

# THE IRISH IN BRITAIN

Findings from the 2021 Census of England and Wales

Irish **50** YEARS  
in Britain  
1973 – 2023



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## Executive Summary

### THE IRISH IN BRITAIN—Findings from the analysis of the 2021 Census of England and Wales

This summary outlines key data and findings from the ‘2021 Census Analysis project’ commissioned by the Irish in Britain to a team of UK-based academics.<sup>1</sup>

#### Size and distribution of the Irish population

According to the latest 2021 Census, the Irish remain a significantly-sized community in England and Wales (data on Scotland will be released only in 2024). Its exact dimension depends on the particular definition we may want to adopt and the Census variables we use. These can include people’s country of birth, ethnic group, national identity and passport held.

Overall, at the time of the Census, there were 523,014 people living in England and Wales who were **Irish-born** (around 325,000 born in the Republic of Ireland and almost 200,000 born in Northern Ireland). This figure is 16% lower than a decade before. There are many factors that have contributed to this, including the age profile of the Irish population in Britain and a historic change of migration trends. These data have led to some media reports referring to a ‘dwindling’ community, promoting a narrative of decline. However, the story behind the official statistics is much richer and multi-layered, as reflected, for example, in the many cultural and community centres thriving across Britain.

Moreover, data on ‘passport held’ has seen only a small reduction of **Irish passports** (364,725) compared to the previous Census (-2.1%). This is likely to be a reflection of the high number of UK residents who have applied for Irish citizenship in recent years, nearly compensating for the decrease in the number of first generation Irish. As for **national identity**, the number of people identifying as Northern Irish and/or Irish was 471,768 (-9.3%).

Finally, with regard to **ethnicity**, the number of people who identified as ‘White Irish’ in 2021 (507,465) had fallen by 4.4% over a decade. However, it is important to point out the proportion they represent relative to the total population (0.9%) is quite similar to what was recorded a decade ago. More to the point, these Ethnicity figures capture only a fraction of the second and third generations of Irish heritage. The very fact that the Census categories conflate Irishness with Whiteness is increasingly problematic and overlooks people with mixed-backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of **regional distribution**, London continues to register the highest presence both in absolute numbers (156,333) and relative to the overall local population (1.8%), followed by the South East (78,219) and North West (61,422) of England. It is however the South West which has registered the largest growth over the decade (10.8% higher than 2011: a total of 31,698 ‘White Irish’ residents).

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<sup>1</sup> The team was led by Dr Alessio D'Angelo (University of Nottingham) and included Dr Neil Kaye (UCL's Institute of Education), Dr Alastair Munro (University of Nottingham), and Professor Louise Ryan (London Metropolitan University). For further details visit: [www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/policy-and-representation/the-census](http://www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/policy-and-representation/the-census)

<sup>2</sup> The Census form allowed ‘write in’ responses - with some 20,000 people coded as ‘Other White: Mixed Irish’ and over 4,000 writing in ‘mixed Irish’. However, many people of mixed ethnicity may struggle to identify with any of the categories on offer and thus feel excluded and end up unrecorded.



### Age, health and welfare

The disproportionately older **age profile** of the Irish population has been researched and discussed for quite some time and continues to be associated with particular health needs. The Census 2021 data confirms among those of ‘White Irish’ ethnicity there is a greater proportion of people over 65 (32.1%) and comparatively fewer younger people. Overall, the average age of this population is 54 years, compared to about 40 years for all residents of England and Wales. This is also a reflection of the migration history of this community. Over 40% of the residents of England and Wales who were born in the Republic of Ireland arrived before 1971—more than fifty years ago.

By cross-tabulating the data on Ethnicity with some of the other variables included in the 2021 Census, it is possible not just to get a more detailed picture of the characteristics of the Irish in Britain—for example with regard to health, disability and other welfare dimensions—but also to compare them with the wider population. For example, whilst overall 5.3% of the resident population of England and Wales reported their **general health** to be ‘bad or very bad’, this applies to 7.7% of the ‘White Irish’. Irish people were also more likely to report a **disability** limiting daily activity (22.2%) than the national average (17.5%). These patterns are also linked to a history of unpaid care and to a higher proportion of **people living alone** (40.3%), especially among older generations.

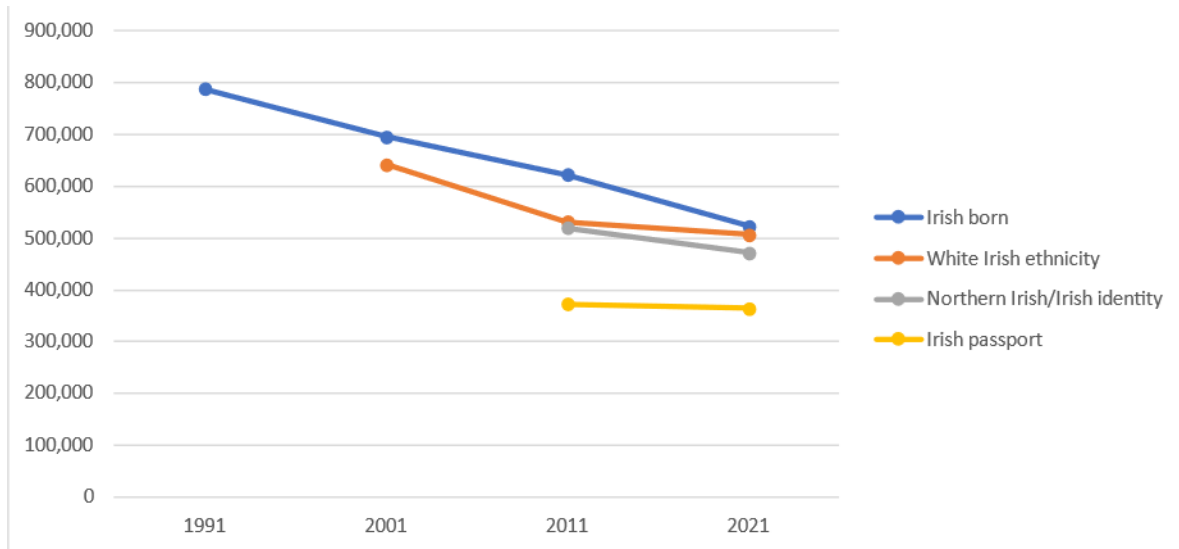
### Education and employment

The data on education and employment present a complex picture, which to a large extent reflects the different generations of Irish migrants as well as second generations. On the one hand, among the ‘White Irish’ there is a higher proportion of people with **no formal education** (19.1%) than in the general population (14.8%). On the other, they report substantially higher proportions of people with a **higher-level qualification** (41.7%, about 10 percentage points above the national average) and of people working in ‘managerial and professional occupations’ (49.9%, compared to a national average of 33%). More broadly, the **economic activity** status of those identifying as ‘White Irish’ is quite similar to that of the ‘White British’ population, with a slightly higher proportion of self-employed workers (13.3%, compared to 11.1%) offset by a slightly smaller proportion of economically inactive people (21%, compared to 23.5%).

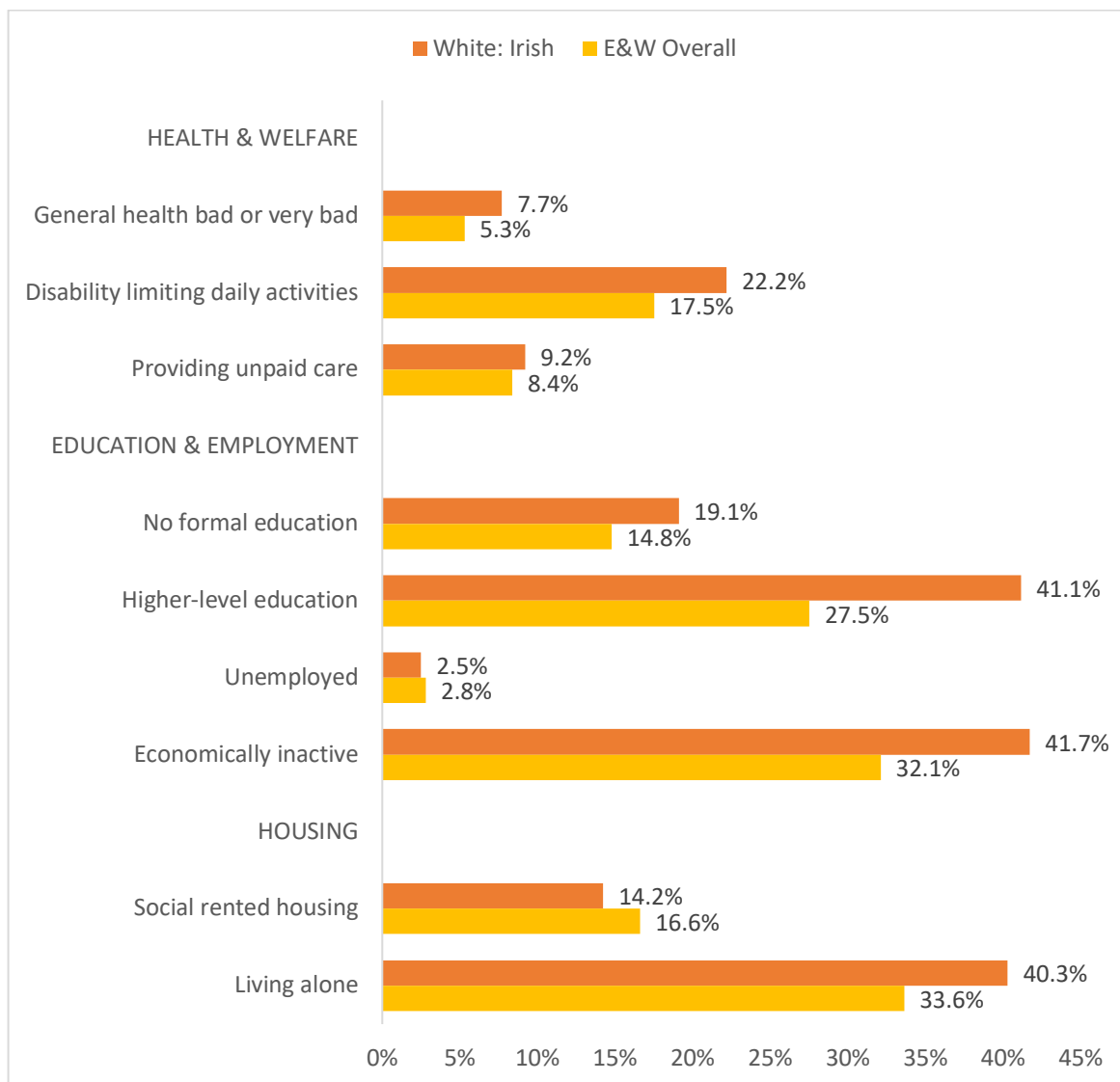
### Gypsy and Irish Travellers

Focusing on Irish communities, our project also looks at those who identify as ‘Gypsy and Irish Traveller’—though we recognise that this category includes English Gypsies as well as Irish Travellers. In this respect, the picture emerging from the 2021 Census confirms a growing population: with 67,800 people compared to 57,700 a decade before. However, Gypsy and Irish Travellers are still characterised by high levels of socio-economic deprivation, with rates of unemployed and economic inactivity nearly twice the national average, whilst they are also nearly six times more likely to live in overcrowded housing.

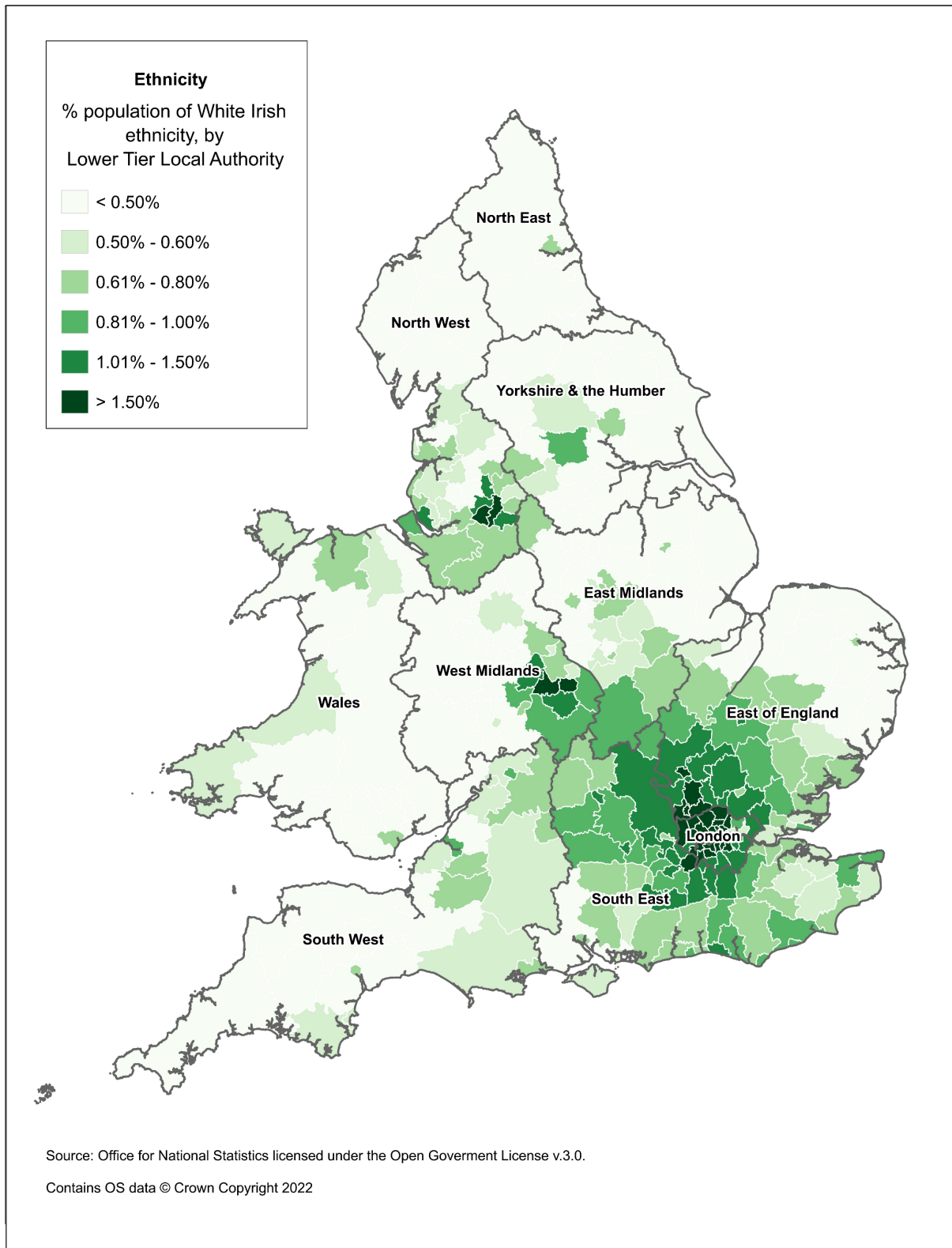
**I - Irish population of England & Wales by various 'measures' of Irish identity**



**II - Key Social indicators for the 'White: Irish' compared to the overall population of E & W**



**III - People who identify as 'White Irish' as a percentage of total resident population**



## THE IRISH IN BRITAIN—Findings from the 2021 Census of England and Wales



### Introduction

This report presents key data and overall analysis of the 2021 Census of England and Wales, with particular regard to the resident Irish population. This includes the datasets released from the ONS (Office for National Statistics) between November 2022 and June 2023.

