

Statistical bulletin

Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, culture and identities, England and Wales: 2022

Qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of Gypsy and Traveller communities, relating to culture and identities.

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Release date:
7 December 2022

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Other pages in this release

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2 . Main points

- Participants' accounts portray considerable variation in the individual preference for a nomadic lifestyle, which impacts personal circumstances such as access to services, employment and family relationships.
- Close relationships with family were recurrently described as fundamental to Gypsy and Traveller values and well-being, but a move away from traditional lifestyles and, with this, greater separation from family, was felt to be occurring.
- Diverse views were expressed on gender roles, with some stepping outside of what were seen as traditional gender roles among Gypsies and Travellers, and emphasising the importance of education for young women, while others valued arrangements described as traditional among Gypsies and Travellers, such as men being the primary breadwinners, while women are responsible for care of family members and the home, with their work outside the home flexing around these roles.
- A range of experiences and relationships were described regarding non-travelling communities; some felt comfortable and accepted while others described past negative interactions resulting in wariness of the settled community and a preference for socialising with other Gypsies and Travellers.
- As well as a sense of loss associated with an evolving culture, some participants focused on new opportunities for themselves and the next generation, embracing new ideas and values, for example, in relation to education, housing, healthcare and gender roles.
- Running through participants' accounts were experiences of perceived prejudice and hostility in many aspects of life, which influenced decisions about whether to disclose or avoid revealing their Gypsy or Traveller identity with employers, educators and non-travelling people; in some cases, the choice was removed and they were "outed" either directly by others or indirectly by their accent, address or surname.
- Throughout discussions about sharing their identity, participants recurrently expressed a desire to be recognised as an individual, not on the basis of preconceived ideas about their ethnic group.

3 . Background to this research

This bulletin explores the diverse lifestyles, values and aspirations of those who participated in the research, as well as what they see as important aspects of Gypsies' and Travellers' lives and identities today, and how that has changed over time.

This study focused on people currently living in England and Wales identifying as Gypsy or Traveller. Within these broad groups, people described themselves in different ways such as Romany Gypsy, English Gypsy, Welsh Gypsy, Irish Traveller or Romany Traveller. Others said they have mixed ethnicity including combinations of the above as well as Showmen and ethnic groups from the settled community.

As Gypsies and Travellers are traditionally nomadic groups, this is important in many aspects of their lives including education, employment, health, housing, family, and wider social and community relationships.

In this study, participants of different ages recounted their personal histories, sometimes stretching back over generations. For example, people now aged in their eighties remembered their own childhood and shared stories of their parents' and grandparents' lives as well. They described personal and social values linked to a traditional need to look after self and family while travelling, particularly as public services such as healthcare and education were commonly viewed as inaccessible or unwelcoming to Gypsies and Travellers. Examples of this type of self-reliance appear throughout this series of bulletins, such as:

- participants teaching themselves to read and write when formal educational opportunities have been perceived as limited, inadequate or unsuccessful ([education and employment](#))
- opting for self-employment to make best use of one's skills and abilities, possibly despite a lack of formal qualifications and perceived discrimination in the labour market ([education and employment](#))
- delayed seeking of healthcare and in some cases, use of home remedies which were once an important, more readily available alternative ([health](#))
- a desire to be on the road and in nature or in a trailer, which felt closer to a traditional nomadic lifestyle where participants could live more freely and independently (though participants varied as to whether they currently wanted to lead a nomadic lifestyle, as noted in [homes](#))

While recognising how their heritage has played a part in who Gypsies and Travellers are today, participants also highlighted the importance of treating people as individuals in their own right and recognising the diversity between and within Gypsy and Traveller communities, in keeping with other ethnic groups. In their own lives, participants varied in their beliefs, values and behaviour. Some adopted what they saw as traditional Gypsy and Traveller values and lifestyles, while others opted for new approaches or tried to strike a balance between the two.

There was also discussion of how traditional ways of life are changing and how this affects the lives of Gypsies and Travellers today, as well as trajectories for the younger generation. Some participants experienced changes away from traditional values and lifestyles as a loss of familiar and positive aspects of their culture, while others focused on new opportunities or acknowledged a need to live differently in a changing world.

