

# Census 2021: Language in Brent

Topic briefing

January 2023



BUILDING A  
BETTER BRENT

A decorative horizontal line consisting of four colored segments: green, blue, purple, and orange.

# Summary

**census**  
2021

Language in  
Brent

**34%** 

1 in 3 Brent residents\* use a main language other than English, the 2nd highest rate in England & Wales

**8%** 

of residents have poor proficiency in spoken English – the 3rd highest rate nationally



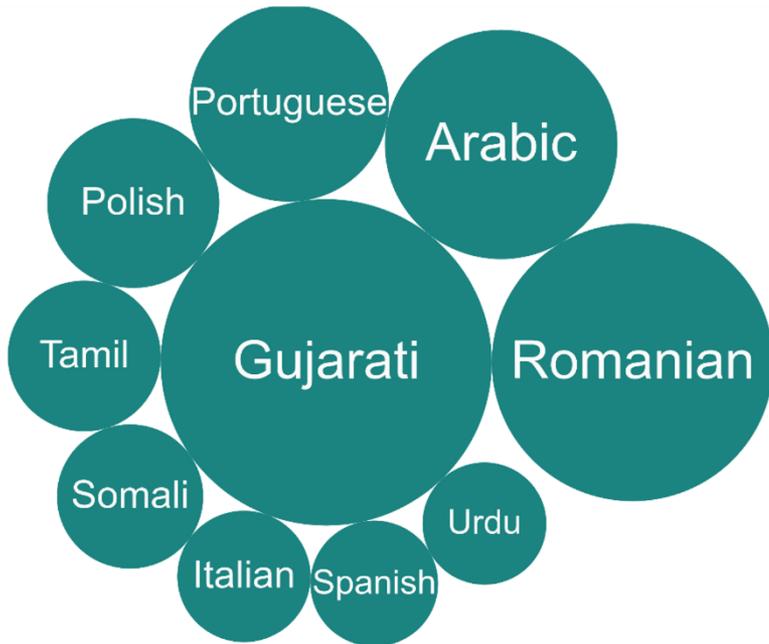
**20%** of households have no-one who uses English as their main language, the highest rate nationally

**23%** 

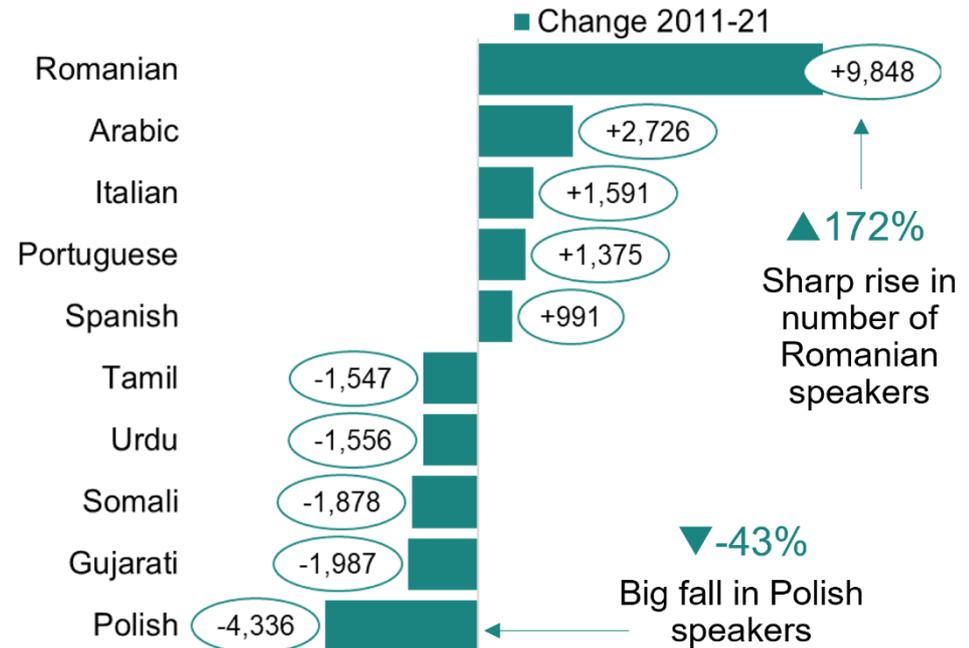
of households are multi-language households - 3rd highest rate in England & Wales

## Top 10 language groups in Brent (exc. English)

Populations range from 3,015 (Urdu) up to 21,513 (Gujarati)



## Change 2011-2021: top 10 language groups:



# Headlines

This briefing summarises census data about languages used in Brent and levels of proficiency in spoken English.

