

## Article

# 2011 Census analysis: Do the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of those living alone in England and Wales differ from the general population?

We analyse the characteristics of those living alone within the household population aged 16 and over, and the broader usually resident population. Characteristics analysed include age and sex, housing, qualifications and ethnicity. Geographical variations of those living alone are also highlighted. In 2011, 13% of the total usually resident household population of England and Wales were living alone. This is similar to the overall proportion of those living alone within the European Economic Area (EEA) at 14%.



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# 1. Foreword

This story analyses the characteristics of those living alone within the household population aged 16 and over, and the broader usually resident population, using data from the 2011 Census. Characteristics analysed include age and sex, housing tenure, qualifications and ethnicity. Geographical variations in those living alone are also highlighted.

## 2. Key points

- The proportion of the total usually resident population of all ages living alone in England and Wales in 2011 (13%) was similar to the overall proportion living alone within the European Economic Area (EEA) (14%).
- Of the household population aged 16 and over in England and Wales in 2011, 16% (7.1 million) were living alone.
- The proportion living alone increased gradually with age: from less than 4% for ages 16 to 24, to 17% for those aged 50 to 64 and 59% for those aged 85 and over.
- 26% of the household population aged 16 and over with no qualifications were living alone in 2011; 14% of those with a degree level or above qualification were living alone.
- More than half (54%) of those living alone owned their own home (including 36% who owned outright).
- The majority (72%) of those living alone were living in properties with two or more bedrooms.
- Of the total usually resident population aged 16 and over, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnic groups had the highest levels living alone in 2011 (17%), while Asian/Asian British ethnic groups were the least likely to live alone (7%).

## 3. Introduction

In 2011, 13% (7.1 million) of the total usually resident household<sup>1</sup> population of England and Wales were living alone. This proportion was the same as in 2001, when 13% (6.5 million) of the total usually resident household population were living alone (see Table 1). Of the household population aged 16 and over<sup>2</sup> in England and Wales in 2011, 16% (7.1 million) were living alone<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1: Usual residents and household population of England and Wales; 2001 and 2011**

|   | 2001 Census<br>(millions) | 2011 Census<br>(millions) | % change<br>2001-11 |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Usually resident population (those in households and communal establishments) | 52.0                      | 56.1                      | 7.8                 |
| Persons in households   | 51.1                      | 55.1                      | 7.6                 |
| Persons in households aged 16 and over  | 40.7                      | 44.5                      | 9.5                 |
| One person households   | 6.5                       | 7.1                       | 8.7                 |

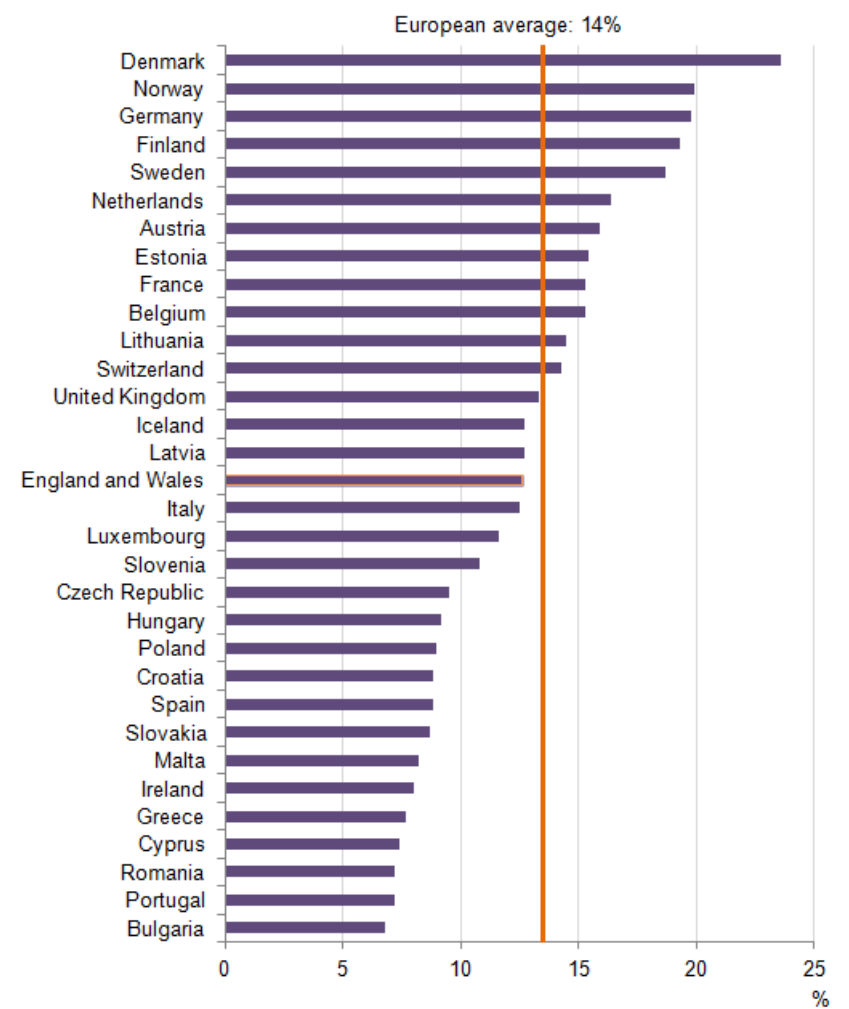
Source: Office for National Statistics

Note:

1. Data from Census tables DC1109EW, KS102EW and 2001 table S001 via Nomis.

The proportion of the total usually resident population<sup>1</sup> living alone in England and Wales (13%)<sup>4</sup> was similar to the overall proportion for the [European Economic Area \(EEA\)](#) countries in 2011 (14%) (see Figure 1), and similar to the proportions in Latvia, Iceland and Italy (all 13%). Within Europe, proportions living alone ranged from 7% in Bulgaria to 24% in Denmark; these differences may be linked to varying cultural and social attitudes across Europe.

