



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

# Labour market and travel to work in Wales (Census 2021)

Census 2021 data about the labour market in Wales, including economic activity status, industry and occupation and travel to work.

**First published:** 8 December 2022

**Last updated:** 8 December 2022

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# Introduction

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published Census 2021 data on Economic activity status, industry and occupation and travel to work for residents in Wales and England this morning (Thursday 8 December) in 3 separate bulletins.

- [Economic Activity Status, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)
- [Industry and Occupation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)
- [Travel to work, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

This statistical bulletin contains summaries for these three topic areas for Wales. It provides information on economic activity status, hours worked and whether individuals had ever done any paid work based on Census 2021 data.

It also includes further information on industry, occupation, social grades, method of travel to work and distance travelled to work based on Census 2021 data.

## Main points

- Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change; periods of lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the labour market travel to work topics.
- At Census Day, 21 March 2021, 1.45 million usual residents aged 16 and over in Wales were economically active (56.5%), whilst 1.11 million (43.5%) were economically inactive.
- Among usual residents aged 16 years and over in Wales, almost half were employees (1.16 million, 45.2%), 211,600 were self-employed (8.3%) and a

further 78,900 (3.1%) were unemployed but looking for work.

- Almost a quarter of usual residents aged 16 and over were economically inactive due to retirement (631,700, 24.7%).
- The industry in which the largest number of usual residents aged 16 and over were employed the week before Census 2021 was Human health and social work activities (232,700 - 17% of all usual residents aged 16 and over in employment).
- The industry with the greatest decline in the number of those in employment since the 2011 Census was Manufacturing, with 118,800 people (8.7% of those in employment) compared with 144,600 (10.5%) in 2011.
- Census 2021 estimates that 350,500 usual residents aged 16 and over in employment in Wales worked mainly at home or from home.

## Economic activity status

In Census 2021, everyone completing the census aged 16 years and over was asked to answer the questions on their economic activity status. The questions asked whether a person was working or looking for work in the week before Census 2021.

The age population base for employment and inactivity rates are different to the Labour Force Survey, please see quality and methodology section for more information.

There are three main types of economic activity status.

1. Economically active: in employment (an employee or self-employed)
2. Economically active: unemployed (those who were looking for work and could start within two weeks, or waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted)
3. Economically inactive (those who did not have a job between 15 March to 21

March 2021 and had not looked for work between 22 February to 21 March 2021 or could not start work within two weeks).

Census 2021 shows that in Wales, of the 2.56 million usual residents aged 16 years and over, around 1.37 million were in employment (53.5%), 78,900 were unemployed (3.1%) and 1.11 million were economically inactive (43.5%).

The economically active population includes people who were put on furlough at the time of Census 2021, who were considered to be temporarily away from work. In England and Wales, HM Revenue and Customs statistics state that 3.8 million employees were enrolled on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme on Census Day while 1.8 million self-employed people made a claim to the fourth grant of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

## **Economically active: in employment**

In Wales, 1.37 million usual residents aged 16 and over were economically active and in employment in the week before the Census, 53.5% of all usual residents aged 16 and over. The percentage who were in employment was lower in Wales compared with England (57.4%).

Across Welsh local authorities, the percentage of people who were in employment ranged from 49.1% in Ceredigion to 57.9% in Flintshire.

The percentage of people in an area who were economically active is likely to have been related to the age profile of the usual resident population. Further information on the age structure of the population can be found in the [Census 2021 population and household estimates](#).

All usual residents aged 16 and over who were in employment were able to specify if in their main job they were:

- an employee (those who did paid work for a private individual, organisation or business)
- self-employed or freelance (those who owned and operated their own business, professional practice, or similar enterprise)

People who were self-employed or freelance were asked to further specify if they were:

- self-employed without employees
- self-employed with employees

The presence of furlough through the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to people changing the ways they classified their economically active status.

In Wales, 1.16 million usual residents aged 16 and over were employees (45.2% of all usual residents aged 16 and over). The proportion of employees was smaller in Wales than in England (47.7%).

There were 211,600 self-employed people in Wales, this is 8.3% of all usual residents aged 16 and over, compared to 9.7% in England. Of the self-employed total in Wales, 38,000 (1.5% of all usual residents aged 16 and over) employed other people and 173,600 (6.8%) were self-employed without employees.

