

# What does the Census tell us about religion in 2011?

Coverage: **England and Wales**

Date: **16 May 2013**

Geographical Area: **Local Authority and County**

Theme: **People and Places**

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## Key points

- In 2011, Christianity had the oldest age profile of the main religious groups.
- The number of Christians has fallen and this was largely for people aged under 60.
- The number of people with no religion has increased across all age groups, particularly for those aged 20 to 24 and the 40 to 44.
- In England and Wales, over nine in ten Christians (93 per cent) were White and nine in ten (89 per cent) were born in the UK, though the numbers have fallen since 2001.
- Nearly four in ten Muslims (38 per cent) reported their ethnicity as Pakistani, a 371,000 increase (from 658,000 to over a million) since 2001. Nearly half of all Muslims were born in the UK.
- The majority of people with no religion were White (93 per cent) and born in the UK (93 per cent) and these groups have increased since 2001.
- People with no religion had the highest proportion of people who were economically active, Christians and Muslims the lowest. Jewish people had the highest level of employment and Muslim people the highest level of unemployment.
- The main reason for Christians being economically inactive was retirement, for Muslims economic inactivity was mainly because they were students, or because they were looking after the home or family.

## Animated YouTube video

A podcast explaining this story using audio commentary and graphical animations is available on the ONS YouTube channel.

## Introduction

In the 2011 Census, Christianity was the largest religious group in England and Wales with 33.2 million people (59 per cent of the population). The second largest religious group were Muslims with 2.7 million people (5 per cent of the population). The proportion of people who reported that they did not have a religion reached 14.1 million people, a quarter of the population (25 per cent).

The overall population of England and Wales grew by 3.7 million between 2001<sup>1</sup> and 2011 to reach 56.1 million. In 2011, there were 4.1 million fewer people reporting as Christian (from 72 per cent to 59 per cent of the population), 6.4 million more people reporting no religion (from 15 per cent to 25 per cent) and 1.2 million more people reporting as Muslim (from 3 per cent to 5 per cent).

There are many factors that can affect the number of people affiliating with a religion including demographic changes, migration and changes in reporting.

This short story will explore some of the characteristics behind these changes such as age, sex, ethnicity and country of birth. Participation in economic activity is also explored. There is a particular focus on findings for Christians, Muslims and people with no religion as these groups changed the most however results are given for all the main religious groups for overall context. Some of the key differences across local authorities for these characteristics are also highlighted. This relates to [earlier analysis](#) which provided an analysis of overall religious affiliation across local authorities.

## Notes

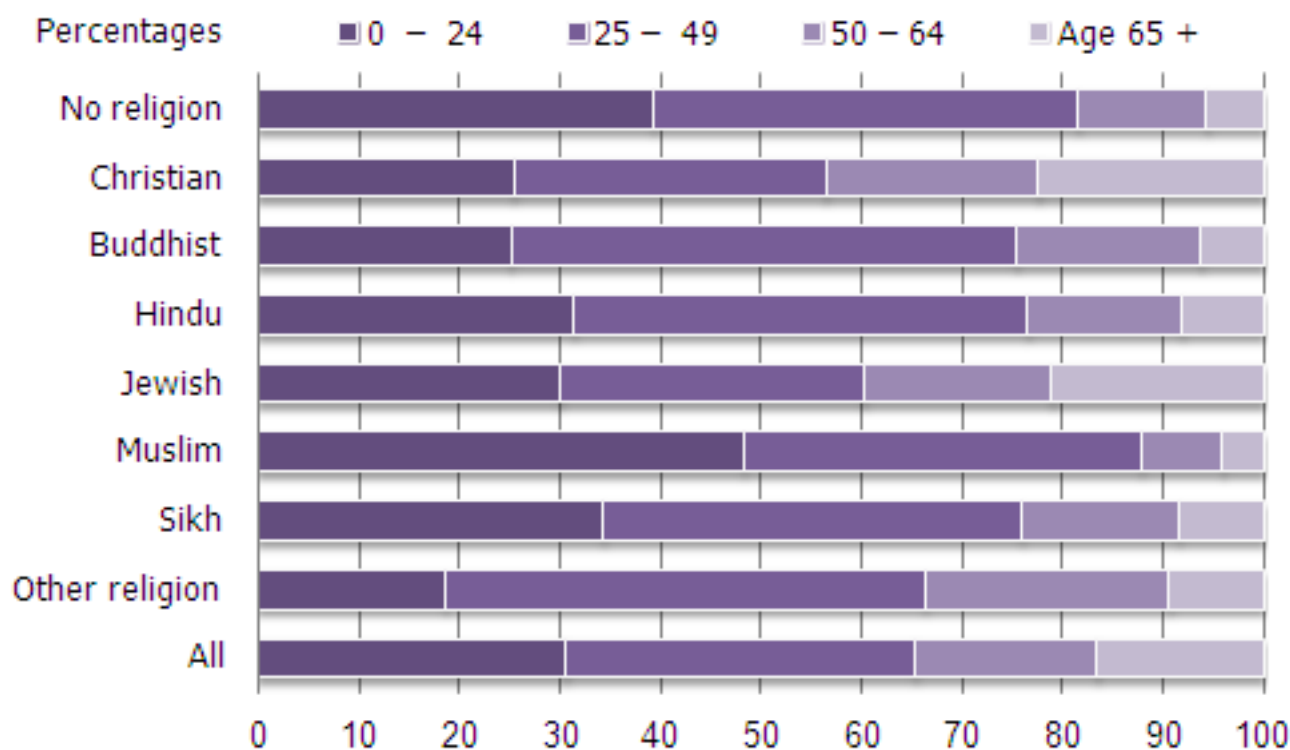
1. 2001 figures are based on Census 2001 (April 2001) results rather than Census mid-year population estimates.