**Figure 1: European comparison of percentage of the population living alone, 2011**



**Source: Census - Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

1. Data obtained from Eurostat 16 October 2014. Countries included are EU member states, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Eurostat data for some countries have been updated from those used in a previous report
2. Data for the UK are obtained from Eurostat and not the 2011 Census
3. Data from Census tables DC1109EW and KS102EW via Nomis. Eurostat table tesov190 (Distribution of population by household types-single person) via Eurostat

Previous analysis of 2011 Census data has summarised changes in [households and household composition](#) between 2001 and 2011. This analysis focuses on the characteristics of those living alone compared to the usually resident population as a whole. The following characteristics are considered in this short story and are based on the household population (excluding those living in communal establishments (1.0 million)):

- Age and sex
- Geographical differences
- Household tenure
- Household spaces
- Qualifications

Additionally, ethnicity is also considered but is based on the total usually resident population aged 16 and over.

Information on those living alone may be used by a variety of people, including:

- MPs and policy makers.
- Those planning and delivering services. For example, information about people living alone can be used to help produce projections of the number of households.
- Researchers, academics and journalists analysing societal changes in the way we are living.
- Businesses including the building industry.

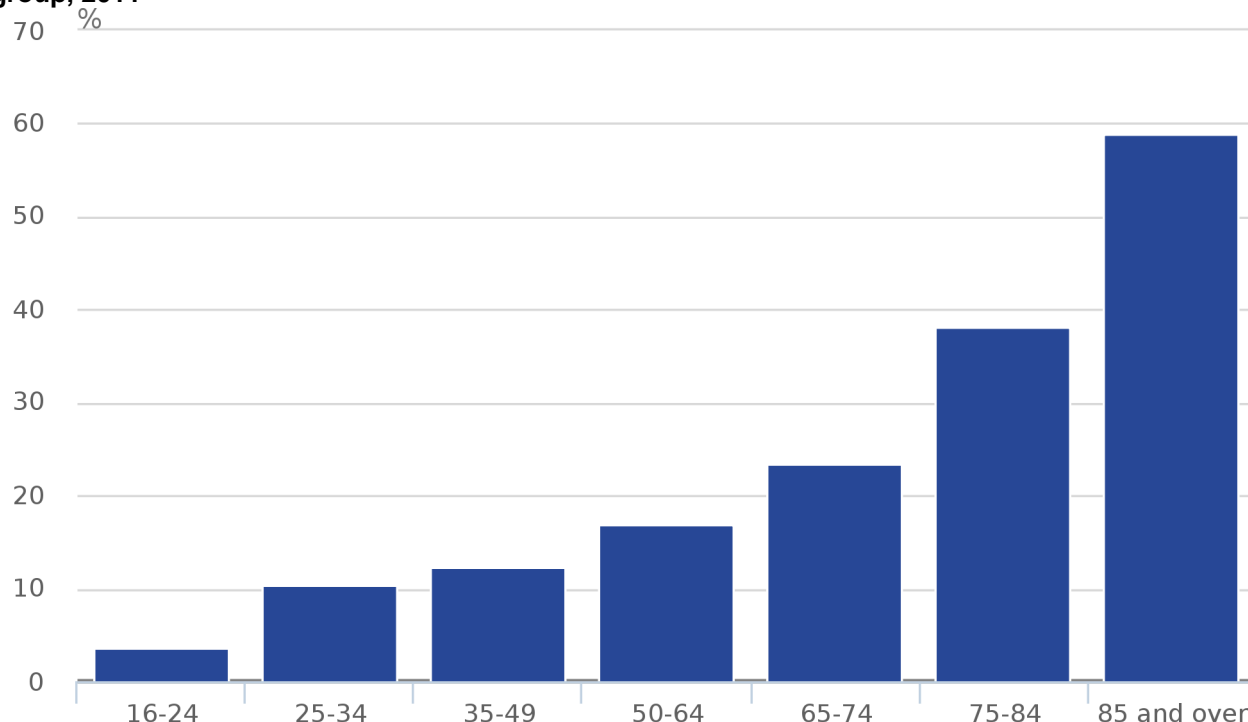
## Notes for introduction

1. The usually resident population refers to people who live in the UK for 12 months or more, including those who have been resident for less than 12 months but intend to stay for a total period of 12 months or more. In 2011, the usually resident population of England and Wales was 56.1 million; the household population was 55.1 million. The difference between the two was the 1.0 million living in communal establishments.
2. The total household population aged 16 and over in England and Wales recorded in the 2011 Census was 44.5 million; the total usually resident population aged 16 and over was 45.5 million. The difference between the two was accounted for by the communal establishment population aged 16 and over (1.0 million); there were a total of 38,000 people aged under 16 in communal establishments in 2011.
3. Comparisons of one person households aged 16 and over in 2011 with equivalent data for 2001 are not possible as data for one person households in 2001 was available for all persons only irrespective of age (it included those aged under 16).
4. ONS house style is to present percentages to one decimal place when under 10%, but rounded to the nearest whole number when above 10%.

## 4. Age and sex analysis

Age and sex analysis of those living alone is based on the household population aged 16 and over (7.1 million); this excludes a total of 822 people aged under 16 who were living alone in 2011. For those aged 16 and over, the proportion living alone increased gradually with age: from less than 4% for ages 16 to 24 to 17% for those aged 50 to 64 and 59% for those aged 85 and over (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Percentage of usually resident household population (aged 16 and over) living alone by age group, 2011**



