



Briefing: Making sense of the Census 2021 for the outcomes and experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people June 2023

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT). The Traveller Movement seeks to advocate for the full implementation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller's human rights. Visit: <https://travellermovement.org.uk/>

What is the Census?

The census is a comprehensive survey for population demographics and insights undertaken every ten years since its inception in 1801. Administered by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in England and Wales, the census is important to local authorities and is vital to the government and many other public sector organisations.

This information helps a wide range of people and organisations to do their work. NGO's use the information to prove unmet need. It also helps local authorities plan and run services (such as schools, health services, roads and libraries) and decide how to allocate funds to make sure public money gets to where it is needed most.

Census analysis is important for The Traveller Movement because it informs much of our representations and advocacy work throughout Britain and particularly in Westminster.

The below paper is a brief summary of the key findings and intended as a quick reference information sheet only rather than an in-depth analysis.

Background

Significant regional and local variability exists with regards to the recording and capturing of data relating to Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller populations; with similar variability existing in and between different central government departments.

For example, the Department for Education records data on Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller ethnicity in two distinct categories: Gypsy/Roma, and Irish Traveller. Conversely, the two categories used by the Ministry of Justice are Gypsy/Irish Traveller and Roma. In some government departments, data on outcomes and experiences are not recorded at all; as is the case for the Department for Health and Social Care's NHS Data Model and Dictionary, which does not include Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller – or any variation thereof – as distinct ethnicities. Significant variability persists across and within government departments and local authorities alike and, even where public bodies do use data collection frameworks which include Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller ethnicities, they are not always implemented across the full range of indicators for which data is collected.

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As a result of these inconsistencies, the decennial census serves as an important, if not the most important, source of data on the life experiences and socioeconomic outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller populations across the United Kingdom.

In the 2011 census, Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity was explicitly included for the first time, followed by the inclusion of Roma as a distinct ethnicity for the first time in the 2021 census. The differentiation of these two ethnicities is important as the experiences and outcomes of Gypsies/Travellers and Roma vary significantly across a range of indicators, as the ONS' census data demonstrates, and data frameworks which allow for separate and distinct data collection and self-identification and reporting of people from Gypsy/Irish Traveller and Roma backgrounds respectively is in line with best practice advocated for by the Traveller Movement.

This briefing outlines key demographic data on the outcomes and experiences for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities across England and Wales relative to outcomes and experiences of the White British ethnic group which, as the largest ethnic grouping in the UK, is used as a comparator throughout. The areas covered in this briefing are:

- Population and demographics
- Education
- Employment and economic activity
- Housing and accommodation
- Health and Wellbeing

Headline indicators for each area are considered, and future briefings will consider each topic area in further depth. All data presented in this briefing is taken from 2021 Census data unless otherwise indicated.

Population and Demographics

The 2021 census records the Gypsy/Irish Traveller population of England and Wales at 67,768, with the Roma population – having been included in the 2021 census for the first time – at 100,981. However, it is likely that this data significantly underestimates the true size of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population in England and Wales, due to low levels of engagement with the census amongst these communities, or unwillingness to disclose ethnicity. This is influenced by several possible factors:

- Reluctance to disclose ethnicity due to fear of discrimination/victimisation
- Literacy or digital literacy barriers precluding involvement
- A generalised distrust of the state and/or public services
- Low levels of existing knowledge about the census, and why data is being recorded.



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A 2013 study from the University of Salford¹ estimated that true size of the combined Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population across the UK was closer to 500,000 – a figure that is most likely higher now owing to patterns of migration and the UK’s growing population overall.

The table below outlines the proportion of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people that reside in each of the regions of England and Wales as a percentage of the overall Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population. This means, for example, that 3.87% of all Gypsies/Travellers live in the North East – not that 3.87% of the North East are from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds.

Regions	Gypsy/Traveller	Roma
South East	24.71	12.66
London	10.38	37.32
North West	8.47	7.29
East of England	13.25	9.58
West Midlands	9.16	6.74
South West	9.42	5.73
Yorkshire and The Humber	8.69	9.37
East Midlands	6.82	7.13
Wales	5.24	1.83
North East	3.87	2.35

The regions in the table are ranked with respect to their total overall population, starting from South East – the region with the highest population – to North East. As the table indicates, there is some degree of correlation between the populations of regions and the respective size of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller populations within those regions.

