

Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2021

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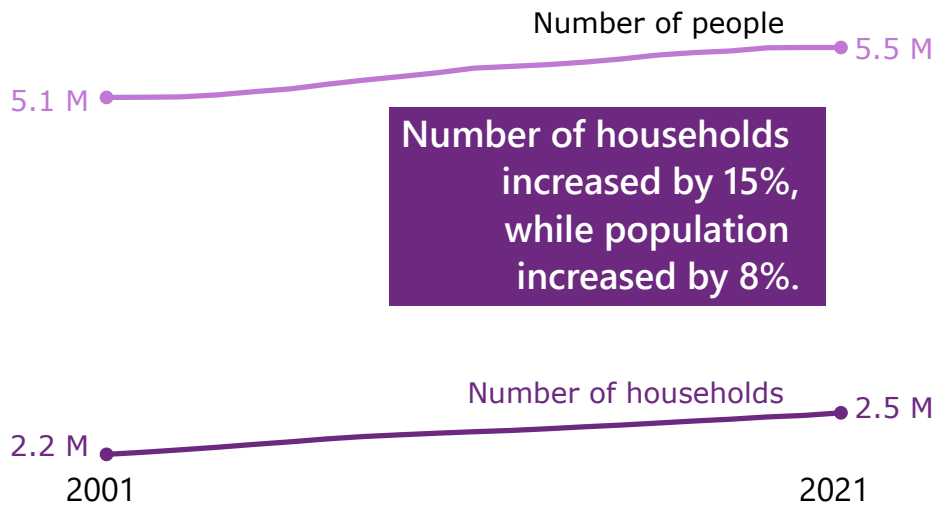
This statistical report describes the latest statistics on occupied and vacant dwellings, second homes, and trends in household types.

In Scotland the number of households is increasing

Since 2001 the number of households in Scotland has increased by 334,000 (15%).

This is due to an increase in population and a trend towards smaller households.

A household is defined as one person living alone or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address



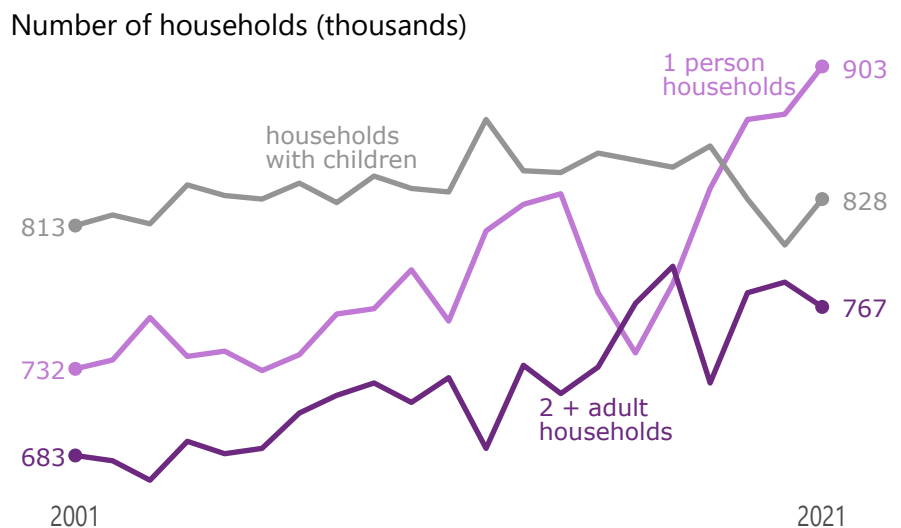
Number of households increased by 15%, while population increased by 8%.

Population change calculated using the 2020 population estimates

People are increasingly living alone or in smaller households

More than a third of households are just one person living alone.

This is partly because Scotland's population is ageing, as older people are more likely to live alone or in smaller households.



