

Ethnicity, Language and Religion

Introduction

On 29th November 2022, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released further results from the 2021 Census for England and Wales. This latest release includes information about ethnic group, national identity, language and religion. Readers are advised that due to statistical disclosure control measures applied by the ONS and the impact of rounding, there may be small differences between estimated numbers contained in this and other Census briefings and analysis (see [page 17](#) of this briefing for further details).

Key Findings

- Around 512,440 residents (93.9%) of East Sussex identified their ethnic group as white in the 2021 Census, the second highest proportion in the South East after the Isle of Wight. The second most common high-level ethnic group was “Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups”, comprising 2.3% of the population (12,310 people).
- The number of residents identifying through the “White: Other White” category increased from 3.4% (17,870 people) in 2011 to 4.5% (24,580) in 2021, the largest percentage increase across all 19 ethnic groups
- Only 5.5% of the overall population (29,880 people) identified with a non-UK national identity; the largest increase within this group was in the “Romanian only” group, which increased from 0.06% of all residents (290 people) in 2011 to 0.4% (2,010) in 2021. Overall, this is the 3rd most common non-UK national identity after “Polish only” (0.4%, 2,390) and “Irish only” (0.4%, 2,250).
- 96.3% of residents aged three and over (511,760 out of 531,370) cited English as their main language, and a further 3.2% (16,770) said they spoke English either “well” or “very well”, but did not speak it as their main language.
- The number of people stating that they have no religion in East Sussex increased to 244,050 (44.7%) from 155,720 (29.6%) in 2011, slightly higher than the national average of 36.7%. Meanwhile, the number identifying as Christian fell from 315,650 (59.9%) in 2011 to 250,330 (45.9%) in 2021.

Ethnic Group

Since 1991, the census for England and Wales has included a question about ethnic group. The ethnic group question has two stages. Firstly, respondents are asked which of the following five high-level ethnic groups they most identify with:

- "Asian or Asian British"
- "Black, Black British, Caribbean or African"
- "Mixed or Multiple"
- "White"
- "Other ethnic group"

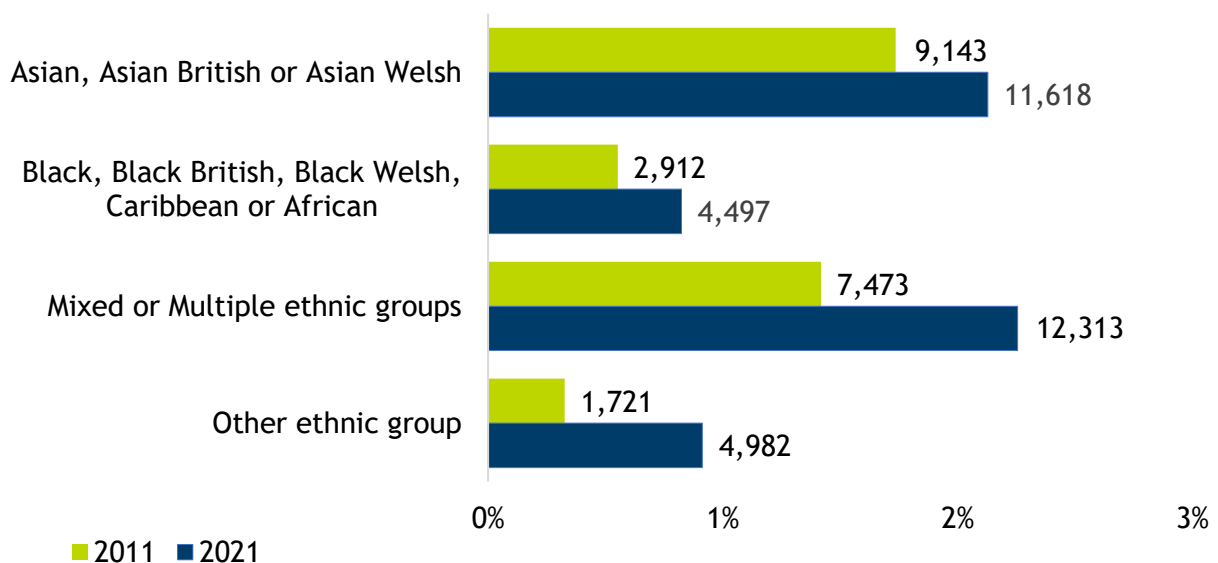
They are then asked to select one of the 19 more detailed options, which include categories with write-in response options.

