



Shetland Protected Characteristics Profiles Report

April 2025

Protected Characteristics Profile: Age

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

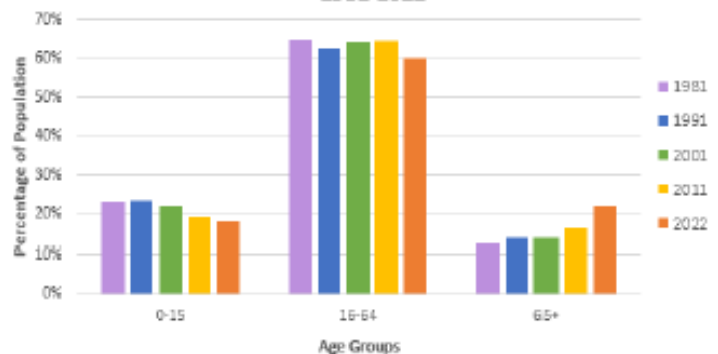
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Age discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their age, in one of the situations that are covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

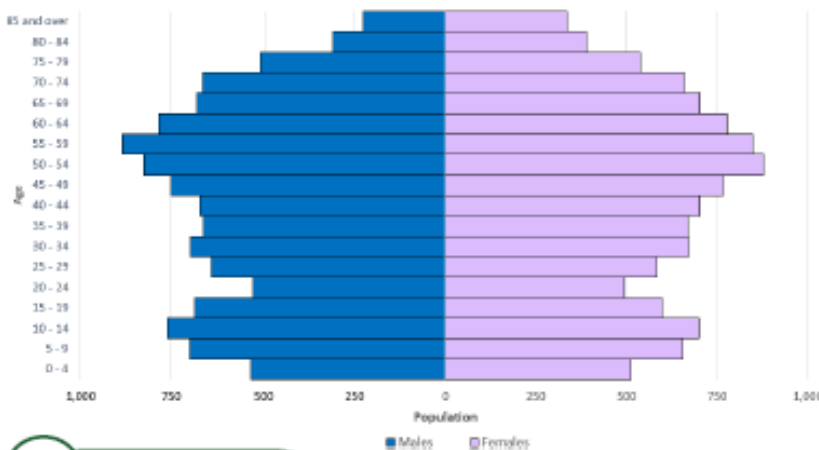
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Since 1981, in Shetland, the 65+ age group has increased each year, whilst the younger age groups have gradually decreased, particularly in 2022. This trend is similar to Scotland and other rural areas.

Percentage of Shetland Population by Age Groups 1981-2022



Shetland Population by Age and Sex in 2022



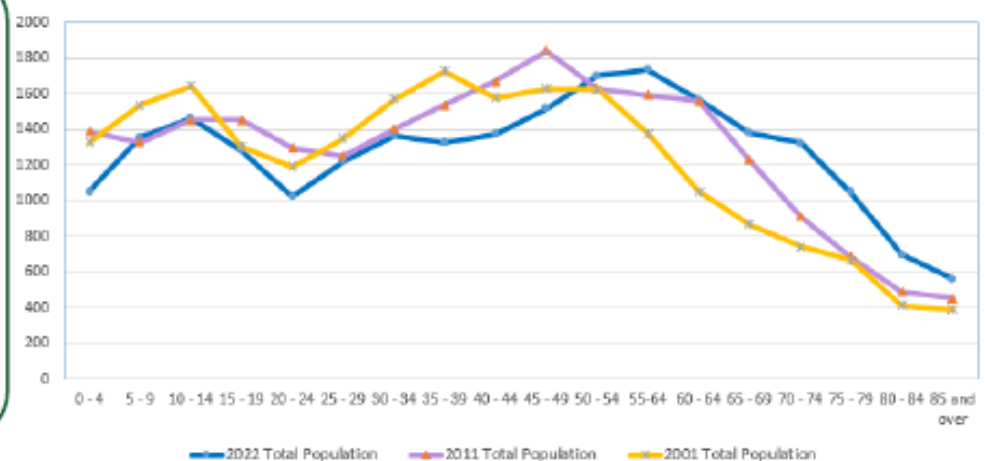
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In 2022, there were notably more males in age groups 0-34 & 55-64 than females, whilst there are more females than males in age groups 35 – 54 & 65-85 and over. This pattern is similar in Orkney, the Western Isles and Scotland, although the Highlands, as a whole, has more females across most age groups.

3

Since 2001, Shetland's older generation (aged 50+) has increased, whilst the number of younger people overall (35 and under) has declined. This trend reflects patterns throughout Scotland and other rural areas.

Shetland Population by Age in 2001, 2011 and 2022



¹ [Age discrimination | EHRC](#)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022, 2011 & 2001)

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who due to their age highlights several key findings:

Employment

Research from the Older People and Employment Scotland 2017 Report, reveals that perceived ageism in the labour market leads participants to believe that older individuals may be forced to accept lower-level jobs, if they need to seek new employment. Ageist and sexist attitudes among employers can interact, particularly disadvantaging older women. As a result, these women often end up in roles for which they are overqualified and underpaid, exacerbating gender inequality in later-life employment opportunities.

Health Disparities

In 2018, FeelsFM launched a campaign alongside young people across Scotland to hear views on mental health. They found that stigma is a significant barrier to young people opening up about their mental health as they feared not being listened to, believed or taken seriously by adults.

Crime

Research from Youth Justice, Keep the Promise Care Review 2020 Report reveals that in Scotland care-experienced children are over represented in the youth criminal justice system, with those in residential care expressing to the Care Review that they had too often had police involvement for behaviour that other families would accommodate within the family.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

Older People

The following summarises the main findings of relevance to this Policy area for Older People.

Access to Services

The main challenges are:

- Accessing buildings, facilities and / or public transport;
- Navigating complex processes and technology systems, such as booking appointments or applying for benefits;
- Relying on others to assist in accessing support and services.

Suggestions for improvement are:

- More flexible service hours, particularly for health services (e.g. evenings or weekends);
- Personalised support, such as a single point of contact;
- Easier to understand services, with clear instructions and support on what to expect and when;
- Greater variety for services to be provided at home; and
- Improved transport reliability and connections, for health appointments.

Health and Care

Positive feedback was provided about health and care professionals and local care homes.

Suggestions for improvement are:

- Increased GP availability and out-of-hours doctor coverage;
- Expanded local treatment options to reduce travel;
- Simplified processes for making appointments, collecting prescriptions, and accessing home adaptations; and
- Improved recruitment and training for health and care staff, to enable older workers to enter the workforce.

Community and Society

Most participants felt the community understood them and there is good support, from family and friends, support groups and local charities. Many felt they could ask for and receive help and feel safe in the community. However there does, now, seem to be less kindness and respect in society and apportioning of blame.

Data Sources: [Older People and Employment in Scotland 2017](#); [See Me Scotland, 2020](#); [Youth Justice 2020](#).

Suggestions for improvement are:

- More training on dignity and respect, to support a shift from blame to kindness, in services and society;
- More training on menopause awareness; and
- Expanding preventative health initiatives.

Cost of Living and Healthy Living

The main challenges are:

- The financial strain of caregiving, ageing and living with health conditions, particularly on a low-income; this can limit access to healthy food and necessities.

Digital and Technology

Opinions are mixed; some prefer digital solutions whilst others find them challenging. There are concerns about online and phone scams and data-sharing, particularly ones targeting older people.

There was positive feedback about services supporting digital access.

Suggestions for improvement are:

- Simplifying online health systems and expanding teleconsultations; and
- Addressing concerns about scams and data privacy.

Communication and Information Sharing

Concerns were raised about the rapid shift to digital systems, leaving some unable to adapt.

Suggestions for improvement are:

- Accessibility for all communication channels (e.g., phone, email, in-person); and
- Transparency in how feedback is addressed.

Young People

Young People in Shetland highlighted the following issues and challenges:

- Adults are frequently suspicious of young people, thinking they are going to cause trouble, particularly if they are in groups of more than 3 – this is stopping young people going to certain places, and being able to ‘just hang out’;
- They can all be penalised for something only one person has done (one young person’s actions don’t represent the motives / actions of all young people) – they point out that this wouldn’t happen to adults with another Protected Characteristic;
- In general, Shetland is old fashioned and prejudiced;
- The wider population associates them with drinking or vaping;
- An assumption that young people make choices (e.g. religion, sexual orientation, disability) for attention;
- Social media exacerbates stories and ‘news’ about young people;
- Young people are paid less for the same job;
- Some employers won’t employ anyone under 18; and
- NHS don’t take young people seriously and mental health services don’t listen or take young people seriously.