- **Overview:** Brent has one of the most linguistically diverse populations in the country. In 2021, around one third (34%) of residents used a main language other than English – the 2nd highest rate in England & Wales after Newham (35%), and well above the national average (9%). At a household level, one in five Brent households (20%) have no-one who uses English as their main language – the highest rate nationally.
- **Proficiency in English:** While the majority of other language speakers said they could speak English ‘well’ or ‘very well’, a significant minority indicated they had poor proficiency in spoken English. In total, 24,681 residents said they could not speak English well, or at all – 7.5% of the population, well above the rate across London (4.2%) and the 3rd highest rate nationally, after Leicester and Newham (9.0% and 8.1%).
- **Main language:** The largest three language groups in Brent were: Gujarati, Romanian and Arabic speakers. Around 7% of residents used Gujarati as their main language – the 3rd highest rate across England & Wales. Around 5% of residents were Romanian speakers - the 4th highest rate nationally and 3% used Arabic, the 2nd highest rate nationally. Brent had the highest percentage of Somali speakers across England & Wales (1.3%).
- **Sign language:** In Brent, 236 residents (0.07% of the population) used sign language as their main language, compared with 0.05% nationally. Of this group, 210 used British Sign Language.
- **Change 2011-21:** Between 2011 and 2021, the number of Romanian speakers in Brent almost trebled in size from 5,722 in 2011 up to 15,570 in 2021 (a rise of 172%). Other language groups to see rises of more than 1,000 in number included: Arabic (+2,726), Italian (+1,591) and Portuguese speakers (+1,375). The Polish speaking population saw the biggest decline in number, down from 10,153 in 2011 to 5,817 in 2021. Other groups to see significant falls included: Gujarati (-1,987), Somali (-1,878), Urdu (-1,556) and Tamil speakers (-1,547).
- **Multi-language households:** Around 23% of Brent households were multiple language households (i.e. households with members from more than one language group) – the 3rd highest rate in England & Wales.

# Introduction

This briefing summarises 2021 census data about languages used in Brent and levels of proficiency in spoken English.

## Census language questions

The census form asked respondents what their main language was: English or another language. Those using a language other than English were asked to specify the language, and also to say how well they could speak English. Respondents were also given a reminder to include British Sign Language if relevant.

For households that did not have English as a main language, assistance in completing the census questionnaire was provided through interpretation services. Also, translation leaflets were made available in over 50 languages.

## About the data

- Language data: The census table on main language identifies 94 different language categories: most are individual languages but some are groups of languages (e.g. Any other South Asian languages).
- Rounding: Most percentages in the narrative have been rounded to the nearest point, unless otherwise specified.
- Rankings: Brent rankings are out of 331 lower tier local authority areas in England & Wales and relate to rates (%).
- Copyright: The report is based on the topic datasets relating to language that were released by the ONS on 29 November 2022. Census statistics are licenced under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 © Crown Copyright.

**! Pandemic impacts:** The 2021 census took place in March 2021 when a range of pandemic lockdown restrictions were still in place. It is likely that some residents were temporarily away at this time (e.g. students, furloughed and migrant workers). While some will still have been captured on the census at their usual address, others will not have been. Census results need to be viewed in this context: as a snapshot of the population as at March 2021.

