

GYPSY/TRAVELLER NUMBERS IN THE UK – A GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Gypsy/Traveller population of the United Kingdom now includes several distinct groups: Scottish Travellers; English Gypsies; Irish Travellers and Welsh Gypsies. Britain has also seen a rise in a non-traditional group of travelling folks, known as New Age Travellers. According to *The Gypsy Media Company* - <http://www.englishunlimited.co.uk/GMC/> -, owned and run by Romani journalist Jake Bowers, there are approximately 300,000 Gypsy/Travellers in Britain today. Indeed, the report 'Common Ground' (2006) - http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/pubs/cat_gandt.html -, for the *Commission for Racial Equality* - <http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/index.html> - estimates this number to be between 200,000 and 300,000. This figure differs considerably from official government statistics (based upon the bi-annual Caravan Count). This discrepancy is due in part to definitional issues, with the majority of sources estimating the population to be between 180,000 and 300,000 (many believed to be living in actual houses). It is generally thought that the population is very similar in size to that of the Bangladeshi community.

Not only does this fact mean that it is nigh on impossible to get completely accurate numbers, but it also highlights how Gypsy/Travellers are still living on the fringes of 'settled society'. This must then surely mean that many Gypsy/Travellers are still not getting access to basic amenities and civil liberties, such as health care and education? Nonetheless, many Gypsy/Traveller websites estimate that the population is on the increase. This may be due in part to the fact that the Gypsy/Traveller population is a more youthful one, with larger households, earlier ages of marriage/having children and stronger ties to extended families, than that of the general population.

There are currently no provisions for distinguishing between precise figures and estimates, even if authorities, as requested, make this distinction. Reasons for this in-accuracy include: a lack of commitment from the local authorities; relation to local policies; inaccurate counting practices; geography and Gypsy/Traveller mistrust. Also, counts are voluntary with no rewards for the official body carrying them out, and pitches on sites many accommodate more than one trailer, with vastly differing amounts of occupants within.

So, here are the official stats (based upon the January 2009 Caravan Count, numbers may well increase throughout the summer months):

Scotland - published on Sept 25, 2009: these numbers are from the summary section, for a more in-depth look go to: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/04152156/0>

- 497 Gypsy/Traveller households living on Council /Registered Social Landlord Sites (RSL Sites), private sites and unauthorised encampments. This figure is estimated to represent a population of 1,547. Broken down, it shows that 280 (56%) are living on Council/RSL sites, 109 (22%) are on private sites, and 108 (22%) on unauthorised encampments. The 2008 numbers are (respectively): 276 (61%), 81 (18%) and 98 (22%).
- Currently, there are 32 Council/RSL Sites across Scotland, with 29 open all year and 3 open only during the summer months. These sites provide a total of 499 pitches, with 320 (64%) currently tenanted, 103 (21%) available for let, and 76 (15%) unavailable for letting.
- 9 out of the 32 Council/RSL Sites were operating at full capacity. The three seasonal sites were unavailable for occupation at the time of the count, and sites in locations such as Glasgow and North Lanarkshire remained unused.
- Around 70% of those living on Council/RSL Sites had been tenants for over a year. 29% of these had held their tenancies for over 5 years or more.
- At the time of the count, there were 21 private sites, with 17 operating all year and 4 open only in the summer months. 109 households were living on these sites, with 95% having been there for 4 weeks or longer.
- On the day of the count, there were 20 unauthorised encampments across 9 counties. Over a period of 6 months, these sites varied in size from 2 to 150 households.
- Age wise, around 45 % of the Gypsy/Traveller population are aged 19 or under, compared with 23% within the settled community. However, only 8% of Gypsy Travellers are aged 60 or over, compared with around 22% of the general population.

Note: The Scottish Government are, at the time of writing, reviewing the twice-yearly Caravan Count, so the above figures are likely to change after these new results are published. Also, the next Scottish Census (due to take place in March 2011) will include new 'tick boxes' under ethnicity, with one finally being provided for Gypsy/Travellers. Hopefully this small change will give us a clearer idea of the real number of Gypsy/Travellers living in Scotland today.

