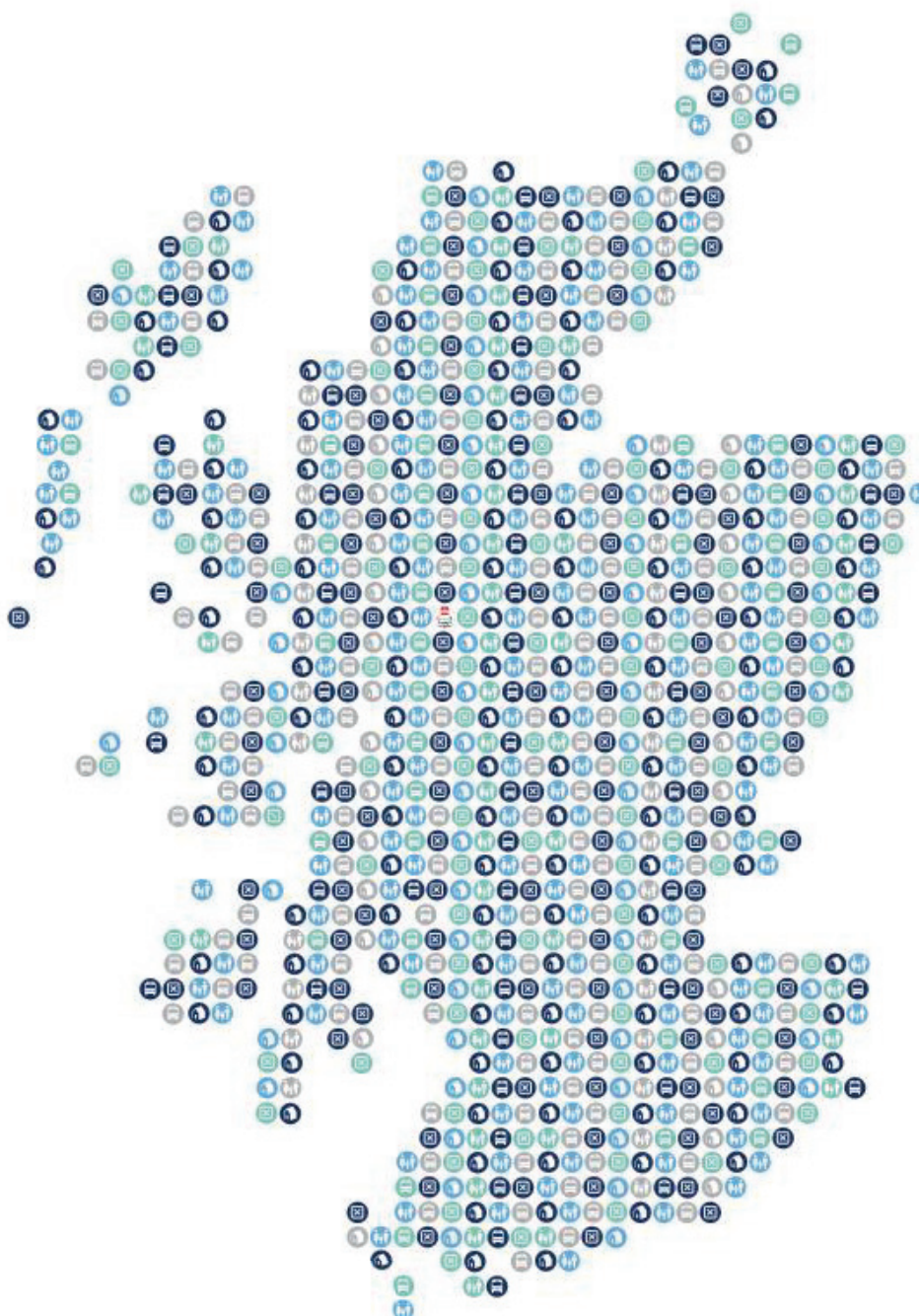


# Scottish Household Survey: Behind the Numbers | 2017

A National Statistics publication for Scotland





# Acknowledgements

The Scottish Government acknowledges and thanks the 10,683 people across Scotland who gave their time to take part in the Scottish Household Survey 2017.