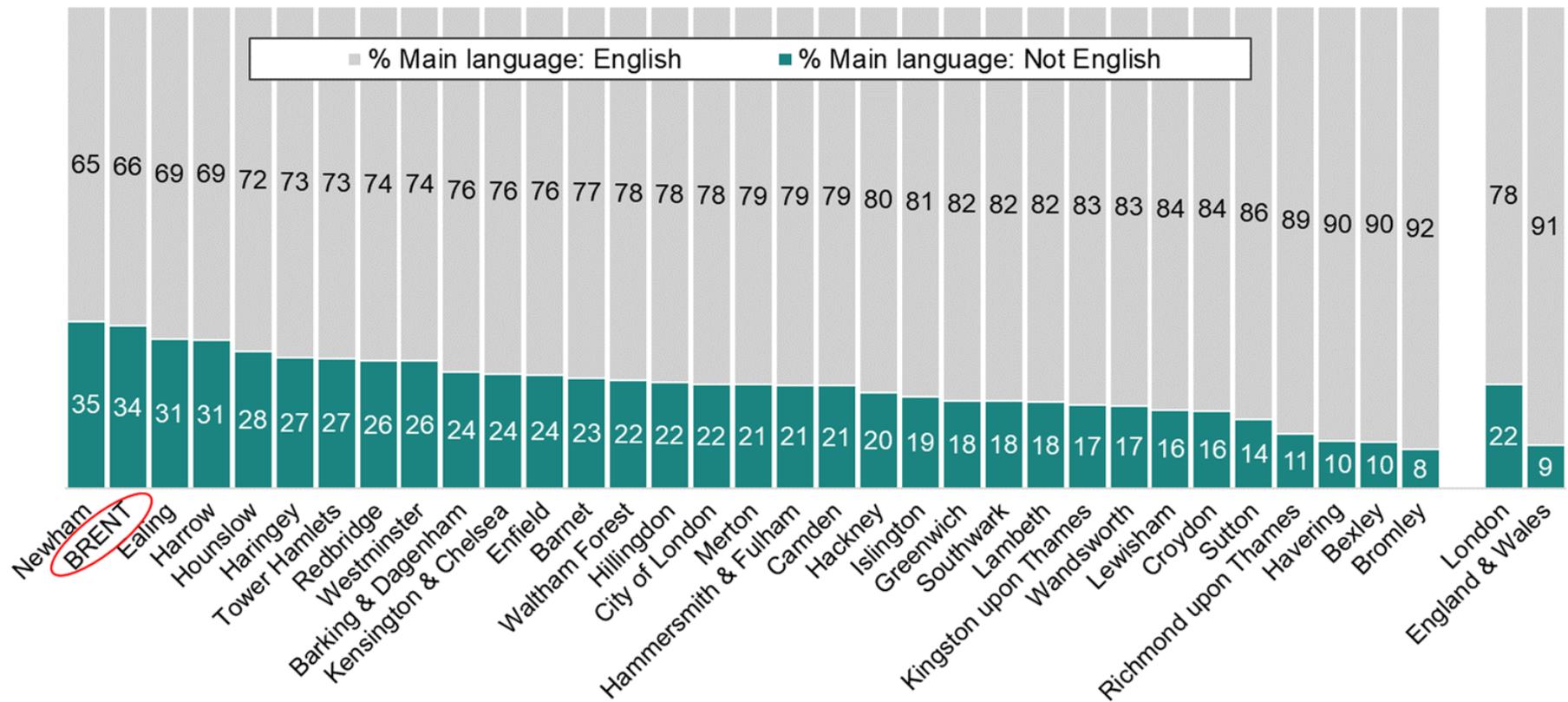
## Census language questions

The image shows a screenshot of the 2021 census form. Question 18 asks 'What is your main language?'. It has two radio button options: 'English' with a blue arrow pointing to 'GO TO 20', and 'Other, write in (including British Sign Language)'. Below the options is a grid of 10 empty boxes for writing. Question 19 asks 'How well can you speak English?'. It has four radio button options: 'Very well', 'Well', 'Not well', and 'Not at all'.

# Main language, London Boroughs, 2021

- Brent has one of the most linguistically diverse populations in the country. In 2021, around one third (34%) of the Brent population used a main language other than English. This was the 2nd highest rate in England & Wales after Newham (35%), and well above the average rate across London and England & Wales (22% and 9%).
- The percentage of Brent residents using a main language other than English fell from 37% to 34% between 2011 and 2021. Note: Language data relate to residents aged 3 and over.

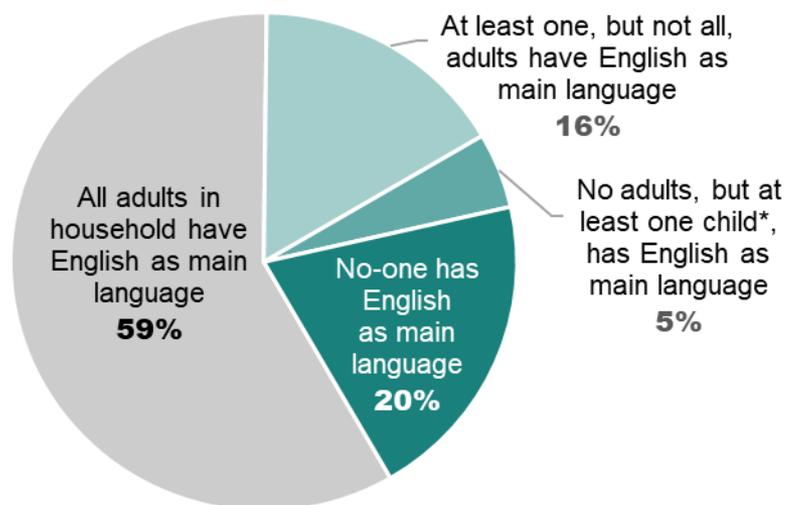
## Population by main language (persons aged 3+), London Boroughs & the City, 2021



