

# Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion

Last updated  
21 May 2024

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A National Statistics Publication for Scotland

Published: 21 May 2024

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This report presents census data on religion, ethnic group, country of birth, national identity and language. These statistics show how Scotland, its people and its culture are changing. Key themes include migration and Scotland's ageing population.

## Religion

For the first time in Scotland's Census, the majority of people said they had no religion. In 2022 51.1% of people had no religion, up from 36.7% in 2011.

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**“The majority of people in Scotland said they had no religion in the 2022 census.”**

Jon Wroth-Smith, Director of Census Statistics, National Records of Scotland

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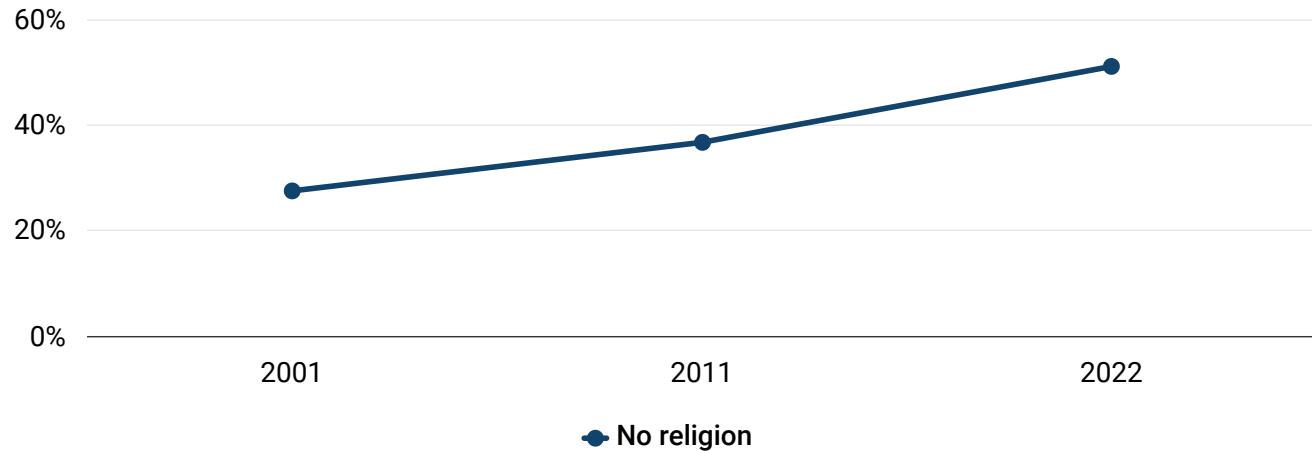
Scotland's Census asked people what religion they belong to. This was a voluntary question, first used in 2001. In 2022 6.2% of people did not answer the religion question. Percentages are calculated using the overall population, not just those who answered the religion question.

The percentage of people with no religion has increased since 2001.

**Figure 1: The majority of people in Scotland had no religion in 2022**



Percentage of population with no religion, 2001 - 2022, Scotland



Other UK countries also saw increases in the percentage of people with no religion over recent decades. Census data from England and Wales shows a similar trend to Scotland but from a lower starting point. In 2021 37.2% had no religion, up from 14.8% in 2001. Census data from Northern Ireland shows an increase from 13.9% in 2001 (no religion and no response combined) to 17.4% in 2021 (no religion only).

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## **"The religious group that saw the largest decrease since the 2011 census was the Church of Scotland."**