**Source: Census - Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

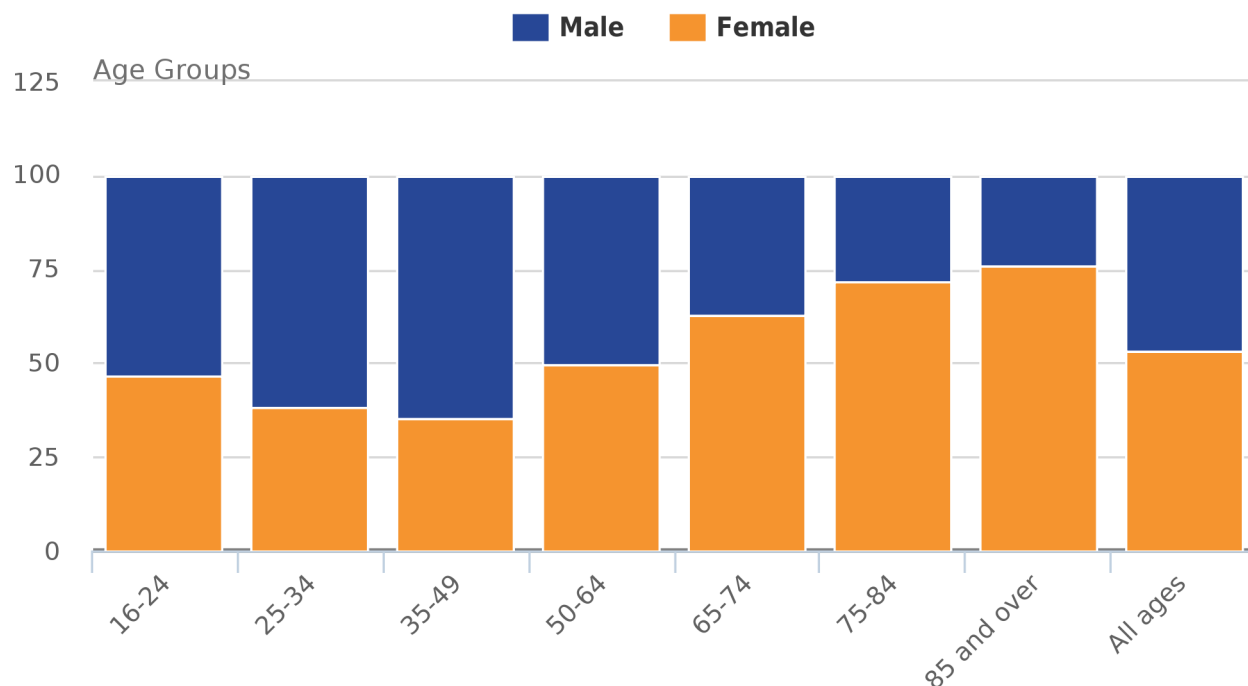
1. Data from Census tables DC1109EW and BD0033 via Nomis.

Overall, there were 88 men for every 100 women living alone in 2011 in the usually resident household population aged 16 and over; this varied from 184 men for every 100 women aged 35 to 49, to 59 men for every 100 women aged 65 to 74 and 32 men for every 100 women aged 85 and over.

Figure 3 shows that there were more men than women living alone in age groups under 65, with the highest proportion of men living alone found in the age group 35 to 49 (65%). This may be partly the result of divorced men in this age group being less likely to be living with their children than divorced women. Those aged 65 and over living alone were more likely to be women (69%), with the percentage increasing from 63% in the 65 to 74 age group to 76% in the age group 85 and over. This reversal at older ages is likely to relate mainly to the longer life expectancy of women compared with men.

A previous [ONS publication](#) identified 150,000 men and 474,000 women aged 85 and over living alone; 69% of all women aged 85 and over living in private households were living alone compared with 41% of men.

**Figure 3: Sex distribution of those living alone by age, 2011**



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Data from Census tables DC1109EW and BD0033 via Nomis.

## 5. Geographical differences in living alone

The five local authorities with the highest proportions of the usually resident household population aged 16 and over living alone are shown in Table 2. Four were London boroughs, with more than one in three residents of City of London aged 16 and over living alone and more than one in four residents of Kensington and Chelsea living alone.

In contrast, a number of London boroughs had very low proportions living alone: the lowest proportion was 10%<sup>1</sup> in Harrow. Outside London, Hart (Hampshire) had 11% living alone. Differences may relate to complex variations in the demographic profile of these areas, including age, sex, ethnicity, availability of suitable housing and marital status; Hart had a high proportion of married persons identified in a previous [ONS publication](#), while Harrow had a low proportion of [divorced people](#).

The local authority with the highest proportion of the population living alone within Wales was Gwynedd (19%), ranked 22nd within England and Wales; Merthyr Tydfil had the lowest proportion living alone (14%), ranked 275th within England and Wales.

**Table 2: Five local authorities with the highest and lowest proportions of the usually resident household population aged 16 and over living alone in England and Wales, 2011**

| Ranked highest | Local authority        | %    | Ranked lowest | Local authority | %    |
|----------------|------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------|------|
| 1              | City of London         | 37.5 | 1             | Harrow          | 10.0 |
| 2              | Kensington and Chelsea | 27.8 | 2             | Hart            | 11.2 |
| 3              | Westminster            | 26.5 | 3             | Newham          | 11.2 |
| 4              | Camden                 | 22.3 | 4             | Surrey Heath    | 11.6 |
| 5              | Hastings               | 22.0 | 5             | Wokingham       | 11.7 |