# Household profile: English language, 2021

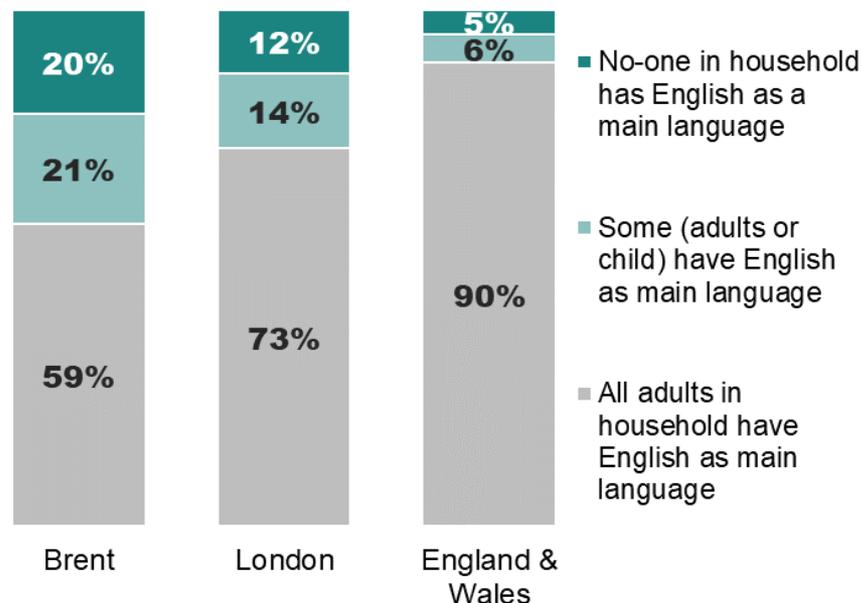
- The census also provides intelligence about the use of English as a main language at a household level. In six in ten Brent households, all adults use English as their main language (59%), well below the rate across London or nationally (73% and 90%). One in five Brent households (20%) have no-one in the household who uses English as their main language – the highest rate nationally, and well above the London average (12%).
- The remaining fifth (21%) of Brent households have a mix of members who use English and other languages: 16% are households where at least one, but not all, adults have English as a main language and 5% are households where only children in the family use English as a main language. The percentage of Brent households with a mix of members using English and other languages is more than three times the rate nationally (21% vs. 6%).

## Household profile: English as main language within households, Brent, 2021



Base: Brent households (118,612)

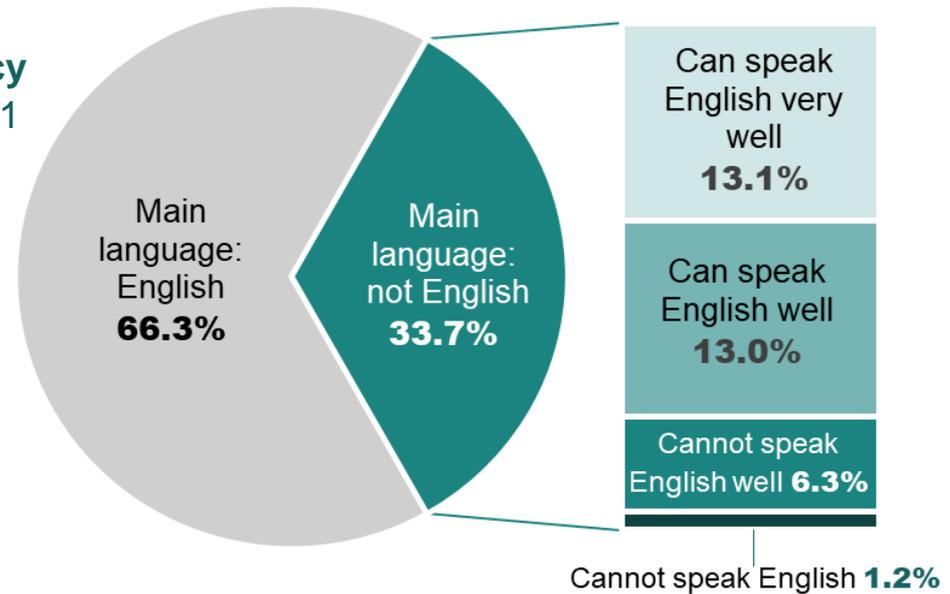
## Brent profile compared with London and England & Wales, 2021



# English language proficiency

- Those who used a main language other than English were asked how well they could speak English: over three quarters of this group (78%) said they could speak English 'very well' or 'well'.
- While the majority of other language speakers could speak English 'well' or 'very well', a significant minority indicated they had poor (or no) proficiency in spoken English.
- In total, 24,681 residents said they could not speak English well, or at all – 7.5% of the Brent population, well above the rate across London (4.2%) and the 3rd highest percentage nationally, after Leicester and Newham (9.0% and 8.1% respectively).
- The percentage of Brent residents with poor proficiency in English has dropped slightly since the last census in 2011 (7.5% and 8.0%).