4 . Travelling lifestyles

Participants' life stories suggest that there is now considerable variation in the extent to which Gypsies and Travellers choose a nomadic lifestyle today and the personal value it has to them. This in turn is affected by a range of individual circumstances such as health, ageing, family relationships and priorities, and employment.

The choice to lead a nomadic life was also viewed by participants as constrained by legislation in England and Wales, which makes it difficult and potentially precarious to live this way in practice. This is explored in more detail in our [homes](#) and [justice](#) bulletins.

Being on the roadside like you know, travelling up and down with my pals and things...[It was] better than what it is today. It was more happier. You know you can play outside. Today you can't do none of that...cos you're not allowed to. You get evicted from one day to the next and you don't know if the police are gonna come and tell you off...And you're a bit scared with the young ones on the roadside. Today it's not as safe as it was back then.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, local authority site

Against this context, a range of different approaches to travelling, both currently and in the past, were discussed by participants, highlighting the diversity in Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles, personal histories and experiences. Some participants described moving from place to place almost continuously for much of their lives.

Apart from the few weeks we were on [site] we would have been on the roadside 40 year of the 48 year we were married.

Male, aged 70 to 80 years, local authority site

Others had a settled base for part of the year and travelled part of the year, or transitioned between travelling and settling.

I lived a Traveller lifestyle very much. We weren't mobile such we didn't live in trailers and you know, move around. You know, as part of the year we had that base that was our yard. But we did go away a lot. We went away to, you know, ...all the fairs all over the country. And we used to go away every holiday, you know every bank holiday we'd go to the coast or we go to New Forest or you know, so.

Female, aged 60 to 70 years, private site

The different variations of a traditional nomadic lifestyle, and different choices people make around travelling highlight the diversity in Gypsies' and Travellers' lives and their different individual needs and priorities.

Their choices are also affected by wider society. For example, recently introduced legislation prohibiting unauthorised stopping and variations in the provisions made for Gypsies and Travellers to stop in each local authority area have contributed to the perception that it is increasingly unfeasible to choose a traditional nomadic lifestyle in England and Wales. A common refrain was that this represents "a dying way of life".

The culture like travelling around it's going away now, it's gradually just fading and fading away cause they don't want you doing it, but everybody else has got their culture. We're not allowed to have our culture, we're not allowed to have our say...

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, roadside

5 . Family and community

The importance of close-knit family and social groups was described by participants as fundamental to Gypsy and Traveller culture, communities and well-being.

And looking back at my childhood now, you could see we were very poor. I never felt poor [in] my life. I felt full of richness, because I had my family and friends around me and I had lots of things. Lots of people I could talk to on the Gypsy and Traveller site.

Male, aged 40 to 50 years, bricks and mortar

These values were also described as an important aspect of traditional child rearing, where children were, and in some cases still are, encouraged to develop life skills and practical, vocational skills early on, working alongside family members.

...We allow our children to do more. They are more grown up as in they're more adulated...You could see a little girl say what's nine or ten year old when she can cook a good dinner for the family or do things for her brothers and sisters...whilst the mother's doing something else...With us it is just everyday life...

Female, aged 40 to 50 years, local authority site

Some participants also described moral values instilled from a young age in family and community life, such as honesty and respect for others, especially elders.

Like growing up on site...We was always brought up well, with good morals and respect amongst our own people, and we was brought up the right way to be honest and that's the way of life, I reckon anyhow.

Male, aged 20 to 30 years, local authority site

There was also recognition that, as in any group in society, not everyone adheres to these norms in equal measure. This was sometimes discussed, for example, in relation to family breakdown or on particular sites where relationships were strained between community members.

There was also discussion of how things may be evolving in Gypsy and Traveller communities. For example, some described a sense of widening disparities over recent years in many aspects of life including wealth, living conditions, educational aspirations and attainment, working lives, values and lifestyle choices such as accommodation, between individuals and groups, and between generations.

And you get these upper-class Travellers as I call them...Yeah, when you're there on your own they'll speak to ya. When they get with the upper-class, they'll put their finger over their nose and walk by and ignore you. They're not Travellers. They're not Travellers in my eyes...The only time you should look down on another Traveller is when you is helping them up...

