

## 2021 Census: First release

28 June 2022

### Introduction

On 28 June 2022 ONS released the first results from the 2021 Census of England and Wales comprising for each local authority the estimated population at census day (21 March 2021), the number of households and population density. Population estimates are by five-year age band and sex. Estimates of responses rates for each local authority were also published.

Data in this 2021 census first release are rounded to the nearest 100. Future releases will provide unit-level estimates. Estimates of Londoners' characteristics including for small areas will be published from October 2022 onwards.

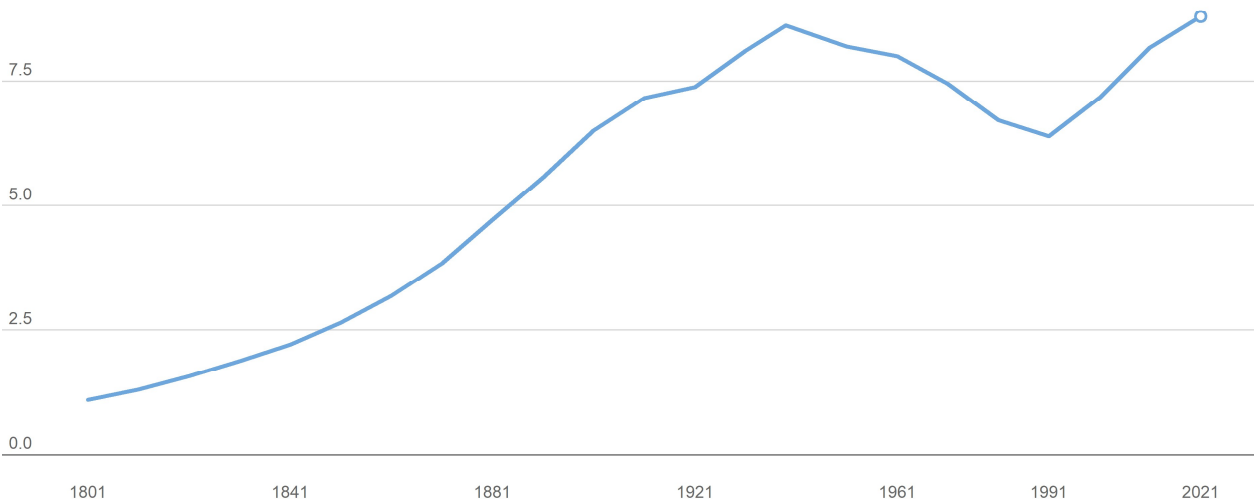
### Census Headlines

The 2021 census reports:

- A London population of 8.8 million, an increase of 626 thousand (7.7 percent) since 2011
- A total of 3.42 million households in London, an increase of 158 thousand (4.6 percent) since 2011
- Tower Hamlets saw the greatest population growth over the decade (22.1 percent) while Kensington & Chelsea (-9.6 percent), Westminster (-6.9 percent) and Camden (-4.6 percent) all saw population decreases. See sections below for explanations of pandemic/Brexit impacts and error in estimates
- Response rates ranged between 89 percent (Kensington & Chelsea) and 98 percent (Kingston upon Thames)

#### London's Population 1801-2021

persons (millions)

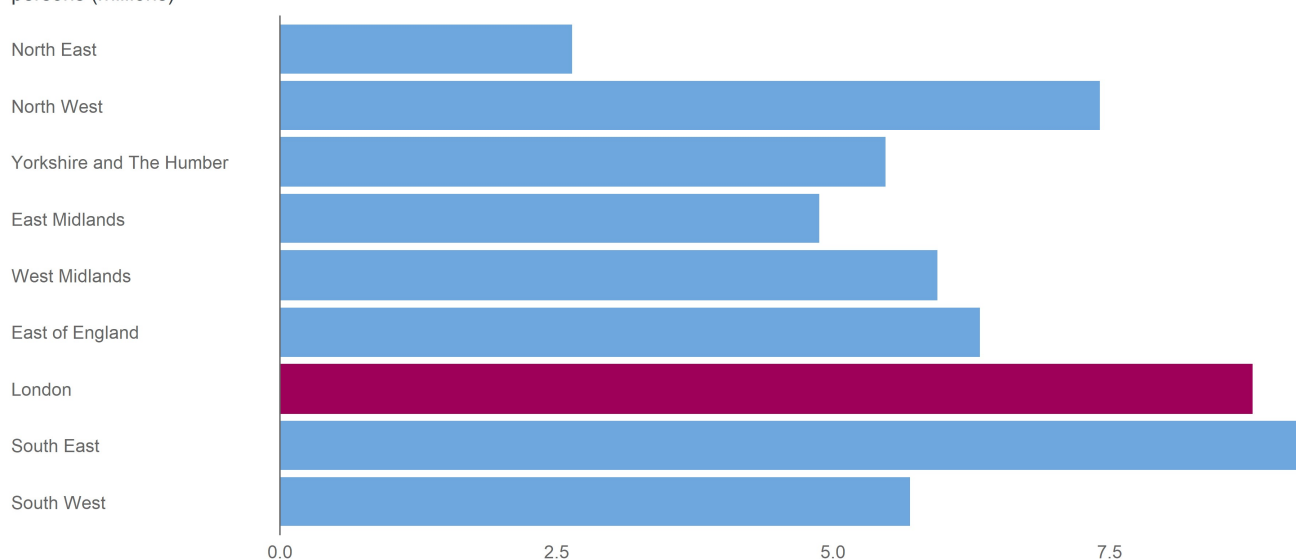


Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

## Regional populations

### Regional populations 2021 census

persons (millions)

