

England and Wales are Becoming Increasingly Ethnically Diverse and Less Residentially Segregated

This briefing focuses on **ethnic diversification** and **neighbourhood mixing** in England and Wales. The analysis uses **Census data from 1991 to 2021**.

Key Findings

- England and Wales have become **increasingly ethnically mixed and diverse**.
- Ethnic diversity has been increasing **within major urban areas**, including in London, Birmingham, and Manchester.
- Diversity has also been **growing outside of cities**. Neighbourhoods that were not diverse previously are now home to people from several ethnic groups.
- Districts being characterised as ‘minority-majority’ can instead be thought of as **ethnically diverse places**. The smaller the proportion of a district’s White British population, the greater the ethnic diversity of that district.
- **Neighbourhood ethnic residential segregation declined for all ethnic groups** from 1991 to 2021. This means there is less residential separation between people belonging to different ethnic groups.
- The **largest proportional decline in residential segregation** occurred for the Black African group. The Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Indian ethnic groups experienced substantial declines. White segregation from minority ethnic groups also decreased.

How has ethnic diversity changed in England and Wales?

Nearly 75 percent of the population of England and Wales in 2021 identified as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British (hereafter White British). More people in England and Wales identified with an ethnic group other than White British in 2021 than in previous censuses. **Figure 1** captures the growth of ethnic diversity nationally between 1991 and 2021. The ethnic groups that have grown the fastest since 1991 are the ones that initially made up smaller proportions of the population. The growing proportion of the ‘Other’ group signals the diversification of diversity since this means there are more people who do not self-identify with the census ethnic groups. For more detailed information on population change by ethnic group, see the GEDI guidance document *Ethnic Groups in the Census: Categorisation and Change* (www.gedi.ac.uk/census-briefings/).

More ethnic mixing

Ethnic diversity refers to the share of the population in an area belonging to different ethnic groups. Ethnic diversity has been increasing in major urban areas of England and Wales. The rainbow charts in **Figure 2** show the ethnic mix of the most diverse districts (a) within and (b) outside

London. The segments of the bars show the population of each of the 19 ethnic groups from the 2021 Census as a percentage of the district’s population. The rainbow charts highlight that these places are highly diverse, home to a large number of people from several ethnic groups. 25 out of the 30 most ethnically diverse districts of England and Wales were found in London. The most diverse districts outside of London were Slough (South East region) and Luton (East region) – the sixth and ninth most diverse districts, respectively.

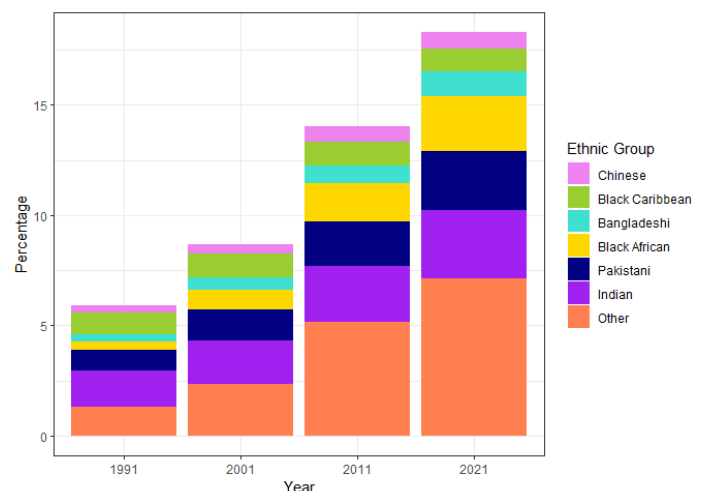


Figure 1. Population size (%) of minority ethnic groups (other than White minority) in the 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021 Censuses of England and Wales

