

Statistical bulletin

International migration, England and Wales: Census 2021

International migration, including country of birth, passports held and year of arrival, Census 2021 data.



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1 . Main points

This page is also available in [Welsh \(Cymraeg\) \(PDF, 458KB\)](#).

- One in six usual residents of England and Wales were born outside the UK, an increase of 2.5 million since 2011, from 7.5 million (13.4%) to 10 million (16.8%).
- India remained the most common country of birth outside the UK in 2021 (920,000 people, 1.5% of all usual residents).
- The number of people who were born in Romania grew by 576% since the previous census, from 80,000 in 2011 to 539,000 in 2021.
- 5.9 million usual residents (9.9%) held a non-UK passport; the most common non-UK passport held was Polish (760,000, 1.3% of all usual residents).
- 545,000 usual residents (0.9% of the population) had an address outside the UK one year before the census, down 11.0% from 612,000 (1.1%) in 2011.

Help us improve our Census 2021 content by [completing our survey](#).

2 . Migration between censuses

Our release of unrounded population data from the census shows that the usual resident population in England and Wales grew by more than 3.5 million (6.3%) in the period between censuses, from 56,075,912 in 2011 to 59,597,542 in 2021.

Changes in the size of the population are caused by births, deaths, and internal and international migration. Using data on live births and deaths registrations shows the proportion of the population change that is attributable to natural causes, and thereby also reveals the proportion that is attributable to migration.

Monthly data show that from April 2011 until the end of March 2021 there were 6.8 million live births and 5.3 million deaths registered in England and Wales. This represents a natural increase of approximately 1.5 million usual residents (42.5% of the total population increase). The remainder of the population growth (approximately 2.0 million usual residents, 57.5% of total population increase) is because of positive net migration (the difference between those who immigrated into and emigrated out of England and Wales).

Figure 1: Over half of the population increase since 2011 is because of positive net migration

Components of population change between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses, England and Wales

Download the data

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3 . Country of birth

Since 1851, the census has been collecting information on where people are born. It is often the [preferred measure when looking at long-term changes in migration](#) as a person's place of birth does not change.

Out of the 59.6 million usual residents in England and Wales in 2021, 49.6 million (83.2%) were born in the UK and 10.0 million (16.8%) were born outside the UK. This means that about one in six people in England and Wales were born outside the UK. The size of the non-UK born population has risen since 2011, when it was 7.5 million (13.4%).

Those born in the European Union (EU) made up 3.6 million (36.4% of all non-UK born usual residents) of the population, an increase from 2.5 million (32.7%) in 2011 (including Croatia, who joined the EU in 2013). The remaining 6.4 million (63.6%) were born outside the EU, up from 5.1 million (67.3%) in 2011.

This continues a longer-term trend of an increasing proportion of non-UK born residents being from within the EU. In 2001, 1.4 million (30.0% of non-UK born residents) were born in the current EU member states [note 1] and 3.2 million (70.0%) were born outside the EU.

The Census 2021 data also show that there were increases between 2011 and 2021 for most individual countries, when looking at those with the largest populations in England and Wales.

Figure 2: There was a large increase in the number of people in England and Wales who were born in Romania

Top 10 non-UK countries of birth in 2021, with 2011 figures for comparison, England and Wales

Download the data

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Those who listed Romania as their country of birth increased to 539,000 in 2021, from 80,000 in 2011, an increase between censuses of 459,000 (576%), making Romania the fourth most common non-UK country of birth. This increase was the highest out of any country and is driven by working restrictions for Romanian citizens being lifted in 2014. Italy also entered the top 10 non-UK countries of birth, rising to 277,000 from 135,000 between 2011 and 2021, a 106% increase.

The three most common non-UK countries of birth for usual residents in 2021 were the same as in 2011:

- India, which has increased to 920,000 (1.5% of the population in England and Wales), up from 694,000 in 2011
- Poland, which has increased to 743,000 (1.2%), up from 579,000 in 2011
- Pakistan, which has increased to 624,000 (1.0%), up from 482,000 in 2011

Ireland retained its position in the top 10 between 2011 and 2021, but was the country for which there was the greatest decrease, a decline of 20.3%, from 407,000 in 2011 to 325,000 in 2021.

The United States and Jamaica fell out of the top 10 non-UK countries of birth in 2021. The number of people in England and Wales who were born in the United States actually increased between censuses (from 177,000 in 2011 to 203,000 in 2021), but even greater increases for other countries meant that the United States no longer features in the top 10. The number of people born in Jamaica declined, from 160,000 in 2011 to 142,000 in 2021.

Notes for: Country of birth

1. Several countries joined the EU after 2001. For comparability with 2011 and 2021 data, these countries have been included in the EU category for 2001. This includes Cyprus because the Census 2001 data do not distinguish between EU and non-EU areas.

4 . Passports held

In 2011, the census started collecting information on passport(s) held by usual residents, which is [another measure that can be used to describe migration statistics](#). It is often used as a proxy for nationality and a way of identifying those who hold dual or multiple nationalities.