Jon Wroth-Smith, Director of Census Statistics, National Records of Scotland

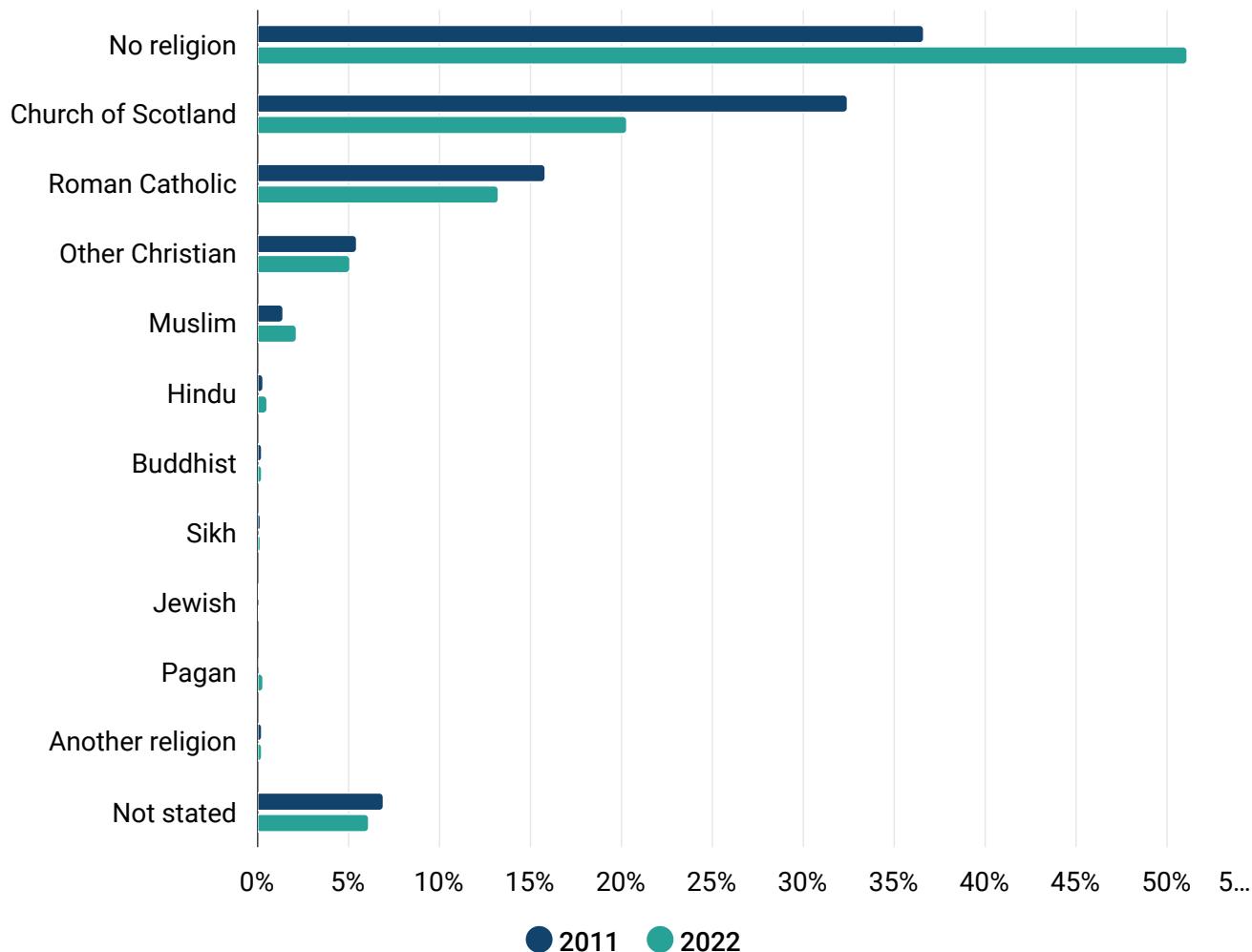
The increase in people with no religion in Scotland coincided with a decrease in people who said they belong to the Church of Scotland. In 2022 20.4% responded 'Church of Scotland', down from 32.4% in 2011 and from 42.4% in 2001. This is a fall of 610,100 people since 2011, and over 1 million since 2001. However 'Church of Scotland' remained the largest group among those who said they had a religion.

The next largest religious groups were 'Roman Catholic' (13.3%), 'Other Christian' (5.1%) and 'Muslim' (2.2%). These groups saw smaller changes since the last census than 'Church of Scotland'. The number of people who described themselves as Roman Catholic decreased by 117,700 since 2011, whilst the number in the Other Christian category decreased by 12,000. The number of people who described themselves as Muslim increased by 43,100 over the same period.

**Figure 2: Church of Scotland saw the largest decrease since 2011**



Percentage of population by religious group, 2011 - 2022, Scotland



Notes: (1) Category order matches the 2022 census form. (2) The 'Pagan' option was added in 2022 so there is no comparable data for 2011.

Males (53.8%) were more likely to have no religion than females (48.6%). This was also true in 2011 and 2001.

