

# Population Estimates for Settlements and Localities in Scotland, Mid-2020

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This statistical report describes the populations of built-up areas in Scotland, known as settlements and localities.

## What are settlements and localities?

Settlements and localities represent the urban or built-up areas of Scotland.

Settlements are groups of adjacent, densely populated postcode areas that add up to 500 people or more. They are separated by low density postcodes.

Larger settlements are sometimes divided into localities. Localities correspond to the historical towns of Scotland.

In mid-2020, 91% of Scotland's population lived in settlements and localities, which made up only 2.3% of Scotland's total land area.

There were 514 settlements in Scotland in mid-2020.

## Population of settlements

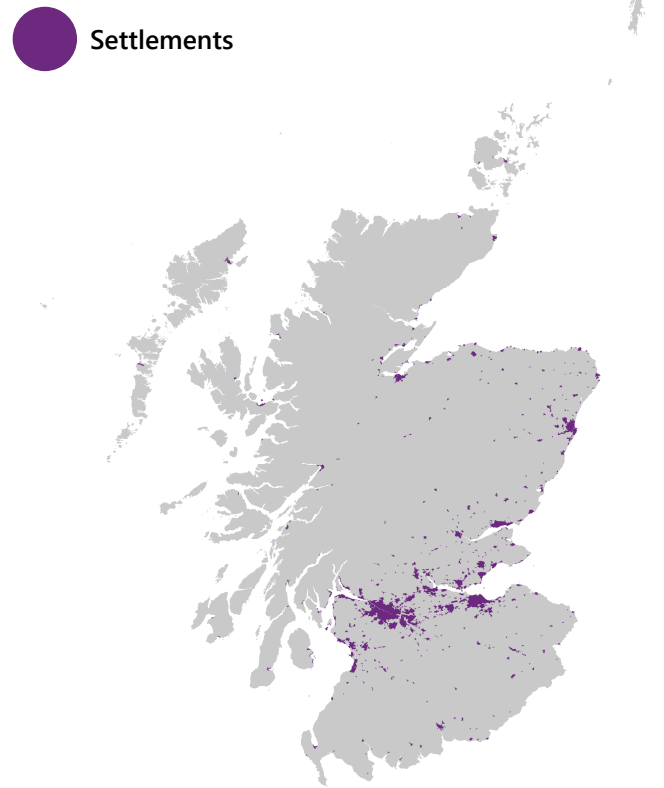
The populations of Scotland's settlements ranged from 500 to 1,028,220.

The median population was 1,905, and the mean was 9,678. There are a few settlements with very large populations compared with most.

Detailed tables containing the latest population estimates by age and sex are available from the [NRS website](#).

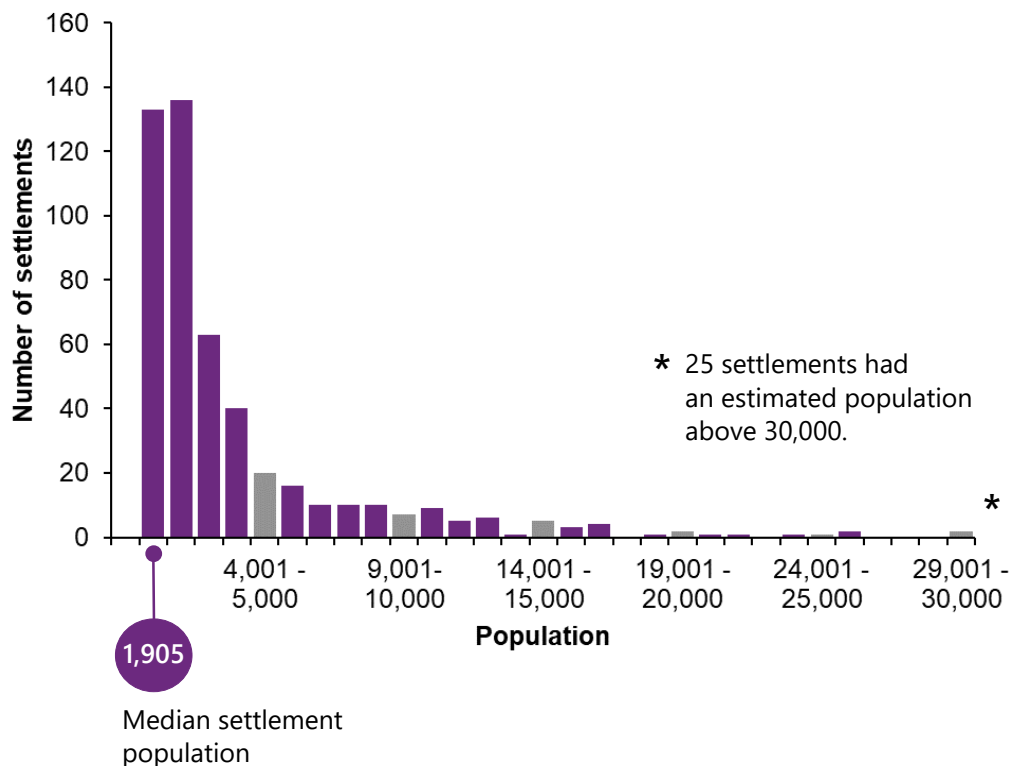
Geographic shape files, which help to visualise settlement and locality boundaries using GIS software, are also available from the [NRS website](#).