Irish in Britain and the community groups that make up its membership will use this and other project outputs to enable organisations and institutions across the country to update and integrate their understanding of the social and demographic profile of Irish communities. This will assist them in informing their plans, organisational activities and service provision. This approach builds on a previous, successful experience, when the Irish in Britain commissioned a series of 'Analysis of 2011 Census' reports<sup>3</sup> which helped to inform the advocacy and campaigning work of third sector organisations nationwide.

This Census report was produced as part of a collaborative project between '[Irish in Britain](#)' and a team of researchers led by Dr Alessio D'Angelo (Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham) and which includes Dr Neil Kaye (Research Fellow at UCL's Institute of Education), Dr Alastair Munro (Researcher at the University of Nottingham), and Professor Louise Ryan (Director of Global Diversities and Inequalities Research Centre at London Metropolitan University).

For further information about the Irish in Britain Census 2021 project visit:

[www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/policy-and-representation/the-census](http://www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/policy-and-representation/the-census)

*'The Census is vitally important to many aspects of our democracy guiding political representation, policy development, planning and administration of public services, and the allocation of key funding.*

*The Irish community is one of the largest and earliest immigrant/minority ethnic groups in Britain and it is essential that we continue to be counted to guide our continued work with the community.'*

**Christian Zik Nsonwu**, Policy & Public Affairs Manager at Irish in Britain.

*'The release of new Census data is a once in a decade opportunity to get an extremely robust and detailed picture of local communities throughout England and Wales, including Ethnic minorities. As previous experience demonstrates, working closely with campaign and advocacy organisations to analyse these data and disseminate findings among practitioners, service providers and other stakeholders can really make a difference in identifying and meeting people's needs.'*

**Alessio D'Angelo**, Associate Professor in Public and Social Policy, University of Nottingham.

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<sup>3</sup> These older 2011 Census reports are still available on:

[www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/publications/census-analysis-reports](http://www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/publications/census-analysis-reports)

## Overview

How many Irish people are there in England and Wales? The answer to this apparently simple question is actually complex, and depends on which specific groups or sub-groups we are interested, on how people are classified by official statistics, and on how they self-identify. The 2021 Census collected information on people's country of birth, ethnic group, national identity and passport held. As discussed further down in the report, the way in which these categories related to each other is a reflection of the complex history and characteristics of the Irish communities.

Overall, at the time of the 2021 Census<sup>4</sup>, there were 523,014 Irish-born people living in England and Wales (including the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland): nearly 100,000 fewer than a decade before. There are many factors that have contributed to this, including the age profile of the Irish population in Britain and a historic change of migration trends. In fact, we can anticipate a further reduction of these numbers in the coming years, as first generations become older.

As we discussed elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, these figures have led to some media reports referring to a 'dwindling' community, promoting a narrative of decline. However, the story behind the official statistics is much richer and multi-layered (see the historical background at the end of chapter 2). Focusing only on data about country of birth can lead to a simplistic reading of the wider picture. For example, 2021 data on 'passport held' has seen only a small reduction of Irish passports (364,725) compared to the previous Census (-2.1%). This is likely to be a reflection of the high number of UK residents who have applied for Irish citizenship in recent years, nearly compensating for the decrease in the number of first generation Irish.

As for the data on 'Ethnicity', on the one hand, the number of people who identified as 'White Irish' in 2021 (507,465) has fallen by 4.4% over a decade. On the other hand, it is important to point out that the proportion of White Irish remains unchanged relative to the total population, with 0.9% being the same figure recorded a decade ago. More to the point, these Ethnicity figures capture only a fraction of the second and third generations of Irish heritage. The very fact that the Census categories conflate Irishness with Whiteness is increasingly problematic (as further discussed in chapter 1).

In fact, whilst Census data represent an essential instrument to inform our understanding of these populations, it is also important to differentiate between 'the Irish' as captured by any statistical snapshot and the reality of the broader 'Irish community'. As visits to Irish cultural and community centres across Britain will show, such community is thriving. The numbers of people frequenting these centres, as well as the profiles of those actively involved in running activities at these cultural hubs confirm the increasing diversity of people who embrace their Irish heritage across Britain—irrespective of their accent and demographics. The rich social and cultural contribution of these formal and informal organisations is something to celebrate, and not just for the Irish population.

The multivariate Census data also allow us to explore relationships between different socio-economic and demographic characteristics, as well as examining these across local communities and—by comparing with the previous Census—over time. The disproportionate age profile of the Irish population has been researched and discussed for quite some time<sup>6</sup> and continues to be associated with particular health needs. 'White Irish' respondents continue to be less likely to report 'very good'

<sup>4</sup> 'Census day' was Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> D'Angelo, A., Ryan, L. (2022), 'What the UK Census really says about the number of Irish in Britain'. RTE Brainstorm Blog, 9 December 2022, <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2022/1208/1340723-uk-census-irish-population-britain-birth-country-passport-ethnicity/>

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Tilki, Ryan, D'Angelo and Sales (2009) *The Forgotten Irish*, Social Policy Research Centre, Middlesex University.



general health and more likely to report ‘bad or very bad’ health (see chapter 3). These patterns are also linked to a history of unpaid care and to a large number of older people living alone. At the same time, the overall ‘White Irish’ population in England and Wales has a proportion of highly-educated and of those working in ‘managerial and professional occupations’ higher than the national average (see chapter 4).

Focusing on Irish communities, our project also looks at those who identify as ‘Gypsy and Irish Traveller’—though we recognise that this category includes English Gypsies as well as Irish Travellers. In this respect, the picture emerging from the 2021 Census confirms a growing population, but which is still characterised by high levels of socio-economic deprivation, with rates of unemployed and economically inactive nearly double the national average and nearly six times more likely to live in overcrowded housing. Interestingly, during the same period of time which saw a reduction of the ‘White Irish’ population, the number of people self-identifying as ‘Gypsy or Irish Traveller’ has grown from 57,700 to 67,800.

Finally, the report includes an Appendix on the Irish living in Wales, providing a useful focus on a population often under-researched if not overlooked.

Collecting and analysing statistical data is only the first step in a longer-term strategic process to inform community groups and stakeholders and to use Census evidence to elicit longer term conversations. Some potential steps in this direction are identified in the concluding chapter 6.

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**Acknowledgements**—This report was written by Dr Alessio D’Angelo (PI) and Dr Neil Kaye, also leading on the statistical analysis. Dr Alastair Munro has produced maps and cartographic analysis. Prof Louise Ryan provided academic advice, bringing additional qualitative insights to help contextualise the statistical findings. The authors would like to thank the ‘Irish in Britain’ team for their support and advice throughout the project.

## 1. Size of the Irish population in England and Wales

The Irish remain a significantly-sized community in England and Wales. As mentioned in the previous section, its exact dimension depends on which of the many variables collected by the Census 2021 we look at and prioritise. Data on country of birth, for example, explicitly refers to people born in Ireland—i.e. first-generation migrants—either in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland. Other measures, such as Ethnicity and National identity are broader, and include a substantial proportion of second- and third-generation Irish, as well as people with a mixed heritage or a more distant Irish descent. Finally, there are people who were not born in Ireland, may not consider themselves to be ethnically Irish (primarily, at least) but who, through a distant forebear or some other link, have acquired a passport issued by the Republic of Ireland.

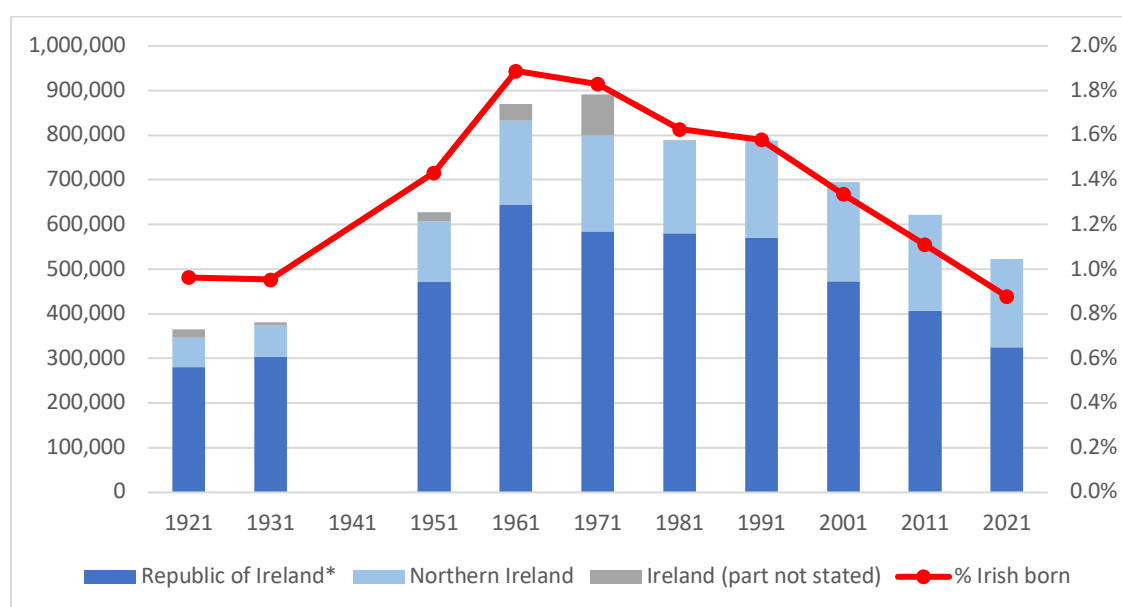
### Country of birth

At the latest 2021 census, there were more than 500,000 people living in England and Wales and who were born on the island of Ireland, comprising around 325,000 born in the Republic of Ireland and almost 200,000 born in Northern Ireland. This represents a decrease of over 99,000 people (-16%) since a decade ago, when the Irish-born population totalled 622,345 (of which 407,357 born in the RoI). For context, the overall size of the non-UK born population in England and Wales has risen from 7.5 million in 2011 to 10 million in 2021 (+33%). The Irish-born population continues to fall in line with decreases seen at censuses since a peak in 1971. The size of the first-generation Irish population in England and Wales is now smaller than at any time since World War II. As a proportion of the total 2021 population of England & Wales, those born in Ireland represent 0.9%—less than half the proportion seen at its peak in 1961.

*Table 1: Irish-born residents of England and Wales, 2001-2021*

Country of birth	2001	2011	2021
Republic of Ireland	472,380	407,357	324,670
Northern Ireland	222,975	214,988	198,344
<b>All-Ireland</b>	<b>695,355</b>	<b>622,345</b>	<b>523,014</b>
E&W population	52,041,916	56,075,912	59,597,300
% Irish born	1.3%	1.1%	0.9%

**Figure 1 - Irish-born residents of England & Wales, 1921-2021**



### Ethnic group

In the current standard classification of the Office for National Statistics (ONS)—and thus in the England and Wales Census—‘Irish’ ethnicity is subsumed within the White ethnic group. Respondents can choose to select ‘White: Irish’ from a list of 18 pre-defined categories, or else can write in their own self-identified ethnic group under the ‘Any other ethnic group’ category. This clearly has implications for Irish people who do not also identify as White, including Black or Asian Irish people, or those for whom Irish is just one of a number of multiple ethnic identities.

Overall, in the 2021 Census, 507,465 people selected the ‘White: Irish’ option, 0.9% of the total population of England and Wales. Compared to a decade before, White Irish ethnicity has fallen by 4.4% (around 23,000). However, this is much smaller than the decrease seen between 2001 and 2011—which was a 17.3% (around 110,000) fall. The largest decline in White Irish ethnicity was seen in the West Midlands (-13.3%) and London (-11.2%). By contrast, the South West saw a 10.8% increase in the White Irish population (see Table 3). Nonetheless the White Irish group fell as a proportion of the total ethnic minority population in every region.

In terms of absolute numbers, London remains the main region in terms of ‘White Irish’, with 507,465 people at the time of the 2021 Census. The highest presence—as a proportion of the overall population—is registered in Inner- and North-West London, with significant clusters in the boroughs of Islington and Camden, but also in Brent, Ealing and Harrow (see figure 3).

**Table 2: Ethnic groups resident in England & Wales, descending order of size (2021)**

Ethnic group	#	%
White: British	44,355,038	74.4%
Other White	3,667,997	6.2%
Indian	1,864,318	3.1%
Pakistani	1,587,819	2.7%
Black or Black British: African	1,488,381	2.5%
Other Asian	972,783	1.6%
Any other ethnic group	923,775	1.6%
Bangladeshi	644,881	1.1%
Black or Black British: Caribbean	623,119	1.0%
White: Irish	507,465	0.9%
Mixed: White & Black Caribbean	513,042	0.9%
Mixed: White & Asian	488,225	0.8%
Other Mixed	467,113	0.8%
Chinese	445,619	0.7%
Arab	331,844	0.6%
Other Black	297,778	0.5%
Mixed: White & Black African	249,596	0.4%
White: Roma	100,981	0.2%
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	67,768	0.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59,597,542</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 3: White Irish ethnic group (2021)**

	White Irish population	White Irish as a % of total population	White Irish as a % of ethnic minority population <sup>7</sup>	Change in White Irish population size since 2011
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>	507,465	0.9%	3.3%	-4.4%
<b>England</b>	494,251	0.9%	3.3%	-4.4%
North East	8,384	0.3%	3.4%	+4.3%
North West	61,422	0.8%	4.4%	-5.4%
Yorkshire and The Humber	25,215	0.5%	2.4%	-4.5%
East Midlands	27,130	0.6%	2.7%	-5.4%
West Midlands	47,886	0.8%	2.9%	-13.3%
East	57,964	0.9%	4.3%	+4.3%
London	156,333	1.8%	2.8%	-11.2%
South East	78,219	0.8%	4.0%	+6.3%
South West	31,698	0.6%	4.6%	+10.8%
<b>Wales</b>	13,214	0.4%	4.5%	-6.2%

<sup>7</sup> Populations other than 'White: British'.