Male, aged 70 to 80 years, local authority site

The speed with which transitions have occurred away from traditional lifestyles and practices, and towards the adoption of different values and approaches has also created strain, leaving some with a sense of uprootedness, loss of belonging and uncertainty about shared values.

You never had the influence of the world imposed upon you. When Travellers started to settle down it was like giving a 10-year-old a million pounds, they just went and spent it anywhere. And this is what happened, Travellers' lives got much better very quickly...And this caused a lot of confusion and I think a lot of greediness. Today they... live in a world which really has got very little realism in it. It's all shiny and gold and aiming somewhere, but they have lost value. They have lost value in sitting around at table, because a table to a Gypsy was a wonderful thing... But now they don't even eat as a family and most of the women can't even cook. They have lost that. They claim to be a Gypsy a lot of the time, but they live in a world that they do not understand because their foundations are not in it.

Female, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

Some described a perceived loss of closeness to family and friends. In some cases, this was linked to geographical dispersion of family groups because of more limited opportunities for families to remain together on Gypsy and Traveller sites, because of a lack of space. Additionally, a loss of perceived closeness was attributed to the social and inter-generational disparities noted previously.

But everything was done family orientated. Even the teenagers, the older brothers and sisters, they would all go, they would be quite happy to go [out] as a family...And so it was a family unit thing you knew where everybody was and everybody knew where you were...And I am very grateful and I feel sorry for the younger generation that doesn't have that kind of family orientation now. It seems to be fading and disappearing and...You look out on Travellers now and there's very few that you recognise.

Female, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

6 . Gender roles

A range of examples were given as to how gender roles play a part in Gypsy and Traveller culture. This was another area in which diverse views were expressed by participants, with some appearing to adhere to gender roles for men and women seen as traditional among Gypsies and Travellers, while others made different choices in their lives.

“Traditional gender roles” were described in relation to a range of expectations about unmarried women avoiding alcohol, remaining “pure” by avoiding sex before marriage and “keeping to themselves”.

So among Gypsy people the peer pressure is the Gypsy girls and the Traveller girls is you stay pure. You don't kiss loads of boys, you don't have lots of experiences, you don't go around getting drunk and being inebriated. You behave in manner that is considered to be pure.

Community member, Focus Group 4

These views may also negatively affect the willingness of some parents to send their children to school beyond the age at which the curriculum involves sex education, as highlighted in our [education bulletin](#).

...We left school. The deciding factor was them sending a letter home for me mam, saying that they're going to start teaching certain lessons that my mam didn't want me to learn. And yeah, got took out the next day. And never went back...

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

Others seemed to find this less of a barrier to supporting their children's educational trajectories.

My daughter is 17. She's at college and going to uni, hopefully. But her goal is to find someone to settle down and have a family, because that's the most important job, isn't it really? Raising our children.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, local authority site

For some Gypsy and Traveller women, these described traditional gender roles appeared to play an important role in shaping the nature of their relationships with men and the balance of power within their households.

...A Travelling woman's life is very hard...You get married and be controlled by someone [in ways] that you didn't even get controlled by your own father...You'd be controlled [by] saying you say you had to keep a certain way. You keep yourself to yourself until you get married then that's it. Then when you go on and get married your life gets ten times harder and stricter.

Female, aged 20 to 30 years, bricks and mortar

In describing their lives, women also recurrently highlighted the central role they play in the care of family members of all generations, including personal care and support, organising healthcare, cooking, looking after the home and organising education or home schooling for children.

Linked to this, participants described a traditional expectation that unmarried women will stay on in the family home to look after a parent and siblings if the other parent dies.

I've got a brother that's younger than me...So he was 14...when my mom passed away. He wasn't very old. So it was my job. I then took on the role of staying at home and looking after my dad and my brothers. And because my mom...had been ill for quite some time, I had taken on a lot of that role anyway, cooking and taking over the family... [I was] very, very conscious of being respectful for me dad, and being home there and doing the things that I needed to do...But before I was 25, my dad passed away...[and] I met my husband, and we got married within five months...And I honestly say to this day, had I not lost my dad, I don't think I would have got married...I would never have left my dad and my brothers to get married.