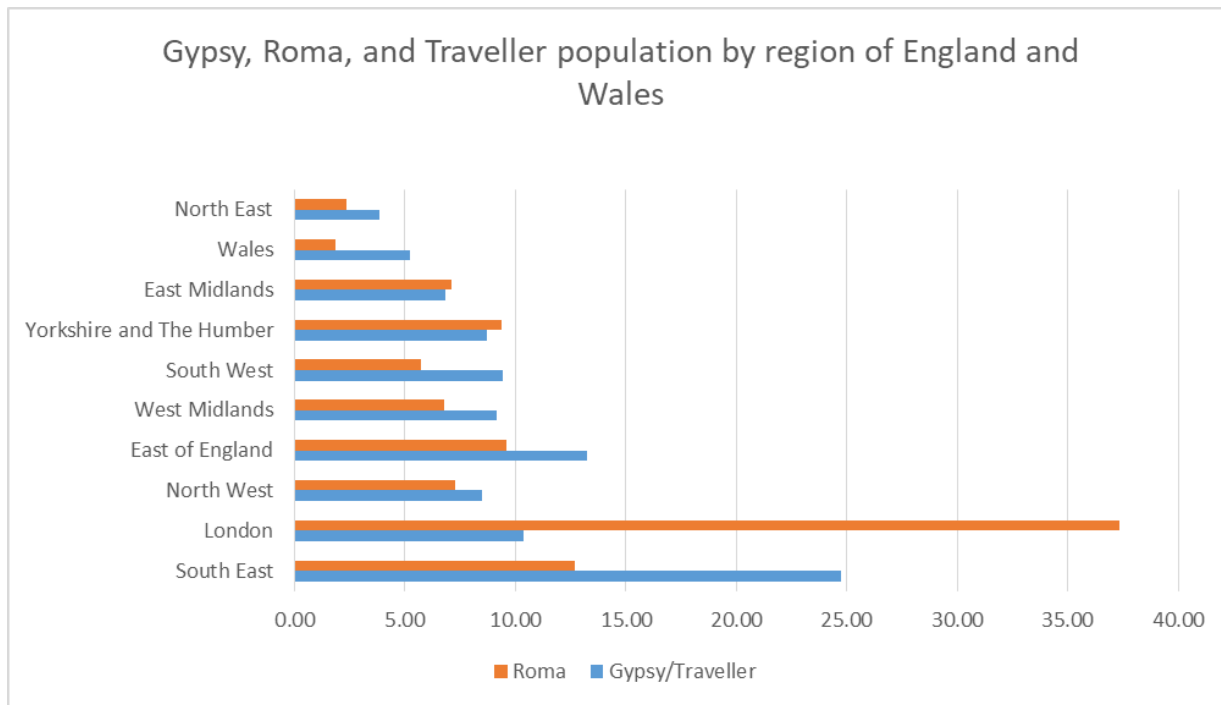
For the Roma ethnic group, this correlation is weaker, with over a third of the total population in England and Wales resident in London. This possibly reflects the composition of the group; many Roma people in the UK are relatively recent migrants and may have a preference for settling in the areas that already have significant Roma populations, in order to be closer to familial or community networks of support.

¹ <https://hub.salford.ac.uk/care-shusu/projects-migration-and-integration/migrant-roma-in-the-united-kingdom-population-size-and-experiences-of-local-authorities-and-partners/>
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Research from other sources has repeatedly demonstrated poorer life expectancy for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities relative to other populations in the UK. Some sources state that life expectancy is between 10-12 years lower than the rest of the population², whilst others state that the overall life expectancy for Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers is 50.³ These significant inequalities are further evidenced by Census 2021 data.

As the graph below demonstrates, the age distribution of the White British ethnic group is reflective of a 'constrictive' population pyramid which is narrowed at the bottom and reflective of older populations on average. Constrictive population pyramids are typical for 'highly developed' countries, and suggest high levels of education, access to good health care, access and incentives to use birth control, and few negative environmental factors⁴.

² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36005.htm>

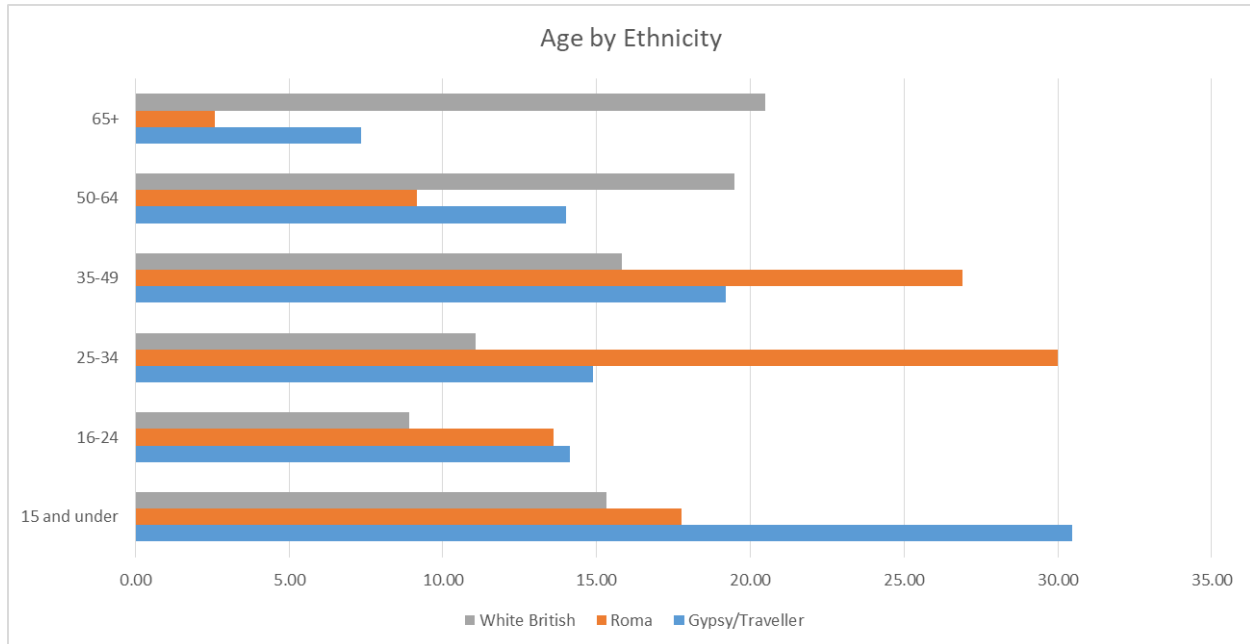
³ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/1697-jsna-2021-22-grt-final-ac/file#:~:text=Gypsy%2C%20Roma%20and%20Travellers%20have,for%20both%20men%20and%20women.&text=There%20are%20various%20reason%20for,a>