## Geographical distribution of settlements



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## Population distribution of settlements



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### How to find data

#### What are you looking for?

The main data tables and graphs for this publication

The geography shape files for building settlements and localities

More information about the methodology

#### Where is it?

[Data and charts](#)

[Shape files](#)

[Methodology guide](#)

## 1. Main Points

Settlements and localities are defined as groups of adjacent, densely populated postcodes that add up to 500 or more people. They help to approximate the urban or built-up areas of Scotland.

- There were **514 settlements in Scotland** in mid-2020. This is **5 fewer than in 2016**, due to some settlements merging or falling below the threshold of 500 people.
- The population living in settlements and localities was **4,974,670**. The population living outside settlements was **491,330**.
- **91% of Scotland's population** lived in settlements and localities, which accounted for **2.3% of Scotland's total land area**.
- The largest settlement in Scotland was Greater Glasgow with a population of 1,028,220. **Nearly 1 in 5 people living in Scotland in mid-2020 lived in Greater Glasgow**.
- Almost all of **Glasgow City's** and **Dundee City's** population lived in a settlement (**99.8% in both**). In contrast, less than a third of **Na h-Eileanan Siar's** population lived in a settlement (**29.4%**).

### What are settlements and localities?

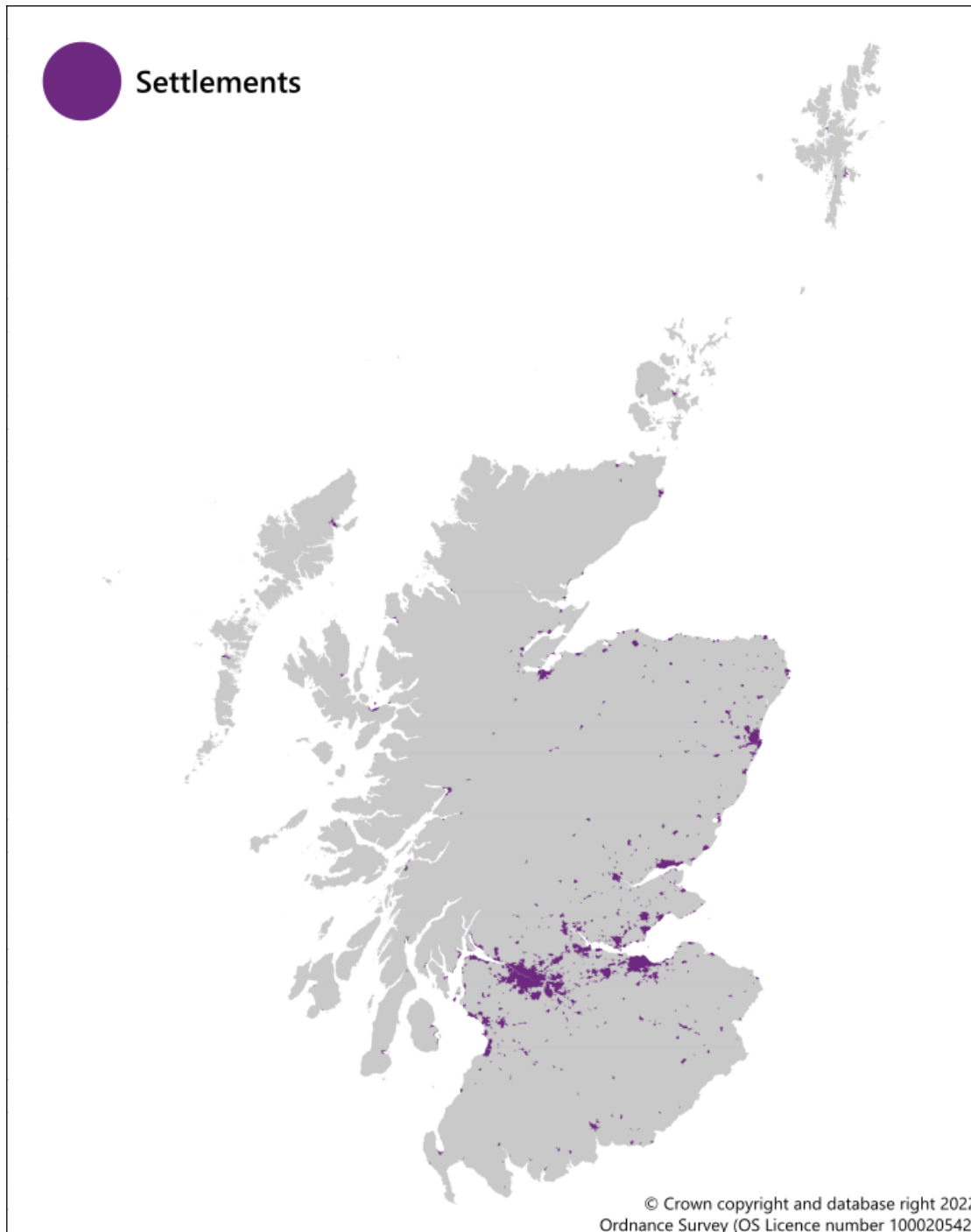
A settlement is a contiguous group of postcode areas with a high population density and whose combined population rounds to 500 people or more. High density postcodes are identified using measures of population, residential addresses, and non-residential addresses per hectare.