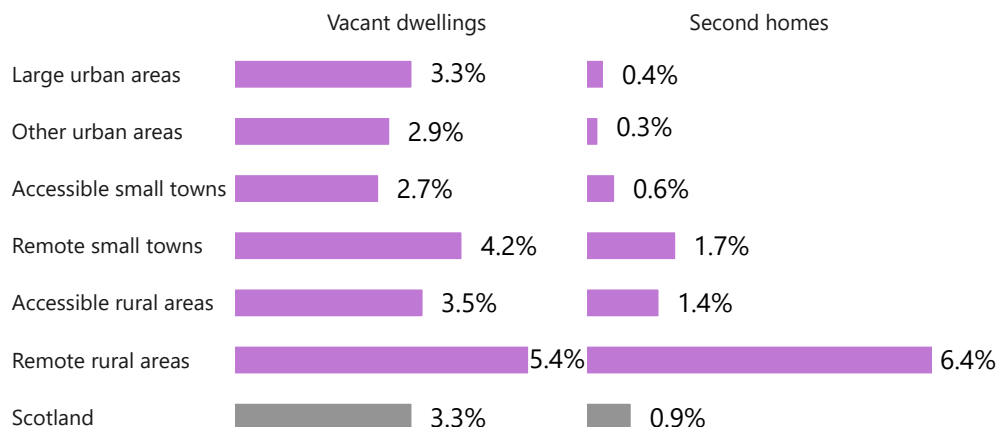
Data source: Labour Force Survey

Ninety-six per cent of homes are occupied

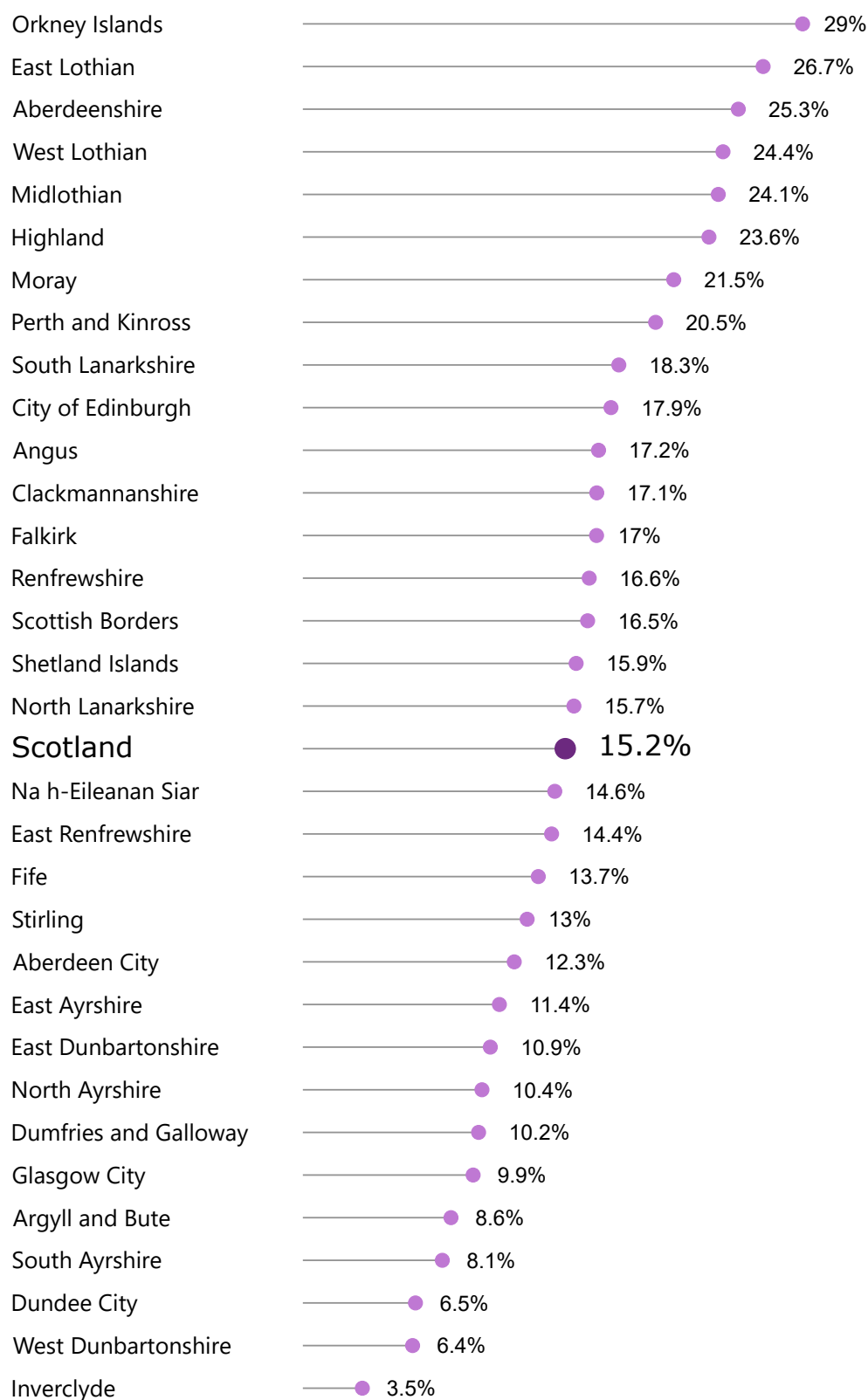
There were 2.67 million dwellings in 2021.

Empty and second homes were not spread evenly across the country. Remote rural areas had the highest percentage of dwellings that were vacant or second homes.

Percentage of empty dwellings and second homes by Urban/Rural classification, 2021



Percentage increase in number of households: 2001 to 2021



Growth in household numbers varies across Scotland

Households numbers increased in every council area between 2001 and 2021.

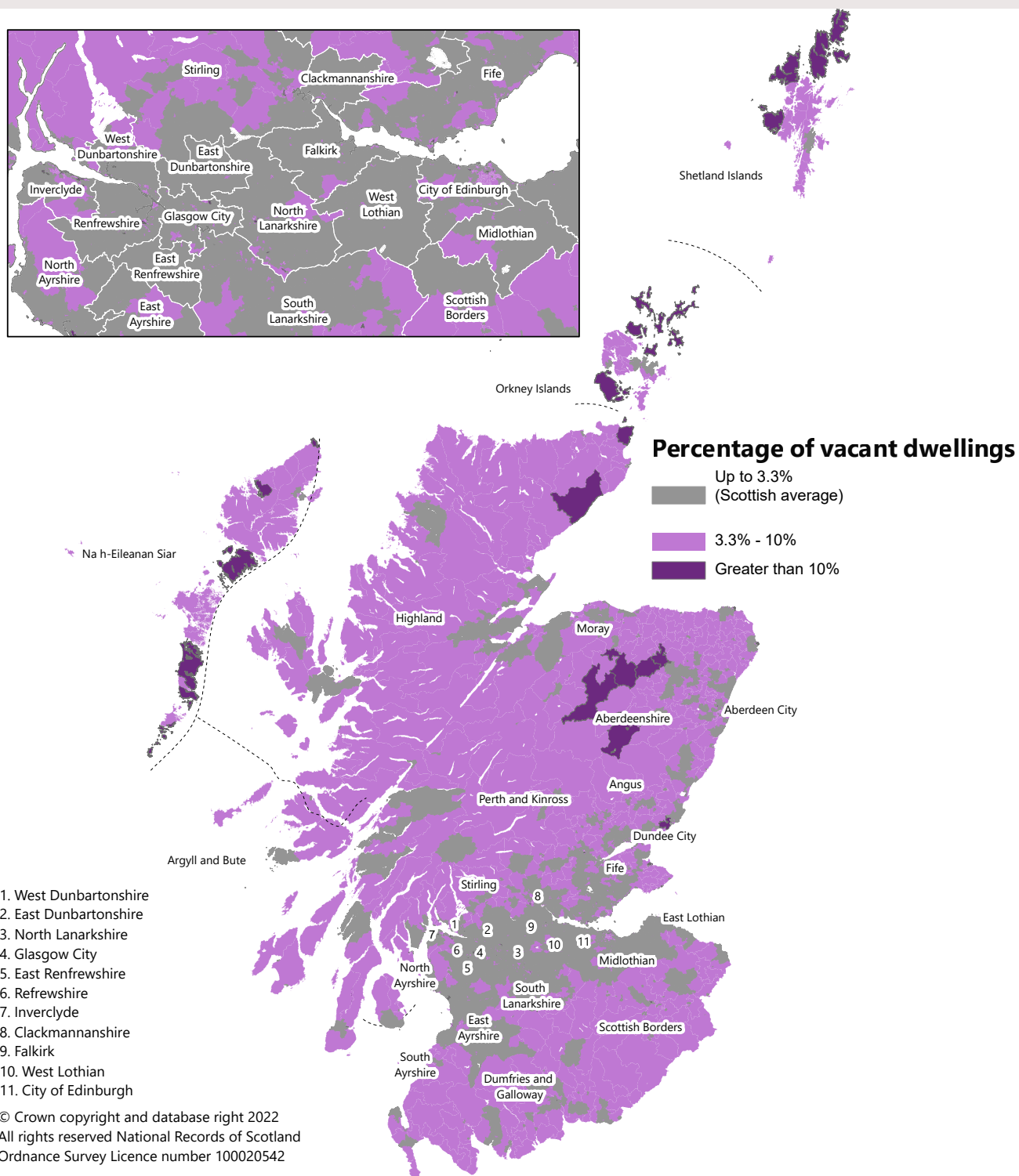
Orkney Islands, East Lothian and Aberdeenshire had the highest percentage increases.

Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire and Dundee City had the lowest.

More illustrations of households trends in each council area are available in an [interactive visualisation](#).

The level of vacant dwellings varies across Scottish areas

The highest proportions of dwellings that are vacant are found in rural areas. Within a council area the proportion of dwellings that are vacant may vary considerably.



The small area dataset of [household estimates](#) which accompany this publication can be used to help to understand changes in the number of households in a local area. This information is also available in an [interactive visualisation](#).

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Supporting data tables and background data for the charts in this publication are available on the [NRS website](#).

A separate [Methodology Guide](#) provides background details on:

- The definitions, data sources and methodology used for producing estimates of household and dwellings in Scotland
- Other data sources used in the production of the statistics in this publication
- How the household and dwelling estimates are used
- Links to related publications and websites

Main points

- Average household size in Scotland decreased from 2.27 people per household in 2001 to 2.19 in 2011, and then to 2.12 in 2021. Average household size has generally increased in City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City since 2008.
- In 2021 more than a third (36%) of households were estimated to be one person living alone. A total of 903,000 people were in these households.
- The number of households in Scotland continued to increase in 2021, reaching 2.53 million. This was 152,400 (6%) higher than in 2011, and 334,300 (15%) higher than in 2001.
- The number of households increased in every council area over the last twenty years. The highest percentage increases were in Orkney Islands (29%), East Lothian (27%), Aberdeenshire (25%), West Lothian (24%) and Midlothian (24%).
- There were 2.67 million dwellings in Scotland in 2021. Of these, 88,300 (3%) were vacant and 24,000 (1%) were second homes. The vacant dwellings included 43,800 dwellings classified as long-term (more than six months) empty and 44,600 as unoccupied exemptions (such as new homes yet to be occupied and dwellings undergoing repair or awaiting demolition).
- Empty and second homes are concentrated in different parts of the country. For example, remote rural areas had the highest percentage of dwellings that were empty (5%) or second homes (6%).

