



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Welsh language data from the Annual Population Survey: April 2023 to March 2024

Data on people's ability in Welsh, and how often they speak the language, for April 2023 to March 2024.

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Introduction

We consider the census of population to be the key source of information to measure the number of Welsh speakers in Wales. However, as the Annual Population Survey (APS) provides quarterly results, it is a useful source to look at trends in Welsh language ability between censuses.

Census 2021 results about the number of people able to speak Welsh were published in December 2022. Census estimates of Welsh language ability continue to be lower than estimates from household surveys such as the APS. However, this is the first time that the census has estimated declining numbers of people able to speak Welsh at the same time as the APS has estimated an increasing number of people able to speak Welsh.

Users should note that there are fundamental differences between these data sources, including differences in how the data are collected and their timeliness.

In April 2023, we published a **joint workplan with the Office for National Statistics (ONS)**, which details further work to improve our understanding of these differences. We have since published a statistical article exploring **differences between estimates of Welsh language ability in Census 2021 and the Labour Force Survey (LFS)**, which is the basis for the Annual Population Survey. An update on the progress of other projects outlined in the workplan is provided below.

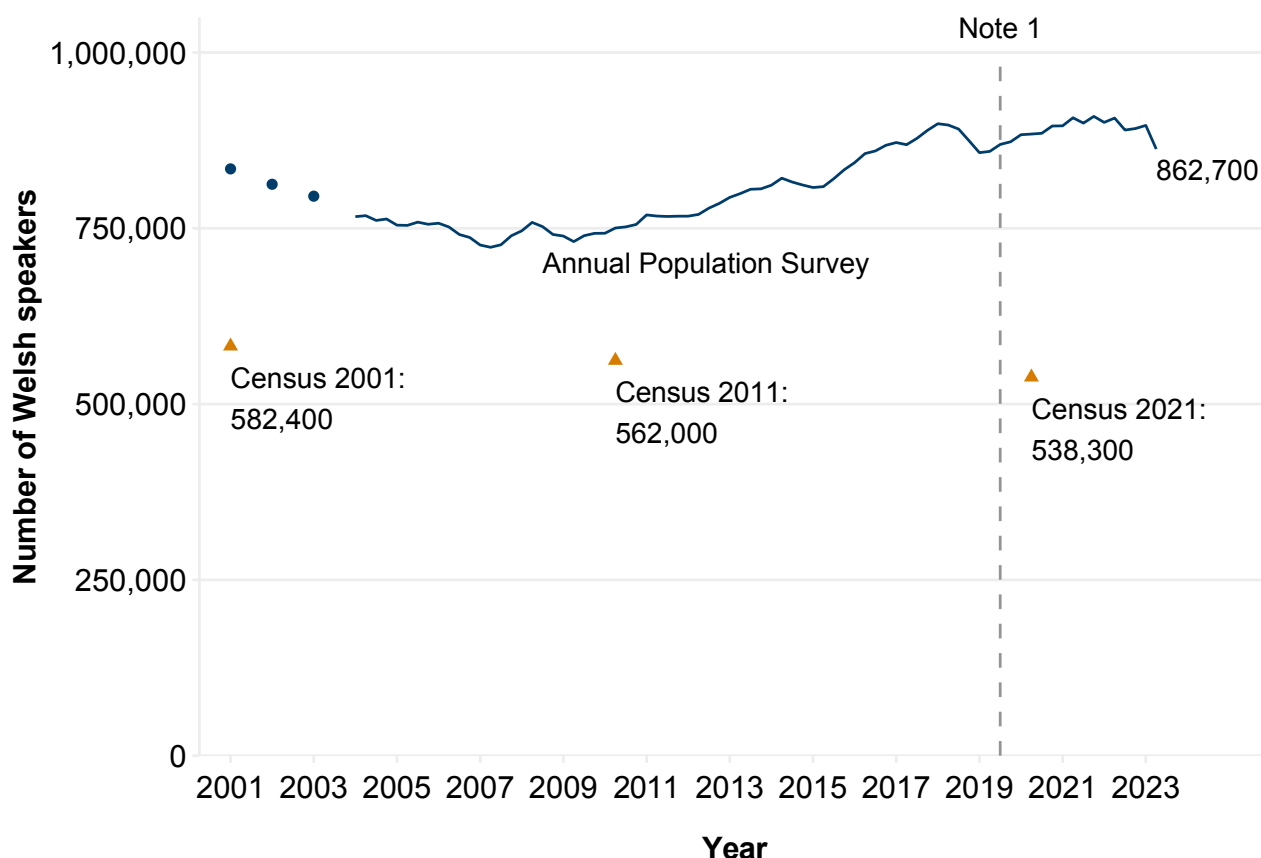
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Main results