According to the latest Census data, 93.9% (512,440) of the population of East Sussex identified their ethnic group within the high-level "White" category in 2021, down from 96.0% (505,420) in 2011. This is significantly higher than both the South East regional and the English national averages of 86.3% and 81.0%. respectively. In fact, of the county and unitary authorities in the South East, only the Isle of Wight recorded a higher proportion of residents identifying as white in the 2021 Census (97.0%).

At district level, Eastbourne had the smallest proportion of residents identifying as white in 2021 (90.8%, 92,340 residents), while Wealden had the greatest proportion (96.0%, 153,810 residents). However, this doesn't tell the full story, with some parts

of the county having a significantly smaller proportion of residents identifying as white than others. In the Eastbourne Pier (E02004365: Eastbourne 010) and Central St Leonards (E02004378: Hastings 011) areas, for example, around 1 in 6 residents (18.2% and 16.2% respectively) identified their ethnic group as being something other than “white”, compared to around 1 in 16 (6.1%) in East Sussex as a whole. By contrast, in Herstmonceux & Ninfield (E02004416: Wealden 014) and Northiam, Peasmarsh & Camber (E02004393: Rother 002), just 2.1% - equivalent to around 1 in 47 residents - identified with an ethnic group other than “white”.

The percentage of the population in all high-level ethnic groups, excluding “White”



Source: ONS

Note: The ethnic group categories are presented alphabetically (except for "Other ethnic group"). We have excluded the "White" ethnic group from this chart to make it easier to see the data concerning the four high-level ethnic groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.

Area	Total Population	Number of Usual Residents Identifying as "White: British"	Percentage of Usual Residents Identifying as "White: British"
East Sussex	545,845	482,043	88.3%
Eastbourne	101,680	83,465	82.1%
Hastings	90,995	77,418	85.1%
Lewes	99,909	88,830	88.9%
Rother	93,114	85,362	91.7%
Wealden	160,152	146,968	91.8%
South East	9,278,063	7,315,058	78.8%
Brighton and Hove	277,103	204,831	73.9%
Kent	1,576,069	1,311,093	83.2%
Surrey	1,203,105	921,285	76.6%
West Sussex	882,670	743,568	84.2%
ENGLAND	56,490,048	9,802,543	73.5%

Source: ONS

Note: "White: British" should be taken to mean "White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British"

Within the "White" ethnic group, 88.3% (482,040) of residents in East Sussex identified their ethnic group as "English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British" (abbreviated to "White: British" in the table above). This was a decrease from 91.7% (482,770) in 2011, and a continued decrease from 2001, when 94.6% (465,530) identified as "White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British".

Meanwhile, the proportion of residents identifying through the "White: Other White" category grew to 4.5% (24,580) in 2021 from 3.4% (17,870) in 2011, which was the largest percentage point increase across any of the 19 ethnic groups. The largest