Across Welsh local authorities, the percentage of all usual residents aged 16 and over who were employees ranged from 35.8% in Ceredigion to 50.5% in Newport. The percentage who were self-employed ranged from 5.5% in Blaenau Gwent to 15.0% in Powys.

## **Economically active: unemployed**

At the time of the 2021 Census, there were 78,900 usual residents aged 16 and over in Wales who were economically active and unemployed (3.1%). This

included people who were looking for work and could start within two weeks or waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted. The percentage who were economically active and unemployed was lower in Wales compared with England (3.5%).

In Wales, the local authority with the highest percentage of people who were unemployed was Cardiff (4.1% of usual residents aged 16 and over).

## Economically inactive

A person is economically inactive if, in the week before the census, they are not in employment, and they are:

- not looking for work
- looking for work, but are not able to start work in the next two weeks

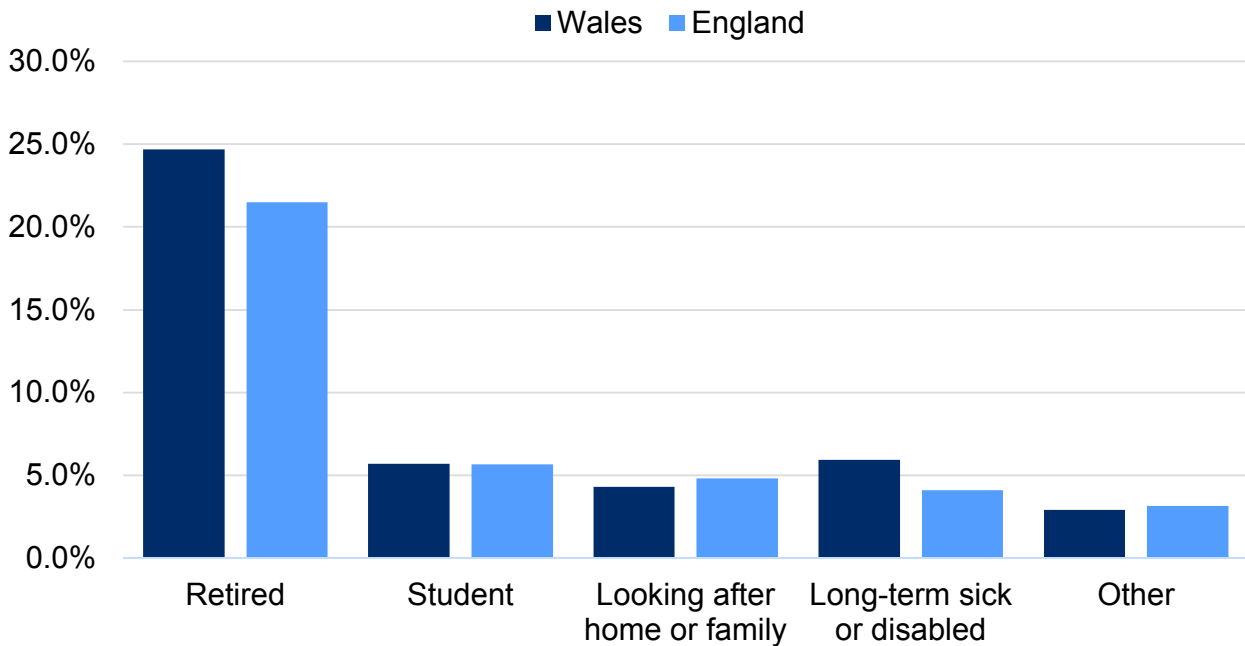
The reason why they are inactive are recorded as being one of the following:

- retired (whether receiving a pension or not)
- studying
- looking after home or family
- long-term sick or disabled
- for another reason

Due to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the UK labour market, the number of people who were economically inactive might be higher than anticipated. It is possible that some people on furlough may have identified as economically inactive, instead of temporarily away from work.

In total, 1.11 million usual residents aged 16 and over in Wales were economically inactive in 2021 (43.5% of usual residents aged 16 and over). This compares to 39.1% for England.