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**“The percentage of people with no religion increased across all age groups since the 2011 census.”**

Jon Wroth-Smith, Director of Census Statistics, National Records of Scotland

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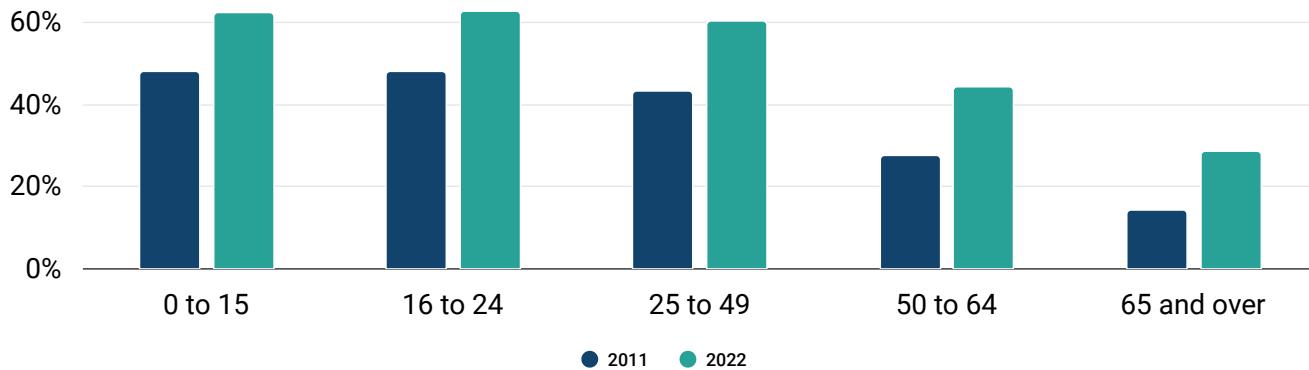
Young people are more likely to say they have no religion than people in older age groups. This was true in 2001 when this question was first asked, and in each census since.

Between 2011 and 2022 we saw increases in the 'no religion' category across all age groups. In the 65+ age group the number with no religion has more than doubled since 2011 - an increase of 186,700 people (from 14.1% to 28.6%).

**Figure 3: All age groups saw an increase in people with no religion**

Percentage of population with no religion by age, 2022, Scotland

80%



The size of the increases in 'no religion' across age groups suggests it is not only due to younger people, who are less religious on average, becoming a decade older and moving up between age categories. Some people in each age group appear to have described themselves as having a religion in 2011, but not in 2022.

'No religion' was the most common response in every council area in Scotland except in Na h-Eileanan Siar and Inverclyde, where 'Church of Scotland' (35.3%) and 'Roman Catholic' (33.4%) were the most common responses respectively. In Na h-Eileanan Siar the percentage of people with no religion increased from 11.4% in 2001 to 29.9% in 2022. These increases are similar in proportion to the increases seen across Scotland, but from a much lower starting point.

## Ethnic group

The percentage of people in Scotland with a minority ethnic background increased from 8.2% in 2011 to 12.9% in 2022. This is a larger increase than over the previous decade (from 4.5% to 8.2%).

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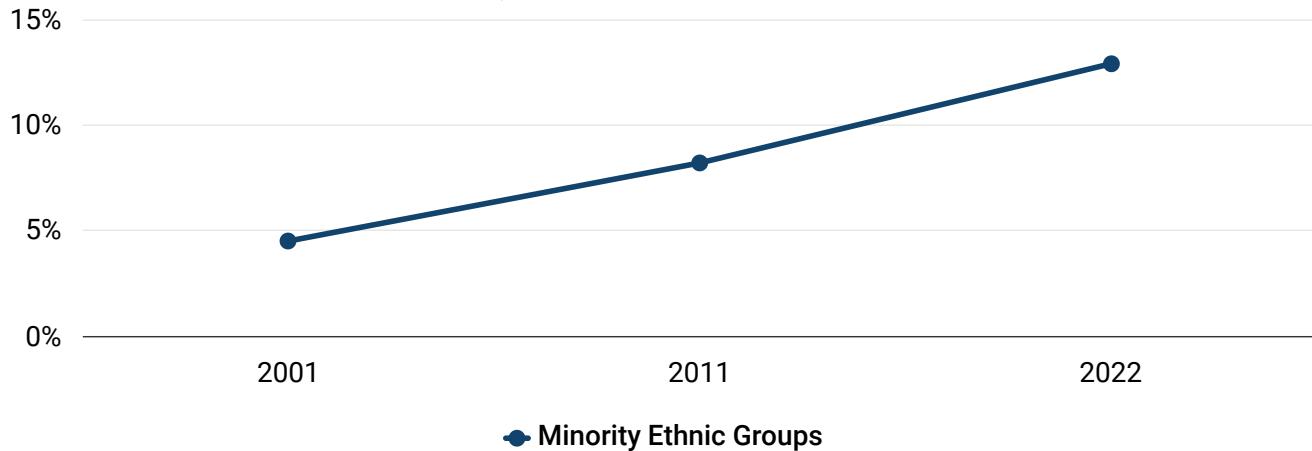
**"In 2022 12.9% of people in Scotland had a minority ethnic background. This is an increase from 8.2% in 2011."**