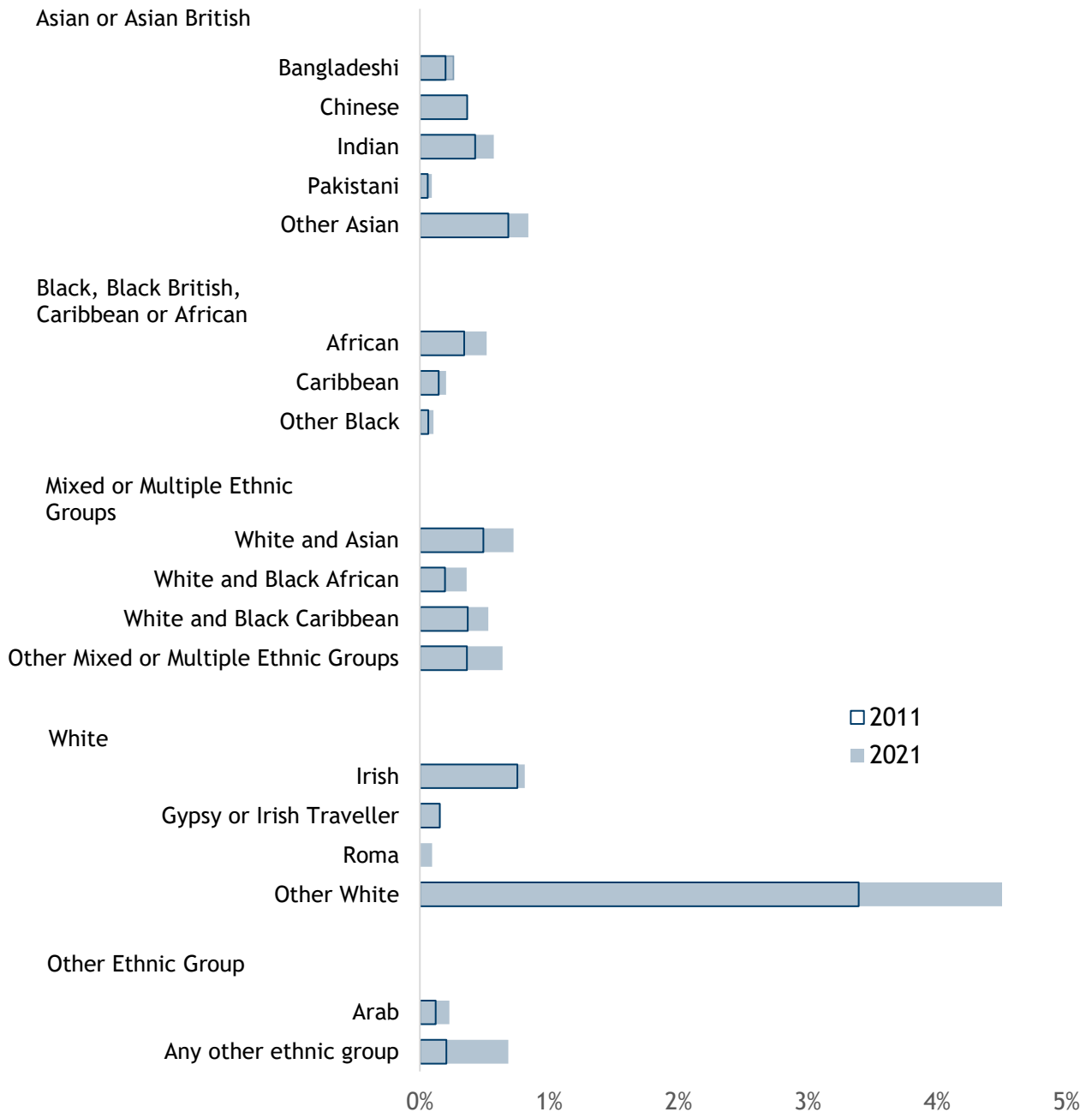
ethnic groups specified within the “White: Other White” category included “White: Irish”, with 4,430 people (0.8%) identifying this way, “White: Polish” (2,630 people, 0.5%), and “White: Romanian” (1,570 people, 0.3%).

In 2021, there was a new response option for “Roma” within the high-level “White” ethnic group (previously, this group was allocated to the “White: Other” group). Overall, 0.1% (520) of East Sussex residents identified as “White: Roma” in 2021. The highest number was in Hastings, where people identifying this way comprised 0.2% of the population, in line with the English national average.

The second most common high-level ethnic group after “White” was “Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups” accounting for 2.3% (12,310) of the East Sussex population. “Asian or Asian British” was the third most common high-level ethnic group (2.1%, 11,620). This contrasts with the rest of the South East region; “Asian or Asian British” was the second most-common high-level ethnic group in every other county and unitary authority in the South East in 2021, with the notable exception of Slough, where “Asian or Asian British” was the most common ethnic group and “White” was the second most common.

The results also mark a change from 2011, when “Asian or Asian British” comprised the largest ethnic group after “White” in all 5 districts in East Sussex. Despite the proportion of residents identifying as “Asian or Asian British” increasing from 1.7% (9,140) in 2011 to 2.1% (11,620) in 2021, the proportion identifying as “Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups” increased at a faster pace from 1.4% (7,470) in 2011 to 2.3% (12,310) in 2021. Within this group, “White and Asian” comprised the largest group (3,960 residents, 0.7%), followed by “White and Black Caribbean (2,890 residents, 0.5%).

Ethnic minority groups in East Sussex in 2011 and 2021



Source: ONS

Note: The ethnic group categories are presented alphabetically (except for "Other ethnic group"). We have excluded the "White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British" ethnic group from this chart to make it easier to see the data concerning the remaining 18 ethnic groups that account for a smaller percentage of the overall population.

National Identity

The census question on national identity was introduced in 2011 because of increased interest in "national" consciousness and a demand for people to be able to acknowledge their national identity. The question allows respondents to select all identities that apply. The term "only" is used throughout the article to refer to respondents classified with a single national identity.

In 2021, 94.5% (515,960) of usual residents of East Sussex identified with at least one UK national identity (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, and Cornish); this is a slight decrease from 95.6% (503,580) in 2011.

