

Your questions answered

What is the Census?

The census is a survey that happens every 10 years and gives us a picture of all the people and households in England and Wales. All kinds of organisations, from local authorities to charities, use the information to help provide the services we all need, including transport, education and healthcare. Without the census, it would be much more difficult to do this.

When should I fill in my census questionnaire?

Census Day is Sunday 21 March – but you can fill yours in as soon as you get your access code in the post. Your answers should be about the people who usually live in your household on this date – even if you’re filling it in before then. If you need help, visit www.census.gov.uk

Do I have to take part?

If you live in England and Wales, you must take part in the census - it's a legal requirement. Census information helps inform how billions of pounds of public funding is spent. By taking around 10 minutes per person to fill in the census questionnaire, you will help make sure your community gets the services needed now and in the future.

Will the government use the information I provide to identify me?

No. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), which is an independent public body, carries out the census in England and Wales. It only ever publishes anonymous information from the census. In fact, it's a crime to share personal census information and everything you say is protected.

How will the census make a difference to me?

The census makes a difference to everyone. It's a once-in-a-decade chance to have your voice heard and help inform the future of your local area.

What if I do not identify with the census options?

The census asks you about your ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, religion and national identity. It's up to you to decide how you would like to answer each question. Some questions allow for a free text response rather than having to use predefined categories. Do it in the way that you feel best represents you.

Could information I share affect my benefits or immigration status?

No. The information you share in the census cannot be used to influence benefit claims, a residency application, immigration status or your taxes. Officials dealing with payments or services you receive cannot see your census information.

What if I cannot fill in my census questionnaire online?

The ONS can help with a wide range of support services to make it as easy as possible for you, whatever your needs. Services include:

- guidance and support in many languages and formats
- help over the phone, in a web chat or on social media
- a paper version of the questionnaire, if you prefer
- accessible census guidance, for example in braille

In addition, there will be four library based Census Support Centres in Ferndown, Gillingham, Weymouth and Dorchester to provide help with online completion. The contact details for this will be available very shortly.

Where can I get this information?

Everyone will receive a postcard followed by a letter with their digital access code which will contain both the website address and phone number for census support.

What other local support is available?

If you run a local community group or organisation and would like more information for your website or newsletter or if you are holding any online events or meetings and would like to receive a presentation or the opportunity to ask questions, you can also contact the ONS Census Engagement Manager for Dorset, Philip Eades, at philip.eades98@field.census.gov.uk or on 07452 948119.

Why is the census asking me about my gender and sexual orientation?

This census asks voluntary questions about sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time. This is to give us more accurate information on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations. This will help organisations combat any inequalities these groups face and show where services are needed. The census will only ask people aged 16 years and over these questions. If you do not feel comfortable identifying on the same form as the rest of your household, you can request an individual census questionnaire and answer separately.

Can I help friends and family fill in the census?

Yes. If a friend or family member needs support, help them if you can. Always fill in your own census first. You can also ask for help for yourself, or for someone else.

Is it safe for the census to go ahead at present?

Yes. The ONS has planned and built a flexible operation which can adapt to the changing circumstances of the pandemic. It will continue to review and adapt these plans to ensure census staff and the public can be kept safe and everyone can be safely counted. It is important to note that the ONS hopes that about 75% of the population will complete the census online without the need for any additional support.

Census 2021 will also be crucial to our understanding of how the people of England and Wales have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and it will give us detailed information on the health, social and economic impacts on all of us. It is essential we understand the needs of different groups and communities and the challenges people are facing in order to inform future decisions and policy making.

Where can I get more information?

- Your local Census Engagement Manager, Philip Eades can provide you with talks, presentations, posters, leaflets in many languages and social media content. Contact Phil via philip.eades98@field.census.gov.uk or call 07452 948119.
- Downloadable resources are available at www.census.gov.uk/downloadable-resources
- There are still jobs available at the Census www.censusjobs.co.uk