

UNDERSTANDING CENSUS AREA TYPES

The ONS flexible table builder allows us to view census data across a range of area types from national to very local level. You can choose to view data for your country, region, local authority, or even more local than that! But what does each area type mean, exactly, and how do you know which one to choose? Below you will find a breakdown of the most common census area types as well as tips for selecting the most appropriate one for your research.

Area Type	Description
Countries/Regions	England & Wales, England only, Wales only, or data for the nine regions in England and Wales as a whole.
Upper and lower tier local authorities	In some parts of England, local government is divided between a county council (upper-tier) and a district council (lower tier). In other areas there is a single unitary authority instead.
Westminster parliamentary constituencies	These are areas used to elect a Member of Parliament to the House of Commons.
Electoral wards and divisions	These are areas used to elect local authority councillors.
Middle layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs)	MSOAs are typically made up of groups of 4-5 LSOAs. They comprise 2,000 - 6,000 households and a usually resident population of 5,000 - 15,000 persons.
Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs)	LSOAs are typically made up of groups of 4-5 Output Areas. They comprise 400 - 1,200 households and a usually resident population of 1,000 - 3,000 persons.
Output Areas	The smallest geographical area used for census data. Output areas comprise 40 - 250 households and a usually resident population of 100 - 625 persons.

TIPS FOR CHOOSING AREA TYPES

- **Choose the geography that is most complementary to your audience and to the purpose of your research.** For example, if you want to use data to support an application for a grant from your local council, it may be most useful to focus on data at local authority level.
- You may find it useful to **compare more than one area type**. For example, you could compare your local authority to a neighbouring one, or to your region or country as a whole. Comparison is especially useful for demonstrating how an issue disproportionately affects women in your area.
- **Be aware of Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC).** This was designed to prevent the identification of individuals, and may result in records being swapped between small areas or not released at all. If you are looking at very detailed variables (i.e. very specific groups of women), you may need to search a larger area type to ensure this doesn't happen.
- Note that **there are some other area types you can choose from that may be useful to those interested in health and care.** These include NHS England regions, local health boards, integrated care boards and sub-integrated care board locations.
- You can use [this app \(bit.ly/3nrpb39\)](https://bit.ly/3nrpb39) to **view the census statistical boundaries for Middle layer, Lower layer and Output areas.**