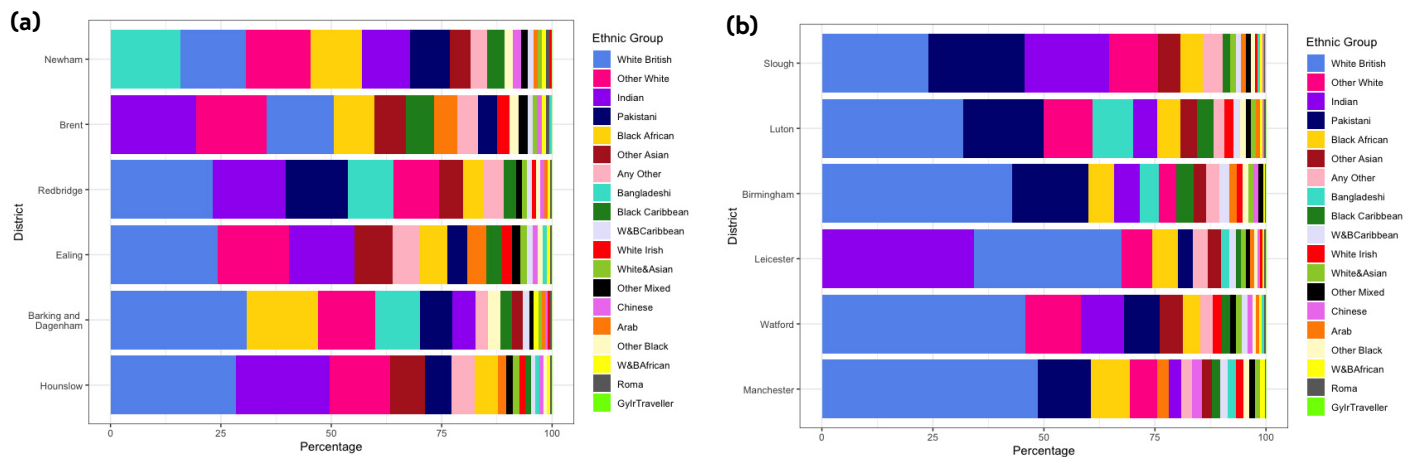


Figure 2. Ethnic group composition of the most ethnically diverse districts of England and Wales in 2021 (a) in London and (b) outside of London

Notes: (1) Ethnic groups are, for each district, ordered left to right by largest to smallest population size in 2021. (2) Ethnic groups in the legend are ordered by population size in England and Wales in 2021. (3) W&BCaribbean = Mixed White and Black Caribbean; White&Asian = Mixed White and Asian; W&BAfrican = Mixed White and Black African; GylrTraveller = Gypsy or Irish Traveller. (4) Ranks by Reciprocal Diversity Index out of all districts in England and Wales (331) are as follows: Newham = 1, Brent = 2, Redbridge = 3, Ealing = 4, Barking and Dagenham = 5, Hounslow = 7, Slough = 6, Luton = 9, Birmingham = 28, Leicester = 29, Watford = 30, Manchester = 32.

More ethnic diversity in more neighbourhoods

Increasing numbers of neighbourhoods comprise a substantial mix of people from different ethnic groups, and this growing neighbourhood ethnic diversity has been spreading across all regions of England, and across Wales. **Figure 3** shows the ethnic diversity of neighbourhoods in England and Wales in 2001, 2011 and 2021, and the change in diversity over the period. The maps show several important patterns of change in ethnic diversity. By 2021, for example, fewer neighbourhoods than ever had low levels of ethnic diversity (**Figure 3c**). High ethnic diversity was most commonly found in neighbourhoods in London and in large cities across England and Wales, from Birmingham to Bristol, Manchester to Cardiff, and Nottingham to Southampton. Birmingham, in particular, saw a considerable increase in the number of neighbourhoods in the highest category of ethnic diversity, with a similar pattern for other parts of the Midlands and also cities in the North West of England. In London, greater increases in ethnic diversity were found in outer London, with slight increases in diversity in inner London (**Figure 3d**). The spreading of ethnic diversity into the surrounding areas of London may be due to family building of people in minority ethnic groups in these places, and internal migration from districts in London and elsewhere¹. The maps also show that ethnic diversity has been spreading over time beyond major urban spaces and historic settlement areas. Many formerly non-diverse neighbourhoods are now home to people from several ethnic groups.

Ethnic mixing as diversity

The growth of so-called ‘minority-majority’ cities, or places where more than 50 percent of their population was either not White or not White British, were the subject

of media attention following the release of data from the 2011 Census, and again following the 2021 Census². To understand the ethnic mosaic across England and Wales, it is more helpful to consider *mix* than *majority*.