Female, aged 60 to 70 years, private site

Although both men and women may work outside the home, men have traditionally been considered the primary breadwinners, and women have been responsible for care of family members and the home, with their work outside the home flexing around these roles.

Through life I have worked on and off, but obviously settling down at a young age because I mean, I'm still with my husband [and] we was together from the age of 15...We believe in the man keeping the woman, not the woman keeping the man. But I did want a job and I went and got a job in [a shop] and I ended up really, really did like it.

Female, aged 40 to 50 years, bricks and mortar

As with other ethnic and cultural groups, there is diversity in this as well with some Gypsy and Traveller families doing things differently, and sometimes stepping outside of the described traditional gender roles.

...My sister got taken to hospital...and me mum stayed with her [as] obviously she was only a baby. But then we stayed with me dad on the camp...And every morning my dad used to get up, make us...a slice of toast, and then he'd take us up to the hospital to see my sister and my mum for a few hours. And then we'd go back to the camp and me dad would make us tea and I think we lived on, I still love it now, fried potatoes, egg and beans. That's what we lived on for six months I think, cause he wouldn't let anybody else make us tea. He tried his best to do everything for us that me mum would normally do.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

Traditional gender roles also appeared to be shifting for some in relation to education, and women's lives and aspirations.

Yep my three children went to school. My eldest daughter went right through to college. She got all top marks, very proud of her.

Female, aged 40 to 50 years, local authority site

7 . Engaging with settled communities

Participants were also asked about their experiences and relationships with people from outside their own Gypsy and Traveller communities. Who people thought of as part of or outside their own community and the terms they used to describe other groups varied. For example, “countryman” and “gorger” are terms used by some to refer generally to groups outside Gypsy and Traveller communities.

A lot of Travellers have a lot of pride that they work for themselves, that they don't work for the man. You kind of do...whether you like it or not. However you do a job, you're still working for a countryman! Whether you're self-employed or not, someone else is still giving you your money.

Male, aged 30 to 40 years, local authority site

Similarly, “non-Traveller”, and “non-Gypsy” are also used to refer to others outside Gypsy and Traveller communities as is “the settled community”, although it is important to note that Gypsies and Travellers may also live in settled accommodation in the wider community, attend schools, colleges and universities, and work in a range of employment settings.

My children nowadays don't mix with anybody. Even when they were at school, they didn't have non-Traveller friends.

Female, aged 60 to 70 years, private site

Some described feeling comfortable with and accepted by people in the non-Traveller community:

I have got experience mixing with non-Travellers, and the non-Travellers I have mixed with are aware that I'm a Gypsy Traveller...Some of them are a bit sceptical about the fact of where I'm from and who I am, and then some of them are completely fine with it, but you still get the stereotypical comment every now and then which isn't nice.

Male, aged 20 to 30 years, local authority site

Others felt more wary of mixing with others from the settled community, typically linked to negative interactions and perceived prejudice in the past and fear of encountering this again.

Only [mix with the Gorgers] if I need to...like if we got a form filling in, if we need to go to the doctors or things like that, where otherwise we don't. It's not like that we wouldn't mix with them it's just that we've never been brought up to mix with them...you know we've always mixed with our own kind... [And] there's been a lot of...basically all your life, you get called a Gypsy and called names. They've never lived in our shoes and we never lived in theirs so you know. I can remember growing up a few times we've had like things thrown at us, being called names this that and the other you know. It's not nice to see and hear all the time but you get used to it as you are growing up basically.

Female, aged 20 to 30 years, local authority site

Some participants also described a greater sense of familiarity and ease in being with other Gypsies and Travellers, particularly among friends and family or among those with similar values, experiences and traditions.

I don't really mix with non-travelling people, I try to stick to me own people, for why I can talk my own language...But I find that I'm more comfortable around me own people than I am with non-Gypsy people.

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

8 . Embracing new opportunities

As well as a sense of loss associated with an evolving culture, some participants focused on new opportunities for themselves and the next generation, embracing new ideas and values, for example, in relation to education, housing, healthcare and described gender roles.

Some parents described education as important to their children's future well-being and have made new choices and personal sacrifices in their own lives, such as settling in one place, to support their children's education.