## English language proficiency Brent, 2021



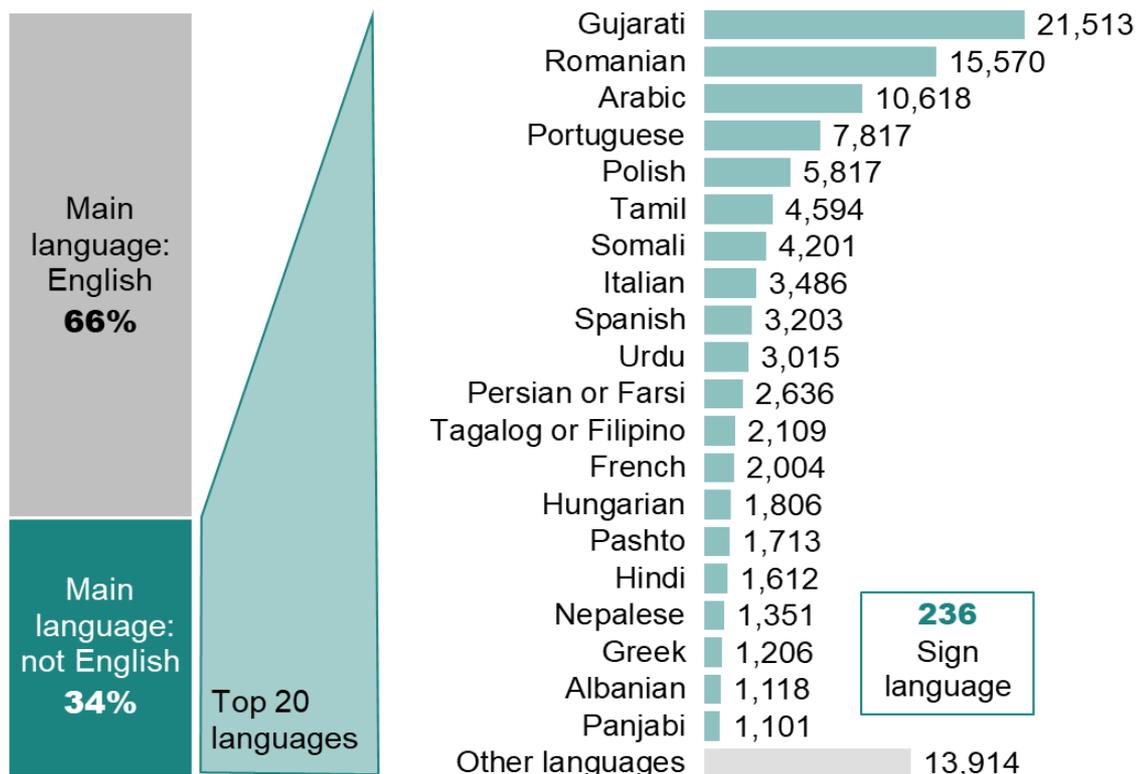
## Population by main language and proficiency in English, 2021

	Brent (number)	Brent (% total)	London (% total)	England & Wales (% total)	Brent rank (*)
Total (population aged 3+)	327,771	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Main language is English	217,371	66.3%	78.4%	91.1%	330
Main language is not English:	110,400	33.7%	21.6%	8.9%	2
Can speak English very well	43,039	13.1%	9.9%	3.9%	5
Can speak English well	42,680	13.0%	7.5%	3.2%	2
Cannot speak English well	20,618	6.3%	3.6%	1.5%	3
Cannot speak English	4,063	1.2%	0.6%	0.3%	2
Cannot speak English well / at all	24,681	7.5%	4.2%	1.8%	3

# Brent population by main language, 2021

- The largest three language groups in Brent were: Gujarati, Romanian and Arabic. Around 7% of residents used Gujarati as their main language – the 3rd highest rate across England & Wales. Around 5% of residents were Romanian speakers - the 4th highest rate nationally. Around 3% used Arabic, the 2nd highest rate nationally after Westminster. Brent had the highest percentage of Somali speakers across England & Wales (1.3%).
- In Brent, 236 residents (0.07% of the population) used sign language as their main language, compared with 0.05% nationally. Of this group, 210 used British Sign Language. Appendix 1 provides the detail for all language groups.

