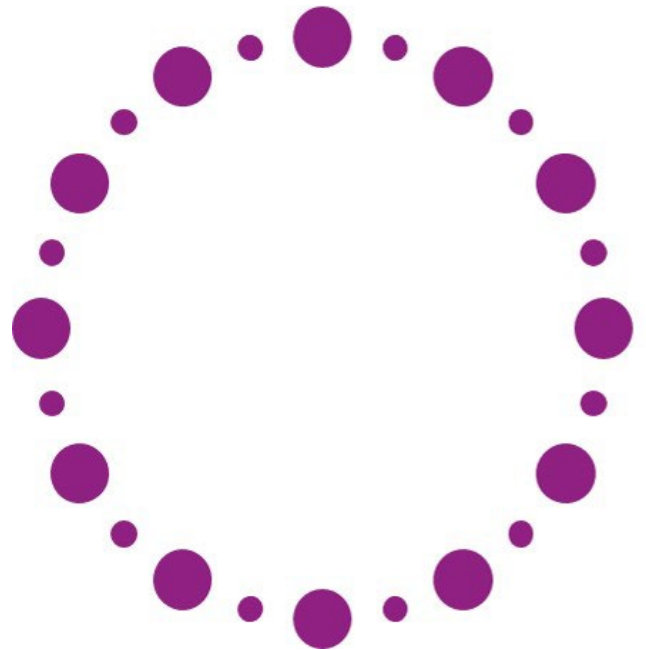


Main statistics for Northern Ireland
Statistical bulletin
Sexual orientation

21 March 2023



Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Key points	4
3. Question asked	5
4. Sexual orientation – Census 2021	6
5. Sexual orientation by Local Government District – Census 2021	7
6. Sexual orientation by age band – Census 2021	10
7. Sexual orientation comparison between Northern Ireland and England & Wales – Census 2021	12
8. Associated outputs.....	14
9. Further information.....	14
9.1. Quality of the results	14
9.2. Confidentiality	15
9.3. Comparability with previous censuses	15
9.4. Supporting material.....	15
9.5. More details	15
9.6. Copyright.....	16

1. Introduction

On 21 March 2023, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) released further results from Census 2021, which was held on 21 March 2021. The statistics released provide a profile of the Northern Ireland population covering:

- **household relationships:** household composition, living arrangements, marital and civil partnership status
- **sexual orientation**
- **labour market:** economic status (e.g. in employment, unemployed, economically inactive), hours worked, industry and occupation
- **qualifications:** highest level of qualifications gained
- **place of work or study:** distance to place of work or study and method of travel
- **communal establishments:** establishments providing supervision of residential accommodation (e.g. student halls of residence, hospitals, care homes)
- **migration:** address one year before the census, and year of arrival for those born outside Northern Ireland

The information covers Northern Ireland and the 11 Local Government Districts (LGDs).

This report relates to **sexual orientation**. For display purposes, figures are appropriately rounded but full figures are available in the [Census 2021 tables](#) on the NISRA website.

2. Key points

The key points relating to the **sexual orientation** topic are as follows:

- A new question for Census 2021 on sexual orientation was asked of people aged 16 and over. While completing the census is required by law, the question on sexual orientation had no statutory penalty for those who failed to provide an answer.
- In total 31,600 people aged 16 and over (or 2.1%) identified as LGB+ ('lesbian, gay, bisexual or other sexual orientation'), 1.364 million people (90.0%) identified as 'straight or heterosexual' and 119,000 people (7.9%) either did not answer the question or ticked 'prefer not to say'.
- 4.1% of adults (1 in 25) in Belfast identified as LGB+, while 1.1% of adults in Mid Ulster identified as LGB+.
- 4.6% of people aged 16 to 24 identified as LGB+, this falls to 0.3% of people aged 65 and over.
- Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland (2.1%) has the lowest percentage of people who identify as (LGB+), thereafter comes Wales with 3.0% of people who identify as LGB+ and then England with 3.2%.

