

Statistical bulletin

Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, homes, England and Wales: 2022

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

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1 . Other pages in this release

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2 . Main points

- Participants' living situations varied greatly; some lived in houses or flats, some in chalets on private land with only a small number of neighbours, and others on large sites owned and managed by a local authority.
- Some participants continued to live a mostly nomadic lifestyle, stopping at transit sites or on the side of the road where they could, although living nomadically was described as increasingly difficult because of the lack of authorised stopping places, likelihood of being moved on by police, and fears of prosecution as a result of the recently introduced [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act \(2022\)](#).
- Of those who had opted to live in a permanent home, some lamented the loss of a nomadic lifestyle, while others appeared to adapt and, in some instances, preferred living in bricks and mortar.
- The accommodation needs and preferences of participants varied, however, a common priority among participants was wanting to live somewhere they felt safe, with access to basic amenities such as electricity, water and showers, and where they could live near to loved ones.
- Some appeared to live in circumstances such as this, while others described a lack of basic amenities, limited choices, a sense of being unsafe and few positive relationships with others around them, with potentially detrimental impacts on their physical and mental well-being.
- Increasing provision of permanent and transit sites, designed through consultation with communities, was described by both community members and local and central government participants as an important way to address the housing and accommodation challenges of Gypsies and Travellers.

3 . Living conditions

Participants from Gypsy and Traveller communities described living in a range of accommodation settings, including houses, dwellings or trailers on their own land, local authority housing, trailers or caravans on permanent local authority sites or "transit" local authority sites, privately owned sites, and at the roadside.

Those with experience of living on Gypsy and Traveller sites identified a range of issues with the standards and management of local authority sites, and with some private sites. This included fly-tipped rubbish, rat infestations, the site being located near busy roads, and issues with facilities, such as toilet and shower blocks being insufficient for the population served, damp and without heating. Rubbish clearance, repairs and necessary updates to amenities such as shower blocks and fences were said to take a long time to be completed.

Conditions are very poor...On there you can wait weeks for anything to be repaired, [if] fencing or a bit of plumbing needs doing, you gotta wait weeks. I end up sometimes doing it meself.

Male, aged 60 to 70 years, local authority site

Participants living on both local authority and private sites also discussed difficulties receiving post and deliveries, opening bank accounts, getting insurance, hiring cars and accessing emergency services such as ambulances (explored in more detail in [health](#) and [justice](#) bulletins). This was thought to be because of site addresses "outing" people as Gypsies or Travellers, resulting in perceived discrimination from service providers (see [culture bulletin](#)).

You can't give away addresses and like a delivery service, if you want the bed or a cooker. [If] you give away, there's no way they'll come out. No way. Same with clothes, you gotta pick them up from the [delivery service shop], you can't actually get delivered to sites...

Community member, Focus Group 3

Community members living on sites described wanting to have the same basic facilities they believe most other communities enjoy including water, electricity, warm showers and toilets, waste disposal, playgrounds for children and community centres.

I got seven children, they're all married but they're all doubled up [note 1] they haven't got their own home, their own pitch. And they all got children. That could be better, if they made more pitches, a play area, and people come in to help them, like a nursery and that.

Female, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

Notes

1. More than one caravan to a pitch.

4 . Choice and influence

A recurrent theme among community member participants was a feeling of having limited choice and influence over their lives.

For some, this was related to having to make difficult trade-offs about where to live, for example, having to choose between better access to healthcare or proximity to family. Others described a perceived lack of choice about their living situation and living conditions.

I mean, like, this is not a choice to live here. This is obviously, this is not a choice at all. This is the only place we got to live cause [we've] nowhere else to go.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, local authority site

Participants who had moved to bricks and mortar or on to small private sites discussed the difficult decision of trading the freedom of travelling and living roadside or living close to family and friends on a site, with the choice to live in accommodation with access to facilities such as hot water, baths and showers. These issues were particularly described by some older participants as well as by those with health conditions.

Because my dad got sick we ended up going into a house which we hated. We still do now, we hate it because you don't see nobody, you're locked away. You're always stressed, the anxiety, the walls is closing in on top of you.

