

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma submission:

Government Statistical Service Harmonisation: Consultation on user needs for additional response options in a future ethnicity standard

2 February 2026

Introduction

The APPG on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma promote the rights of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities in Parliament and with the government, and promotes inclusive policies and laws to tackle prejudicial attitudes.

This submission sets out the case for improved ethnicity data for Romany Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma communities in England. It focuses on the need for further disaggregation of the existing 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' category used by the Government Statistical Service and the Office for National Statistics and highlights the inconsistent adoption of the existing harmonised ethnicity standard across government departments. The submission emphasises the consequences of inadequate and inconsistent data for policy development, equality monitoring, resource allocation and service delivery.

Context

Whilst the umbrella term 'Gypsies and Travellers' is used in some contexts, it does in fact encompass several distinct ethnic groups, including Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsy Travellers and Welsh Gypsies. Roma are also a separate ethnic group (as recognised by the GSS and ONS, with a separate ethnicity category). These ethnic groups have distinct histories, cultural traditions, languages, and migration patterns. For example, Romany Gypsies trace their origins to northern India, while Irish Travellers originated from Ireland. These distinctions are well established in academic research and policy literature and are recognised in UK law. Today Gypsies and Travellers experience some of the [worst inequalities](#) across health, education, criminal justice, economic inclusion, and accommodation deprivation.

Gypsies and Irish Travellers are protected as ethnic groups under the Equality Act 2010, which places a positive duty on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Discharging this duty effectively depends on the availability of accurate, granular and consistently collected ethnicity data.

The need for disaggregation of the 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' category

Use of the aggregated 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' ethnic category in the harmonised standard and 2021 Census does not reflect the distinct communities it combines; furthermore, aggregation under one label obscures group-specific inequalities and hinders targeted action. Further disaggregation, at minimum separating Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers (with capacity to include Scottish Gypsy/Travellers and Welsh Gypsies where feasible), would:

- Improve accuracy and relevance of analysis by revealing group-specific experiences that are otherwise obscured in combined results (for example, differences linked to language or migration history, in accommodation status and health and educational outcomes).
- Target services and funding more effectively, so commissioners can design culturally appropriate interventions and allocate resources where need is greatest.
- Enhance accountability and evaluation, allowing programmes to set baselines and track progress for each group instead of drawing conclusions from aggregated data that may mask divergence.

The ‘Gypsy or Irish Traveller’ category sits under the high-level ‘White’ category in official classifications. When data is reported only at this aggregated level due to small sample sizes, the significant and persistent inequalities experienced by these communities are effectively obscured. This is the case for Home Office [data on the ethnicity of hate crime victims](#). Despite [evidence](#) which highlights high levels of race hate incidents and crimes experienced by Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers, there is no national data on this, and therefore, policy development, resource allocation and service delivery have largely failed to address this issue. This lack of granularity undermines evidence-based policymaking and hampers the development of targeted interventions to address specific needs. To address this, steps should be taken to boost sample sizes through other methods.

Lack of consistent adoption of the existing Harmonised Ethnicity Standard

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) is consulting on the need for additional ethnic categories; however, it is unlikely to make a meaningful impact while the existing harmonised ethnicity standard and 2021 Census classification of ‘Gypsy or Irish Traveller’ is not widely or consistently applied across government.

The Women and Equalities Committee ran an inquiry which concluded in 2019, [‘Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities’](#). The Committee highlighted the inadequate and inconsistent ethnic monitoring across departments and the impact this has on policy development, resource allocation and service delivery.

‘The lack of consistent data collection on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people means that public bodies are failing to tackle inequalities that are clearly evidenced in academic research and in work being carried out by grassroots organisations...Although the importance of having data, both for policy-making and resource allocation, is clear, it seems that most public bodies do not provide the option for Gypsy and Traveller people to disclose their ethnicity.’

Little progress has been made since this inquiry, for example:

- The Department for Education has one ethnic category for ‘Gypsy/Roma’ and a separate category for ‘Irish Traveller’. By aggregating Romany Gypsies and Roma into one ethnic category, this compromises the data as they are separate ethnic groups, who experience different barriers to education, such

as having English as a second language for Roma, digital exclusion and accessibility for families who travel. For these barriers to education to be addressed, data needs to be collected and published separately for Romany Gypsies and Roma.

- The Department of Health and Social Care have omitted to include Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma entirely in the Data Dictionary, which masks stark health inequalities which are highlighted in the 2011 and 2021 Censuses and in other data sets. For example, those who identified as 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' in the Census reported worse health across all age groups and in both sexes than the overall England and Wales population.

The failure to adopt the harmonised standard and/or the 2021 Census categories conceals essential data needed in order to develop targeted policies, allocate resources and deliver those services to the right people.

Recommendations

The Government Statistical Service should disaggregate the existing 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' ethnicity category into two separate categories of 'Romany Gypsy' and 'Irish Traveller' (whilst continuing to have 'Roma as a distinct category').

The Government Statistical Service should lead efforts with government departments and public bodies to standardise ethnicity data collection, ensuring that the Harmonised Ethnicity Standard is fully implemented with Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, and Roma consistently represented.