Figure 2: 'White Irish' as a percentage of total resident population (2021)

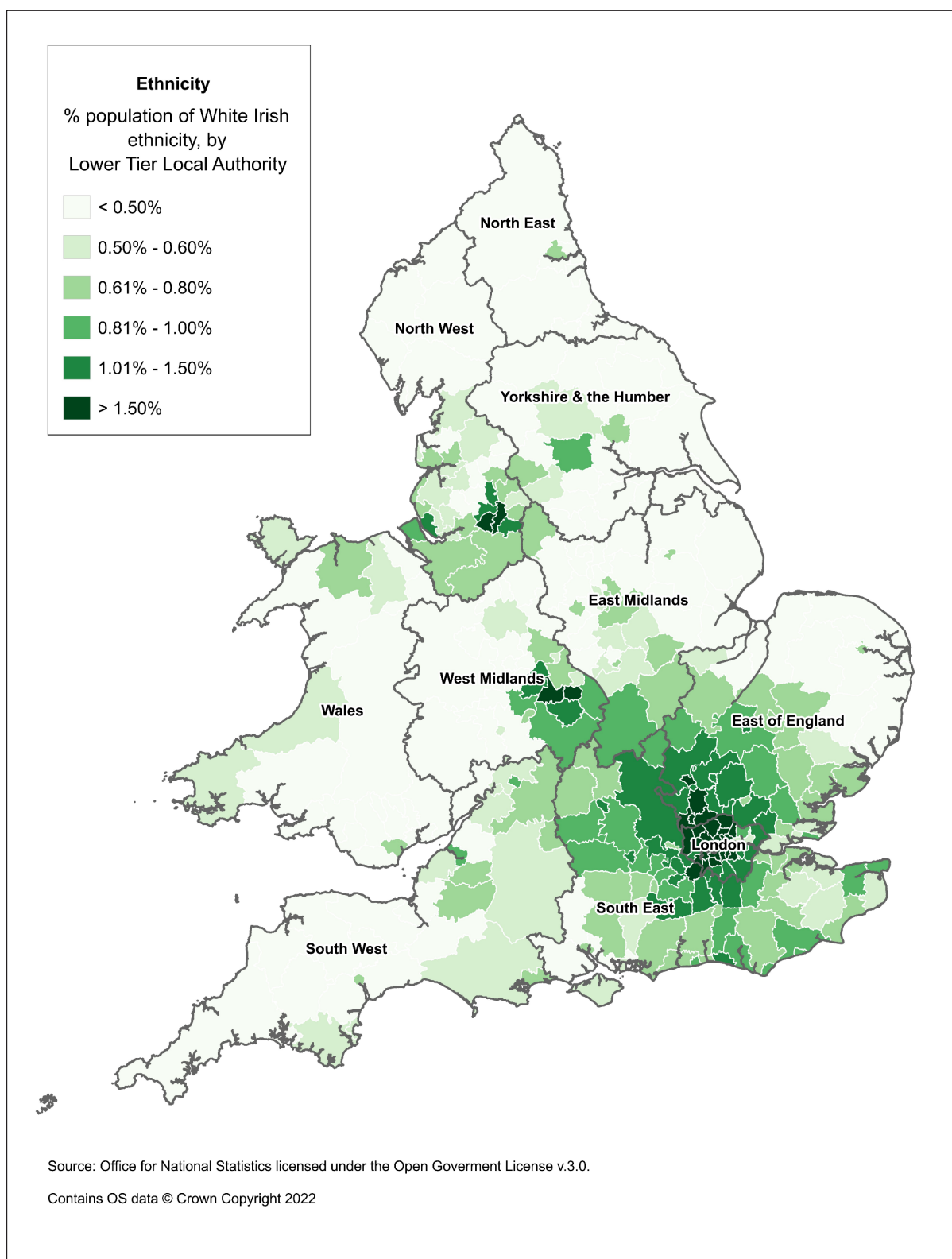
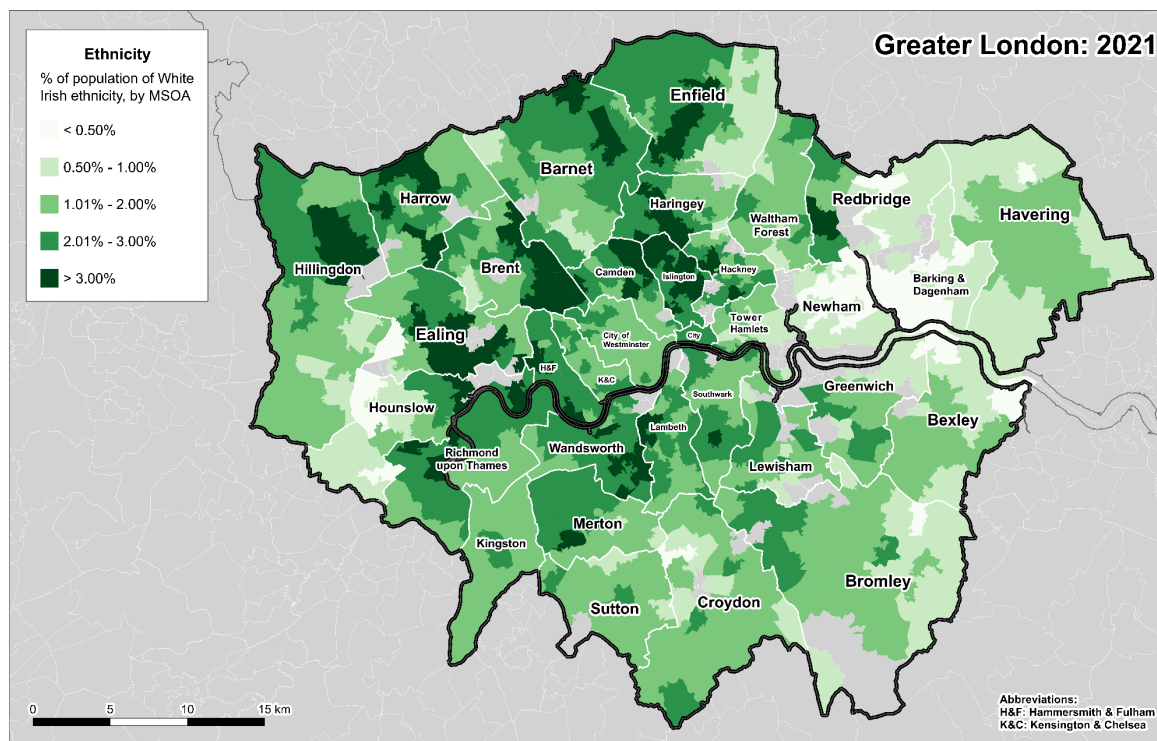




Figure 3: 'White Irish' as a percentage of total resident population (2021)—Greater London



### National identity

The 2021 Census was only the second in which the ONS has collected data on individuals' national identity, with available options including: British, English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, and 'Other' (write in).

In terms of national identity, the total number of people identifying as Northern Irish and/or Irish fell by 9.3% from around 520,000 to just over 470,000. The largest Irish population remains in London, where around 1 in 65 people identify, at least in part, as Irish or Northern Irish. The only region to see an increase in the proportion of people identifying as Irish and/or Northern Irish was the South West of England—correlating to some extent with the increase in White Irish population in this region.

**Table 4: Irish and/or Northern Irish national identity**

	Northern Irish only	Northern Irish & British	Irish only	Irish and at least one UK identity	Total Irish and/or N. Irish identity	% Irish and/or N. Irish identity	Change in those with Irish and/or N. Irish identity since 2011
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>	79,117	30,834	299,546	62,271	471,768	0.8%	-9.3%
<b>England</b>	75,497	30,180	290,790	60,290	456,757	0.8%	-9.3%
North East	3,474	1,554	4,755	1,398	11,181	0.4%	-1.4%
North West	15,113	4,868	35,407	6,546	61,934	0.8%	-7.8%
Yorkshire & The Humber	5,919	2,421	13,312	3,698	25,350	0.5%	-9.2%
East Midlands	5,323	2,273	15,316	3,401	26,313	0.5%	-10.4%
West Midlands	6,757	2,497	25,698	4,950	39,902	0.7%	-18.6%
East	6,848	3,041	33,502	6,792	50,183	0.8%	-4.6%
London	13,917	4,504	99,780	16,941	135,142	1.5%	-15.2%
South East	11,501	5,572	45,521	11,029	73,623	0.8%	-1.9%
South West	6,645	3,450	17,499	5,535	33,129	0.6%	+3.2%
<b>Wales</b>	3,620	654	8,756	1,981	15,011	0.5%	-6.5%

### Passports held

In 2021, there were 364,725 people living in England and Wales and holding a passport issued by the Republic of Ireland.\* This number represents only a very small reduction (-2.1%) when compared to the 2011 Census (372,389). There are also quite large regional variations: London has the largest drop-off (-14%) but areas like South West England (16.1%) and North East England (12.9%) have seen sizeable increases in Irish passport holders.

Overall, this seems to be due—at least in part—to a ‘Brexit effect’, whereby people who previously held a British passport have applied for an Irish one, thanks to family links. Even ahead of the 2016 UK referendum to leave the EU, Ireland's Department for Foreign Affairs had reported unprecedented numbers of applications.<sup>8</sup> A pragmatic choice, maybe, but that has also represented an occasion for many to embrace their Irish heritage in the post-Brexit landscape.

\*This figure does not include dual passport holders who also hold a UK passport.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-irish-passports-britain-coveney-b1826580.html>

**Table 5: Irish passport holders (2021)**

	Number of Irish passport holders*	% population holding an Irish passport	Change in Irish passport holders since 2011
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>	364,725	0.6%	-2.1%
<b>England</b>	354,923	0.6%	-2.2%
North East	5,956	0.2%	+12.9%
North West	42,243	0.6%	+8.6%
Yorkshire and The Humber	15,988	0.3%	+3.8%
East Midlands	18,115	0.4%	+5.0%
West Midlands	30,152	0.5%	-7.1%
East	41,559	0.7%	+4.7%
London	121,247	1.4%	-14.0%
South East	58,075	0.6%	+7.1%
South West	21,588	0.4%	+16.1%
<b>Wales</b>	9,802	0.3%	+2.7%

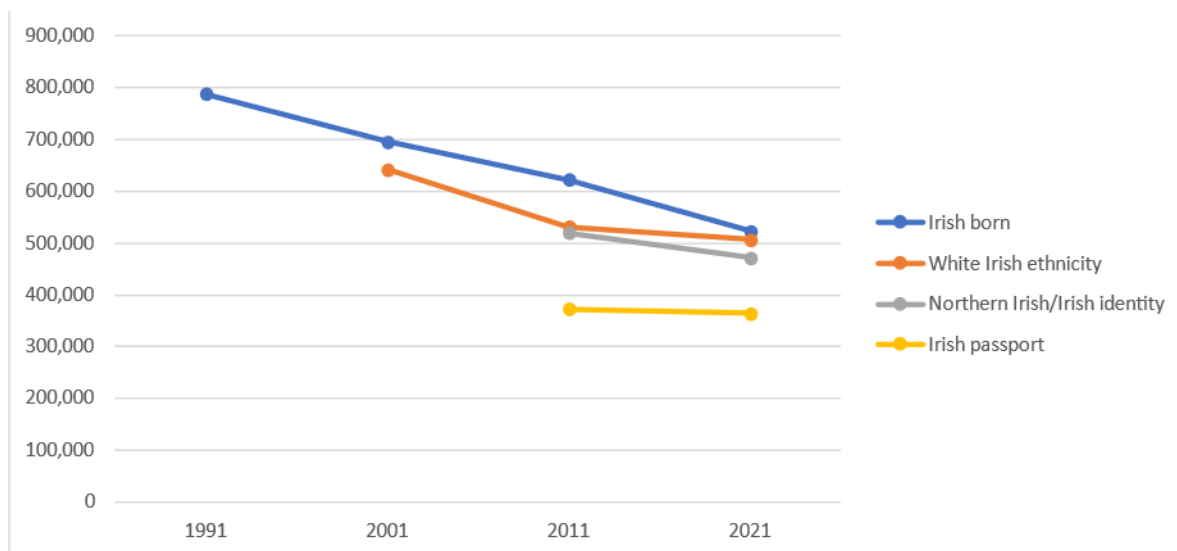
### Overall trends and mixed-heritage populations

The overall downward trend in the size of the Irish community can be seen across all ‘measures’ of Irish identity—country of birth, ethnicity, national identity and passports held (see figure 4 below).

As for the ‘Ethnicity’ figures, as mentioned before, the ONS classification does not capture the diversity of the Irish community in Britain today. Conflating ‘Irishness’ with ‘Whiteness’ is increasingly inaccurate and problematic, with a larger number of people unable to identify to the standard categories which emerge from the traditional statistical typology. In fact, between the 2011 and 2021 census there has been a notable increase in ‘Mixed or multiple ethnic groups’: from 1.2 to 1.7 million people (2.9% of all residents). These would include, among others, many people of Irish heritage. Ethnicity also varies within households and across generations. In 2021, 10% of households had more than one ethnic group represented. Although the Census form allowed ‘write in’ responses—including some 20,000 people coded as ‘Other White: Mixed Irish’ and over 4,000 who selected ‘Mixed or multiple ethnic group’ and wrote in ‘Mixed Irish’—many people of mixed ethnicity may still struggle to identify with any of the categories on offer and thus feel excluded.

\*This figure does not include dual passport holders who also hold a UK passport.

**Figure 4: Irish population of England & Wales by various 'measures' of Irish identity**



Whilst those holding an Irish passport comprise the smallest of these groups in absolute terms, the stability in their number since the previous census—alongside a reduction in the other dimensions—is one of the most interesting findings emerging from the 2021 data-set. Passport data can also help us to address—at least in part—the limitations of the Ethnic identity variables used in the Census.

As shown on table 6, individuals born outside of the island of Ireland, and who do not self-identify in the White: Irish group, comprise 30.9%—almost a third—of all Irish passport holders in England and Wales (some 170,000 people). These individuals primarily identify as White: British (a category that explicitly includes those identifying as White: Northern Irish). Other substantially-represented groups include those identifying as ‘Other White’ (around 12,000), Mixed (10,600) and Black (8,800).

Adding these 170,000 individuals to the 523,000 Irish-born residents, and 211,000 non-Irish-born people identifying as ‘White: Irish’ ethnicity, we can confidently say that the ‘Irish community’ thus defined exceeds 900,000 in England and Wales. There are likely also to be individuals who are eligible for an Irish passport but do not hold one or whose Irish lineage remains important to them despite a more distant family connection. It would not be improbable to suggest, then, that England and Wales is currently home to more than a million Irish people.

**Table 6: Irish passport holders by ethnicity and country of birth**

Ethnicity	Country of birth								Total Irish Passport Holders*
	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland		All-Ireland		Outside of Ireland		
	#	%*	#	%*	#	%	#	%*	
White: Irish	220,797	40.2%	19,375	3.5%	240,172	43.7%	83,039	15.1%	<b>323,211</b>
White: British	13,129	2.4%	24,903	4.5%	38,032	6.9%	127,501	23.2%	<b>165,533</b>
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1,076	0.2%	93	0.0%	1,169	0.2%	769	0.1%	<b>1,938</b>
Other White	1,767	0.3%	208	0.0%	1,975	0.4%	12,177	2.2%	<b>14,152</b>
Mixed	2,007	0.4%	373	0.1%	2,380	0.4%	10,607	1.9%	<b>12,987</b>
Black	7,515	1.4%	282	0.1%	7,797	1.4%	8,788	1.6%	<b>16,585</b>
Asian	2,524	0.5%	602	0.1%	3,126	0.6%	6,745	1.2%	<b>9,871</b>
Other ethnic group	1,465	0.3%	194	0.0%	1,659	0.3%	3,096	0.6%	<b>4,755</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>250,280</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	<b>46,030</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>296,310</b>	<b>54.0%</b>	<b>252,722</b>	<b>46.0%</b>	<b>549,032</b>

\* = Percentage of all Irish passport holders

### Gypsy or Irish Traveller population

The Census, like other official data-sets collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) adopts ‘White: Gypsy and Irish Travellers’ (GIT) as one of its Ethnic categories—with Travellers of Irish roots being subsumed into a larger group which describes “people from a range of ethnicities who are believed to face similar challenges”—as discussed in a Government explainer.<sup>9</sup>

In the Census 2021, the number of people identifying as ‘White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller has increased by 17.5% over the last decade, from 57,680 to 67,768. Some regions have seen significant increases in GIT population in that time, e.g., the North East (55.6%), the North West (38.4%), the East Midlands (35.2%) and Yorkshire & the Humber (34.6%). London was the only region to see a decrease in the GIT population—a fall of 14.2%, from around 8,000 to 7,000.