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

One participant recounted fond memories of being surrounded by family and nature, which came with growing up on the road, but discussed how on becoming a parent, she had opted to move into a house to avoid the stress of being unable to access facilities like toilets and water easily.

But then you didn't realise the stress of what your family was going through on the side of the road, 'cause we were brought up without baths. Hot baths and taps or whatever and brushing your teeth outside, sometimes even getting a washing in the lake...All of these things but then it was like... it was just like your own kind, wild as anything going through nature. Taking long walks, making food on the fires...

Female, aged 20 to 30 years, bricks and mortar

Frustrations were raised with having to rely on wardens or site managers on local authority sites to be able to access water and electricity, with examples given of having to wait until the following day to top-up electricity if the warden was unavailable.

People also spoke about being unable to choose their water or electricity suppliers, with the implication that they would pay higher rates than those who could shop around.

We would like to get a chance to go private, the same as the people in houses, so we can switch from one electric company to another, we can switch from [current] water board to a different water board. We can switch gas companies over [to] whichever we think is cheaper... but we are not allowed to do that...

Male, aged 60 to 70 years, local authority site

Participants described a lack of consultation with the community into the design of homes and sites.

When they're trying to build a site they should actually do a survey or come and [say] 'hold on, what would you like?...'. It would be nice to have a building on there ...where perhaps there's a day room or something...people can use because they've only got the small caravan. People like a garden, some people you know, not everyone at the end of the day wants [to] have just a concrete block.

Female, aged 40 to 50 years, local authority site

Linked to traditional aspects of Gypsy and Traveller culture and nomadic ways of life, some participants highlighted the importance of being able to have open fires around which families and neighbours can socialise. They felt this was not generally considered in the design of sites and was often against site regulations. This was seen by some as reducing opportunities for social interaction, potentially contributing to feelings of isolation among community members.

Fire is important, fire is socialising. If you light a fire someone will come, it don't matter where we come from or how we are living or what kinda life, you will always find if you light a fire people will come and have a chat because everybody is interested in it.

Female, aged 40 to 50 years, local authority site

Similarly, having horses and other animals was reportedly not allowed on most sites. This was once an important aspect of nomadic life as horses were used to pull wagons, while keeping animals now seems more important for emotional and mental well-being, and was discussed as a factor in the decisions of some to move away from sites.

But me mum and dad just wanted to give us the best childhood they could, they did that by making memories with us. And we always had animals, me brother was an animal man. And like, whenever we went back to the yard, we always went back with an animal, there was always a cow or a sheep or a goat or a horse, or Shetland, [some] random animal our brother decided he wanted, that we've got took back with us. So there was always plenty to entertain us...

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

5 . Relationships with other Gypsies and Travellers

For nearly all participants, living close to family and friends was seen to be important to their well-being. For some, moving into houses, flats or chalets on private land was viewed as a positive step. However, others described moving because of perceived necessity and felt that the move away from family and friends undermined their mental well-being. Feelings of loneliness, isolation and oppression were described, as well as anxiety and depression.

We went from just being surrounded by everybody that loved us and cared for us and that we could have a good time with, to being stuck in a house with nobody because we didn't, even like when we went to school and that, people weren't us, we weren't them.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

A perceived scarcity of sites and limited space on existing sites were viewed as important issues affecting people's ability to live close to family. For example, participants discussed having to "double-up", with multiple caravans put in spaces meant for one.

[We need] more pitches, bigger sites, more sites for people to go on, because everyone's got families growing up, and there's literally nowhere for them [to] go.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, local authority site

Overcrowding because of a lack of available sites was also described as negatively impacting relationships between groups. For example, tensions were described on some sites because of having to compete for space to be near family. This was said to have a considerable impact on the mental well-being of some participants, with fears about safety and concerns about the security of property and belongings, contributing to a sense of chronic anxiety.

This was also a factor in the decisions of some to move away from sites and into houses or private land, in cases where these options were available. Some participants described feeling safer and more peaceful in private settings.

