



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

Welsh language composition of households in Wales (Census 2021)

Analysis of Welsh-speaking ability within households in Wales
from Census 2021.

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Introduction

On 6 December 2022, we published a statistical bulletin summarising the initial results from Census 2021 about the [Welsh language skills of the population living in Wales](#).

This statistical bulletin includes estimates of the Welsh-speaking ability of children aged three to four years old by the Welsh-speaking ability of adults in the same household. This provides a possible basis to examine and extrapolate the intergenerational transmission of Welsh (the process whereby a language is transferred from generation to generation through the normal familial interactions of parents or guardians and children). Please note that Census 2021 does not include data on Welsh language use, only ability.

Main results on Welsh language transmission in the household are presented for one-family households with children aged three to four years old (this represented 93.2% of three to four year olds in 2021). The transmission rate is defined as the proportion of three to four year olds within a family type able to speak Welsh.

Information about Welsh language skills in the census is based on a person's self-assessment of their ability. In some cases, especially for children, Welsh language ability was reported by another person, for example, a parent or guardian.

Census 2021 was held during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, on 21 March 2021. This followed periods of lockdown, remote learning for children and many people were working from home. It is not known if the pandemic may have impacted people's reported Welsh language ability, or the perception of the Welsh language ability of others.

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Main points

- The number of three to four year olds able to speak Welsh decreased from 16,500 in 2011 to 11,950 in 2021, a decrease from 23.3% to 18.2%.
- However, the number of three to four year olds in the population has also decreased by almost 5,000 between 2011 and 2021.
- In 2021, 80.7% of children aged three to four years old, living in couple households where two or more adults were able to speak Welsh, were able to speak Welsh. This is commonly referred to as the 'Welsh language transmission rate'. This is broadly consistent with 2011, when it was 82.2%.
- The Welsh language transmission rate for couple households, where one adult was able to speak Welsh, decreased from 45.4% in 2011 to 40.4% in 2021.
- The Welsh language transmission rate for lone parent households, where one adult was able to speak Welsh was 52.1%, which is broadly similar to 2011, when it was 53.3%.

Local variation

The Welsh language transmission rates by type of household varied by local authority. It should be noted that some of the numbers in these groups are small or aren't available due to statistical disclosure control. More details about how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has protected the confidentiality of individuals can be found in the [quality and methodology information section](#).

- For couple households where two or more adults were able to speak Welsh, the Welsh language transmission rate was highest in Cardiff and Gwynedd (at 88.9% and 88.7% respectively), and lowest in Torfaen (at 60.0%)
- For couple households where one adult was able to speak Welsh, the Welsh language transmission rate was highest in Gwynedd (at 60.0%), and lowest

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in Blaenau Gwent (at 18.8%)

- For lone parent households where one adult was able to speak Welsh, the Welsh language transmission rate was highest in Ceredigion and Gwynedd (at 77.8% and 77.0% respectively), and lowest in Newport (at 22.2%).

Welsh-speaking ability in households

- Almost a quarter (23.7%) of households in Wales contained at least one person who was able to speak Welsh in 2021, a decrease from 25.9% in 2011.
- Almost one in ten households (9.0%) in 2021 comprised of people who were all able to speak Welsh, a slight decrease from 9.4% in 2011.
- 3.4% of households contained no adults who were able to speak Welsh but at least one child aged 3 to 15 years old who was able to speak Welsh in 2021.
- Of the 532,200 people who were able to speak Welsh and who lived in households in 2021, nearly 232,100 (43.6%) lived either by themselves or in households where everyone could speak Welsh.

Quality and methodology information

The ONS held Census 2021 in Wales and in England on Sunday 21 March 2021. It is carried out every 10 years and provides the most detailed picture of the entire population, with the same core questions asked to everybody across Wales and England. Census results can be more reliable than survey results based on a sample of the population, because the whole population is included.

Census 2021 achieved a very high response rate of 96.4% of the usual resident population in Wales. The ONS ensures the census results reflect the whole

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population by using statistical methods to estimate the number and characteristics of people who were not recorded on a census response. This means that the census statistics are estimates rather than simple counts of responses, so they have some statistical uncertainty associated with them. The ONS takes numerous steps to minimise possible sources of error.

Quality considerations along with the strengths and limitations of Census 2021 are more generally provided in the [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) for Census 2021 \(ONS\)](#). Read more about the specific quality considerations for Welsh language: [Welsh language quality information for Census 2021 \(ONS\)](#).