\* includes dual nationals holding an Irish passport and 1 or more other passports.

<sup>9</sup> Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/summaries/gypsy-roma-irish-traveller>



**Table 7: White Gypsy or Irish Traveller ethnic group**

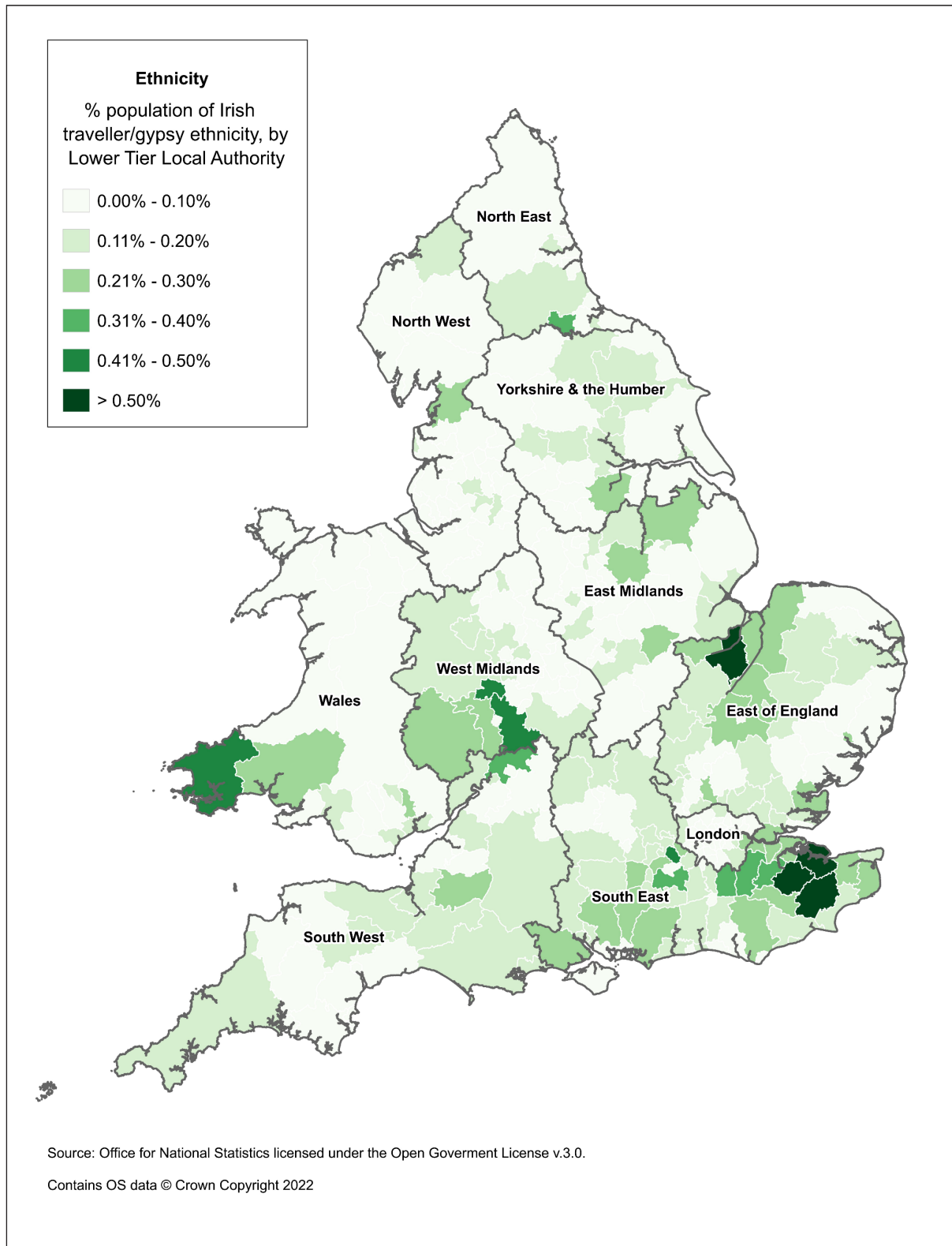
	White Gypsy or Irish Traveller (GIT) population	GIT as a % of total population	GIT as a % of ethnic minority population	Change in GIT population since 2011
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>	67,768	0.11%	0.4%	+17.5%
<b>England</b>	64,218	0.11%	0.4%	+17.0%
North East	2,621	0.10%	1.1%	+55.6%
North West	5,741	0.08%	0.4%	+38.4%
Yorkshire & The Humber	5,891	0.11%	0.6%	+34.6%
East Midlands	4,620	0.09%	0.5%	+35.2%
West Midlands	6,207	0.10%	0.4%	+31.1%
East	8,977	0.14%	0.7%	+9.9%
London	7,031	0.08%	0.1%	-14.2%
South East	16,748	0.18%	0.9%	+15.2%
South West	6,382	0.11%	0.9%	+13.3%
<b>Wales</b>	3,550	0.11%	1.2%	+27.5%

Of all the people identifying as ethnically ‘White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller’, the vast majority of these (83.5%) were born in Britain, with less than 3% born on the island of Ireland. The remaining 1-in-7 were born outside of the UK & Ireland. As shown on table 6, 1,938 of this ethnic group held an Irish passport, around two-thirds of whom were born in Ireland, with the rest born elsewhere.

**Table 8: ‘White Gypsy or Irish Traveller’ by country of birth**

Country of birth	White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	
	#	%
Republic of Ireland	1,644	2.4%
Northern Ireland	340	0.5%
<i>All-Ireland</i>	<i>1,984</i>	<i>2.9%</i>
Britain	56,570	83.5%
Outside of UK & Ireland	9,214	13.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67,770</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Figure 5: 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' as a percentage of total resident population (2021)

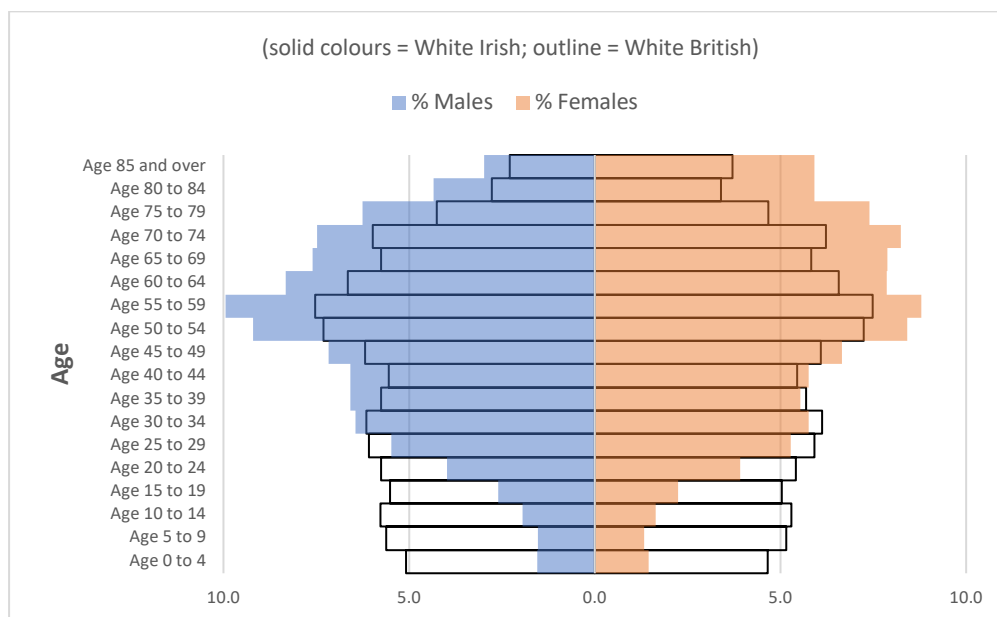


## 2. Structure of the Irish population in England and Wales

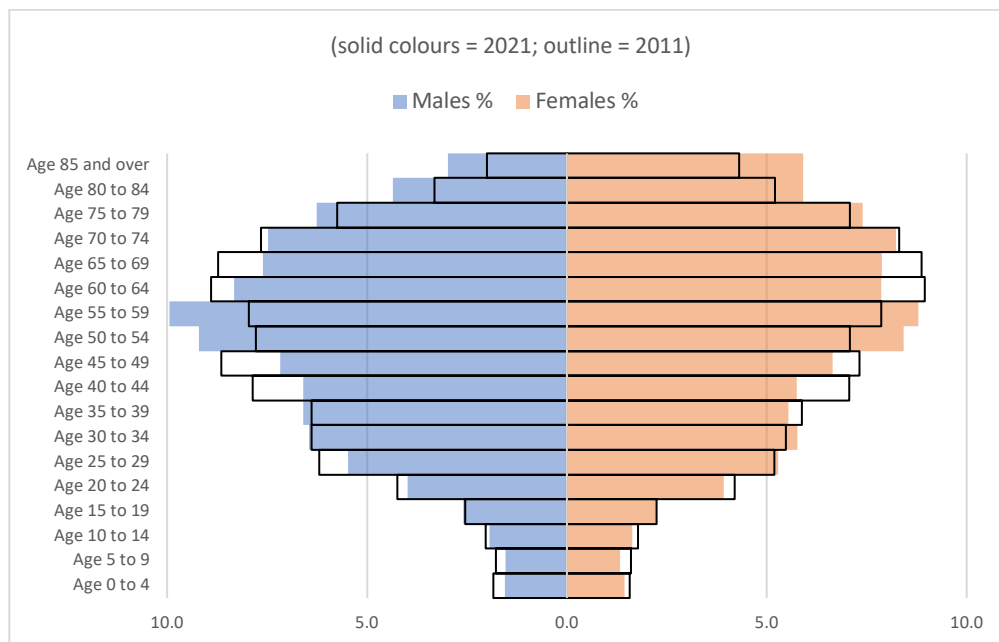
### White Irish population by age and sex

There are clear age profile differences between the White Irish population and the White British, with a greater proportion of older people (particularly the over 50s), whilst comparatively much fewer young people (under 20). There is also considerable variability across English regions, with the average age for White Irish ranging from 49 years in the North East to 59 years in the West Midlands. The age and sex distribution of the White Irish in England and Wales in 2021 remains broadly consistent with the 2011 census, highlighting a continuation of demographic trends.

**Figure 6: England & Wales population by age & sex: White: Irish compared to White British (2021)**



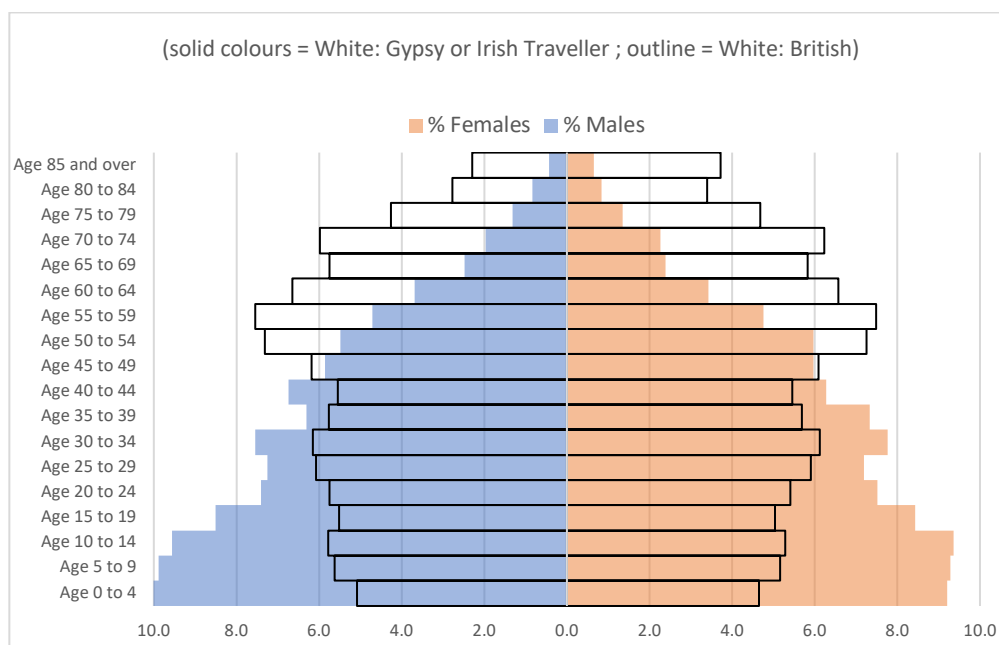
**Figure 7: White Irish population by age and sex (2011-2021)**



### Gypsy or Irish Travellers by age and sex

Compared to either the White British or White Irish populations, the structure of the White: Gypsy and Irish Traveller population is much younger, with a substantial number of young people (under 24) and relatively much fewer older people. This is a pattern that has remained consistent over the past decade.

**Figure 8: England & Wales population by age & sex: White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller compared to White British (2021)**



### *Migration from Ireland to England and Wales*

The demographic profile of the Irish population currently living in England and Wales—and particularly with regard to its age structure—is a reflection of the migration history of this community.

As we discussed elsewhere<sup>10</sup>, migration has been a defining feature of Irish society throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Geographical proximity and a history of colonialism have not only resulted in a shared language and lack of immigration barriers but also a perceived ease of mobility which means that migration from Ireland to Britain is relatively simple and inexpensive and can often be regarded as temporary. This has been associated with poorly planned migration and some negative outcomes for health and wellbeing.<sup>12</sup> As a result of this history of migration, Irish people have come to be one of the most significant ethnic minority groups in British society and have made a significant contribution to Britain's workforce.

Migration to Britain occurred over many decades and is often depicted through different 'waves'. The 1950s migrants are frequently associated with the construction sector.<sup>13</sup> These migrants tended to arrive 'on the boat' at a young age—often in their late teens—with limited formal qualifications. By contrast, the 1980s-90s migrants are usually regarded as highly educated and seeking employment in professional occupations.<sup>14</sup> At the start of the twenty-first century, with the collapse of the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' economy, emigration saw a new, significant increase.<sup>15</sup> This included a sizeable number highly qualified—and highly mobile—young migrants. Unlike most other migrant groups, women have made up the majority of Irish migrants to Britain for much of nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>16</sup> In many instances women have been directly recruited from Ireland to fill specific vacancies within specific regions of the British labour market, such as nursing<sup>17</sup> and teaching.<sup>18</sup>

These different waves can still be identified in the Census, by looking at the data on 'year of arrival' for those born in Ireland or who identify as 'White Irish'. Of the nearly 325,000 Irish-born residents of England and Wales (2021), over 40% arrived before 1971—more than fifty years ago. The 1980s also saw a large influx of Irish migration (13.3% of Irish-born residents arrived in that decade), whilst the 2000s and early 2010s saw a further wave of Irish migrants. A significant drop in numbers arriving from Ireland is noticeable in the period after the Brexit referendum (2017-21), as compared to the period leading up to it (2011-16).