This report was produced by the Scottish Household Survey Project Team at the Scottish Government.

We would also like to thank all the Scottish Government lead analysts who contributed to the project.

Finally, special thanks to Ipsos MORI and their interviewers and surveyors for continuous efforts during the fieldwork.



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## What is a survey?

Surveys are a method of gathering information from individuals. A survey investigates the opinions or experience of a group of people by asking them questions with the aim of generalizing the results to a larger population, in this case, Scotland.



The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is the largest face-to-face collection of information that the Scottish Government runs.

The Scottish Household Survey sample has been designed to produce results for the whole of Scotland and every local authority every year.





## Why are surveys important?

Information from people living in Scotland is a critical source of data, not just for those working in government, but also for academics, charities, the media and citizens themselves.



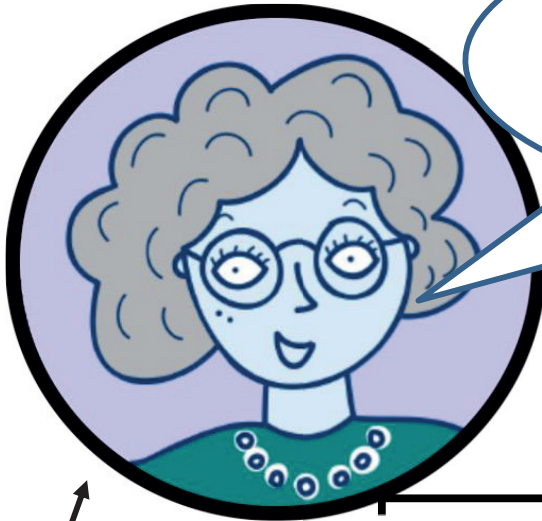
Without the government collecting views from its citizens, policies and laws would be made without reference to those who have to live by them.

The government can then check if their policies are having the intended effect and design laws appropriately.

How long has the SHS been running?



The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) has run continuously in Scotland since devolution in 1999. This means trends over time can be measured.



1999

2017

1995

2000

2005

2010

2015

Click me for more details

How many people do you speak to?



In 2017 the final number of social survey interviews in the sample was 10,683, exceeding the target of 10,678.

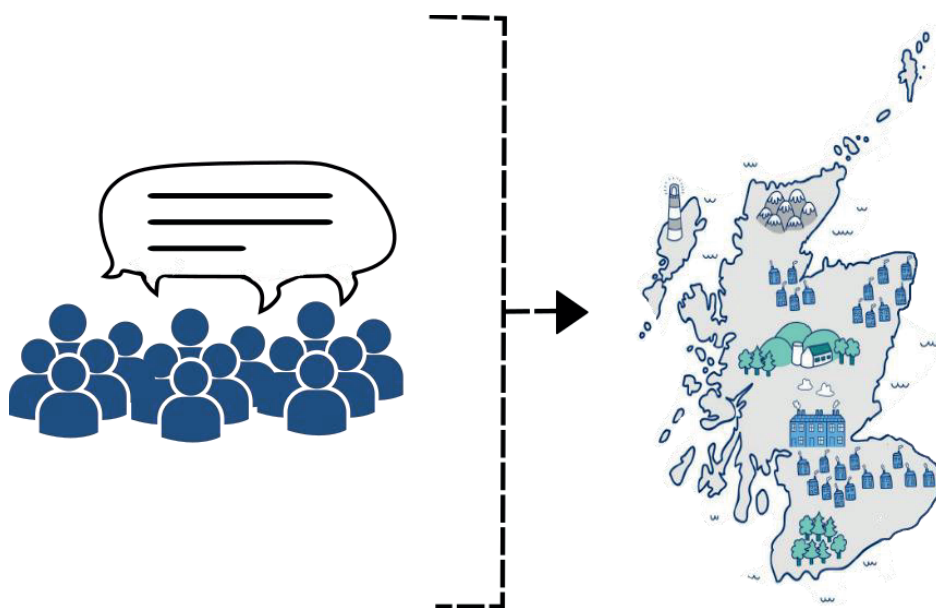




What is a sample?

A sample is a small part or quantity intended to show what the whole is like.