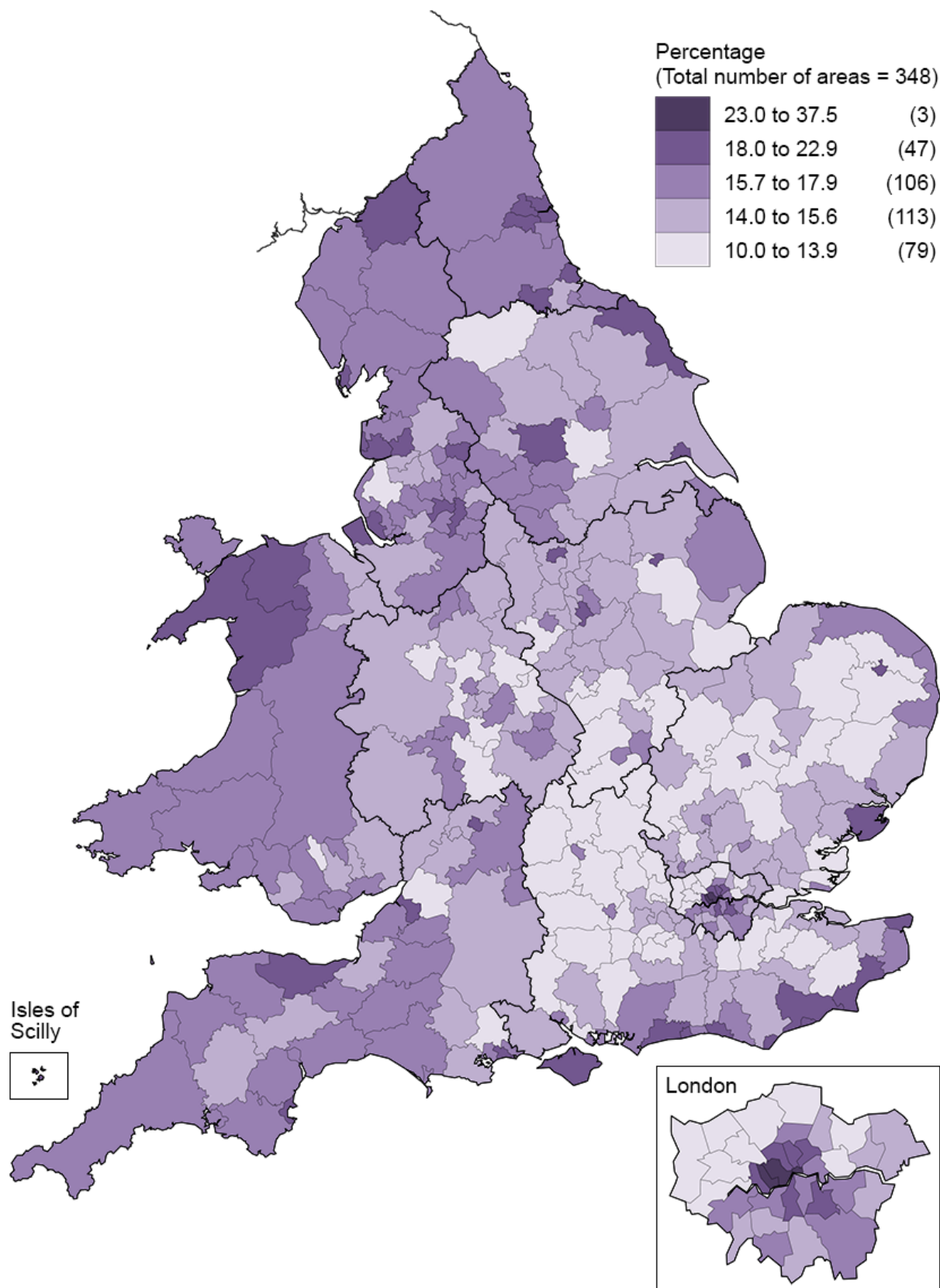
Source: Office for National Statistics

Note:

1. Data from Census table DC1109EW via Nomis

Map 1 summarises the distribution of the usually resident household population aged 16 and over who lived alone in local authorities in England and Wales. Local authorities with the highest proportions of people living alone included many [coastal areas](#) (many of which had high divorce rates and [older populations](#)), North Wales and parts of both the North West and North East.

**Map 1: Percentage of the usually resident household population aged 16 and over living alone in 2011 by local authority**



Source: Office for National Statistics

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The five local authorities with the highest proportions of the usually resident household population aged 50 and over living alone were all London boroughs (Table 3). Almost half (46%) of residents aged 50 and over in City of London were living alone in 2011, the highest proportion of any local authority in England and Wales. While this is a relatively high proportion it may not reflect relationship status: City of London also had a high proportion of usual residents with second addresses elsewhere; this suggests that some of the residents living alone may actually have had families elsewhere, and lived with those families for some of the time.

**Table 3: Five local authorities with the highest and lowest proportions of the household population aged 50 and over living alone in England and Wales, 2011**

| Ranked highest | Local authority        | %    | Ranked lowest | Local authority        | %    |
|----------------|------------------------|------|---------------|------------------------|------|
| 1              | City of London         | 46.4 | 1             | Hart                   | 17.5 |
| 2              | Westminster            | 38.8 | 2             | Harrow                 | 18.1 |
| 3              | Kensington and Chelsea | 37.1 | 3             | Surrey Heath           | 18.2 |
| 4              | Islington              | 36.8 | 4             | Wokingham              | 18.2 |
| 5              | Camden                 | 36.6 | 5             | South Northamptonshire | 18.5 |