Young People in Shetland highlighted the following opportunities:

- There is a need for education and activity to reduce stigma and discrimination: there needs to be greater respect for young people, with no labelling (labelling impacts on mental health) and a consistent approach across all school years and all school settings;
- There are a lot of activities for young people, but nowhere to just hang out – especially without drawing suspicion from wider society, as a group of young people. They would like to meet with businesses and services to discuss the challenges, and seek to find solutions, so that not all young people are banned.
- Explore Shetland minimum wage for young people.

Data Sources: [Older People and Employment in Scotland 2017](#); [See Me Scotland, 2020](#); [Youth Justice 2020](#).

Protected Characteristics Profile: Disability

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

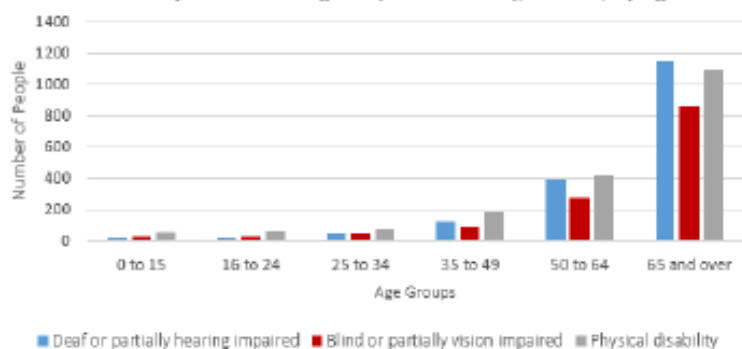
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Disability discrimination is when a person is treated less well compared to others or is put at a disadvantage for a reason that relates to their disability in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

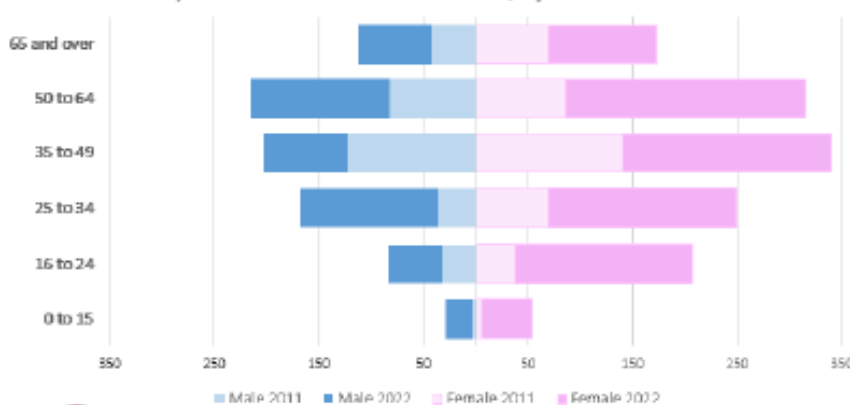
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In 2022, the majority of those who responded to the Census as having a long-term health condition (Deaf or partially hearing impaired, Blind or partially vision impaired or having a physical disability) were aged 65 and over. This trend is similar to Scotland, the Highlands, the Western Isles and Orkney.

Number of people in Shetland who reported in the Census as being Deaf or Partially Hearing Impaired, Blind or Partially Vision Impaired or having a Physical Disability, in 2022, by Age



Number of people in Shetland who reported in the Census that they had a Mental Health Condition, by Gender in 2022 vs 2011



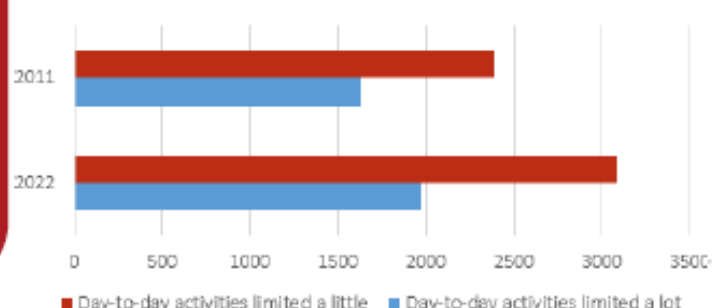
2

In 2022, Shetland, like Scotland, had more females (62%) than males (38%) respond to the Census, that they had a mental health condition, compared to 2011 when the figures were 56% for females and 44% for males. Whereas Orkney, the Western Isles, and Highland had more males in 2011; this trend changed to more females in 2022.

3

Since 2011, there has been an increase in the number of people reporting their day-to-day activities are limited due to a health problem or disability lasting 12 months or more. Additionally, the number of people reporting their day-to-day activities are not limited has decreased. This trend is consistent across Scotland and the Highlands; however, the opposite is true for Orkney.

Number of people who reported in the Census that their day-to-day activities are limited due to a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months



¹ [Disability discrimination | EHRC](#)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022, 2011)

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who have disabilities highlights several key findings:

Employment

Statistics from the DWP: Employment of Disabled People 2022 reveals that one in five working-age individuals are classified as disabled, with the number steadily rising, driven by increased reporting of mental health conditions. Nearly one-third of those classified as disabled in one year are no longer classified as such the following year. There has been a strong growth in the number and rate of disabled people in employment and a narrowing of the gap between the rate of disabled and non-disabled people in employment (the disability employment gap).

The disability employment gap is notably wider among disabled men, older disabled individuals (aged 50–64), those with no qualifications, White people, and disabled individuals in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the North West and North East of England.

Disability Hate Crimes

In 2023/24, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service Report details 903 disability aggravated charges in Scotland, an increase of 22% from the previous year. This is the highest annual number of charges in relation to this crime reported since the legislation (creating this aggravation) came into force in 2010. Since then, it has been an almost unbroken upward trend.

Economic Disparities

A rapid evidence review by the Scottish Centre for Social Research states that compared to non-disabled people, disabled people are more likely to live on low incomes and nearly one-half of people in poverty live in a household where someone is disabled. Deep poverty, defined as a household income 40% below the national median, is nearly twice as prevalent among working-age disabled people compared with non-disabled working-age people.

Population

Nearly one in four of the working-age population in the UK, in 22/23, are classed as disabled based on an analysis from the Department for Work and Pensions' family resources survey. Amongst disabled working-age adults, the most prevalent impairment type reported was mental health impairments at 47%.

Mental Wellbeing

Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People research report, from 2019, states that disabled people have lower average mental wellbeing scores than non-disabled people (45 compared to 52 on a scale of 14 to 72).

Lack of Data and Understanding

Frontline staff from local authorities report that disabled victims often lack access to advocacy and consequently do not receive necessary support in dealing with and reporting discrimination and hate crime. Being Disabled in Britain: a Journey Less Equal, 2017 Report, also emphasises the lack of data available to monitor, such as for disabled employees and employers to recruit disabled staff.

Discrimination & Harassment in Scotland

The Scottish Household Survey 2023 states that 11% of disabled adults in Shetland have experienced discrimination and/or harassment in the last 12 months.

This places it as 15th of 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, with the Scottish national average of 11.37%.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

The following summary highlights the main findings from two disability groups run by local services.

Access to Services

Many of those who responded rely on transport services. This means that information about services, links between different services, punctuality and easy access to public transport, is important. There is a desire for more public transport, including links to work, education, health appointments and leisure and particularly where there are unsafe walking routes in rural areas, so that people with a disability can be more independent.

Data Sources: [Hate Crime in Scotland 2023-24](#) | [COPFS: Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People 2019](#); [Understanding the drivers of food insecurity among disabled people: A rapid evidence review \(natcen.ac.uk\) 2023](#); [Employment of disabled people 2022 - GOV.UK](#); [Supporting documents - Discrimination and Harassment in Scotland, results from the 2023 Scottish Household Survey - gov.scot](#); [12. Poverty - Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people - gov.scot](#); [Being disabled in Britain: a journey less equal | EHRC 2017](#).