3. Question asked

A new question for Census 2021 on sexual orientation was asked of people aged 16 or over. While completing the census is required by law, the question on sexual orientation had no statutory penalty for those who failed to provide an answer. The question is presented in Figure 1 (online) and Figure 2 (paper).

Figure 1: Census 2021 online questionnaire – sexual orientation question

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

The online questionnaire displays four radio button options stacked vertically: 'Straight or Heterosexual', 'Gay or Lesbian', 'Bisexual', and 'Other sexual orientation'. Below the 'Other sexual orientation' option is a text input field with the placeholder text 'Enter sexual orientation'. Below these options is the word 'Or' followed by a radio button option 'Prefer not to say'.

Figure 2: Census 2021 paper questionnaire – sexual orientation question

24 Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

The paper questionnaire shows four radio button options: 'Straight/Heterosexual', 'Gay or Lesbian', 'Bisexual', and 'Other sexual orientation, write in'. Below the 'Other sexual orientation, write in' option is a long, narrow grid of 15 small boxes for handwritten input. Below this grid is a radio button option 'Prefer not to say'.

4. Sexual orientation – Census 2021

In Census 2021, a sexual orientation question was asked only of those people aged 16 and over. The response options are shown in Figures 1 and 2 and the headline results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sexual orientation (Census 2021)

Sexual orientation	Population	Percent
Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)	31,600	2.1%
Gay or Lesbian	17,700	1.2%
Bisexual	11,300	0.7%
Other sexual orientation	2,600	0.2%
Straight or heterosexual	1,363,900	90.0%
No sexual orientation stated	119,300	7.9%
Prefer not to say	69,300	4.6%
No answer stated	50,000	3.3%
Population aged 16 and over	1,514,700	100.0%

Table 1 shows that 2.1% (31,600) of our population aged 16 and over identified as 'lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)' and 90.0% (1,363,900) identified as 'straight or heterosexual'.

Almost 8% of our population aged 16 and over (119,300) either ticked 'prefer not to say' or chose not to answer the question. Taken together, these are labelled 'No sexual orientation stated' in this report.

5. Sexual orientation by Local Government District – Census 2021

The Census 2021 sexual orientation statistics show variation across areas in Northern Ireland. Table 2 shows the percentage of the population aged 16 and over by sexual orientation and Local Government District (LGD).

Table 2: Percentage of population aged 16 and over by sexual orientation and LGD (Census 2021)

Geography	Population aged 16 and over	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)	Straight or heterosexual	No sexual orientation stated
Antrim & Newtownabbey	116,400	2.0%	91.2%	6.7%
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	170,400	1.5%	90.5%	8.0%
Belfast	279,300	4.1%	87.1%	8.8%
Causeway Coast & Glens	114,200	1.4%	91.3%	7.3%
Derry City & Strabane	118,800	2.1%	90.3%	7.6%
Fermanagh & Omagh	92,000	1.2%	89.5%	9.3%
Lisburn & Castlereagh	118,900	2.1%	91.4%	6.6%
Mid & East Antrim	113,100	1.6%	91.0%	7.4%
Mid Ulster	115,700	1.1%	90.0%	8.8%
Newry, Mourne & Down	142,000	1.5%	90.4%	8.1%
Ards & North Down	134,000	2.0%	91.2%	6.9%
Northern Ireland	1,514,700	2.1%	90.0%	7.9%

Table 2 shows that the percentage of people who identified as LGB+ varies from 4.1% (or one person in 25) in Belfast LGD to 1.1% (or one person in 90) in Mid Ulster LGD. The spatial variation is shown clearly in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Table 2 also shows the percentage of people with 'No sexual orientation stated'. This varies from 6.6% in Lisburn & Castlereagh LGD to 9.3% in Fermanagh & Omagh LGD.