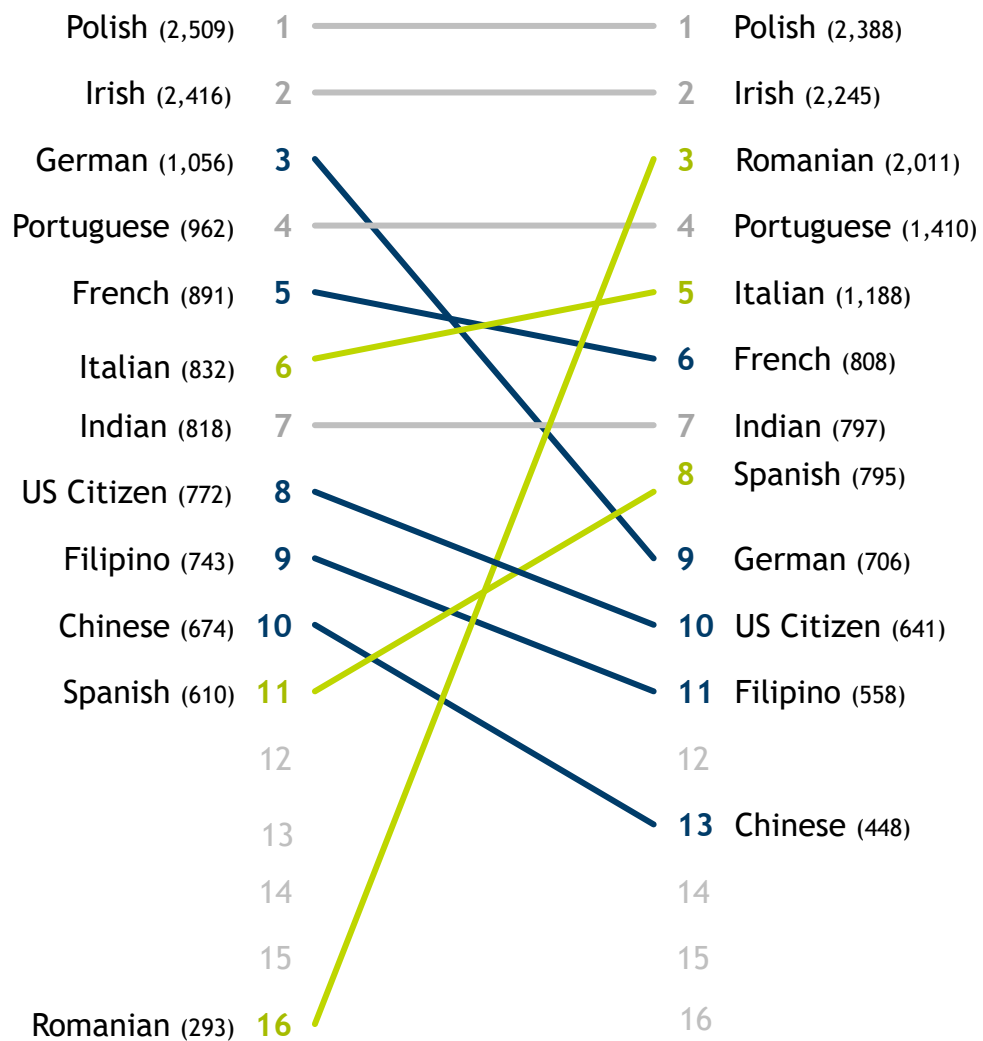
Those selecting a non-UK identity only accounted for 5.5% of the overall population (29,880 people), which is an increase from 4.3% of the population (23,090 people) in 2011. Among those who described a non-UK national identity, the most common responses were "Polish only" (0.4%, 2,390) and "Irish only" (0.4%, 2,250), which were also the most common responses in 2011.

"Romanian only" was the third most commonly reported non-UK national identity, increasing to 0.4% (2,010 people) in 2021 from 0.06% (290 people) in 2011, which is the largest increase for any non-UK national identity.

Area	Total Population	Number of Usual Residents Selecting a Non-UK identity Only	Percentage of Usual Residents Selecting a Non-UK identity Only
East Sussex	545,845	29,884	5.5%
Eastbourne	101,680	9,160	9.0%
Hastings	90,995	6,469	7.1%
Lewes	99,909	5,012	5.0%
Rother	93,114	3,427	3.7%
Wealden	160,152	5,817	3.6%
South East	9,278,063	807,318	8.7%
Brighton and Hove	277,103	35,220	12.7%
Kent	1,576,069	108,931	6.9%
Surrey	1,203,105	110,293	9.2%
West Sussex	882,670	62,988	7.1%
ENGLAND	56,490,048	5,629,752	10.0%

Source: ONS

The top 10 non-UK national identities of East Sussex residents in 2011 (left) and 2021 (right)