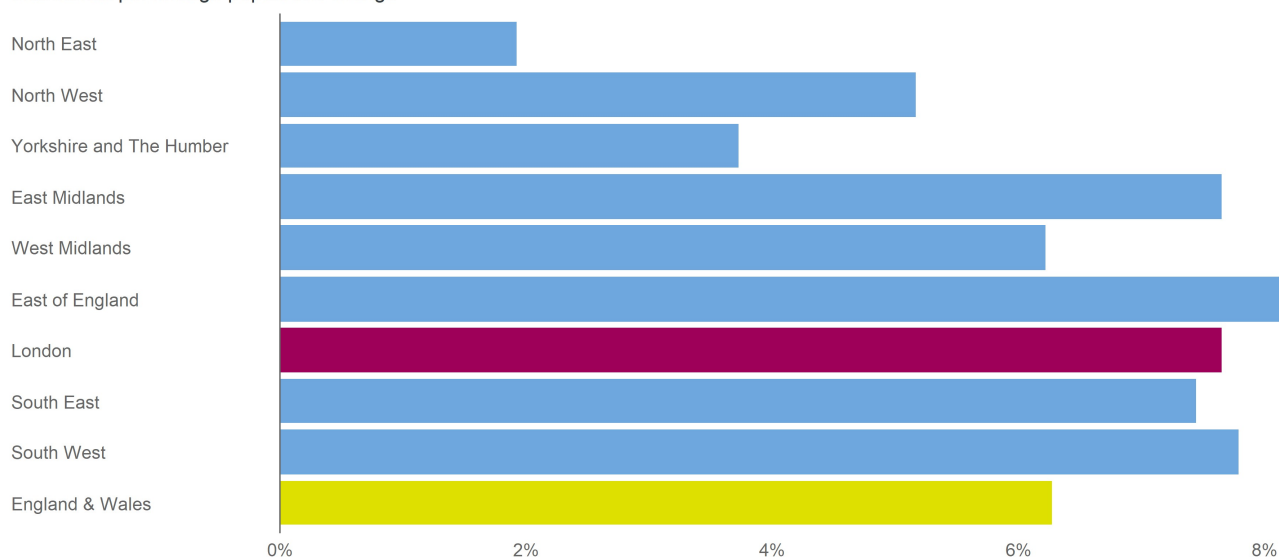


Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

London grew by 626 thousand persons (7.6 percent) in the decade since the last census. At 8.8 million London is the second largest region by population size after the South East. London's growth rate over the decade was higher than the national average (6.3 percent) but lower than that of East of England and the South West regions.

### Change in Population 2011-2021

Intercensal percentage population change



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

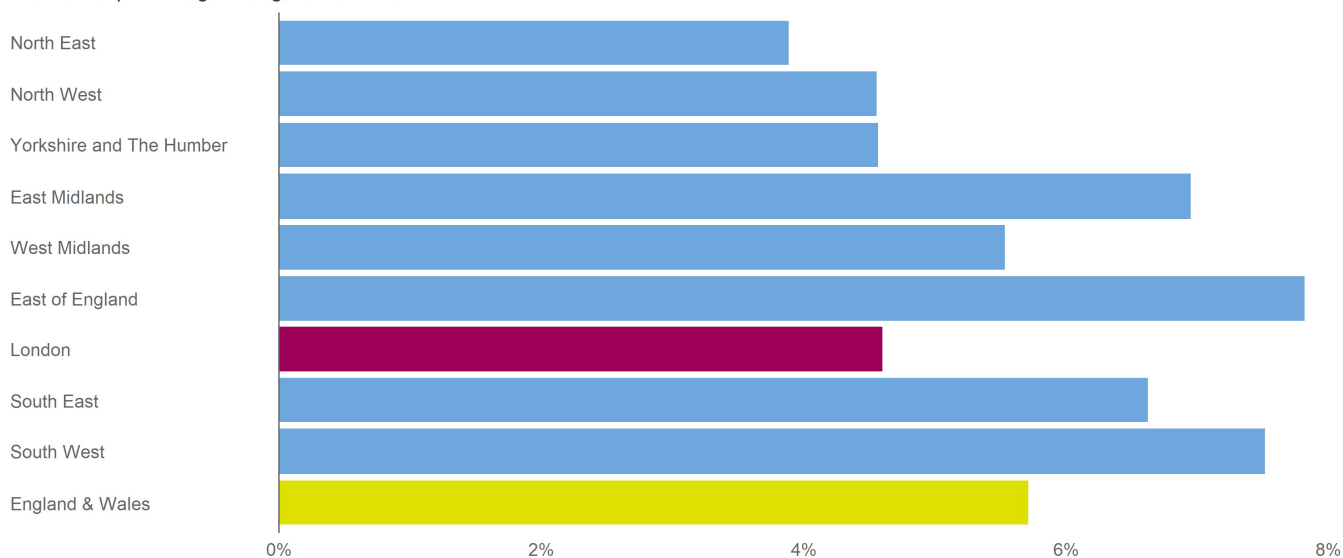
## Households

The census reports the total number of households in London was 3.42 million, an increase of 158 thousand (4.6 percent) over the 2011 estimate. This data does not include empty dwellings so if a proportion of homes were vacant when the census was taken then these would not show in this data. The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) reports 313 thousand net additional dwellings were completed over the same period.

Household growth in England and Wales as a whole over the decade was higher than London at 5.7 percent.

### Change in Households 2011-2021

intercensal percentage change in households

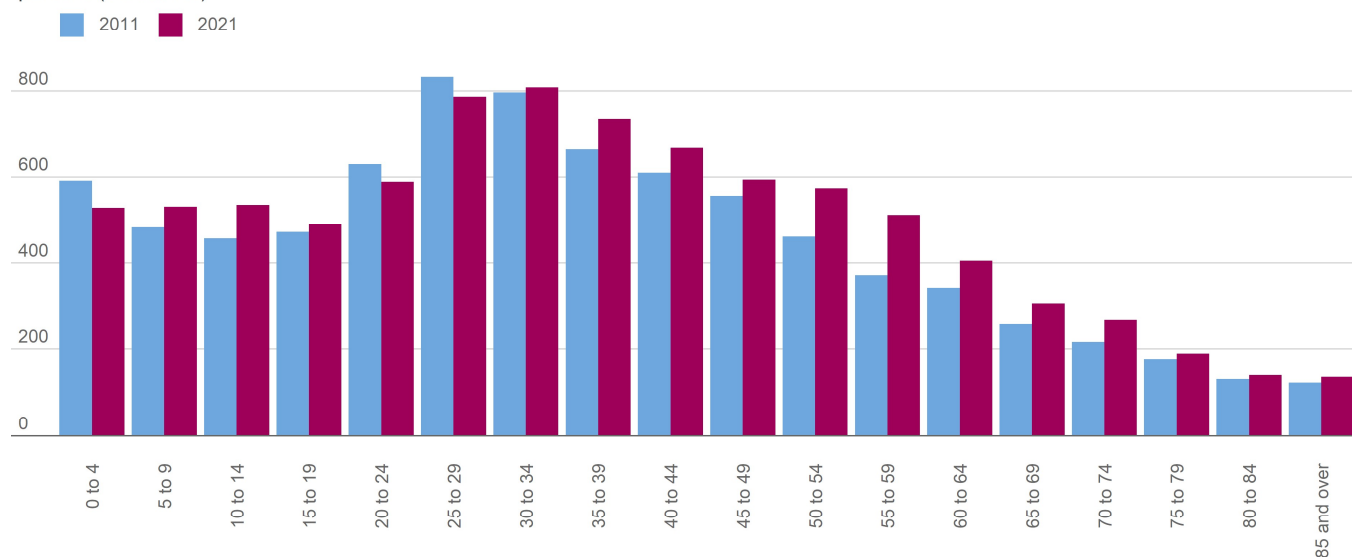


Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

# Age Structure

## Population age structure by census, London

persons (thousands)