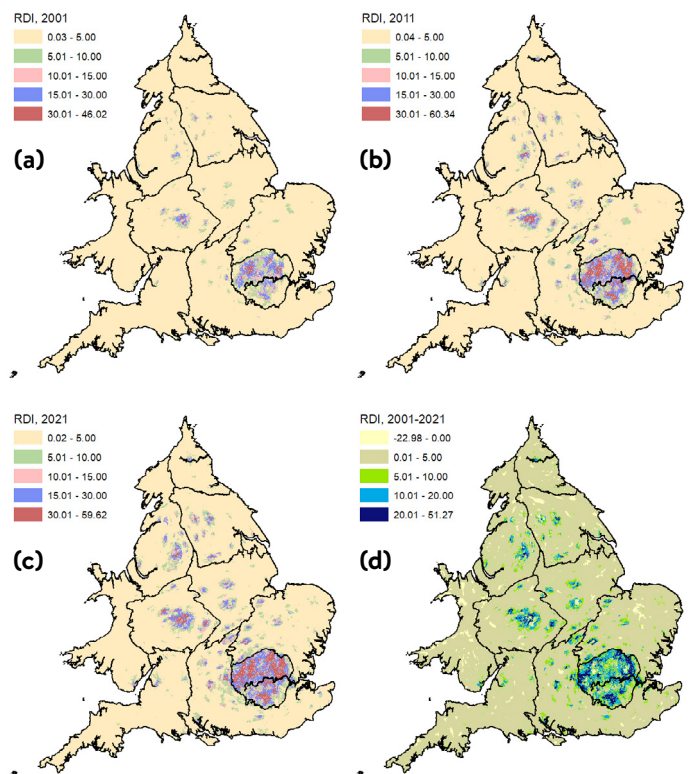


Figure 3. Ethnic diversity (RDI) for neighbourhoods in England and Wales (a) 2001, (b) 2011, (c) 2021 and (d) change between 2001 and 2021

Notes: The maps are cartograms whereby geographically smaller neighbourhoods (which have higher population densities) appear relatively larger, while geographically larger neighbourhoods (with lower population densities) appear relatively smaller. The few neighbourhoods with declines in ethnic diversity (Figure 3d) are principally in the most diverse districts. These decreases will partly be a function of how the index operates; even a small increase in one (relatively larger) ethnic group compared with other (smaller) groups will lead to a decline in RDI.

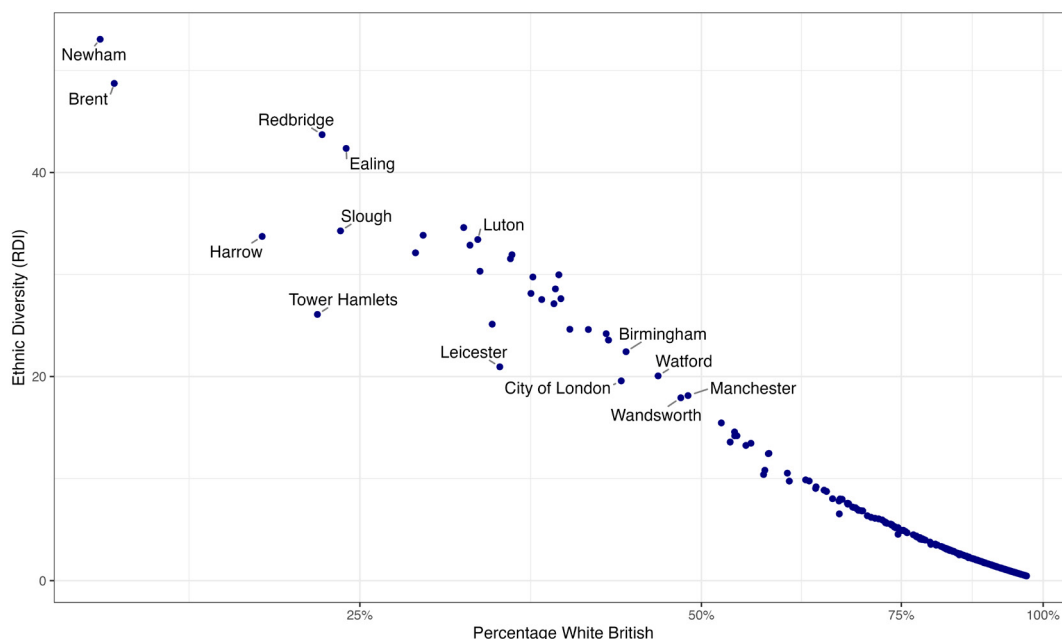


Figure 4. Ethnic diversity (RDI) and proportion of White British population in districts in England and Wales, 2021