People can hold multiple passports. We prevented double-counting residents by only showing them in one passport category. When a person had more than one passport, they were categorised in the following priority order:

1. UK passport
2. Irish passport
3. Other country passport

Overall, results from Census 2021 show that 51.6 million usual residents (86.5%) held at least one passport; 8.0 million (13.5%) did not have a passport, down from 9.5 million (16.9%) in 2011.

Those who held a UK passport increased, from 42.5 million (75.7%) in 2011 to 45.7 million (76.7%) in 2021. Those who held a non-UK passport also increased, from 4.2 million (7.4%) in 2011 to 5.9 million (9.9%) in 2021.

Of those who had a non-UK passport, 3.9 million were EU passports. This is an increase of 72.5% from 2011, when 2.3 million people had passports from the same EU countries (including Croatia). The other 2.0 million non-UK passports in 2021 were from outside the EU (up 5% from 1.9 million in 2011).

As with country of birth, there were increases between 2011 and 2021 for most countries.

Figure 3: Polish continues to be the most common non-UK passport held in England and Wales

Top 10 non-UK passports held in 2021, with 2011 figures for comparison, England and Wales

Download the data

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Polish (760,000, 1.3%), Romanian (550,000, 0.9%) and Indian (369,000, 0.6%) were the three most common non-UK passports held by usual residents in England and Wales in 2021. In 2011, Polish passports had also been the most common non-UK passport and India was ranked third, whereas the second most common was Irish (ranked fifth in 2021).

Mirroring the trend from country of birth, Romania also had the largest increase in non-UK passport holders in England and Wales, an increase of 477,000 (652%) between 2011 and 2021.

5 . How country of birth and passports held varied across England and Wales

Since the 2011 Census, there has been an increase in the number and percentage of people born outside the UK and people with non-UK passports in each region of England and in Wales.

London has remained the region with both the largest proportion of people born outside the UK and the largest proportion of people with non-UK passports. In 2021, more than 4 in 10 (40.6%) usual residents in London were non-UK born, and more than 1 in 5 (23.3%) had a non-UK passport. This is a small increase since 2011, when 36.7% of London residents were non-UK born, and 21.0% had a non-UK passport.

In contrast, both Wales (6.9%) and the North East of England (6.8%) had approximately 1 in 14 usual residents born outside the UK. Similarly, Wales (4.0%) and the North East (3.7%) also had the lowest proportions of the population with non-UK passports.

The local authorities (LAs) with both the highest percentage of non-UK born residents and non-UK passport holders tended to be in London.

Figure 4: The local authorities with the highest percentage of non-UK born residents and non-UK passport holders were in London

Country of birth and passports held, 2011 and 2021, local authorities in England and Wales

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Of the top 20 LAs with the highest proportion of non-UK born residents, 18 were in London. The areas with the highest proportions were Brent (56.1%), Westminster (55.6%) and Kensington and Chelsea (53.9%). The only non-London LAs in the top 20 were Slough (44.0%) and Leicester (41.1%), and the Welsh LA with the highest proportion was Cardiff (16.5%). In contrast, the LAs with the lowest proportion of non-UK born residents were the Staffordshire Moorlands (2.6%) and Caerphilly (2.9%).

Of the top 20 LAs with the highest proportion of non-UK passport holders, 15 were in London. The top three were the City of London (34.0%), Westminster (33.6%) and Newham (33.3%). Outside of London, the highest proportions of non-UK passport holders were in Cambridge (28.3%) and Slough (24.7%), and in Wales the highest proportion was in Cardiff (9.2%). Across the two nations, the LAs with the lowest proportion of non-UK passport holders were Redcar and Cleveland (1.1%) and the Staffordshire Moorlands (1.3%).

6 . Address one year before the census

The census asked respondents whether their address when filling out the census form was the same as their address one year previously (that is, on 21 March 2020). These data can then be used to explore migration to England and Wales in the year before the census.

In 2021, 545,000 usual residents (0.9% of the population) told us their address one year before the census was outside the UK. This is a decrease compared with 2011, when 612,000 (1.1%) had an address outside the UK one year before the census.

A decline in the number of arrivals in the previous year had been expected, as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. UK travel restrictions were enforced from March 2020 onwards and restrictions were also put in place in other countries across the world. As a result, migration to and from the UK in the year before the census was highly restricted. Despite this, more than half a million people arrived in the year before the census.

London was the English region with the highest proportion of the population with an address outside the UK one year before the census in 2021 (1.7%). The North East had the lowest proportion (0.6%) of any English region and the proportion in Wales (0.5%) was even lower.

The local authorities with the highest proportion of the population with an address outside the UK one year before the census in 2021 were the City of London (6.4%) and Westminster (4.9%) in England, and Cardiff (1.4%) in Wales.

7 . Age and year of arrival

Usual residents born outside the UK were asked when they have most recently arrived to live in the UK. Combining this with their date of birth also gives us information on their age of arrival.