**Chart 1: Proportion of economically inactive individuals by reason for inactivity, all usual residents aged 16 and over, England and Wales, 2021**



The bar chart shows the largest reason for inactivity in both England and Wales was retired, accounting for 24.7% and 21.5% respectively.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

Within Wales, the most-selected reasons for economic inactivity were:

- Retired (24.7% of usual residents aged 16 years and over, 631,700)
- Long-term sick or disabled (5.9%, 151,300)
- Studying (5.7%, 145,200)

Wales had higher percentages of usual residents aged 16 and over who were retired (24.7%) or long-term sick or disabled (5.9%) than England (21.5% and



4.1% respectively).

## Hours worked

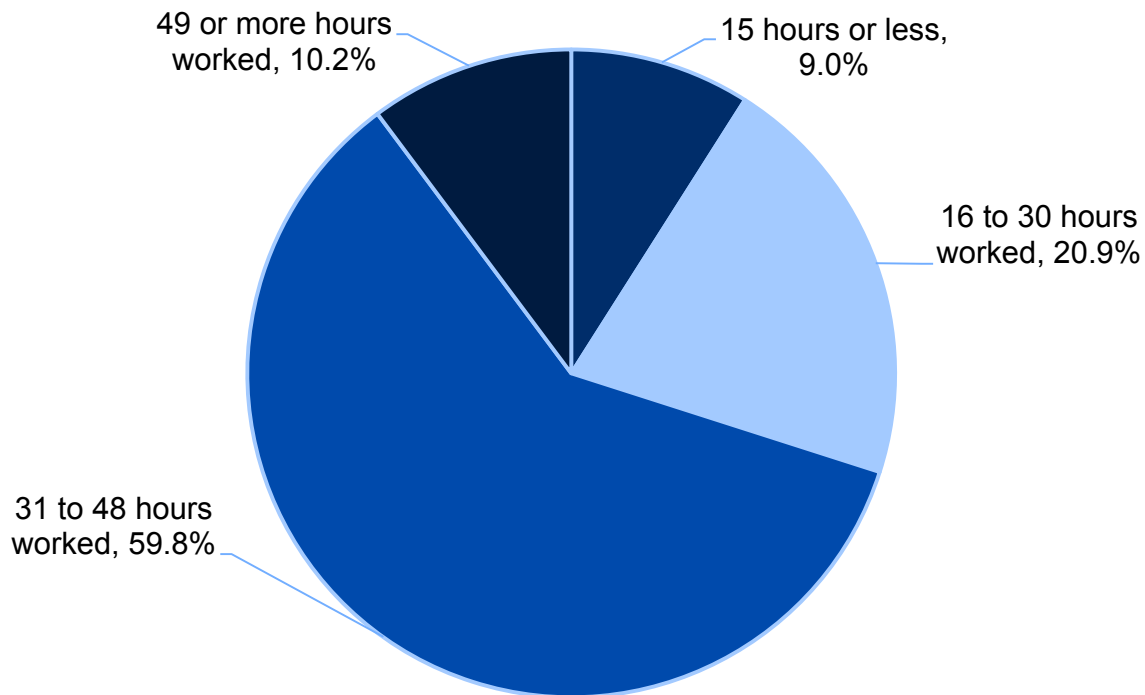
All usual residents aged 16 and over who were in employment were asked how many hours a week they usually worked, including paid and unpaid overtime.

Furlough, and businesses being open for reduced hours in England and Wales at the time of the 2021 Census due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, may have led to people reporting more, or fewer, hours worked than pre-pandemic.

In Wales, 958,900 (70.1%) usual residents aged 16 and over in employment worked full time (31 hours or more a week). Within this total, 818,800 people worked 31 to 48 hours per week (59.8%), and 140,100 worked 49 hours or more a week (10.2%).

The remaining 409,600 (29.9%) of usual residents aged 16 and over in employment worked part time (up to 30 hours a week). Of those who worked part-time, 123,600 (9%) worked 0 to 15 hours a week, and 285,900 (20.9%) worked 16 to 30 hours a week.

**Chart 2: Proportion of usual residents aged 16 and over in employment by weekly hours worked, Wales, 2021**



The pie chart shows 70% of Welsh residents in employment worked full-time, with 59.8% of residents in employment working 31 to 48 hours per week.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

Of those usual residents aged 16 and over in employment, the proportions working full-time and part-time in England were similar to Wales, at 70.2% and 29.8% respectively.