In terms of ethnic groups, 43% of people identifying as White: Irish were born in the UK, whilst a further 22% arrived before 1971. This speaks to a very well-established Irish community with first- and

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<sup>10</sup>Ryan, L., D'Angelo, A, Puniskis, M, Kaye, N. (2014), *Analysis of 2011 Census Data*, Irish Community Statistics. Irish in Britain.

<sup>11</sup>For an historical account, see for example: Kennedy, R. (1973), *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility*; Jackson, J.A. (1963), *The Irish in Britain*; Fielding, S. (1993), *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics In England*.

<sup>12</sup>Leavey, Rozmovits, Ryan and King (2007), 'Explanations of Depression among Irish Migrants in Britain', *Social Science and Medicine*, 65, pp. 231-244.

<sup>13</sup>Cowley, U. (2001), *The Men who built Britain: A History of the Irish Navy*, Wolfhound Press.

<sup>14</sup>Gray, B. (2004), *Women and the Irish Diaspora*, Routledge.

<sup>15</sup>Glynn, Kelly and MacEinri (2013), *Irish Emigration in the Age of Austerity*, UCC.

<sup>16</sup>Walter, B. (2001), *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, place, and Irish women*, Routledge.

<sup>17</sup>Ryan, L. (2008), 'I had a sister in England': Family-led migration, social networks and Irish nurses', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(3), 453-470.

<sup>18</sup>Ryan, L. and Kurdi, E. (2014), 'Young, highly qualified migrants. The experiences and expectations of recently arrived Irish teachers in Britain', SPRC.

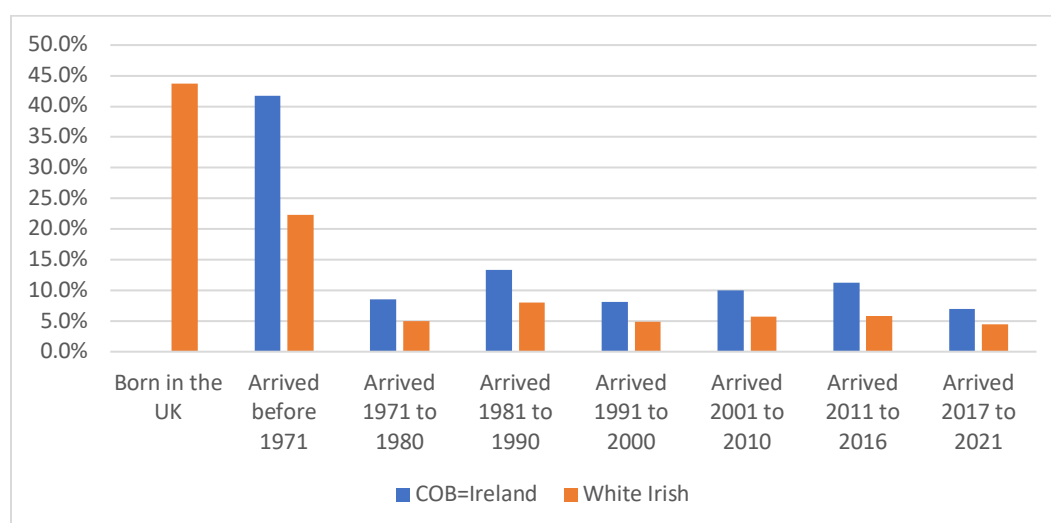


second-/third-generation Irish migrants resident in England & Wales. It also reflects the older age profile of this community, with more than 110,000 migrants having lived here for more than fifty years.

**Table 9: Irish-born and White: Irish ethnic group by year of arrival in the UK**

	Country of birth		Ethnic group	
	Republic of Ireland		White: Irish	
	#	%	#	%
Born in the UK	N/A	N/A	221,641	43.7%
Arrived before 1971	135,314	41.7%	113,451	22.4%
Arrived 1971 to 1980	27,809	8.6%	25,372	5.0%
Arrived 1981 to 1990	43,250	13.3%	40,633	8.0%
Arrived 1991 to 2000	26,511	8.2%	24,892	4.9%
Arrived 2001 to 2010	32,520	10.0%	29,157	5.7%
Arrived 2011 to 2016	36,678	11.3%	29,608	5.8%
Arrived 2017 to 2021	22,590	7.0%	22,711	4.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>324,672</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>507,465</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Figure 9: Irish-born and White: Irish by year of arrival in the UK**



### 3. Health and welfare

By cross-tabulating the data on Ethnicity with some of the other variables included in the 2021 Census, it is possible not just to get a more detailed picture of the characteristics of the Irish in Britain—for example with regard to health, disability and other welfare dimensions—but also to compare them with the wider population. This section focuses on general health, disability status and provision of unpaid care among the people who identified as ‘White Irish’ (with a summary of welfare data for the ‘Gypsy and Irish Travellers’ at the end).

#### General health

Whilst overall close to half of the people living in England and Wales reported being in ‘very good’ health, this applies to only 41% of those identifying as White Irish. White ‘Gypsy and Irish Traveller’ (GIT) individuals also, on average, reported lower levels of ‘very good’ general health, compared to the White British population or the national average (see table 10). For all groups, men reported slightly higher levels of ‘very good’ general health than women.

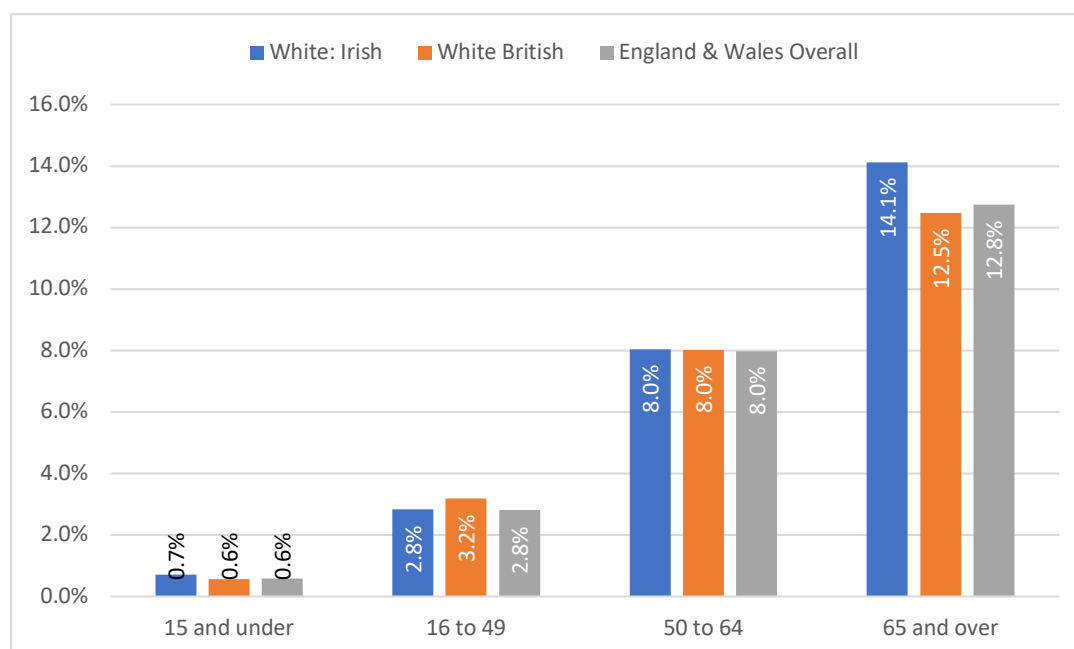
Both the White Irish and White GIT reported higher levels of poor health (‘bad’ or ‘very bad’) compared to the national average of 5.2%. 7.7% of White Irish people reported being in poor health, whilst more than 1-in-8 White GIT people (12.5%) report poor health—more than twice the rate seen in the population as a whole.

To an extent these patterns reflect, once again, the older age profile of Irish people in Britain. However, by focusing on people aged 65 and over, the percentage reporting ‘very bad’ health is significantly higher among the White Irish (3.6%) than the population overall (3.0%). Conversely, among all younger aged group (from 64 and below), White Irish respondents are more likely than average to report ‘Very good’ health.

**Table 10: General health by ethnic group and age group**

	White: Irish				White: British				England & Wales Overall			
	15 and under	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	15 and under	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	15 and under	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over
Very Bad	0.2%	0.7%	2.1%	3.6%	0.1%	0.6%	1.9%	2.9%	0.1%	0.6%	1.9%	3.0%
Bad	0.5%	2.2%	5.9%	10.5%	0.4%	2.5%	6.1%	9.6%	0.4%	2.2%	6.1%	9.8%
<b>Bad or Very Bad</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>
Fair	1.8%	7.4%	14.5%	29.7%	2.3%	9.0%	16.5%	29.3%	2.2%	8.3%	16.7%	29.5%
Good	11.8%	32.2%	38.7%	37.4%	14.7%	35.3%	40.9%	40.1%	15.8%	35.2%	41.2%	39.8%
Very Good	85.7%	57.6%	38.8%	18.8%	82.4%	52.5%	34.6%	18.2%	81.4%	53.7%	34.2%	17.9%
<b>Good or Very Good</b>	<b>97.5%</b>	<b>89.8%</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>56.2%</b>	<b>97.1%</b>	<b>87.8%</b>	<b>75.5%</b>	<b>58.3%</b>	<b>97.2%</b>	<b>88.9%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>	<b>57.7%</b>

**Figure 10: Percentage reporting bad or very bad health by age group and ethnic group**



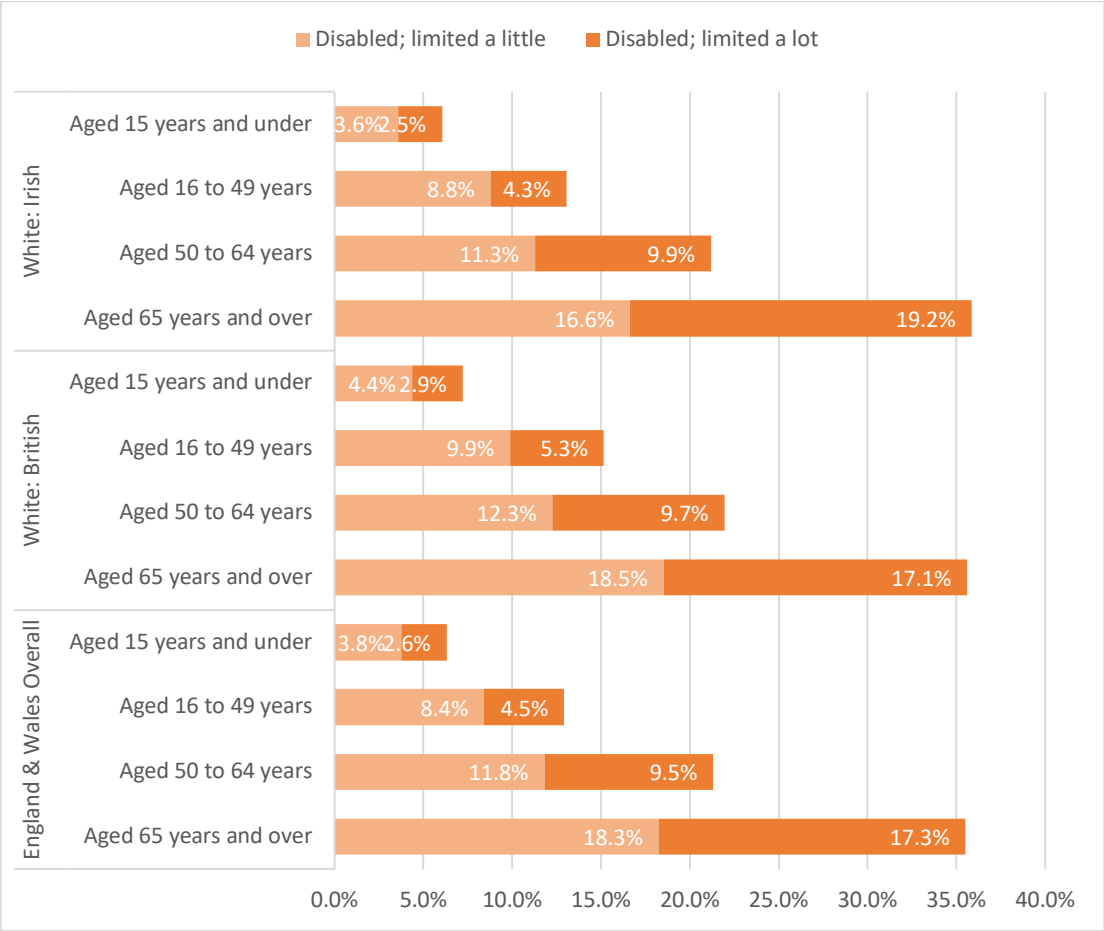
### Disability status

Overall, in England and Wales, 17.5% of the population reported having a disability which limits their daily activities a little or a lot; this is higher for women (19%) than men (16%). The White Gypsy and Irish Traveller group reported the highest levels of disability for both women (27.9%) and men (25.9%). White Irish people are also significantly more likely to report a limiting disability (women: 24%; men: 20.2%) compared to the national average. As it is to be expected, the proportion of reported disability tends to be higher for the older age groups. In this respect, among the White Irish aged 65 and over, 16.6% report having disability that limits daily activities ‘a little’, and 19.2% a disability which is limiting ‘a lot’. This compares to proportions of, respectively, 18.3 and 17.3% among the overall population.

**Table 11: Reporting a disability that limits daily activities ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ by ethnic group and age group**

	Age group	Disabled; limited a little	Disabled; limited a lot
White: Irish	Aged 15 years and under	3.6%	2.5%
	Aged 16 to 49 years	8.8%	4.3%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	11.3%	9.9%
	Aged 65 years and over	16.6%	19.2%
White: British	Aged 15 years and under	4.4%	2.9%
	Aged 16 to 49 years	9.9%	5.3%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	12.3%	9.7%
	Aged 65 years and over	18.5%	17.1%
England & Wales Overall	Aged 15 years and under	3.8%	2.6%
	Aged 16 to 49 years	8.4%	4.5%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	11.8%	9.5%
	Aged 65 years and over	18.3%	17.3%

Figure 11: Disability status by ethnic group and age group (%)



## Unpaid care

People in ethnic groups with higher rates of disability and poorer health typically also spent more time providing unpaid care. Within the White Irish population, levels of unpaid care provision are broadly similar to the overall population of England and Wales.

**Table 12: Provision of unpaid care by ethnic group and sex**

		19 or less hours a week	20 to 49 hours a week	50 or more hours a week
White: British	Male	4.1%	1.5%	2.5%
	Female	5.6%	2.2%	3.5%
White: Irish	Male	4.2%	1.5%	2.4%
	Female	5.3%	2.0%	3.3%
England and Wales Overall	Male	3.7%	1.5%	2.2%
	Female	4.9%	2.1%	3.2%

As may be expected, the provision of unpaid care is heavily gendered for each of the groups presented. Overall, around 10% of women provide unpaid care, compared to only 7.4% of men. Within the White Gypsy and Irish Traveller (GIT) population, the gender difference is even greater: 1-in-7 women (14.3%) report providing care, compared to only 1-in-11 men (9.2%).