Jon Wroth-Smith, Director of Census Statistics, National Records of Scotland

**Figure 4: The percentage of people with a minority ethnic background increased**



Percentage of population with a minority ethnic background, 2001 - 2022, Scotland



Scotland's Census asked people to choose the option that best described their ethnic group or background. The majority of people in Scotland chose 'Scottish' (77.7%) or 'Other British' (9.4%) within the White category. In 2022 these groups together made up 87.1% of the population.

'Minority ethnic group' is used here to refer to all other ethnic groups. This includes some ethnic groups that were in the White category on the census form such as Irish, Polish, Gypsy/Traveller, Roma and Showman/Showwoman.

The increase in people from minority ethnic backgrounds was driven by increases across several different groups.

## Figure 5: There were increases across several minority ethnic groups

Percentage of population by minority ethnic group, 2011 - 2022, Scotland



Notes: (1) Category order matches the 2022 census form. Tick boxes were grouped under broad headings: 'White', 'Mixed or multiple', 'Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British', 'African, African Scottish or African British', 'Caribbean or Black' and 'Other'. (2) The 'Roma' and 'Showman/Showwoman' ethnic group options were added in 2022 so there is no comparable data for 2011. (3) The 'Gypsy/Traveller' numbers for 2022 are not fully comparable with 2011. Some people in the 'Showman/Showwoman' and 'Roma' ethnic groups in 2022 might have ticked 'Gypsy/Traveller' in 2011.

The 'Other white' category saw an increase of 56,600 people. Around three out of four people in this group had European heritage – they wrote in 'European', or wrote in a European country to define their ethnic background.

The 'Mixed or multiple ethnic group' category saw an increase of 41,100 people. This category contains a wide range of write-in responses.

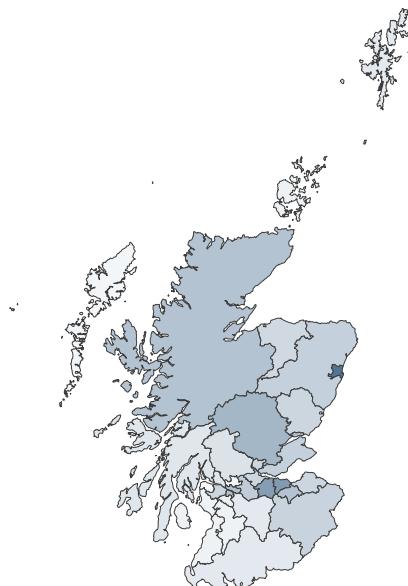
The 'Other ethnic group' category saw an increase of 22,400 people. This category also contains a wide range of write-in responses. No single group accounted for more than 10% of write-in responses in this category.

We will publish more information on write-in responses later in 2024.

The 'Polish' category saw an increase of 29,500 people. 'City' council areas were amongst those with the highest representation of people with a Polish ethnic background. Aberdeen City (4.4%) had the highest percentage, followed by City of Edinburgh (3.2%). However the Polish ethnic group is more spread out across Scotland than most other minority ethnic groups. More than half of people with a Polish background live outside of the four 'City' council areas (54.2%).

## Figure 6: Aberdeen City had the highest percentage of people with a Polish ethnic background

Percentage of population with a Polish ethnic background, 2022, council areas in Scotland



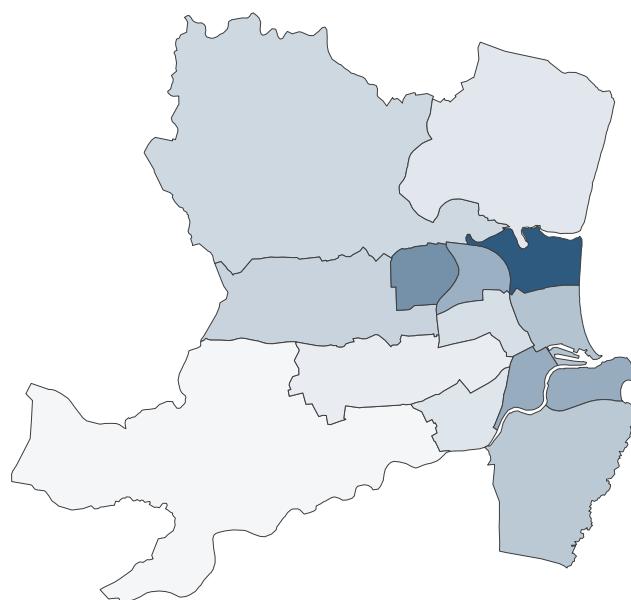
%



Census data allows us to look at how smaller areas within a council area compare. Looking closer at Aberdeen City we can see that the percentage of people from a Polish background is highest towards the centre of the council area. Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen was the ward with the highest percentage of people with a Polish background (13.2%).