Of the 10.0 million residents in England and Wales in 2021 who were not born in the UK:

- 4.2 million (42.4%) had arrived since 2011
- 2.7 million (26.9%) had arrived between 2001 and 2010
- 3.1 million (30.7%) had arrived before 2001

The trend across the past decade shows that more people listed their most recent year of arrival in the later years. This trend continued despite the international travel restrictions imposed during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic; 680,000 non-UK born usual residents (6.8%) arrived between 2020 and Census Day, 21 March 2021.

One reason behind this is that the census collects the most recent arrival, rather than when people first came to live in the UK. Also, as the census is a snapshot in time, the numbers only include those living in England and Wales at that time. It does not show the full flow of people moving to live here during the decade because some would have also left the UK in that period.

Figure 5: Around 4 in 10 non-UK born residents arrived in the UK in the decade before the census

Most recent year of arrival: all usual residents who are non-UK born, 2021, England and Wales

Notes:

1. Figures are individually rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may not add exactly because of this rounding.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

The data on age of arrival show that:

- 3.0 million non-UK born usual residents were below the age of 18 years when they arrived in the UK (30.2% of all non-UK born usual residents, down from 33.3% in 2011)
- 4.3 million were aged 18 to 29 years (42.4%, down from 44.8% in 2011)
- 2.1 million were aged 30 to 44 years (21.1%, up from 17.4% in 2011)
- 546,000 were aged 45 to 64 years (5.5%, up from 3.9% in 2011)
- 79,000 were aged 65 years and over when they arrived (0.8%, up from 0.6% in 2011)

8 . Short-term resident population

The census also counts the short-term resident population, which includes people who had arrived in the UK within the year before Census Day and did not intend to stay for longer than 12 months. Short-term residents are not included in the usual resident population estimates shown previously.

On Census Day, there were 136,000 short-term residents in England and Wales (132,000 in England, 4,000 in Wales).

To provide the best estimate of the population of England and Wales, we usually adjust census data for people who did not respond. For Census 2021, adjustment happened for usual residents only as this is the main population base. Short-term residents were not adjusted, meaning that the data presented here do not include an estimate of the short-term residents who were living in England and Wales at the time of the census but did not respond to the census. As such, the 2021 estimates are not directly comparable with the 2011 estimates of the short-term resident population.

9 . Future publications

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

10 . International migration, England and Wales: data

[Number of non-UK short-term residents by sex](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify non-UK born short-term residents in England and Wales by sex. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Country of birth](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

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

[Country of birth \(detailed\)](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

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

[Passports held](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

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

[Passports held \(detailed\)](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

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

[Year of arrival in UK](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their year of arrival in the UK. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Length of residence](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their length of residence in the UK. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Age of arrival in the UK](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides Census 2021 estimates that classify usual residents in England and Wales by their age of arrival in the UK. The estimates are as at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

[Migrant Indicator](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

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

11 . Glossary

Address one year ago

The place where a person was living one year before Census Day, that is, on Sunday 22 March 2020. People could choose from:

- same as the current address
- student term-time or boarding school address in the UK
- another address in the UK
- outside of the UK

Age of arrival in the UK

The date a person last arrived to live in the UK and their age. Arrival dates do not include returning from short trips away from the UK.

Age of arrival only applies to usual residents not born in the UK. It does not include usual residents born in the UK who have emigrated and since returned. These are recorded in the category "born in the UK".

Country of birth

The country in which a person was born.

For people not born in one of the four parts of the UK, there was an option to select "elsewhere". People who selected "elsewhere" were asked to write in the current name for their country of birth.

Non-UK passport

People who hold a passport or passports that are neither UK nor Irish passports. This may be in addition to holding an Irish or UK passport.

People were asked to select whether they held "no passport", a "United Kingdom passport", an "Ireland passport", or a "passport from another country" (which they could write in). If more than one option was applicable, people were asked to indicate all that applied.

People will appear in all passport categories that apply to them in results that classify people by passports held.

Passports held

"All passports" classifies a person according to the passport or passports they held at the time of the census. This included expired passports or travel documents people were entitled to renew. Where a person recorded having more than one passport, they were counted only once, categorised in the following priority order:

1. UK passport
2. Irish passport
3. Other passport

Short-term residents

A census short-term UK resident is anyone born outside of the UK who, on 21 March 2021, had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for a period of three months or more but less than 12 months.

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.

Year of arrival in the UK

The year someone not born in the UK last arrived in the UK. This does not include returning from short visits away from the UK.

12 . Measuring the data

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.

13 . Strengths and limitations

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. Read more about the [specific quality considerations for demography and migration](#).

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

14 . Related links

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

Bulletin | Released 2 November 2022

Census 2021 data about the characteristics of households and residents in England and Wales.

[Census maps](#)

Interactive content | Released 2 November 2022

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

[Demography and migration quality information for Census 2021](#)

Methodology | Released 2 November 2022

Known quality information affecting demography, migration and international migration data from Census 2021 in England and Wales.

[Census 2021 dictionary](#)

Supporting information | Released 28 October 2022

Variables, definitions and classifications to help when using Census 2021 data.

[Demography and migration in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Headline release | Released 2 November 2022

A summary by Welsh Government of Census 2021 data about demography and migration in Wales.

15 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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