up areas will be identified. The question on caring simply asks how much time people spend on it.

Accessing data

How will we be able to access the data?

Aggregate data will be available from the ONS and the UK Data Service. Safeguarded versions of the microdata and flow data will only be available from the UK Data Service.

UK wide dataset

Are there plans to release a harmonised microdata file?

Harmonised aggregate tables, microdata and flow data for the UK will be released. The timing will depend on the release of Scottish data. Preparatory work is underway to look at potential issues because of the different classifications of variables used. When the data is released

guidance will be provided to guide researchers through issues with individual variables and to flag those where a comparison is not advised.

Other

I'm working in an area where students form a significant part of the ethnic minority population. Will I be able to create tables with the first release of data that will enable me to exclude them from specific tabulations?

In theory the flexible table builder will allow for this analysis but it does use a reduced set of ethnic categories. As a result the potential analysis using the full ethnic coding will be restricted to those tables that include an indicator of being a student and ethnic characteristic. There may also be a need to consider the age of students as the figures have included those in tertiary education as well. An alternative would be to request commissioned tables though it is not clear what level of service will be available for this.

Could you offer some training on how to produce data sets in different formats and in particular how to move data from one format to the other? In particular, I would be interested in moving data from SPSS to Excel.

You can save an SPSS file as an Excel spreadsheet. However you lose the definition of categories for the variables. You can recreate them by using the Data Dictionary function. File > Display Data File Information > Working File and then save the information. For each variable you will need to produce a lookup table in Excel and use the VLOOKUP function to population the category labels in any output you want to produce.

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