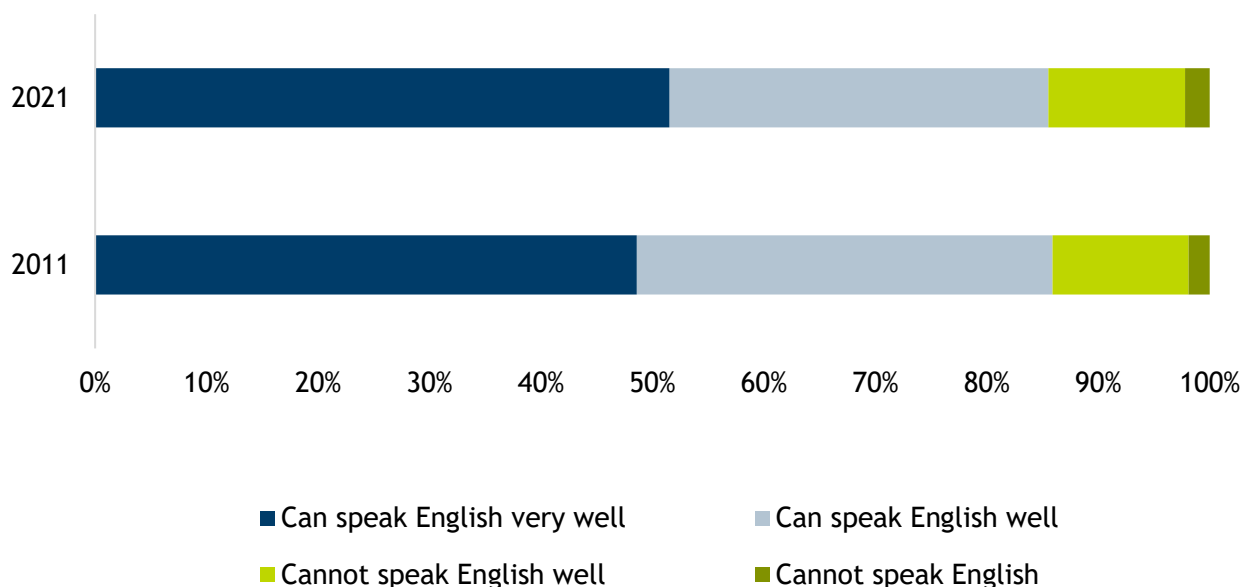
Source: ONS

Languages

96.3% of usual residents of East Sussex aged three years and over (511,760 out of 531,370) cited English as their main language in 2021. This is down slightly from 2011, when 96.8% (493,870) had English as a main language.

In 2021, a further 3.2% (16,770) of the overall population were proficient in English, and said they spoke English either "well" or "very well", but did not speak it as their main language. Additionally, 0.5% (2,400) could not speak English well, and a small percentage (0.1%, 430) of the overall population could not speak English at all.

Proficiency in English of East Sussex residents aged 3 and over whose main language is not English



Source: ONS

Overall, 1.9% (5,000) of households consisted of members who all had a language other than English as their main language. This is significantly lower than the rest of the country, with 5.0% of households in England as a whole, and 3.8% across the South East region consisting entirely of non-native English speakers.

The most common main languages, other than English were: Polish (0.4%, 2,380), Romanian (0.4%, 2,020), Portuguese (0.3%, 1,390), and Spanish (0.2%, 1,090).

In 2021, Romanian moved into the top 10 foreign languages spoken in East Sussex, rising from the 17th most common language in 2011 to the 2nd most common in 2021. This mirrors a similar increase in the number of people who listed Romania as their country of birth between 2011 and 2021 (an increase between censuses of 2,180, or 582%). It also mirrors an increase in the number who chose “Romanian only” as their national identity.

