

Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2023

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

In 2023 the number of households in Scotland was 2.5 million

A household is a group of people living together in a dwelling.

The number of households is calculated from the number of occupied dwellings that are in the Council's evaluation list.



In Scotland the number of households is increasing

Over the last 20 years the number of households in Scotland increased by 304,500 (14%).

The number of households

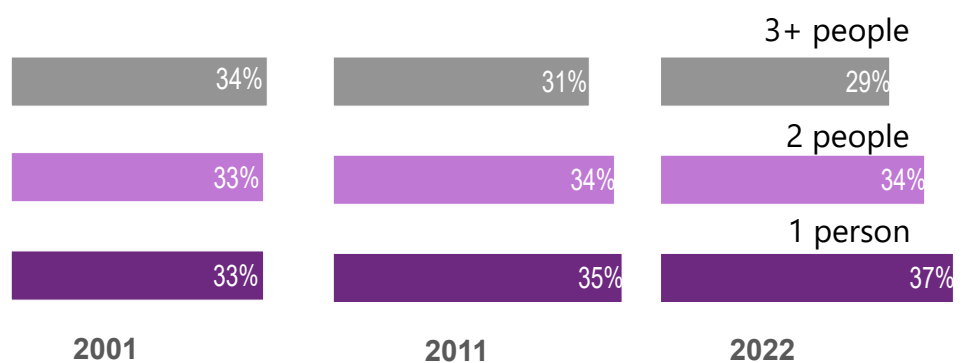


This is due to an increase in population and a trend towards smaller households.

Scotland has the highest proportion of one-person households in UK

Over a third of households in Scotland are just one person living alone.

The proportion of households



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

Source: 2001, 2011 and 2022 Census

Contents

Main points.....	4
1. Households.....	5
National.....	5
Council areas.....	8
Data Zones.....	10
2. Dwellings.....	10
National.....	10
Council areas.....	13
Data Zones.....	16
Dwellings with Council Tax discounts and exemptions.....	17
Urban rural areas.....	18
Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.....	18
3. Notes on statistical publications.....	21

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.

The household estimates for Scotland and council areas in this publication include revisions to the estimates published previously for the years 2012 to 2022.

These revisions arise from incorporating 2022 Census information to update the set of census adjustment factors used in calculating household estimates. Further details are provided in the [Methodology Guide](#).

Main points

- In 2023 the number of households in Scotland was estimated to be 2.54 million. This was 304,500 (14%) higher than in 2003.
- The 0.8% (20,000 households) increase in the number of households between 2022 and 2023 was the highest annual growth rate since 2008. It continued the general upward trend in the growth rate from a low of 0.3% in 2012.
- Over the last twenty years the number of households increased in every council area. The largest percentage increases were in East Lothian (28%), Midlothian (27%) and Orkney Islands (26%). The smallest percentage increases were in Inverclyde (2%), Dundee City (5%) and West Dunbartonshire (5%).
- Of the 2.72 million dwellings in Scotland in 2023, 92,500 (3%) were vacant and 24,000 (1%) were second homes.
- 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 vacant (6%) or second homes (6%).
- Average household size in Scotland has generally decreased in recent decades. According to census data it fell from 2.27 people per household in 2001 to 2.19 in 2011 and then to 2.12 in 2022.
- At the time of the 2022 Census over a third (37%) of households comprised one person living alone. A total of 930,000 people were living alone, 17% of the population.

1. Households

National

In 2023 there were 2.54 million households in Scotland. This was 20,000 (0.8%) higher than in 2022 and 304,500 (14%) higher than in 2003. Over the last twenty years Scotland's population increased by around 8% (Figure 1b).

Figure 1a shows that the 0.8% increase in household numbers between 2022 and 2023 was the highest annual growth rate since 2008. It continued the general upward trend in the growth rate from a low of 0.3% in 2012.

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 1a: The annual percentage change in households increased to 0.8% in 2023