Across Welsh local authorities, the percentage of those in employment who were working full-time ranged from 65.3% in Ceredigion to 73.7% in Blaenau Gwent.

## Employment history: ever done any paid work

All usual residents aged 16 and over who were economically active and unemployed, or economically inactive were asked whether they had ever done any paid work. This enabled those not in employment at the time of Census 2021 to be divided into three categories.

1. Last did paid work within the last 12 months (136,800, 11.5% of all usual residents aged 16 and over not in employment)
2. Last did paid work more than 12 months ago (779,000, 65.4%)
3. Have never worked (275,200, 23.1%)

The proportion of the usual resident population aged 16 and over not in employment who had never worked was lower in Wales (where 23.1% had never worked) than in England (25.6%). The percentage who last did paid work more than 12 months ago was greater in Wales (65.4%) than in England (61.1%).

Within Wales, Cardiff was the local authority with the largest percentage of people not in employment who had never worked (28.6%) and the smallest percentage who last did paid work more than 12 months ago (53.4%).

## Industry and occupation

### Industry

In Wales, there were 1.37 million usual residents aged 16 and over in employment in the week before Census 2021 (53.5% of all usual residents aged 16 and over).

**Chart 3: Number of usual residents aged 16 and over in employment by Industry in Wales, 2021**



The bar chart shows the industries in Wales with the largest numbers of employment are Human health and social work activities, and Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

The broad industries that employed the largest number of people in Wales at the time of Census 2021 were:

- human health and social work activities (232,700 people, 17% of all usual residents aged 16 and over in employment)

- wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles (198,000, 14.5%)
- education (131,100, 9.6%)

The broad industry which saw the greatest percentage point increase in employment in Wales was human health and social work activities (2.6 percentage point increase, from 14.4% in 2011 to 17.0% in 2021).

Employment in the manufacturing industry in Wales decreased by 1.9 percentage points (from 10.5% in 2011 to 8.7% in 2021), the largest decrease of any broad industry.

The industry classification can be broken down further into divisions, to provide an even more detailed overview of employment by industry. This breakdown shows that in Wales overall, large industry divisions included:

- human health activities (137,700, 10.1%)
- retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles (137,100, 10.0%)
- social work activities without accommodation (69,900, 5.1%)
- food and beverage service activities (56,400, 4.1%)

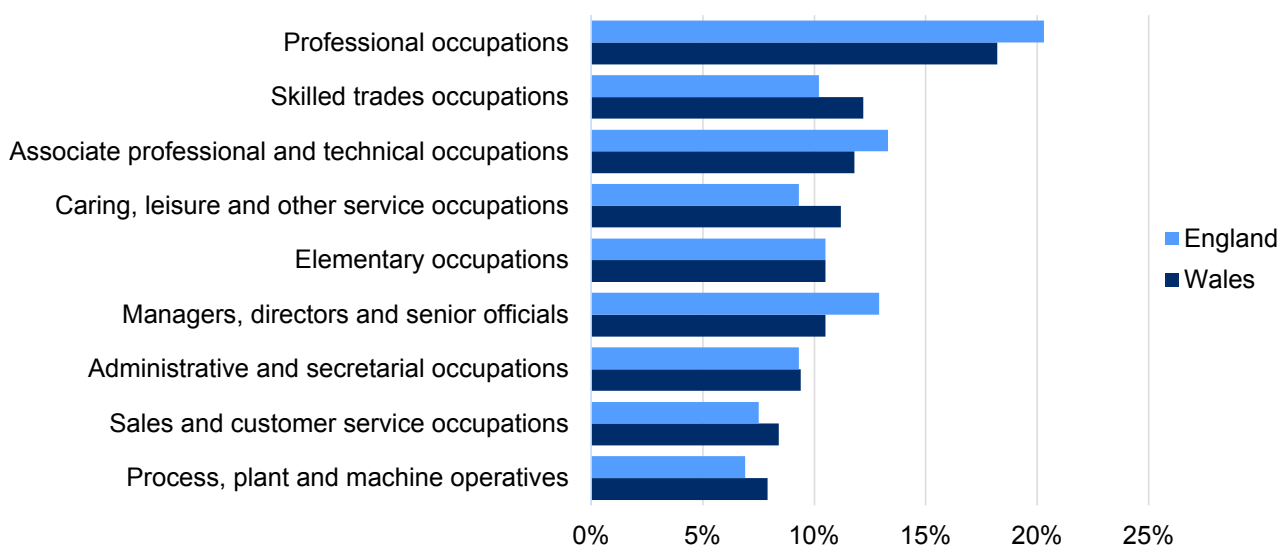
In Wales, employment in Human health activities increased (from 7.6% in 2011 to 10.1% in 2021), whilst the largest decrease in employment was observed in Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles (from 11.1% in 2011 to 10.0% in 2021).