⁴ <https://populationeducation.org/what-are-different-types-population-pyramids/>



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In contrast, the Gypsy/Traveller population closely mirrors an ‘expansive’ population pyramid; characteristic of developing countries with poor health care, a high birth-rate, and potentially low life expectancies leading to high death rates. The contrast between expansive and constrictive populations are generally seen between – not within – countries, and the disparities between Gypsy/Traveller and White British populations are indicative of significant health, social and economic inequalities and are a cause for serious concern.

The Roma pyramid sits somewhere between the White British and Gypsy/Traveller pyramids. By far the highest proportion of Roma people in England and Wales are between 25 and 49 years of age. It is possible that this disproportionality is explained by patterns of migration and there are similarities between Gypsy/Traveller and Roma populations in other areas. The relative population under 24 is higher for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities than it is for the White British ethnic group and, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people are far less likely to live beyond 65 than their White British peers.



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Educational Attainment

Educational inequalities for people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller backgrounds are well established. The Department for Education (DfE) regularly collects ethnically disaggregated data on pupil outcomes which demonstrate the disparities experienced by these groups. Whilst the data collection frameworks used by the DfE are superior to most other government departments, they are limited by the decision to group Roma and Gypsy pupils together, with Irish Traveller pupils in an independent category. Nevertheless, data collected and held by the DfE indicates a wide range of outcomes in which Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils lag considerably behind the White British ethnic group, as the table below demonstrates.

Indicator	Gypsy/Roma	Irish Traveller	White British
GCSE/Attainment 8 results (scored out of 90) ⁵	21.0	29.2	47.4
Pupils getting a grade 5 or above in English and Maths ⁶	9.1%	21.1%	50.9%
Pupils getting at least 3 A grade A levels ⁷	10.8%	20.0%	25.9%
Overall absence rate ⁸	15.0%	19.1%	4.6%
Permanent exclusion rate ⁹	.18	.10	.05

The indicators shown detail significant disproportionality in the educational experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people. The disparity between Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller groups and the White British group is narrowest, though still disproportionate, for A level attainment. However, this smaller disparity is marked by the vanishingly small numbers of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people who progress to further education in the first place. Per the DfE's most recently available data, the total number of

⁵ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/gcse-results-attainment-8-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest>

⁶ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/a-to-c-in-english-and-maths-gcse-attainment-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest>

⁷ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/latest>

⁸ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/absence-from-school/latest>

⁹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/permanent-exclusions/latest>

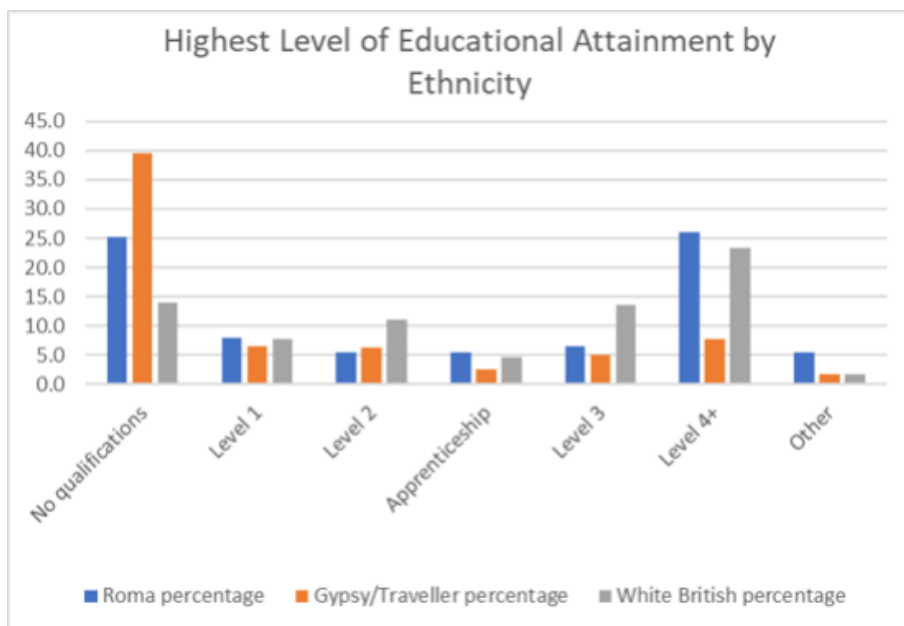


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Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils receiving at least 3 A grade levels was 52, compared with 112,904 White British students.