Glossary

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

Some of the definitions below (for example, 'couple households') are specific to this analysis and may differ slightly from conventional census definitions.

Welsh language transmission

The transmission rate is defined as the proportion of three to four year olds within a family type able to speak Welsh.

Household

A household is defined as:

- one person living alone
- a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who

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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)
- 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.

Household composition

Households according to the relationships between members.

One-family households are classified by:

- the number of dependent children
- family type (married, civil partnership or cohabiting couple family, or lone parent family)

Other households are classified by:

- the number of people
- the number of dependent children
- whether the household consists only of students or only of people aged 66 years old or older

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Welsh household composition

This is a derived variable identifying households in Wales, classified by type of household and according to the number of Welsh speakers in the household.

This variable excludes students at their non-term-time address and short-term migrants.

Couple households

A household with a couple family (either married, civil partnered or cohabiting) and no others. In the census, a couple family may or may not have children in the household. However, in this analysis, all couple households contained at least one dependent child. Data for couple households where two or more adults could speak Welsh include children living in households where more than two adults were able to speak Welsh (for example, two parents and an older non-dependent child or children).

Lone parent households

A household where there is a lone parent family and no others. In this analysis, all lone parent households contained at least one dependent child. Data for lone parent households where two or more adults could speak Welsh includes children living in households where they are non-dependent.

Welsh-speaking dependent child

This is a derived variable identifying if dependent children aged three years old or older, living in a family, are able to speak Welsh.

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Students and school children living away during term-time, and people aged 16 to 18 years old who are not in full-time education, are excluded from this variable.

Measuring the data

We are unable to draw some comparisons between 2011 and 2021 for data on Welsh-speaking ability by household as the 2011 data were only available at the household level, whereas the 2021 data are available for usual residents living in households.

Statistical disclosure control

Statistical disclosure control (SDC) is a technique used by the ONS to ensure no person or organisation is identifiable from the results of an analysis. The data supplied to the Welsh Government for this analysis were disclosure controlled by removing all counts less than 10 and rounding all remaining figures to the nearest five.

The ONS applies statistical disclosure control to protect the confidentiality of census respondents. Differences in the methods used for statistical disclosure control may result in minor differences in data totals between census products. As we round all figures individually, table totals may not sum exactly. Percentages were calculated based on these rounded numbers.

Welsh language

Census 2021 in Wales included a question about people's ability to understand spoken Welsh, speak Welsh, read Welsh, and write Welsh. This question was included in Wales only. The census does not include questions about how often

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people speak Welsh, or how well they speak the language.

Information about Welsh language skills in the census is based on a person's self-assessment of their ability. Guidance for completion of the census stated, if you live in Wales, it's up to you to decide whether you're able to speak Welsh, read Welsh, write Welsh and/or understand spoken Welsh. People were asked to select all the options they believed to be right for them, however not everyone will have read this instruction and they may have selected only one option.

The way in which people perceive and report on their skills can be influenced by a number of factors and can vary from person to person. In some cases, especially for children, Welsh language ability was reported by another person, for example, a parent or guardian. Their assessment of the person's Welsh language ability may not be the same as that of the person themselves.

Census 2021 was held during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, on 21 March 2021. This followed periods of lockdown, remote learning for children and many people were working from home. It is not known if the pandemic may have impacted people's reported Welsh language ability, or the perception of the Welsh language ability of others.

Data sources

We consider the census to be the authoritative source of information on the number of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh in Wales. This is how the Welsh Government measures progress towards its ambition of having **a million Welsh speakers by 2050**.

The National Survey for Wales also includes questions about Welsh language ability, how often they speak Welsh, and about their fluency levels. The questions are asked annually of people aged 16 years or older. Results can be found via our interactive **results viewer**. Additional data linked to Welsh

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language transmission were collected in 2018-19 on [where and when Welsh speakers started to learn the language](#). This gives an estimate of the number of Welsh speakers who started to learn the language at home as young children.

The Welsh Language Use Survey is carried out as part of the National Survey for Wales. Although the purpose of the Welsh Language Use Survey is to understand more about how Welsh speakers use the language, it also offers another estimate of the percentage of Welsh speakers. [Initial results](#) and subsequent topical bulletins from the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 are available on the Welsh Government website. Similar to the National Survey for Wales, data is also collected on how many Welsh speakers started to learn the language at home as young children.