## Figure 7: Census data on ethnicity at local area level in Aberdeen City

Percentage of population with a Polish ethnic background, 2022, electoral wards in Aberdeen City



%



## Country of birth and Scotland's ageing population

Population change is driven by births, deaths and migration (people moving into or out of Scotland). The increase in Scotland's minority ethnic population is partly explained by people moving to Scotland from overseas between 2011 and 2022.

The percentage of people born outside the UK increased from 7.0% to 10.2% between 2011 and 2022. We also know that an increasing share of births in Scotland are to mothers born outside the UK ([Table 3.13, NRS Vital Events Reference Tables 2022](#)).

The census asked people how well they understand, speak, read and write English. Whilst the number of people born outside the UK has increased since 2011, the overall percentage of people with good English language skills was similar. In 2022 94.2% of people said they speak, read and write English well or very well, compared to 93.8% in 2011.

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**“Without migration Scotland’s population would have decreased, and we would have fewer people in younger age groups.”**

Jon Wroth-Smith, Director of Census Statistics, National Records of Scotland

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Scotland's population grew by 144,400 (2.7%) since 2011. Looking at population change by country of birth helps show the effect of migration. Between 2011 and 2022 the number of people living in Scotland who were born in Scotland decreased by 90,400.

This decrease was offset by increases in the number who were born in the rest of the UK (up 49,200) and born overseas (up 185,600). So the increase in Scotland's population was driven by an increase in people born outside of Scotland.

Scotland's population is ageing. There were more people in the older age groups in 2022 than ever recorded in Scotland's Census. There were over one million people aged 65 and over (1,090,600). This is 60.7% higher than the number aged 20 to 29 (678,900). And 55.1% higher than the number aged 30 to 39 (703,300).

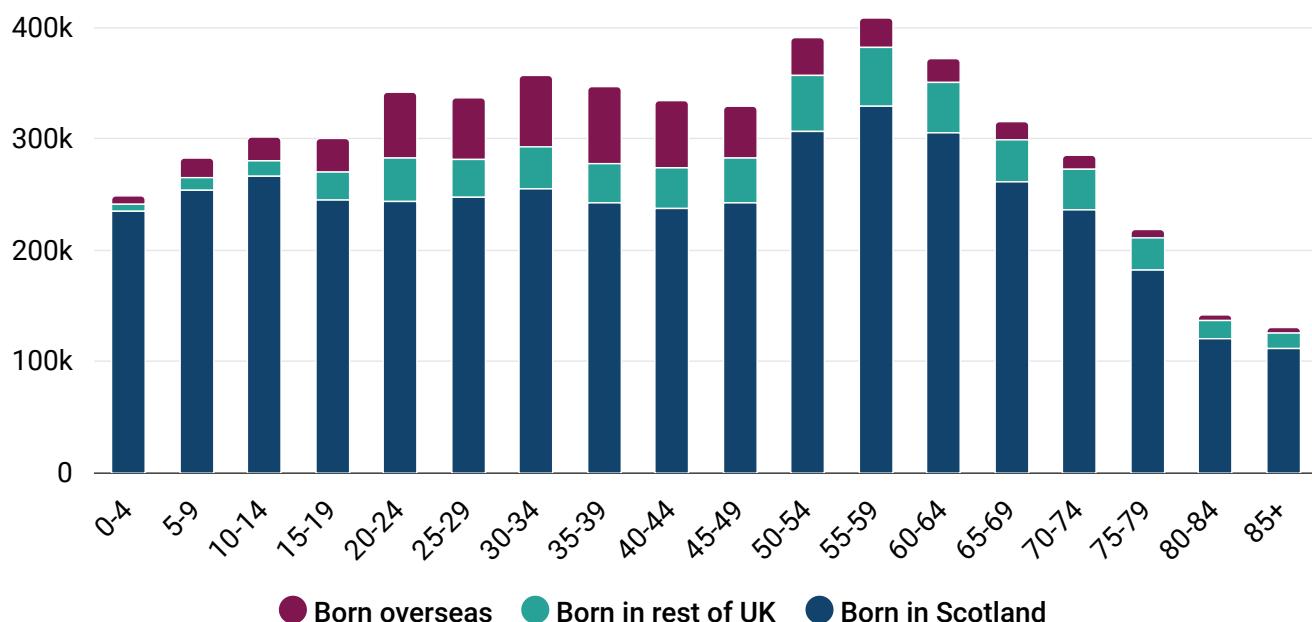
Looking at age by country of birth helps show the effect of migration. If we look at only people born in Scotland, we see larger relative differences between the size of older and younger age groups. There are 911,100 people who were born in Scotland and aged 65 and over. This is 85.5% higher than the number aged 20 to 29 (491,100). And 82.8% higher than the number aged 30 to 39 (498,300).