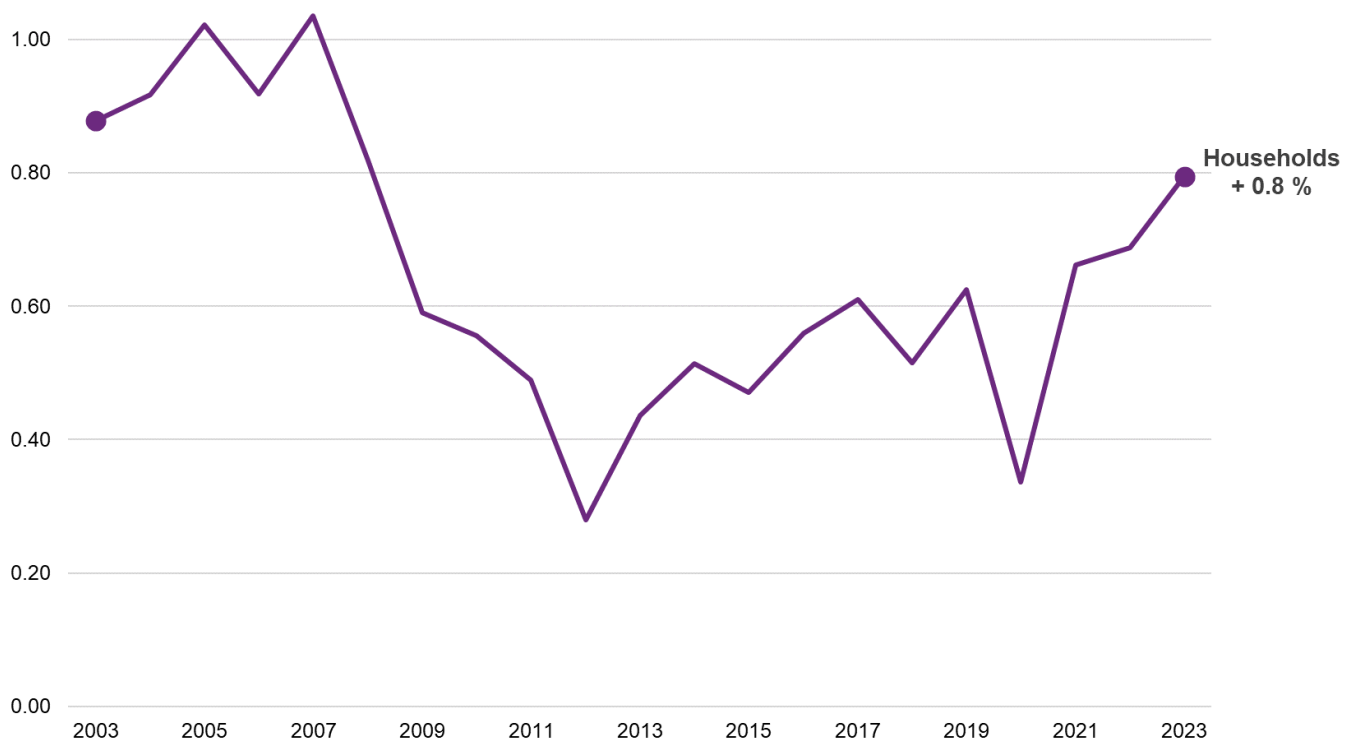
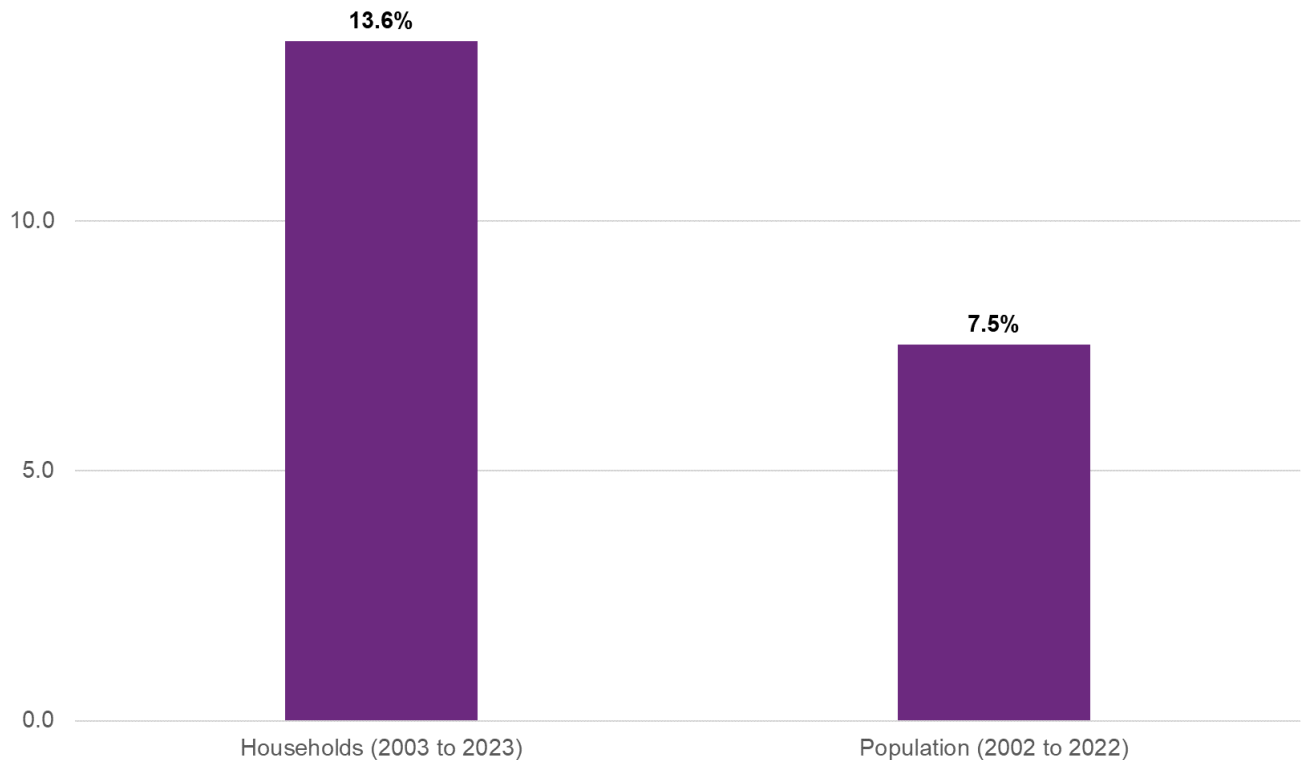


Figure 1b: The percentage increase in household numbers in the last 20 years has been greater than the population growth