## Population by main language (top 20), Brent, 2021 (residents aged 3+)



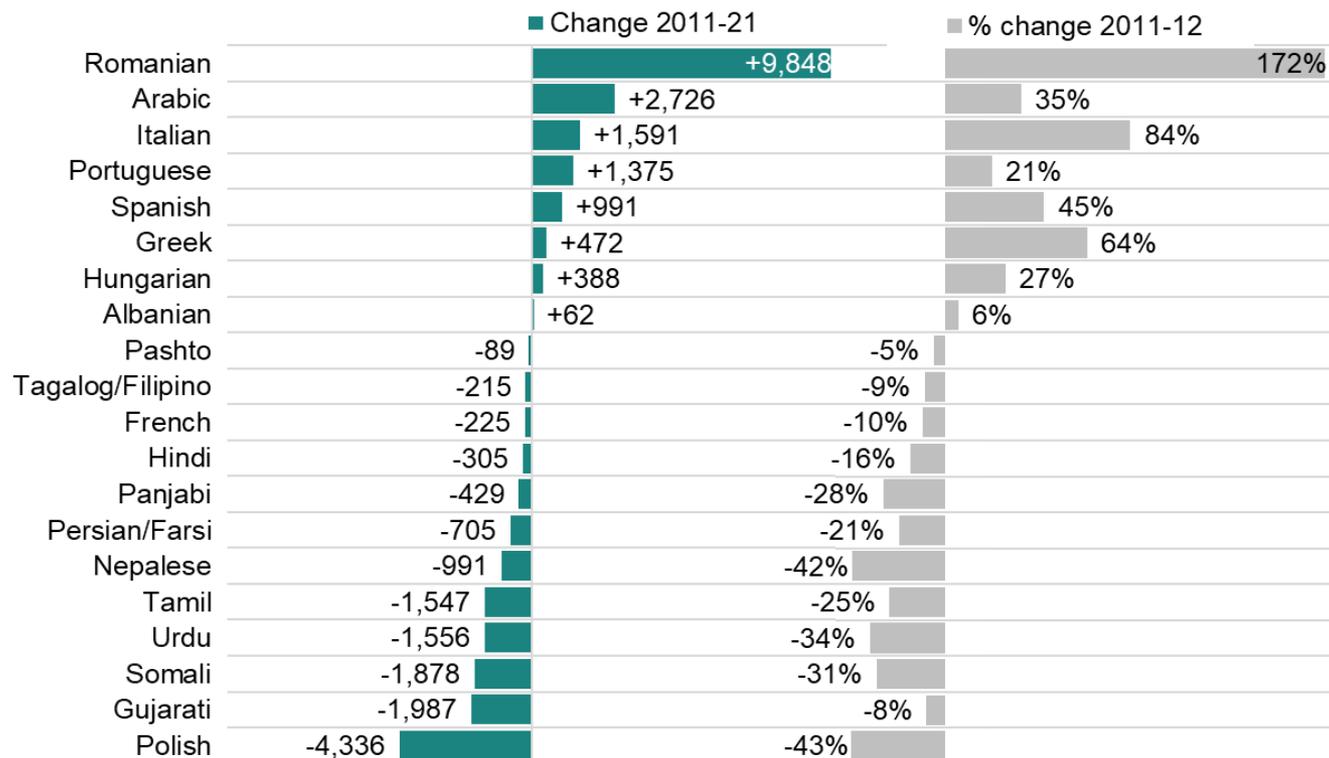
	% of the population	Brent rank*
Gujarati	6.6%	3
Romanian	4.8%	4
Arabic	3.2%	2
Portuguese	2.4%	2
Polish	1.8%	40
Tamil	1.4%	9
Somali	1.3%	1
Italian	1.1%	14
Spanish	1.0%	20
Urdu	0.9%	39
Persian/Farsi	0.8%	5
Tagalog/Filipino	0.6%	3
French	0.6%	18
Hungarian	0.6%	6
Pashto	0.5%	6
Hindi	0.5%	7
Nepalese	0.4%	23
Greek	0.4%	17
Albanian	0.3%	13
Panjabi	0.3%	73
Other	4.2%	

# Change 2011-2021: top 20 language groups

- Between 2011 and 2021, the number of Romanian speakers in Brent almost trebled in size from 5,722 in 2011 up to 15,570 in 2021 (a rise of 172%). This is consistent with the significant growth in the size of Brent's Romanian over the period, following the working restrictions for Romanian citizens being lifted in 2014. Other language groups to see rises of more than 1,000 in number included: Arabic (+2,726), Italian (+1,591) and Portuguese speakers (+1,375).
- The Polish speaking population saw the biggest decline in number, down from 10,153 in 2011 to 5,817 in 2021. Other groups to see significant falls included: Gujarati (-1,987), Somali (-1,878), Urdu (-1,556) and Tamil speakers (-1,547).