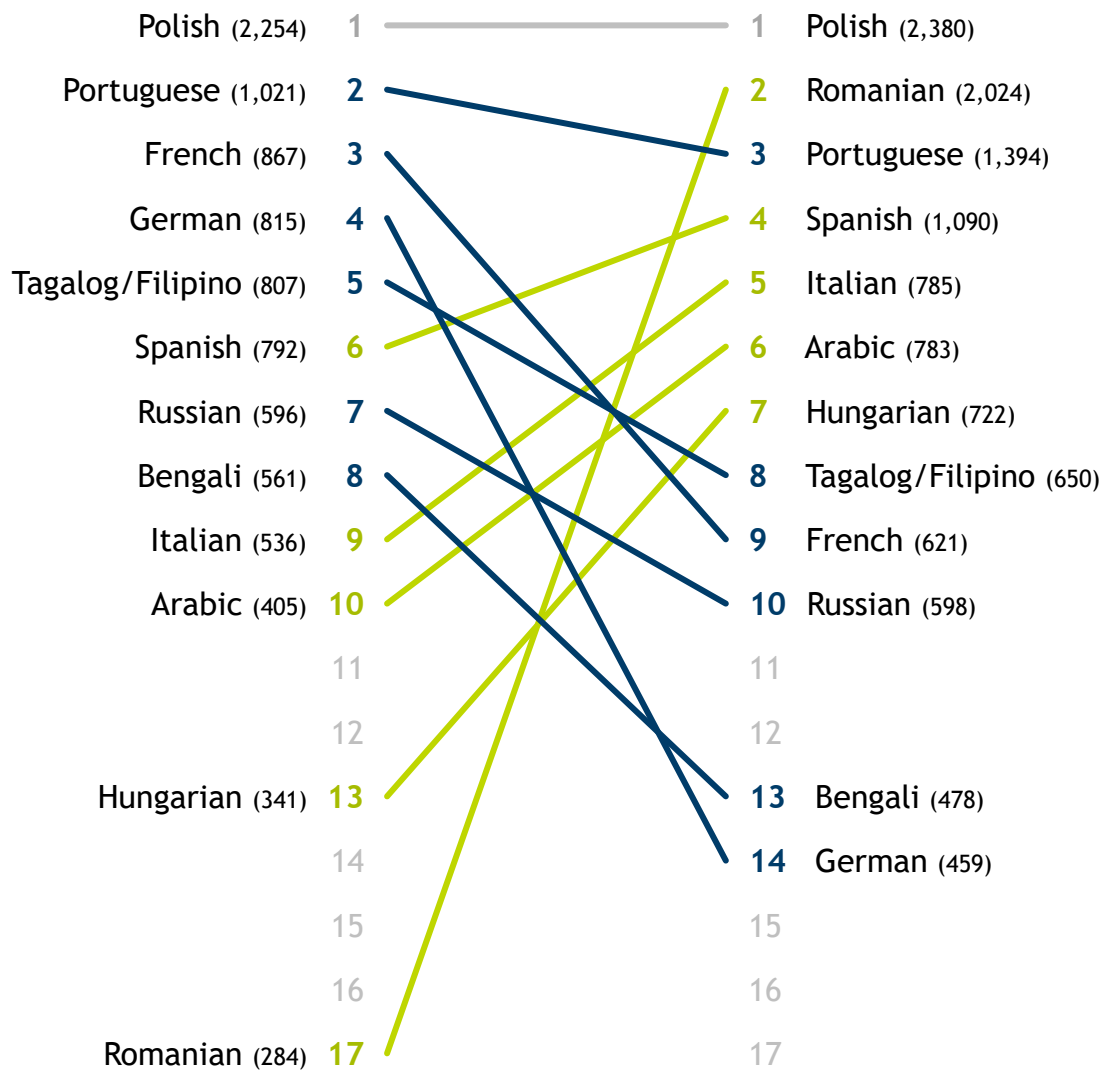
Eastbourne and Hastings have the highest proportion of residents with a main language other than English. 60.6% (11,880) of all East Sussex residents with a main language other than English live in one of these two districts, despite them only comprising 35.3% of the total population of the county overall. Almost half (47.6%) of those with Polish as a main language reside in Eastbourne alone. The most common foreign language in Hastings is Romanian, which is spoken by 670 residents (0.8% of the total population).

In addition to spoken languages, British Sign Language (BSL) was the main language of 160 (0.03%) usual residents aged three years and over in East Sussex. This is up slightly from 2011 when 100 residents cited British Sign Language as their main language.

Area	Total Population Aged 3+	Number of Residents Aged 3+ With a Main Language Other Than English	Percentage of Residents Aged 3+ With a Main Language Other Than English
East Sussex	531,368	19,609	3.7%
Eastbourne	98,944	7,263	7.3%
Hastings	88,118	4,613	5.2%
Lewes	97,333	2,806	2.9%
Rother	90,939	1,770	1.9%
Wealden	156,025	3,148	2.0%
South East	8,989,837	648,896	7.2%
Brighton and Hove	270,193	24,579	9.1%
Kent	1,525,271	88,052	5.8%
Surrey	1,164,959	80,799	6.9%
West Sussex	856,784	49,844	5.8%
ENGLAND	54,686,087	5,033,915	9.2%

Source: ONS

The top 10 main languages spoken in East Sussex excluding English in 2011 (left) and 2021 (right)