Times are getting very, very hard. The sites are horrible. Everybody's, like, using social media to call and back fight and rip each other to pieces. There's all this tension going on up and down the country where everybody's fighting for their little bit of land. And being – being in a trailer on a site just doesn't appeal to me right now. Here it's peaceful, I mind my own business, me and my husband and my little girl, we shut the door when we want to, you know, it's peaceful. It's a quiet life.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

6 . Relationships with settled communities

Some participants who had moved into houses or onto small private sites described building positive relationships with settled communities, contributing to an increased sense of belonging.

Yeah, we're settled. The people know us. And it's funny because the people said to us, like, all the people in the shops around there knows we've been there for quite a while now. And all the people in the shops around there knows even in the supermarkets, and they'll say, 'oh but you're not like the rest, the others?' And I say, 'Yeah, I am. I said, the fact is you just don't get to know the others'.

Female, aged 70 to 80 years, bricks and mortar

For others, however, relationships with settled communities appeared strained. Some described feeling the need to hide who they were for fear of prejudice (for more detail see [culture bulletin](#)), while others who were open about their Gypsy or Traveller background described being harassed by neighbours because of their ethnicity, or them having "nothing to do with you". (Female, aged 40 to 50 years, bricks and mortar).

... When we lived in that house, we had bottles thrown through the window. We had dog [excrement] put through the letterbox, we had writing on the fences '...Go home!'

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

A recurrent belief expressed by participants was that settled communities hold prejudiced views of Gypsies and Travellers, which they felt can affect local decisions not to expand site provision across England and Wales. Examples were described of where decision-makers raised objections to sites being built in areas where local residents from settled communities were opposed to them.

7 . Freedom to travel

The ability to "pull away"[note 1] was described by participants as increasingly difficult because of a lack of suitable stopping places and the perceived likelihood of being moved on by enforcement officers or police. The instability and apprehension of being moved on was a source of anxiety among those who wished to maintain a nomadic or partially nomadic lifestyle.

So you know...in those [television] documentaries...when Travellers could just park up on a piece of land and it didn't matter because that's how the country was. Well, it's not like that now. You can't just go up and park up on a piece of land. Somebody will come and enforce on it...That's how it is for everybody really.

Local government participant, England

While some local authorities were said to take a "negotiated stopping" approach where community members were provided with facilities and supported to stop somewhere for a short period of time, others took an "enforcement first" approach. The latter involves the use of evictions to move people on as quickly as possible from their stopping place. Some community members felt that the introduction of the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act \(2022\)](#) would make it even harder to stop, through affording additional power to police to move people on.

Everything's getting a bit harder today than, than it was then, because places what we used to stop on, they're all, erm...got big mud heaps or big rocks [to prevent access]...and especially now with this other thing what's coming out, this police thing [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022], where they can come and...take your caravan off you, and put your children into care, and different things like that, so, God knows what the future brings.

Female, aged 50 to 60 years, local authority site

In some local authorities, participants described being able to access "transit sites", where they could stop for a temporary period while travelling. It was suggested that the provision of more transit sites could enable those who wanted to travel to do so, without having to trespass or face being moved on quickly if an "enforcement first" approach was taken by the local authority.

However, community participants also gave examples of transit sites built with minimal facilities in a perceived attempt to discourage their use.

Notes

1. To travel away from home for periods of time, usually during summer months (see [culture bulletin](#))

8 . Access to permanent accommodation

For some participants, living on the roadside was seen as a necessity rather than a choice. Both historical and more recent instances were described of families staying in their trailers in lay-bys, car parks or transit sites (designed only for temporary stopping), sometimes for several years at a time, because of being unable to access space on a permanent site.

...They all seem like they've got a waiting list a mile long. And there's people literally queuing up to get on them and they can't. And it's like there's an outcry for sites and they're not bothered they're just knocking the ones [new sites] back what people are trying to do because they don't care...They're not bothered they'll just leave people living on roadsides...some people do choose to live like that. But years ago it were different to what it is now. You can pull up on a roadside and they'll block everything off, or you can't go into...a leisure centre because they're not letting Travellers in, you can't go in for a shower. You can't go in for a wash or a toilet. So they're not bothered that that's how people have to live at all because it's not affecting them because we're Travellers and 'if that's how they want to live, then leave them [to] live like that'. But they don't realise that that's not how everybody wants to live. It's how they've been forced to live.