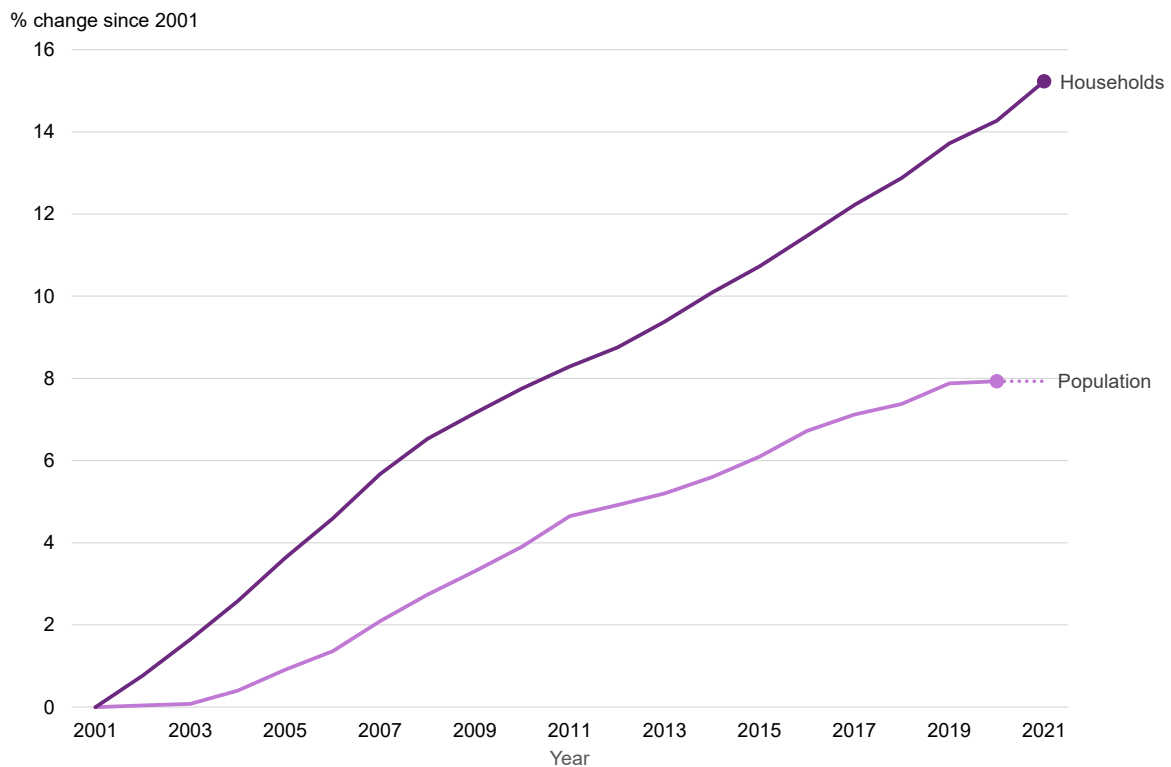
1. Households

National

In 2021 there were 2.53 million households in Scotland. This was an increase of 334,300 (15%) since 2001. Over the last twenty years Scotland's population increased by 8%.

People increasingly live in smaller households or alone. So the number of households has increased at a faster rate than it would due to an increase in the population alone.

Figure 1: Cumulative percentage change in households and population, 2001 – 2021



Source of population data: NRS [Mid-Year Population Estimates](#). The population estimate for 2021 was not available at the time of the publication, so the 2020 value has been used as a proxy instead.

Average household size is decreasing

Average household size has been decreasing over a long period, though at a slower rate in more recent years. It decreased from 2.27 people per household in 2001 to 2.19 in 2011, and to 2.12 in 2021.

The trend towards smaller households is also reflected in changes to the proportions of different household types. According to the Labour Force Survey, an estimated 903,000 households (36% of the total) in 2021 consisted of one adult living alone. By comparison, the proportion of single person households at the time of the 1971 Census was 19%.

The changes in household size and type over time are partly due to changes in the way we live. They also reflect the general ageing of Scotland's population. Older people are more likely to live alone or in smaller households. In addition, a growing proportion of older people are living in their own homes rather than in care homes¹.

How Scotland compares with the rest of the UK

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) enables comparisons to be made of household numbers and types across the UK countries. The LFS shows that between 2001 and 2021 there was an estimated 14% increase in households in the UK as a whole. There were increases in each country:

- England: 15%
- Wales: 9%
- Scotland: 12%
- Northern Ireland: 15%

Households in Scotland are smaller than in other UK countries. According to the Labour Force Survey, in 2021 Scotland had the highest proportion (36%) of single person households. It also had the lowest proportion (30%) with three or more people². One reason contributing to this might be the lower fertility rate in Scotland.

¹ Analysis of [Care Home Census](#) data, available from Public Health Scotland website.

² [Families and households in the UK: 2021](#)

The proportions of people aged 65 or over in 2020 (latest year for which data are currently available) in Scotland and the UK as a whole are similar, at just under a fifth. So this would not appear to be a factor contributing to the higher proportion of one person households in Scotland.

Council areas

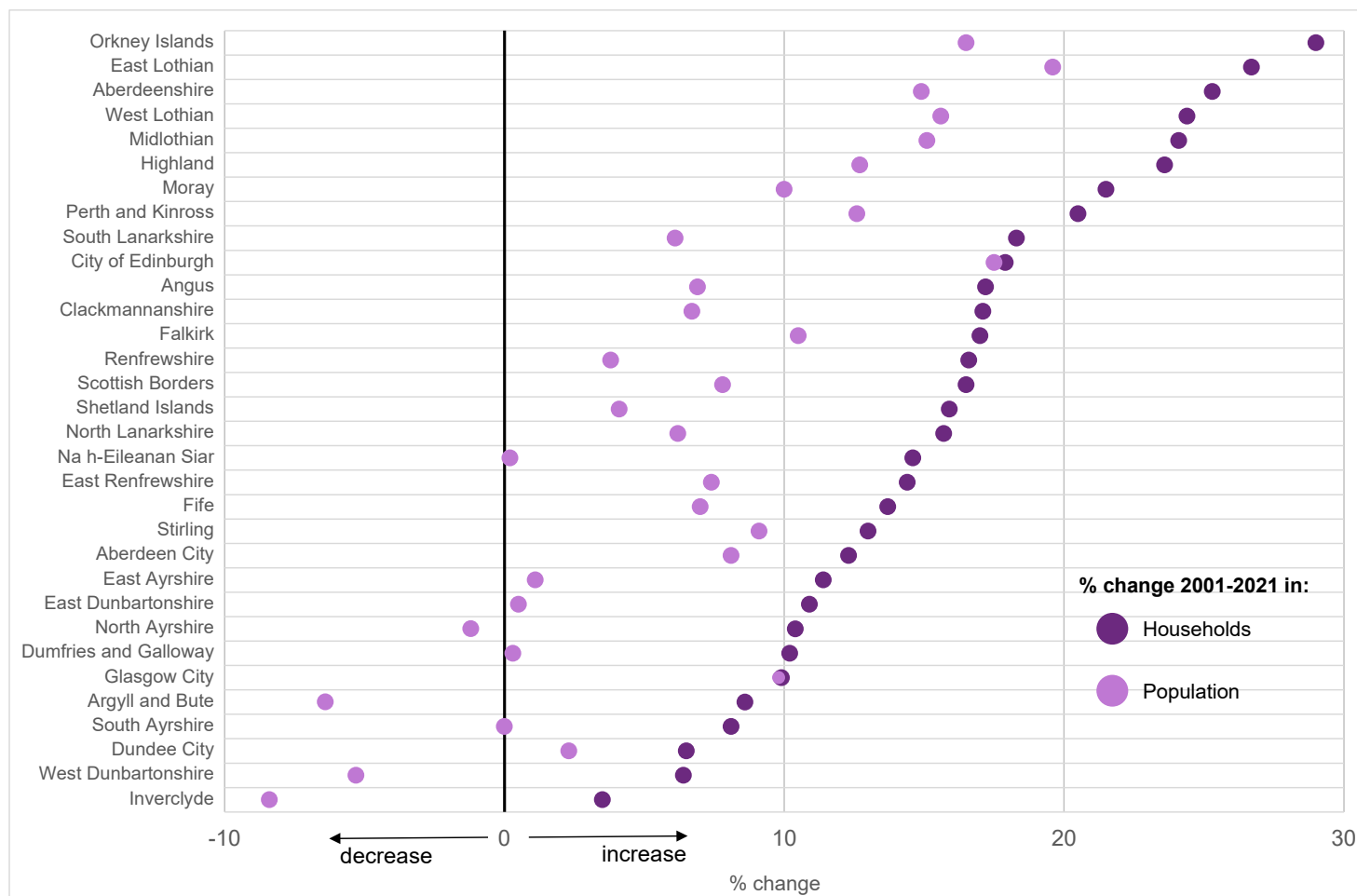
Over the last twenty years the number of households has increased in every council area (Figure 2). Broadly speaking, the east and north of the country have seen bigger increases compared with the west and south.