I...had children [and] put them to school so they could lead a normal life...Well yeah because I mean in this day and age, what can you do without an education? I mean there's so many job opportunities now for somebody who can read and write which years ago it didn't really make that much difference, but this day and age I feel you got to have an education.

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

In some cases, mixing between parents and children at school was also viewed as one way of bringing more positive relationships and empathy between Gypsies and Travellers, and non-Traveller communities.

Things are changing, all my grandchildren go to school...They got a good balance. I think the reason why that is, is that their parents will invite children over to them, so you've got control over what they are learning and what they are not learning. Who they are mixing and who they're not mixing with. And that way the mums at the school become friends they meet up and have a cuppa coffee, so they grow together. And the women are more likely to understand more and have more empathy for each other. They have a respect for each other's lives.

Female, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

Participants also described pursuing careers, including self-employment, involving higher level skills, education, qualifications and employment (covered in more detail in our [education bulletin](#)).

I think both my children and grandchildren know what they are, accept what they are and they have all done very well for themselves in life. You know my son travels the world, he works for [a transport company]. My daughter goes through university and has got a very good job so it is...something to be proud of...I have seen so much in life that...it makes you proud...You can think that your children know what they are, accept it and they follow in your footsteps.

Male, aged 80 to 90 years, bricks and mortar

9 . Identifying as a Gypsy or Traveller today

Although there were diverse experiences reported by participants, an important theme running throughout their accounts is the perception of prejudice and hostility towards Gypsies and Travellers, described by some as permeating many aspects of their lives. This formed an important part of the context within which they made personal decisions about whether and with whom to share their Gypsy or Traveller identity.

Participants took different stances on this, ranging from those who felt proud and did not want to hide their ethnicity.

...When I was a young little one I did say that I didn't want to be a Gypsy girl. But as I go now I'm proud of what I am because it makes me think, you know, why should I hide from my end? Why should my children hide from what they are because that's [what] we were born as?

Community member, Focus Group 1

To those who feel more conflicted and avoid others knowing they are a Gypsy or Traveller.

...You shouldn't forget who you are but today I feel like you have got to hide who you are...When I got my first one to school, that was my only worry. I went in and I said to them, 'I don't want no one to know she's a Traveller'.

Community member, Focus Group 4

Linked to previous experiences and in anticipation of future discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, some participants described hiding their Gypsy or Traveller identity as a means of avoiding possible harms. A range of circumstances in which people chose to hide their ethnicity were discussed, as well as strategies for doing so.

For example, some participants described acting and speaking differently when among people from settled communities to avoid being identified as a Gypsy or Traveller. This is captured in a common expression: "Be a Gypsy among the Gypsies and a Gorgger amongst the Gorggers".

A Traveller accent is a very, very different accent, and people click on to that. So you gotta try and talk how they talk so you don't get picked on. You gotta watch how you talk.

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, roadside

Others discussed minimising their interaction with people from the settled community to avoid being identified. Examples included avoiding mixing with other parents from their children's schools, sending children to schools some distance from where they live or avoiding interaction with neighbours when living in bricks and mortar housing.

I'm scared to go around them. I have neighbours but I keep myself to myself...I don't know just in case like, they found out that we're actually Travellers. I live in a house...I do not come out. I don't have friends. The only people that I really see is if I go get the shopping or I pick my [child] up from school and I see the children's mothers at school. That is it!

Female, aged 20 to 30 years, bricks and mortar

Additionally, participants discussed trying to prevent current and prospective employers becoming aware that they are a Gypsy or Traveller, for example, by not including any information on job applications or interviews that would indicate their ethnicity, and living in fear of losing their jobs if employers were to find out.

My current job, I have actually been intimidated by my employers and colleagues cos we've recently had some roadside Travellers come into the car park and obviously I know that they are not bad people and...that's just the way they live and just what they do...These people automatically assume that they are going to cause problems and cause trouble whereas they didn't. And hearing everything my colleagues and employers had to say just made me feel really alienated from the work team although they didn't know where I was from because there's a worry that if they know where you're from you're gonna be treated in the same way and would you even still be allowed your job is the question.

Male, aged 20 to 30 years, local authority site

Concealing personal information, such as names associated with local Gypsy and Traveller families, was also a way to access opportunities they felt they might otherwise be denied.