The Census 2021 questionnaire asked respondents a series of questions about the types of qualifications they had attained. Individuals are then grouped into 7 distinct categories according to the qualifications they disclosed in their responses:

- **No qualifications**
- **Level 1 qualifications:** 1-4 GCSEs from A* to C; any GCSEs at other grades, O levels or CSEs (any grades), 1 AS level, NVQ level 1, Foundation GNVQ, Basic or Essential skills
- **Level 2 qualifications:** 5 or more GCSEs (A* to C or 9 to 4), O levels (passes), CSEs (grade 1), School Certification, 1 A level, 2 to 3 AS levels, VCEs, Intermediate or Higher Diploma, Welsh Baccalaureate Intermediate Diploma, NVQ level 2, Intermediate GNVQ, City and Guilds Craft, BTEC First or General Diploma, RSA Diploma
- **Apprenticeships**
- **Level 3 qualifications:** 2 or more A levels or GCEs, 4 or more AS levels, Higher School Certificate, Progression or Advanced Diploma, Welsh Baccalaureate Advance Diploma, NVQ level 3, Advanced GNVQ, City and Guilds Advanced Craft, ONC, OND, BTEC National, RSA Advanced Diploma
- **Level 4+ qualifications:** Degree (BA, BSc), Higher Degree (MA, PHD, PGCSE), NVQ level 4 to 5, HNC, HND, RSA Higher Diploma, BTEC Higher level, professional qualifications (e.g. teaching, nursing accountancy)
- **Other qualifications:** Vocational or work-related qualifications, any other qualifications achieved outside of the UK where the equivalent is not stated or known.





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Census 2021 data on educational attainment amongst Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities is roughly consistent with the DfE's data, as well as with qualitative data and findings established by the Traveller Movement, academics, and other civil society organisations.

Significant percentages of Roma (25.1%) and Gypsy/Traveller (39.1%) people have no qualifications, far in excess of the corresponding figure of 13.9% for White British people. As Traveller Movement's previous research *Roads to Success* outlined, lack of attainment in formal education has, for many people, a lifelong impact on the ability to access further education, training, and employment.¹⁰

The proportion of people with level 1 qualifications are roughly comparable across the 3 ethnic groups, but the proportion of White British people with level 2 qualifications (11%) is approximately double that of both Gypsy/Traveller (6.2%) and Roma (5.5%); this disproportionality also persists for level 3 qualifications, indicating structural barriers to onward study at different levels.

5.6% of Roma and 2.6% of Gypsy/Travellers have completed an apprenticeship, compared with 4.5% of White British people. Similar rates between the Roma and White British group potentially indicate that opportunities to combine studying and work without possessing qualifications may be available, but that such opportunities are not being accessed by Gypsy/Traveller people.

Given the high requirements of entry to level 4 study, the disparity between Gypsy/Traveller people with a qualification (7.7%) and White British people (23.3%) is not unexpected. However, the Census data also find that a greater proportion of Roma people (26%) have level 4 qualifications than the White British comparator group. This is not consistent with other data sources on outcomes for Roma people in education and is arguably inconsistent with other data from this census outlining the high proportion of Roma people with no qualifications.

Health

The NHS data model and dictionary is not inclusive of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller ethnicities. Unlike with education, there is no comprehensive governmental data on the health outcomes and experiences for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities that Census data can be compared to.

Health inequalities for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities have been researched heavily by academics and civil society organisations, however. A variety of sources, cited by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, have confirmed that:

- The health status of Gypsies and Travellers is much poorer than that of the general population
- Life expectancy for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities is between 10-12 years lower than that of the general population
- One in five Gypsy and Traveller women will experience the loss of a child, compared with one in one hundred in the general population

¹⁰ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/policy-and-publications/roads-to-success-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-youth>
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- The suicide rate in Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities is approximately 6 times higher than in the general population

Though the evidence base developed through non-Governmental research and data collection is comprehensive, it is insufficient to assess the full extent of negative health experiences in Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller populations. There is an urgent need for more comprehensive data collection and ethnic monitoring within the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the NHS, the benefits and implications of which are considered in greater detail in the Traveller Movement's briefing on the NHS data model.