Larger settlements can comprise of multiple localities. For instance, Greater Glasgow is a settlement and it contains several localities like Giffnock or Clydebank. Localities correspond to the historical towns of Scotland, and can be identified through consultation with local authorities. For more information about the methodology please read the [background section](#) of this report.

## 2. Where are settlements located?

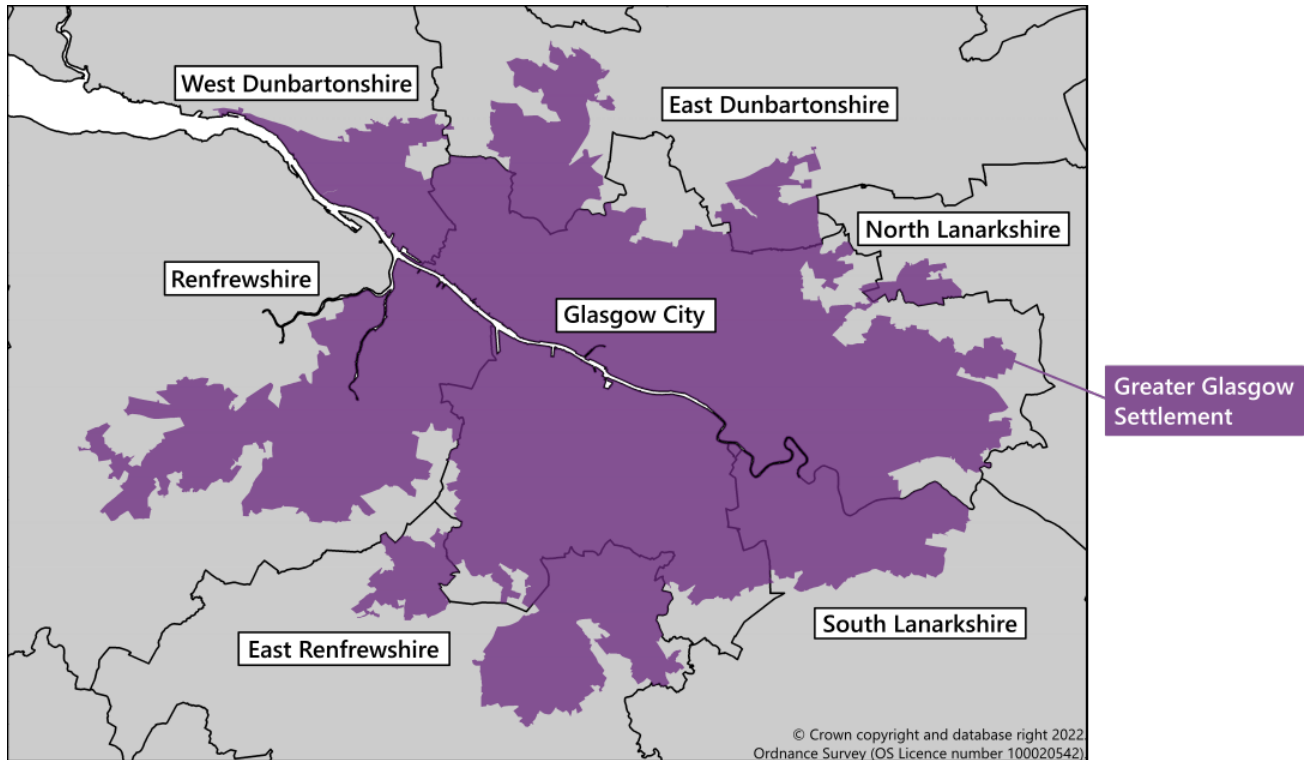
In mid-2020 there were 514 settlements in Scotland. [Figure 1](#) maps their distribution across the country. Settlements tend to be concentrated across the Central Belt and the east coast, but are sparse in the Highlands and Islands. Scotland's settlements make up 2.3% of the total land area of Scotland.

**Figure 1: Settlements in Scotland, mid-2020**



Settlements can cross council area boundaries. For example, the Greater Glasgow settlement spans seven councils – East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire. This is shown in [Figure 2](#).