Female, aged 20 to 30 years, private site

Participants living in these situations described practical difficulties they faced, such as being unable to access facilities and receive post, but also well-being impacts linked to this lack of stability.

It's not nice cause some days when I was growing up with my family and that you'd never know like. You'd do a day's work and then you had to come back and move through the night. So at 11 o'clock at night sometimes, we'd find a pitch or we're on the side of a main on a dual carriage way for the night. Where we can just get some rest and go again in the morning. That's no life for nobody.

Male, aged 50 to 60 years, roadside

Although people living in circumstances with no access to a Gypsy or Traveller site are [legally recognised as homeless](#), concerns were raised that they may also be more at risk of arrest and prosecution if they stay in unauthorised areas because of the [Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act \(2022\)](#).

I mean, even like the new announcement of 10 million pounds for sites [note 1] ...that will go nowhere, nationally, in building more sites. It will get us, virtually, nothing. And in the meantime, we're making living roadside without a proper camp, illegal. So you've got...people that are homeless, 10 million pounds [is] not going to put even a bit of a dent in that...The local authorities are going to use it to do up their existing sites, not build more, it's going to do nothing.

Female, aged 30 to 40 years, bricks and mortar

Notes

1. [Traveller site fund, 2022 to 2023](#)

9 . Local variation in provision, practices and data

There was recognition among central and local government participants of the variation in the policy and provision landscape between England and Wales and between local authority areas in each country. As groups with a traditional nomadic lifestyle and where travelling is still an important aspect of life, moving across these boundaries can present real challenges in navigating the differences in provision and practices within different areas.

In keeping with the accounts of community participants, local government participants also noted wide variation in the number of Gypsy and Traveller sites available across local authority areas. The variation in provision was linked to difficulties finding appropriate places for accommodating Gypsies and Travellers and was thought to put more pressure on some local authority areas than others.

Local and central government participants highlighted a lack of robust data hindering the development of evidence-informed policies and services to support Gypsy and Traveller communities. This includes examples where ethnicity data are not collected at all, where Gypsies and Travellers are not included in the data available, or where data are thought to provide an inaccurate picture of their lives and needs.

10 . Towards solutions

The provision of additional suitable permanent and transit sites, designed through consultation with communities, was outlined as the most effective solution to the issues described previously by most participants.

I just think that the people responsible for developing policies and services... should be made aware that Travellers are ...not hard work. All they want is somewhere to like have a roof, have a family...Some Travellers have bought their own places...For the ones that don't have the money to do it, why can't they just...build a site for them, leave them to go in? That's it. It's easier on everyone.

Female, aged 20 to 30 years, bricks and mortar

The provision of ringfenced funding to encourage and enable local authorities to proactively meet the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities in their areas was suggested as a possible way forward.

Well-maintained, culturally appropriate sites, with facilities such as playgrounds, transport links and community centres, which could be attended by healthcare and education providers, were seen as important to improving the living situations of community members.

Build parks for the children to play in. Help us along; keep the places clean. Put us in like, a place where we can mix with non-Gypsies who want, who can understand what we are. Not just put us somewhere where no one can see us, in a little place on our own.

Male, aged 40 to 50 years, local authority site

Yes, if possibly who's ever listening to this tape, if they could possibly make some changes, and actually, when they're putting it into writing, to actually put it into action to see...a good outcome and sites because we do need them. Families is getting bigger, and they're not allowed on the side of the roads. So, if they want Travellers to live on sites, they got to get more accommodation for the people...that do need them, but not to leave them in bins, because the sites is like bins.

Female, 40 to 50 years, local authority site

Participants described designated stopping places in some areas of Europe, which include access to facilities such as water, electricity and waste disposal, as a potential solution to the tensions linked to unauthorised encampments here. Tensions between settled communities and Gypsies and Travellers were felt to arise in situations where, for example, bins had not been provided and rubbish was left in temporary public stopping places. Providing facilities for people as early as possible was suggested as a practice that could improve relationships between local settled communities and Gypsies and Travellers stopping nearby.

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.

Transit sites are Gypsy and Traveller sites which are designed to be used for a temporary amount of time, usually between 28 days and three months.

12 . Methodology

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

13 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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