Respondents highlighted the cost of external travel, particularly as cheaper options, such as the pods on Northlink, are not an option for many of those with a disability. The challenges and stresses of external travel mean that some would prefer healthcare appointments to be in Shetland.

Other suggestions for improvement are:

- Better designed ramps and access to buildings and shops to enable wheelchair users to move around;
- More disabled parking across Shetland;
- Better provision and accessibility of public toilets;
- More opportunities to retain independent living whilst having more activities at Supported Living and Outreach;
- Greater choice of communication methods to contact services, such as BSL and Makaton;
- Services open outwith current normal office hours, including EGRC;
- More compassion and understanding from bus drivers of blue buses and public buses towards bus users; and
- More local amenities to support those with specific disabilities.

Health and Care

Some respondents shared information about facing discrimination accessing health services, requesting that NHS staff have training in disability awareness, negative language and being more sensitive.

There was a request to make healthcare appointments less scary and quieter.

Employment

It is important to feel independent in the working environment, but there is acknowledgement of the need for support in certain areas. Support staff are valued, but some participants would like to earn more by working in mainstream employment.

Discrimination when applying for jobs is experienced, with employers stating they cannot employ because of the participant's disability.

Suggestions for improvement are:

- Opportunities for skills development and support to move into mainstream employment opportunities; and
- More opportunities to learn to drive.

Community and Society

Most participants feel they are treated well in the community and are understood. However, there was mention of stigma, as a result of disability.

Suggestions include:

- More opportunities for volunteering such as at polycrubs;
- More outreach from support groups, for example, in halls, and more information about what community groups are already doing;
- Increased awareness and protection from discrimination in Shetland;
- More promotion of advocacy services; and
- Share resources to support those with a disability, within the community.

Safe Places

Most participants feel safe in Shetland, but additional street lighting along the main roads in Lerwick would help to feel safer at night. Improved road safety measures at the junction near COPE would support greater independence for those commuting to and from work.

Active and Sociable Life

Participants would like to walk more often and be able to walk to work but cannot, as it is too far away.

Suggestions include:

Data Sources: [Hate Crime in Scotland 2023-24 | COPFS](#); [Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People 2019: Understanding the drivers of food insecurity among disable people: A rapid evidence review \(natcen.sc.uk\) 2023](#); [Employment of disabled people 2022 - GOV.UK](#); [Supporting documents - Discrimination and Harassment in Scotland, results from the 2023 Scottish Household Survey - gov.scot](#); [12. Poverty - Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people - gov.scot](#); [Being disabled in Britain: a journey less equal | EHRC 2017](#).

- More social activities such as discos, karaoke, dance lessons and gigs in Shetland;
- More physical activities such as more boccia sessions, ability sports sessions, more walking and joining a football club and female football team; and
- More walking paths in local villages and planting of trees for people to enjoy.

Cost of Living

There is a lack of financial support for homeowners with disabilities, preventing adaptations to these properties, which in turn disqualifies them from receiving housing-related financial assistance.

Financial resources to assist with off-island travel and availability, particularly in emergencies, would be beneficial; those with a disability need to pay for a support worker, to travel with them.



Data Sources: [Hate Crime in Scotland 2023-24 | COPFS](#); [Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People 2019](#); [Understanding the drivers of food insecurity among disable people: A rapid evidence review \(natcen.ac.uk\) 2023](#); [Employment of disabled people 2022 - GOV.UK](#); [Supporting documents - Discrimination and Harassment in Scotland, results from the 2023 Scottish Household Survey - gov.scot](#); [12. Poverty - Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people - gov.scot](#); [Being disabled in Britain: a journey less equal | EHRC 2017](#).

Protected Characteristics Profile: Gender Reassignment

Purpose

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Background

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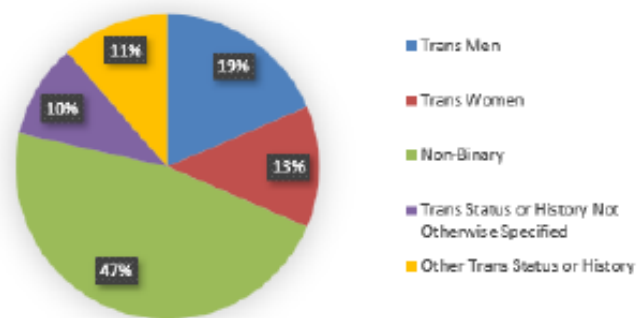
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Gender reassignment discrimination is when a person is treated differently because they are trans in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

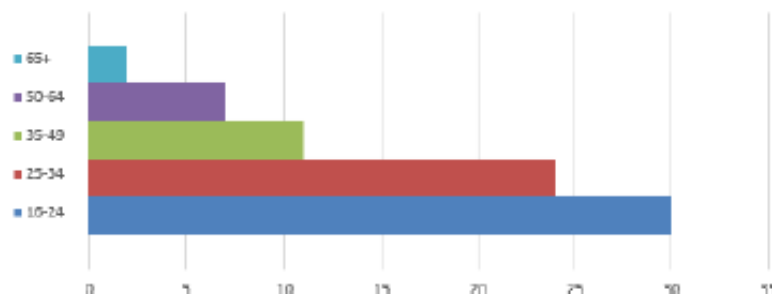
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In 2022 in Shetland, 47% of those who responded to the Census to say they were trans or have a trans history, were non-binary. Of the remaining respondents 19% were trans men, 13% trans women, 11% other trans status or history and 10% not otherwise specified. This trend is similar to Scotland, the Highlands, the Western Isles and Orkney.

Percentage of people who said yes to Trans Status and History in Shetland



Number of people who answered yes to Trans Status and History, by Age in Shetland



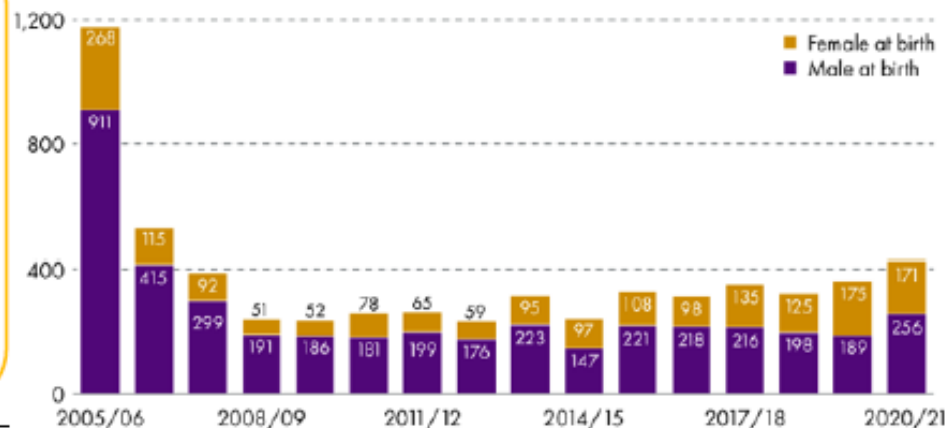
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Among those who answered yes to trans status and history in the Census, most were aged 16-34, with the numbers gradually decreasing with age. Compared to Scotland and other rural areas, Shetland had the highest percentage of those aged 25-34 to confirm their trans status.

3

Since 2005, in the UK, there have been 6010 Gender Recognition Certificates granted, of which 4226 were male at birth (70%) and 1784 were female at birth (30%). The legislation created a process to enable trans people to change their sex on their UK birth certificates.¹

Gender Recognition Certificates (GRC) granted, by gender at birth in the UK, 2005-2021



¹ Gender reassignment discrimination | EHRC (equality/humanrights.com)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022);

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who identify as transsexual highlights several key findings:

Health Disparities

Research explained in the Herald, Scotland, explains that trans people experience disproportionately poorer health than those who fit their assigned birth gender. They are more likely to suffer from mental health issues and be victims of crime and, where their transgender status is known, be subject to bullying and harassment. Additionally, 37% of trans people avoid seeking healthcare for fear of discrimination from staff.

Workplace Discrimination

LGBT Health and Wellbeing research report reveals that employees may experience disadvantage due to their trans identity such as: experiences of trans identity negatively impacting on their job prospects, workplaces not being trans inclusive, harassment and unfair treatment at work impacting negatively on their mental health.