Figure 1: Number of people aged three years or over able to speak Welsh, 2001 to March 2024 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 1: This line chart shows that, having fallen between 2001 and 2007, there has since been an general increase in the estimated number of Welsh speakers recorded by the APS. The numbers have decreased over the most recent year. According to the APS, there were an estimated 862,700 Welsh speakers living in Wales in the year ending 31 March 2024. The number of Welsh speakers recorded in the 2001, 2011 and 2021 Census are plotted on the same chart, labelled 582,400, 562,000 and 538,300 respectively.

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Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS) and population census (ONS)

[Note 1] Changed to phone interviews only in March 2020. Face-to-face interviews were reintroduced in autumn 2023.

- For the year ending 31 March 2024, the APS estimated that 28.0% of people aged three years or over were able to speak Welsh. This figure equates to around 862,700 people.
- The latest estimate is around 1.6 percentage points lower than the year ending 31 March 2023 when an estimated 29.7% of people aged three years or over were able to speak Welsh. This decrease is statistically significant, but this decrease should be interpreted with caution due to a change in the survey mode between the two periods. Face-to-face interviews were suspended in mid-March 2020 in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and all interviews were conducted over the phone. Face-to-face interviews were reintroduced in autumn 2023 meaning that the latest data is based on a combination of phone and face-to-face interviews. See '[Changes to the survey](#)' below.
- The chart shows how these figures have been generally increasing since March 2010 (25.2%, 731,000), after they had been gradually declining from 2001 to 2007. The numbers have decreased over the most recent year. However, as noted above, this recent decrease should be treated with caution due to a change of survey mode.
- Children and young people aged 3 to 15 years were more likely to report that they could speak Welsh (48.4%, 241,300) than any other age group. This is consistent over time, but the percentage of children and young people aged 3 to 15 years who can speak Welsh has been decreasing in general since the beginning of 2019.
- The highest estimated numbers of Welsh speakers are found in Carmarthenshire (91,700), Gwynedd (91,200) and Cardiff (76,100).
- The lowest estimated numbers of Welsh speakers are in Blaenau Gwent (10,000) and Merthyr Tydfil (12,500).
- The highest estimated percentages of Welsh speakers can be found in

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Gwynedd (76.3%) and the Isle of Anglesey (59.3%).

- The lowest estimated percentages of Welsh speakers are in Blaenau Gwent (14.6%) and Rhondda Cynon Taf (16.4%).
- 14.4% (443,800) of people aged three years or older reported that they spoke Welsh daily, 5.4% (165,500) weekly and 6.5% (201,200) less often. Around 1.7% (51,700) reported that they never spoke Welsh despite being able to speak it, with the remaining 72.0% not able to speak Welsh.
- 32.5% (1,001,500) reported that they could understand spoken Welsh, 24.7% (759,200) could read and 22.2% (684,500) could write in Welsh.