**Figure 2: Greater Glasgow settlement and its council areas, mid-2020**

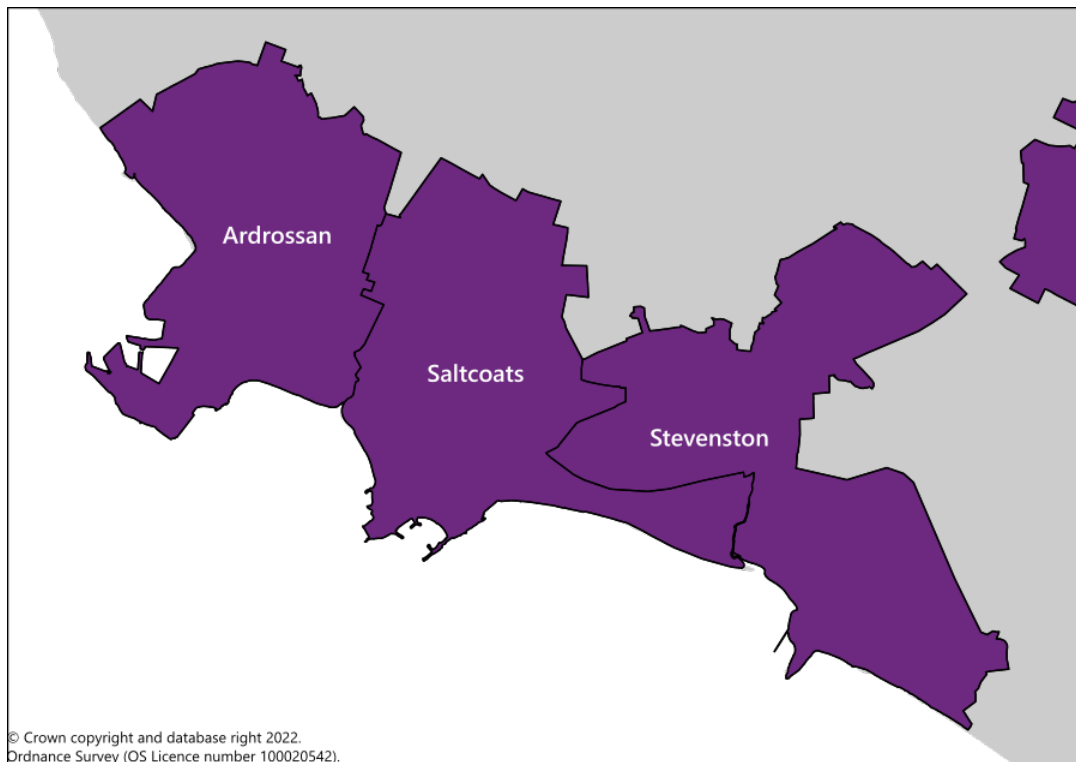


There were six settlements in Scotland whose boundaries extended over more than one council area: Greater Glasgow (7), Dundee (3), Edinburgh (2), Harthill (2), Kelty (2), and Liff (2). A list of all settlements by council area can be found in our published [data tables](#).

Larger settlements are often subdivided into localities. In mid-2020 there were 196 localities which formed part of a larger settlement. Localities correspond more to the historical burghs of Scotland, and can be identified through consultation with local authorities.

[Figure 3](#) illustrates the three localities that make up the settlement of Saltcoats, known locally as the “three towns” – Ardrossan, Saltcoats, and Stevenston. They exist as distinct Scottish towns for historical reasons, but together form an area of contiguous, high-density postcodes, and therefore form one settlement.

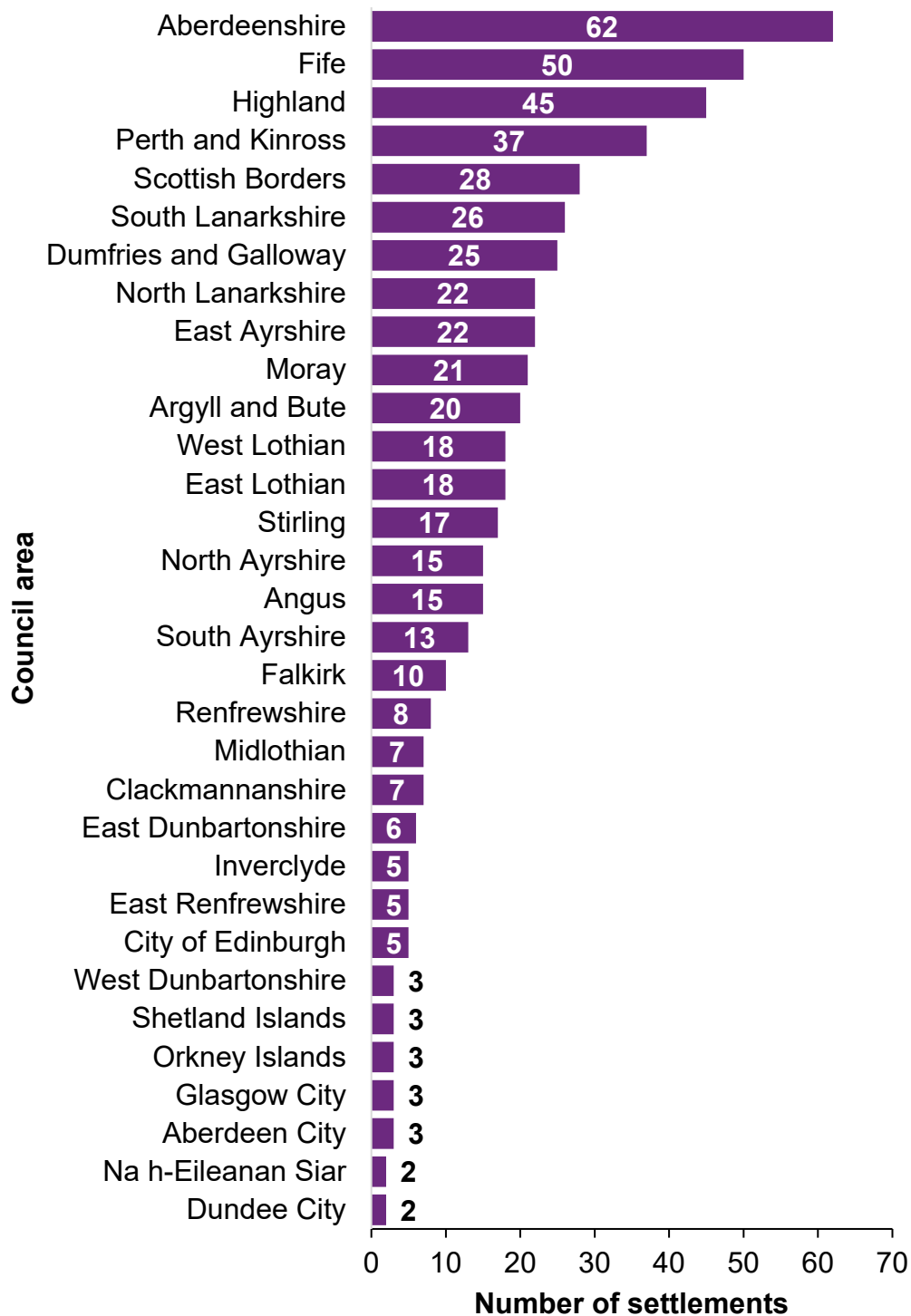
**Figure 3: Saltcoats settlement and its localities, mid-2020**



