

Forces in Mind Trust's response to Census 2031 topic consultation - Census topic group: UK armed forces veterans

Data use and purpose

151. At what geographical levels do you expect to use UK armed forces veterans Census 2031 data? Select all that apply

- ☒ National
- ☒ Regional
- ☒ Local authority
- ☐ Middle layer Super Output Area
- ☐ Lower layer Super Output Area
- ☐ Output Area
- ☐ Other, please specify

152. What are your requirements for UK armed forces veterans Census 2031 data? Please include examples of why you need them.

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was founded in 2011 to improve transition to civilian life for Service leavers and their families. Our mission is to enable successful and sustainable transition to civilian life, and the Trust's strategy is to provide an evidence base that will influence and underpin effective policy-making and practice.

The UK Armed Forces veterans 2031 data will provide a robust insight into the size and demographics of the veteran population, as well as understanding the prevalence of different needs. This includes providing a picture of these demographics and needs at differing geographical levels. The data provided by the Census also enables a comparison with the non-veteran population. There is a lack of data available on the veteran community, and there is no other comparable data set available outside

of the census data. Without this vital source of information, it would not be possible to understand veterans' demographics and needs at the level of detail that the Census provides.

As an evidence-based organisation, using this data allows for better identification and awareness of the Armed Forces veteran landscape. It can lead to better support mechanisms being developed and implemented in the right places, and inform service expansions where they are needed.

At a policy-making level, using Census data alongside our own evidence-based research allows us to communicate with the correct and relevant areas by using the Census data for the identification of trends and areas of prevalence or need. In addition, the Census data can be used to formulate a picture of need at different geographical levels, which is used to commission the most appropriate research.

153. What purpose do you use UK armed forces veterans census data for?

The UK Armed Forces veteran data provides beneficial usage in many ways for FiMT and those who work with the Armed Forces community:

- For example, our recently published research, [Our Community, Our Covenant and beyond](#), found that the inclusion of an Armed Forces question in the 2021 Census has improved the data landscape, supporting the identification of disadvantage within the Armed Forces Community. Local authorities have been using the Census data to better understand their local Armed Forces population, undertaking needs assessments and comparable regional evaluations. In addition, when conducting and sharing the research, FiMT and our research partners were able to identify the presence of the Armed Forces community across English local authorities using the Census data and develop case studies of good practice based on whether areas have a high or low Armed Forces community presence.
- **Data collation** has enabled us to map demographics and trend shift, as well as compare veteran and non-veteran outcomes internally at FiMT alongside other robust sources, to construct a comprehensive picture of the UK Armed Forces community and characteristics and report on this to inform our strategic mission and aims.
- **Geographical level data** has been shared with policy-makers, MPs and local authorities to enable them to understand the profile of the Armed Forces community at the desired geographical level, in particular the application, usage, and assessment of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Census data has also been used to **assess access to services**. For example, it was used in a [FiMT-funded study](#) to estimate the number of veteran patients expected to register with primary health care in an area compared to those who had registered, helping to target communication campaigns.

154. How, if at all, do you use UK armed forces veterans census data at small geographies?

N/A

155. How, if at all, do you use UK armed forces veterans census data to understand more about small population groups?

Census data pertaining to small population groups will allow FiMT to identify any trend shifts in these groups in the future, which could reveal specific barriers these small population groups face, such as those from differing small population groups experiencing disproportionate housing or employment issues. Through identification, it allows for policy implementations to be made, and for FiMT, it identifies areas where there are potential issues and barriers where research is needed to inform a specific policy problem and subsequent implementation of policy development and service delivery.

It is also a useful tool to be able to compare outcomes and demographics for veterans and non-veterans across policy areas.

Within the recent [Our Community Our Covenant and Beyond](#) report, findings show local authorities and stakeholders attribute the Armed Forces veterans Census data to being able to have a better understanding of the Armed Forces community. They also show that local disadvantage has improved, particularly since the release of the England and Wales Census in 2021.

156. How, if at all, do you use census data on UK armed forces veterans combined with other census variables (otherwise known as multivariate analysis)?

Multivariate outputs have enabled us to understand different demographic groups and identify trends where two variable factors are directly correlated with one another. As previously mentioned in an earlier question response, using comparisons of variables aids in showing where veterans may be more or less likely to experience worse outcomes compared to the non-veteran population. Using this data to target interventions and policies effectively is beneficial. For example, [recently published research](#) showed the barriers some ex-Service personnel, in particular those with mental or physical health disabilities, face when interacting with the benefits system. When considering the Census data, it showed that whilst veterans and non-veterans have similar levels of employment, the proportion of disabled veterans was larger than the proportion of non-veterans. In using this comparison, it shows a more accurate picture of the proportions of veterans who may be more likely to interact with the benefits system and face barriers than employment levels alone show.

157. How, if at all, do you compare UK armed forces veterans census data to geographical areas outside England and Wales?

Data and item harmonisation across censuses is vital as this enables cross-national comparison. As FiMT's remit covers the UK, it is integral to us being able to compare cross-nationally. This allows us to consider and identify where veterans may be disadvantaged compared to the non-veteran population and, if the issue extends to other areas, such as Northern Ireland and Scotland, to decipher if it is a wider trend or nation-specific. This also enables consideration of whether policy implementation and/or interventions are effective or if there are additional barriers that need to be addressed.

Census data and comparative data with other UK nations provide the opportunity to learn lessons from different geographical areas for policy development, such as the implementation and extension of the Covenant legal duty.

158. How, if at all, are these current uses different from your (future) needs for Census 2031 data on UK armed forces veterans?

Our current usages and future usages would likely not change exponentially; however, should there be better harmonisation of data cross-nationally, this would allow for better comparatives and joined-up comparable data.

Alternative data sources

159. How, if at all, do alternative (non-census) sources of data on UK armed forces veterans meet your requirements? Please include detailed examples in your answer.

There are some alternative and limited sources of data on UK Armed Forces veterans, such as the Annual Population Survey, Veterans Survey, MONARCH, the King's College Health and Wellbeing Cohort Study, as well as survey data from previous (e.g., the 2014 RBL Household Survey) and ongoing studies on the veteran community. However, there is no other data source currently available at a comparable level. To our knowledge, there is no alternative data source that provides data that can be compared over time frames with a rich diversity of data across a national level on the veteran population. In considering 2031, it is also unlikely that there will be an alternative comparable data source at this point.

FiMT, as a spend-out trust, will be closing in 2031 and will therefore not be funding independent research after this point, which further limits the potential availability of an alternative data source.

160. What would the consequences be, if any, for you if UK armed forces veterans data were not collected in Census 2031?

As mentioned in our response to the previous question, there is no other comparable data source available that undertakes data collation of such a wide span. As such, if UK Armed Forces veterans' data were not collected in Census 2031, there would be a significant loss in data quality in this area. To find alternatives would be not only time-consuming and costly, but it could also end up in inaccurate or mismatched data. For example, similar alternative data sources could word a question differently, leading to incomparable data from previously collected census data. In addition, consideration would need to be given to regionally collected data and whether it was representative nationally and cross-nationally, and also if similar data collected between different regions is comparable.

161. What else, if anything, would you like to add about your requirements for UK armed forces veterans Census 2031 data?

It would be beneficial if there were improved harmonisation of data with the Scottish Census to enable cross-national comparison. This would allow for better comparatives and joined-up comparable data.

The ONS should also ensure it continues to capture household member data to ensure Armed Forces families' data is available. Capturing this data ensures an understanding of the wider UK Armed Forces community is available and can be used in future policy implementation and decision-making.