In lieu of appropriate Governmental ethnic monitoring, census data is vital in assessing outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. However, as the Census questionnaire does not include detailed questions on specific health conditions, it is not a substitute for ethnic monitoring in healthcare. Furthermore, the Census questionnaire does not ask respondents about their perceptions of access to health care services. Independent research has repeatedly demonstrated significant structural barriers in accessing health services for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities; which will inevitably impact not only their outcomes in health, but in how they perceive their own health.

The table below sets out responses to the question "How is your general health?" by ethnicity.

	Very Bad	Bad	Fair	Good	Very Good
General health of Roma respondents	0.9%	2.4%	5.9%	30.5%	60.3%
General health of Gypsy/Traveller respondents	3.8%	8.9%	15.3%	27.2%	44.8%
General health of White British respondents	1.2%	4.1%	12.8%	31.1%	41.9%

In line with available research, a significant minority of Gypsy/Traveller respondents reported very poor general health. 12.7% of Gypsy and Travellers reported bad or very bad general health, more than double the White British rate of 5.3%. However, the percentage of respondents reporting good general health are similar for both Gypsy/Traveller (72%) and White British (73%) ethnicities. The comparable proportions of Gypsy/Traveller and White British people in good health may be informed by the average ages of the respective populations. Younger people are generally healthier than older people and, as the demography section of this briefing sets out, the Gypsy/Traveller population is much younger than the White British one.

Given that younger populations are expected to be healthier, 12.7% of Gypsy/Traveller people reporting poor health outcomes is a cause for serious concern. Taken in isolation this figure



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represents a significant minority of the entire population and when compared with the White British group it is indicative of entrenched health inequalities. On both dimensions, urgent action is required by the DHSC. Firstly, to improve ethnic monitoring frameworks and commission research to uncover the root causes of poor general health; and second to implement policy to close the ethnicity health gap in the medium to long term.

Conversely, a smaller percentage of Roma respondents recorded very bad, bad, and fair personal health when compared with the White British group. Roma people (60.3%) were almost 1.5 times more likely to consider themselves to be in good health than White British people (41.9%). These figures are surprising, and inconsistent with the available research on health outcomes for Roma communities in the UK. A 2014 European Commission report highlighted health inequalities for Roma populations across the European Union and, in the UK specifically, barriers to healthcare and lower life expectancy.¹¹ In 2022, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) published *Improving Roma health: a guide for health and care professionals*, which identifies Roma communities as an inclusion group based on experiences of “multiple overlapping risk factors for poor health.”

In this context it is surprising that the responses on general health from Roma communities are, largely, positive. There are several possible factors which may inform the good levels of general health in the census data. It is possible, but unlikely, that the census data reflects a true snapshot of Roma health in the UK, and that other prevailing theories and small-scale studies on Roma health inequalities are flawed. Other possibilities include:

- Self-selection bias; the Roma individuals with the poorest health outcomes were not reached by – or did not engage with – the 2021 census
- Established literacy gaps in Roma communities contributing to poor comprehension of census questions
- Cultural and community taboos dissuading Roma respondents from making honest disclosures about their health
- Distrust of the NHS, or public services and the State more broadly, dissuading Roma respondents from making honest disclosures about their health
- A combination of the above

However, if the above possibilities are affecting the way that Roma people engage with the census, it is not clear why these factors would not influence Gypsy/Traveller data in a comparable way given that they are similarly applicable.

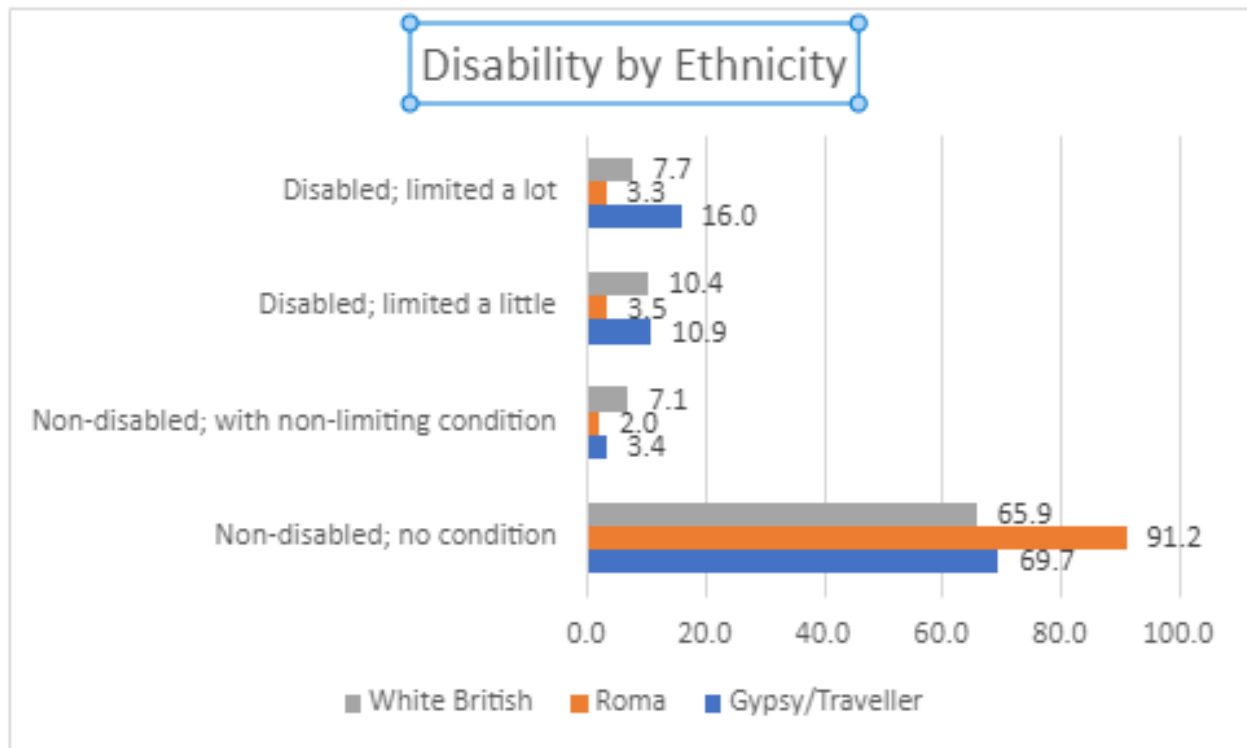
¹¹ https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2016-11/2014_roma_health_report_en_0.pdf