## Occupation

In Census 2021, respondents aged 16 years and over were asked for their full job titles (for their main job, or if not working their last main job) and the main activity of their employer. The answers they gave were coded using the [Standard Occupational Classification 2020](#).

The data published with this statistical bulletin include occupational data broken down into 104 minor groups. These can be combined into the nine high-level occupational categories shown in chart 4.

**Chart 4: Proportion of usual residents aged 16 and over in employment by SOC, England and Wales, 2021**



The bar chart shows the category with the highest proportion of employment is Professional occupations, at 18.2%.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

In Wales, 18.2% of all usual residents aged 16 and over in employment were employed in professional occupations (249,500), making it the largest broad occupation category. In addition, 166,600 people (12.2%) were employed in skilled trades occupations and 161,300 (11.8%) were employed in associate professional and technical occupations.

A smaller percentage in Wales were employed in professional occupations

(18.2% of all usual residents aged 16 and over in employment) compared with England (20.3%).

Using the 104 categories in the detailed classification, we can understand more about the occupations people were employed in. In Wales, the minor occupational groups with the largest numbers of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment included:

- Caring Personal Services (6.5%, 88,400)
- Sales Assistants and Retail Cashiers (5.3%, 72,900)
- Teaching and other Educational Professionals (3.5%, 47,900)
- Road Transport Drivers. (3.3%, 44,600)

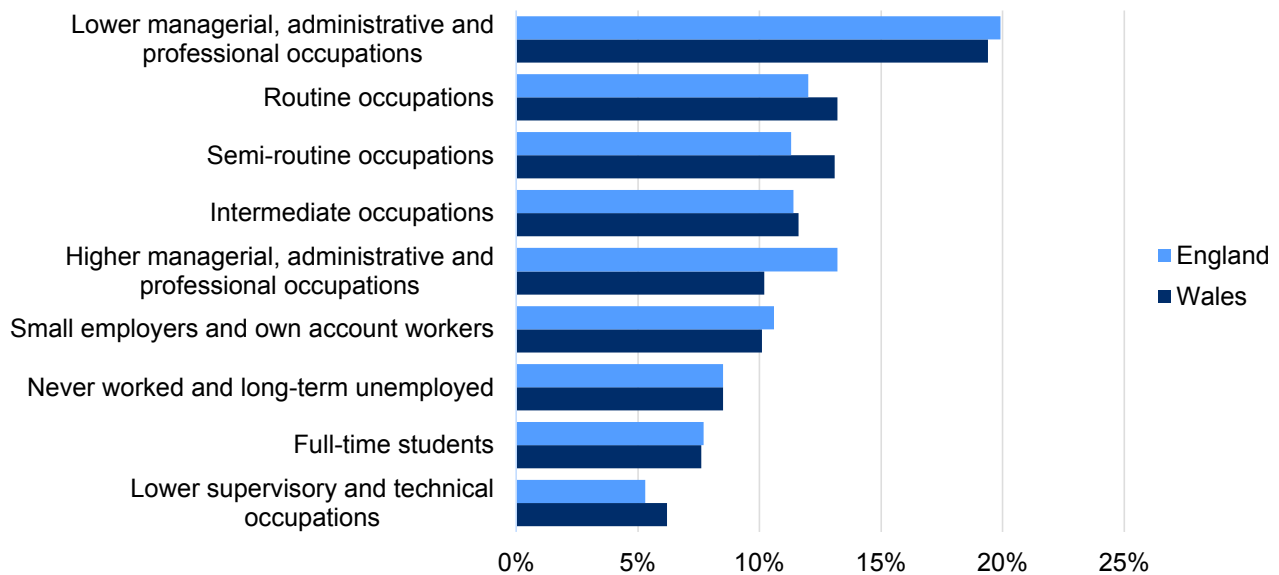
The largest detailed occupational group was caring personal services in both England (4.9%, 1.3 million) and in Wales (6.5%, 88,400).