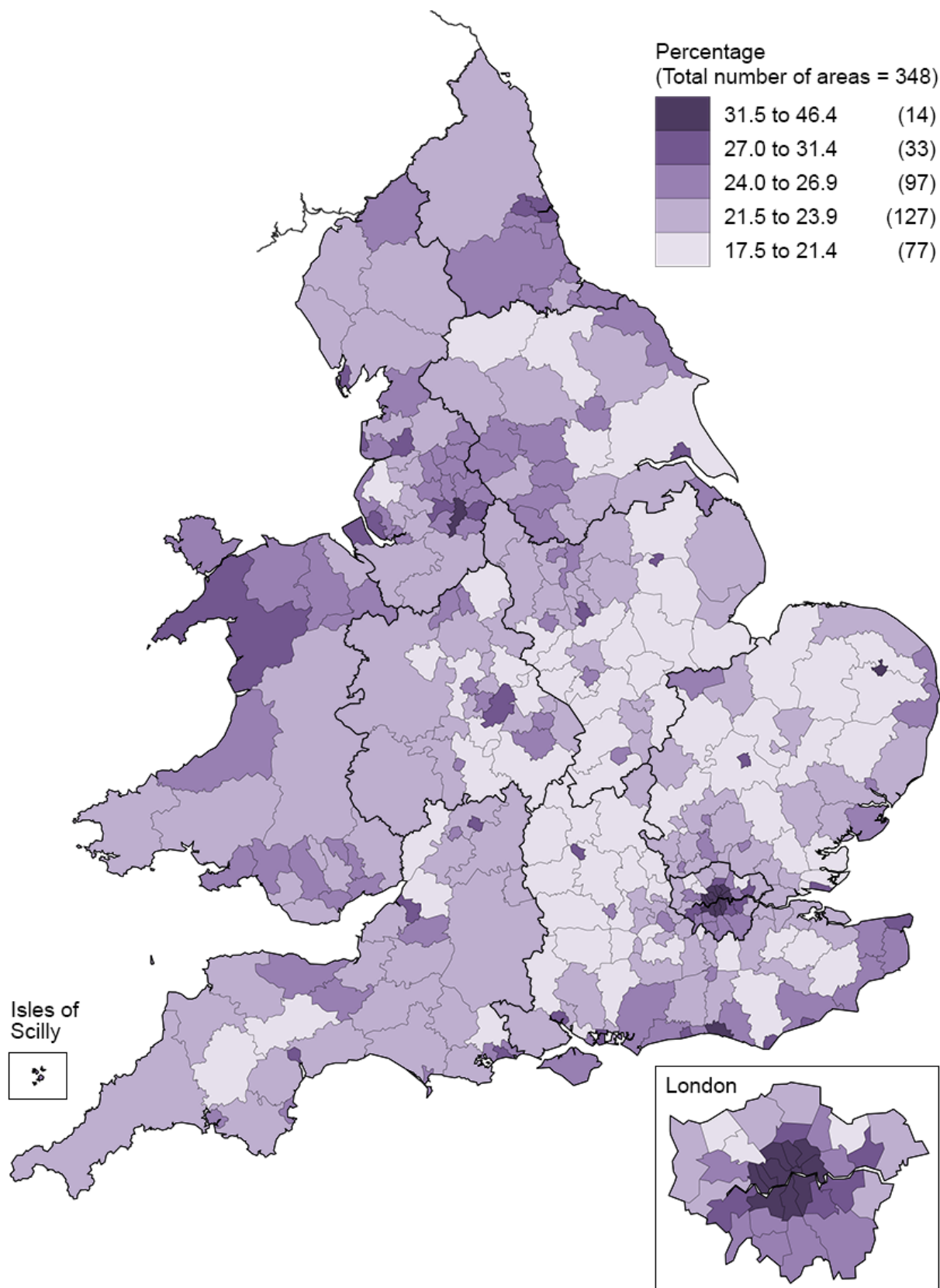
Source: Office for National Statistics

Note:

1. Data from Census tables DC1109EW and BD0033 via Nomis.

The proportions of usual residents aged 50 and over living alone in the household population were generally higher in the North West, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, London and Wales (Map 2). By contrast, Hart (Hampshire) had the lowest proportion of those aged 50 and over living alone (18%) (Table 3); this may relate to high levels of life expectancy in the South East which may allow couples to remain living together longer. Map 2 shows that proportions of those aged 50 and over living alone were generally lower in the Midlands and the East of England, though they were high in the coastal regions of South East and East England.

**Map 2: Percentage of the usually resident household population aged 50 and over living alone by local authority district, England and Wales, 2011**



Source: Office for National Statistics

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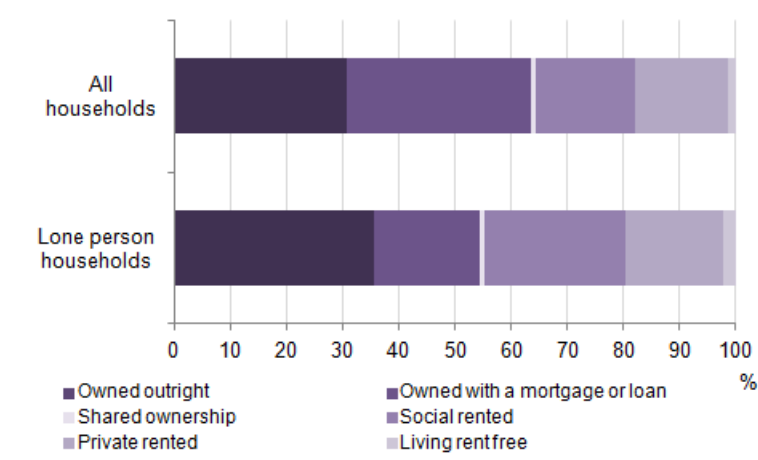
## Notes for geographical differences in living alone

1. ONS house style is to present percentages to one decimal place when under 10%, but rounded to the nearest whole number when above 10%.

## 6. Household tenure

Household tenure analysis is based on the total household population of all ages living alone (7.1 million). Over half (54%) of those living alone in 2011 owned their own property (including 36% who owned their home outright) (Figure 4). This may relate to the age profile of those living alone as older residents are more likely to have purchased property and paid off their mortgages; 59% of those aged 65 and over living alone owned their home outright compared to 19% of those aged under 65 living alone.

**Figure 4: Comparison of tenure distribution for one person households and all households, 2011**



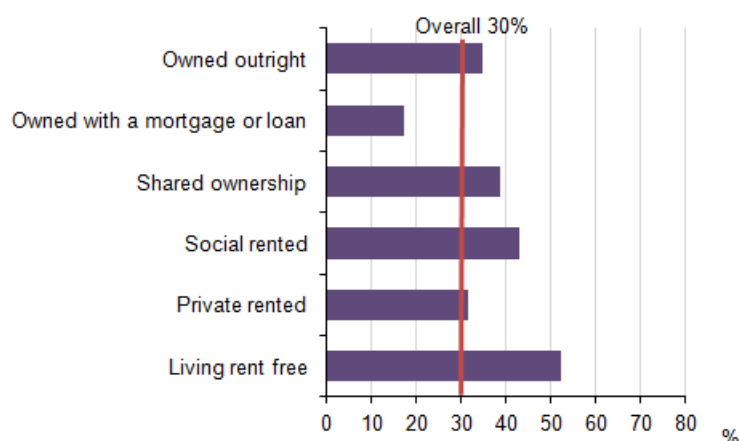
**Source: Census - Office for National Statistics**

### Notes:

1. Data from Census table DC4101EW via Nomis.

In 2011, 30% of all households in England and Wales were one person households (Figure 5); the proportion was lower among owner occupied households, with one in four (26%) being one person households. Within the owner occupied category there were variations: a higher proportion of households that were owned outright (35%) or had shared ownership (39%) were one person households, while a lower proportion of those owned with a mortgage (17%) were one person households. More than two in five (43%) of social rented households were one person households, while more than half (52%) of those living rent free were one person households.