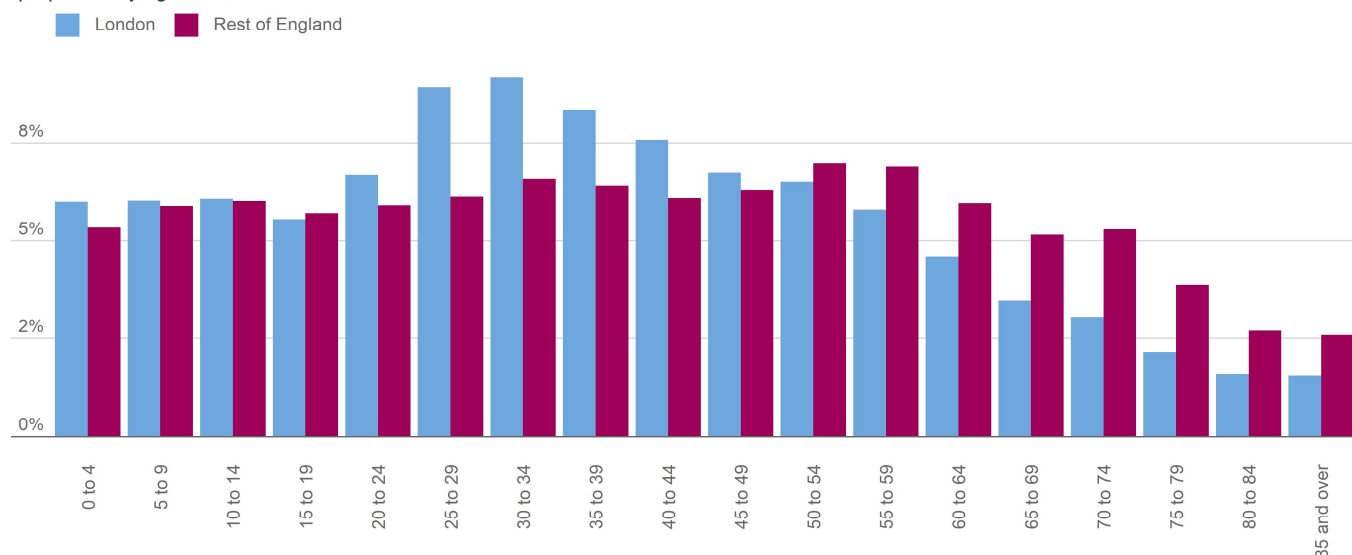


Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

Population growth over the decade is concentrated in older ages. There were fewer 0-to-4 year-olds and 20-to-29 year-olds in 2021 than in 2011.

## Population age structure by location, 2021

proportion by age band



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

London's population is much younger than the rest of the country. Economic migrants from within the UK and from overseas in their 20s and 30s give London its distinctive age structure. The older population is comparatively much smaller in London as people migrate away from the capital as they begin to form families and then later again as they move into retirement.