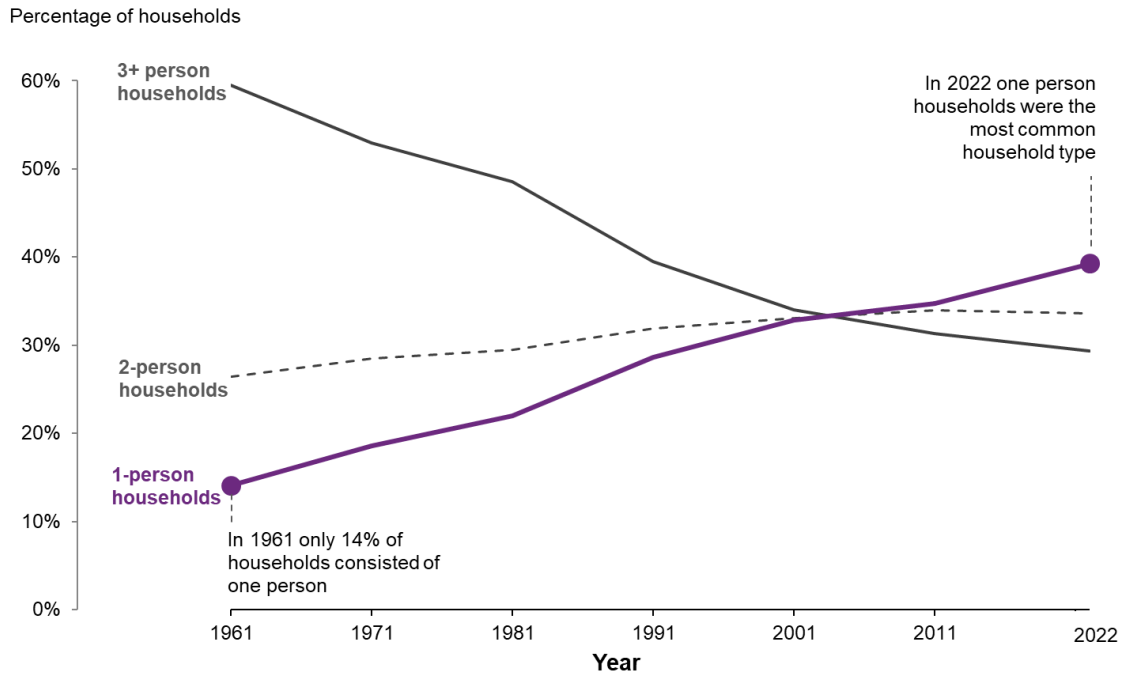
Source of population data: NRS [Mid-Year Population Estimates](#). The population estimate for 2023 was not available at the time of publication, so the 20 year change is from 2002 to 2022.

Average household size is decreasing

Average household size has been decreasing over a long period, though at a slower rate in more recent years. Census data show it fell from 2.27 people per household in 2001 to 2.19 in 2011 and then to 2.12 in 2022.

The long-term trend towards smaller households is also reflected in changes to the proportions of different household types. According to the census, in 1961 only 14% of households consisted of one person, while 59% consisted of three or more people (Figure 2). By the time of Scotland's Census in 2022, one person households were the most prevalent type (37% of households). Households of three or more people were the least prevalent (29% of households).

Figure 2: One person households are the most common household type in 2022



Source: Scotland's census data. 2 and 3+ person households could be adults, or both adults and children.

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 homes or other communal establishments.

How Scotland compares with the rest of the UK

Table 1, based on data from the last two censuses shows that between 2011 and 2021 (2022 in Scotland) the increase in the number of households in Scotland (5.8%) was lower than in England (6.2%) or Northern Ireland (9.3%), but higher than in Wales (3.4%).

Table 1: Scotland has the second lowest increase in the number of households in the UK and the smallest average household size according to the latest census figures.

	% increase in households, 2011 to 2021	% households with one person, 2021	% households with 3 or more people, 2021	Average household size, 2021
Scotland ¹	5.8	37	29	2.12
England	6.2	30	36	2.41
Wales	3.4	32	33	2.27
Northern Ireland	9.3	31	39	2.44

Source: Census data for [Scotland](#), [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)

Average household size in Scotland was smaller than in the other UK countries. Scotland had the highest proportion (37%) of single person households, and the lowest proportion (29%) of households with three or more people.

One reason contributing to this might be the lower fertility rate in Scotland. The proportions of people aged 65 or over in 2022 (the latest year for which data are currently available) in Scotland and the UK as a whole were broadly similar, at around a fifth. So this would not appear to be a major factor contributing to the higher proportion of one person households in Scotland.