**Figure 5: One person households as a proportion of all households by tenure, 2011**



**Source: Census - Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

1. Data from Census table DC4101EW via Nomis.

The overall proportion of owner occupied households that were one person households varied from 55% in City of London to 19% in Uttlesford (Essex); the low proportion in this affluent part of Essex may be a result of older people moving away to other areas after selling high value property, and the presence of Stansted Airport in the area as a major employer.

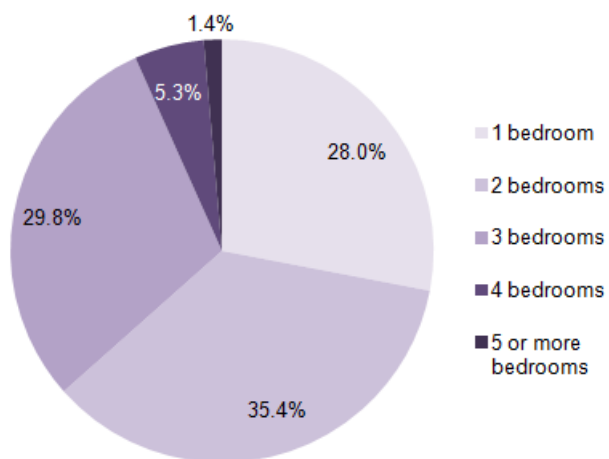
The proportion of households owned outright that were one person households varied across England and Wales: from 59% in Trafford to 28% in Cheshire West and Chester.

## 7. Household spaces

There were 23.4 million occupied household spaces<sup>1</sup> in 2011; of these, 30% (7.1 million) were one person households. Of those living alone in 2011, only 28% lived in one bedroom properties. The remaining 72% of people living alone were living in household spaces with two or more bedrooms (35% were living in two bedroom properties, 30% in three bedroom properties and 6.7%<sup>2</sup> living in properties with four or more bedrooms), and were therefore living in under-occupied<sup>3</sup> properties (Figure 6). The proportion under-occupied was slightly higher than the total proportion of households found to be under-occupied (69%) in an earlier 2011 [Census analysis](#).

However, not all of those living alone may necessarily be living alone all the time: there may be parents whose non-resident children stay with them some of the time, lone parents with non-dependent children who live with them outside term-time and people who 'live apart together'. In some of these cases, people may require extra bedrooms for some of the time.

**Figure 6: Proportion of all one person households by number of bedrooms, 2011**



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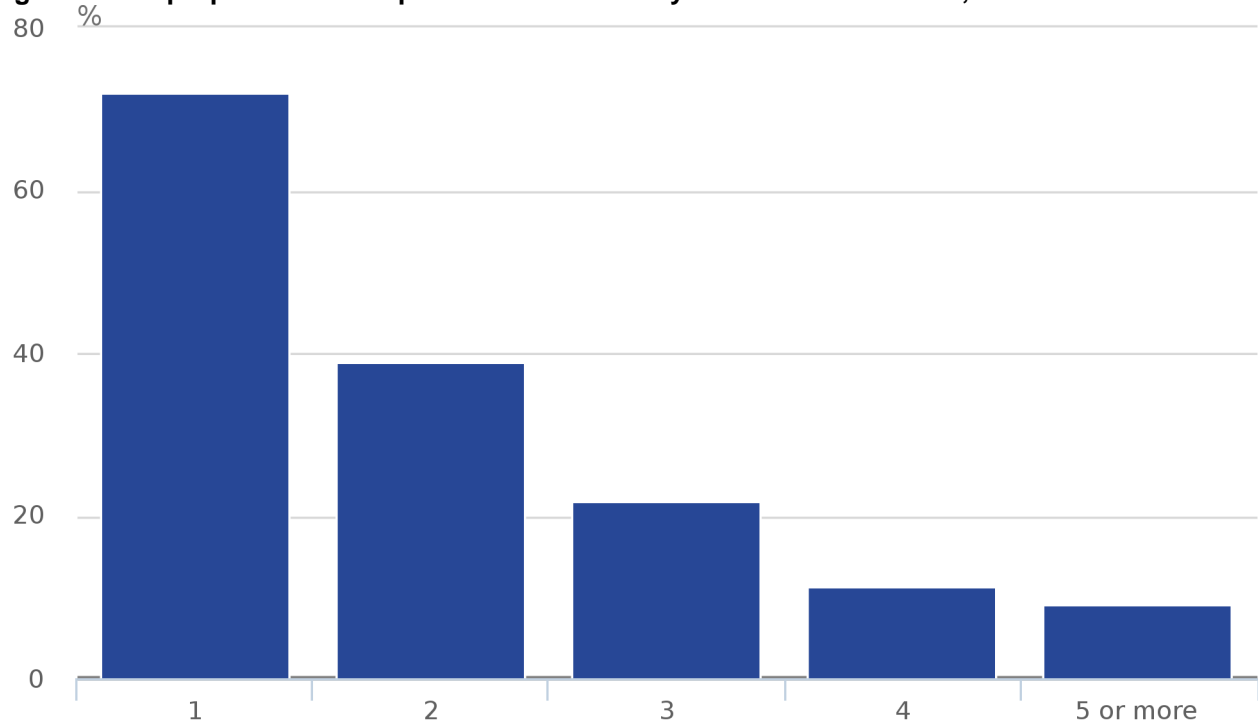
**Source: Census - Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

1. Data from Census table DC1402EW via Nomis.

The majority (72%) of one bedroom households were occupied by one person (Figure 7). The proportion of one person households declined with increasing numbers of bedrooms; however 39% of two bedroom properties and more than one in five (22%) three bedroom properties were occupied by people living alone. Even among households with five or more bedrooms, almost one in ten had only one occupant.