Note

The APS is a UK-wide survey conducted by the ONS. The APS, which began in 2004, is compiled from interviews for the LFS. [Details about how the survey is developed and carried out can be found on the Office for National Statistics website.](#)

The APS results should not be compared with census results, nor used to measure progress towards the Welsh Government target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. The Welsh language strategy, [Cymraeg 2050](#), clearly states that this target was based on census data and that progress towards this target will be monitored using census of population data.

The census results and APS results for 2001, 2011 and 2021 have been included on the chart above to show the differences between the two sources at the same time periods. Differences in the estimates of Welsh language ability between the census and household surveys such as the APS are longstanding, and both the [ONS \('Differences in estimates of Welsh Language Skills'\)](#) and the [Welsh Government \('Welsh language data from the Annual Population Survey: 2001 to 2018'\)](#) have explored possible reasons for some of these differences in the past. For example, the census is a statutory self-completion

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questionnaire while the APS is a voluntary survey, which uses face-to-face and telephone interviews. A [blog post published by the Chief Statistician \(Digital and Data blog\)](#) in 2019, discussed briefly how to interpret the Welsh language data from the APS.

While household surveys typically provide us with higher estimates of Welsh-speaking ability, this is the first time that the census has estimated declining numbers of Welsh speakers while the APS has estimated an increasing number of Welsh speakers.

Following the publication of Census 2021 data, we have published a joint workplan with the ONS to examine the differences between these data sources in more detail, including the exploration of innovative approaches such as data linking, to ensure we have a coherent evidence base which can be used for decision making.

Update on the joint workplan with the ONS

In April 2023, we published a [workplan which outlines the work that the ONS and the Welsh Government are planning to undertake during 2023-24 and beyond](#) to improve our understanding of the main survey and administrative data sources used to produce statistics about the Welsh language. [This workplan was accompanied by a blog post published by the Chief Statistician \(Digital and Data blog\)](#).

We and the ONS published the first output from project 1 in October 2023. [This statistical article explored differences between estimates of Welsh language ability in Census 2021 and the LFS](#), which is the basis for the APS.

Project 4 involves gathering information on how questions about Welsh language skills have been developed and delivered on household surveys,

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including the census. This project will provide a review and summary of this information in order to understand the impact of mode or design effects on the collection of this data, and note if further research needs to be done. We continue to make progress on this project and we will communicate further information about publication plans in due course.

The ONS is currently transforming the way labour market statistics are produced. A new, online-first survey, [the Transformed Labour Force Survey \(TLFS\) \(ONS\)](#), has been running in parallel to the existing LFS since February 2022. Eventually, this new survey is intended to replace the LFS as the lead survey measure for labour market and productivity outputs.

When the ONS makes this switch, we will make the appropriate adjustments to ensure that we can continue to publish data on the Welsh language regularly and advise users on how to interpret these statistics. In the meantime, we have been comparing the results of the two surveys and work is continuing to explore the feasibility of linking TLFS data or its predecessor, [the Labour Market Survey \(LMS\) \(ONS\)](#), with Census 2021.

Work on the remaining projects is scheduled to take place once the previous projects are complete.

Changes to the survey

Following government advice regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the APS as well as all other ONS face-to-face studies about people, families and households were suspended. [Further details of these changes can be found in a statement on the ONS website.](#)

The APS switched from face-to-face to phone interviews in mid-March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ONS has been monitoring the impact this

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change has had on the survey and as a result have re-weighted the estimates accordingly. Face-to-face interviews were reintroduced in autumn 2023. This set of results cover the period from April 2023 to March 2024, meaning that some responses were collected through face-to-face interviews and others over the phone.

By comparing people who completed the survey over the telephone with people who completed the survey face-to-face in the period before March 2020, respondents did appear to be more likely to state that they could speak Welsh when answering the survey over the telephone.

At present, it is not possible to say whether any recent changes in Welsh language ability are as a result of the change in the way the survey is conducted, or real changes in the population's ability in Welsh. The results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Data

[Datasets and interactive tools \(StatsWales\)](#)

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