**Table 13: Provision of unpaid care by ethnic group and age group**

Age group		19 or less hours a week	20 to 49 hours a week	50 or more hours a week
White: Irish	Aged 15 years and under	0.9%	0.1%	0.1%
	Aged 16 to 49 years	4.0%	1.5%	1.6%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	8.0%	2.6%	3.0%
	Aged 65 years and over	3.3%	1.5%	4.5%
White: British	Aged 15 years and under	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
	Aged 16 to 49 years	3.9%	1.9%	2.2%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	9.6%	3.0%	3.9%
	Aged 65 years and over	4.0%	1.6%	5.1%
England & Wales Overall	Aged 15 years and under	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
	Aged 16 to 49 years	3.5%	1.9%	2.0%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	8.9%	3.0%	3.8%
	Aged 65 years and over	4.0%	1.6%	5.0%

## Gypsy or Irish Travellers—health and welfare

**Table 14: Health & welfare indicators: White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller population compared to White: British and national average**

	White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller		White: British		England & Wales Overall	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
General health: bad or very bad	8,564	12.6%	2,601,019	5.9%	3,126,999	5.3%
Disability limiting daily activities	18,226	26.9%	8,811,887	19.9%	10,444,764	17.5%
Providing unpaid care	7,233	10.7%	4,088,339	9.2%	4,989,009	8.4%

## 4. Education and employment

This section explores the education and occupational profile of ‘White Irish’ people living in England and Wales at the time of the 2021 Census. Specifically, it looks at levels of education, economic activity (i.e. whether people are employed, unemployed or economically inactive), and, for those working, the kind of employment they are in. The analysis of data by age groups reflects, once again, the different generations of Irish migrants as well as second generations. This is further evidenced by the last table on industry of employment by year of arrival (for those born in Ireland).

### Education

Overall, around 18% of people in England and Wales reported having no formal qualifications, with around 1-in-3 having achieved qualifications at degree level or above.

Amongst the White Irish population, around 20% have no formal qualifications (slightly higher than the national average), whilst those with higher-level qualifications represent a significantly higher proportion of this group (43.4%), compared to either the White: British group (30.8%) or overall population (33.8%). This may well be reflective of the relatively older population profile of the White Irish group, who will have had longer to attain higher levels of education.

This may also be explained in part by employment patterns as Irish migrants have been actively recruited into particular sectors of the labour market including skilled jobs such as nursing and teaching.<sup>19</sup>

As in the previous Census, the White Gypsy and Irish Traveller group have the highest levels of those with no formal qualifications and the lowest proportion of those with higher-level qualifications. Whilst both these figures represent an improvement on the rates seen ten years ago, more than half of GIT individuals have no qualification; whilst the proportion managing to attain a degree remain substantially below the national average.

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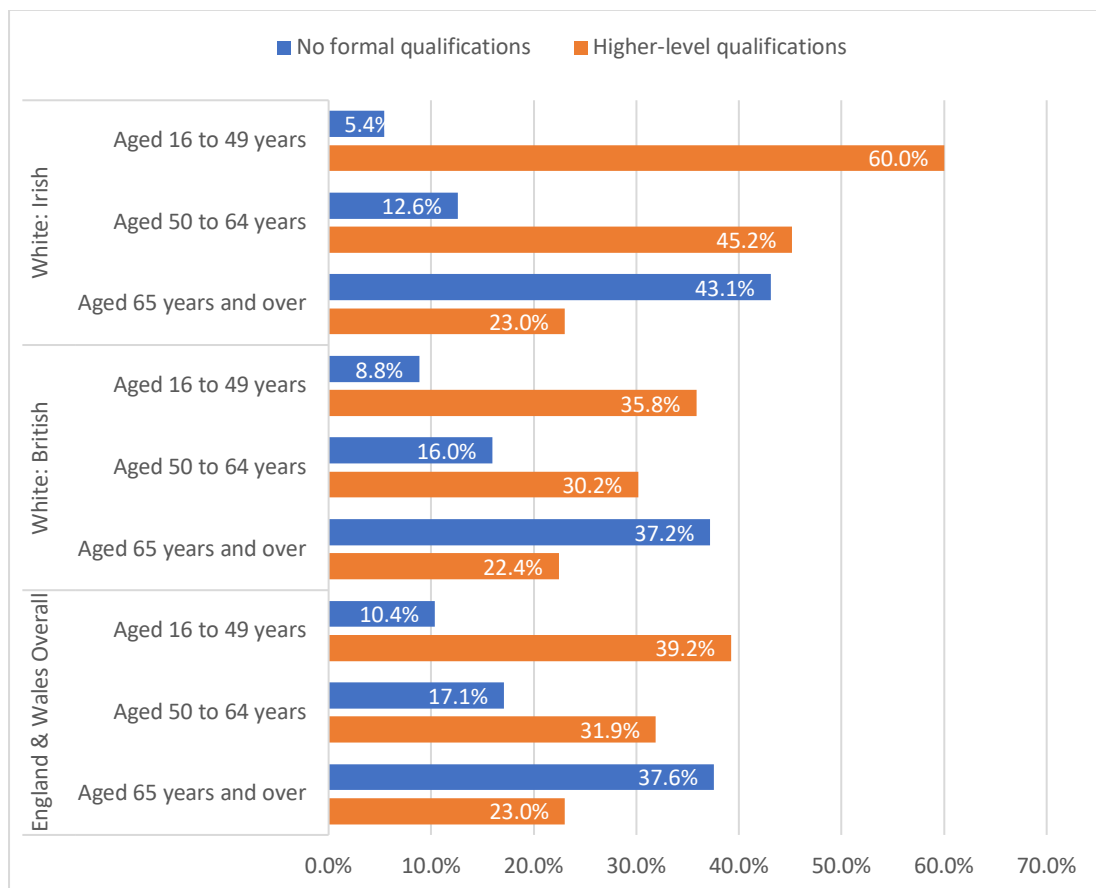
<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Ryan, L. (2008), ‘I Had a Sister in England’: Family-Led Migration, Social Networks and Irish Nurses’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34:3.



**Table 15: Educational level by ethnic group and age group**

	Age group	No formal qualifications	Higher-level qualifications
White: Irish	Aged 16 to 49 years	5.4%	60.0%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	12.6%	45.2%
	Aged 65 years and over	43.1%	23.0%
	<b>All 16 and over</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>
White: British	Aged 16 to 49 years	8.8%	35.8%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	16.0%	30.2%
	Aged 65 years and over	37.2%	22.4%
	<b>All 16 and over</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>
England & Wales Overall	Aged 16 to 49 years	10.4%	39.2%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	17.1%	31.9%
	Aged 65 years and over	37.6%	23.0%
	<b>All 16 and over</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>33.8%</b>

**Figure 12: Educational level by ethnic group and age group**

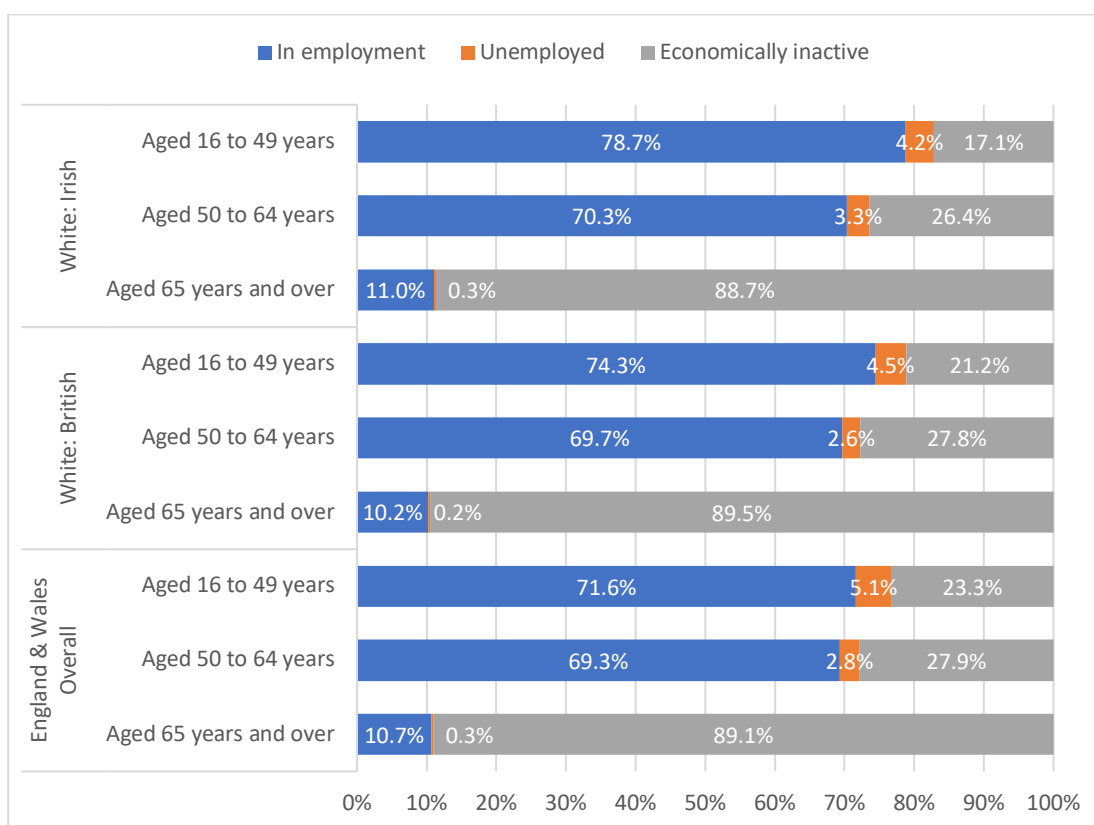


### Economic activity

The economic activity status of those identifying as White Irish is broadly similar to that of the White British population, with a slightly higher proportion of self-employed workers (13.3%, compared to 11.1%) offset by a slightly smaller proportion of economic inactive people (21%, compared to 23.5%). This difference is particularly pronounced among the youngest age groups (16 to 49), with 17.1% of White Irish being economically inactive, against 23.3% for the overall population.

Among the White Gypsy and Irish Traveller group, over half (53.3%) reported being economically inactive (see Table 21), whilst only a quarter work as an employee (less than half the national average). The 6% of GIT individuals reporting being unemployed is also significantly above the average for England and Wales.

Figure 13: Economic activity by ethnic group by age



Amongst the economically inactive, around 9% of White Irish report being long-term sick or disabled or retired. Whilst this may be indicative of this group’s older age profile, it is not significantly higher than the rate seen for the White British group.

As noted above, the Gypsy and Irish Traveller group report significantly higher rates of overall economic inactivity than the national average. This comprises primarily of those looking after home or family (17.7%) and those reporting long-term sickness or disability (15%). Around 1-in-7 report being economically inactive for ‘some other reason’.

**Table 16: Reason for inactivity by ethnic group by age**

	White: Irish			White: British			England & Wales Overall		
	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over
Student	8.1%	0.4%	0.2%	9.0%	0.2%	0.1%	10.4%	0.3%	0.1%
Looking after home or family	3.5%	4.6%	1.2%	4.9%	5.2%	1.0%	5.8%	5.8%	1.2%
Long-term sick or disabled	2.7%	8.1%	2.9%	3.9%	8.1%	2.1%	3.3%	8.0%	2.3%
Retired	0.2%	9.6%	83.2%	0.1%	10.8%	85.5%	0.1%	9.9%	84.5%
Other	2.7%	3.8%	1.2%	3.3%	3.4%	0.8%	3.7%	3.9%	1.0%
<b>Total inactive</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>88.7%</b>	<b>21.2%</b>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>89.5%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>89.1%</b>

### Occupational categories

The census classifies occupations into nine broadly hierarchical groups: from (1) Managers, Directors and Senior Officials to (9) Elementary occupations. The following table and chart present—by ethnic group—the proportion of respondents in each occupational category.

For both men and women, the White Irish population have a significantly greater proportion of people in managerial/professional occupations compared to the national average. Around a half of White Irish individuals in employment were in these higher occupational status groups.

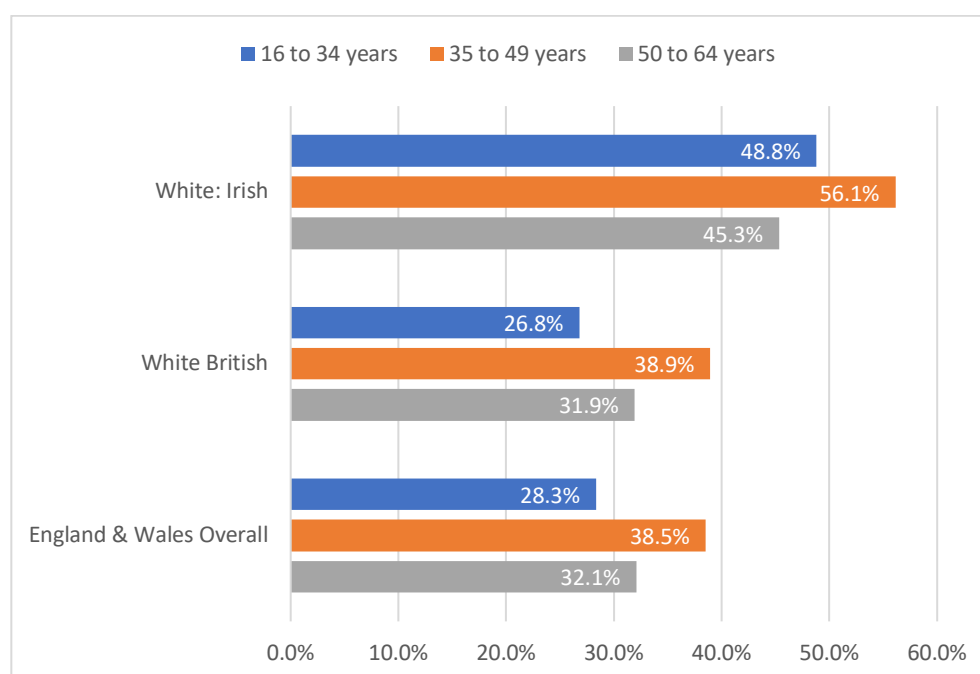
By contrast, only around one-sixth of Gypsy and Irish Traveller individuals in employment were in managerial/professional occupations—around half the rate seen nationally. Additionally, it is important to note, as presented above, that the proportion of GIT population in employment is much lower than for the national population as a whole.