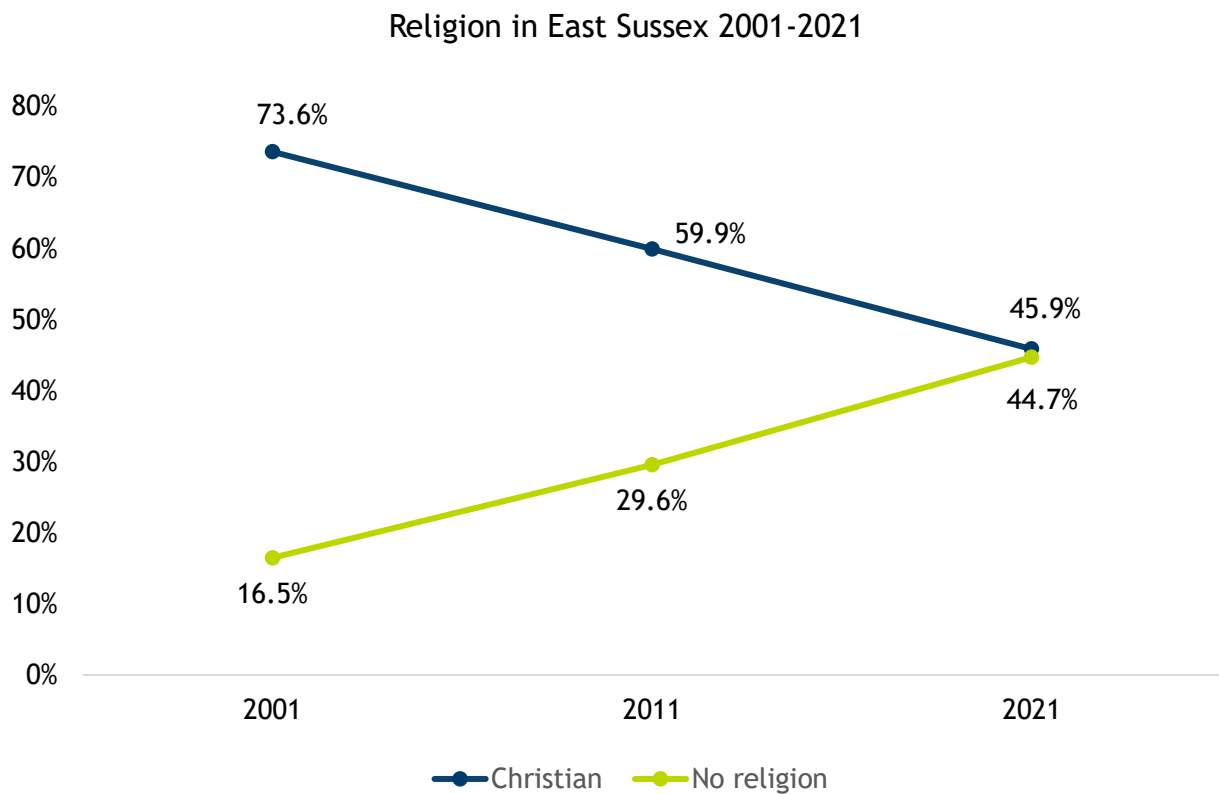


Source: ONS

Note: Bengali includes Sylheti and Chatgaya

Religion

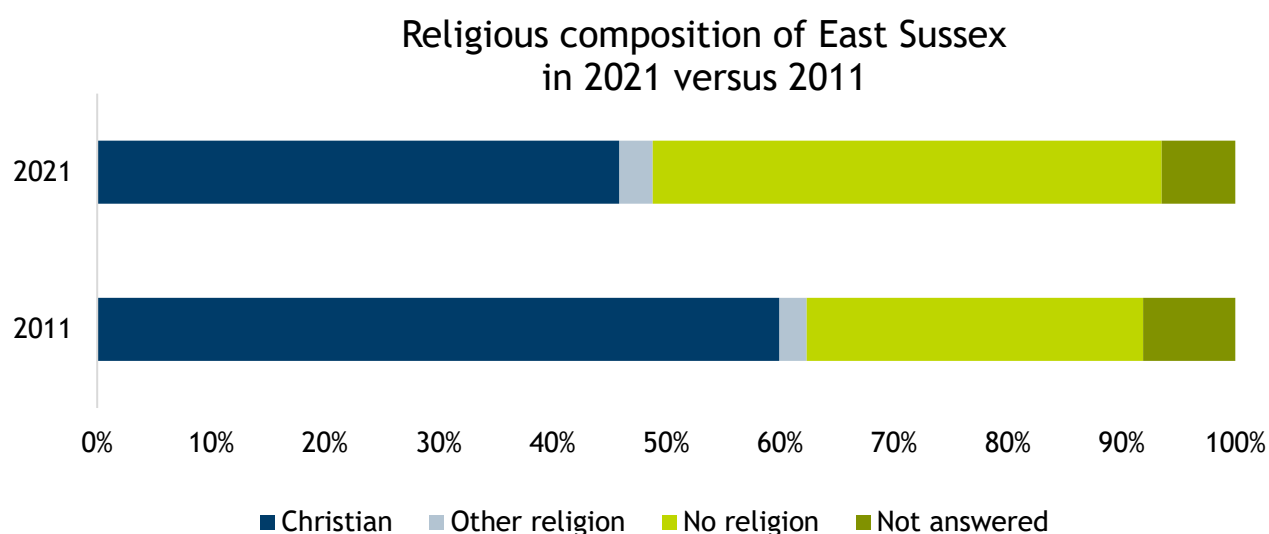
The number of people stating that they have no religion in East Sussex increased to 244,050 (44.7%) from 155,720 (29.6%) in 2011. This is higher than the English national average, where 36.7% of usual residents stated they had no religion in 2021, up from 24.7% in 2011. Across the South East region as a whole, 40.2% reported having no religion in 2021, up from 27.7% in 2011.