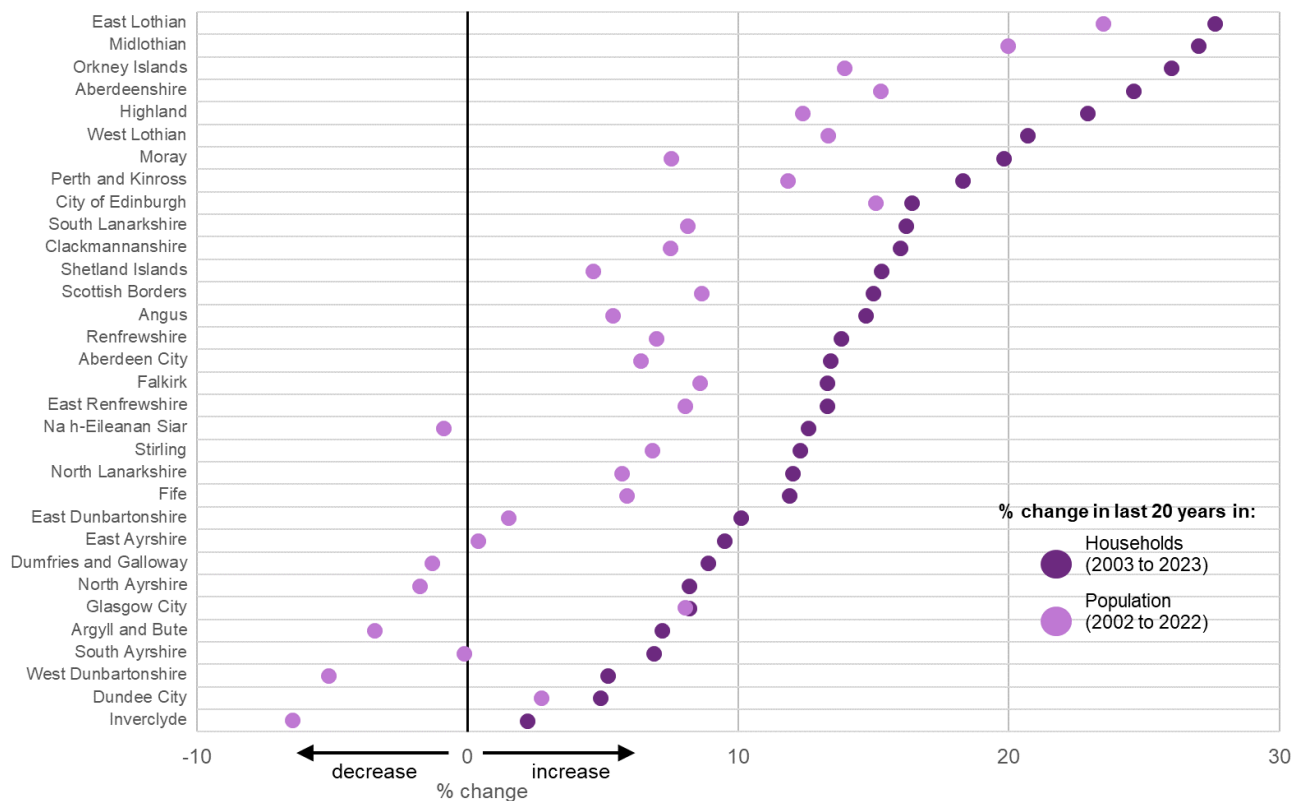
Council areas

Over the last twenty years the number of households has increased in every council area. Figure 3 shows that changes in household numbers and population over the last 20 years are generally correlated. Council areas with the largest percentage increases in households tend also to be those with the largest percentage increases in population.

¹ For Scotland the % increase in household numbers relates to 2011 to 2022; and household size data relate to 2022.

Broadly speaking, the east and north of the country saw bigger increases in household numbers compared with the west and south. The largest percentage increases were in East Lothian (28%), Midlothian (27%) and Orkney Islands (26%). The smallest percentage increases were in Inverclyde (2%), Dundee City (5%) and West Dunbartonshire (5%).

Figure 3: There has been a bigger percentage increase in households than in population in each council area



Source of population data: NRS [Mid-Year Population Estimates](#).

In the 2022 census, the average household size varied from 1.97 people per household in Aberdeen City to 2.43 people per household in East Renfrewshire. The biggest relative decrease between 2001 and 2022 occurred in Na h-Eileanan Siar, (from 2.32 to 2.03 people per household) and in Moray (from 2.37 to 2.12 people per household).

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 from the [NRS website](#).

2. Dwellings

National

In 2023 there were 2.72 million dwellings in Scotland. This was an increase of 16% (365,000 dwellings) since 2003.

Of these 2.72 million dwellings, 116,600 (4.3%) were unoccupied. These unoccupied dwellings included:

- vacant properties (92,500, 3.4% of all dwellings)
- second homes (24,000, 0.9% of all dwellings).

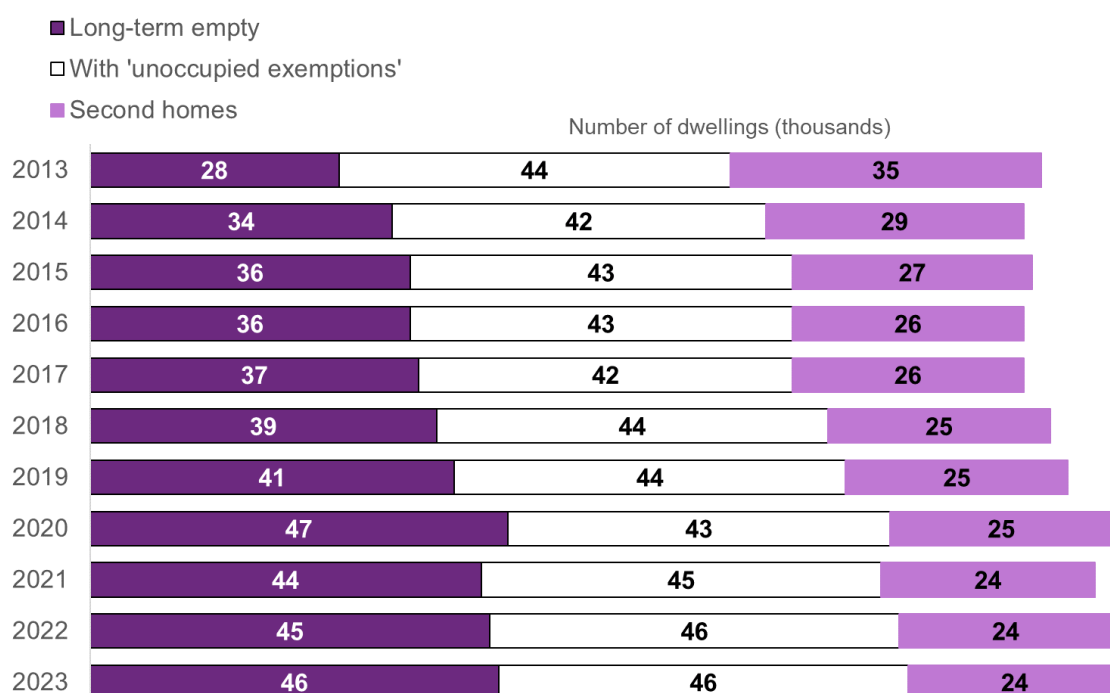
Vacant properties included those classified as:

- long-term (six months or more) empty (46,200, 1.7% of all dwellings)
- unoccupied exemptions (46,300, 1.7% of all dwellings), such as new homes yet to be occupied and dwellings undergoing repair or awaiting demolition.