Figure 3: Percentage of population aged 16 and over who identified as LGB+ by LGD (Census 2021)

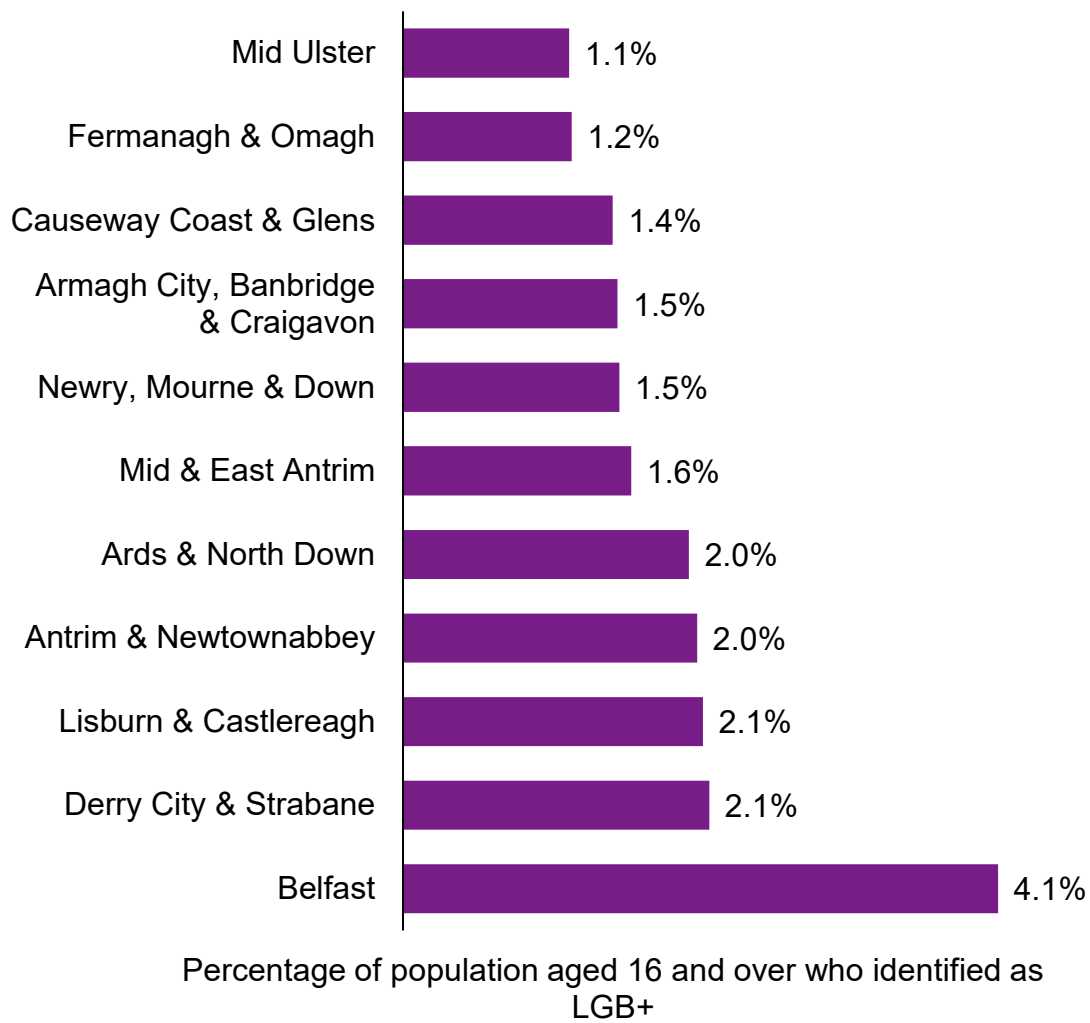
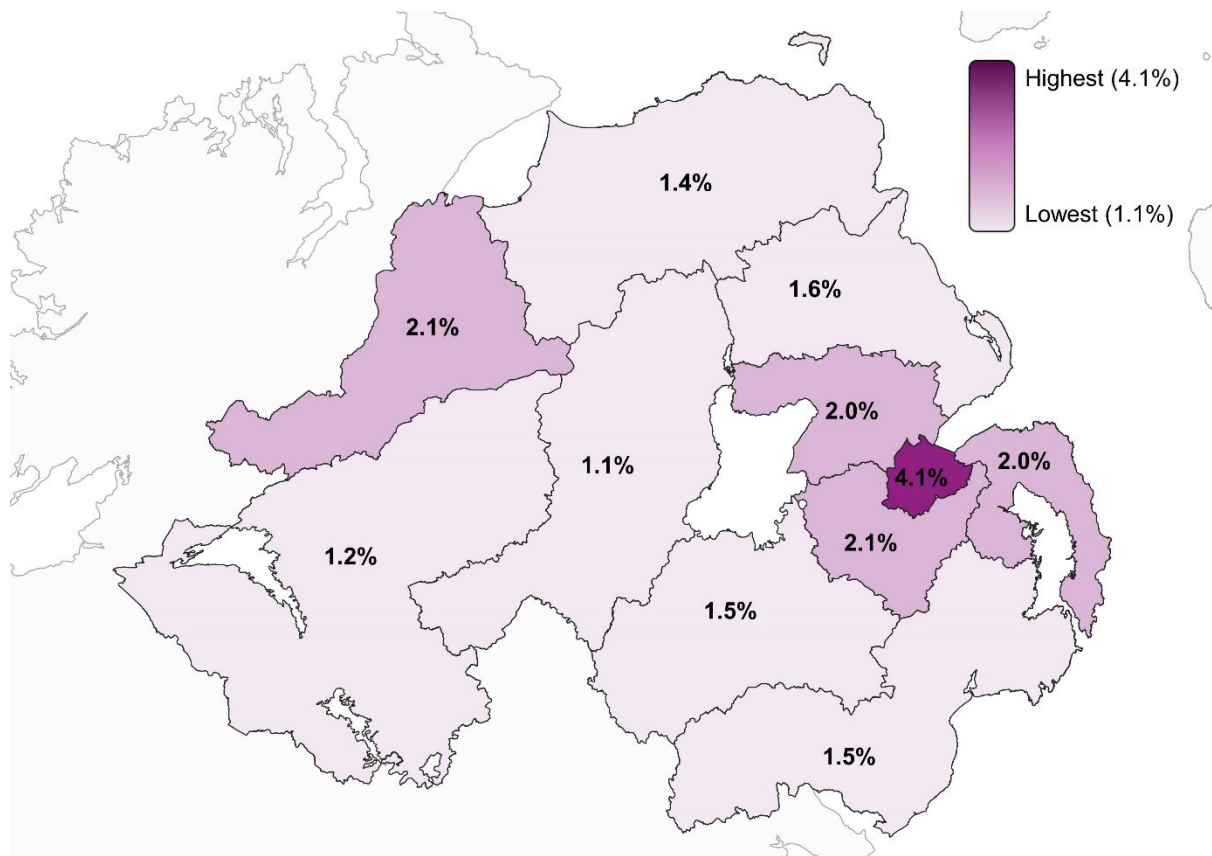