## Religion by age and sex

In the 2011 Census, Christians had the oldest age profile of the main religious groups. Over one in five Christians (22 per cent) were aged 65 and over. This is higher than the overall population in 2011, where 16 per cent of the population were aged 65 and over. Christians had a similar age profile in 2001.

Muslims had the youngest age profile of the main religious groups. Nearly half of Muslims (48 per cent) were aged under 25 (1.3 million) and nine in ten people (88 per cent) were aged under 50 (2.4 million). Muslims also had the youngest age profile in 2001.

People with no religion had a younger age profile than the population as a whole in 2011. Four in ten people with no religion (39 per cent) were aged under 25 and over four in five (82 per cent) were aged under 50. This compares to 31 per cent and 65 per cent for the population of England and Wales respectively.

**Figure 1: Religion by age, England and Wales, 2011**

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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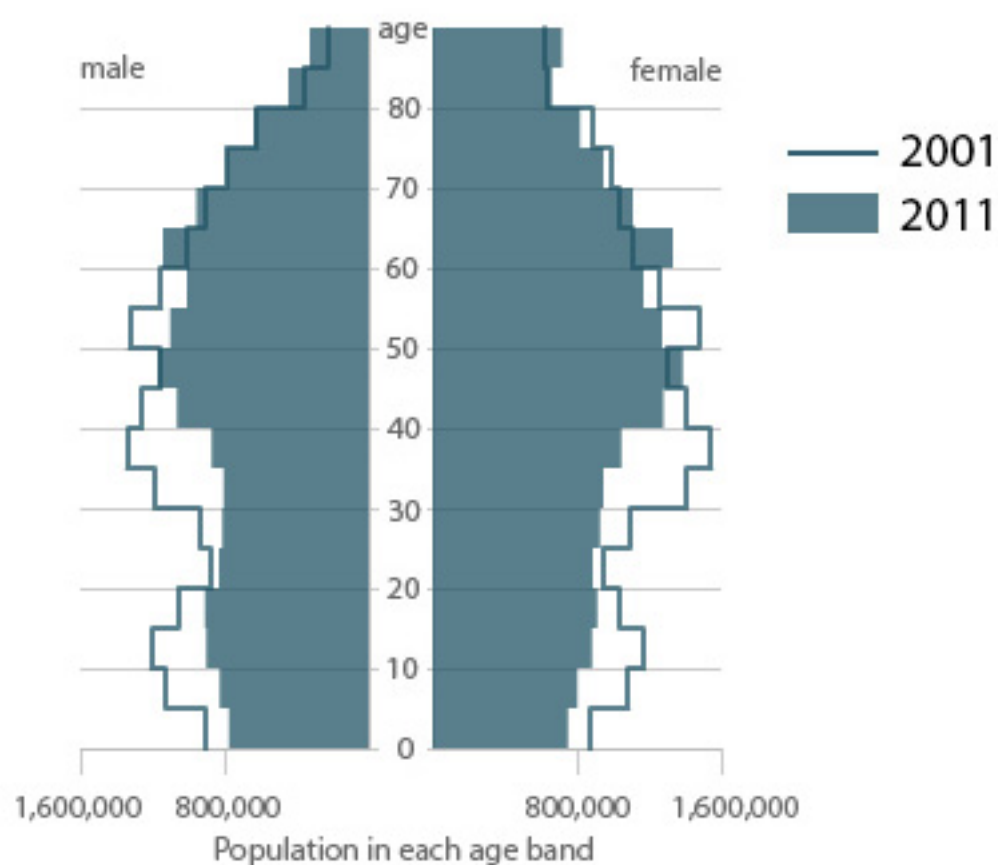
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Population pyramids are presented below (Figure 2) for Christians, Muslims and people with no religion. These show the age and sex structure of the population in numbers in 2001 and 2011. An [interactive chart](#) is available for all main religious groups.

There were 4.1 million fewer people identifying as Christians in 2011 than in 2001 despite overall population growth<sup>1</sup>. This decrease was equally split between men and women.

Looking at the detailed age groups for Christians there were large falls in the 30 to 39 age group and 5 to 14 year olds. This corresponds with declines in these age groups in the overall population. The increase in the 60 to 64 age group also corresponds with a spike in this age group for the overall population (due to a high number of 63 to 64 year olds reflecting the post second world war baby boom).

People were less likely to report being Christian across all age groups in 2011 than 2001, particularly those aged under 60. The male 35 to 39 age group decreased the most with 47 per cent reporting as Christian in 2011 compared to 66 per cent in 2001.