In 2023, just under three fifths (28,300) of long-term empty dwellings had been empty for 12 months or more².

In this publication ‘long-term empty’ properties nominally relate to those which have been empty for six months or more. However, it has been identified that some councils have additionally included properties furnished and unoccupied for a shorter period in their data. The number of ‘long-term empty’ properties reported in these statistics will therefore be overstated in such instances. Further analysis is planned to estimate the extent and scale of this.

Figure 4: There were around 92,000 long-term empty and dwellings with unoccupied exemptions in Scotland in 2023



² [Scottish Government Housing Statistics \(download a table\)](#)

How do these figures compare with recent trends?

Overall, the percentage of unoccupied dwellings in Scotland has remained fairly stable in recent years, around 4%. However, within this overall picture the number of vacant dwellings has been increasing as shown in Figure 4.

This is mainly due to an increase in long-term empty properties. (The slight spike in the number of long-term empty properties in 2020 may reflect the impact of Covid restrictions, for example with fewer people moving house in that period).

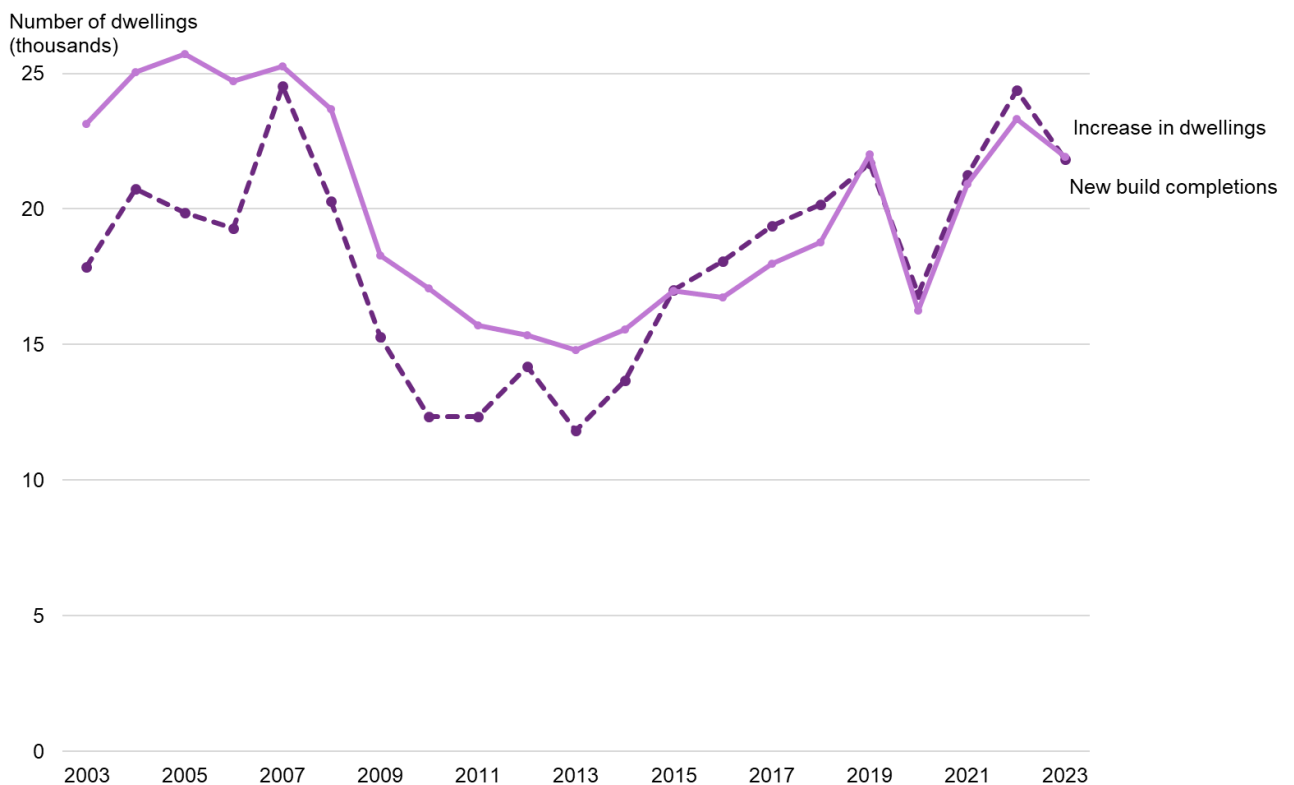
The numbers of vacant and second homes can fluctuate a lot from year to year. This can be due to changes in the definitions involved, the charges payable on these types of property and reviews carried out by councils. Further details on this are included in the [Methodology Guide](#).

Figure 5 shows the annual change in the number of dwellings and in the number of new build completions in Scotland since 2003. 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 restrictions – in 2020. The total of 22,000³ completions for the year to September 2023 was 1,400 less than the previous year. However, it was 5% higher than the 21,000 completions in the year to September 2021.

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 comes from two different sources.

³ Scottish Government: [Housing Statistics for Scotland – New House Building](#)

Figure 5: There were nearly 22,000 new build completions (October, 2003 to 2023) and an increase of 22,000 dwellings (September, 2003 to 2023) in Scotland



Council areas

Figure 6 shows the proportion of dwellings which are vacant, long-term empty or second homes in 2023.