Figure 4: Percentage of population aged 16 and over who identified as LGB+ by LGD (Census 2021)



Figures 3 and 4 show that the more urban LGDs have a higher percentage of people who identified as LGB+. This finding is similar to that found in [Census 2021 in England and Wales](#).

6. Sexual orientation by age band – Census 2021

To present a more detailed understanding of sexual orientation, statistics have also been released showing sexual orientation by age band. This is shown in Table 3a and Table 3b.

Table 3a: Population by age band and sexual orientation (Census 2021)

Age band	Population	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)	Straight or heterosexual	No sexual orientation stated
Aged 16-24	201,400	9,300	175,300	16,700
Aged 25-39	369,800	14,000	330,700	25,000
Aged 40-64	617,100	7,500	571,500	38,200
Aged 65 and over	326,500	900	286,300	39,300
Aged 16 and over	1,514,700	31,600	1,363,900	119,300

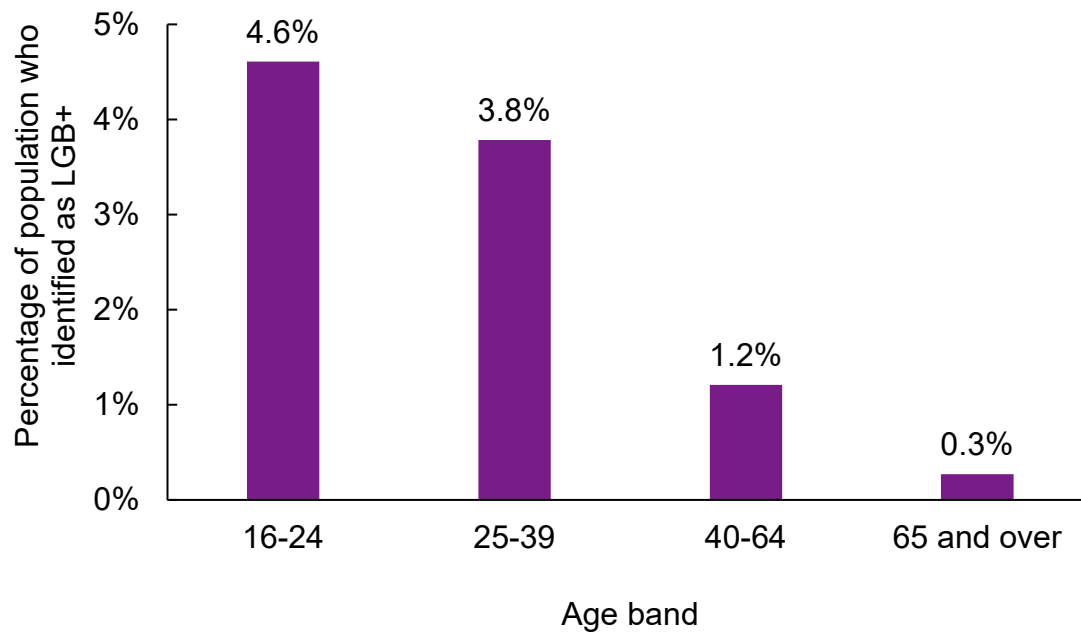
Table 3b: Percentage of population by age band and sexual orientation (Census 2021)

Age band	Population	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)	Straight or heterosexual	No sexual orientation stated
Aged 16-24	201,400	4.6%	87.1%	8.3%
Aged 25-39	369,800	3.8%	89.4%	6.8%
Aged 40-64	617,100	1.2%	92.6%	6.2%
Aged 65 and over	326,500	0.3%	87.7%	12.0%
Aged 16 and over	1,514,700	2.1%	90.0%	7.9%

The tables show differences across the four age bands. In total, 9,300 (4.6%) people aged 16 to 24 identified as 'lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)', this falls to 0.3% of people aged 65 and over. This is shown graphically in Figure 5 below.

In comparison, the percentage of people aged 65 and over who responded with 'no sexual orientation stated' was largest at 12.0%.

Figure 5: Percentage of population within age band who identified as LGB+ (Census 2021)



7. Sexual orientation comparison between Northern Ireland and England & Wales – Census 2021

Census 2021 also included a question on sexual orientation in England and Wales. The Census 2021 sexual orientation question, collection and data processing operations were similar across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Whilst there are small differences in the question wording these will not affect the statistics presented here. Table 4 shows the headline sexual orientation results from Census 2021 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Table 4: Percentage of population aged 16 and over by country [note 1] and sexual orientation (Census 2021)

Geography	Population aged 16 and over	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)	Straight or heterosexual	No sexual orientation stated
Northern Ireland	1,514,700	2.1%	90.0%	7.9%
Highest LGB+ area Belfast LGD	279,300	4.1%	87.1%	8.8%
England	46,007,000	3.2%	89.4%	7.5%
Highest LGB+ area Brighton & Hove LA	235,400	10.7%	80.6%	8.7%
Wales	2,559,400	3.0%	89.4%	7.6%
Highest LGB+ area Cardiff LA	296,300	5.3%	87.0%	7.7%

[note 1: The census in Scotland, which was postponed to 2022, contained a sexual orientation question – results on this topic for Scotland are not expected to be published until next year. The census in the Republic of Ireland, which was also postponed to 2022, did not include a question on sexual orientation.]