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**Figure 8: The population is ageing and without migration we would have fewer people in younger age groups**

Number of people by country of birth and age, 2022, Scotland

500k



So while Scotland's population is ageing, migration from the rest of the UK and overseas means we have more people in younger age groups than we otherwise would. This is offsetting the higher numbers in older age groups to some extent, resulting in a slightly flatter age distribution.

In 2022 17.8% of Scotland's population aged between 20 and 39 were born outside the UK. But the overall percentage of people born outside the UK is still relatively small (10.2%).

## National identity

The percentage of people who said Scottish was their only national identity increased since the previous census (from 62.4% to 65.5%). The percentage who said their only national identity was British also increased (from 8.4% to 13.9%). The percentage who said they felt Scottish and British decreased (from 18.3% to 8.2%).

**Figure 9: More people said their only national identity was either Scottish or British than in 2011**

Percentage of population by three largest national identity groups, 2011 - 2022, Scotland

80%

60%

40%

20%

0%

Scottish only identity

British only identity

Scottish and British only identity

● 2011 ● 2022

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A higher percentage of females (66.3%) said their only national identity was Scottish compared to males (64.6%).

## Gàidhlig agus Albais

Lorg Cunntas-sluagh na h-Alba gun robh tomhas de chomas ann an Gàidhlig aig 2.5% de dhaoine aois 3 agus nas sine ann an 2022. Seo àrdachadh de 43,100 neach bho 2011, nuair a bha tomhas de chomas ann an Gàidhlig aig 1.7%. Ann an 2001 bha tomhas de chomas ann an Gàidhlig aig 1.9%, coltach ri 2011.

Anns na h-Eileanan Siar bha tomhas de chomas ann an Gàidhlig aig a' mhòr-chuid (57.2%). Bha seo mòran na b' àirde na na h-ath sgìrean comhairle a b' àirde: a' Ghàidhealtachd (8.1%) agus Earra-Ghàidheal is Bòd (6.2%). Ann an sgìrean comhairle eile bha tomhas de chomas ann an Gàidhlig aig na bu lugh a na 3% de dhaoine aois 3 agus nas sine.

Dh'èirich an earrann de dhaoine aois 3 agus nas sine le tomhas de chomas ann an Albais cuideachd, gu 46.2% ann an 2022 bho 37.7% ann an 2011. Bha an earrann le comas ann an Albais na b' àirde ann an ear-thuath na h-Alba. Bha an earrann a b' àirde aig Siòrrachd Obar Dheathain a thaobh tomhas de chomas Scots (64.1%) agus bha an ìre a b' ìse aig Na h-Eileanan Siar (30.7%).

## Gaelic and Scots

Scotland's Census found that 2.5% of people aged 3 and over had some skills in Gaelic in 2022. This is an increase of 43,100 people since 2011 when 1.7% had some skills in Gaelic. In 2001 1.9% had some Gaelic skills, similar to 2011.

In Na h-Eileanan Siar the majority had some Gaelic skills (57.2%). This was far higher than the next highest council areas, Highland (8.1%) and Argyll and Bute (6.2%). In all other council areas less than 3% of people aged 3 and over had some Gaelic skills.

The percentage of people aged 3 and over with some skills in Scots also increased, to 46.2% in 2022 from 37.7% in 2011. The percentage with Scots skills was higher in the north east of Scotland. Aberdeenshire had the highest percentage with some Scots skills (64.1%) and Na h-Eileanan Siar had the lowest (30.7%).

## British Sign Language

Scotland's Census found that 117,300 people can use British Sign Language (BSL), 2.2% of people aged 3 and over.