You know, I mean, despite...[being] married for 37 years, and I lived here as a young girl before we ever got married. And I know the ins and outs [of this place] and I've never known any harm, and I can hold my head high but yet, we don't get our opportunity. We're not allowed [as] soon as you say the name. I'm quite lucky because I married a non-Traveller. So, my surname [they] didn't recognise it. I can reserve for people. I can go down reserve a campsite...and see whoever and you don't know who I am...But I know all my own family are fine, decent, upstanding people, and they put a name [down] and...there's no availability. How's that work? Surely, [that] shouldn't be accepted in today's society.

Female, aged 70 to 80 years, bricks and mortar

Despite attempts to control whether and with whom they share their ethnicity, some participants also gave examples of being "outed" and described a range of negative impacts when their ethnicity became known. People were "outed" both directly and indirectly, with both forms of "outing" taking away their choice about whether to disclose the information for themselves.

Examples of indirect outing happened, for example, when people gave their address as a site exclusively for Gypsies and Travellers (to police, employers, doctors, schools or emergency services) or when others saw them entering or leaving these sites.

The negative side of it was when friends [at school] found out where you were from. You were completely alienated and it was a worry because you didn't want judgement from people just because of where you lived and it wasn't a nice experience.

Male, aged 20 to 30 years, local authority site

Examples of direct outing involved someone else disclosing their ethnicity without giving them a choice. Cases of direct outing included being introduced to others publicly as a Gypsy or Traveller without prior consent and an official calling an employer about an incident involving a Gypsy or Traveller and disclosing their ethnicity.

I went to [school name]. First day, I got stood, bear in mind I'm a chubby...[child] with curly hair...Yeah, really self-confident at that time, gets stood in front of the class of 30 odd kids. I've actually wrote a poem about this experience. I'm getting introduced as; 'This is [NAME], a Gypsy'...I wanted to sink for the floor.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

Looking at their wider life stories provides the context within which people's current decisions about sharing their identity can be better understood.

Participants described wanting to hide their identity for several reasons including:

- avoidance of possible harm or negative interactions
- enabling others to know them as an individual prior to learning their identity in the hope of avoiding perceived prejudiced views towards the group as a whole
- unlocking better access to new opportunities such as improved material living standards or better education for their children

Avoiding harm was a recurrent theme among participants and sometimes co-existed alongside a desire for a different life, both reinforcing a desire to hide their identity.

Participants trying to avoid harm, stigmatisation and vulnerability by hiding their identity tended to focus on past experiences of perceived discrimination and feelings of being stigmatised, vulnerable, “treated like scum” or as “second-class citizens” linked to being a Gypsy or Traveller.

You grow up with that, you grow up feeling second class, with that representation on telly of you being what it is which is completely one-sided generally and doesn't show a true picture. And I've noticed really...now that the Bill [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, 2022] has gone through, it's destroying Gypsy and Travellers' mental health because you can't get no help from the Police, you can't get no help from healthcare. School treats you like second class citizen and now they put through a Bill. This is insane. We're second-class citizens here.

Community member, Focus Group 4

They also described shielding their children from discrimination they feel they have experienced and delaying disclosure of their ethnicity so they can first be known as an individual and perhaps avoid stigmatisation on the basis of their ethnicity.

I didn't really say to be quite honest with you [that I was a Traveller]... I just left them and let them find out to know the person that I was before I explained to them...who I was. And as time go on, they knew exactly who I was... The only thing was I didn't turn around and let them know, I just let people find out when they found out. They took me for the person I was, not for the stigma.

Female, aged 40 to 50 years, local authority site

By contrast, participants who described living with greater openness about their identity as a Gypsy or Traveller focused more on having a sense of pride in their ethnicity and heritage, and potentially wanting to stand up to perceived prejudiced attitudes towards Gypsies and Travellers, and call it out.

They generally recognised that others could respond negatively to their ethnicity and saw this as a reason to be honest and up front about it, addressing it head on and “owning” who they are as a way of dealing with discrimination and maintaining self-esteem.

I tell people straight up that I'm a Traveller and if they like it, they like it; and if they don't, they don't. That's their problem. If they find out later on in the friendship, things can get out of hand.