The council areas with the greatest percentage increases in household numbers between 2001 and 2021 were:

- Orkney Islands (29%, 2,400 households)
- East Lothian (27%, 10,200)
- Aberdeenshire (25%, 23,000)
- West Lothian (24%, 15,900)
- Midlothian (24%, 7,900).

City of Edinburgh had the largest increase in absolute number of households (36,700), an increase of 18%.

Figure 2: Percentage change in the number of households and population by council area, June 2001 to 2021



Source of population data: NRS [Mid-Year Population Estimates](#). The population estimates for 2021 were not available at the time of the publication, so the 2020 values have been used as a proxy instead

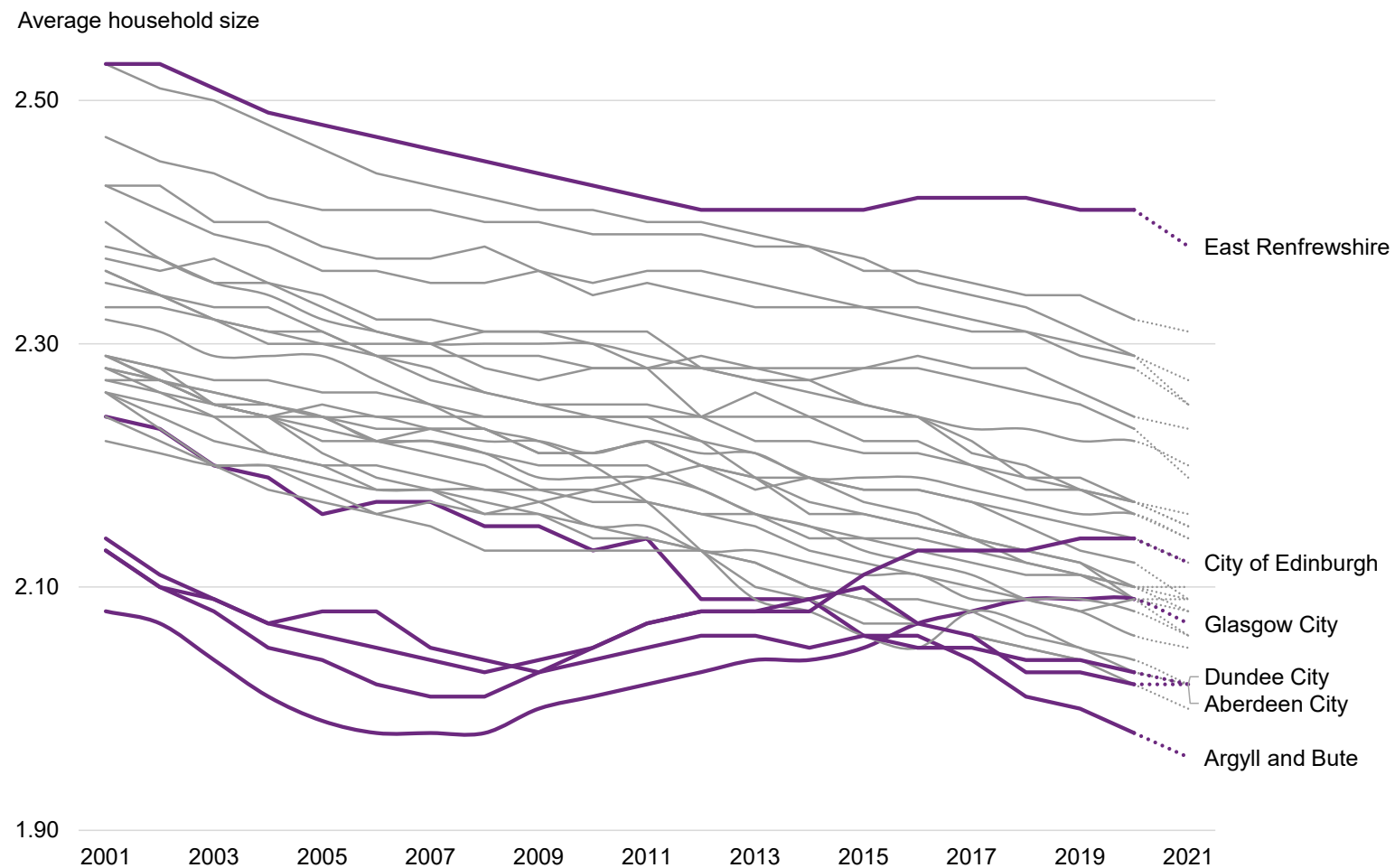
Changes in household numbers and population are generally correlated. So council areas with the biggest percentage increases in households tend also to be those with the biggest percentage population increases.

City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City stand out from this general pattern. Both had above average percentage increases in their population over the last twenty years. However, the percentage change in their number of households was similar to or below the national average.