Figure 4 shows that the smaller the proportion of a district’s population that is White British, the *greater* the ethnic diversity of that district. This means that districts often labelled as ‘minority-majority’ should alternatively be thought of as ethnically *diverse* places (see, for example, **Figure 2**). Areas where the White British group makes up less than half of the population are the most ethnically diverse. Many of these places are found in London, but there are also a few districts elsewhere: Birmingham, Leicester, Slough, Watford, Luton, and Manchester.

1991 and 2021. Segregation has declined for all ethnic groups – White and minority. The largest proportional decline in residential segregation was for the Black African group, with the Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Indian populations also experiencing large decreases in neighbourhood residential segregation since 1991. White segregation from minority ethnic groups also declined. During the most recent period – 2011 to 2021 – the largest reductions in segregation were for the Black African and Black Caribbean groups.

Ethnic groups in the Census

Different ethnic group categorisations were used to measure ethnic diversity and ethnic residential segregation. This is because the number of ethnic groups have changed between censuses and must be aggregated to create ethnic group categories that are comparable over time. To measure changes in ethnic diversity between 2001, 2011 and 2021, 16 comparable ethnic groups were used. To measure ethnic segregation between 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021, eight comparable ethnic groups were used.

Find out how comparable ethnic group categories were created across censuses in the GEDI guidance document *Ethnic Groups in the Census: Categorisation and Change* (see www.gedi.ac.uk/census-briefings/).

Declining ethnic residential segregation

Residential segregation indicates how evenly spread an ethnic group is across neighbourhoods relative to the rest of the population. Patterns of ethnic residential segregation are important indicators of spatial integration and inequalities. **Figure 5** shows the steady decline of neighbourhood ethnic residential segregation between

Measures of ethnic diversity and segregation

The Reciprocal Diversity Index (RDI) measures an area’s ethnic diversity and can be used to compare ethnic diversity levels over time. RDI can range from 0 to 100 when standardised, with 0 meaning no diversity and 100 meaning each ethnic group makes up an equal share of the total population in an area.

The most commonly used measure of segregation is the Index of Dissimilarity (*D*). The Index can range from 0 to 100, with 0 meaning the ethnic groups compared are evenly spread across areas and 100 indicating complete segregation.

Ethnic group changes are analysed at three different spatial scales in this study: national (England and Wales), districts (Local Authority districts) and neighbourhoods (Lower Layer Super Output Areas). In the 2021 Census, there were 331 districts, with an average population of 180,053 people, and 35,672 neighbourhoods, with an average of 1,671 people.

More detailed explanations on measures can be found in the GEDI guidance document *Methods and Measures* (see www.gedi.ac.uk/census-briefings/).

GEDI

Geographies of Ethnic Diversity and Inequalities (GEDI) is a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. GEDI is examining, analysing, and explaining the UK's changing ethnic geographies.