For the SHS, a sample is a group of people that are taken from the whole of Scotland. The sample should be representative of the population to ensure that we can generalise the findings to Scotland as a whole.



Why do you not speak to everyone?

We only speak to a sample of people to reduce the burden on people in Scotland and because it is cheaper.



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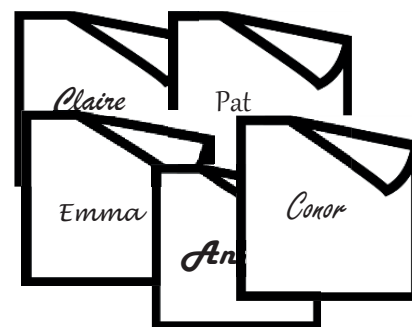
How do you get it to be representative?



A sample of the general population are randomly chosen to take part every year.



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Random sampling is like to putting everyone's name into a hat and drawing out several names. Each person in the population has an equal shot of being picked and are selected by chance.

This means that those selected are more likely to represent the entire Scottish population than just focussing on one sub-group of the population.

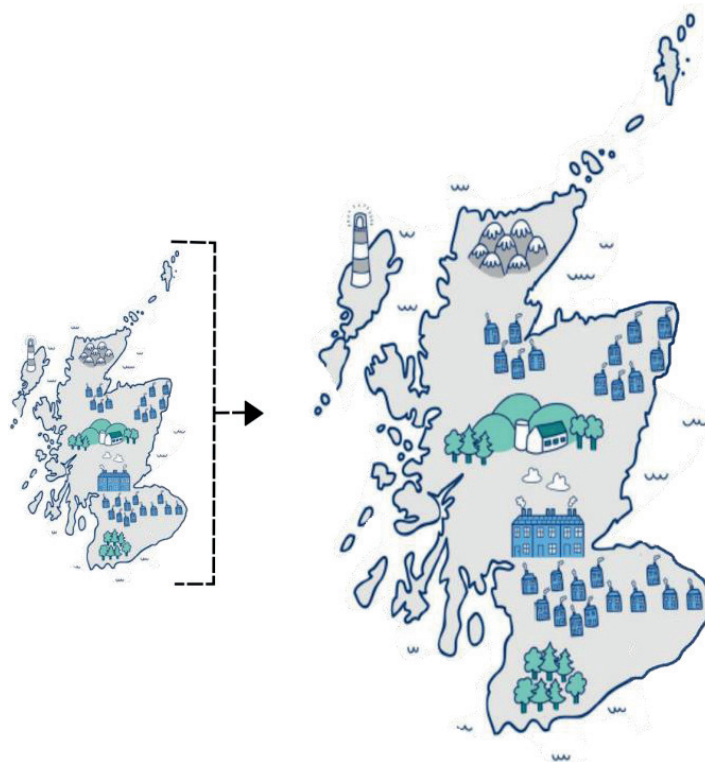
This is critical to the overall survey research design.



So the SHS represents everyone in Scotland?

Ideally, a selected sample is a miniature of the population it came from.

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Unfortunately, this is often not the case.

One of the problems is non-response; when respondents don't want to take part. This may cause some groups to be over- or under-represented within the sample. If this occurs, no reliable conclusions can be drawn.

What do you do about non-representative data?