Hate Crimes

There were 84 charges reported to the Crown Office in Scotland in 2023/24, with an aggravation of prejudice relating to transgender identity. This is the second highest annual number of such charges recorded since 2010, two fewer than the 21/22 figure of 86.

Education Barriers

Research into the experience of trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Scotland's colleges and Universities by TransEdu Scotland found that students often face significant barriers in education settings related to their trans status such as: provision of gender-neutral facilities, navigating administrative processes and feeling unsafe or unwelcome on campus. The biggest challenge concerned peer relationships with colleagues and students, with many experiencing ignorance and hostility.

Lack of Data and Understanding

Whilst there are no exact figures, SPICe Research that contributed to the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill reveals there are approximately 200,000 – 500,000 trans people in the UK based on the prevalence range of 0.35% and 1% of the population. This is based on work carried out by the Gender Identity Research and Education Society.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

A number of conversations were held with people in the local community, including members of the Pride Committee. To date, there has not been an opportunity to receive formal feedback.



Data Sources: [Transgender Education Scotland Report 2017](#); [LGBT Health – Trans People and Work in Scotland 2019](#); [The Herald 2023 – Gender reassignment process in Scotland explained 2023](#); [Stonewall 2018](#); [SPICe Briefing: Gender Recognition Reform \(Scotland\) Bill 2022](#); [Hate Crime in Scotland, 2023-24](#).

Protected Characteristics Profile: Marriage and Civil Partnership

Purpose

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Background

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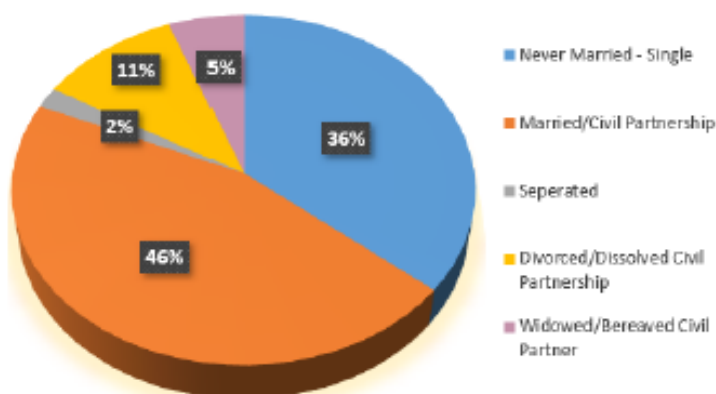
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Marriage and civil partnership discrimination is when a person is treated differently at work because they are married or in a civil partnership.¹

Key Points

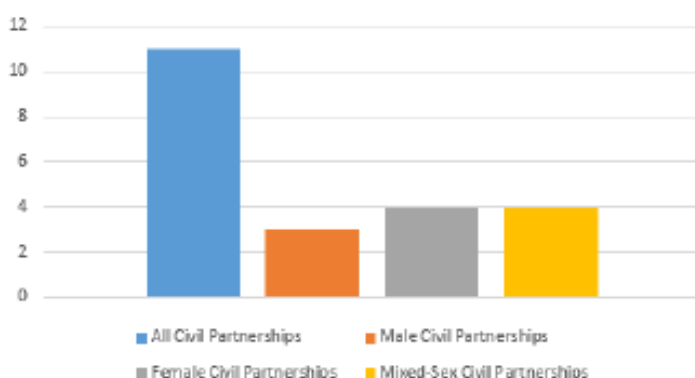
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In 2022, 46% of Shetland's population who responded to the Scottish Survey Core Questions were married or in a civil partnership, with 36% single, 11% divorced, 5% widowed and 2% separated. This trend is similar for Orkney, the Western Isles, Highland and Scotland overall.

Marital and Civil Status in Shetland in 2022



Civil Partnerships in Shetland from 2005 - 2023



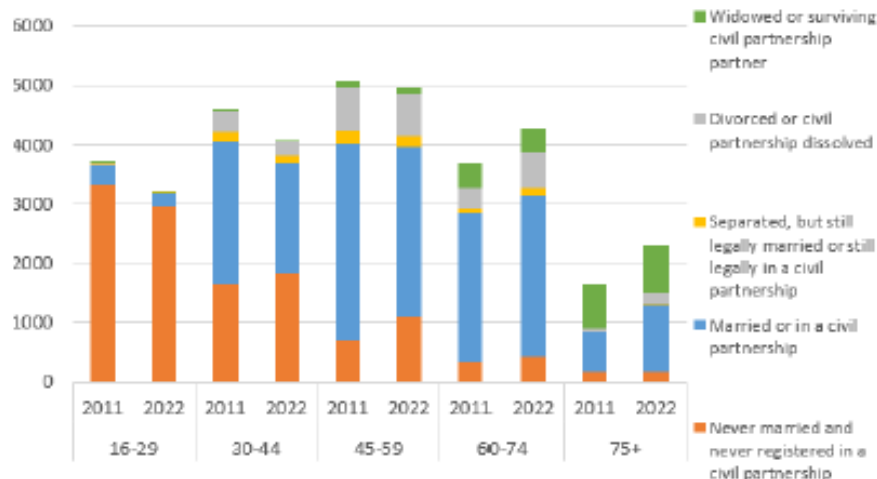
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In Shetland, most registered civil partnerships through National Records Scotland are female or mixed-sex, with fewer male partnerships. This trend is similar to Scotland overall and Highland, but Orkney and the Western Isles have more mixed-sex and fewer male partnerships.

3

There has been a decline in those who are married or in civil partnerships, across most age groups between 2011 and 2022. There is an increase in those never married or registered in a civil partnership among younger groups. As expected, the number of people married, in a civil partnership, separated, or divorced increases to the 45-59 age range.

Marital and Civil Status in Shetland in 2011 vs 2022



¹ [Marriage and civil partnership discrimination | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/marriage-civil-partnership-discrimination)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022, 2011); Scottish Survey Core Questions (2022); National Records Scotland (2005-2023).

Summary of Other Publications

There is a lack of focused research on marriage and civil partnership discrimination at work in Scotland and Britain. While there is some research on same-sex couples and transgender individuals within the marriage and civil partnership framework, these studies are part of the broader discussions on LGBTQ+ rights.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

Efforts were made to engage with individuals by inviting all Council staff to participate in a Focus Group or 1-1 discussion; to date, no one has made contact wishing to discuss issues.



Data Sources: [Transgender Education Scotland Report 2017](#); [LGBT Health – Trans People and Work in Scotland 2019](#); [The Herald 2023 – Gender reassignment process in Scotland explained 2023](#); [Stonewall 2018](#); [SPICE Briefing: Gender Recognition Reform \(Scotland\) Bill 2022](#); [Hate Crime in Scotland, 2023-24](#).

Protected Characteristics Profile: Pregnancy and Maternity

Purpose

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Background

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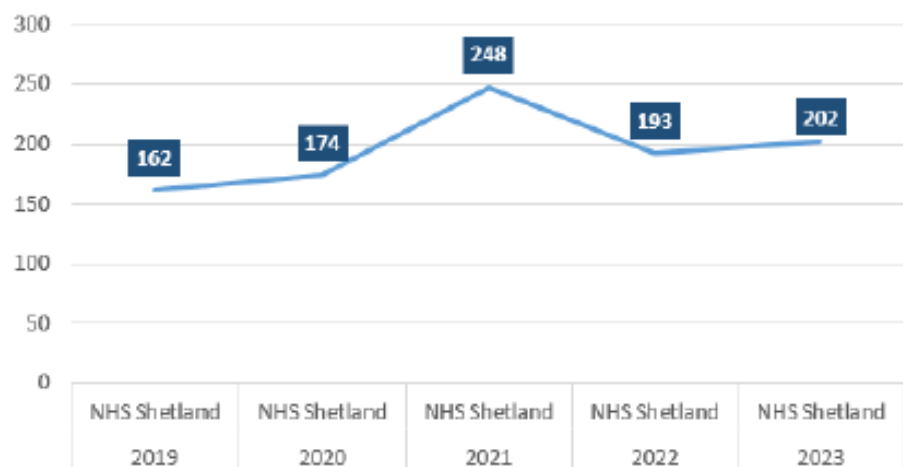
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Pregnancy and maternity discrimination is when a person is treated unfavourably (differently) because they are pregnant, breastfeeding or they have given birth, in one of the situations that are covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