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The disparity between available research and data on Roma health outcomes and census 2021 data cannot be fully ascertained by quantitative data analysis alone, and The Traveller Movement recommends that OHID undertake further research to assess the factors informing these apparent contradictions.



Data on disability is largely consistent with how respondents rated their general health. A roughly comparable percentage of the Gypsy/Traveller and White British population are non-disabled; but over a quarter (26.9%) of the entire Gypsy/Traveller population have a disability which limits them a little or a lot; compared with 18.1% of White British people. Given the much younger average age of the Gypsy/Traveller population, this is evidence of significant health inequalities.

Data on disability in Roma communities is largely consistent with data on general health; the overwhelming majority of Roma respondents did not report any disability, findings which are not consistent with other studies of Roma health outlined above. It is possible that this may be – in part – attributable to cultural taboos and an unwillingness to disclose disability, but this is an area which requires further research.



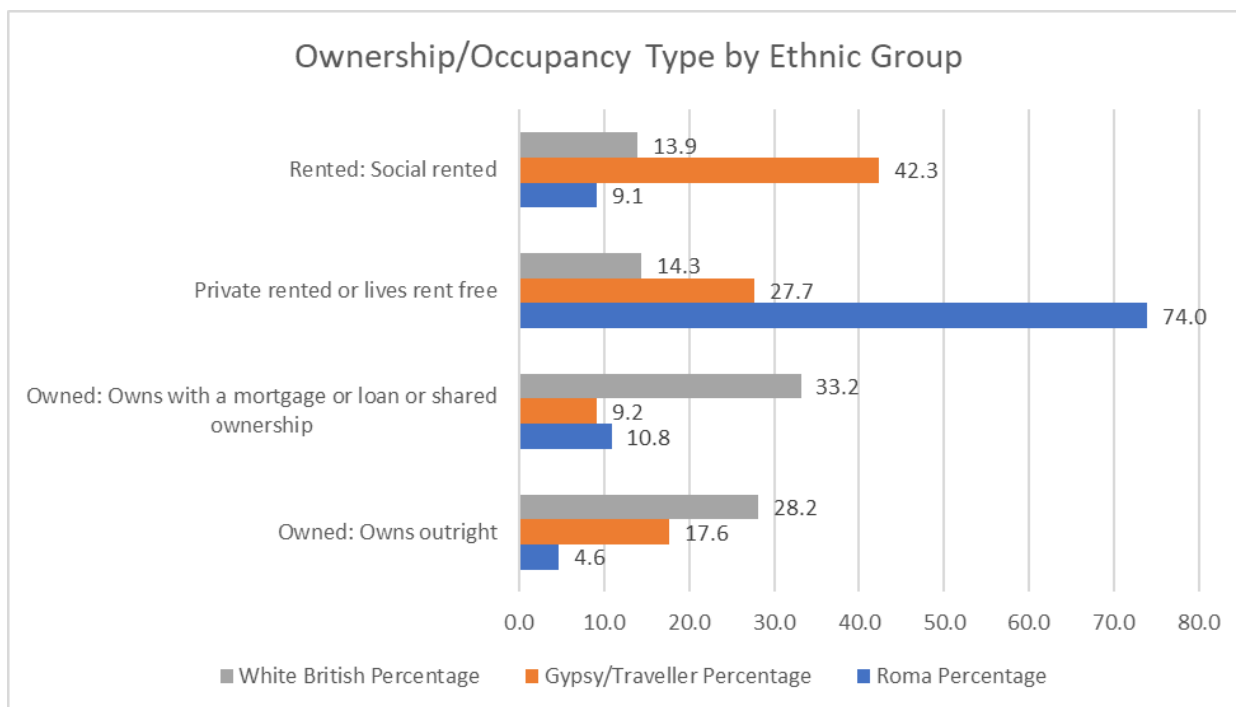
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Home Ownership/Occupancy