In 2021, average household size varied from 1.96 people per household in Argyll and Bute to 2.38 people per household in East Renfrewshire. Average household size has decreased in most council areas since 2001 (Figure 3). The biggest relative decrease occurred in Na h-Eileanan Siar, from 2.32 to 2.02 people per household.

City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City have bucked the general downward trend in average household size. Both experienced increases in most years since 2008.

Figure 3: Average household size by council area, June 2001 to 2021



Source of population data: NRS [Mid-Year Population Estimates](#). The population estimates for 2021 were not available at the time of the publication, so the 2020 values have been used as a proxy instead. The trend between 2020 and 2021 is shown as a dotted line in the chart.

Data Zones

2011 Data Zones are a geography widely used for official statistics on small areas in Scotland. There are 6,976 data zones, typically with between 200 and 600 households. Estimates of the number of occupied dwellings – a close equivalent to households – in each data zone are available for downloading from the [NRS website](#).

2. Dwellings

National

In 2021 there were 2.67 million dwellings in Scotland. This was an increase of 15% since 2001.

Of the 2.67 million dwellings in Scotland in 2021, 112,300 (4.2%) were unoccupied. These unoccupied dwellings include:

- vacant properties (88,300, 3.3% of all dwellings)
- second homes (24,000, 0.9% of all dwellings).

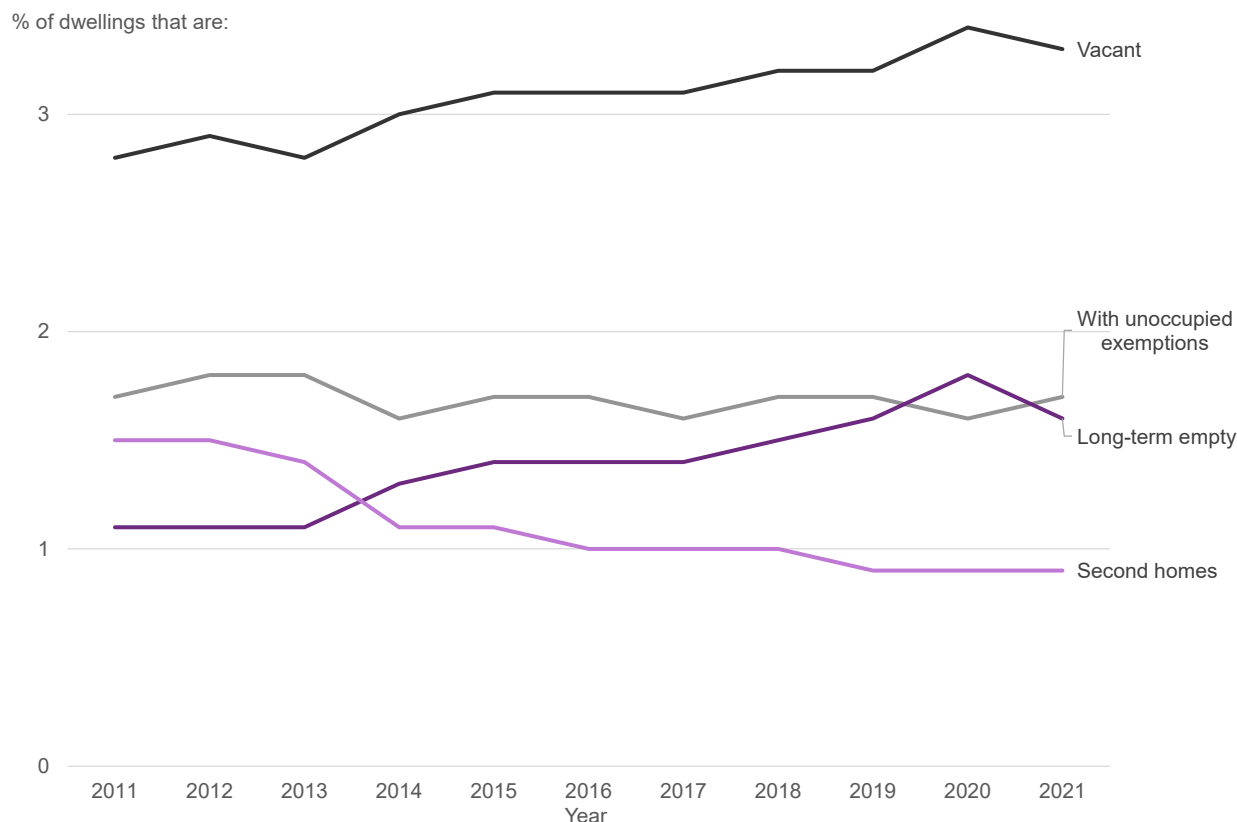
Vacant properties include those classified as:

- long-term (six months or more) empty (43,800, 1.6% of all dwellings)
- unoccupied exemptions (44,600, 1.7% of all dwellings) such as new homes yet to be occupied and dwellings undergoing repair or awaiting demolition.

In 2021, just under two thirds (27,900) of long-term empty dwellings had been empty for 12 months or more³.

³ [Scottish Government Housing Statistics \(download a table\)](#)

Figure 4: Numbers of unoccupied exemptions, long-term empty dwellings (LTE) and second homes, September 2011 to 2021



How do these figures compare with recent trends?

Overall, the percentage of unoccupied dwellings in Scotland has remained fairly stable in recent years. However, within this overall picture the number of vacant dwellings has been increasing (Figure 4). This is mainly due to an increase in long-term empty properties. (The spike in the percentage of long-term empty properties in 2020 may reflect the impact of Covid lockdown restrictions, for example with fewer people moving house in that period.)

The numbers of vacant and second homes can fluctuate a lot from year to year. This can be due to changes in the definitions involved, the charges payable on these types of property and reviews carried out by councils. Further details on this are included in the [Methodology Guide](#).