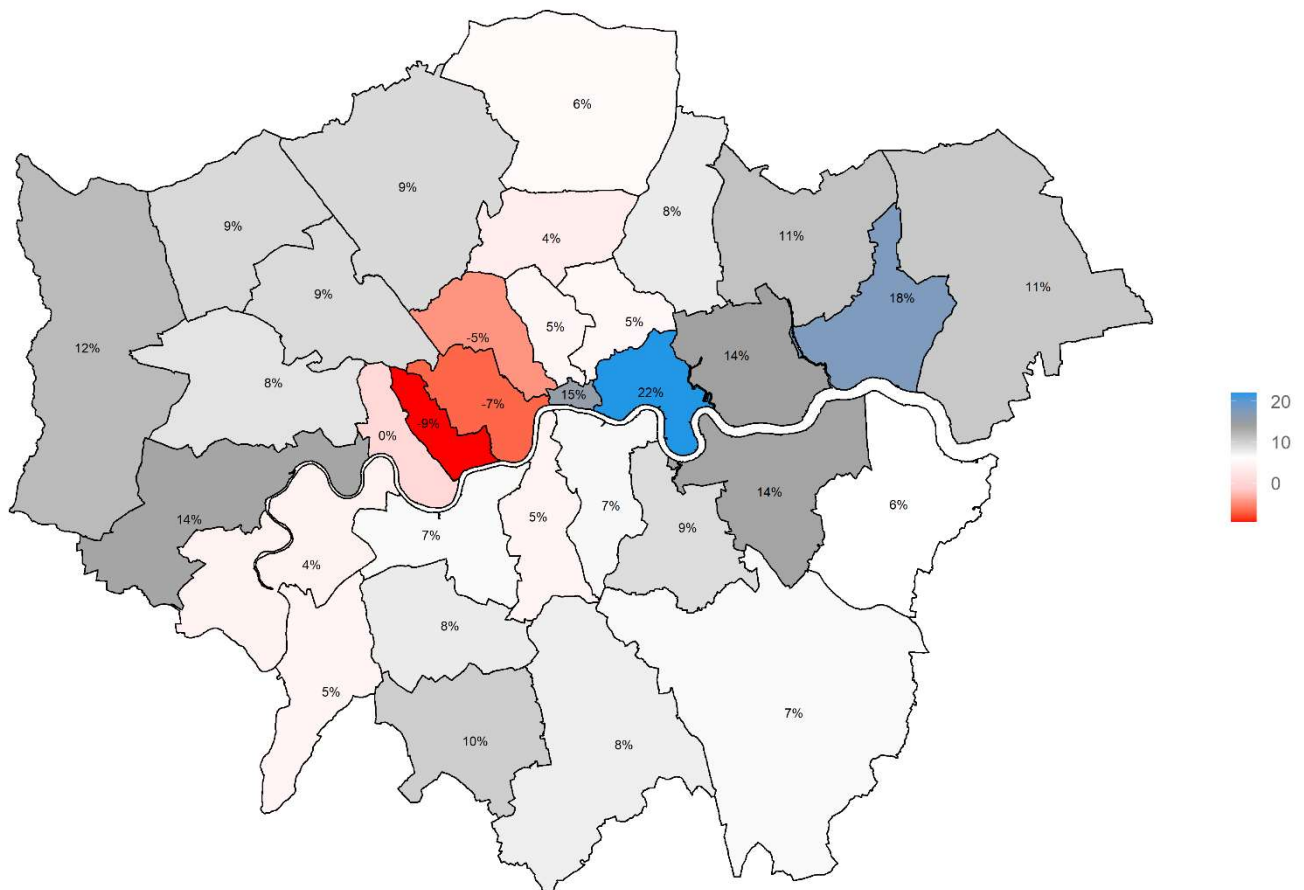
## Borough populations

Three London Boroughs had lower populations in 2021 than in 2011. Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster both decreased by 15 thousand persons while Camden's population decreased by 10 thousand.

Tower Hamlets saw the largest growth in absolute population increasing over the decade by 56 thousand, while Newham (43 thousand) and Greenwich (35 thousand) also saw large increases in total population. Barking and Dagenham had the largest proportional growth (17.6 percent) which constituted total change of 33 thousand persons.

See Appendix 1 for a table of borough populations and population change over the decade.

**London Borough population change 2011-2021**  
percentage change



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

## London Borough age structure, 2021

proportion of population by age band



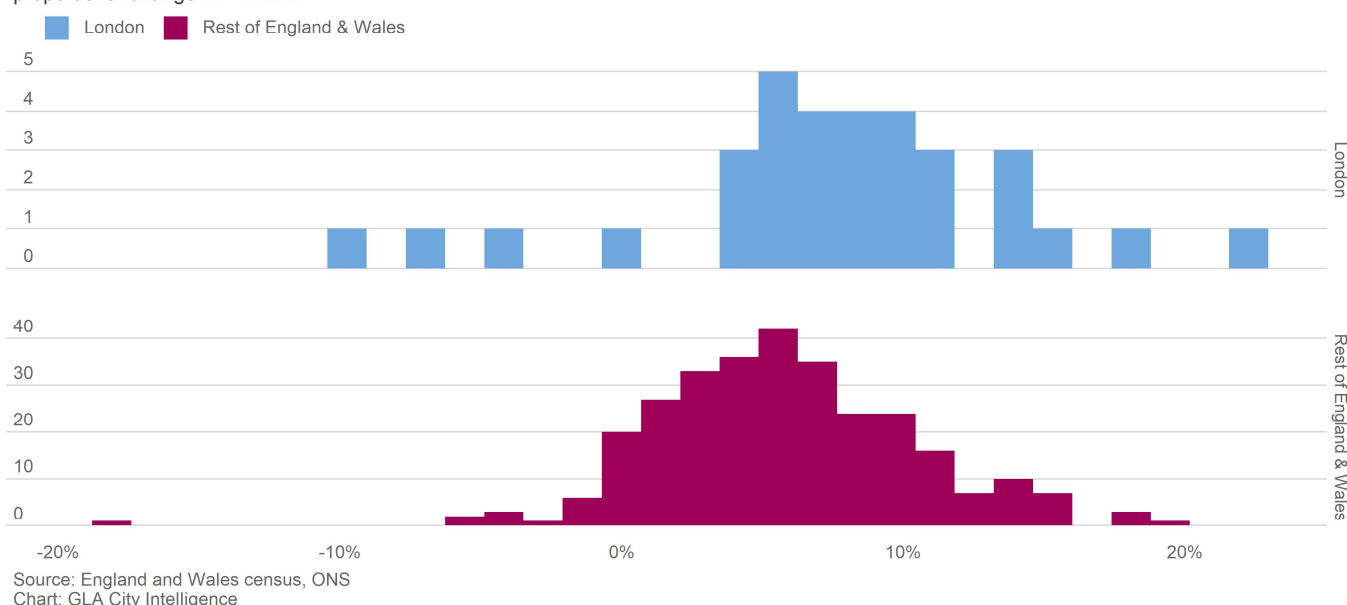
Source: UK census, MYE (ONS). GLA projections (GLA)

Chart: GLA City Intelligence

In Tower Hamlets 47 percent of the population is in the 20 to 39 age group. Across London as a whole, 33 percent of the population are found in this group. Croydon has London's largest population of 40 to 64 year olds (128 thousand, 33 percent of its total population) while Bromley has the largest population of persons aged 65 and over (58 thousand, 17 percent of its total population).

## Local Authority population Change

proportional change 2011-2021



## Interpreting differences with annual population estimates data

Annual population estimates produced by ONS provide the basis of much of our understanding of population change between census years. The most recent official population estimates available are the 2020 mid-year estimates released in June 2021.

Comparing the results of the census with the estimate for mid-2020 can potentially reveal information about both the errors that have built up in the annual estimates series over the course of the decade, and the impacts of the major shocks that occurred at the end of the decade, namely: the departure of the UK from the European Union, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

ONS estimated London's total population in mid-2020 as 9.00 million. This is over 200 thousand higher than the 2021 Census-based estimate of 8.80 million. The GLA's 2020-based population projections, informed by analysis<sup>1</sup> of a range of available data sources, assumed a fall in London's total population of 87 thousand in the year to mid-2021.

One interpretation of the census results would therefore be that the actual fall in London's population over this period was far larger than anticipated. However, disentangling real changes in population between mid-2020 and March 2021 from errors in the annual estimates is not straightforward.