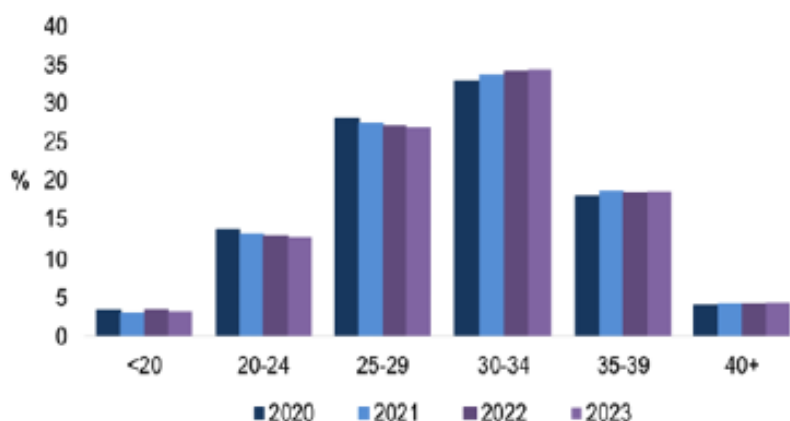
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In 2021, NHS Shetland experienced a notable increase in the number of pregnancies booked. While this trend was consistent across most Scottish health boards, Shetland saw the largest percentage increase in booked pregnancies in 2021.

Number of booked pregnancies at NHS Shetland



Percentage of pregnancies booked, by age



2

Across Scotland, between 2020-2023, there has been an increase in pregnancies booked by women aged 30 years and older, with a decrease in pregnancies booked by younger women. Booked is defined by the first midwife appointment before 10 weeks of pregnancy.

¹ [Pregnancy and maternity discrimination | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.ehrc.org.uk/en/our-work/areas-of-work/pregnancy-and-maternity-discrimination)

Data Sources: Public Health Scotland (2019-2024); Public Health Scotland. (2024). Percentage of pregnancies booked, by age. In: *Antenatal Booking in Scotland*. [online] Public Health Scotland, p. 8. Available at: <https://publichealthscotland.scot/og/> [Accessed 1 August 2024].

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals during pregnancy and maternity highlights several key findings:

Workplace Discrimination

Research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that 73% of Scottish women had a negative or possibly discriminatory experience at work while pregnant, on maternity leave or on return to work; one in five mothers experienced harassment or negative comments related to pregnancy or flexible working from their employer and /or colleagues. The study showed there are barriers to raising complaints about discrimination in the workplace due to fears of negative consequences and not being taken seriously.

Mental Health and Disability

Evidence from the SG Equality Outcomes: Pregnancy and Maternity Review suggests women with mental health issues or learning disabilities suffer discrimination during pregnancy within the health system in the UK. This negatively impacts on pregnant women's engagement with healthcare.

Pre & Post Natal Care

Evidence from the SG Equality Outcomes: Pregnancy and Maternity Review showed that when using the healthcare services in Scotland, teenage mothers often face negative stereotypes during prenatal and postnatal care in relation to their parenting abilities. Young expectant fathers were more likely than expectant mothers in the same age-range to report negative experiences of healthcare. Research from the SG Equality Outcomes: Pregnancy and Maternity Evidence Review.

Health Disparities

Research from the SG Equality Outcomes: Pregnancy and Maternity Evidence Review shows that obese women experience discrimination accessing maternity and post-natal care. There is an identified stigma associated with obesity in pregnancy which impacts negatively on maternal healthcare experiences.

Unfair Dismissal

In 2017, the Power to the Bump campaign research showed that young mothers are significantly more likely to experience pregnancy and maternity discrimination, with mothers under 25 years old, six times more like to report they were dismissed at some point between informing their employer of their pregnancy and participating in the survey.

Migrant & Asylum Seeker Status

Research from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists found that Migrant pregnant women often face multiple barriers to care, such as language barriers, trauma from previous experiences, and lack of knowledge about their rights and the healthcare system; they are more likely to access antenatal care later than recommended.

Ethnic Minority Background

Pregnant Minority Ethnic women are subjected to discrimination throughout the UK healthcare service. Research from BMC Public Health shows that discrimination is often rooted in stereotypes, cultural insensitivity and inequalities in healthcare treatment with significant disparities in quality of care compared to others.

Education Barriers

Research from the SG Equality Outcomes: Pregnancy and Maternity Evidence Review Studies of the experiences of pregnant students show learning environments can be unsupportive and discriminatory. Teenage pregnancy can have a severe impact on the education of mothers, possibly hindering returning to school or continuation on to post-school education.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

A focus group facilitated by colleagues from Shetland Islands Council's Community Planning & Human Resources departments took place in December, with participants able to attend in person or online. However, as the findings specifically relate to Council staff and issues of discrimination within the Council, the Focus Group findings are not relevant to these profiles.



Data sources: [Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination Working Group, 2021. Final Report](#); [Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016](#); [Scottish Government Equality Outcomes: Pregnancy and Maternity Evidence Review, 2013](#); [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2023. Position Statement: Equitable access to maternity care for refugees, asylum seeking and undocumented migrant women: Inside the 'imperfect mosaic': Minority ethnic women's qualitative experiences of race and ethnicity during pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity care in the United Kingdom 2023](#)

Protected Characteristics Profile: Race

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

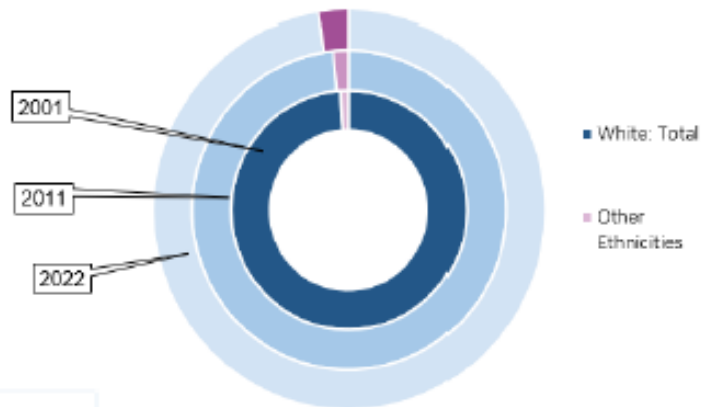
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Race discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their race in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

1

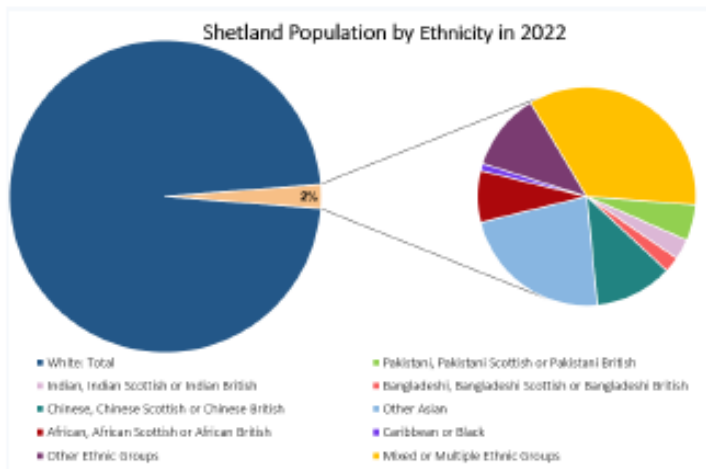
In 2001, 2011 and 2022, a majority of the Shetland population (98-99%) responded to the Census to describe their ethnic group as White, with Other Ethnicities making up 1%-2% of the total population. There has been a gradual increase in diversity, consistent with the trend across Scotland.