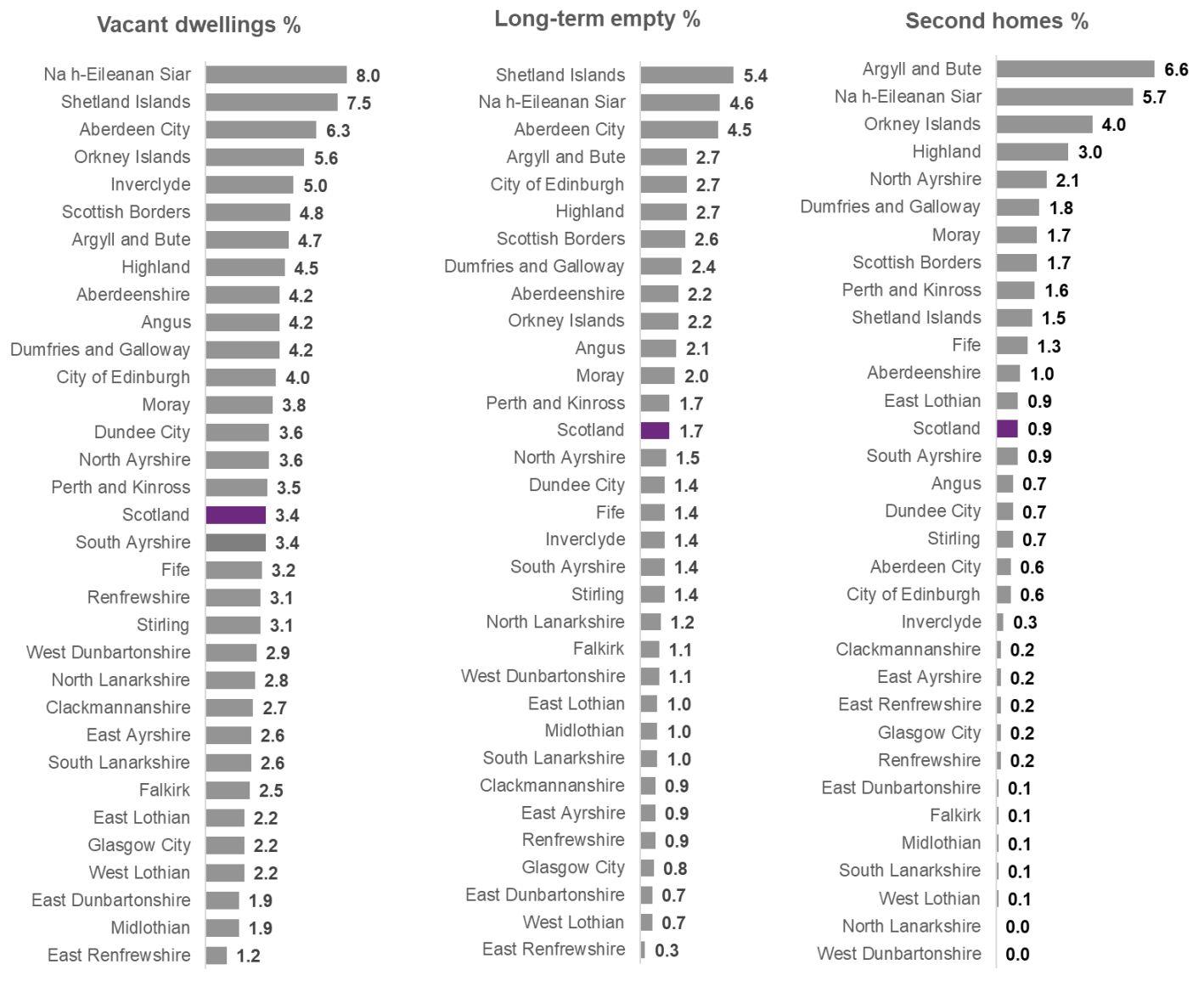
The council areas with the highest proportion of dwellings that were vacant in 2023 were Na h-Eileanan Siar (8%), Shetland Islands (8%), Aberdeen City (6%) and Orkney Islands (6%).

The areas with the highest proportion of dwellings that were second homes were mainly rural and island areas, including Argyll and Bute (7%), Na h-Eileanan Siar (6%), Orkney Islands (4%) and Highland (3%).

Highland, Argyll and Bute and Fife together accounted for 9,300 second homes, more than a third (39%) of the total for Scotland.

In 2023 there were 0.35 dwellings per hectare in Scotland as a whole. This varied 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 density (18.64 dwellings per hectare), followed by Dundee City (12.78 dwellings per hectare).

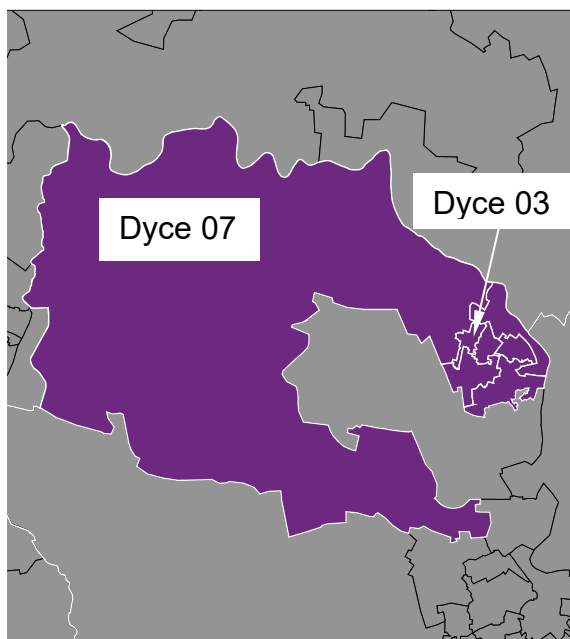
Figure 6: Proportion of dwellings which are vacant, long-term empty or second homes by council area, 2023



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 7). 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 7: 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 2023 North Ayrshire had a relatively high proportion of dwellings which were second homes: 2.1% compared with 0.9% for Scotland as a whole. 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](#). This information is also available as an [interactive map](#).