## **National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC)**

The NS-SEC provides an indication of socio-economic position, based on responses to economic activity status, occupation and employment history questions in Census 2021. It is an ONS standard classification.

All usual residents aged 16 years and over were coded to one of the broad NS-SEC categories shown in chart 5.

**Chart 5: Percentage of usual residents aged 16 and over in employment by NS-SeC Category, England and Wales, 2021**



The bar chart shows the largest category for both countries is Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations, accounting for 19.4% of the workforce in Wales and 19.9% in England.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

In Wales, the largest NS-SeC category in 2021 was Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations with 497,400 (19.4%) individuals, followed by Routine occupations with 337,700 (13.2%) individuals. In England the largest category was also Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations (9.2 million, 19.9%).

The smallest NS-SeC category in Wales in 2021 was Lower supervisory and technical occupations with 159,900 (6.2%) individuals. This was also the smallest category in England (2.5 million, 5.3%).



# Travel to work

## Working mainly at or from home

In 2021, 1.37 million usual residents in Wales aged 16 and over were in employment during the week leading up to the Census 2021.

On the Census 2021 form, people who were in employment or temporarily away from work in the week before the Census were asked “How do you usually travel to work?”. People were asked to select one mode of transport which they used for the longest part, by distance, of their usual journey to work.

In total, there were an estimated 350,500 people in Wales who worked mainly at, or from, their homes. This figure was 25.6% of all usual residents aged 16 and over in employment.

A smaller percentage worked mainly at or from home in 2021 in Wales (25.6%) than in England (31.5%). Across Welsh local authorities, the highest proportion of people working from home in 2021 was in Cardiff (36.1%), whereas the lowest proportion was in Blaenau Gwent (14.0%).

The differences in working from home at the country, regional and local authority level may be partly explained by variations in employment within occupations and industries. Find more information about the how people were employed in the Industry and Occupation section.

As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the UK government had introduced furlough measures to ensure those who could not work were able to remain in employment. Furlough includes people on the Self Employment Income Support (SEIS) and Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) income support schemes. When completing the Census 2021 form, people on furlough were advised to say that they were temporarily away from work, as were those

who were quarantining or self-isolating because of the pandemic. People on furlough had specific guidance to help them respond; read more about this in [Travel to work quality information for Census 2021](#). People who were temporarily away from work were included in the economically active population.