**Figure 2: Christian population by age and sex, England and Wales, 2001 and 2011**

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

### Download chart

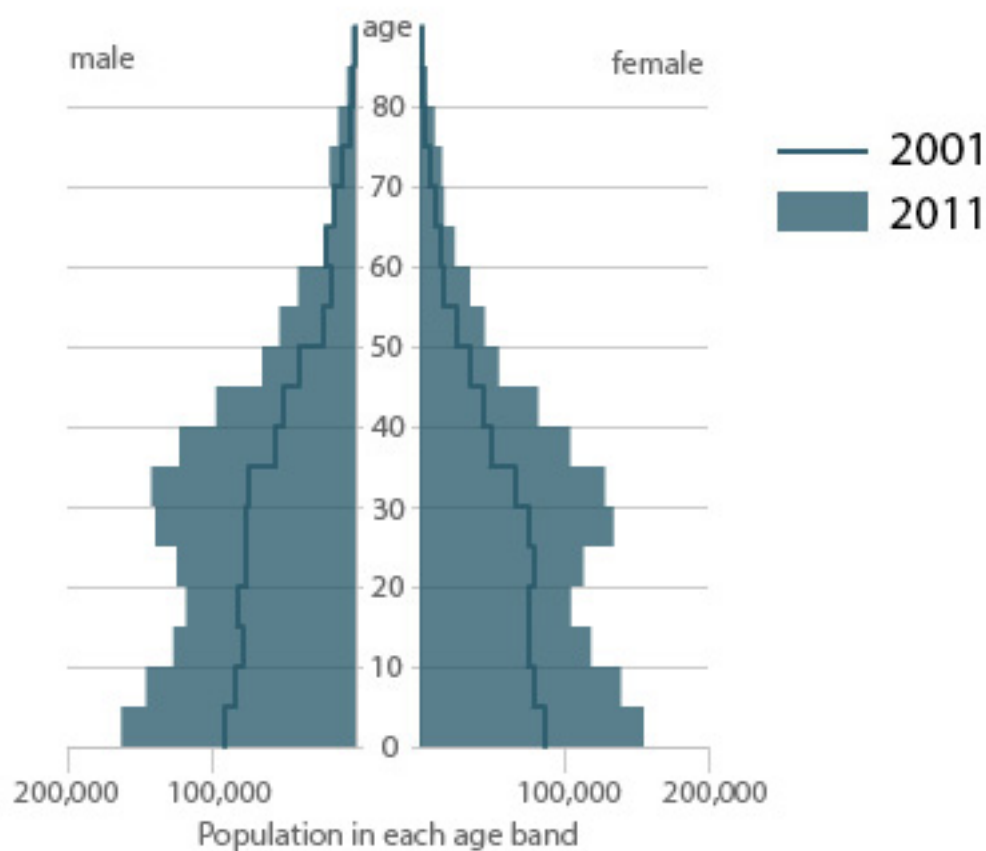
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The number of Muslims in England and Wales has increased since 2001 from 1.5 to 2.7 million people (5 per cent of the population). The shape of the pyramid shows the younger age structure of the population with increasing numbers in the younger age groups. As was the case in 2001, there were more men than women in 2011 (52 per cent to 48 per cent).

There were increases for every age group and for both men and women. There were half a million (505,000) more Muslims aged under 25 and a similar number (503,000) aged 25 to 49.

Younger people were more likely than older people to identify as Muslim. The proportion of the population reporting as Muslim increased across all age groups under 60 and for both men and women. Eight per cent of people aged under 25 identified as Muslim in 2011 compared to 5 per cent in 2001. Migration has also contributed to the increase (see later section on country of birth).

**Figure 3: Muslim population by age and sex, England and Wales, 2001 and 2011**

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

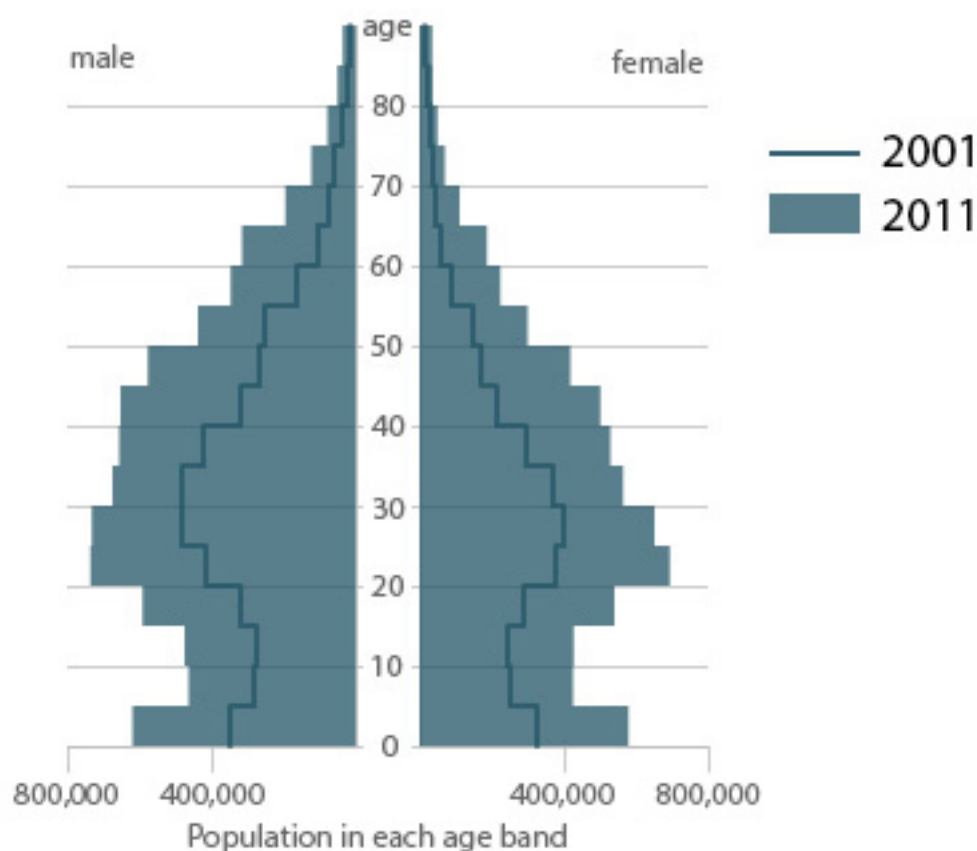
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The number of people reporting no religion has reached 14.1 million, an increase of 6.4 million since 2001. There were increases across all age groups. The largest of the increases was for those aged 20 to 24 and the 40 to 44 where there was a rise of 637,000 and 620,000 respectively. As was the case in 2001 there were more men than women in 2011 (55 per cent to 45 per cent).