**Figure 7: The proportion of one person households by number of bedrooms, 2011**



**Source:** Census - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Data from Census table DC1402EW via Nomis.

## Notes for household spaces

1. Household space is the accommodation used or available for use by an individual household, at the defined address. Occupied household spaces are those occupied by usual resident (households). In 2011 there were 24.4 million household spaces; 96% (23.4 million) of these were occupied, the remaining 4.4% (1.1 million) were not occupied by usual residents. Household spaces with no usual residents may still be used by short-term residents, visitors who were present on census night or a combination of short-term residents and visitors. Vacant household spaces and those that are used only as second addresses are also classified in census results as household spaces with no usual residents.
2. ONS house style is to present percentages to one decimal place when under 10%, but rounded to the nearest whole number when above 10%.
3. For each household, ONS derived a bedroom occupancy rating by subtracting the notional number of bedrooms recommended by the bedroom standard from the number of bedrooms actually available. An occupancy rating could indicate overcrowding or under-occupation within a household as follows:
  - Occupancy rating of 0: implies that a household has the precise notional number of bedrooms recommended by the bedroom standard, for the number and composition of people living within the household. Occupancy rating of -1 or less: indicates that a household has at least one bedroom too few for the number and composition of people living in the household and is considered overcrowded by the bedroom standard.
  - Occupancy rating of +1: indicates that a household has one bedroom more than is recommended for the number and composition of people living in the household and is considered under-occupied by the bedroom standard.
  - Occupancy rating of +2 or more: indicates that a household has two or more bedrooms more than is recommended for the number and composition of people living in the household and is also considered under-occupied.

The Housing (Overcrowding) Bill of 2003 defines the bedroom standard as: “(4) For the purposes of the bedroom standard a separate bedroom shall be allocated to the following persons:

(a) A person living together with another as husband and wife (whether that other person is of the same sex or the opposite sex) (b) A person aged 21 years or more (c) Two persons of the same sex aged 10 years to 20 years (d) Two persons (whether of the same sex or not) aged less than 10 years (e) Two persons of the same sex where one person is aged between 10 years and 20 years and the other is aged less than 10 years (f) Any person aged under 21 years in any case where he or she cannot be paired with another occupier of the dwelling so as to fall within (c), (d) or (e) above.”

Please note that while the 2011 Census uses the bedroom standard definition stated above, the Housing Bill of 2003 also takes account of uninhabitable bedrooms and rooms with less than 50ft<sup>2</sup> floor space in determining bedrooms or rooms available to a household. The census does not collect this information and it is therefore not used in deriving the 2011 Census bedroom occupancy ratings.

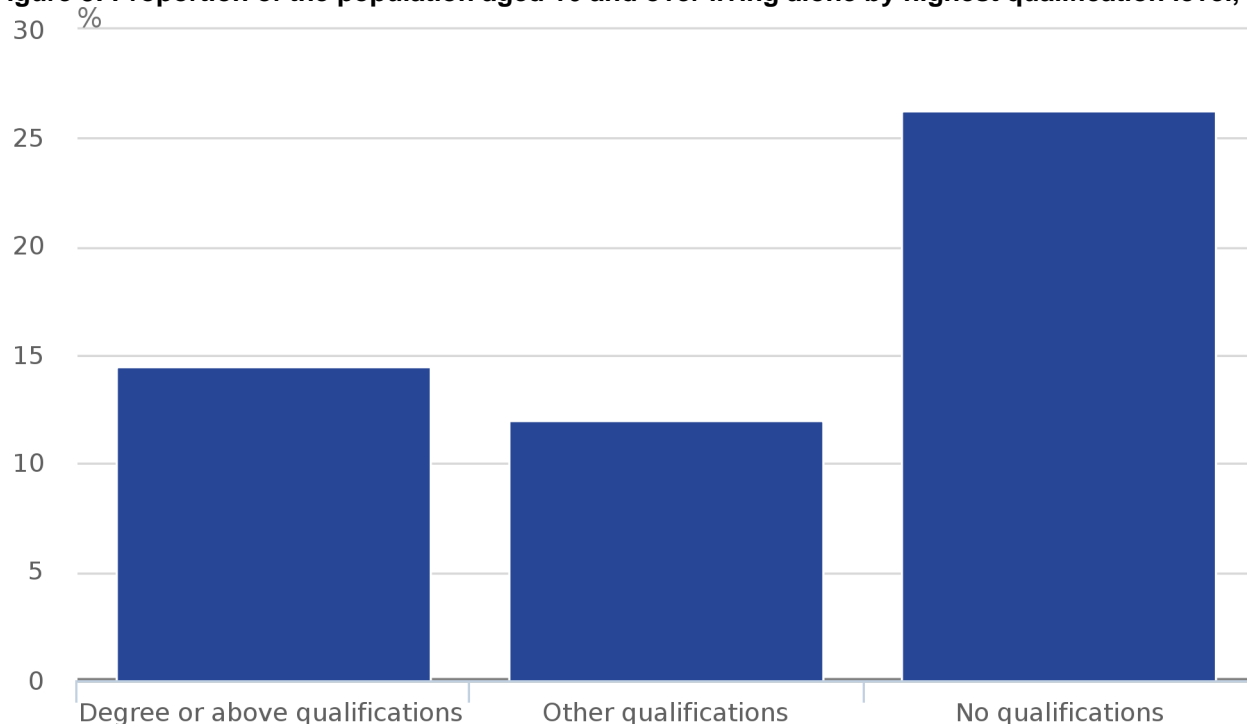
Please note also that households with one bedroom include those which indicated having no bedrooms in their census responses.

## 8. Qualifications

Highest qualification analysis is based on the usually resident household population aged 16 and over. In 2011, 26% of the population aged 16 and over with no qualifications were living alone, while the equivalent proportion for those with a degree level or above qualification was 14% (Figure 8).

The proportion of people living alone with different qualification levels varied geographically: while 38% of residents with a degree level qualification or above in City of London were living alone, only 9% of those similarly qualified in Harrow were living alone.

**Figure 8: Proportion of the population aged 16 and over living alone by highest qualification level, 2011**



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Data from Census table DC5103EW via Nomis.
2. 'Other' qualifications include apprenticeships, vocational qualifications, foreign qualifications for which the UK equivalent is not known and those qualified to level 1, 2 or 3 (secondary and tertiary education)

## 9. Ethnicity

Ethnicity analysis is based on the total usually resident population aged 16 and over (45.5 million). A person's ethnic group refers to their own perceived [cultural background](#). The proportion of the population aged 16 and over <sup>1</sup> living alone [varied by ethnic group](#) in 2011.