Shetland Population by Ethnicity in 2001, 2011 and 2022



2

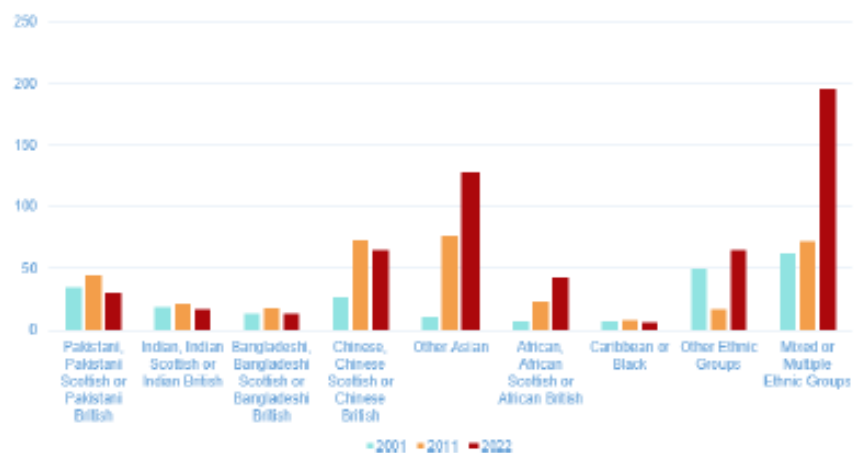
In 2022, the Other Ethnicities groups (2%) accounted for 563 people in Shetland, according to the Census. The highest number of people (196) described their ethnic group as mixed or multiple ethnic groups; 128 people responded as other Asian; 65 people responded as other ethnic groups; 65 Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British, with all other ethnic groups ranging from 6-43 people per group.



3

This graph shows an increase in Shetland's diversity over time, specifically among those who responded to the Census to describe their ethnic group as Other Asian, African, African Scottish or African British, Other Ethnic Groups and Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups. Some group respondents, like the Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi communities grew, until 2011, but declined by 2022.

Population by Ethnicity in Shetland (by Census year)



¹ [Race discrimination | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/what-we-do/our-work/anti-discrimination-law)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022, 2011 & 2001).

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who are of race in Britain highlights several key findings:

Health Disparities

Research from the Healing a divided Britain review into race inequality reveals there are stark health inequalities, particularly in mental health settings; not only do Ethnic Minorities suffer poorer health, they also suffer from poorer access to healthcare compared to the White population. In Britain, Black people will have longer stays and higher rates of re-admission in mental health settings, and studies report lower access to palliative end of life care services for Ethnic Minorities compared with White British people. Black British women are four times more likely to be detained under the mental health legislation than White British women, and Mixed Ethnicity women almost seven times more likely.

Crime

Race report statistics published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2020, reveals that the rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people are three times higher than for White people in Britain; 18 people per thousand of the population compared to 6 people per thousand for White

Education and Learning

The YMCA's Young and Black report found that 95% of young Black people in the UK have heard or witnessed racist language at school; with findings showing that 49% feel that racism is the biggest hurdle to academic achievement and 50% saying that teacher perceptions are the biggest barrier to educational success. These experiences of young Black people in the UK mirrors that of their peers in other countries, such as the US and Australia. Research from the Healing a divided Britain review into race inequality reveals just 6% of Black school leavers attended a Russell Group university, compared with 12% of Mixed and Asian school leavers and 11% of White school leavers.

Living Standards

In Scotland, Ethnic Minority households are more likely to experience overcrowding; 11.8% for Ethnic Minority households compared to 2.9% for White households, according to the Race Report statistics published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2020.

Employment

Research from the Healing a divided Britain review into race inequality reveals that race inequality impacts on employment and income. For example, unemployment rates are higher for people of all other ethnic minorities compared to white people in Britain. Black workers, with degrees, earn 23.1% less on average than their white counterparts, and there is a considerable gap in the percentage of White (89%) and Ethnic Minority (2-5%) people starting apprenticeships in Britain.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

"Shetland has become more diverse; it can be easier to mix with people of other races, here, than in England. However, it's important to go out to meet people, and start becoming part of the community."

Some people have faced discrimination when coming to Shetland from elsewhere and being termed a "Sooth Moother", stating they are not believed, included or taken seriously and are often dismissed compared to Shetlanders.

People face verbal abuse because of the colour of their skin and their religion, and this can go unreported.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Creating safe, open and honest spaces to encourage discussion, learning and understanding about different backgrounds, cultures and identities;
- Opportunities to welcome more refugees in Shetland and how to support them; and
- Resources to feel safer, in Lerwick and Scalloway on the main streets, particularly in the evenings.



Data Sources: [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(2016\) Healing a divided Britain: the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy](#); [Marchant, N. \(2020\) Study: Almost all Black British children have experienced racism at school](#); [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(2020\)](#)

Protected Characteristics Profile: Religion

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

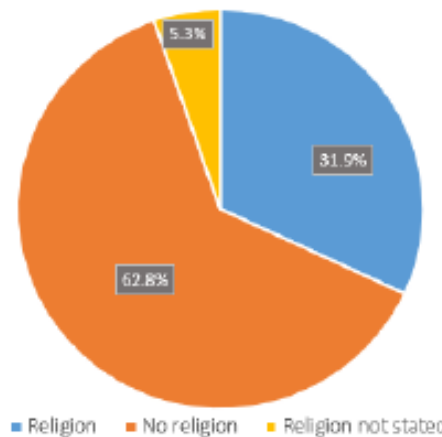
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Religion or belief discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their religion or belief, or lack of religion or belief, in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

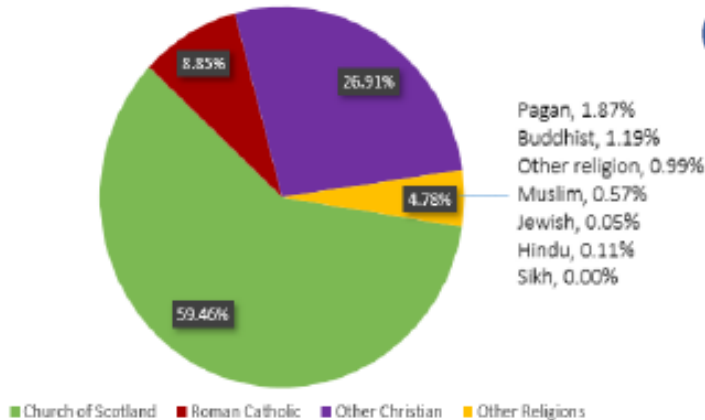
1

In 2022, 31.9% of those who responded to the Census stated they were religious, with 62.8% of respondents stating they were not religious. Shetland has the highest percentage of non-religious people, and the lowest percentage of religious people compared to other rural areas and Scotland overall.

Percentage of Shetland Population by Religion



Percentage of People Practicing each Religion, by Religious Group, against Total Number of Religious People



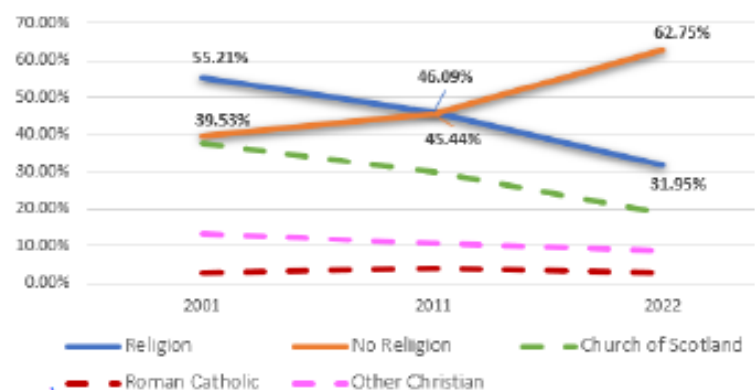
2

Among Shetland's religious population, 59.46% responded they follow the Church of Scotland, 8.85% Roman Catholicism, 26.91% other Christian denominations, and 4.78% other religions. This pattern is similar in Orkney, the Western Isles, and the Highlands, though Scotland as a whole has a higher percentage of Roman Catholics (31%) and other religions (9%), but fewer other Christians (12%).

3

Since 2001, the percentage of people who stated in the Census they were religious has decreased in Shetland. Religion as a whole has declined across Scotland, with the number of people identifying as non-religious increasing by over 20% from 2001 to 2022.

Percentage Practicing a Religion or no Religion in Shetland (by Census year)



¹ Religion or belief discrimination | EHRC (equalityhumanrights.com)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022, 2011 & 2001); Scottish Survey Core Questions.

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who have a religion or belief highlights several key findings:

Religion in the Workplace

Research from Religion at Work 2023 Survey reveals that 47% of 6,315 workers in the UK and US, feel uncomfortable discussing their religious festivals at work, 64% of respondents did not feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols at work, and 38% felt their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress.