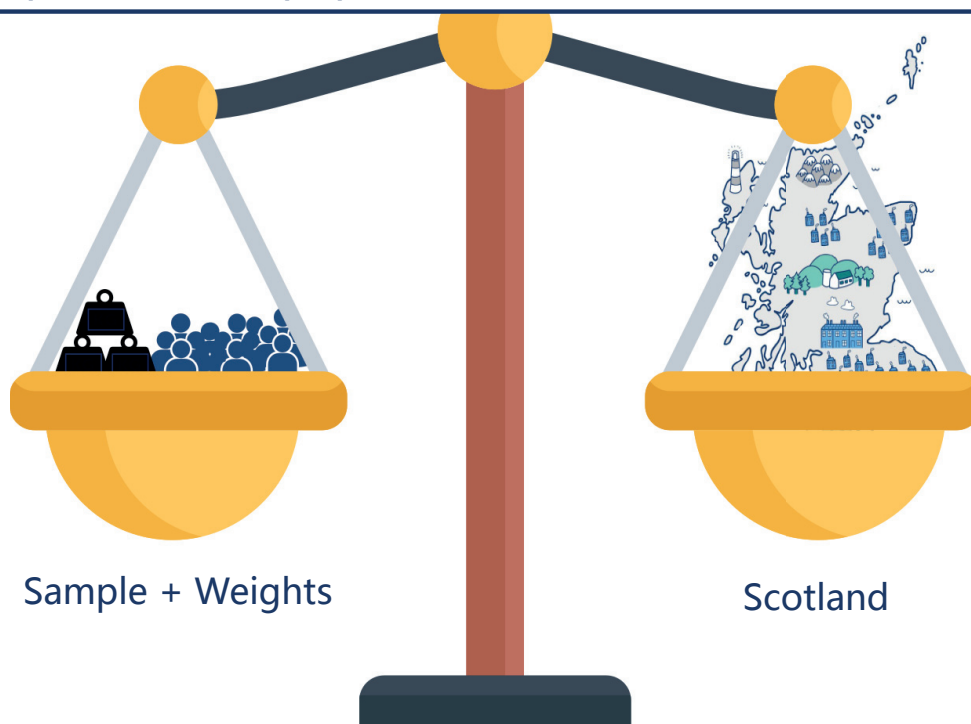


A correction technique called weighting adjustment is made to ensure the sample is representative of the population.



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Weighting assigns an adjustment weight to each survey respondent. This ensures that the sample in the Scottish Household Survey represents the population of Scotland as a whole.



The procedures for the implementation of the weighting methodology were developed by the Scottish Government working with the Methodology Advisory Service at the Office for National Statistics.

The weighting procedures for the SHS incorporate a selection weighting stage to address the unequal selection probabilities and calibration weighting to correct for non-response bias. Calibration weighting derives weights such that the weighted survey totals match known population totals.

Where do the addresses for the SHS sample come from?



The Royal Mail's list of residential addresses\* was used as the sample frame for random address selection of the general population.



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The sample of the general population excludes prisons, hospitals and military bases.

\*Called the small user Postcode Address File (PAF)



# How is the SHS data collected?



The SHS social interview is carried out face-to-face with members of the Scottish population by professional interviewers.



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Interviewers ask questions and have a book of multiple choice answers for the respondent...



...This is followed by a physical survey of the dwelling by professional surveyors.

Interviewers work for Ipsos Mori and use computer tablets to record answers.

It is important that we get as many interviews as possible, so interviewers are required to make up to six calls at an address.

Surveyors complete a physical inspection of the dwelling.





Why can't I do it online?

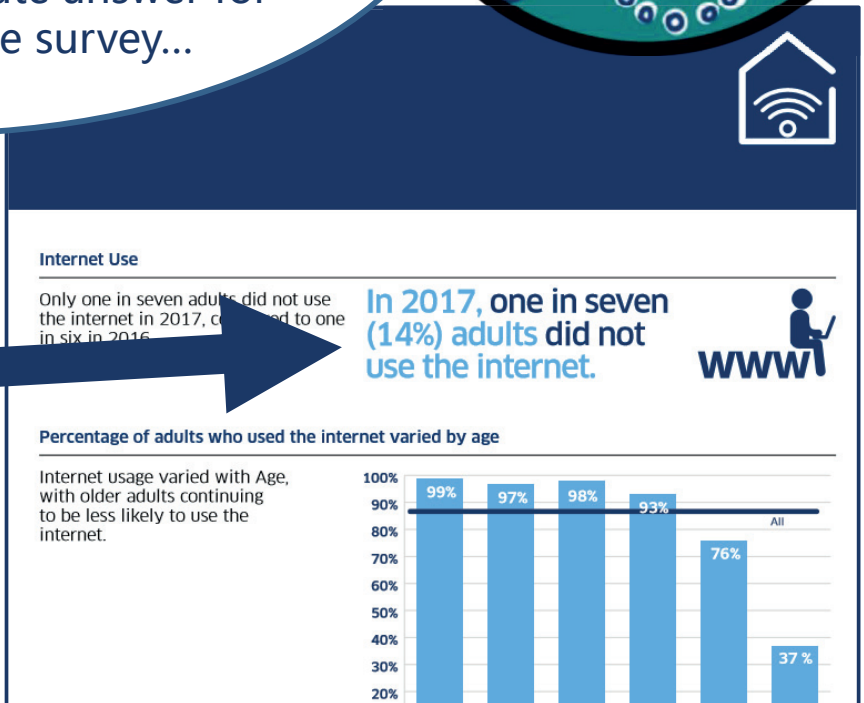
We can't do the survey online because the data wouldn't be accurate enough.