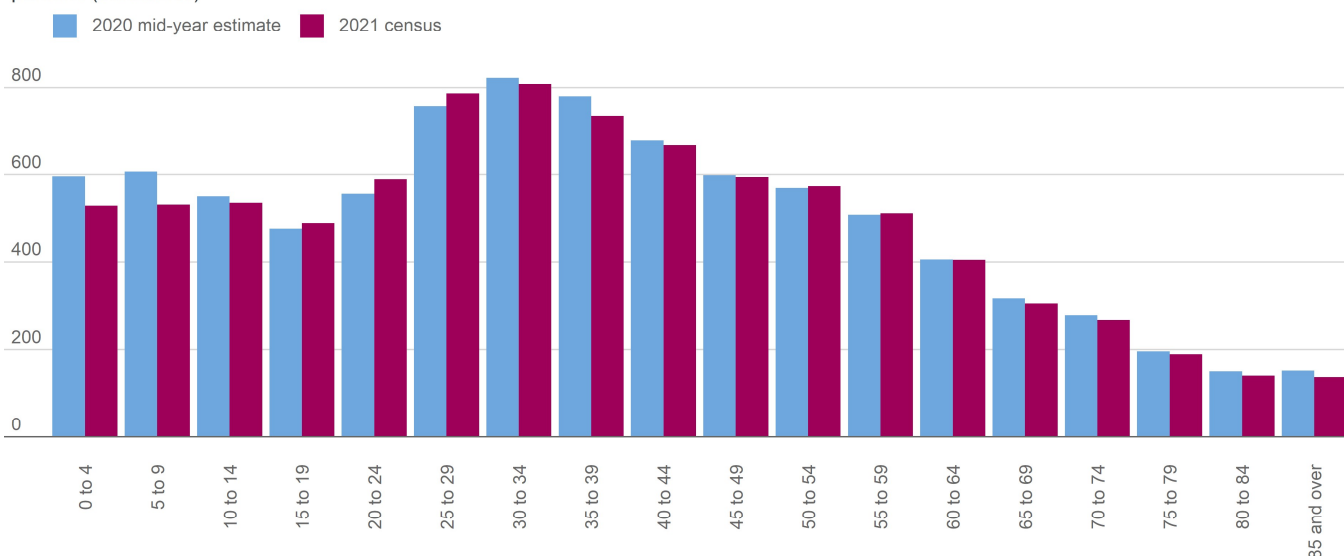
Accounting for likely errors in the mid-year estimates series may allow for more insight in the impacts of Brexit and the pandemic on population change over the year preceding the census, though it is likely impossible to remove all ambiguity in this way.

## Anticipated issues with the accuracy of the annual estimates

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/population-change-in-london-during-the-pandemic>

## Population age structure, London

persons (thousands)



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

### Inflated estimates of children

The estimated number of children age 0 to 9 in London was 1.06 million. The mid-year estimate for 2020 for the same age group is 1.20 million, over 140 thousand (13 percent) higher than the census figure. A difference of this scale was anticipated by the GLA, who identified issues with the official estimates in 2018.

The methodological issue that causes the inflation is linked to the assumed age structures applied to international migration flows. As a result, the impacts tend to be greatest in areas with high levels of international migration, with Westminster (78 percent higher), Camden (53 percent higher), and Kensington and Chelsea (34 percent higher) seeing much larger differences than did lower migration areas, such as: Havering (3 percent higher), Sutton, and Bexley (both 4 percent higher).

For several years, the GLA has made adjustments to the official series to account for this effect and minimise its impact before incorporating the data into its own projections. In the most recent (2020-based) GLA projections, the London population age 0 to 9 was assumed to be 1.08 million in mid-2021.

### Inflated estimates of persons age 70 and over

The 2021 Census estimate of London's population age 70 and over was 737 thousand. This is significantly lower than both the 2020 mid-year estimate figure of 780 thousand and the GLA's projected figure for 2021 of 788 thousand (this projection is consistent with the official estimate series up to mid-2020 and accounts for the additional deaths that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic over the following year). Most of the difference of over 50 thousand (7 percent) from the projected 2021 figure is likely accounted for by inflation that has built up in the annual estimates over the course of the decade.

This cause of this inflation is likely to be the same underlying methodological issue that affected the estimates of children and is also linked to high volumes of international flows. The largest differences between the projected and Census estimates were again seen in areas with the highest levels of international migration, with standouts being Westminster and Camden (both with projected figures 40 percent higher than the Census estimate), Kensington and Chelsea (29 percent higher), and Tower Hamlets (27 percent higher).



## Impacts of the pandemic

The census was taken on 21 March 2021 at the height of the covid-19 pandemic and during Phase 1 of the UK's "roadmap out of lockdown"<sup>2</sup>. Census respondents were required to answer questions based on their place of residence on Census Day. This will have a significant impact on census results. In addition, the period following the census in which restriction on social contact and movement were gradually lifted and London began to show signs of economic recovery mean that population change since the census was taken is likely to be considerable. In particular, returning students (most of whom taught remotely during 2020/21), workers returning to the hospitality and entertainment sectors and individuals who left London temporarily during the height of the pandemic will contribute to population change over this period.

