

Activity Alliance analysis of Census 2021 data

An analysis provided by our research and insight team.

Contents

Introduction	2
Health	2
About the Census	4
Other data from the Census	4
Learning from the census	4
Resources	5

Introduction

The Census 2021 data about disability, health, and unpaid care in England and Wales was released on 19 January 2023.

- 17.7% of us are now living with a long-term physical or mental health condition or impairment that affects their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This represents 10.4 million people, an increase of 400,000 since the last Census in 2011. The proportion has decreased 1.7% since 2011.
 - In England, the North East had the highest percentage of disabled people (21.2%) and London had the lowest (15.7%).
 - 32% (7.6 million) households in England include at least one disabled member.
- 9% of people provide unpaid care or support to someone with long-term physical or mental health conditions. This is a decrease from 11.4% in 2011. However, the data shows a shift towards people dedicating more hours of their time to unpaid care, with 1.5 million people providing 50 or more hours a week of unpaid care.

These changes could be influenced by a range of factors. We know that we have an ageing population, and that health, disability and unpaid care, are all closely related to age. In a more elderly population, you would expect poorer health, more disability and more unpaid care. The figures above use age-standardised proportions (ASPs), which adjust for the older population. We look forward to more data releases to understand these changes, and potential influences.

Disabled people continue to face many challenges. These range from accessibility and discrimination to inequalities in work, living standards and finances, and access to services. This disparity is seen in participation in sport and physical activity: disabled people are almost twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people, with 42.4% of disabled people taking part in less than 30 minutes of activity each week compared to 22.6% of non-disabled people¹.

Health

- 10.7 million people report their health as 'fair', 'bad' or 'very bad', an increase from 10.5 million in 2011 (though a decrease in proportion of the population, to 18.5% 2021 from 20.4% in 2011)

We recognise that health and disability are two different aspects of life. Health is related to how well we feel, whereas disability is caused by barriers in society. However, disabled people are at greater risk of 'bad health', with previous data showing disabled adults more likely than non-disabled adults to report their current health status as bad or very bad (28% compared with 1%*)².

We highlight the clear relationship between physical activity and improved health outcomes and quality of life. Particularly for disabled people, being active has an important role in managing impairments, reducing risk of health conditions, improving fitness and strength – as well as improving mental health, loneliness, and independence³.

Activity Alliance believes the government and policy makers need to prioritise providing inclusive opportunities to be active to continue to improve health of our nation. Despite the cost-of-living crisis, funding and support for local organisations providing physical activity opportunities, as well as improving access to health and social services, is vital to ensuring the future wellbeing of disabled people. Improving health and wellbeing will have substantial social and economic benefits for the country.

¹ Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022 release)

² Equality and Human Rights Commission. Being disabled in Britain; a journey less equal. 2017

³ Public Health England, Health Matters (2020), Activity Alliance, 'Inclusive recovery' (2022)

“It’s really important to get it across to government – our health is literally our wealth, you know, and this includes anyone who has a disability, because by investing, ensuring that disabled people can access all these facilities in the long run, it’s going to benefit not just us, it’s going to benefit everyone. Disabled people want to be active – there are still a lot of barriers and this need to change. So let’s step in and do something about it.”

Activity Alliance research participant

Organisations delivering physical activity for the population need to consider the accessibility for and experience of disabled people. Work with us and our partners to strengthen your offer for disabled people and become a more inclusive organisation.

“It’s about inclusiveness. For everybody – it doesn’t matter what background you’re from, what ability you have, race, religion, creed. Sport is a leveller for everyone. If we get everyone or as many people involved in sport, no matter what the sport is, no matter what their ability is, no matter what their if they are disabled, or not. The better for society, the better for people on their own health, their own mental health.”

Activity Alliance research participant

Kat Southwell, our Head of Programmes, highlights the importance of adopting an inclusive and person-centred approach, as used in our [Get Out Get Active \(GOGA\) programme](#):

“It’s got harder but even more important to reach, connect and support those that will benefit most from being more active. For the communities we reach through the Get Out Get Active approach, inequalities have grown. People’s existing needs have been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and further still through the cost-of-living crisis. The learning from it has shown that driving an approach, with disabled people’s inclusion at the heart, creates healthier and happier individuals and communities, whether they consider themselves a disabled person or not.”