The number of settlements varies by council area. [Figure 4](#) shows that Aberdeenshire had the highest number of settlements (62). Council areas with a large land area such as Aberdeenshire and Highland tended to have higher numbers of settlements, since their populations are more spread out.

Island council areas such as Orkney Islands and Na h-Eileanan Siar had fewer settlements given their smaller land area and total population. City council areas like Glasgow or Dundee also had fewer settlements. Their populations tend to be concentrated into a smaller number of settlements.

**Figure 4: Number of settlements in Scotland by council area, mid-2020**





### 3. How many people live in settlements?

In mid-2020, an estimated 5,466,000 people were resident in Scotland. Of the total population, 91% (4,974,670) lived in settlements and localities across Scotland.

Table 1 shows the five most populated settlements in Scotland. Greater Glasgow was the largest settlement, containing 18.8% of Scotland's total population. The most populated settlements contained cities or were near to cities. Greater Glasgow is also the largest settlement in terms of land area. It had an area of 274.4 square kilometres. In general, a settlement's population increases with its land area.

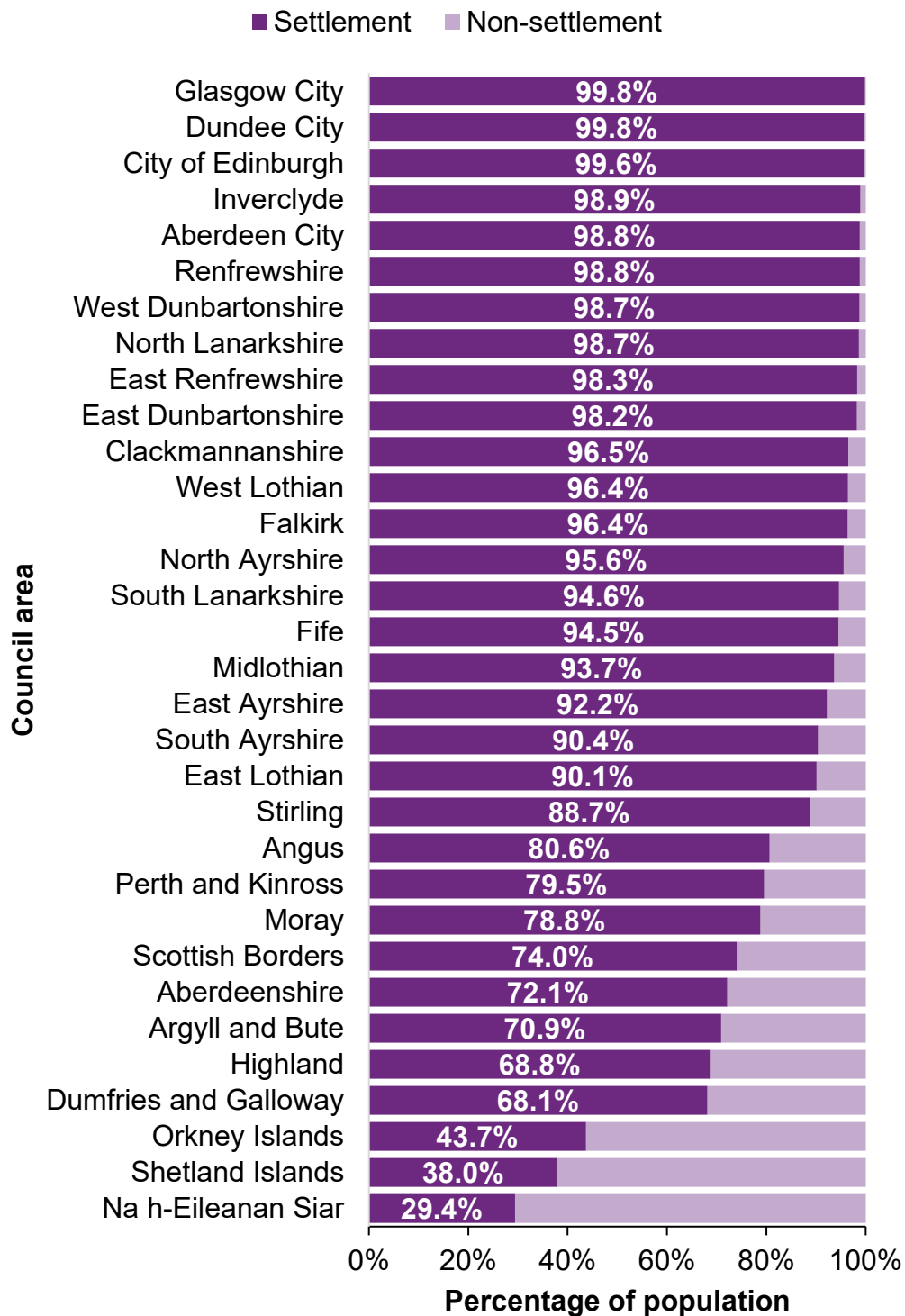
**Table 1: Settlements in Scotland with the highest population, mid-2020**