For example, we collect information about the proportion of people in Scotland who use the internet. We couldn't get an accurate answer for this from an online survey...



...And we would miss the views and opinions of these 14% of adults.

(Source: [SHS 2017 Key Findings](#))



We appreciate that many people would prefer to complete an online or paper version of the survey. I'm afraid that it is not possible to run the SHS this way. It is widely recognised that face-to-face interviews offer the best value for money for the type of information we are collecting.

Unfortunately, whilst postal and online surveys are cheaper, they are affected by very low response rates, have problems in capturing views of hard-to-reach groups (e.g. people who do not use the internet) and we would only be able to ask a fraction of the questions which we ask.

We do keep the surveys under constant review though and one possibility for the future is to run a small part of the survey as a self-completion exercise, perhaps over the internet, and then follow this up with a face-to-face interview. We will keep this type of option under review for the future.



What is the response rate?

In survey research, the response rate is the number of people who answered the survey divided by the number of people in the sample. It is usually expressed in the form of a percentage.

The response rate of the Scottish Household Survey in 2017 was:

# 64%



This means over 6 out of every 10 people who we asked to take part, did.

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This is the highest response rate of the major SG surveys in Scotland!

The response rate is an important indicator of survey quality, but not the only one, as non-response can introduce bias into survey estimates.

See further information on quality assurance on [page 17](#).



How has the response rate changed since 1999?



The SHS response rate has fallen by 4% since 1999.

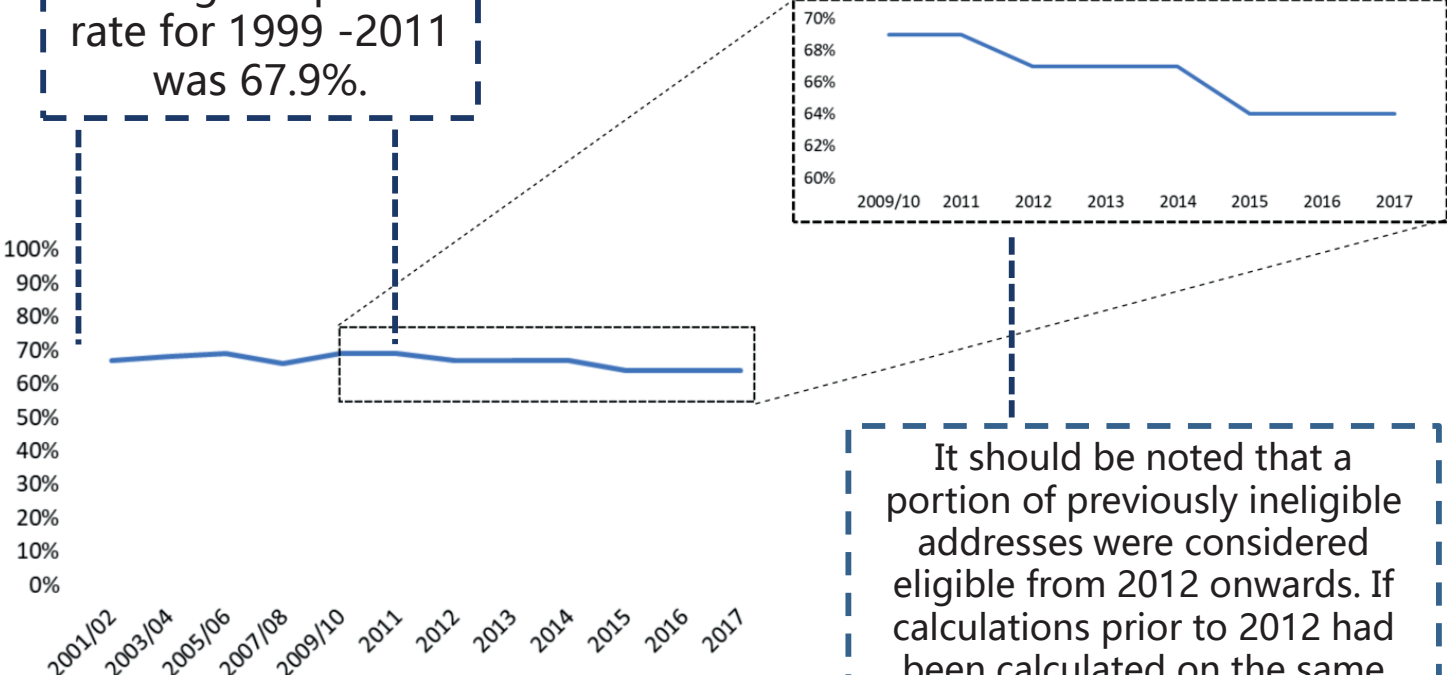
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In 2017 the SHS response rate was 64%...