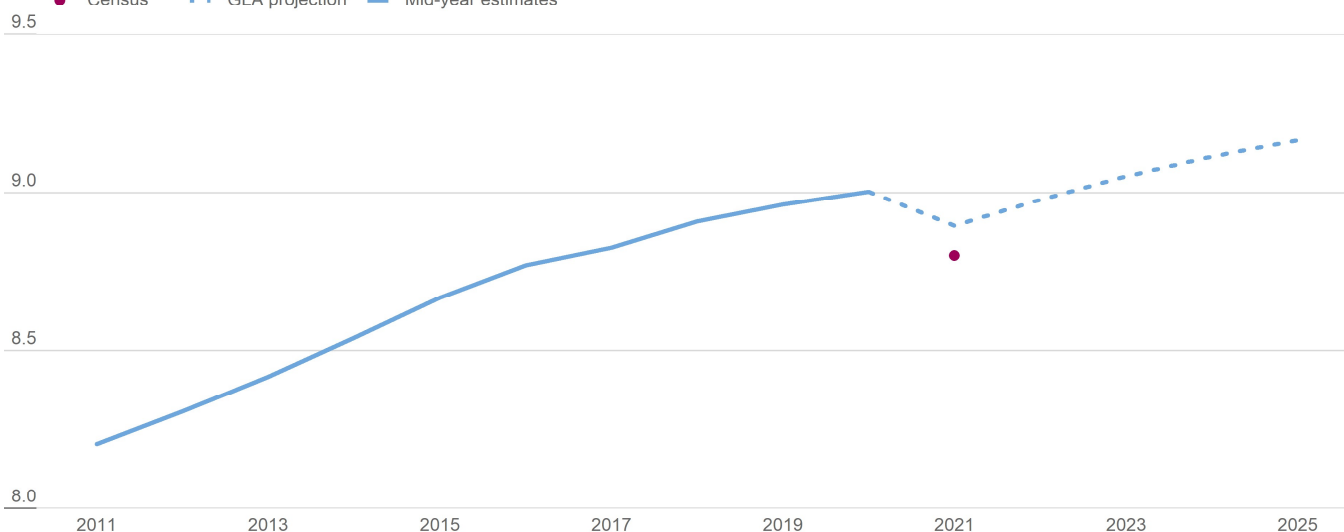
## GLA projected population

GLA population projections are produced annually using the most up-to-date data and assumptions about future fertility, mortality and migration. The most recent projections (2020-based<sup>3</sup>) were published in November 2021. The initial year of the projections is 2021 and projected populations include assumptions about pandemic and Brexit impacts on the population over the period mid-2020 to mid-2021.

### London's Population Past and Projected

persons (millions)

● Census    ● GLA projection    — Mid-year estimates



Source: UK Census, ONS; 2020-based projections, GLA  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

It should be noted that errors in the official mid-year estimate series (see above) will also be present in the GLA projections as these form the base from which the population is projected.

The projected population for London in 2021 was 8.894 million, a decrease from the 2020 mid-year estimate of 108 thousand. The projected figure was 94 thousand higher than the census estimate.

However, the fall in London's population is projected to be temporary and by 2022 the population is projected to have returned to 9 million with future growth projected to be stable.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/demography/population-and-household-projections/>

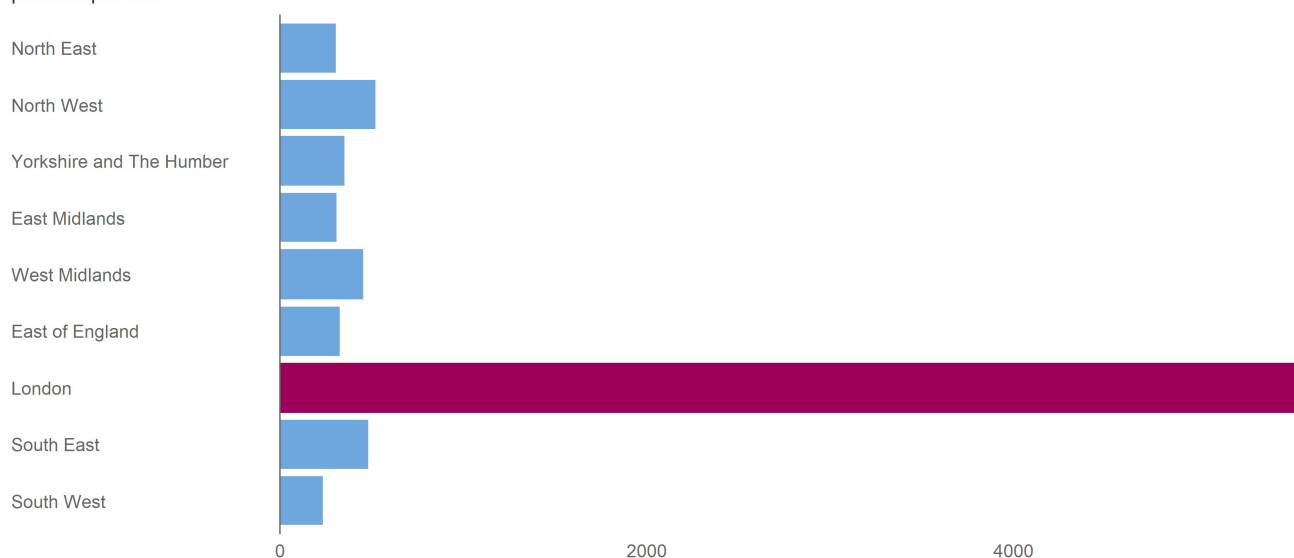
Following the release of the census the mid-year estimate backseries will be revised so that the two census points in 2011 and 2021 are consistent. The GLA will then produce a new set of projections based on the revised backseries. These are scheduled for late 2022.

## Population density

Population density in London in 2021 was 5,600 persons per km<sup>2</sup> significantly higher than all other English regions. London is more densely populated than all of the Metro Mayor regions including the West Midlands where population density is 3,200 persons per km<sup>2</sup>.