Follow the project and read about its findings at www.gedi.ac.uk

Contact us: info@gedi.ac.uk

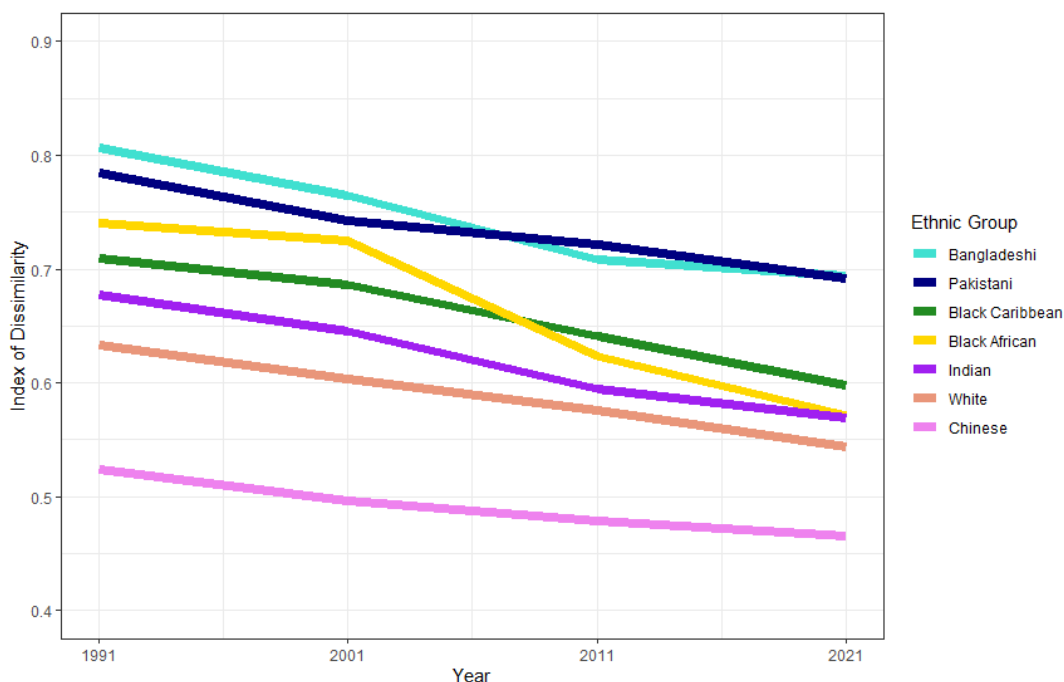


Figure 5. Change in ethnic residential segregation (D) for neighbourhoods in England and Wales, 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021

Notes: Ethnic groups are ordered by highest to lowest Index of Dissimilarity (D) values in 2021. Here, D measures each ethnic group's spatial distribution in neighbourhoods across England and Wales compared with that of the rest of the population (e.g., the Pakistani ethnic group is compared with all ethnic groups other than Pakistani). Other is included in the population total for the analysis. However, given the group's heterogeneity, its D values are not reported.

References

- 1 Catney, G. (2016a) The changing geographies of ethnic diversity in England and Wales, 1991–2011. *Population, Space and Place*, 22(8): 750–765. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1954>
- 2 Simpson, L. (2015) Does Britain have plural cities?, in: S. Jivraj & L. Simpson (Eds.) *Ethnic Identity and Inequalities in Britain: The Dynamics of Diversity*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 49–63.
- 3 Catney, G., Lloyd, C. D., Ellis, M., Wright, R., Finney, N., Jivraj, S., & Manley, D. (2023) Ethnic diversification and neighbourhood mixing: A rapid response analysis of the 2021 Census of England and Wales. *The Geographical Journal*, 189(1): 63–77. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12507>

Further reading

Catney, G. (2016b) Exploring a decade of small area ethnic (de-) segregation in England and Wales. *Urban Studies*, 53(8): 1691–1709. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/004209801557685>

Catney, G., Ellis, M., & Wright, R. (2023) Changes in mixed ethnicity households and neighbourhood transitions in England and Wales. *Population, Space and Place*, e2745. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2745>

Jivraj, S. & Simpson, L. (Eds.) (2015) *Ethnic Identity and Inequalities in Britain: The Dynamics of Diversity*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Data sources

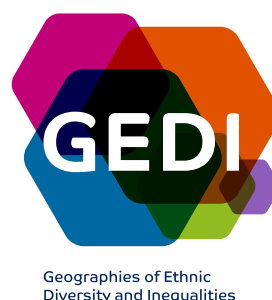
1991 Census, Table SAS06 (Crown Copyright); 2001 Census, Table KS006 (Crown Copyright); 2011 Census, Table KS201 (Crown Copyright); 2021 Census, Table TS021 (Crown Copyright).

How to cite this briefing:

Catney, G., Lloyd, C.D., Ellis, M., Wright, R., Finney, N., Jivraj, S., Manley, D. and Nishikido, M. (2024) England and Wales are Becoming Increasingly Ethnically Diverse and Less Residentially Segregated. *GEDI Evidence from the 2021 Census Briefing Series: Issue 1*. Geographies of Ethnic Diversity and Inequalities (GEDI). www.gedi.ac.uk

Want to know more?

This briefing is a summary of an open access journal article published in *The Geographical Journal*: [Ethnic diversification and neighbourhood mixing: A rapid response analysis of the 2021 Census of England and Wales](#)³



Economic and Social Research Council