## Change 2011-2021: largest 20 language groups in Brent (excluding English). Ranked by size of change

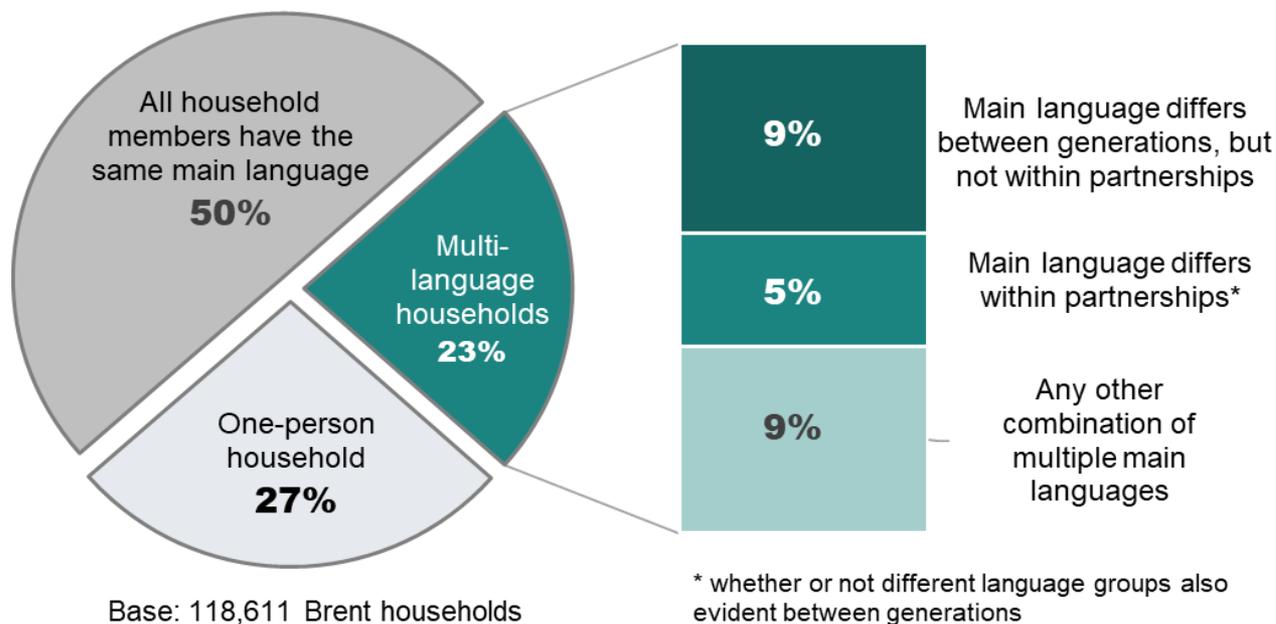
	2011	2021
Romanian	5,722	15,570
Arabic	7,892	10,618
Italian	1,895	3,486
Portuguese	6,442	7,817
Spanish	2,212	3,203
Greek	734	1,206
Hungarian	1,418	1,806
Albanian	1,056	1,118
Pashto	1,802	1,713
Tagalog/Filipino	2,324	2,109
French	2,229	2,004
Hindi	1,917	1,612
Panjabi	1,530	1,101
Persian/Farsi	3,341	2,636
Nepalese	2,342	1,351
Tamil	6,141	4,594
Urdu	4,571	3,015
Somali	6,079	4,201
Gujarati	23,500	21,513
Polish	10,153	5,817



# Multiple main languages in households

- The census also provides intelligence about the mix of main languages used within households. Around 23% of Brent households were multiple language households (i.e. members from more than one main language group). The remainder of the borough's households were those where all members used the same language (50%), or those that were single person households (27%).
- Around 9% of Brent households were multi-language households with different languages used between generations and 5% were those where partners used different main languages. The remaining 9% were other household types with a mix of people using different languages (e.g. flatmates).
- Brent has a relatively high percentage of multi-language households (23%) – the 3rd highest percentage across areas in England & Wales, and well above the percentage across London or nationally (16% and 6%).

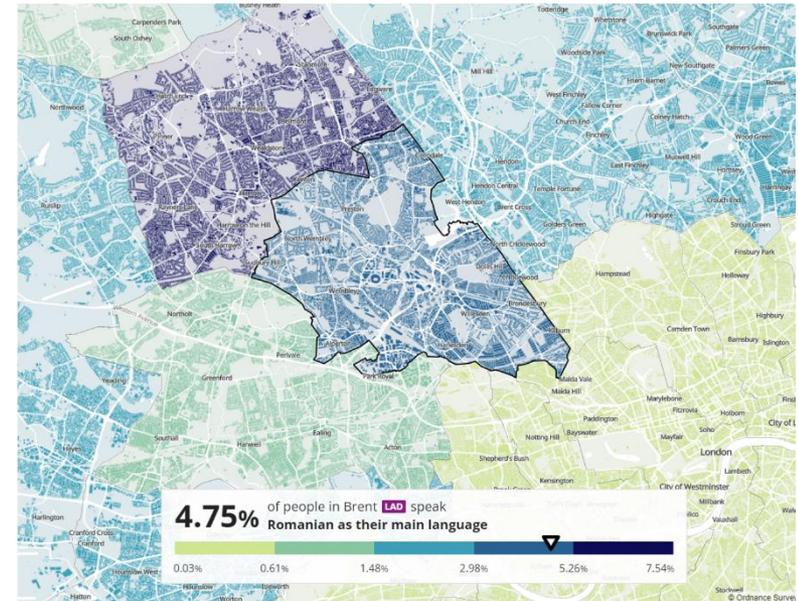
## Multiple language households, Brent, 2021