Settlement name	Settlement population	Population (% of Scotland's total population)	Land area (square kilometres)
Greater Glasgow	1,028,220	18.8%	274.4
Edinburgh	530,990	9.7%	125.8
Aberdeen, Milltimber, and Peterculter	220,690	4.0%	75.6
Dundee	158,820	2.9%	50.1
Motherwell and Wishaw	125,610	2.3%	45.5

Settlement populations can also be summarised by council area. Figure 5 shows the percentage of a council's total population that live in settlements and localities, rather than sparsely populated areas.

Glasgow City and Dundee City had the highest urban populations compared to other council areas. Almost all of their populations (99.8% of both) lived in settlements. Na-h Eileanan Siar had the lowest proportion of people living in settlements (29.4%).

**Figure 5: Proportion of population living in settlements by council area, Scotland, mid-2020.**



#### 4. What is the age structure of settlements?

Figure 6 shows the five settlements with the highest proportion of their population aged under 16. Forgandenny in Perth and Kinross had the highest percentage of children, with 41.3% of the population aged under 16. This settlement contains Strathallan boarding school which explains the large proportion of young people in this settlement.

**Figure 6: Settlements in Scotland with the highest proportion of population aged under 16, mid-2020**

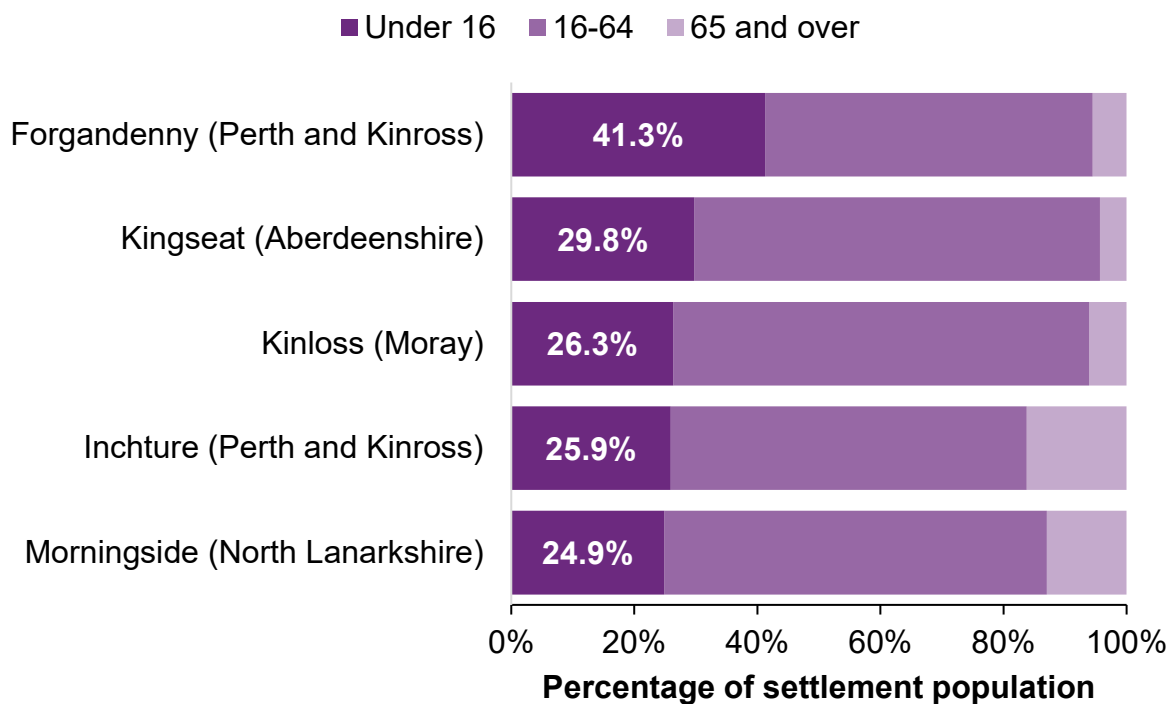
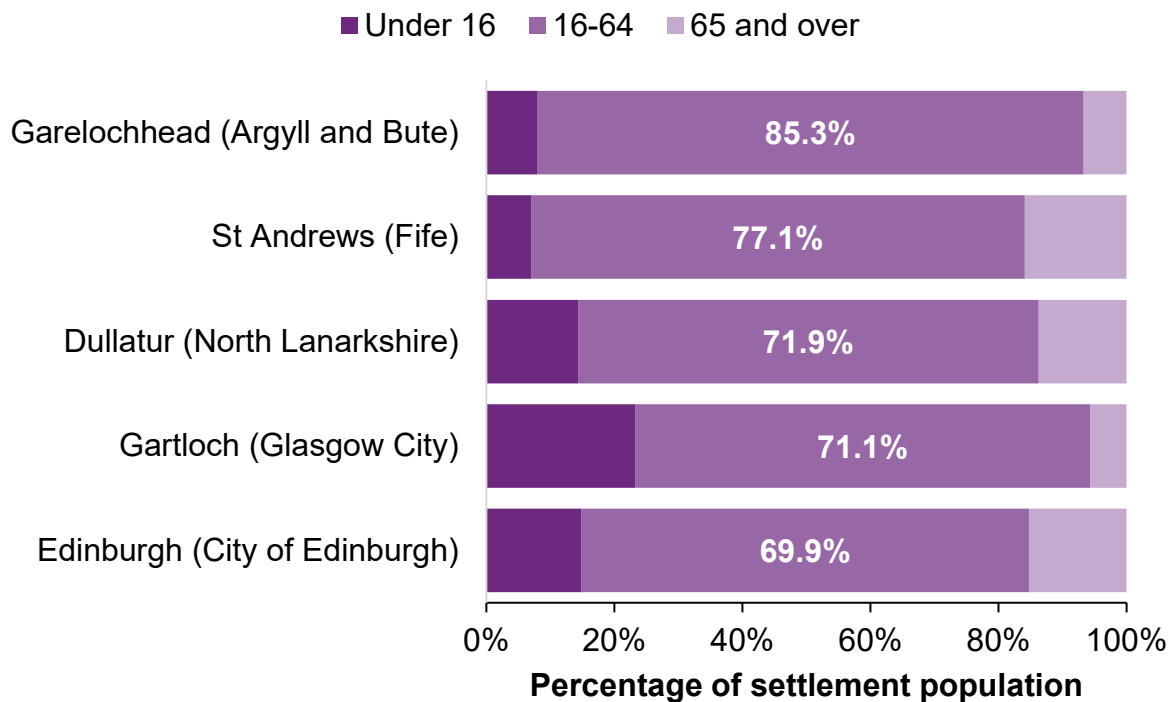