Figure 5 shows the annual change in the number of dwellings and in the number of new build completions in Scotland since 2001. Following the recession in 2007/8 the number of new build completions fell over the period to 2013. Completions then

increased until 2019 before a decrease – most likely reflecting the impact of Covid - in 2020. The total of 20,100 completions for the year to September 2021 was over 4,000 more than the previous year, but 9% below the 22,000 completions in the year to September 2019⁴.

The trend in the annual change in the number of dwellings is similar to that seen for the number of new build completions. However, there are differences between the two measures. For instance, changes in dwelling numbers also reflect demolitions and conversions. Moreover, the data come from two different sources.

Figure 5: New build completions (October, 2002 to 2021 and annual increase in number of dwellings (September, 2002 to 2021)



⁴ Scottish Government: [Housing Statistics for Scotland – New House Building](#)

Council areas

The council areas with the highest proportion of dwellings that were vacant in 2021 were:

- Na h-Eileanan Siar (7.7%, 1,100 dwellings)
- Aberdeen City (6.7%, 8,200)
- Shetland Islands (6.7%, 800)
- Orkney Islands (5.6%, 600)

The council areas with the highest proportion of unoccupied exemptions dwellings in 2021 were:

- Orkney Islands (4.0%, 500 dwellings)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (3.6%, 500)
- Inverclyde (3.4%, 1,300)

The council areas with the highest proportion of dwellings that were long-term empty in 2021 were:

- Shetland Islands (4.9%, 600 dwellings)
- Aberdeen City (4.9%, 6,000)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (4.0%, 600)

The council areas with the highest proportion of dwellings that were second homes in 2021 were:

- Argyll and Bute (6.1%, 3,000 second homes)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (5.7%, 800)
- Orkney Islands (3.7%, 400)
- Highland (3.1%, 3,800)

Argyll and Bute, Fife and Highland together accounted for more than a third (37%) of second homes in Scotland.

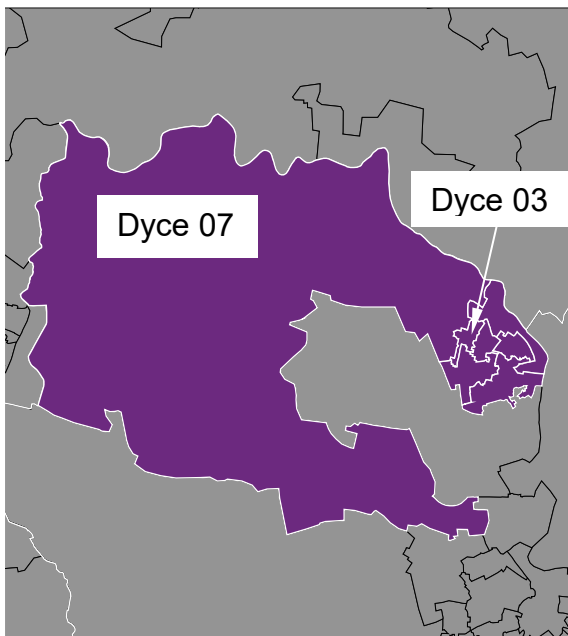
In 2021 there were 0.34 dwellings per hectare in Scotland as a whole. However, this varies widely between council areas. Highland and Na h-Eileanan Siar had the

lowest density of housing, each with an average of 0.05 dwellings per hectare. Glasgow City had the highest average density (18.37 dwellings per hectare), followed by Dundee City (12.65 dwellings per hectare).

Data Zones

While each data zone in Scotland is designed to have a roughly similar population size, those in more urban council areas tend to be much smaller in area (see Figure 6). This is because of the greater density of population and dwellings in such areas. The data zone level information can be used to illustrate geographic patterns within council areas.