Lack of Understanding in Religious Education (R.E)

There are frequent instances where those of particular religions face discrimination due to a lack of understanding of their religious practices. Evidence shows that this is exacerbated by reduced provision of R.E in schools, which limits school leavers' abilities to have respect for and tolerance of people with different religious beliefs in their own communities. This was highlighted during a parliamentary debate on Religious Education in Modern Britain.

Religious Hate Crimes

Research from Stop Hate UK reveals in 2021/22, there were 8,730 religious or other faith Hate Crimes in the UK, an increase of 37% from the previous year. Religious or faith-based Hate Crimes have increased for the last 5 years and are one of the most common Hate Crimes according to Stop Hate UK.

Potential for Healthcare Discrimination

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities published Guidance in 2017 that recognises the differences in cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs alongside other factors can limit the success of healthcare provision. Other factors include language barriers, insecure immigration status and housing, discrimination, lack of trust between patients and healthcare professionals, and the time and cost of attending appointments.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

People with different faiths highlight that they generally feel that Shetland is a peaceful and friendly place, and that the community is non-judgemental, with a healthy scepticism, respect and cultural understanding. However, pockets of prejudice remain.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Provision of religious premises to worship and meet for prayer, particularly for smaller religious groups;
- More accessible women-only sessions and healthcare provision, including gender-specific leisure activities;
- More opportunities for alcohol-free events to reduce social pressures and misuse of alcohol in Shetland; and
- More conversations about faith, where honesty and openness are key, including in schools and communities, to improve understanding about religious groups and cultural differences.



Data Sources: The UK in the World Values Survey (WVS) (1981-2022); [Stop Hate UK 2022](#); [Religious discrimination in Britain: A review of research evidence, 2000-10](#); [Religion at Work 2023](#); [Hansard, 2022. Religious Education in Modern Britain](#)

Protected Characteristics Profile: Sex

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

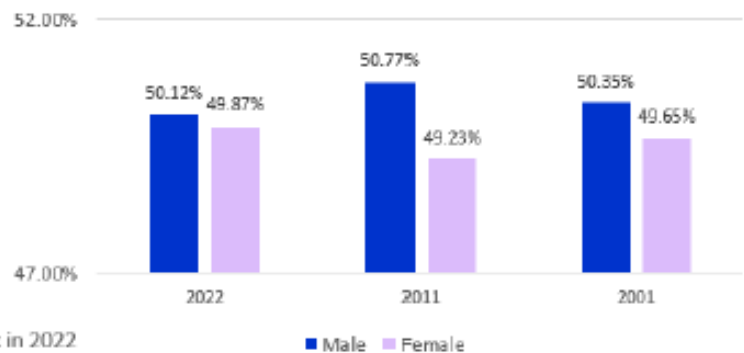
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Sex discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their sex, in one of the situations that are covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

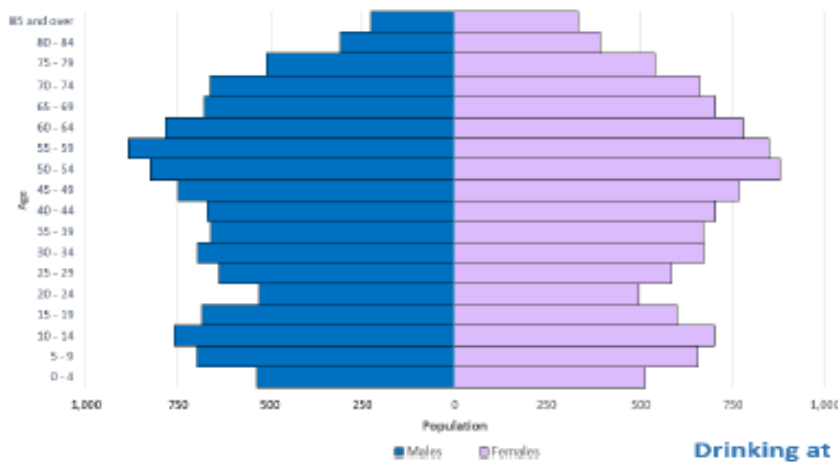
1

The population in Shetland, by sex, has remained stable over time, with a slight male majority across all Census years. In contrast, Scotland has consistently had more females than males every Census year.

Percentage of Population in Shetland, by Sex, in 2022, 2011 & 2001



Shetland Population by Age and Sex in 2022



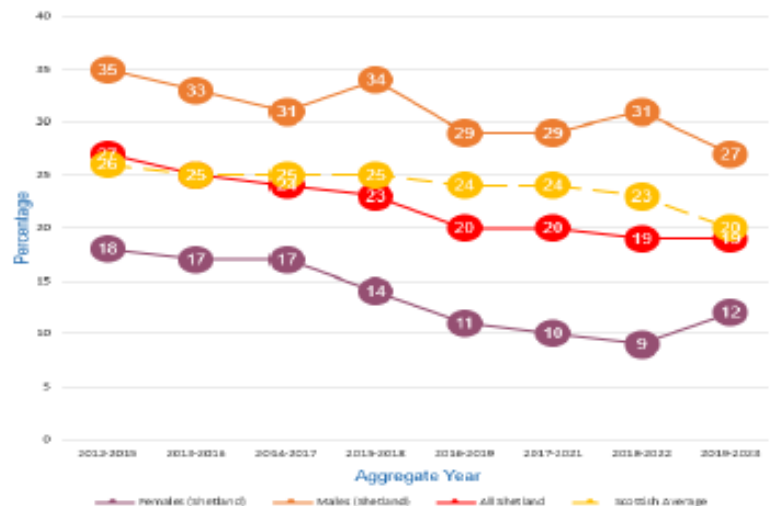
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In 2022 there were more males in age groups 0-34 & 55-64 than females, whilst there are more females than males in age groups 35-54 & 65-85 and over. This pattern is similar in Orkney, the Western Isles and Scotland, although the Highlands, as a whole, has more females across most age groups.

3

Over time, males in Shetland have consistently consumed alcohol at harmful levels more than females. However, since 2012, the overall average in Shetland has remained lower than the Scottish average and has declined over time.

Drinking at Harmful Levels Over Time by Sex



¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010/sex-discrimination>

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022); National Records Scotland (2022); Scottish Household Survey (2023).

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who due to their sex highlights several key findings:

Employment

Research from the Older People and Employment Scotland 2017 report, reveals that there is evidence to suggest that ageist and sexist attitudes among employers can interact, particularly disadvantaging older women. As a result, these women often end up in roles for which they are overqualified and underpaid, exacerbating gender inequality in later-life employment opportunities.

Workplace Discrimination

Research from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research found that women aged over 50, in Scotland, face significant barriers such as ageism, gender discrimination, and limited access to career advancement opportunities. Women in this demographic often face lower wages, reduced job security, and are under-represented in leadership roles.

Education

In the UK, there is a higher percentage of men than women who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This has been the case since 2001.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

This is a summary of the key issues, challenges and opportunities for women living in Shetland, provided through an online survey promoted by Shetland Women's Aid.

Living with Fear and Insecurity: a recurring theme is the fear of violence and harassment that women in Shetland experience. This includes sexual assault and harassment, with several women recounting personal experiences ranging from inappropriate comments and groping to violent assaults and rape. This fear is amplified by the understanding that perpetrators are rarely held accountable. One respondent shared how the perpetrator of her assault was only convicted after he went on to commit even more serious crimes, suggesting a reluctance to believe victims and take action against abusers. This lack of accountability can leave women feeling vulnerable and unprotected.

Navigating a Culture of Silence: the Shetland community can be a double-edged sword for women experiencing abuse. The fear of social repercussions, judgment, or retaliation from the abuser or their network of family and friends is described by some respondents as a significant deterrent to reporting abuse or seeking help. Some describe the pressure to conform to traditional norms and maintain a facade of harmony, even at the expense of personal safety and well-being.

Confronting Endemic Sexism and Misogyny: some respondents describe a culture of sexism and misogyny that permeates everyday life. The Up Helly Aa festival was often cited as a stark example of male entitlement and the acceptance of double standards. Some describe how men are seemingly given a free pass to engage in infidelity during the festival, while women are expected to tolerate this behaviour, with no consideration of women's feelings and boundaries.

