

Sexual orientation and gender identity quality information for Census 2021

Known quality information affecting sexual orientation and gender identity data from Census 2021 in England and Wales to help users correctly interpret the statistics.

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1 . Quality information

Designation of the statistics

On 5 September 2024, Emma Rourke, Deputy National Statistician, [wrote to Ed Humpherson](#), Head of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), to request that the gender identity estimates from Census 2021 are no longer [accredited official statistics](#) and are classified as [official statistics in development](#). The change in designation was confirmed by the OSR on 12 September.

This change in designation reflects the innovative nature of the gender identity estimates and the evolving understanding of measuring gender identity, along with the uncertainty associated with these estimates.

All other Census 2021 estimates, including those on sexual orientation, are still designated as accredited official statistics.

Corrected "pansexual" figures

Some responses to the sexual orientation question that should have been coded to "All other sexual orientations" in the detailed classification were incorrectly coded to "Pansexual". This error did not affect estimates using the standard six-category "checkbox" census outputs classification (SO_6A) for sexual orientation but did affect estimates using the nine-category detailed classification (SO_9A) used in the [Sexual orientation estimates in the England and Wales Census 2021 statistical bulletin](#) and in our [Sexual Orientation \(detailed\) dataset \(TS079\)](#).

In November 2023, we published two new datasets containing corrected figures:

- [Corrected sexual orientation \(nine categories\), category totals only, geographic areas in England and Wales](#)
- [Sexual orientation \(nine categories\) by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

We also published a dataset allowing users to see the difference between the correct and original data:

- [Sexual orientation detailed comparison of correct and original data, England and Wales Census 2021](#)

Links to these datasets are provided in the affected products.

The corrected figures show that for England and Wales:

- The estimate for "Pansexual" is 48,000 rather than 112,400 as originally published.
- The estimate for "All other sexual orientations" is 74,600 rather than 10,200 as originally published.

Figures for all other groups in this nine-category classification are unchanged. Figures for all groups shown in the standard six-category classification are unchanged, including the "All other sexual orientations" category in that classification.

Corrected figures were produced by using write-in responses to recode records initially coded to "Pansexual". The 6,700 records in this group created through the undercoverage adjustment did not have a write-in response and have been assumed to be correctly coded as "All other sexual orientations".

Reliability of estimates

In November 2023, we published a summary of our recent investigations into the quality of census data from the gender identity question and further planned research into this topic. For more information, please see our [Quality of Census 2021 gender identity data](#).

In the [November 2023 quality report](#), we identified patterns in the data that suggested that some respondents may not have interpreted the question as intended, notably those with lower levels of English language proficiency. It appears that these respondents in England and Wales were more likely than the general population to say that their gender identity was different to their sex registered at birth, some of whom may have unintentionally given an answer suggesting they were trans.

All census estimates contain a degree of statistical uncertainty as described in Section 6 of our [Quality and methodology information \(QMI\) for Census 2021](#). However, the potential misinterpretation of the gender identity question adds extra uncertainty. This is particularly important here because the group we are interested in (the trans population) is small. This means that a very small percentage of inaccurate responses can have a relatively large impact on the estimates of trans people.

We have previously noted that as a voluntary question on a complex topic, being asked on the census for the first time, we would expect greater uncertainty than we see with other questions in Census 2021. We are unable to quantify the impact of all the sources of uncertainty to give an overall estimate of uncertainty. However, we can say that smaller group breakdowns should not be used as precise estimates of the trans population and comparisons between areas or groups should be considered with caution, particularly where there are different levels of English language proficiency.

Since the publication of this bulletin, we have undertaken further research to provide more information on the uncertainty associated with these estimates and additional guidance on appropriate use of the Census 2021 gender identity estimates. Our latest analysis concluded that the Census 2021 estimate of the trans population of England and Wales aged 16 years and over (0.54%) gives an indication of the size of the population and is broadly consistent with other sources but caution is needed for estimates of gender identity subcategories.

Our research also shows that Census 2021 gender identity estimates, when broken down by age, sexual orientation, housing, health, disability and unpaid care, are useful to provide insights on the relationship between gender identity and these variables. However, we are less confident in the reliability of breakdowns by other variables. This is partly because of how these variables correlate with English language proficiency.

Overall we conclude that gender identity estimates from Census 2021 should not be used as precise estimates to support service delivery, but they can be used to provide insights – users should refer to the specific advice in our article before using the Census 2021 gender identity estimates to come to conclusions about the trans population.

Not answered

As sexual orientation and gender identity were voluntary questions in the census, missing values on census responses were legitimate responses. So, (unlike with mandatory questions) we did not impute values to replace those missing on received responses. This means that these questions include a "not answered" category in standard outputs. Any write-in responses that did not relate to the question were coded as if the question had not been answered. Take care to not confuse between proportions of all people aged 16 years and over falling in a particular category and proportions of all people aged 16 years and over who answered the question falling in that category.

Data collection and coding

As with all census questions, the questions on sexual orientation and gender identity were tested thoroughly as described in our [Sexual orientation question development for Census 2021](#) and [Sex and gender identity question development for Census 2021](#). The final questions collected information on these topics using a combination of tickboxes.

Answers for these questions did not always correspond to well-defined concepts and write-in answers have been coded, both automatically and manually, to categories shown in published tables. While overall estimates for both these topics are consistent with other available sources it is possible that the comparability of individuals' responses was affected by different interpretations of the questions and that proxy responses for these sensitive topics may be less accurate than for other topics. A proxy response is where someone has answered the census questions on behalf of someone else.

Student adjustment for sexual orientation and gender identity

An adjustment made to improve the estimation of students living at their term-time address will have slightly increased the proportion of “Not answered” and decreased proportions of other categories. Take care when interpreting data for 18- to 22-year-olds or, specifically, full-time students. Other than this, the effect of this adjustment should not materially affect analysis of these topics.

Age and geographical distributions

Census data on sexual orientation and gender identity show age and geographical patterns which may affect relationships between these topics and topics such as education, employment, health and housing. In particular, people who report a sexual orientation other than ‘straight/heterosexual’ and people who report a gender identity different from sex registered at birth are more likely than average to be younger and to live in urban areas. You should be aware of these factors when drawing conclusions from the census estimates for these topics.

Topic summary feedback

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

2 . Related links

[Census 2021 gender identity estimates for England and Wales, additional guidance on uncertainty and appropriate use](#)

Article | Released 26 March 2025

Additional guidance for users on how the gender identity estimates from Census 2021 in England and Wales can best be used, building on the previous research published in November 2023.

[Quality and methodology information Census 2021](#)

QMI | Updated 9 December 2022

Details the data strengths, limitations, uses, users and methods used for Census 2021, England and Wales.

[How we quality assured the census population estimates](#)

Methodology | Released 7 November 2022

Methodology for the validation of Census 2021 population estimates for England and Wales, including the assurance of processes, assessment of estimates, and involvement of local authorities.

[Sexual orientation and gender identity variables Census 2021](#)

Supporting information | Released 4 January 2023

Variables and classifications used in Census 2021 data about sexual orientation and gender identity.

3 . Cite this methodology

Office for National Statistics (ONS), updated 8 April 2025, ONS website, methodology, [Sexual orientation and gender identity quality information for Census 2021](#)