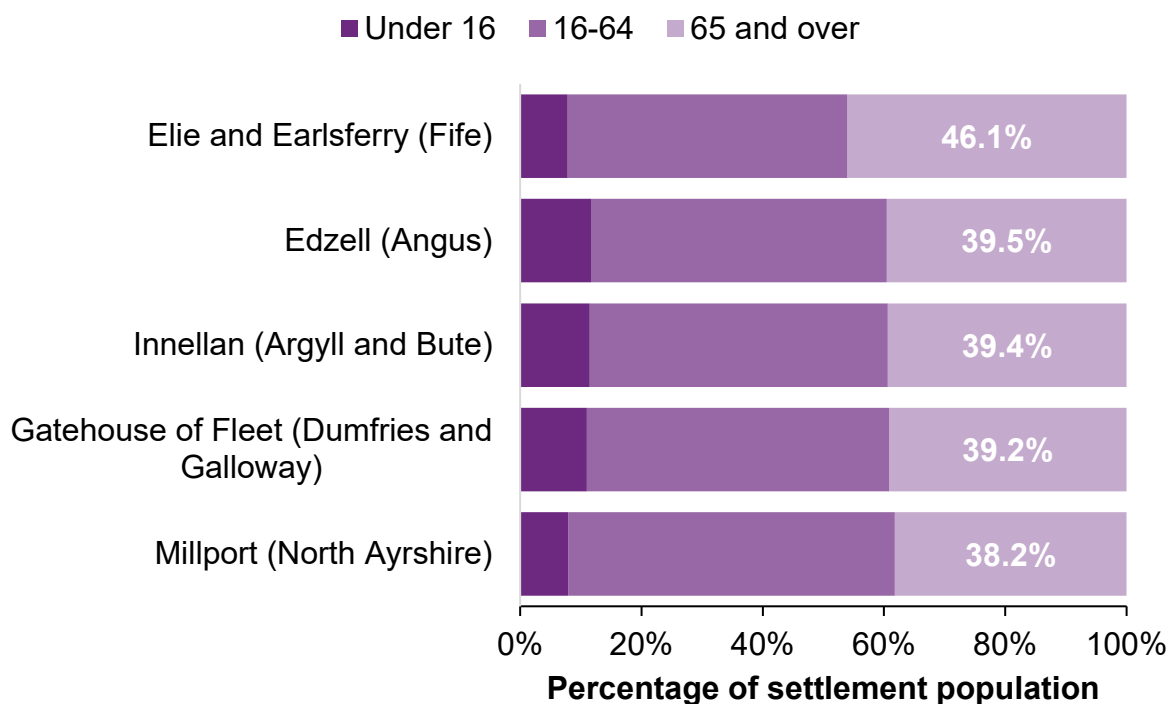
Figure 7 describes the five settlements with the highest proportion of 16 to 64 year olds, which approximates the working age group. 85.3% of the Garelochhead population are in this age category, which is likely to be explained by the presence of HM Naval Base Clyde in Argyll and Bute. St Andrews also has a high proportion of 16 to 64 year olds which reflects the large student population studying at the University of St Andrews.