The census included a new question on the use of BSL in 2022. This means we do not have comparable data for previous censuses. The new question asked whether people can use BSL. In the previous census information on BSL use was only collected through the question "Do you use a language other than English at home?".

Two out of every three BSL users are female (67.0%). And we know that females make up a larger proportion of the workforce in the education and health and social work industries ([Table 1, Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions – industry tables](#)).

This is likely to be contributing to the high percentage BSL users that are female. We will be able to combine data from different census questions to look into patterns like this later in 2024.

Around 2,600 people consider sign language to be their main language, but not all will be BSL users.

## Small area population change

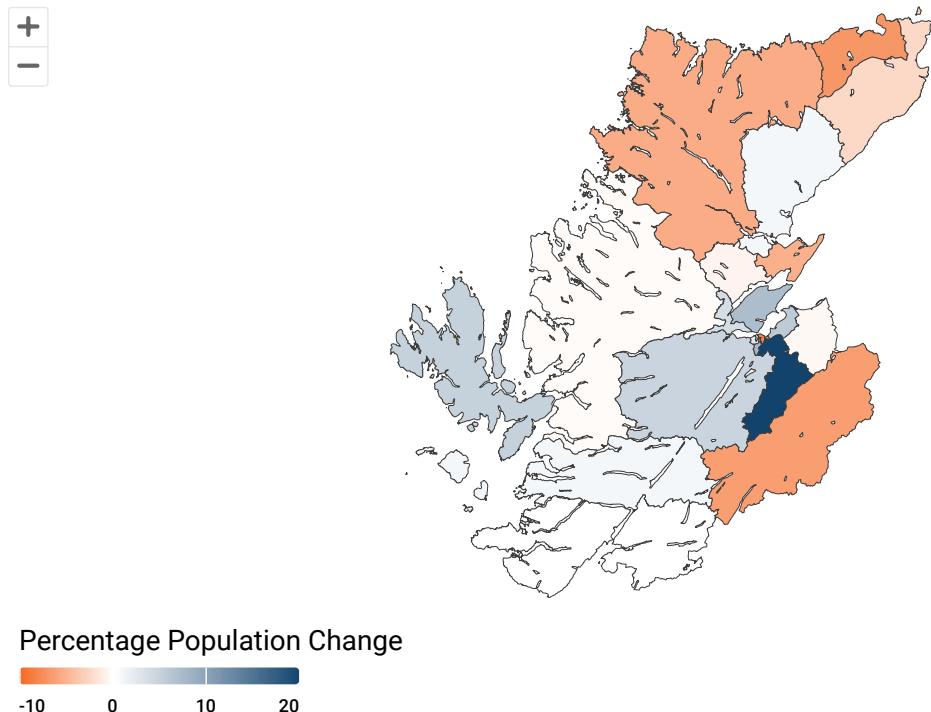
In the [first release of data](#) from Scotland's Census 2022 we looked at population change in Scotland across council areas. The population data in this release allows us to go further and look at changes in smaller areas.

**"Census data paints a detailed picture of how Scotland and our communities are changing. We are pleased to be putting this data into the hands of our users and encourage them to explore their local areas."**

Jon Wroth-Smith, Director of Census Statistics, National Records of Scotland

The Highlands council area saw a 1.4% increase in population between 2011 and 2022. But population change varied substantially between electoral wards across the council area. Ten of the twenty-one wards saw a decrease in their population. The largest decreases were in Inverness Millburn (down 8.2%) and Thurso and Northwest Caithness (down 7.0%). The largest increase was in Inverness South (up 27.7%).

**Figure 10: Census data on population change at local area level in Highland**  
Percentage change in population, 2011 - 2022, electoral wards in Highland



## Other data published today

This report includes data on:

- Ethnic group

- National identity
- Country of birth
- Religion
- Gaelic language skills
- Scots language skills
- English language skills
- British Sign Language

We have also published data on:

- Main language
- Passports held
- Multiple ethnic group households
- Households numbers
- Household size

Search for Scotland's Census 2022 data tables in the [census data](#) section.

[Output areas tables](#) are available to download separately.

[Geography boundaries and lookups](#) for use with census data are available on the NRS website.

## Privacy protection

All data tables have privacy protection applied to keep the data of individuals safe. Cells might not sum to sub totals and totals due to these Statistical Disclosure Controls (SDC). More information about SDC is available via the [slides from our May 2024 webinars](#).