Over three fifths (61.4%) of White British people own their own home, either outright or with a loan/mortgage, more than double the rate of Gypsy/Travellers (26.8%) and over four times the rate of Roma people (15.4%). Given the variance in terms of economic activity and employment type in Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities discussed in the next section, it is likely that this disparity reflects the lower likelihood of being able to save for a first-time house deposit due to a reliance on lower-paid employment, and higher prevalence of long-term unemployment and economic activity. Nevertheless, the percentage of a Gypsy/Traveller people who own their home in some form or another is higher than had been anticipated.

This is further reflected in the high proportion of Gypsy/Travellers who lived in socially rented accommodation, which is over 3 times the rate of the corresponding figure for the White British group and is amongst the highest rate for any ethnic group in England and Wales. As poverty rates are highest amongst people living in social housing; data on home ownership and social housing are both indicators of economic inequality.



Almost three quarters of Roma people in England and Wales live in privately rented accommodation (or rent free) and are significantly less likely to live in socially rented accommodation than people from Gypsy/Traveller and White British backgrounds. This may be, at least in part, explained by migration –



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many Roma residents in the UK have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and are thus not eligible for social housing¹².

Economic Activity and Employment

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people are economically inactive at a higher rate than the White British population in every category other than retirement, reflecting the very small proportion of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population aged 65+. The high rates of economic inactivity, particularly for the reason of long-term unemployment, reflect the poor rates of overall educational attainment, and further evidence the long-term impact of negative experiences and outcomes in schooling.

Gypsy/Traveller people are economically inactive through sickness or disability at more than 3 times the rate of the White British group, which strongly reflects the poorer levels of general health, and higher levels of limiting disability, outlined in previous sections. Whilst the percentage of Roma who are economically inactive due to sickness or disability is lower than for the White British group, it is still relatively high when compared with the very low incidence of disability reported by Roma respondents to the 2021 census.

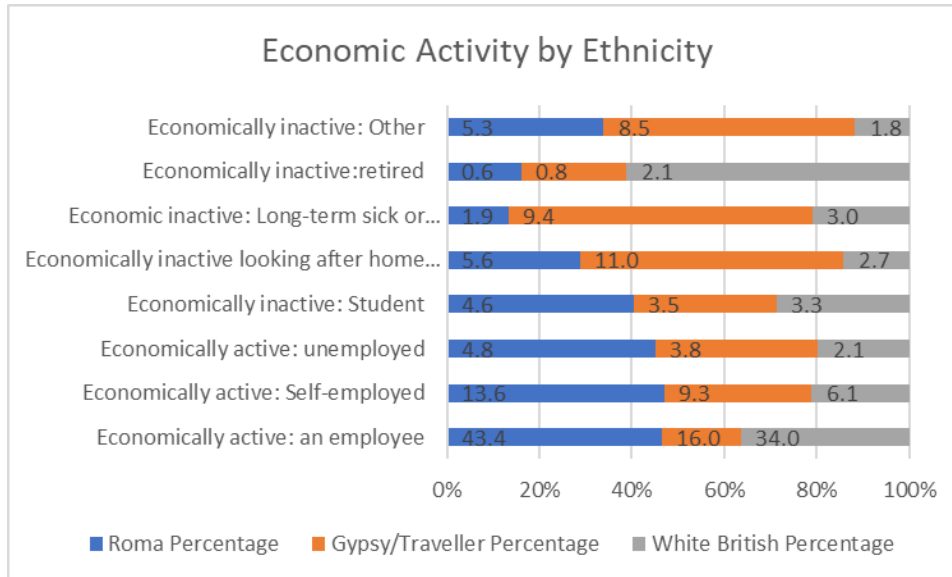
Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people are more likely to be students than the White British group. Given the generally low levels of qualifications in these communities outlined in previous sections, this appears to be attributable to the younger age profile of the respective populations; in relative terms there are more Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people of formal education age than is the case for the White British group.

Gypsy/Traveller people are far less likely to be employed than the White British group; but Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers are more likely to be self-employed than the White British comparator group; reflecting a strong cultural tradition of self-employment

¹² <https://women.travellermovement.org.uk/roma/>



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The ONS’s typology of occupation type classifies all forms of jobs into 9 distinct categories, ranging from elementary occupations which:

“cover occupations which require the knowledge and experience necessary to perform mostly routine tasks, often involving the use of simple hand-held tools and, in some cases, requiring a degree of physical effort.

Most occupations in this major group do not require formal educational qualifications but will usually have an associated short period of formal experience-related training.”

to managerial, directorial, and senior occupations which:

“cover occupations whose tasks consist of planning, directing and coordinating resources to achieve the efficient functioning of organisations and businesses. Working proprietors in small businesses are included, although allocated to separate minor groups within the major group.