**Figure 7: Settlements in Scotland with the highest proportion of population aged 16-64, mid-2020**



The five settlements with the highest proportion of their population aged 65 and over is shown in [Figure 8](#). Three of these settlements are coastal areas which are often popular among retired people.

**Figure 8: Settlements in Scotland with the highest proportion of population aged 65 and over, mid-2020**



## 5. How have Scotland's settlements changed?

The number of settlements and localities can change over time. New settlements and can be added if:

- The population estimate for a cluster of high density postcodes **increases to 500 or more**.
- Larger settlements **split** into smaller parts due to the introduction of low density postcodes between the original settlements.

On the other hand, settlements may be removed if:

- The population estimate for a cluster of high density postcodes **decreases below 500**.
- Multiple settlements **join** into one due to the introduction of high density postcodes between the original settlements.

Settlements and localities can also be renamed through consultation with local authorities. The previous version of this publication was released in 2018 and was

based on mid-2016 population data. In **2016**, there were **519 settlements**. In **2020** this had decreased to **514**.

From 2016 to 2020, six new settlements have been added. Three of these resulted from urban areas reaching the population threshold of 500. These are listed in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2: New settlements in 2020 due to population increases**

<b>Settlement name 2020</b>	<b>Council area</b>
Aberuthven	Perth and Kinross
Countesswells	Aberdeen City
South Forres	Moray

The other three new settlements resulted from splits in previous settlements as shown in [Table 3](#).

**Table 3: New settlements in 2020 due to settlement splits**

<b>Settlement name 2016</b>	<b>New settlements names 2020</b>	<b>Council areas of 2020 settlements</b>
Anstruther and Pittenweem	Anstruther; Pittenweem	Fife
Glenrothes	Glenrothes; Thornton	Fife
Wemyss Bay	Skelmorlie; Wemyss Bay	North Ayrshire; Inverclyde

Eleven settlements from 2016 were no longer counted as settlements in 2020. Five settlements were dropped because of a decrease in their population below 500. These are summarised in [Table 4](#).

**Table 4: Settlements removed in 2020 due to population decreases**

<b>Settlement name in 2016</b>	<b>Council area</b>
Crosshill	South Ayrshire
Dirleton	East Lothian
Moniaive	Dumfries and Galloway
Queenzieburn	North Lanarkshire
Thankerton	South Lanarkshire

Six settlements were removed in 2020 because they had joined with other settlements, as shown in [Table 5](#).

**Table 5: Settlements removed in 2020 due to settlement joins**

<b>Settlement names 2016</b>	<b>Settlement name 2020</b>	<b>Council areas of 2020 settlement</b>
Aberdeen; Peterculter	Aberdeen, Milltimber and Peterculter	Aberdeen City
Croy; Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld and Croy	North Lanarkshire
Barrhead	Greater Glasgow	Multiple
Brookfield	Greater Glasgow	Multiple
Kirkfieldbank; Lanark	Lanark and Kirkfieldbank	South Lanarkshire
Chryston; Moodiesburn	Moodiesburn and Chryston	North Lanarkshire

## 6. Background notes

The population data for this publication are based on the mid-2020 small area population estimates.

There are currently over 145,000 postcodes in Scotland. Postcodes are split into high-density and low-density postcodes. Postcodes are defined as high-density if they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- more than 2.1 residential addresses per hectare;
- more than 0.1 non-residential addresses per hectare; or
- an estimated population of more than 5 people per hectare.

Settlements are created from groups of contiguous, densely populated postcodes whose population rounds to 500 or more. Postcodes within a settlement are then assigned to localities based on previous locality boundaries. Local authorities are also consulted on the locality boundaries, to suggest any changes needed.

For more details on the methodology used to produce the settlements and localities estimates, see the [methodology guide](#) on the NRS website.

### How are these statistics used?

The population estimates for settlements and localities help inform Scottish Government policy and legislation. Previously these statistics have been used to:

- Inform the Scottish Government's [Urban Rural Classification](#).
- Define land for the [Community Right to Buy](#) scheme under [Part 2 of the Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#).
- Identify rural areas where qualifying properties are eligible for ratings relief under the [Local Government and Rating Act 1997](#).

## 7. Links to related statistics

[Population estimates](#) for Scotland and its council areas are available from the NRS website. Mid-2021 population estimates will be released in May 2022.

Population estimates for [small areas and other areas](#) within Scotland are available for mid-2020. Mid-2021 small area population estimates will be released in autumn 2022.



## 8. Notes on statistical publications

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The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (available on the [UKSA](#) website).

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### 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 metadata that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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We also provide information about [future publications](#) on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government [ScotStat website](#).

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### **Enquiries and suggestions**

Please get in touch if you need any further information, or have any suggestions for improvement.

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