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 2023, 39% of dwellings in Scotland received a single adult Council Tax discount. This proportion varied from 31% in East Renfrewshire to 45% in Dundee City.

Some occupied dwellings are exempt from paying Council Tax. Most of these are all-student households, though this category also includes other types of occupied dwellings such as armed forces accommodation. Summary information from Council Tax systems is therefore a good source of data on the numbers of such dwellings. In 2023, 3.4% 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.

The council areas with the highest proportion of dwellings with unoccupied exemptions in 2023 were:

- Inverclyde (3.5%, 1,400 dwellings)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (3.5%, 500 dwellings)
- Orkney Islands (3.4%, 400 dwellings).

Characteristics of dwellings

In 2023, 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 (26%). Just over one in seven (14%) dwellings fell into the highest Council Tax bands (F-H). This proportion was highest in East Renfrewshire (36%) 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 areas.

Figure 8: Accessible rural areas had the biggest change in the percentage of occupied dwellings from 2015 to 2023

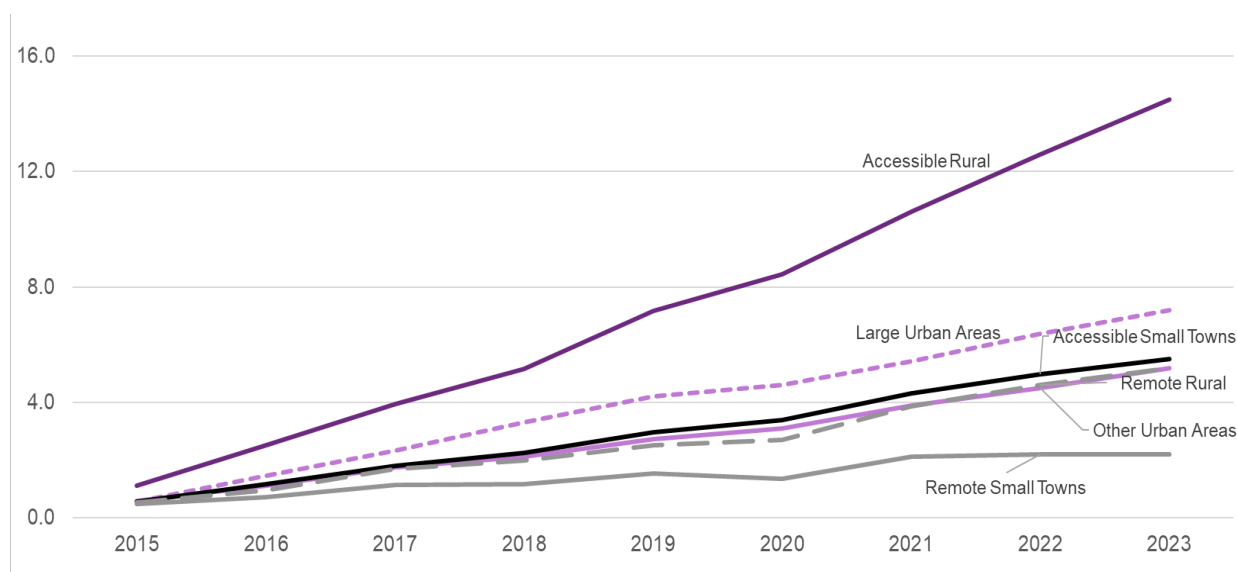


Figure 8 illustrates the percentage change in the number of occupied dwellings by urban rural area categories since 2015. The greatest increase in the number of occupied dwellings over this period were accessible rural areas (15%). This compared with an increase of just 2% for remote small towns.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a relative measure of deprivation across the 6,976 data zone areas in Scotland. More information is available on the [Scottish Government website](#).

Figure 9: The proportion of vacant dwellings is generally smaller in the less deprived SIMD deciles while more deprived areas have a lower proportion of second homes