Across the three countries, Northern Ireland (2.1%) has the lowest percentage of people who identified as 'lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)', thereafter comes Wales with 3.0% of people who identified as LGB+ and then England with 3.2%.

Looking at lower geographical levels in Northern Ireland, Belfast Local Government District (LGD) had the highest percentage of people who identified as LGB+ (4.1%).

Belfast LGD is similar to local authorities in England such as Sheffield (LGB+ at 4.1%), Leeds (4.2%) and Liverpool (4.4%). However, Belfast LGD (4.1%) has proportionately fewer people who identified as LGB+ than the local authorities that have the highest percentages in England and in Wales (Brighton & Hove at 10.7% and Cardiff at 5.3% respectively).

8. Associated outputs

[Census 2021 outputs on sexual orientation](#) are available to download from the NISRA website, they include:

- MS-C01 Sexual orientation; and
- MS-C02 Sexual orientation by broad age bands.

9. Further information

Census statistics are produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency free from political influence. In May 2022, following a full assessment, the United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#) and the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). National Statistics status means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The census plays a fundamental role in the provision of official statistics – census data are used to inform key policies, plan key services and allocate public funds.

9.1. Quality of the results

The census data collection operation was supported by an independent [coverage survey](#). The coverage survey along with administrative data and information from the field operation were combined to allow statistical estimates to be made of the small percentage of people who did not make a return. The statistical estimates discussed here, as with all Census 2021 outputs, reflect the full population of Northern Ireland.

The question on sexual orientation was asked of people aged 16 and over and was new for Census 2021. The law underpinning the census makes it a duty for respondents to complete their questionnaire, however the question on sexual orientation has no statutory penalty. In general a process called item imputation was used to model missing census responses for other questions – however this was not applied to the sexual orientation question. Therefore the statistics presented here include the number of people who did not state their sexual orientation under the

label 'no answer stated' (3.3% in total). More details on this are available in the [Census 2021 statement about data quality \(PDF 151 KB\)](#).

Further information on accuracy, coverage and imputation is also provided on the NISRA website in the [Census 2021 quality assurance report \(PDF 275 KB\)](#).

9.2. Confidentiality

Census Office has taken steps to ensure that the confidentiality of respondents is fully protected. All published results from the census have been subject to statistical processes to ensure that individuals cannot be identified. For more information, please refer to the [statistical disclosure control methodology](#). These processes may result in very marginally different results between tables for the same statistic.

9.3. Comparability with previous censuses

The census is designed to provide the most accurate possible picture of the population on the day the census is taken. A sexual orientation question has not been asked in the census previously therefore no comparability with previous censuses can be made.

9.4. Supporting material

A number of [supporting documents](#) are available on the census pages of the NISRA website. These documents describe the census methodology in more detail, the quality assurance processes applied, the paper questionnaire used in the census, and a full list of definitions and output classifications.

9.5. More details

Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from Census Customer Services at:

Telephone:	028 9025 5156
Email:	census@nisra.gov.uk
Responsible Statistician:	Dr David Marshall

This report was made possible by the co-operation of the public in responding to the census, the commitment of the census field and headquarters staff, and the assistance of many other people and organisations throughout all aspects of the census. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland, who is responsible for the planning, conduct and reporting of the census, would like to thank all of those who contributed to the census.

9.6. Copyright

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the [Open Government Licence v.3](#). Where any third party copyright information is identified, you need to obtain permission from the copyright holders.

The map in this report is Crown copyright and reproduced with the permission of Land and Property Services under the delegated authority from the Controller of HMSO.

© Crown copyright and database rights NIMA MOU207.2