This ingrained sexism extends beyond the festival, manifesting in the prevalence of sexist and misogynistic language, particularly in social settings like pubs, where women are expected to endure "sexual jokes and harassment". This normalisation of disrespect contributes to a hostile environment where women feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Respondents also describe a persistent "boys' club" mentality in business and community organisations, which excludes women from decision-making positions and leadership roles. This exclusion perpetuates a power imbalance, reinforcing the idea that men are more capable and deserving of authority.

Struggling with Limited Support and Resources: the geographical isolation of Shetland presents a significant barrier for women seeking help and support. Respondents describe long waiting lists for counselling and limited access to specialised services, such as trauma therapy. The high cost of living and travelling south further restricts options for women seeking to escape abusive situations or access resources available on the mainland. This lack of accessible and

Data Sources: [Older People and Employment in Scotland 2017](#); [Fair Work Convention, 2022](#); [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\), 2024](#).

affordable support leaves women feeling trapped and isolated, exacerbating their sense of vulnerability and hopelessness.

Suggestions for Improvement include:

- **Challenging Cultural Norms:** support to create a shift in attitudes and beliefs through open dialogue, education, and a willingness to confront harmful behaviours and attitudes;
- **Strengthening Support Systems:** improving access to support services for women experiencing abuse or other challenges, including ensuring that specialised services, such as trauma therapy, are readily available;
- **Promoting Gender Equality:** breaking down the "boys' club" mentality and promoting gender equality in all aspects of Shetland life. For example by encouraging women's leadership and participation in decision-making roles, promoting equal opportunities in the workplace, and challenging traditional gender roles that limit women's choices and aspirations; and
- **Holding Perpetrators Accountable:** a zero-tolerance approach to violence and harassment against women, that believes and supports victims, holds perpetrators accountable for their actions, and sends a clear message that such behaviour will not be tolerated.



Protected Characteristics Profile: Sexual Orientation

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

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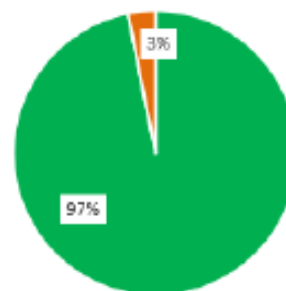
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Sexual orientation discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their sexual orientation in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

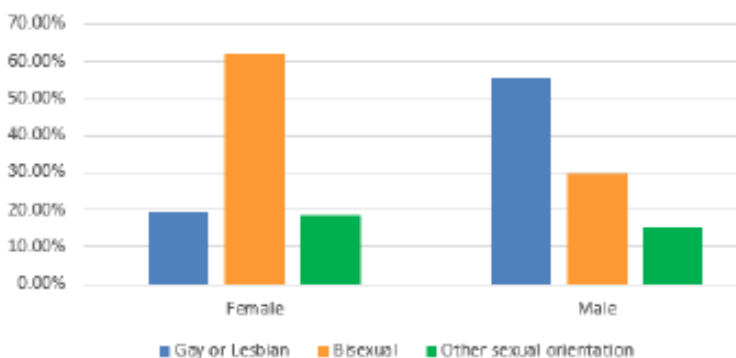
1

In 2022, in Shetland, the majority (97%) of those who responded to the Census, stated their sexual orientation as heterosexual/straight, with 3% of respondents as gay or lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual orientation. This data is similar for Orkney, Western Isles, Highland, and Scotland as a whole.

Sexual Orientation of all People Aged 16 and over in Shetland



Percentage of people who reported in the Census as being Gay or Lesbian, Bisexual or Other Sexual Orientation, in 2022, by Gender in Shetland



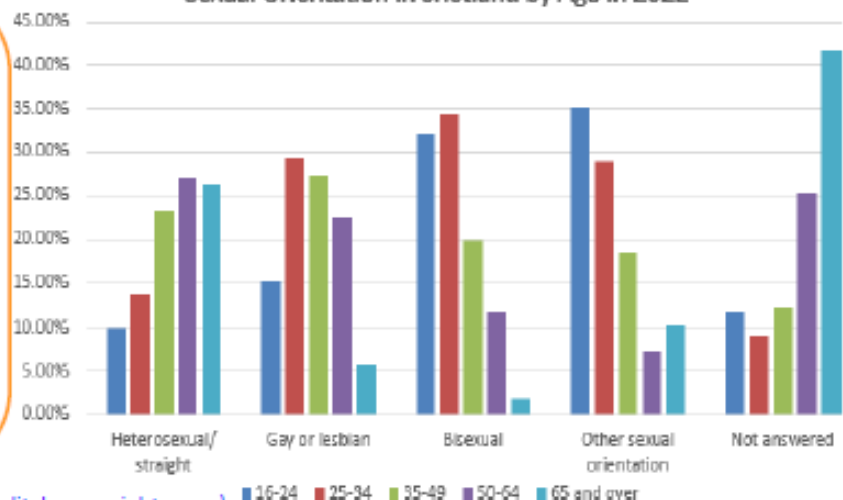
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In Shetland, among the gay or lesbian, bisexual and other sexual orientations, most females who responded to the Census said they were bisexual (62%), with most males (54%) stating that they were gay. This is similar to other rural areas and Scotland overall.

3

In 2022, younger generations in Shetland were more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ in the Census, whereas older generations tended to identify as heterosexual or chose not to respond. While Scotland's highest percentage of bisexual individuals is in the 16-24 age group, Shetland's peak occurs in the 25-34 age group. Similarly, the 25-34 age group has the highest percentage of gay or lesbian individuals in both Shetland and Scotland.

Sexual Orientation in Shetland by Age in 2022



¹ [Sexual orientation discrimination | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/sexual-orientation-discrimination)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022);

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals as a result of their sexual orientation highlights several key findings:

The UK is the 15th most inclusive country for LGBTI in 2024

In 2024, ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map ranked the UK 15th out of 49 countries, assessing laws and policies affecting LGBTI human rights. The UK scored well in family rights and civil society space but performed less strongly in areas like equality, hate crime, legal gender recognition, intersex rights, and asylum policies.

Hate Crime

Research from LGBT in Scotland: Hate Crime and Discrimination report by Stonewall Scotland 2017, reveals 20% of all LGBT people experienced a hate crime or incident due to their sexual orientation and / or gender identity; with almost half of trans people having experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity. 13% of LGBT people who visited a café, restaurant, bar or nightclub in the last 12 months stated they have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation and / or gender identity. 87% of those who experienced hate crime, or an incident did not report it to the police.

Discrimination and Less Fair Treatment at Work

Research from the Scottish LGBT Equality Report 2015 reveals 24% of respondents had personally experienced discrimination or harassment (22%) at work because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Fear of Prejudice

The Scottish LGBT Equality Report 2015 states that the majority of LGBT people in Scotland still never or only sometimes feel able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity with their own family (52%), at work (60%) or when accessing services (71%), for fear of the prejudice.

Health Disparities

Research from the Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Scotland Fairer report, reveals 69% of 289 trans and non-binary respondents had not been to a sexual health clinic in the last 2 years; 24% of this group said this was due to fear and anxieties relating to their gender identity. The report details that gay, lesbian and bisexual women face barriers accessing sexual health services; a health needs assessment of LGBT people found gay and lesbian women felt health professionals saw them as low risk and reluctant to do full sexually transmitted infection screenings; some bisexual women encountering staff making biphobic assumptions.

Employment

Research from LGBT in Scotland: Work Report by Stonewall Scotland, reveals one in six LGBT employees in Scotland in 2016 were subjected to negative comments or conduct from work colleagues in the previous year because they were LGBT. This increased to two in five trans-employees in 2017. One in seven (14%) LGBT employees in Scotland were excluded by colleagues for being LGBT, doubling to a third (32%) for trans employees and 20% for LGBT disabled employees.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

A number of conversations were held with people in the local community, including members of the Pride Committee. To date, there has not been an opportunity to receive formal feedback.



Data Sources: [ILGA-Europe. \(2023\) Rainbow Europe Map: United Kingdom](#); [Stonewall Scotland \(2017\) LGBT in Scotland: Hate Crime](#); [Equality Network \(2015\) The Scottish LGBT Equality Report](#); [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(2023\) Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Scotland – Fairer Scotland Duty](#); [Stonewall Scotland. \(2018\) LGBT in Scotland: Work Report](#).