**Table 17: Occupational categories by ethnic group by age**

	White: Irish				White: British				England & Wales Overall			
	16 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	All 16 to 64	16 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	All 16 to 64	16 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	All 16 to 64
1. Managers, directors and senior officials	9.9%	21.1%	19.1%	<b>17.3%</b>	7.8%	16.4%	15.4%	<b>13.2%</b>	7.8%	15.4%	14.9%	<b>12.6%</b>
2. Professional occupations	38.9%	35.1%	26.2%	<b>32.6%</b>	19.0%	22.5%	16.6%	<b>19.3%</b>	20.6%	23.1%	17.2%	<b>20.4%</b>
3. Associate professional and technical occupations	19.1%	15.6%	12.5%	<b>15.3%</b>	16.1%	14.8%	11.2%	<b>14.0%</b>	15.4%	13.5%	10.8%	<b>13.4%</b>
4. Administrative and secretarial occupations	6.8%	7.3%	10.6%	<b>8.5%</b>	8.6%	9.4%	11.4%	<b>9.8%</b>	8.4%	8.6%	10.8%	<b>9.2%</b>
5. Skilled trades occupations	5.7%	6.5%	8.6%	<b>7.1%</b>	11.3%	10.3%	11.5%	<b>11.1%</b>	9.9%	9.6%	11.0%	<b>10.1%</b>

6. Caring, leisure and other service occupations	5.5%	4.7%	7.5%	<b>6.0%</b>	10.5%	8.4%	9.5%	<b>9.5%</b>	9.9%	8.6%	9.8%	<b>9.4%</b>
7. Sales and customer service occupations	5.6%	2.7%	3.8%	<b>3.9%</b>	10.7%	5.3%	6.5%	<b>7.5%</b>	10.6%	5.4%	6.4%	<b>7.5%</b>
8. Process, plant and machine operatives	2.2%	3.3%	5.6%	<b>3.9%</b>	4.6%	5.7%	8.6%	<b>6.3%</b>	5.2%	6.9%	8.9%	<b>6.9%</b>
9. Elementary occupations	6.2%	3.7%	6.1%	<b>3.9%</b>	11.4%	7.1%	9.3%	<b>9.3%</b>	12.3%	8.8%	10.3%	<b>10.5%</b>

**Figure 14: Percentage in Managerial or Professional occupations by ethnic group and age**



### Industries of employment

In addition to the occupational hierarchies presented above, the Census also collected data on broad industries of employment. In 2021, the largest group of people in employment worked in public administration, education and health: 30.5% across the whole population. Among the White Irish workers, the proportion is even higher (35.1%), and particularly pronounced among the over 50s. Nationwide, the second largest group is represented by those working in Distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants: 19.9% of all the workers in England and Wales. However, the proportion among the White Irish is nearly half the size: 11.9%. Instead, White Irish workers are slightly overrepresented in the construction sector and in the ‘financial, professional and administrative’ activities.

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**Table 18: Industry of employment by ethnic group by age**

Industry	White: Irish				White: British				England & Wales Overall			
	16 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	All 16 to 64	16 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	All 16 to 64	16 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	All 16 to 64
A, B, D, E Agriculture, energy and water	1.4%	1.6%	1.6%	<b>1.6%</b>	2.3%	2.6%	2.9%	<b>2.7%</b>	2.0%	2.2%	2.5%	<b>2.3%</b>
C Manufacturing	4.1%	4.9%	5.1%	<b>4.8%</b>	6.3%	7.7%	8.9%	<b>7.6%</b>	6.3%	7.4%	8.5%	<b>7.3%</b>
F Construction	8.7%	11.2%	12.7%	<b>11.5%</b>	9.2%	9.4%	9.9%	<b>9.5%</b>	8.1%	8.6%	9.3%	<b>8.7%</b>
G, I Distribution, hotels and restaurants	15.1%	10.3%	10.8%	<b>11.9%</b>	24.1%	16.0%	17.2%	<b>19.1%</b>	24.6%	17.3%	17.5%	<b>19.9%</b>
H, J Transport and communication	9.5%	10.9%	9.9%	<b>9.9%</b>	7.7%	9.4%	9.0%	<b>8.6%</b>	8.8%	10.7%	9.5%	<b>9.6%</b>
K, L, M, N Financial, real estate, professional & admin. activities	22.0%	22.5%	17.8%	<b>20.3%</b>	16.5%	17.4%	15.6%	<b>16.6%</b>	17.4%	17.8%	15.9%	<b>17.2%</b>
O, P, Q Public administration, education and health	33.2%	33.8%	38.0%	<b>35.1%</b>	28.3%	33.0%	32.4%	<b>31.0%</b>	27.7%	31.8%	32.8%	<b>30.5%</b>
R, S, T, U Other	5.9%	4.8%	4.2%	<b>4.9%</b>	5.5%	4.5%	4.1%	<b>4.8%</b>	5.1%	4.3%	4.0%	<b>4.6%</b>

Table 19, below, provides a more detailed classification of occupational industries, with the main sectors of employment for the White Irish being Health and social work (16.3%), Education (12.85%), Construction (11.5%), Professional and technical activities (9.1%) and Wholesale and retail trade (8.7%).

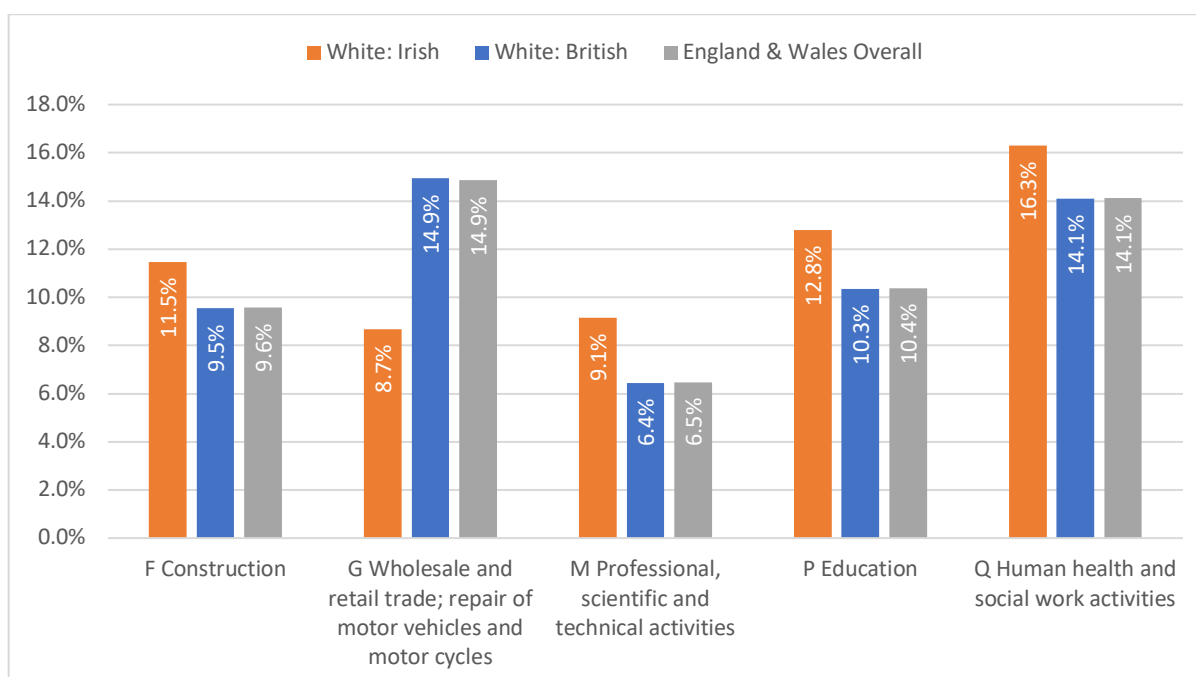
**Table 19: Industrial sector of employment by ethnic group**

	White: Irish	White: British	England & Wales Overall
A Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0.3%	0.9%	0.7%
B Mining and quarrying	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
C Manufacturing	4.8%	7.6%	7.3%
D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%
E Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0.6%	0.9%	0.7%
F Construction	11.1%	9.5%	8.6%
G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles	8.5%	14.9%	14.9%
H Transport and storage	3.6%	4.4%	5.0%
I Accommodation and food service activities	3.2%	4.3%	5.0%
J Information and communication	6.6%	4.3%	4.7%
K Financial and insurance activities	5.7%	3.7%	3.8%
L Real estate activities	1.8%	1.5%	1.5%
M Professional, scientific and technical activities	9.3%	6.4%	6.5%
N Administrative and support service activities	3.7%	4.9%	5.2%
O Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	6.2%	6.7%	6.0%

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P Education	13.0%	10.4%	9.9%
Q Human health and social work activities	16.1%	14.2%	14.8%
R, S, T, U Other	4.8%	4.7%	4.5%

**Figure 15: Industrial sector of employment by ethnic group (Top 5 industries for White: Irish population)**



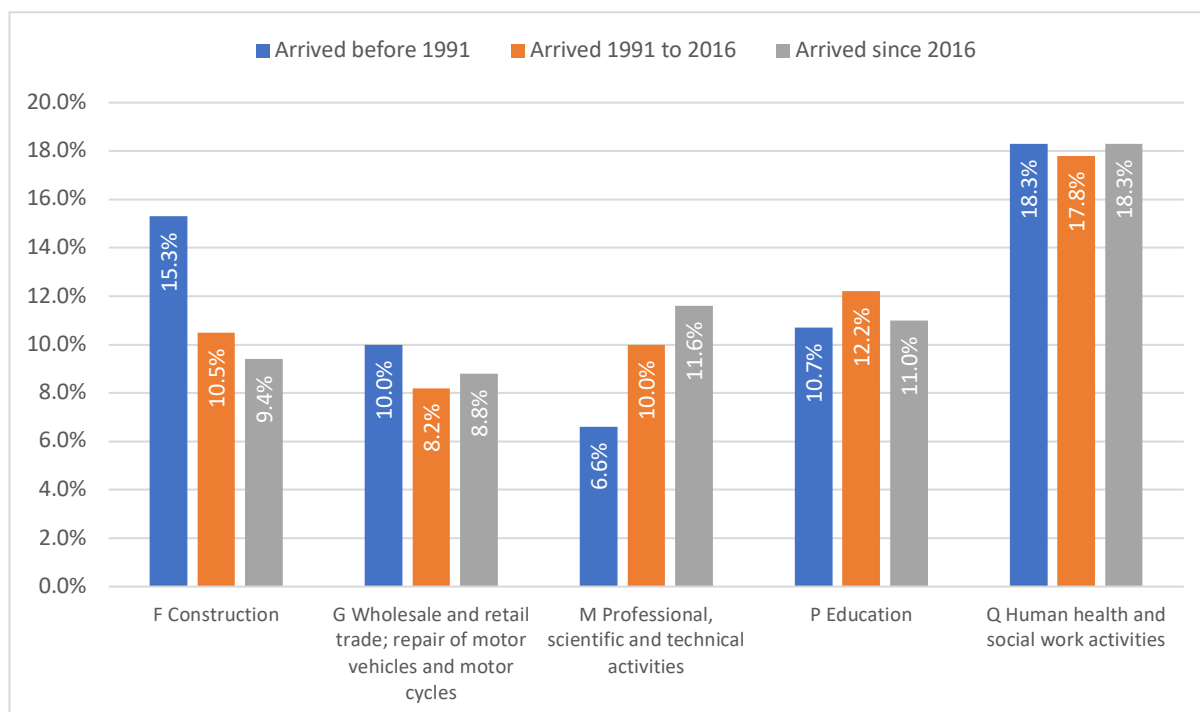
### Industry by year of arrival

Shifting our focus from the data on Ethnicity (White Irish) to that on country of birth (people born in the Republic of Ireland), Health and Social work, Education and Construction are confirmed as the main industries of employment for Irish migrants in England and Wales. However, the percentage of people working in Construction decreases significantly among those arrived from the 1990s onwards: 15.3% for those born in ROI and arrived before 1991, 9.4% for those arrived since 2016. At the same time, the percentage of people working in professional, scientific and technical activities is significantly larger among those arrived in the past few years than for those who came before 1991.

**Table 20: Industry of employment by year of arrival for Republic of Ireland-born population**

	Arrived before 1991		Arrived 1991 to 2016		Arrived since 2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
A Agriculture, forestry and fishing	224	0.4%	271	0.4%	121	0.5%
B Mining and quarrying	69	0.1%	93	0.1%	30	0.1%
C Manufacturing	2,770	5.0%	3,135	4.9%	1,150	4.7%
D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	274	0.5%	384	0.6%	134	0.5%
E Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	384	0.7%	294	0.5%	69	0.3%
F Construction	8,536	15.3%	6,784	10.5%	2,332	9.4%
G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles	5,571	10.0%	5,308	8.2%	2,178	8.8%
H Transport and storage	2,543	4.5%	1,825	2.8%	581	2.4%
I Accommodation and food service activities	2,049	3.7%	2,306	3.6%	992	4.0%
J Information and communication	2,301	4.1%	4,584	7.1%	1,984	8.0%
K Financial and insurance activities	1,879	3.4%	4,547	7.1%	1,672	6.8%
L Real estate activities	1,272	2.3%	1,005	1.6%	309	1.3%
M Professional, scientific and technical activities	3,669	6.6%	6,446	10.0%	2,858	11.6%
N Administrative and support service activities	2,775	5.0%	2,216	3.4%	886	3.6%
O Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	2,990	5.3%	2,831	4.4%	824	3.3%
P Education	5,994	10.7%	7,831	12.2%	2,709	11.0%
Q Human health and social work activities	10,228	18.3%	11,436	17.8%	4,515	18.3%
R, S, T, U Other	2,400	4.3%	3,053	4.7%	1,366	5.5%

Figure 16: Industry of employment by year of arrival for Republic of Ireland-born population (Top 5)



## Gypsy or Irish Travellers—education and employment

Table 21: Education & employment indicators: White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller compared to White: British and national average

	White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller		White: British		England & Wales Overall	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Educational level</b>						
No formal education	26,817	39.6%	6,763,578	15.2%	8,827,477	14.8%
<b>Economic activity</b>						
Economically inactive	26,935	39.7%	15,248,996	34.4%	19,117,513	32.1%
Long-term unemployed	16,442	24.3%	3,365,012	7.6%	5,299,970	8.9%
<b>Occupational category</b>						
Managerial/professional	2,914	4.3%	6,673,601	15.0%	9,153,971	15.4%
Routine/semi-routine	6,220	9.2%	3,252,419	7.3%	4,846,949	8.1%



## 5. Housing

Two key indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage relate to housing: whether an individual lives in socially-rented accommodation, and overcrowding (i.e. whether an individual lives in accommodation that has fewer bedrooms than occupants).

With regard to housing tenure, across the population of England and Wales, around 1-in-6 people live in social rented housing. This rate is slightly lower amongst the White Irish population, for whom 1-in-7 find themselves in social rented accommodation. By contrast, more than two-fifths (43.7%) of White Gypsy and Irish Traveller people are living in social rented housing. Despite the overall rate of White Irish people in social rented housing being below the national average, breaking this down by age reveals that for working-age and retired people the rate is significantly higher than within the overall population of England and Wales.

As for overcrowding, the White Irish population has one of the lowest rates: 3.5% against a national average of 8%. This is also a reflection of the large number of older people living alone (see below). As for the Gypsy and Irish Traveller population, at 26.3%, the proportion of people living in overcrowded accommodations is about three times the average.