The Annual Population Survey (APS) also collects information on [Welsh language skills](#). Differences in the estimates of Welsh language ability between the census and household surveys such as the APS are longstanding, and both the [ONS \('Differences in estimates of Welsh Language Skills'\)](#) and the Welsh Government (['Welsh language data from the Annual Population Survey: 2001 to 2018'](#)) have explored possible reasons for some of these differences in the past. For example, the census is a statutory self-completion questionnaire while the APS is a voluntary survey, which uses face-to-face and telephone interviews. While household surveys typically provide us with higher estimates of Welsh-speaking ability, this is the first time that the census has estimated declining numbers of Welsh speakers at the same time as the APS has estimated an increasing number of Welsh speakers. A [blog published by the Chief Statistician in 2019](#), discussed briefly how to interpret the Welsh language data from the APS.

The Pupil Level Annual School Census is an electronic collection of pupil-level and school-level data provided by all maintained schools in January each year. There are a number of Welsh language indicators available including information about the language of education provision in the school, the Welsh-speaking ability of pupils and teachers, and whether pupils are taught in Welsh. The most

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recent data in this report relates to the situation as at February 2022, which were published on 31 August 2022 and are available on [StatsWales](#).

Following the publication of Census 2021, we are prioritising work to examine the differences between these data sources in more detail, including the exploration of innovative approaches such as data linking, to ensure we have a coherent evidence base which can be used for decision making.

We have published a [workplan which outlines the work that the ONS and the Welsh Government are planning to undertake during 2023-24 and beyond](#) to improve our understanding of the main survey and administrative data sources used to produce statistics about the Welsh language. This workplan has been accompanied by a [blog published by the Chief Statistician](#).

Students

As in previous censuses, students were enumerated at both their usual term-time address and their usual out-of-term address if these were different. Though students were asked to respond at both addresses they were counted as usually resident only at their term-time address.

In light of the pandemic, lockdown restrictions, and the fact that many students may not have been at their term-time address, the ONS reviewed and enhanced the guidance for students on how they should complete the census. The ONS also established methods for estimation of, and adjustment for, non-response or overcount of students. In addition, they designed an extensive quality assurance process which is flexible and adaptable.

Read more about [how ONS ensured an accurate estimate of students in the 2021 Census](#).

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Related links

[Welsh language in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Census 2021 data about the Welsh language skills (ability to understand spoken Welsh, speak Welsh, read Welsh, and write Welsh) of people aged three years or older living in Wales.

[Welsh language by population characteristics \(Census 2021\)](#)

Estimates of the population who were able to speak Welsh by demography, national identity, economic activity, health, and several other characteristics from Census 2021.

[Demography and migration in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#)

Unrounded population and household estimates, including an overview of the non-UK born population and characteristics of households and residents in Wales from Census 2021.

[Welsh language household transmission \(Census 2011\)](#)

Census 2011 data about Welsh-speaking ability within households.

[Welsh language transmission and use in families](#)

This report presents the findings of a research study into patterns of intergenerational language transmission and language use among families with children aged 0 to 4 years old.

[Welsh language quality information for Census 2021 \(ONS\)](#)

Quality information affecting Welsh language data from Census 2021 to help

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correctly interpret them.

Quality and methodology information (QMI) for Census 2021 (ONS)

Details the strengths, limitations, uses, users and methods used for Census 2021, England and Wales.

Census 2021 dictionary (ONS)

Definitions, variables and classifications to help when using Census 2021 data.

How the ONS assured the quality of Census 2021 estimates

Methodology for the validation of Census 2021 population estimates for England and Wales, including the assurance of processes, assessment of estimates, and involvement of local authorities.

National Statistics status for Census 2021

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

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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 and this release is linked to one of the national indicators namely:

- (37) Number of people who can speak Welsh.

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.

The Act states national milestones must be set that “...the Welsh Ministers consider would assist in measuring whether progress is being made towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals.” In doing so Welsh Ministers must specify how we know that a national milestone has been achieved and the time by which it is to be achieved.

National milestones are not performance targets for any individual organisation, but are collective measures of success for Wales.

In this release indicator 37: Number of people who can speak Welsh corresponds to one milestone:

- A million Welsh speakers by 2050

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.

Contact details

Statistician: Llio Owen

Email: welshlanguagedata@gov.wales

Media: 0300 025 8099

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