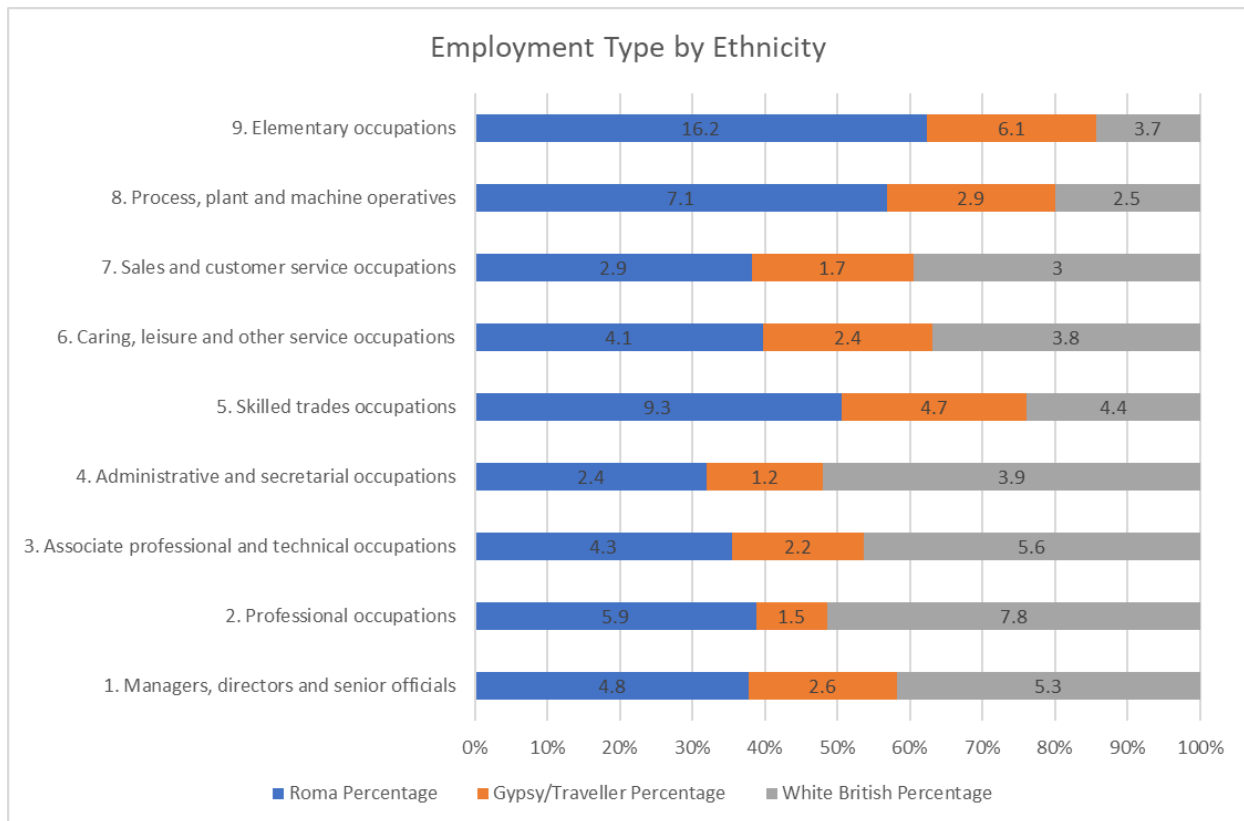
Most occupations in this major group will require a significant amount of knowledge and experience of the production processes, administrative procedures or service requirements associated with the efficient functioning of organisations and businesses.”



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The full standard occupational classification (SOC), with descriptors of each classification, can be found on the ONS website¹³. Largely speaking, SOC is correlated strongly with income and other in-kind benefits.



Both the Roma and Gypsy/Traveller ethnic groups are significantly overrepresented in elementary occupations, and process, plant and machine operative occupations; reflecting the proportionally high numbers of these communities who do not possess level 1 qualifications.

The Gypsy/Traveller and Roma ethnic groups are also overrepresented, to a smaller extent, in skilled trade occupations. This may be explained by the cultural norm toward working with a family business in which on the job training is provided; which is particularly prevalent in construction and construction adjacent businesses.

Generally speaking, Gypsy/Traveller communities are underrepresented in occupation types which require specific levels or types of qualifications. This relationship is not as evident for Roma

¹³ https://onsdigital.github.io/dp-classification-tools/standard-occupational-classification/ONS_SOC_hierarchy_view.html



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communities, and in the 3 'highest' types of occupation, Roma people are significantly overrepresented when compared with Gypsy/Traveller populations, and do not lag significantly behind the White British group. Whilst this is consistent with Census data showing a surprisingly large minority of Roma people with level 4 qualifications; it is not consistent with broader research and data on employment and socioeconomic status within Roma communities.



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