Younger people were more likely than older people to report no religion. However, there has been an increase in the reporting of no religion across all groups between 2001 and 2011. Nearly a third (32 per cent) of people aged under 25 reported no religion in 2011 compared to a fifth (19 per cent) in 2001.

**Figure 4: No religion by age and sex, England and Wales, 2001 and 2011**

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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Differences at the local authority level give further insight into areas with highest and lowest proportions of religious groups.

- In 2011, Knowsley had the highest proportion of Christians (81 per cent). Knowsley had the highest proportion of under 25s (76 per cent), 25 to 49 year olds (79 per cent) and 50 to 64 year olds (86 per cent) reporting as Christian. For the over 65s, St Helens had the highest proportion reporting as Christian (90 per cent).
- Tower Hamlets had the highest proportion of the population reporting as Muslim for all ages except 25 to 49 year olds where Newham had the highest proportion. The highest percentage point increase for those reporting to be Muslim for the under 25s and 25 to 49 age groups was in the London borough of Redbridge with 14 and 12 percentage points respectively.
- All local authorities saw an increase in no religion across all broad age ranges with the exception of Harrow and Newham. There were five local authorities where over half of people aged under 25 reported no religion (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Norwich, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Brighton and Hove). Caerphilly saw the largest percentage point increase for this age group with 23

percentage points. The lowest proportions were in Newham and Brent with just 9 per cent of under 25s reporting no religion.

## Notes

1. The overall population of England and Wales grew by 3.7 million between 2001 and 2011.

## Religion by ethnicity

In 2011, England and Wales became more ethnically diverse with more people identifying with minority ethnic groups. Despite the White ethnic group decreasing in size, it was still the majority ethnic group that people identified with (86 per cent).

In 2011, over nine out of ten Christians in England and Wales were White (93 per cent) accounting for 30.8 million people. Within this group White British<sup>1</sup> was the largest group (28.7 million people, 86 per cent). Over 1.6 million people (5 per cent) identified with Other White.

Muslims were more ethnically diverse. Two-thirds of Muslims (68 per cent) were from an Asian background, including Pakistani (38 per cent) and Bangladeshi (15 per cent). The proportion of Muslims reporting as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (10 per cent) was similar to those reporting as Other ethnic group (11 per cent).

93 per cent of people (13.1 million) with no religion were from a white background.

The majority of Hindus and Sikhs were from an Asian ethnic background (96 per cent and 87 per cent respectively). As with Muslims, Buddhists were also ethnically diverse.

**Figure 5: Religion by ethnicity, England and Wales, 2011**

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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There have been some changes in the largest religious-ethnic groups between 2001 and 2011.

The number of White British Christians fell by 5.8 million people. However, there have been increasing numbers of Christians with minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest increase was in the Other White Christians, doubling from 843,000 to 1.6 million people between 2001 and 2011. The rise in Other White can be linked to migration patterns over the last decade (see country of birth section) and is consistent with changes for England and Wales overall.

The number of Muslims increased in all ethnic groups particularly Asian Muslims. Pakistani Muslims increased by 371,000 (658,000 from to over a million) and Bangladeshi Muslims have grown by 142,000 (from 260,000 to 402,000).



The number of people with no religion with a White British background has increased by 5.6 million (from 7.0 million to 12.6 million people).

**Table 1: Largest religious ethnic groups, England and Wales, between 2001 and 2011**

Thousands

		2001		2011		Changes since 2001	
		Level	%	Level	%	Level	%
1	Christian White British	34,576	92.6	28,739	86.4	-5.8	-6.2
2	No Religion White British	7,033	91.2	12,624	89.6	5.6	-1.7
3	Christian Other White	843	2.3	1,618	4.9	0.8	2.6
4	Muslim Pakistani	658	42.5	1,028	38.0	0.4	-4.5
5	Christian African	330	0.9	691	2.1	0.4	1.2
6	Hindu Indian	467	84.5	622	76.2	0.2	-8.3
7	No Religion Other White	214	2.8	465	3.3	0.3	0.5
8	Christian Caribbean	416	1.1	442	1.3	0.0	0.2
9	Christian Irish	548	1.5	426	1.3	-0.1	-0.2
10	Muslim Bangladeshi	260	16.8	402	14.9	0.1	-1.9

Table source: Office for National Statistics

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There were some notable differences on the religious ethnic groups across local authorities

- The London borough of Kensington and Chelsea had the highest proportion of Christians from the Other White background at 33 per cent, followed by Westminster at 30 per cent.
- The highest proportion of Muslims who reported to be Pakistani was in Pendle (91 per cent). The highest proportion of Muslims who were Bangladeshi was in Tower Hamlets (83 per cent). This was also the case for 2001.
- Blaneau Gwent had the highest proportion of people who had no religion who were White British (99 per cent). The lowest proportion of people with no religion who were White British was in the London boroughs, with Kensington and Chelsea at 47 per cent and Westminster at 46 per cent.