In 2021, 45.9% (250,330) of usual residents of East Sussex identified as Christian, down from 59.9% (315,650) in 2011. This is in line with the wider national trend, with

the proportion of people in England identifying as Christians falling from 59.4% in 2011 to 46.3% in 2021.

The second most common religion in East Sussex after Christianity is Islam. The proportion of the population stating they were Muslim increased from 0.8% of the usual resident population (4,200) in 2011 to 1.1% (6,190) in 2021. This is low compared to both the South East Regional and the English national averages, with 3.3% of residents in the South East specified their religion as Islam, and 6.7% across the whole of England.



At district level, Hastings registered both the smallest proportion of Christians (37.8%) as well as the largest proportion of residents with no religion (51.4%), while Rother had the highest proportion of Christians (50.9%) and the lowest proportion of people without religion (40.7%).

Area	Total Population	Percentage of Residents with a Religion Other than Christianity	Percentage of Residents with No Religion
East Sussex	545,845	9.4%	44.7%
Eastbourne	101,680	10.9%	43.2%
Hastings	90,995	10.8%	51.4%
Lewes	99,909	9.2%	48.2%
Rother	93,114	8.5%	40.7%
Wealden	160,152	8.4%	42.1%
South East	9,278,063	13.3%	40.2%
Brighton and Hove	270,193	13.9%	55.2%
Kent	1,576,069	10.7%	40.9%
Surrey	1,203,105	13.3%	36.6%
West Sussex	882,670	10.8%	41.1%
ENGLAND	56,490,048	17.0%	36.7%

Source: ONS

Limitations and mitigations

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) produces census data for a range of different output geographies. This includes census statistics for small areas/neighbourhoods right up to statistics for large administrative units. When added together, detailed census results for smaller areas may not exactly match the same data for larger areas. This is because the ONS uses statistical disclosure control methods which swap very small numbers between areas, and/or add small changes to some counts (cell key perturbation). For example, they might change a count of four to a three or a five, to make sure that it is impossible to identify specific individuals. This means that data for small areas may not sum to the totals for higher geographical levels.

For this reason, in any discussion of the census results, we have chosen to round numbers to the nearest 10. Where percentages have been provided, these are based on unrounded numbers. Tables published in this report and on East Sussex in Figures website contain unrounded data as supplied by the ONS, but come with the caveat that individual numbers and totals may vary slightly between tables depending on the selected output geography, as detailed above.

Census statistics are estimates rather than counts, and therefore have measures of uncertainty associated with them. As with all self-completion questionnaires, some forms will have contained incorrect, incomplete, or missing information about a person or household. While the ONS takes numerous steps to correct and minimise possible sources of error, as described in their [Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) Report](#), no census is perfect.

Future publications

The ONS will be releasing more detailed data and analysis on ethnicity, language and religion over the coming months, alongside the release of multivariate data. This will enable us to delve into the statistics in more detail and look at things such as the age profile of different ethnic groups.

Further Information

For more information about the census data visit the [ONS website](#). For queries specifically relating to East Sussex, please contact the Research and Intelligence Team via email at esif@eastsussex.gov.uk.

Data can be found on East Sussex in Figures:

[Ethnic group](#)

[Religion](#)

The Research and Intelligence Team, Governance Services, provides demographic and socio-economic data, intelligence and insight to support East Sussex County Council and other East Sussex Partners. The Team also manages East Sussex in Figures (ESiF), the Local Information System for East Sussex. ESiF is a web-based information system that contains detailed, up-to-date and reliable information on a very wide range of topics. Visit www.eastsussexinfigures.org.uk for more information.