Figure 6: Example of difference in size for data zones: Aberdeen City: Dyce

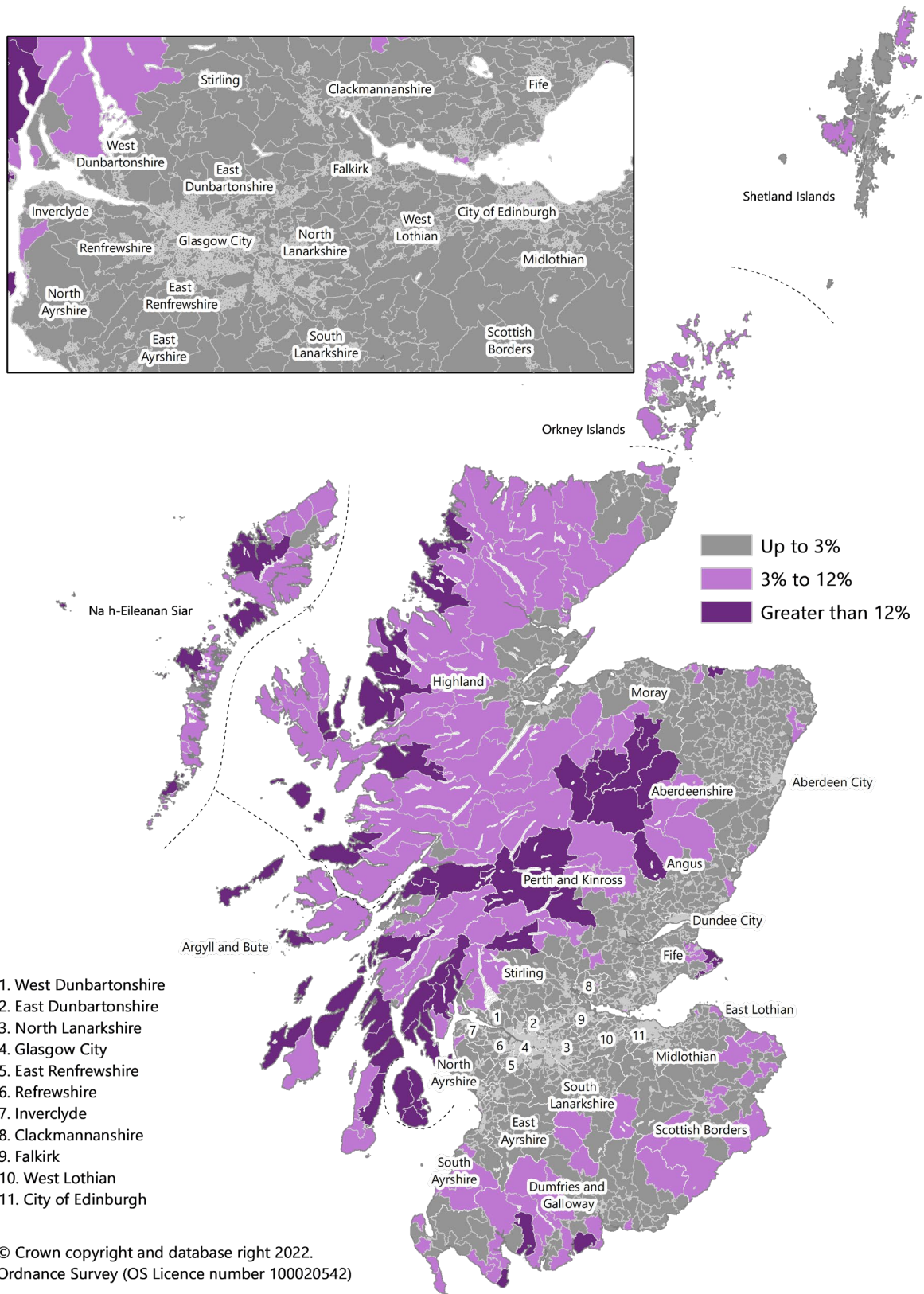


The distributions of household and dwelling characteristics can vary considerably within a council area. For example, in 2021 North Ayrshire had a relatively high

proportion of dwellings which were second homes: 2.2% compared with 0.9% for Scotland as a whole. However, as the map in Figure 7 shows, this is mainly because North Ayrshire includes the island of Arran, which has high proportions of second homes. The proportion in the mainland part of North Ayrshire is much lower.

The data zone level estimates of occupied and vacant dwellings, and of dwelling characteristics, are published in full online at the [NRS website](#) and statistics.gov.scot.

Figure 7: Percentage of dwellings which are second homes in each data zone, September 2021



Dwellings with Council Tax discounts and exemptions

Single adult discounts from Council Tax are granted to dwellings where one adult lives either alone, with children or with another adult who is 'disregarded' for Council Tax purposes (for example a student). In 2021, 38% of dwellings in Scotland received a single adult Council Tax discount. This proportion varied from 31% in East Renfrewshire to 45% in Dundee City and Glasgow City.

Some occupied dwellings are exempt from paying Council Tax. Most of these are all-student households, though other types of occupied dwellings such as armed forces accommodation are also included in this category. Summary information from Council Tax systems is therefore a good source of data on the numbers of such dwellings. In 2021, 3.3% of dwellings in Scotland were occupied but exempt from paying Council Tax.

The proportion of occupied dwellings that are exempt from Council Tax tends to be highest in council areas which have major universities, and therefore large student populations. They also tend to be quite concentrated within certain parts of these council areas.

Characteristics of dwellings

In 2021, around three in five (59%) dwellings in Scotland fell into the lowest Council Tax bands (A-C). This proportion was highest in Na h-Eileanan Siar (77%) and lowest in East Renfrewshire (27%). Just over one in seven (14%) dwellings fell into the highest Council Tax bands (F-H). This proportion was highest in East Renfrewshire (35%) and lowest in Na h-Eileanan Siar (2%).

Urban rural areas

The Scottish Government produces an [Urban Rural classification](#). This is based on settlement size defined by NRS and accessibility based on drive-time analysis.

The density of dwellings in large urban areas is around 370 times greater than in remote rural.

In 2021:

- Remote rural areas had the highest proportions of both second homes (6.4% in these areas) and vacant dwellings (5.4%). Other urban areas (settlements of 10,000 to 125,000 people) had the lowest proportion of second homes (0.3%). They also had, together with Large urban areas and Accessible small towns, the lowest proportion of vacant dwellings (around 3%).
- Large urban areas had the highest proportion of dwellings with single adult discounts for Council Tax (41%). Accessible rural areas had the lowest proportion (30%).
- Large urban areas (which include cities with large student populations) had the highest proportion of occupied dwellings exempt from Council Tax (6.1%). Remote rural areas had the lowest proportion (0.7%).

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is produced by Scottish Government. It identifies concentrations of deprivation across Scotland in a consistent way. The statistics included in this publication relate to the [SIMD 2020](#) classification.

The statistics for 2021 show that:

- Areas which are more deprived tend to have a higher proportion of dwellings in the lower council tax bands.
- The density of dwellings in the most deprived neighbourhoods (19 dwellings per hectare) is nearly three times that in the least deprived areas (7 dwellings per hectare).
- The proportion of dwellings which are vacant, or are occupied but exempt from Council Tax, is roughly similar to the national average across all SIMD deciles. However, the proportion with a single adult discount from Council Tax is much higher in the most deprived neighbourhoods (52%) than in the least deprived neighbourhoods (29%).
- Second homes are less likely to be located in more deprived areas.

Household and dwellings estimates for other geographies

Household and dwelling estimates for electoral wards and parliamentary constituencies are available on [NRS website](#). These are based on aggregations of the estimates for data zones.

3. Notes on statistical publications

National Statistics

The designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in August 2021 following a compliance check by the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value. It signifies the statistics have been produced in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and are compliant with the [Code of Practice](#). They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc can be found in the [About this Publication](#) document that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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Informing the future – We are responsible for the Census of Population in Scotland which we use, with other sources of information, to produce statistics on the population and households.

You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the [Statistics](#) section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the [Scotland's Census](#) website.

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