## Notes

1. English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British.

## Religion by country of birth

In 2011, 48.6 million people (87 per cent) living in England and Wales were UK-born, compared to 7.5 million people (13 per cent) who were born outside of the UK.

In 2011, nine in ten Christians usually resident in England and Wales (89 per cent) were born in the UK. Since 2001 there has been a decrease in Christians born in the UK (by 5.3 million). In 2011, there were 3.6 million people who identified themselves as Christian who were not born in the UK, an increase of 1.2 million. This is consistent with the increases in the Other White and other minority ethnic groups. Of the non-UK born Christian people, 887,000 of were from EU accession countries<sup>1</sup> (including Poland). Four in five people (80 per cent) who were born in EU accession countries, who were resident in England and Wales in 2011, reported being Christian.

Just over half of all Muslims (53 per cent) in 2011 were born outside the UK. Numbers have almost doubled in a decade with a rise of over half a million (599,000) from 828,000 to 1.4 million in 2011. A similar pattern can be seen for the number of Muslims born in the UK where there was also a rise of over a half a million (560,000) from 718,000 to 1.2 million in 2011.

Over nine in ten people (93 per cent) who had no religion were born in the UK. The rise in the number of people reporting no religion was largely among UK-born. Numbers have almost doubled with a rise of 5.8 million people, from 7.2 million to 13.1 million.

In 2011, Hindus (33 per cent) were the least likely of all religious groups to be born in UK, followed by Buddhists (40 per cent) and Muslims (47 per cent), this pattern remains unchanged since 2001.

**Table 2: Changes in religion by country of birth, England and Wales between 2001 and 2011**

Thousands

2011	Changes between 2001-2011						
	UK- Born		Non UK- Born		UK - Born	Non UK - Born	Total
	Level	%	Level	%	Level	Level	Level
No religion	13,064	92.7	1,033	7.3	5,843	545	6,388
Christian	29,676	89.3	3,567	10.7	- 5,337	1,242 -	4,095
Buddhist	98	39.7	149	60.3	32	71	103
Hindu	272	33.3	545	66.7	65	200	264
Jewish	214	81.1	50	18.9	- 3	6	3
Muslim	1,278	47.2	1,428	52.8	560	599	1,159
Sikh	239	56.6	184	43.4	55	39	94
Other religion	193	80.3	47	19.7	72	18	90

Table source: Office for National Statistics

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An analysis of religion by country of birth differences across local authorities finds that:

- Redcar and Cleveland, Knowlsey and South Tyneside had the highest proportion of Christians who were born in the UK at 98 per cent. The London boroughs of Brent, Newham and Westminster had the lowest proportions with under half the Christian population born in the UK.
- Craven had the highest proportion of Muslims born in the UK at 67 per cent.
- The top five local authorities with the highest percentage of those with no religion who were born in the UK were in Wales - Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Neath Port Talbot and Merthyr Tydfil (all 99 per cent). The lowest proportion of people with no religion who were born in the UK was in the London boroughs of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea (both 52 per cent).

**Notes**

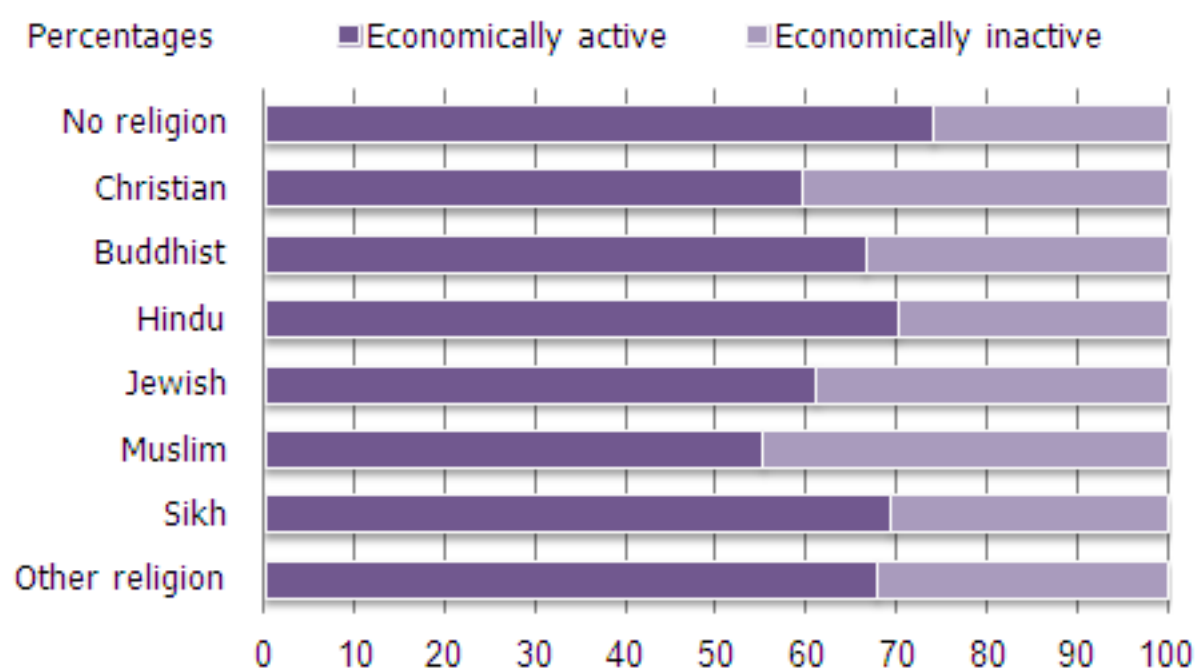
1. EU Accession countries April 2001 to March 2011 and include the 12 countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, 10 of which were eastern European countries.