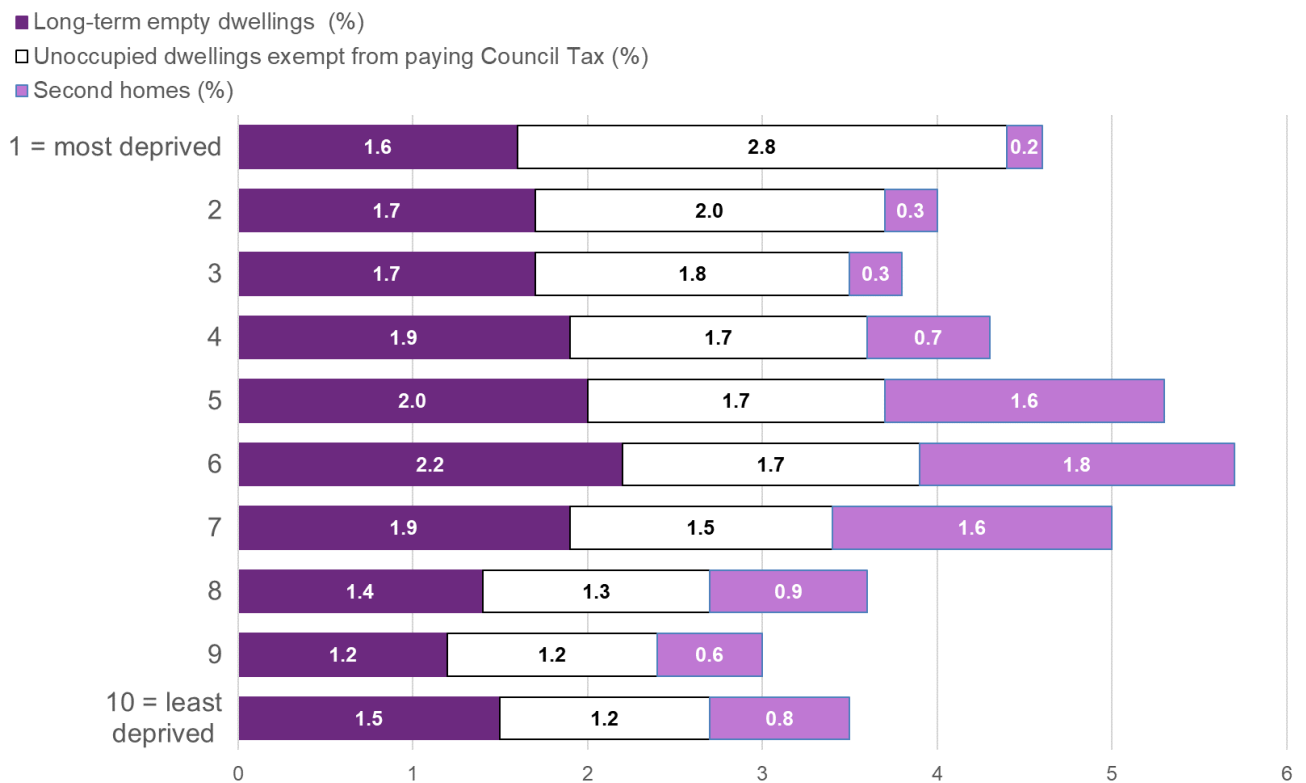
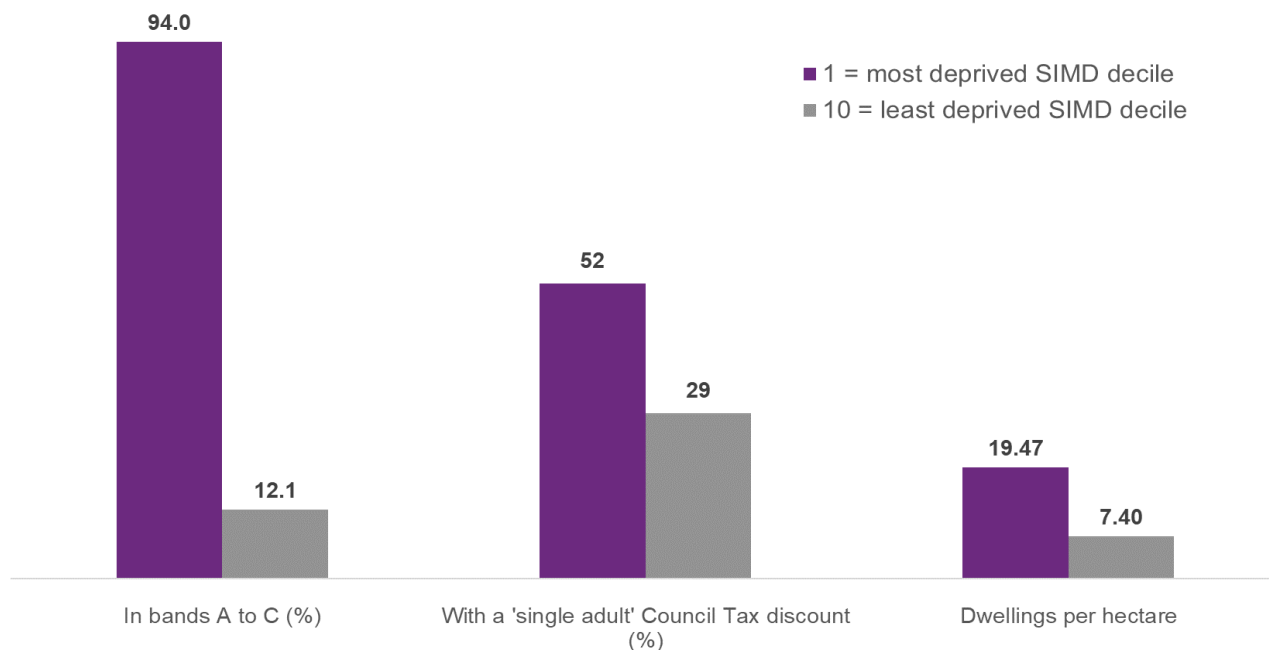


Figure 9 shows the percentage of vacant dwellings and second homes by SIMD decile. The proportion of vacant dwellings is generally smaller in the less deprived SIMD deciles. Second homes are less likely to be located in more deprived areas.

Figure 10 illustrates that the most deprived neighbourhoods have much higher proportions of dwellings in the lowest (A-C) Council Tax bands, and with a single adult discount from Council Tax. 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 data tables for the analysis by urban rural and SIMD classifications can be downloaded from the [NRS website](#) for dwelling characteristics (2005 to 2023) and for occupied and vacant dwellings (2014 to 2023).

Figure 10: The most deprived areas have higher proportions of dwellings in Council Tax bands A to C and with a single adult discount than the least deprived areas



Household and dwellings estimates for other geographies

Household and dwelling estimates for electoral wards, parliamentary constituencies and Scottish Island Regions are available from the [NRS website](#). These are based on aggregations of the estimates for Data Zones. Estimates for National Park areas are also available, based on aggregations of estimates for postcodes.

3. Notes on statistical publications

Accredited Official Statistics

The designation of these statistics as Accredited Official Statistics was confirmed in December 2021 following an independent review and compliance check by the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice](#) for Statistics and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics'.

In June 2024 The Office for Statistics Regulation introduced the new accredited official statistics badge, to denote official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and judged to meet the standards in the Code of Practice for Statistics. The new badge replaces the current National Statistics badge, though the meaning is the same. Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. Accredited Official 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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Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.

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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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