## Method of travel to work

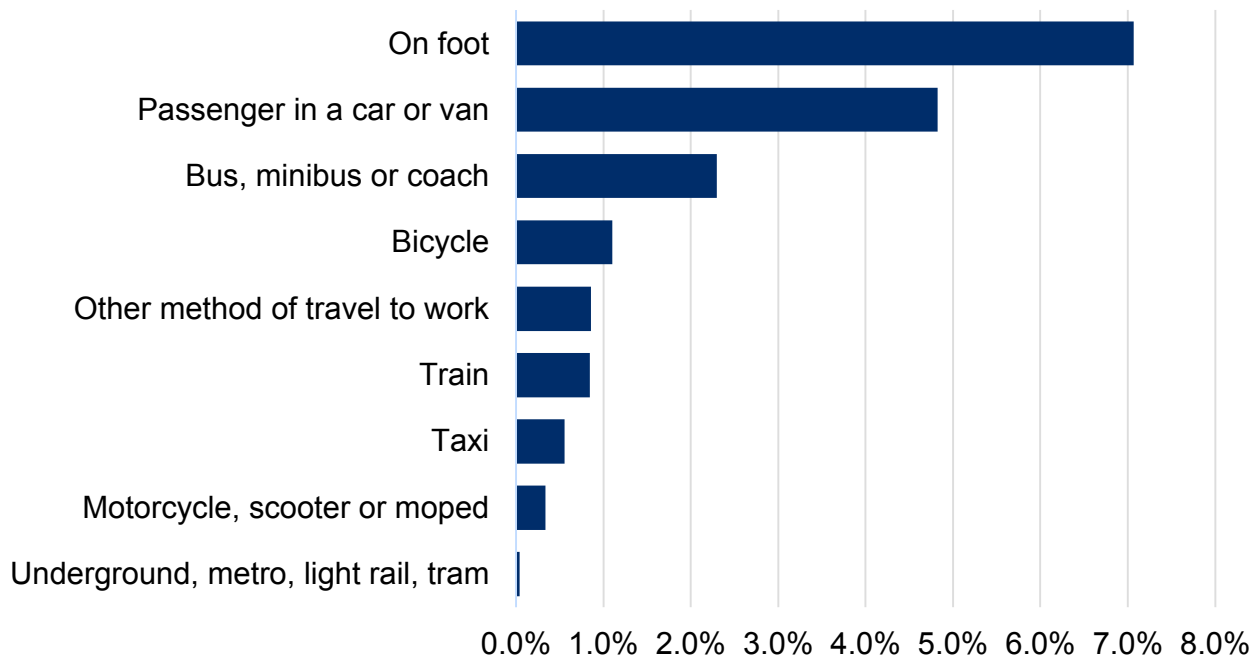
In Wales 1.02 million usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment (74.4%) did not work mainly at or from home. They instead specified the main mode of transport they used to reach their place of employment. It is likely that restrictions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic contributed to changes in the way people travelled to work, including fewer people using public transport.

In Wales, out of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment:

- 772,600 people travelled to work by driving a car or van (56.5% of all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment)
- 66,000 travelled as passengers in a car or van (4.8%)

The estimated percentage of people who drove a car or van to work was greater in Wales than in England (44.5%, 11.8 million). Percentages within Welsh local authorities ranged between 40.1% in Cardiff and 68.5% in Blaenau Gwent.

**Chart 6: Method of travel to work other than driving a car or van for usual residents aged 16 and over in Wales, 2021**



The bar chart shows the other than driving a car or van the largest category is on foot, accounting for 7.1% of travel to work.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

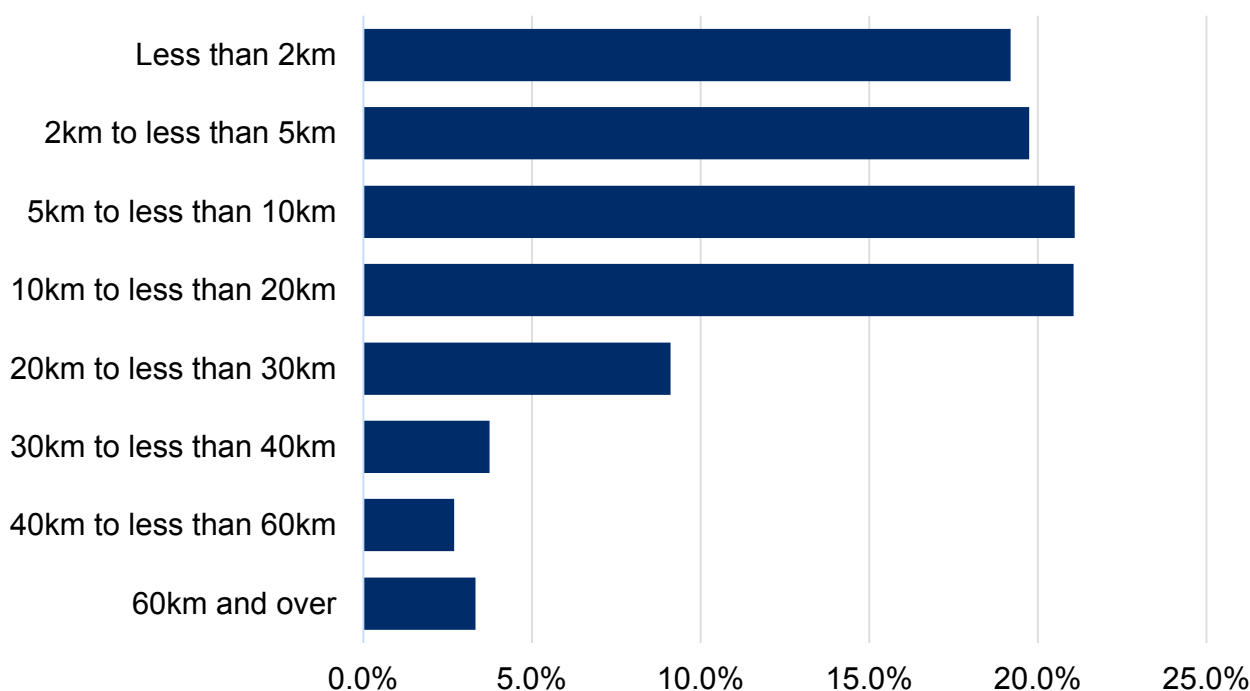
It is likely that government social distancing guidance, workplace closures and furlough, as well as advice not to travel for non-essential purposes and to avoid travel by public transport may have affected how people travelled to work in 2021 compared with the 2011 Census.