## Religion by economic activity

Economic activity includes those aged 16 or over who are employed or unemployed (those who are actively seeking and available for work). Economic inactivity, includes people who are aged 16 and over who are not in employment and are either not actively seeking and/or not available for work.

Economic activity and economic inactivity varies considerably by religion, see figure 6.

**Figure 6: Religion by economic activity, England and Wales, 2011**



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

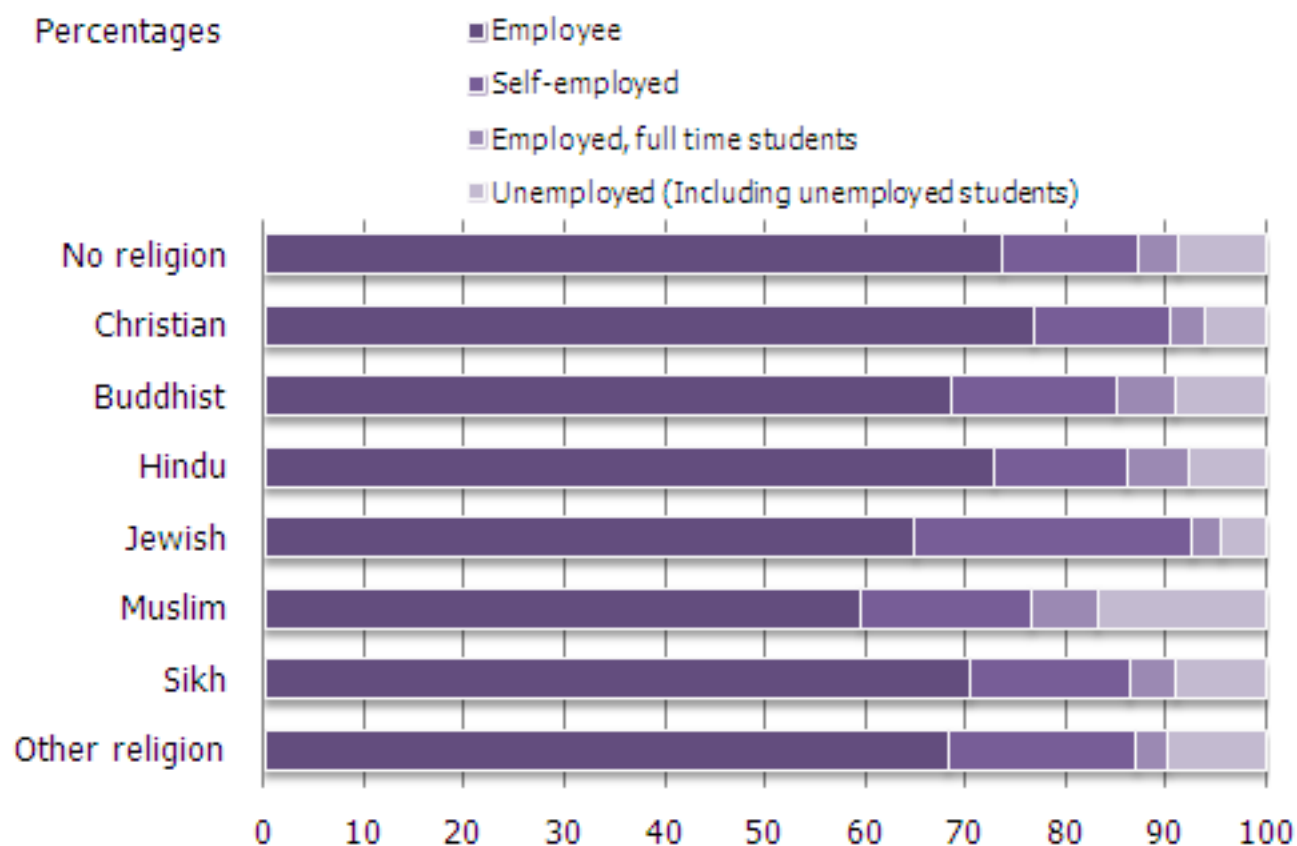
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The group with greatest economic activity in 2011 were those with no religion at 74 per cent. The groups with the lowest levels of economic activity were Muslims (55 per cent) and Christians (60 per cent).

Age is a major factor in economic activity. The older age profile of Christians means that a large proportion of Christians not participating in the labour force were 'retired' (69 per cent). Muslims, on the other hand, had the youngest age profile and were most often economically inactive because they were 'looking after home or family' (31 per cent) or because they were 'students' (30 per cent).