The Census 2021 website provides further analysis and data to help understand the population of England and Wales, including data on a local level.

Please contact us if you would like any assistance using or interpreting data on disabled people:

- Jessica Flavell, Senior Research and Insight Advisor
- Email: Jessica@activityalliance.org.uk
Phone: 0161 200 5441

About the Census

- The Census takes place every 10 years. The Census data is from 21 March 2021, with 97% of households in England and Wales responding to the survey.
- To identify disability in England and Wales, the Census asked people "Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?". If they answered yes, a further question "Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?" was presented.

Other data from the Census

The Census data shows other changes, and our increasing diversity, over the last decade:

- **Population:** The population of England and Wales on was 59,597,300. This has increased by more than 3.5 million since 2011.
- **Age:** There are more people than ever before in the older age groups; the proportion of the population who are aged 65 years and over was 18.6%, compared to 16.4% in 2011.
- **Ethnicity:** 9.3% of us are Asian or Asian British, 4.0% are Black or Black British, Caribbean, or African, and 2.9% recorded mixed or multiple ethnic groups. 81.7% (48.7 million) of usual residents identified as 'White', a decrease from 86.0% (48.2 million) in 2011.
- **Language:** 91.1% (52.6 million) of usual residents had English (English or Welsh in Wales) as a main language (down from 92.3% in 2011). The most common main languages were: Polish (1.1%, 612,000), Romanian (0.8%, 472,000), Panjabi (0.5%, 291,000), and Urdu (0.5%, 270,000). British Sign Language (BSL) was the main language of 22,000 (0.04%) usual residents aged three years and over across England and Wales. This is an increase of over 6,000 since 2011 (15,000, 0.03%). This underrepresents the true number of people who know BSL as it does not include people who have BSL as a secondary language – the overall figure is estimated to be closer to [127,000 in England](#)⁴.
- **Sexual orientation** and **gender identity:** Recorded in the Census for the first time, 43.4 million people (89.4%) identified as straight or heterosexual. 1.5 million people (3.2%) identified with an LGBT+ orientation ("Gay or Lesbian", "Bisexual" or "Other sexual orientation"). 262,000 (0.5%) said their gender identity was not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. The Census may underestimate the true figures, as not everyone may be comfortable answering these questions.
- 27.8 million adults (57.2%) were in **employment**. The industries with the largest number of people in employment were 'wholesale, retail, and motor trade', 'human health and social work', and 'education'.
- **Housing:** More of us are living in private sector rented housing, with home ownership falling. There are less people living in social housing, and more people living in flats or apartments compared to 2011.

Learning from the census

The 2021 Census provides valuable learning for people undertaking or using social or market research.

- Providing standardised demographic questions to use in your surveys.
- Allowing you to understand your demographic using robust local data.
- Providing a comparison point for your own data for representation or outcomes.
- How to undertake public consultation for question design and outputs.
- The importance of allowing people to self-identify using write-in options.
- Allowing responses on tablets, computers, phones, and paper forms.

⁴ British Deaf Association, 2022

With the increasing number of disabled people, all research and evaluation projects need to be accessible and inclusive. We worked with Sport England to produce a [guide to including disabled people in research projects](#).

Like everyone else, disabled people are varied in terms of other characteristics, like age, health, employment status, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. We look forward to upcoming releases from the Office for National Statistics to allow more analysis of how the diversity of disabled people has changed over the last decade.

Resources

- Visit the [Census website](#) to explore the data in your area.
- Use a '[person-centred approach to inclusive activity](#)', considering your audiences social and demographic factors.
- Use [our research](#) to understand the experience of disabled people and how activities can be made more inclusive.
- Use our [Inclusive Communications](#) guidance to reach and engage with a wider audience.
- To find out more about the GOGA approach, please visit our learning resources: [Learn more from Get Out Get Active](#)

[Visit our website for more information on Activity Alliance.](#)