this was the same as in the previous two years...

but 3 percentage points lower than the 2014 response rate of 67%.

The long-term average response rate for 1999 -2011 was 67.9%.



It should be noted that a portion of previously ineligible addresses were considered eligible from 2012 onwards. If calculations prior to 2012 had been calculated on the same basis, there would have been a lower response rate.



What is collected in the SHS?



Information on the structure and characteristics of Scottish homes and the people who occupy them, and views on a variety of topics. The interview has a two-part structure.

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Generally the Highest Income Householder or their spouse/partner answers the first part.



And one adult (aged 16+) member of the household is selected at random to conduct the second part.

The 2017 Household Composition part covered:  
Household Composition & Characteristics, Accommodation, Internet Access, Recycling, Driving & transport, Young people in the household and Health & Disability

The 2017 Random Adult part covered:  
Adult Characteristics, Accommodation & Housing Experiences, Neighbourhoods & Community Safety, Education & Training, Transport, Volunteering, Convenience of local services, Culture, Sport, Health & Disability and Employment

The SHS questionnaire (between 2012 and 2017) has a core and modular design which rotates and replicates across to subsequent years.



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### Questions asked of:

everyone annually (including the core)

everyone biennially

1/3 sample annually (including the SHCS)

1/3 sample biennially



2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

A "core" set of 20 questions, such as age and gender, are included which have been designed to be asked in a consistent way with other surveys.

From 2012, the physical survey of the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) has been incorporated into the SHS. Such surveys are conducted by professional surveyors through a visual inspection of the dwelling.



Why are you asking me these questions when the government already knows all about us?