### Regional population density 2021

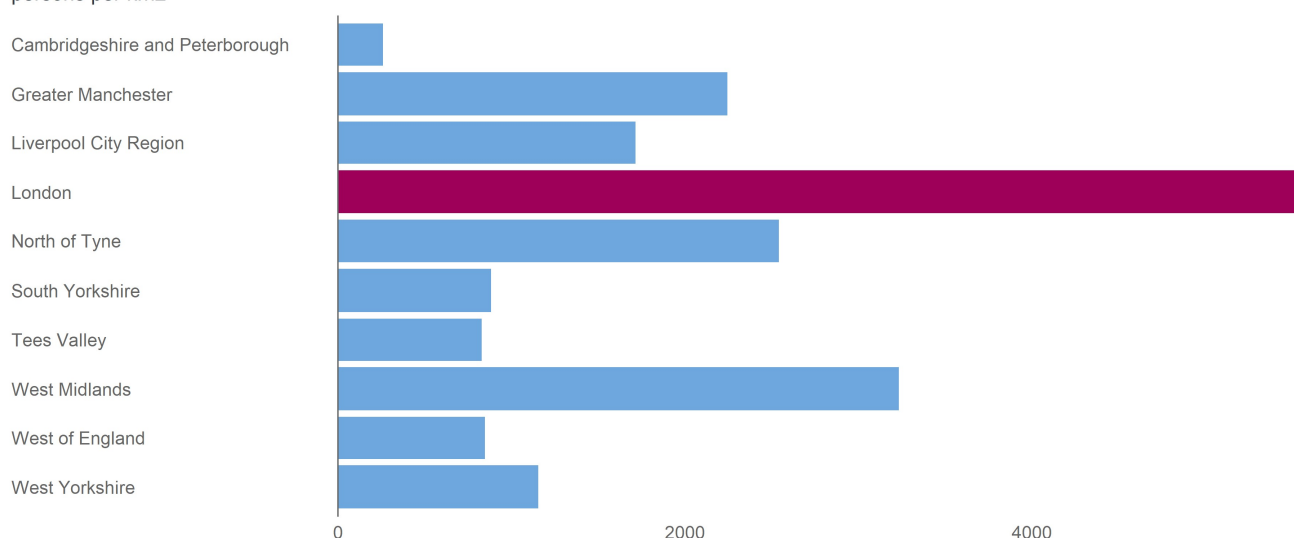
persons per km<sup>2</sup>



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

### Metro Mayor areas population density 2021

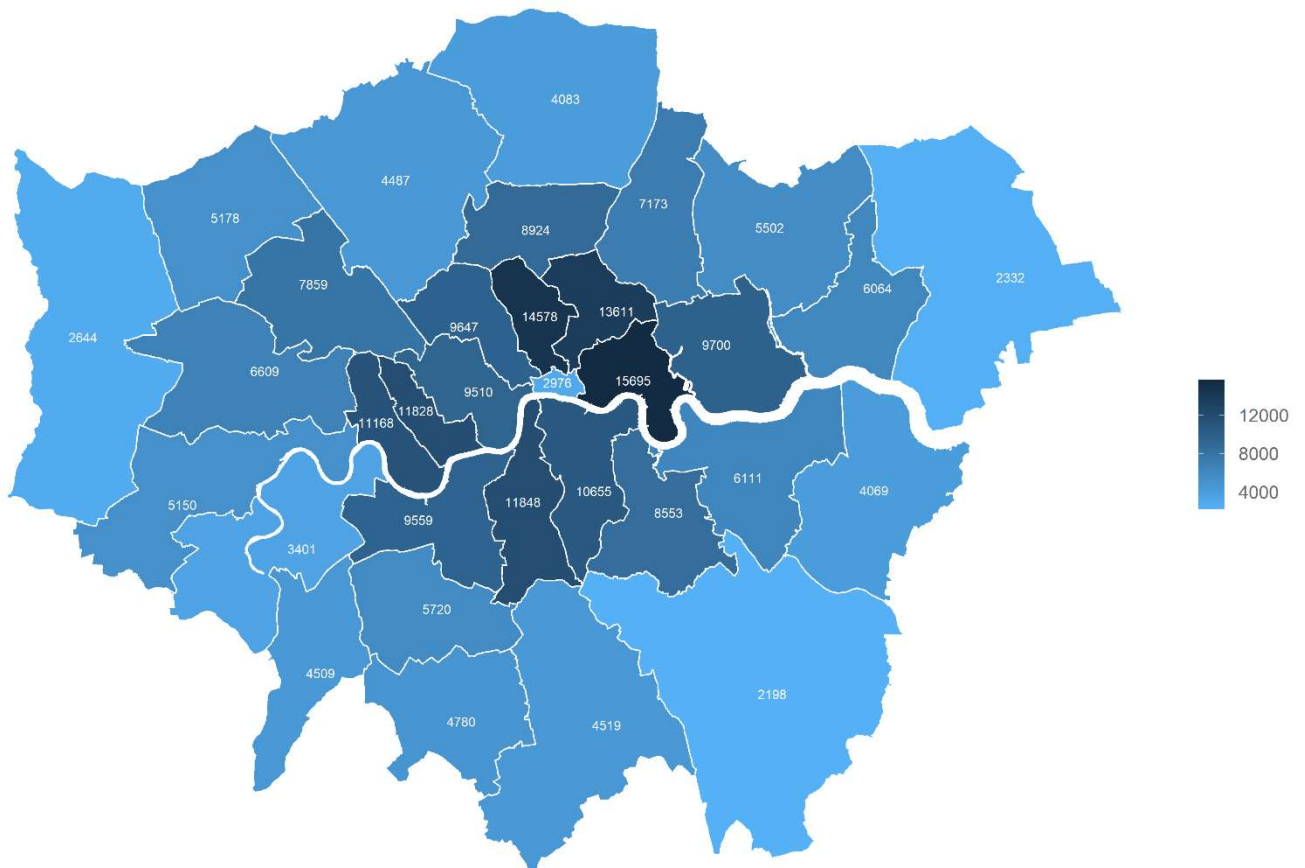
persons per km<sup>2</sup>



Source: UK census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

Note: Metro Mayor area definitions include constituent members only (<https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/everything-need-know-metro-mayors/>)

**London Borough population density 2021**  
persons per km<sup>2</sup>



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

Tower Hamlets at a density of 15,695 persons per km<sup>2</sup> is the most densely populated local authority in England and Wales. In fact, the top 20 most densely populated local authorities in the country are in London.

Inner London has a density of 10,700 persons per km<sup>2</sup> and Outer London has a density of 4,300 persons per km<sup>2</sup>.