The Welsh local authorities with the largest proportion travelling by bicycle were Cardiff (2.9%, 4,700) and Flintshire (1.5%, 1,100).

## Distance travelled to work

Respondents aged 16 years and over who were in employment and stated that their main place of work was a workplace or a depot were asked for their workplace address, from which we calculated the distance they travelled to work.

**Chart 7: Distance travelled to work by usual residents aged 16 and over in Wales, 2021**



The bar chart shows the most common distance travelled was between 5 and 10 kilometres, accounting for 21.1% of those who travel to work.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of Census 2021 data

In Wales, 827,500 people travelled to a workplace or depot (60.5% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment). In addition to the 350,500 people who worked mainly at or from home (25.6%), a further 190,400 people worked mainly at an offshore installation, in no fixed place, or outside the UK (13.9%).

Of those travelling to a workplace or depot, 496,900 people (36.3% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment) travelled short distances to work (less than 10 kilometres). Looking in more detail within this group:

- 158,900 people travelled less than 2 kilometres (11.6% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment)
- 163,400 people travelled at least 2 kilometres to less than 5 kilometres (11.9%)
- 174,600 people travelled at least 5 kilometres to less than 10 kilometres (12.8%)

A larger percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled both shorter distances (less than 10 kilometres) and longer (10 kilometres and over) distances to work in Wales (36.3% and 24.2%, respectively) than in England (35.4% and 18.7%, respectively).

Within Wales, the local authorities with the largest percentages travelling short distances (less than 10 kilometres) were Swansea (46.7%) and Wrexham (46.3%), whereas the local authorities with the largest percentages travelling long distances (10 kilometres or more) were Blaenau Gwent (32.5%) and Carmarthenshire (32.2%).

## Quality and methodology information

For full quality and methodology information, including a glossary of terms,

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please visit the [ONS' quality and methodology information report](#).

Census 2021 took place during a period of rapid change. Extra guidance was given to help people on furlough answer the census questions about work. However, we are unable to determine how furloughed people followed the guidance. Take care when using this data for planning purposes. Read more about specific quality considerations in [ONS' Labour market quality information for Census 2021 methodology](#).

Population change in certain areas may reflect how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected people's choice of usual residence on Census Day. These changes might have been temporary for some and more long-lasting for others.

There will be further releases of Census 2021 data from December, including information about topics such as the Welsh language. For further information about the data and analysis that will be available, see the [ONS' release plans](#).

Reports comparing the Census 2021 population estimates with the [latest mid-year estimates \(Office for National Statistics\)](#) and the [ONS' admin-based population estimates](#), including explanations for any differences, are planned for publication later this year by the ONS.

## Economic activity status

People who were furloughed at the time of the Census were guided to respond with "temporarily away from work" and were included in the economically active population.

The age population base for employment and inactivity rates (usual residents aged 16 and over) are different to the Labour Force Survey (usual residents aged 16 to 64). For further information please see the [Welsh Government Labour Market Overview](#).

## Glossary

For a full glossary of terms, please see the [ONS' Census 2021 dictionary](#).

## National Statistics status

The [United Kingdom Statistics Authority](#) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality, and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed to the ONS in June 2022 following a [full assessment against the Code of Practice by the Office for Statistics Regulation](#).

## Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier, and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.



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