**Figure 7: Religion by type of economic activity, England and Wales, 2011**

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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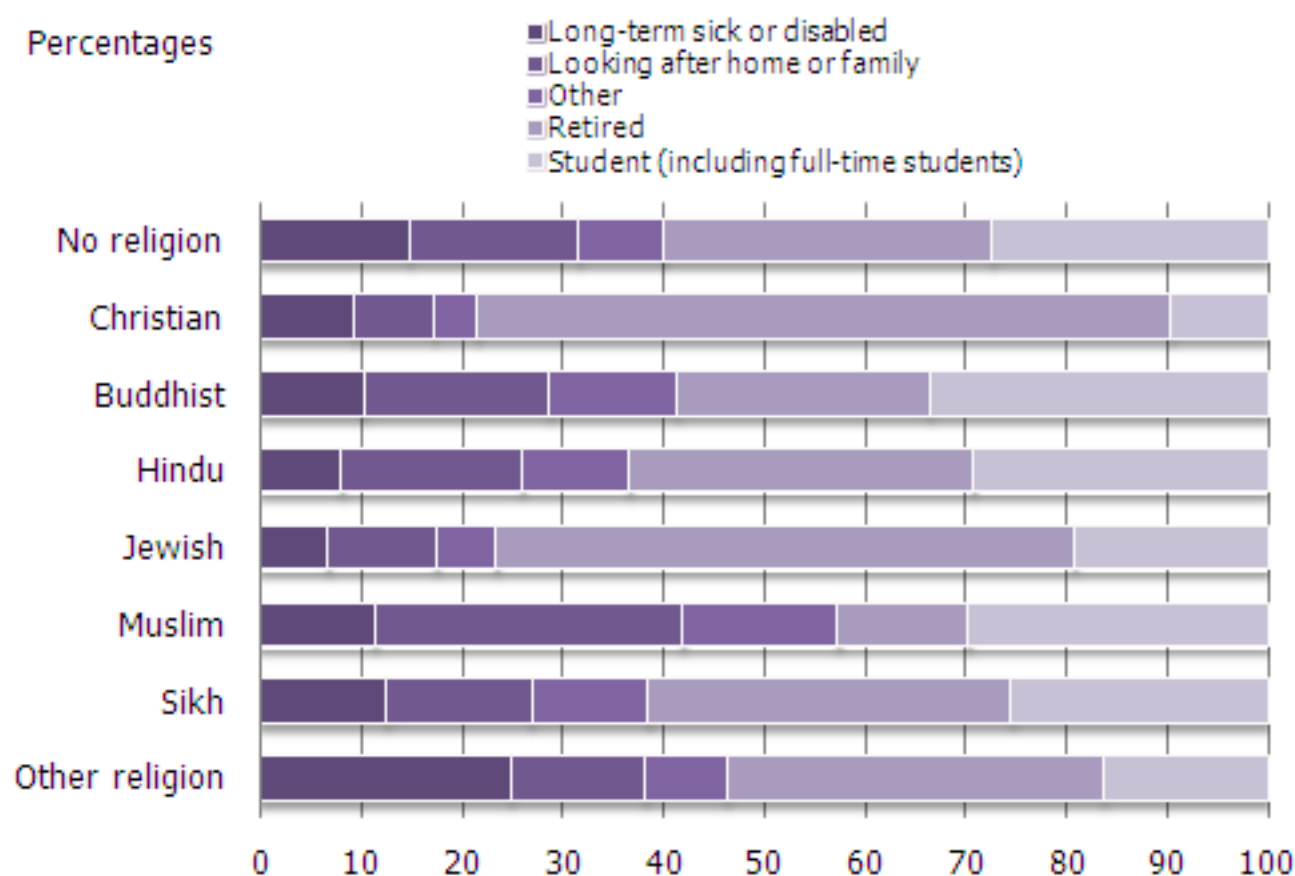
In 2011, the majority of those who were economically active were employees in employment (75 per cent); Around three quarters of Christians and those with no religion (77 per cent and 74 per cent respectively) were economically active employees, compared with around three-fifths (59 per cent) of Muslims.

Self-employment made up the next largest category of economic activity (14 per cent); More than a quarter (28 per cent) of Jewish people were self-employed compared with 13 to 19 per cent of people with other religious affiliations.

Around seven per cent of Muslims and six per cent of Buddhists and Hindus were students in employment compared with three per cent of Christians, Jewish people and those with other religious affiliations.

17 per cent of economically active Muslims were unemployed (including unemployed students) compared with around six per cent of Christians and nine per cent of people with no religion. The religion with the smallest proportion of people in this category was Jewish at four per cent.

**Figure 8: Religion by economic inactivity, England and Wales, 2011**



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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A quarter of economically inactive people with Other religious affiliation were long-term sick or disabled. This compares to 15 per cent of those with 'no religion', 11 per cent of Muslims and 9 per cent of Christians, only 7 per cent of Jewish people were long-term sick or disabled.

Almost a third (31 per cent) of economically inactive Muslims were 'looking after the home or family', compared to 17 per cent of those with no religion and 8 per cent of Christians.

More than two-thirds (69 per cent) of economically inactive Christians were 'retired' compared to 33 per cent of those with no religion and 13 per cent of Muslims.

Just nine per cent of Christians who were not in the labour force were full-time students compared to around a third of Muslims and Buddhists (30 and 33 per cent respectively).

Changes to the way in which economic inactivity is defined since the 2001 Census means that comparisons over time are complicated and are beyond the scope of this release.