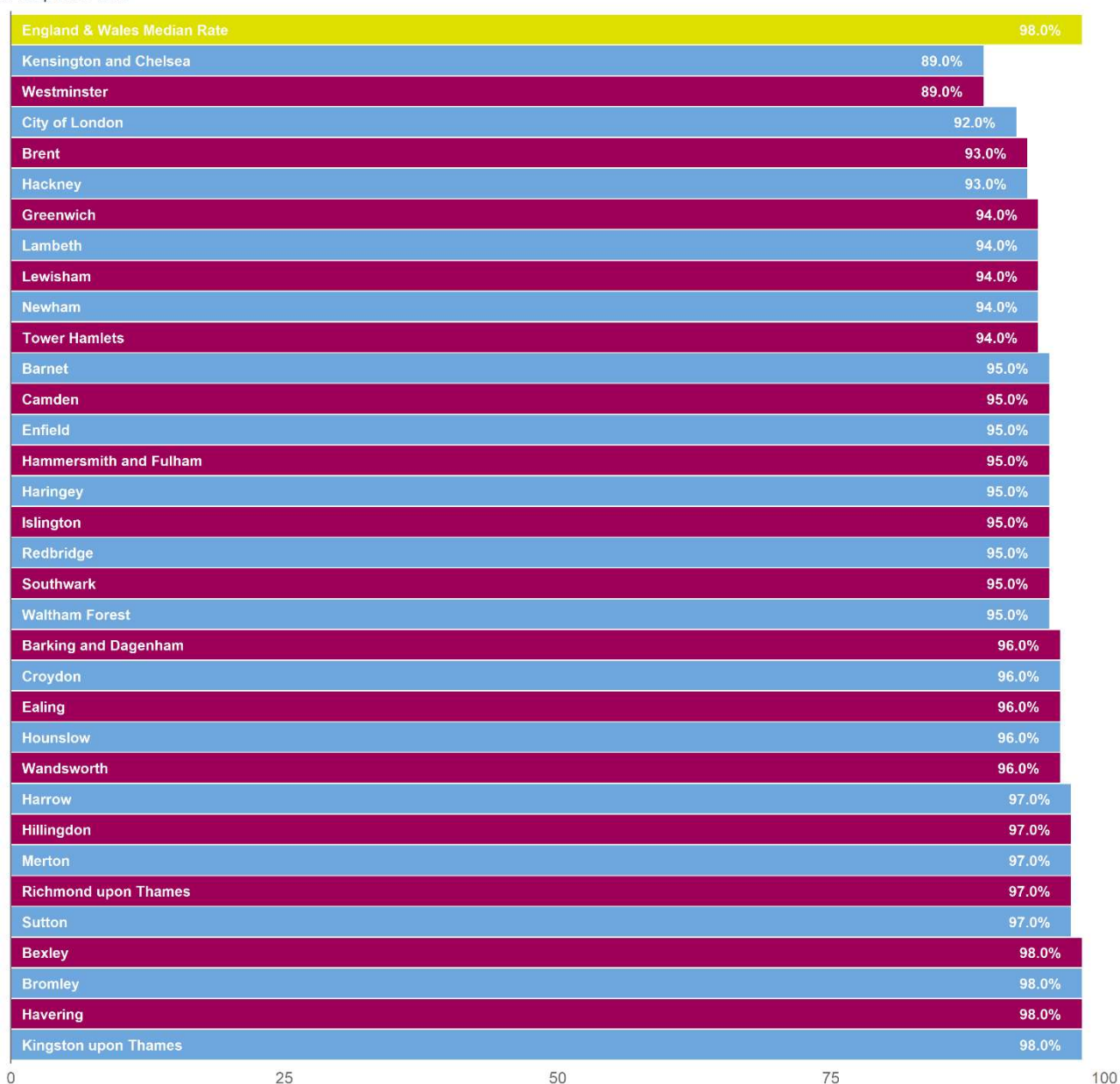
## Census response rates

Census response is the number of people who returned a census form as a proportion of the total population. In England and Wales, the median local authority response rate was 98 percent. In London the median response rate was 95 percent with the boroughs ranged in response from 89 percent (Kensington & Chelsea) to 98 percent (Bexley, Bromley, Havering & Kingston).

In developing the census questionnaire methodology ONS produced a 'hard-to-count' index which identified those areas where either digital exclusion or willingness to complete the census would be barriers to effective enumeration. London contains many areas in the highest HTC-5 category. Greater resource was placed into these areas during the census data collection process however, by their nature these areas can be expected to have higher rates of non-response than average. Where no response is received data are estimated and imputed.

### 2021 census response rates

person response rate



Source: England and Wales census, ONS  
Chart: GLA City Intelligence

## Plans for further analysis

ONS have today published a Quality Assurance pack alongside the population figures, including information on how the local authorities' estimates were constructed and their response rates. The CIU census team will produce a report on the QA process for London local authorities.

## Timetable of upcoming releases

Data on residents' characteristics will be released from October to December 2022, including data for the smallest geographical areas. Cross-tabulations of more than one Census topic will follow from late 2022.

The census team will report on these figures for London as they are published and will make comparable data for 2011 and 2021 available to partners across the capital.

## ONS Commentary

The Office for National Statistics have published alongside the first data release a set of interactive data exploration tools and two census bulletins. These can be found here: <https://census.gov.uk/>

## Contact

Please contact [demogarphy@london.gov.uk](mailto:demogarphy@london.gov.uk) with any questions relating to this release. For general census enquiries contact [census@london.gov.uk](mailto:census@london.gov.uk).

## Appendix: Borough populations

Borough	2011 census	2021 census	Change 2011-2021	Percentage change
City of London	7,400	8,600	1,200	16.2%
Barking and Dagenham	185,900	218,900	33,000	17.8%
Barnet	356,400	389,300	32,900	9.2%
Bexley	232,000	246,500	14,500	6.3%
Brent	311,200	339,800	28,600	9.2%
Bromley	309,400	330,000	20,600	6.7%
Camden	220,300	210,100	-10,200	-4.6%
Croydon	363,400	390,800	27,400	7.5%
Ealing	338,400	367,100	28,700	8.5%
Enfield	312,500	330,000	17,500	5.6%
Greenwich	254,600	289,100	34,500	13.6%
Hackney	246,300	259,200	12,900	5.2%
Hammersmith and Fulham	182,500	183,200	700	0.4%
Haringey	254,900	264,200	9,300	3.6%
Harrow	239,100	261,300	22,200	9.3%
Havering	237,200	262,000	24,800	10.5%
Hillingdon	273,900	305,900	32,000	11.7%
Hounslow	254,000	288,200	34,200	13.5%
Islington	206,100	216,600	10,500	5.1%
Kensington and Chelsea	158,600	143,400	-15,200	-9.6%
Kingston upon Thames	160,100	168,000	7,900	4.9%
Lambeth	303,100	317,600	14,500	4.8%
Lewisham	275,900	300,600	24,700	9.0%

<b>Merton</b>	199,700	215,200	15,500	7.8%
<b>Newham</b>	308,000	351,100	43,100	14.0%
<b>Redbridge</b>	279,000	310,300	31,300	11.2%
<b>Richmond upon Thames</b>	187,000	195,200	8,200	4.4%
<b>Southwark</b>	288,300	307,700	19,400	6.7%
<b>Sutton</b>	190,100	209,600	19,500	10.3%
<b>Tower Hamlets</b>	254,100	310,300	56,200	22.1%
<b>Waltham Forest</b>	258,200	278,400	20,200	7.8%
<b>Wandsworth</b>	307,000	327,500	20,500	6.7%
<b>Westminster</b>	219,400	204,300	-15,100	-6.9%
<b>London</b>	8,173,900	8,799,800	625,900	7.7%
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>	56,075,900	59,597,300	3,521,700	6.3%

Source: England and Wales census, ONS

Note: Data in the 2021 census first release is rounded to the nearest 100. Future releases will provide unit-level estimates.



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