Male, aged 40 to 50 years, bricks and mortar

Participants also felt that it is important to give children a sense of “who they are” and see their Gypsy or Traveller heritage as a source of strength for themselves and their families.

Yeah, I made it clear [to their school that they were Romany Gypsy] from day one...We were very lucky actually the primary school and the secondary school my children went to was absolutely brilliant...All the school friends they made in primary they still got to this day. They've never lost a friend through being Gypsies, my children haven't. That might be because they were settled down at the time, you know...I think this day and age where there's so many cultures within England I think that there's more acceptance now I feel than there was years ago.

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

10 . Recognising the individual

Whatever the choice, it is important to acknowledge that decisions, such as to share one's identity as a Gypsy or Traveller, are made in the context of individual's lives and at specific points in time. Choices around sharing information about ethnicity appeared linked to a desire to be recognised as an individual. This was also a recurrent theme; to be recognised empathetically as an individual rather than treated on the basis of stereotypes about a group as a whole.

I can look at the settled people and say are they all paedophiles, you know they are all murderers...but they're not. There's good and bad in everybody. There's good and bad in my community and there's good and bad in the settled community. So, just accept people as you find them.

Female, aged 60 to 70 years, bricks and mortar

Participants also highlighted examples in the media which they felt erroneously presented Gypsies and Travellers as a homogenous group, potentially reinforcing stereotypes.

...A lot of the television programmes that they're watching...like all the girls on there getting married at 16 and things like that but Travellers are all different...Some might believe in their children getting married at 16/17 and that's like their way, and then there's other Travellers, like my family, that believed in getting an education and if you didn't want to get married at 16 you didn't, you wasn't forced...If you wanted to get married at 16, 19, 25, 30...there was no pressure...Travellers are different and with the [television programmes], they just cause more discrimination and more stereotypes [making]...everyone to think like all Travellers are like [that]. Like you have to have the big dress and you have to get married at 16 and all you're there for is to have children, clean up and cook...I think that's where most of the discrimination in school [comes from] where the children get bullied [because]...that's all they're watching...They think that's how it is, but it's not. It's not like that at all. It's just that each family is their own.

(from field notes) Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

The consequences of the choice to withhold or be open about ethnicity may also have implications beyond the individual, for Gypsy and Traveller communities more widely and for future generations. For example, some participants highlighted famous Gypsies and Travellers who help to increase their community's visibility and can serve as positive role models for young people.

It's like with Tyson Fury. Tyson Fury is fighting for us. To get our name out there because everybody just thinks we are like scum...

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, roadside

Local and central government participants also recognised the importance of finding new ways to engage more effectively with Gypsy and Traveller communities to improve understanding, trust and policy development.

...We fund an advice and advocacy service...We recognise that a lot of mainstream service provision isn't tailored or trusted by these communities. So we fund partners to act as advocates to people in the community to ensure that they're able to get access to their rights, ... access public services, ombudsman service, more effectively. [And] so that ...people can be empowered to speak directly with politicians and commissioners and decision makers so that we can actually bring those voices in into the places where they can be heard.

Welsh Government participant

11 . Glossary

Bricks and mortar

This term is used commonly by Gypsies and Travellers when talking about homes which are permanent structures, such as houses or flats.

Participants

In this bulletin, “community members” and “participants” refers to people currently living in England and Wales, aged 16 years and over, identifying as Gypsy or Traveller, who took part in this research. Where quotes have been used from local or central government participants, this is explicitly stated. We aim to portray the views of participants and to reflect their words as closely as possible. Some quotes have been edited for language and grammar to improve accessibility, without changing the content or meaning.

Roadside

Living at the roadside means staying temporarily on public land, such as in a car park or on a verge next to a road.

Settled communities

A term used to refer generally to communities who are not of Gypsy or Traveller ethnicity, sometimes referred to as “countrymen”, “gorgers”, “non-Gypsy” and “non-Travellers”.

Sites

Gypsy and Traveller sites are authorised places of residence which may be owned and managed by the council or privately.

12 . Methodology

More information about the background and rationale, approach to sampling and recruitment, strengths and limitations and design of the material and approach to analysis can be found in our accompanying [methodology article](#).

13 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 7 December 2022, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, culture and identity, England and Wales: 2022](#)