Key differences in economic activity and inactivity across local authorities include:

- In Knowsley, 60 per cent of all adults were economically active. Amongst Christians, 59 per cent were economically active. Over half (54 per cent) of economically inactive Christians were 'Retired' and a further fifth (20 per cent) 'Long term sick or disabled'.
- In Tower Hamlets in London, around half of Muslims were economically active (52 per cent) compared to around two-thirds (67 per cent) of all people. The majority of Muslims who were economically inactive were 'Looking after the home or family' (34 per cent) and 'Students' (24 per cent).
- In Norwich and Brighton and Hove the proportions of economically active people reporting no religion were broadly similar (75 per cent for Brighton and Hove and 71 per cent for Norwich). 'Unemployment' affected less than 11 per cent of these people. Economic inactivity for people with no religion in Brighton and Hove and in Norwich was characterised mainly by 'Students'; 44 per cent and 38 per cent respectively.
- In Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen between 67 and 71 per cent of people reporting no religion in these areas were economically active, higher than the average for these areas. 'Employment' for people of no religion in these areas was between 85 and 89 per cent, lower than the equivalent figures for Christians at 91 to 94 per cent. Economic inactivity for people of no religion was characterised by a mixture of 'Retirement' and 'Long-term sick and disabled', each affecting around a quarter of people.

## Measuring religion

The England and Wales census asked the same voluntary religion question in 2011 as was asked in 2001. The question ('What is your religion?') asks about religious affiliation, that is how we connect or identify with a religion, irrespective of actual practise or belief. Religion is a many sided concept and there are other aspects of religion such as religious belief, religious practice or belonging which are not covered in this analysis<sup>2</sup>.

The religion question was the only voluntary question on the 2011 Census and 7 per cent of people did not answer the question.

Religion is an important defining characteristic of people's identity. Collecting information on religious affiliation complements other questions on people's ethnic group, national identity and language to provide a detailed picture of the society we live in, and how it is changing.

## Comparability with other sources

The Annual Population Survey, an ONS sample survey, asks a question on religious affiliation, although comparisons with the census should be treated with caution for methodological reasons. Between 2005 and 2010 the proportion of respondents reporting to be Christian fell from 77 per cent

to 70 per cent, the proportion reporting no religion increased from 16 per cent to 21 per cent and the proportion reporting to be Muslim increased from 3.8 per cent to 4.8 per cent. The question changed in 2011 to be consistent with the census question. In 2011, 63.1 per cent reported to be Christian, 27.9 per cent as having no religion and 4.8 per cent as Muslim.

## Notes

1. See [Census Comparability Report](#) for further details.
2. Further details on how the question was developed can be found on [Census web pages](#).

## Statistical contacts

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## Background notes

1. This publication follows [previous releases of census data](#) including household and population totals and local authority level Key Statistics tables. The census provides estimates of the characteristics of all people and households in England and Wales on census day. These are produced for a variety of users including government, local and unitary authorities, business and communities. The census provides population statistics from a national to local level. This bulletin discusses the results at the national level for England and Wales.
2. In making comparisons to 2001, the population estimates (by age and sex) have been compared with the mid-year estimates for 2001, 52.4 million. For other characteristics, comparisons are made with 2001 Census estimates, 52.0 million. Footnotes are provided with tables to identify the data sources used.
3. Both 2001 and 2011 Census data are available via the [Neighbourhood Statistics](#) website. Relevant table numbers are provided in all download files within this publication.
4. Interactive [data visualisations](#) developed by ONS are also available to aid interpretation of the results.
5. Future releases from the 2011 Census will include more detail in cross tabulations, and tabulations at other geographies. Further information on future releases is available online in the [2011 Census Prospectus](#).



6. Due to definitional differences, and because the census questionnaire is self completed by the population of England and Wales, the census estimates of people in employment may differ from other sources as, for example, some respondents may include voluntary work when asked about employment. The most authoritative and up to date estimates of the labour market status including employment and unemployment are the labour market statistics that ONS publishes monthly. The census is valuable in providing a detailed picture at the time of the census of the characteristics of the economically active population.
7. ONS has ensured that the data collected meet users' needs via an extensive [2011 Census outputs consultation](#) process in order to ensure that the 2011 Census outputs will be of increased use in the planning of housing, education, health and transport services in future years.
8. Any reference to local authorities includes both local and unitary authorities.
9. Figures in this publication may not sum due to rounding. Percentage point changes in the text are based on rounded data.
10. The England and Wales census questionnaires asked the same questions with one exception; an additional question on Welsh language was included on the Wales questionnaire.
11. ONS is responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales. Simultaneous but separate censuses took place in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These were run by the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) respectively.
12. ONS is responsible for the publication of UK statistics (compiling comparable statistics from the UK statistical agencies above). These will be compiled as each of the three statistical agencies involved publish the relevant data. The [Northern Ireland census prospectus](#) and the [Scotland census prospectus](#) are available online. The [first release of UK population estimates](#) took place on 17 December 2012.
13. A person's place of usual residence is in most cases the address at which they stay the majority of the time. For many people this will be their permanent or family home. If a member of the services did not have a permanent or family address at which they are usually resident, they were recorded as usually resident at their base address.
14. A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area.
15. All key terms used in this publication, such as resident and short-term residents are explained in the [2011 Census user guide](#).
16. All census population estimates were extensively quality assured, using other national and local sources of information for comparison and review by a series of quality assurance panels. An extensive range of [quality assurance, evaluation and methodology papers](#) were published

alongside the first release in July 2012 and have been updated in this release, including a [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) document \(152.8 Kb Pdf\)](#).

17. The 2011 Census achieved its overall target response rate of 94 per cent of the usually resident population of England and Wales, and over 80 per cent in all local and unitary authorities. The population estimate for England and Wales of 56.1 million is estimated with 95 per cent confidence to be accurate to within +/- 85,000 (0.15 per cent).
18. 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)

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