# Further information

- **2021 Census data:** 2021 Census topic summary datasets can be found on the [NOMIS website](#). NOMIS also provides access to statistics from previous censuses.
- **ONS mapping tool:** ONS has produced an interactive [mapping tool](#) which allows exploration of the data for different language groups across local authority areas.
- **Future census data:** This 'topic summary' data is part of the phase 1 release of the 2021 Census datasets. More detailed results are expected during 2023. A timetable summarises the release timetable can be found on the [ONS website](#).
- **Brent Open Data:** For more facts and figures about the borough of Brent please see the [Brent Open Data website](#).
- **Contact:** This report was produced by Brent Council's Data and Insight team. For more information please email the team at: [open.data@brent.gov.uk](mailto:open.data@brent.gov.uk)

## ONS mapping tool



<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps>

# Appendix: Language (detailed groups)

## Population by main language (detailed groups), Brent, 2021

Population (aged 3+)	<b>327,775</b>	Main language: English	<b>217,371</b>	Main language not English	<b>110,404</b>
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<b>Other UK languages</b>	<b>156</b>
Romany English	85
Welsh	41
Gaelic (Irish)	18
Gaelic (other)	8
Scots	3
Cornish	1

<b>EU languages*</b>	<b>44,040</b>
Romanian	15,570
Portuguese	7,817
Polish	5,817
Italian	3,486
Spanish	3,203
French	2,004
Hungarian	1,806
Greek	1,206
Bulgarian	1,086
Lithuanian	490
German	449
Dutch	205
Slovak	203
Czech	168
Swedish	160
Latvian	100
Danish	61
Finnish	46
Estonian	31
Slovenian	22
Maltese	12
Other EU language	98

<b>Other European/Eurasia (n.e.s)</b>	<b>2,896</b>
Albanian	1,118
Russian	584
Turkish	568
Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin	258
Ukrainian	228
Yiddish	8
Any Romani language	5
Other Eastern European (non EU)	5
Northern European language (non EU)	122

<b>South Asian language</b>	<b>36,661</b>
Gujarati	21,513
Tamil	4,594
Urdu	3,015
Hindi	1,612
Nepalese	1,351
Panjabi	1,101
Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	630
Malayalam	576
Sinhala	431
Telugu	271
Marathi	268
Pakistani Pahari (inc Mirpuri, Potwari)	28
Any other South Asian language	1,271

### Notes:

The census table identified 94 different languages (or groups of languages). In Brent, residents were identified in 90 categories.  
 (\*) Includes all European (EU) languages except Croatia which is included elsewhere in the Other European group. EU languages also includes languages used internationally such as Spanish, Portuguese and French.

<b>West/Central Asian language</b>	<b>5,160</b>
Persian or Farsi	2,636
Pashto	1,713
Kurdish	540
Hebrew	89
Other West/Central Asian	182

<b>East Asian language</b>	<b>4,447</b>
Tagalog or Filipino	2,109
All other Chinese	866
Cantonese Chinese	384
Mandarin Chinese	237
Japanese	227
Malay	130
Thai	128
Korean	66
Vietnamese	64
Other East Asian language	236

<b>Caribbean Creole</b>	<b>21</b>
English-based Caribbean Creole	6
Any other Caribbean Creole	15

<b>Arabic</b>	<b>10,618</b>
<b>African language</b>	<b>6,079</b>
Somali	4,201
Tigrinya	558
Akan	298
Amharic	245
Swahili or Kiswahili	119
Igbo	110
Lingala	104
Yoruba	103
Luganda	29
Afrikaans	18
Shona	13
Krio	7
Other Nigerian language	38
Other West African language	119
Other African language	117

<b>Sign language</b>	<b>236</b>
British Sign Language	210
Any other sign language	9
Any sign communication system	17

<b>Other languages</b>	<b>90</b>
Oceanic or Australian language	6
North/South American language	2
Other languages	82