Wales: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2009/090527sdr782009aen.pdf?lang=en>

- The January 2009 count showed that there were 850 Gypsy/Traveller trailers across Wales, with 74 sites averaging 11 trailers per site. Comparing this result with the January 2008 count, the total number of trailers has increased by around 4% (29 vans), with sites increasing by 9% (11 sites).
- 702 (83%) households were kept on authorised sites with planning permission, of these, 540 (7%) were on socially rented sites, and 162 (23%) were on private sites. The number of households on authorised sites has increased by around 3% (17 caravans) when compared with the January 2008 figures for the same authorities.
- There were 80 caravans on unauthorised sites, on land owned by Gypsy Travellers, accounting for 9% of all caravans. A further 68 caravans (8%) were on land *not* owned by Gypsy/Travellers. The number of households on unauthorised sites has increased by 9%.
- A total of 383 pitches were provided by local authorities, of these 377 (98%) were residential pitches, and 6 (2%) were transit pitches.
- At the time of the count, local authority sites had a capacity for 565 caravans, with this number decreasing by 2% from 2008.

England:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/gypsiesandtravellers/gypsyandtravellersitedataandstat/>

(This list is not so comprehensive)

- There was a total count of 17,865 caravans (compared with 17,844 in January 2008).
- Of this number 6785 were found on socially rented sites (6696 in Jan 2008), with 7400 on private sites (7351 in Jan 2008).
- On land owned by Gypsy/Travellers, 1279 were ‘tolerated’, with 1086 ‘not tolerated’ (1054 and 1233 respectively, with reference to Jan 2008).
- On land *not* owned by Gypsy/Travellers, 770 caravans were ‘tolerated’, with 545 ‘not tolerated’ (687 and 823 respectively, with reference to Jan 2008).
- The number of sites provided for Gypsy/Travellers by Registered Social Landlords equated a total caravan capacity of 7865, with a total number of 4820 pitches – 4609 being residential and 211 being transit.

Northern Ireland

There was no such current information available from the *Northern Ireland Executive*, indeed no Caravan Count has been undertaken and the last population Census was carried out in 2001, rendering it completely out-of-date (nonetheless, a Census rehearsal is due to take place on the 11th of October in certain parts of Northern Ireland, this may give us a clearer indication of the Gypsy/Traveller population in distinct areas, a complete Census will not be carried out until March 2011).

However, a 2008 Needs Assessment concerning the accommodation needs of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Northern Ireland – carried out in order to try and alleviate some of the problems faced by Gypsy/Travellers due to their inadequate living conditions – states that, through consultation with various organisations including: Gypsy/Traveller support groups; education and library boards; health visitors and the Housing Executive, a total of 531 Gypsy/Traveller households were identified (with Gypsy/Traveller support groups confirming that this figure is likely to be close to the actual number). The report also states that the exact number of Gypsy/Traveller households in Northern Ireland fluctuates depending on the time of year, and so no official number can be guaranteed. Nonetheless, the findings of the 2008 Needs Assessment saw an increase in the number of households from that of the 2002 report, rising from 452 to 531. A brief breakdown of the findings of the 2008 report is below, for a more in-depth look please follow this link: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/travellers_accommodation_needs_assessment_2008.pdf

- Of the 531 households identified, 449 were interviewed. Within these 449 households, 1,486 individuals were identified, with 60% being female and 45% aged between 25 and 39. Most households (94%) contained only one family unit, with a quarter stating that their family unit comprised of more than 5 people.
- Less than a third (29%) of Gypsy/Traveller households in Northern Ireland actually travel, with 94% of these travelling (usually) within the summer months.
- 26% reported that they were either living with someone who has a limiting disability, or that they themselves have one.
- 55% of respondents stated that they had experienced crime, with two thirds believing that this was as a direct result of their ethnic origin. 14% stated that they had been victims of discrimination, with 9% experiencing verbal threat.
- 42% were living in social housing, 21% on serviced sites, 9% in privately rented accommodation and 7% on unauthorised sites.

- 82% of those surveyed had been living at their current accommodation for more than a year, with 78% believing that they would remain at their current accommodation for the next year, at least.
- Respondents were asked what they felt were the most important issues facing today's Gypsy/Traveller population, almost half (48%) cited accommodation, with discrimination/racism following closely behind with 35%.

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Policy and Research

YGTL – Article 12 in Scotland