Table 4 shows the proportion of the population aged 16 and over in 2011 living alone by broad ethnic group. Of these, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnic groups had the highest level living alone (17%); however, this group accounted for only 3.3% (232,000) of all those aged 16 and over living alone. White ethnic groups were living alone slightly less frequently (16%), but accounted for the majority (91% or 6.5 million) of all those living alone. Among these broad ethnic groups, Asian/Asian British ethnic groups were living alone least commonly in 2011 (6.6% or 209,000); this may be partly a result of varying attitudes towards living arrangements in different cultures as identified in previous research on [concealed families](#). The age profile of different ethnic groups may also have an effect, as older residents are more likely to live alone.



**Table 4: Proportion of usual residents aged 16 and over living alone by broad ethnic group, 2011**

| Ethnic group  | % living alone |
|---|----------------|
| White   | 16.2           |
| Mixed/multiple  | 15.8           |
| Asian/Asian British   | 6.6            |
| Black/African/Caribbean/Black British                         | 17.1           |
| Other   | 14.6           |
| All ethnic groups living alone in usually resident population | 15.5           |

Source: Office for National Statistics

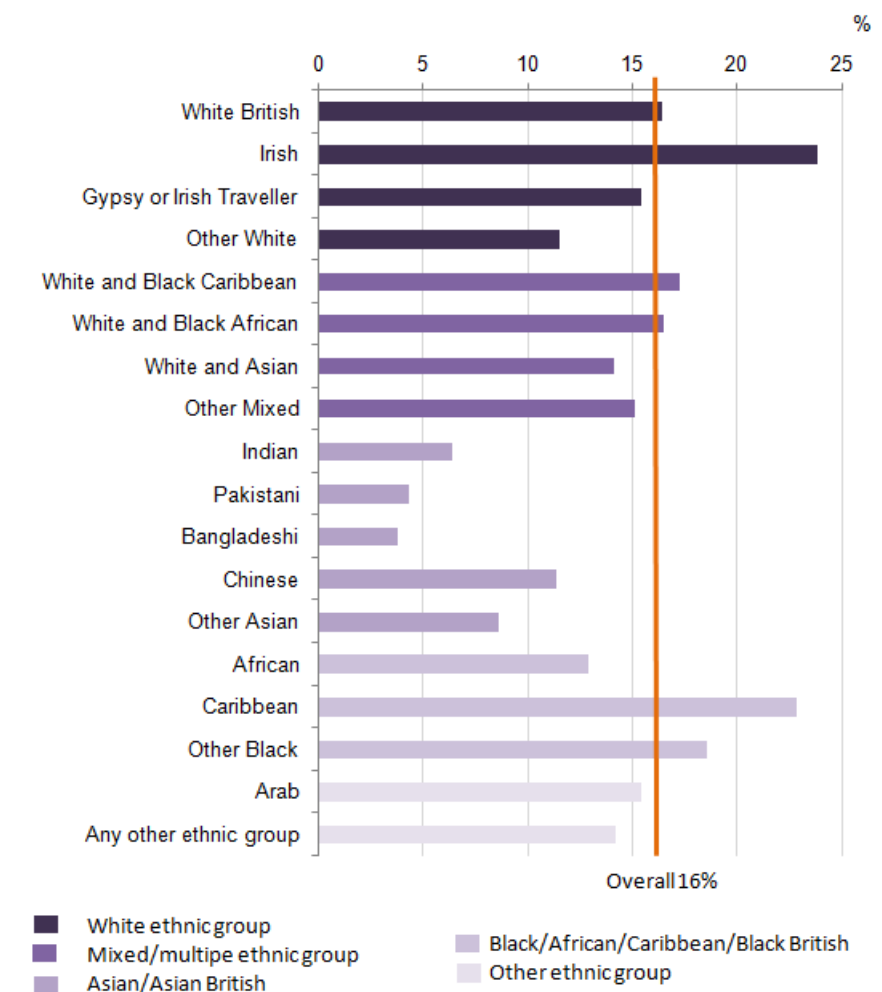
Note:

1. Data from Census tables DC2101EW and DC1201EW via Nomis

Figure 9 shows a more detailed breakdown of those living alone by ethnic group. Among the white ethnic groups, those of Irish origin were living alone most frequently, with almost one in four (24%) residents living alone; this was the highest proportion of any ethnic group. The median age of [Irish-born](#) in England and Wales in 2011 was 61.7 years. Among the white ethnic groups, those of 'other white origin' were living alone least frequently (11%); this included those Eastern European migrants with a younger age profile (for example the median age of [Polish-born](#) was 30.1 in 2011). Those of Caribbean ethnicity showed similar proportions living alone (23%) to those of Irish ethnicity; this may also relate to the [age profile of Caribbean residents](#) (for example, the median age of [Jamaican-born](#) was 55.3 in 2011).

Within the Asian/British Asian group, proportions living alone varied. Those of Chinese ethnicity were most likely to live alone (11%)<sup>2</sup>, while those of Bangladeshi (3.7%), Pakistani (4.2%) and Indian (6.3%) ethnicity were least likely to live alone. This may relate partly to cultural and economic differences, but may also reflect the age structures of the different groups.

**Figure 9: Percentage of the population aged 16 and over living alone by ethnic group, 2011**



**Source:** Census - Office for National Statistics

## Notes:

1. Data from Census tables DC1201EW and KS201EW via Nomis

## Notes for ethnicity

1. Proportions have been calculated using usual residents aged 16 and over as a denominator. The figures for those living alone include a small number of people (822 nationally) living alone who were under the age of 16. This will have a minimal effect on the resulting proportions; however it is possible that the impact could vary between ethnic groups if those aged under 16 living alone were more frequent in some ethnic groups. This was considered to be a more representative measure than the proportion of all usual residents living alone, as almost all residents under the age of 16 were dependent children and not living alone.
2. ONS house style is to present percentages to one decimal place when under 10%, but rounded to the nearest whole number when above 10%.

## 10. Background notes

1. Relevant Table numbers are provided in all download files within this publication. All data Tables are available via the Nomis website.
2. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

These National Statistics are produced to high professional standards and released according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority.