

# Census 2021 Briefing

## Ethnicity

**GMCA Research**  
June 2023

## Dataset: Ethnicity

**Datalink:** The data used in this briefing can be found at [Ethnic group - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ethnicgroup.gov.uk) It can also be found at [TS021 - Ethnic group - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2021/ts021)

**Definition:** In this briefing, we have followed the terminology used in the Census, in line with the government's [Writing about Ethnicity](#) guidance and [Style Guide](#), and the approach adopted by the [Office for National Statistics](#). Much of the analysis reports for the five high-level ethnic groups used in the Census, but with summary titles where this facilitates reporting: Asian (incorporating Asian and Asian British); Black (Black, Black British, Caribbean or African); Mixed (Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups); White; and Other ethnic group. In places, specific sub-groups are also referenced – in general, the high-level group name is also given, unless this makes the text difficult to interpret or results in chart labelling being overly wordy. Although some of the ethnic sub-groups are also nationalities (for example, Bangladeshi and Pakistani), references in this briefing generally relate to ethnicity, as self-defined by Census respondents.

Where we have reported aggregated data combining groups that are not White British, we have used the term 'ethnic minority' (incorporating the Asian, Black, Mixed, and Other high-level groups, but also the following elements of the White group: Irish; Gypsy or Irish traveller; Roma; and Other White). However, we recognise that people may not see themselves as minorities, and that ethnic minority residents represent the majority group in some Greater Manchester districts, with a population that is larger than White British residents. It is also important to acknowledge the negative consequences of aggregating data for specific ethnicities together into higher-level groupings, as there are significant differences both between and within these groups. Whilst doing so is often necessary due to small numbers and can be useful in assisting understanding of broad trends in the data, we recognise that it can result in the loss of detailed insight into specific ethnic groups.

**Census day:** The 2021 Census was held in England and Wales on 21 March 2021. Census 2021 was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic so may not show normal population and household patterns due to temporary changes in living circumstances during the pandemic for some households.

## Key points

- The 2021 Census estimated that there were 821,801 Greater Manchester residents from an ethnic minority. This equated to 28.7% of Greater Manchester's population, slightly above the England average of 26.5%. Asian residents were the most numerous high-level ethnic group (389,283), accounting for very nearly half (47.4%) of the overall ethnic minority population, followed by White people who were not

White British (144,887) and Black people (134,113). People of mixed ethnicity (86,520) and those from Other ethnic groups (66,997) were less numerous.

- Between 2011 and 2021, the ethnic minority population of Greater Manchester increased by 280,960. This represented growth of 51.9%, significantly above the national increase of 39.3%, and largely driven by new arrivals – more than three quarters (77.4%) of the increase was accounted for by people who had settled in the UK since 2011. Amongst the high-level ethnic groups, the Other ethnic group increased the most in percentage terms (up 144.3%), followed by the Black (up 81.0%), Asian (up 43.0%) and Mixed ethnicity (up 42.5%) groups. In comparison, the White British population in Greater Manchester reduced by 4.5% over the period, a bigger decrease than seen nationally (down 1.7%).
- All ten Greater Manchester districts saw an increase in the number of ethnic minority residents between 2011 and 2021, with those districts that previously had a relatively small ethnic minority population experiencing the highest percentage growth rates.
- The proportion of ethnic minority residents in the district of Manchester in 2021 (51.3%) surpassed 50% for the first time since the Census began recording ethnicity in 1991.
- Across the ten districts, there was some variance in how the relative mix of ethnic minority groups has changed over the last ten years. For example, in Oldham between 2011 and 2021, the African population (a sub-group within the Black high-level group) experienced particularly high percentage growth (up 269.8%). In Salford, the ethnic minority population with the largest numerical increase (up 8,600) was the Other White sub-group (part of the White high-level group), with the Polish population alone increasing by 1,288.
- The median age of Greater Manchester's ethnic minority residents in 2021 was younger than that for the White British population (29 years compared to 41 years). The increase in Greater Manchester's total working-age population (up 4.1% between 2011 and 2021) was driven by an increase in working-age ethnic minority residents (up 52.9%). In contrast, the White British working-age population decreased by 8.1%.
- In 2021, Greater Manchester had residents from all of the 189 countries listed in the Census. The country of origin accounting for the highest number of Greater Manchester residents who were born overseas was Pakistan (89,331), followed by India (31,030) and Poland (29,859). At least 90 different languages were spoken as a main language in Greater Manchester in 2021, and 42 of these languages had at least a thousand speakers.

# Main Findings

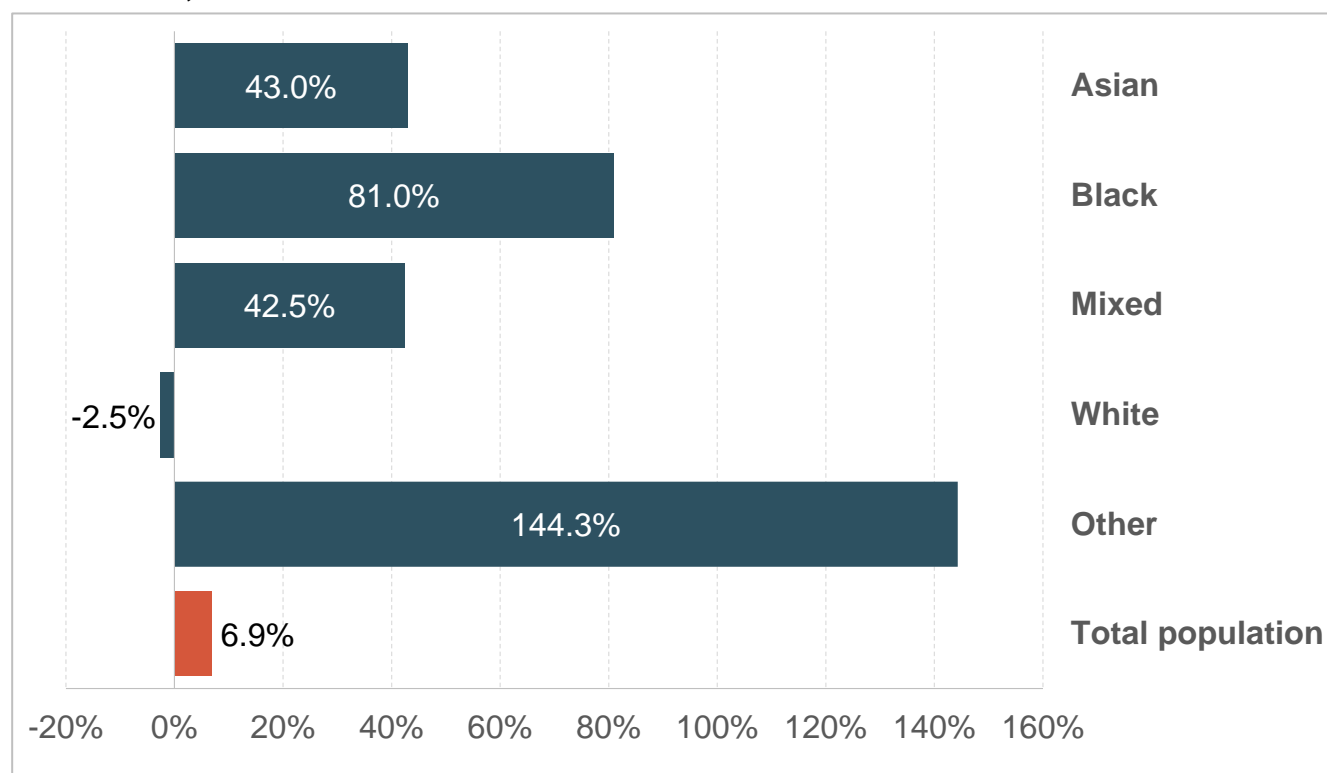
## Population change

The ethnic minority population of Greater Manchester stood at an estimated 821,801 in 2021, equating to 28.7% of the total population, slightly above the England average of 26.5%. This represented an increase of 280,960 compared to the 2011 estimate of 540,841 (20.2% of the total population). The Greater Manchester ethnic minority population grew by 51.9% between 2011 and 2021, considerably higher than the 39.3% growth seen in England as a whole.

Very nearly half of Greater Manchester's ethnic minority population in 2021 was Asian (47.4%, equating to 389,283 people). The next most numerous group was White people who were not White British (114,887), followed by Black people (134,113). There were fewer residents of mixed ethnicity (86,520) or from Other ethnic groups (66,997).

There was considerable variance in population change across the high-level ethnic groups in Greater Manchester over the period. The Other ethnic group saw the highest growth (up 144.3%) between 2011 and 2021, followed by the Black population (up 81.0%). In contrast, there was a slight reduction (down 2.5%) in the White population.

### Percentage change in the population by high-level ethnic group, Greater Manchester, 2011-2021

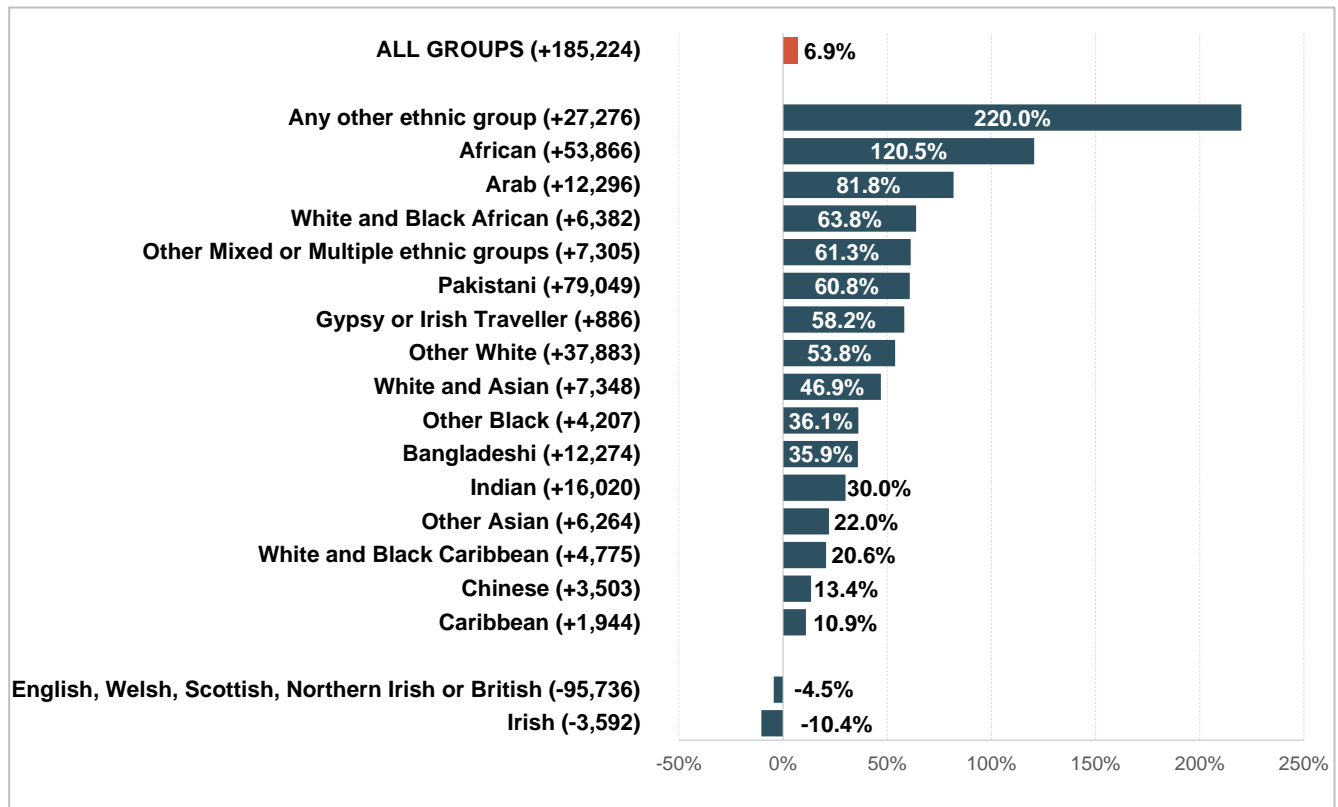


Sources: ONS, Census 2011, [KS201EW Ethnic group - Nomis](#); ONS, Census 2021, [TS021 – Ethnic group - Nomis](#)

Within the sub-group ethnicities, already large ethnic minority groups such as Pakistani residents (part of the Asian high-level group) saw some of the largest population

increases in numeric terms between 2011 and 2021 – the Greater Manchester Pakistani population increased by 79,049 (60.8%) over the period. However, in terms of percentage growth, some of the biggest increases were seen in previously smaller ethnic minority groups. For example, the African population (a constituent element of the Black high-level group) grew by 120.5% (53,866) between 2011 and 2021, becoming the third largest ethnic minority sub-group. Only two sub-groups (both part of the White high-level group) experienced a decline in population between 2011 and 2021: White British (down 95,736 or 4.5%) and White Irish (down 3,592 or 10.4%).

### Percentage change in ethnic sub-group populations in Greater Manchester, 2011-2021



Source: ONS, Census 2021, [TS021 – Ethnic group - Nomis](#), and ONS, Census 2011, [KS201EW – Ethnic group - Nomis](#).<sup>1</sup>

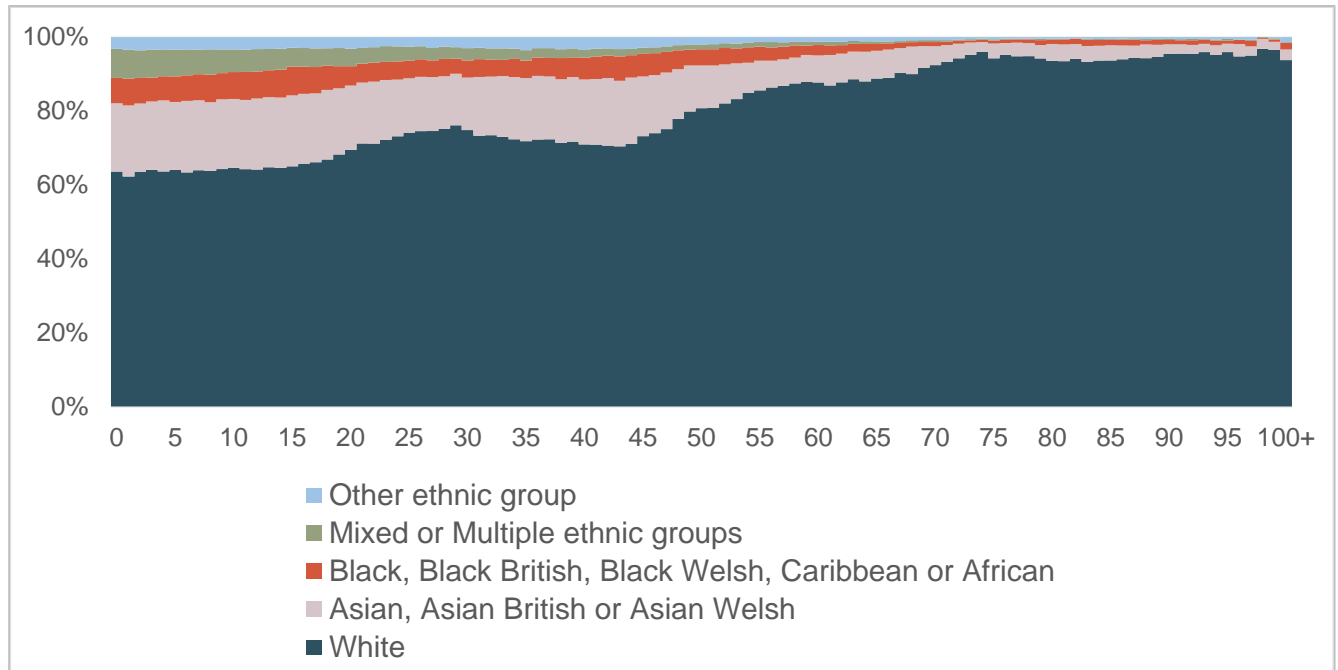
A quarter of Greater Manchester’s ethnic minority population arrived in the UK in the period between the 2011 and 2021 censuses. These new arrivals accounted for more than three quarters (77.4%) of the increase in the city region’s ethnic minority population since 2011. Natural change (births exceeding deaths) and internal migration (within the UK) accounted for the remainder of ethnic minority growth (22.6%) in Greater Manchester.

As shown in the chart below, younger ethnic minority residents represented a higher proportion of Greater Manchester’s total population in 2021 than ethnic minority residents in the older age groups, who accounted for a considerably smaller proportion

<sup>1</sup> Note that data for the Roma sub-group are not plotted, as Roma was not provided as a separate response option in the 2011 Census, so change over time cannot be calculated.

of the overall population. For example, 40% of those aged 1 at the time of the 2021 Census were from an ethnic minority – the highest proportion for any single year of age. Conversely, the lowest proportions of ethnic minority residents were found amongst people who were born after the end of the Second World War. Only 7% of those born at the very start of the post-war baby boom and who had reached the age of 74-75 by 2021 (and who were in their mid-70s by 2021) were from an ethnic minority.

### High-level ethnic groups by single year of age, Greater Manchester, 2021



Source: ONS, Census 2021, [Create a custom dataset - Office for National Statistics](#)

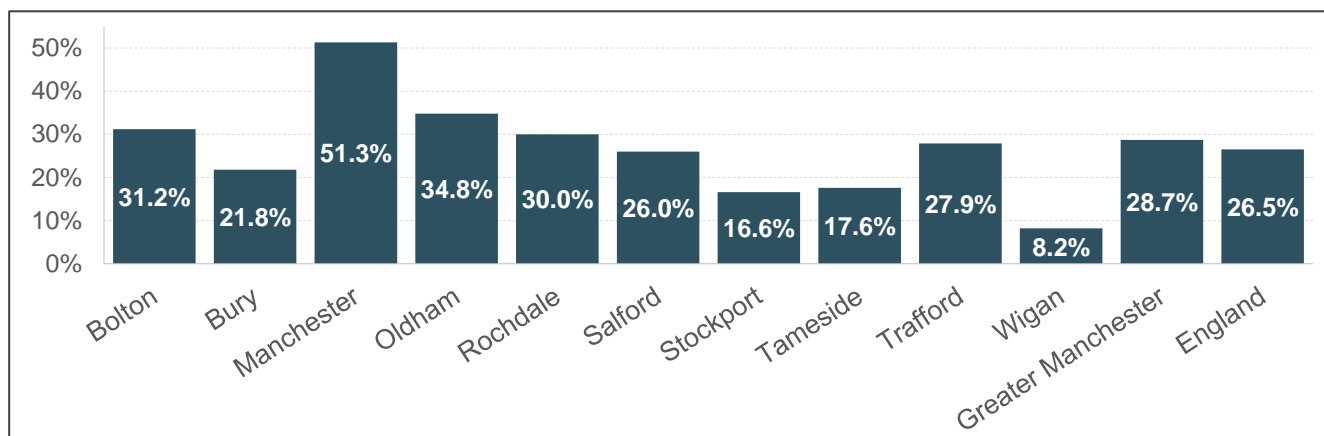
Reflecting the age distribution shown in the above data, the median age of Greater Manchester’s ethnic minority population in 2021 was 29 years, twelve years younger than the median age of the White British population (41 years). The ethnic minority working-age population in Greater Manchester increased by 52.9% between 2011 and 2021, driving an increase in the total working-age population of 4.1% over the period. In contrast, the White British working-age population decreased by 8.1%.

## Ethnicity at the district level

There was considerable variance in the ethnic make-up of the ten Greater Manchester districts. In 2021, Manchester was the most ethnically diverse district in absolute and percentage terms, with 283,366 residents from an ethnic minority – this equated to 51.3%, a majority of the population for the first time since the Census began reporting ethnicity in 1991. Although no other Greater Manchester district had an ethnic minority population that accounted for more than half of its total population, this was also the case in a number of other urban centres across the country: for example, 66.6% of Leicester’s population was from an ethnic minority, 63.2% in London (85.2% in the London Borough of Newham), and 57.1% in Birmingham. However, there were no other districts in the north of England where more than 50% of the population was from an ethnic minority.

Oldham and Bolton were the next most ethnically diverse Greater Manchester districts, with 34.8% and 31.2% of their total population from an ethnic minority respectively. Wigan was the least ethnically diverse district in 2021, with ethnic minority residents representing 8.2% of its overall population, a considerably lower proportion than the other nine districts.

### Percentage of the population from an ethnic minority group, 2021



Source: ONS, Census 2021, [TS021 – Ethnic group - Nomis](#)

All ten Greater Manchester districts saw increases in their ethnic minority populations between 2011 and 2021. In numerical terms, ethnic minority populations grew the most in districts where these populations were larger at the start of the period. However, the highest percentage growth was in districts that had relatively small ethnic minority populations in 2011: the largest percentage change since 2011 was seen in Salford (up 92.7%, from 36,488 ethnic minority residents to 70,308), followed by Wigan (up 87.4%, from 14,330 to 26,848).

In some districts, the mix and relative position of some of the ethnic sub-groups changed between 2011 and 2021. For example, 24.6% (59,565) of Oldham residents were from the Asian high-level group in 2021; amongst the Asian sub-groups, Oldham had the largest Bangladeshi population of any of the Greater Manchester districts (21,754). However, some previously smaller ethnic minority sub-groups in Oldham saw the largest percentage increases, including the African population (a sub-group of the Black high-level group), which grew by 269.8% over the period. In Salford, much of the high growth seen in its ethnic minority population from 2011 was driven by the Other White sub-group (part of the White higher-level group), which by 2021 had risen to 18,942, up by 83.2% (8,600) since 2011; the Polish population within this sub-group grew by 39.1% (1,288). Whilst Stockport is less ethnically diverse than most other Greater Manchester districts, the White: Irish sub-group (also from the White higher-level group) grew by 6.0%, in contrast to decreases in this ethnic group in the other nine districts.

## National and cultural identity

In 2021, the Greater Manchester population included people who were born in all of the 189 countries listed in the Census. The country of origin accounting for the highest

number of overseas births was Pakistan (89,331, or 3.1% of the Greater Manchester population), followed by India (31,030, or 1.1%) and Poland (29,859, or 1.0%).

Census 2021 responses on national identity also demonstrate the diversity of the Greater Manchester population; all of the national identities that were recorded across the whole of England and Wales were also recorded within Greater Manchester. Aside from the UK, the national identities that were most reported by Greater Manchester residents were Pakistani (29,643, 1.0% of the Greater Manchester population), Polish (24,536, or 0.9%) and Italian (19,261, or 0.7%).

The increasingly diverse population can also be seen in other indicators relating to cultural identity. For example, the Census shows that at least 91 different languages were spoken as a main language in Greater Manchester in 2021, with 42 of these languages having more than a thousand speakers. Urdu was the main language spoken by 45,249 residents, while 24,869 spoke mainly Polish and 19,323 mainly Arabic.

## Reflections

The increasing ethnic diversity of Greater Manchester is demonstrated in its growing cultural diversity, with numerous ethnic sub-groups becoming increasingly established in the city-region, and a multitude of languages spoken. The ethnic minority growth seen between 2011 and 2021 is likely to continue over time, given that the population is relatively young. This ongoing demographic change confirms the requirement for public services to respond to the needs of a diverse range of ethnic groups – for example, through the provision of translation services and language courses. There are also implications in terms of representation within public life, given the relative lack of ethnic diversity amongst leaders, decision-makers and the wider workforce in many Greater Manchester organisations.

The Census findings demonstrate the dynamic nature of the ethnic make-up of Greater Manchester communities over time in different parts of the city region, both in terms of the district variance demonstrated in this briefing, but also variance within districts. Given that the Census data are reported at the hyper-local level, they will prove valuable in helping local authorities, partner agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations to understand demand and target their services accordingly.

This briefing has focused on the Census 2021 ethnicity data from a largely demographic perspective. Further briefings will explore the intersection of ethnicity with wider socio-economic variables such as economic inclusion / exclusion and the types of occupation in which Greater Manchester residents work. Wider sources typically provide little information on how such outcomes vary by ethnicity, so the 2021 Census data represent a valuable opportunity to update our understanding and inform targeted activity in response.