## Working with census statistics

Census statistics represent the total population rather than just those who completed the questionnaire. Since the 2001 censuses, statistical modelling has been used across the United Kingdom to produce total population estimates from census responses.

As with all estimates, there is a level of uncertainty. Users should consider uncertainty when working with census estimates and interpreting small changes.

## More information on quality

The quality of census data is important. We made innovative changes to our approach to account for the census response rate (89.8%) and ensure census statistics represent the total population rather than just those who completed the questionnaire.

We published a [blog on the quality of small area statistics](#) and why you can be confident using census data.

## Quality assurance

We have [published quality information](#) for the variables included in this release alongside this report.

In 2023 we published a [report on our approach to statistical quality assurance](#) alongside the first release of data from Scotland's Census 2022. We have carried out extensive quality assurance work to produce high quality census estimates.

## Rounding

This report uses rounded estimates. Figures may not add exactly to totals because of the rounding. Unrounded census data is used to calculate percentages and for comparisons with previous censuses.

## Future census publications

We will publish outputs from Scotland's Census 2022 in phases. This reflects the additional work required to produce more detailed census statistics.

### Topic summaries

This report is the first in a series of topic summaries. The remaining summaries are:

- Demography and migration
- Armed forces veterans
- Sexual orientation and trans status or history
- Housing
- Education, Labour market and travel to work
- Health, disability and unpaid care

The topic order above is provisional and release dates will be confirmed on our [census outputs release schedule page](#).

Topic data will be published down to output area where possible. Output areas are made up of approximately 50 households. We will also produce breakdowns of these topics by age and sex where appropriate.

### Multivariate/Build your own tables

In the following phase we will publish multivariate data. This means we will publish tables which include more than one census topic variable. For example, ethnic group by country of birth.

Our Flexible Table Builder will allow users to create their own census tables. Users will be able to combine the different census variables they are interested in.

## Glossary

### Age

A person's age on Census Day, 20 March 2022. Infants aged under 1 year are classified as 0 years of age.

### British Sign Language (BSL)

British Sign Language (BSL) is the most common form of signed communication used by deaf people in Scotland.

### Country of Birth

The country in which a person was born.

### Council Area

There are 32 council areas in Scotland. Councils provide public services, including education, social care, waste management, libraries and planning.

### **English language skills**

A classification of a person's skills in the English Language based on their ability to speak, read, write, or understand English.

### **Ethnic Group**

A classification of people according to their own perceived ethnic group and/or cultural background.

### **Electoral Wards**

Each Council area in Scotland contains a number of electoral wards. The voters in each of these electoral wards elect councillors to the local council. There are currently a total of 355 wards in Scotland, with each Mainland ward returning 3 or 4 councillors.

### **Gaelic language skills**

A classification of a person's skills in the Gaelic Language based on their ability to speak, read, write, or understand Gaelic.

### **Household**

A household is defined as:

- one person living alone, or
- a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room or sitting room, or dining area

This includes:

- all sheltered accommodation units in an establishment (irrespective of whether there are other communal facilities), and
- all people living in caravans on any type of site that is their usual residence; this will include anyone who has no other usual residence elsewhere in the UK

A household must contain at least one person whose place of usual residence is at the address. A group of short-term residents living together is not classified as a household, and neither is a group of people at an address where only visitors are staying.

### **National identity**

National identity is a feeling of attachment to a nation. This does not need to be the same as ethnic group or legal nationality (citizenship). For example, this could be about the country or countries where a person feels they belong or they think of as home.

### **Religion**

This is a person's current religious denomination or body that they belong to, or if the person does not have a religion, 'No Religion'. No determination is made about whether a person was a practising member of a religion.

Unlike other census questions where missing answers are imputed, this question was voluntary, and where no answer was provided the response is categorised as 'not stated'.

### **Scots language skills**

A classification of a person's skills in the Scots Language based on their ability to speak, read, write, and understand Scots.

### **Sex**

This is the sex recorded by the person completing the census. The options were "Female" and "Male".

We provided guidance on how to answer the sex question.

### **UK censuses**

The Office for National Statistics is responsible for the census in England and Wales. Data and supporting information is available on the [ONS website](#).

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency is responsible for the census in Northern Ireland. Data and supporting information is available on the [NISRA website](#).

### **Contact us**

Please get in touch if you need any further information, or have any suggestions for improvement.

E-mail: [statisticscustomerservices@nrscotland.gov.uk](mailto:statisticscustomerservices@nrscotland.gov.uk)

NRS customer services telephone: 0131 202 0451

### **Join our mailing list**

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