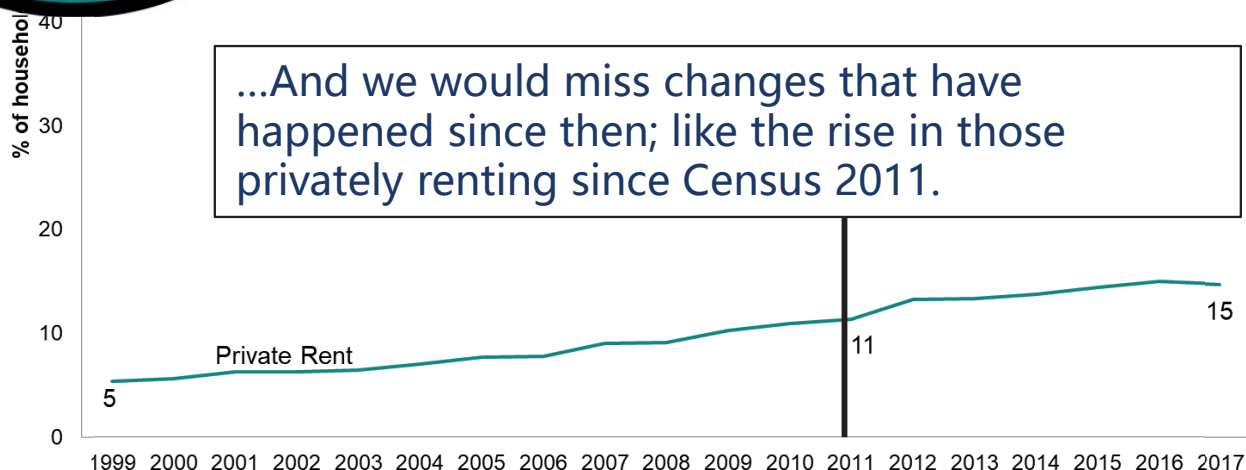


We need this information because we don't have all the answers about Scotland's population.

The government gets some information from the census but this quickly goes out-of-date as it's only once every 10 years...



...And we would miss changes that have happened since then; like the rise in those privately renting since Census 2011.



\*Please note the chart excludes 'other' tenure

(Source: [SHS 2017](#))

Making lawful, ethical, secure and transparent use of administrative data to supplement the information respondents are asked by interviewers could create time and cost savings.

Unfortunately most data is not currently readily available to Scottish Government for these purposes. The "Long-term Survey Strategy" published in March 2018 sets out ongoing work to realise the public benefits that access to these data sources would bring, and references the burden asking these questions in surveys places on respondents.





Are there any limitations of SHS data?

There are a number of important methodological and data issues that users need to be aware of when using the SHS data.



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Like all sample surveys, the SHS can only produce estimates. However, we also report confidence intervals. A 95% confidence interval is a range of values that you can be 95% certain contains the true mean of the population.

The SHS is limited in the amount of detail it can collect about some topics. As a multi-purpose survey, the SHS is not designed to provide in-depth information about household income. This can be obtained from more specialised surveys such as the Labour Force Survey and the Family Resources Survey.

Although the SHS has a large sample that covers the whole of Scotland, it has some geographical limitations. Users should not use it to undertake geographical analysis below local authority level. Instead, the [Scottish Surveys Core Questions](#) should be used for this.

Users need to be mindful of the sampling errors for analysis, especially when this is based on breakdowns within a local authority.

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In statistics, **sampling error** is the **error** caused by observing a **sample** instead of the whole population. The **sampling error** is the difference between a **sample** statistic used to estimate a population parameter and the actual but unknown value of the parameter.



Measuring and assuring the quality of any survey does not just boil down to the response rate.

## We ensure quality at every stage.

The Scottish Household Survey team ensures the quality of the data in many ways. Some of these include...

- Cognitive testing to ensure good quality questions
- Extensive training for interviewers
- Experienced researchers conducting the data processing



The Scottish Household Survey report is produced under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. National Statistics are produced free of political interference, to agreed standards, and undergo regular quality assurance reviews.

For more information, visit <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/code-of-practice/>



Where can I find out more about the SHS?



Click me to go directly to the SHS homepage

Whilst this publication focuses on some key technical points, the SHS collects and publishes a wide array of information on various topics. These can be found below.

## **Publications**

[SHS Annual Reports](#)

[SHS Methodology and Fieldwork](#)

[Outcomes SHS Questionnaires](#)

[SHS 2017 Local Authority Tables](#)

[SHS Interactive Dashboard](#)

[SHS 2017 Key Findings](#)

[SHS Data Comic](#)

[SHS Inequalities Data Comic](#)

[Scottish Government Open Data Statistics](#)

[website UK National Data Archive](#)

[Transport and Travel in Scotland \(TATIS\)](#)

[Scottish Surveys Core Questions \(SSCQ\)](#)

[Scottish House Condition Survey \(SHCS\)](#)



How do I contact the SHS team?



Click me to go directly to the SHS homepage or contact us at the details below.

## Contact Details



Webpage: <http://www.gov.scot/SHS>



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## Mailing list

If you wish to be added to the e-mail mailing list to be kept informed of details of SHS developments, you should register your interest in 'Population and Household Surveys' and/or the Scottish Household Survey' sub-topic on the [ScotStat Register](#)

Comic illustrations are by [Katie Quinn](#).