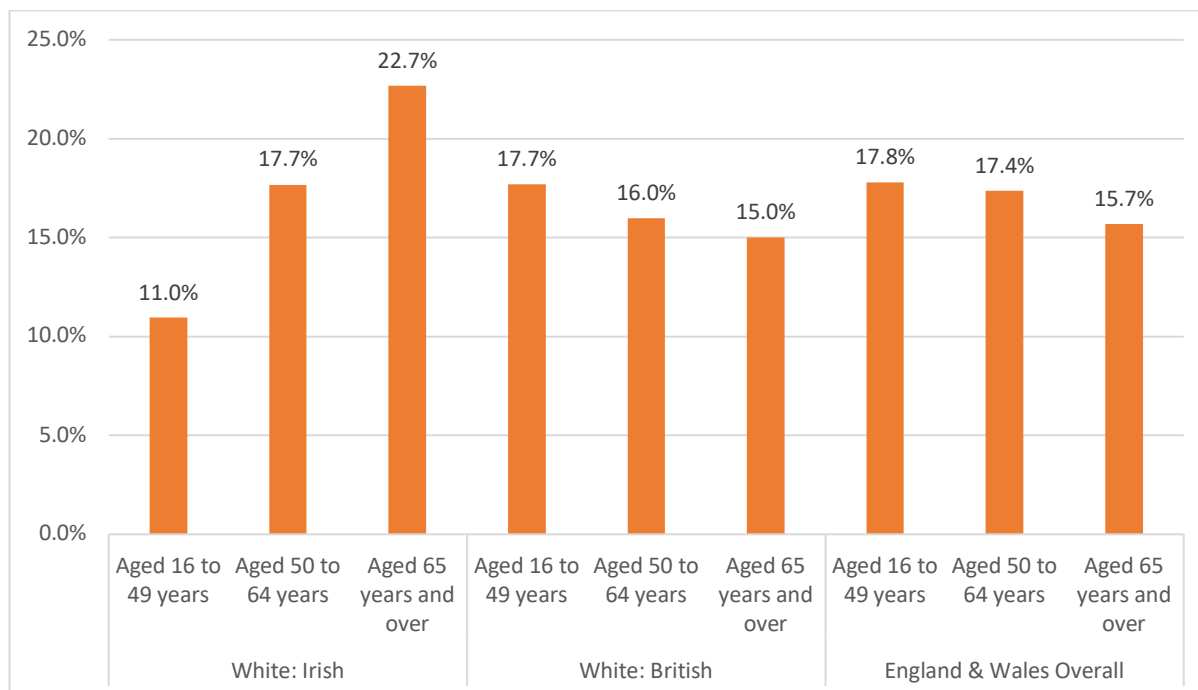
### Housing tenure and social housing

**Table 22: Housing tenure by ethnic group and age (HRP<sup>20</sup>)**

	White: Irish				White: British				England & Wales Overall			
	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	All 16 and over	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	All 16 and over	16 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over	All 16 and over
Owns outright	6.4%	31.8%	64.0%	<b>36.6%</b>	6.5%	35.8%	72.6%	<b>37.3%</b>	6.4%	33.0%	71.2%	<b>32.8%</b>
Owns with a mortgage	43.6%	37.5%	6.3%	<b>27.2%</b>	47.0%	36.4%	6.0%	<b>30.2%</b>	41.6%	35.8%	6.4%	<b>29.7%</b>
Private rented or rent free	39.1%	13.1%	7.0%	<b>18.7%</b>	28.8%	11.8%	6.4%	<b>16.3%</b>	34.2%	13.8%	6.8%	<b>20.4%</b>
Social rented	11.0%	17.7%	22.7%	<b>17.6%</b>	17.7%	16.0%	15.0%	<b>16.3%</b>	17.8%	17.4%	15.7%	<b>17.1%</b>

<sup>20</sup> Household reference person.

**Figure 17: Social rented housing by ethnic group and age group (HRP)**



### People living alone

According to the Census 2021 data, White Irish people are significantly more likely to report ‘living alone’ than the national average: 23.6% against 15.7%. As to be expected, this figure is particularly high among those 65 and over. The experiences of older Irish-born people living alone has been the subject of some academic research in recent years and indicates the key role that community organisations can play as sources of practical support and sociality.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 23: Living alone by ethnic group and age**

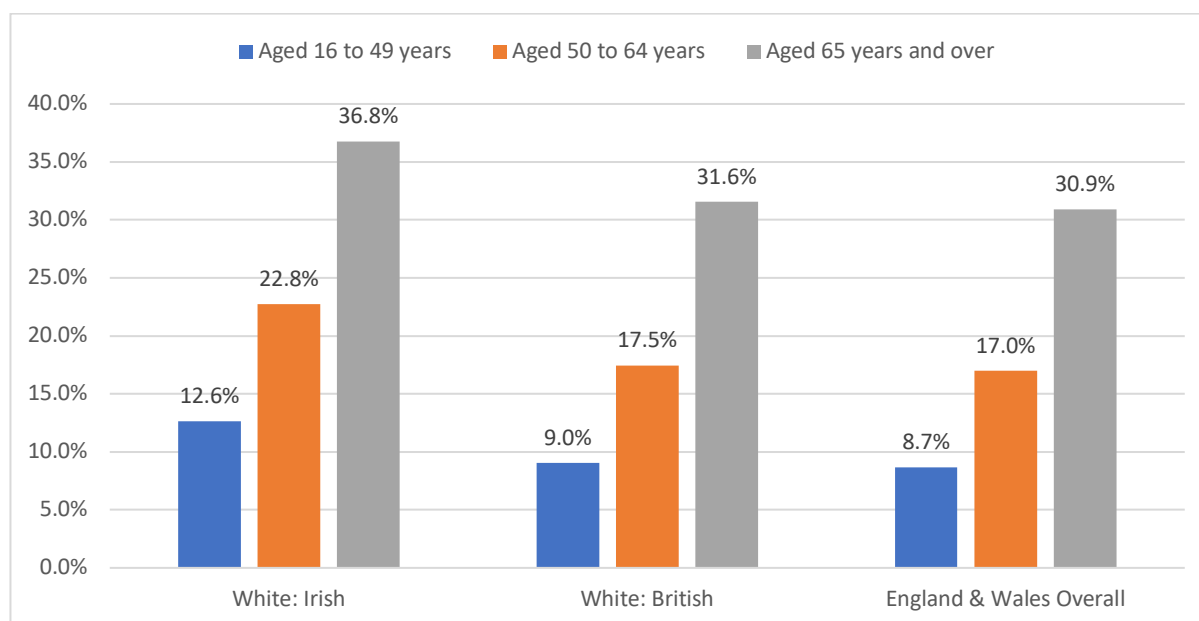
	Age group	Living alone	
		#	%
White: Irish	Aged 16 to 49 years	22,690	12.6%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	30,148	22.8%
	Aged 65 years and over	58,539	36.8%
	<b>All 16 and over</b>	<b>111,377</b>	<b>23.6%</b>
White: British	Aged 16 to 49 years	1,539,617	9.0%
	Aged 50 to 64 years	1,648,656	17.5%
	Aged 65 years and over	3,056,633	31.6%
	<b>All 16 and over</b>	<b>6,244,906</b>	<b>17.3%</b>
England & Wales Overall	Aged 16 to 49 years	2,190,391	8.7%

<sup>21</sup> Ryan et al (2021), ‘Analysing migrants’ ageing in place as embodied practices of embedding through time: ‘Kilburn is not Kilburn any more’’, *Population Space Place*, 2021; 27:2420; McDaid, M. (2021), *Older Irish People Living in East London and their Stories of Migration and Dance* (Doctoral dissertation, Uni. of Sheffield).

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Aged 50 to 64 years	1,960,405	17.0%
Aged 65 years and over	3,327,387	30.9%
<b>All 16 and over</b>	<b>7,478,183</b>	<b>15.7%</b>

**Figure 18: Proportion living alone by ethnic group and age**



## Gypsy or Irish Travellers—housing and overcrowding

**Table 24: Housing indicators: White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller compared to White: British and national average**

	White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller		White: British		England & Wales Overall	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Housing tenure (HRP)</b>						
Social rented housing	10,432	44.1%	3,190,194	16.3%	4,227,765	17.1%
<b>Occupancy rating</b>						
Overcrowded	17,231	26.3%	1,903,913	4.4%	4,915,341	8.4%

## 6. Conclusions

The picture emerging from the analysis of the Census 2021 is particularly rich and complex. This report aims to be just a first step into a longer process of research, dissemination, community engagement and public discussion; informing advocacy, service delivery and a range of local and national interventions. Official statistics are a crucial element to better understand the changing shape, needs and opportunities of Irish communities in England and Wales—but they should be used alongside and in interaction with other types of data sources, including qualitative research.

The Census data confirms that the first generation of Irish migrants in Britain is getting significantly smaller and older. Given their age and gender profile, more research is needed into their care needs. Recent studies show the impact of declining mobility among older Irish people and the challenges of living in particular neighbourhoods—e.g. in London—that are also undergoing considerable change and transformation.<sup>22</sup> The combined impact of ageing, declining health, reduced mobility and shrinking social networks, due to bereavement, can result in loneliness and social isolation.<sup>23</sup> There is need for continued support, such as befriending services, to help those who are unable to get out and about.

As the earlier waves of migrants now enter advanced older age, there is also a need for more oral history projects to record and preserve their stories. The Irish in Britain has undertaken a ‘50<sup>th</sup> anniversary heritage project’ to capture the history of its member organisations and the communities they serve.<sup>24</sup> Starting with training local volunteers in heritage skills, the project featured a travelling roadshow exhibition in late 2023.

Other research is being undertaken by academics and independent researchers. For example, the ongoing ‘Irish Nurses in the NHS project’ is undertaking interviews with retired Irish-born nurses to create an archive of invaluable resources including stories and photos and will produce a series of podcasts, exhibition, a film and a book.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, looking at multiple identifiers of ‘Irishness’—including national identity, passports and ethnicity—shows the layered complexity of multiple identities in British society. As discussed in the previous chapters, categories such as ‘White British’ are now capturing only a limited proportion of those of who see themselves as part of the Irish community. ‘Irish in Britain’ will continue to make recommendations to the ONS to better capture this diversity.

More needs to be done to engage these wider Irish communities, including e.g. the 39,000 Irish passport holders who identify as Black, Mixed or Asian (either born in Ireland and outside of Ireland—see table 6). The 165,000 people who identify as White British but have an Irish passport are also worthy of further research. It is important to understand their motivations for claiming an Irish passport and to what extent, if any, they might wish to engage more with Irish cultural activities in Britain. Overall, it is necessary for Irish organisations in England and Wales to continue reaching out and engage more with diverse populations—including second- and third-generation Irish—to maintain the vitality of their communities into the future.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan, L., Kilkey, M., Lórin, M., & Tawodzera, O. (2021), ‘Analysing migrants’ ageing in place as embodied practices of embedding through time: ‘Kilburn is not Kilburn any more’’, *Population, Space and Place*, 27(3), e2420.

<sup>23</sup> Lórin, M., Kilkey, M., Ryan, L., & Tawodzera, O. (2022), ‘“You still want to go lots of places”: exploring walking interviews in research with older migrants’’, *The Gerontologist*, 62(6), 832-841.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/irish-in-britain-s-50th-anniversary-heritage-project>

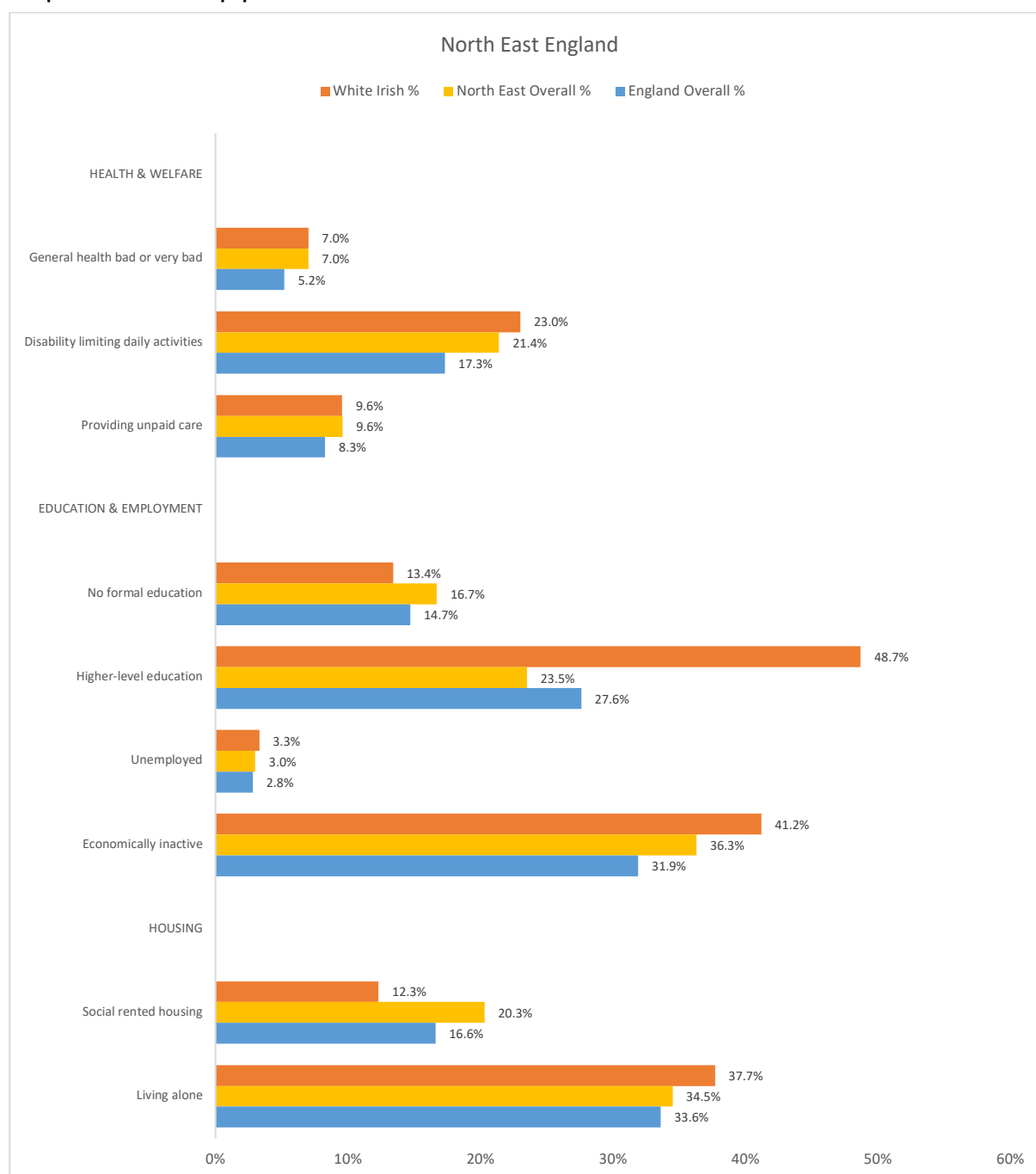
<sup>25</sup> <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/centres-groups-and-units/global-diversities-and-inequalities-research-centre/projects-and-partners/irish-nurses-in-the-nhs-an-oral-history-project/>

## Appendix 1: Social Indicators for English Regions

### North-East of England

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 8,384 people in the North East of England self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.3% of the overall population in the region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

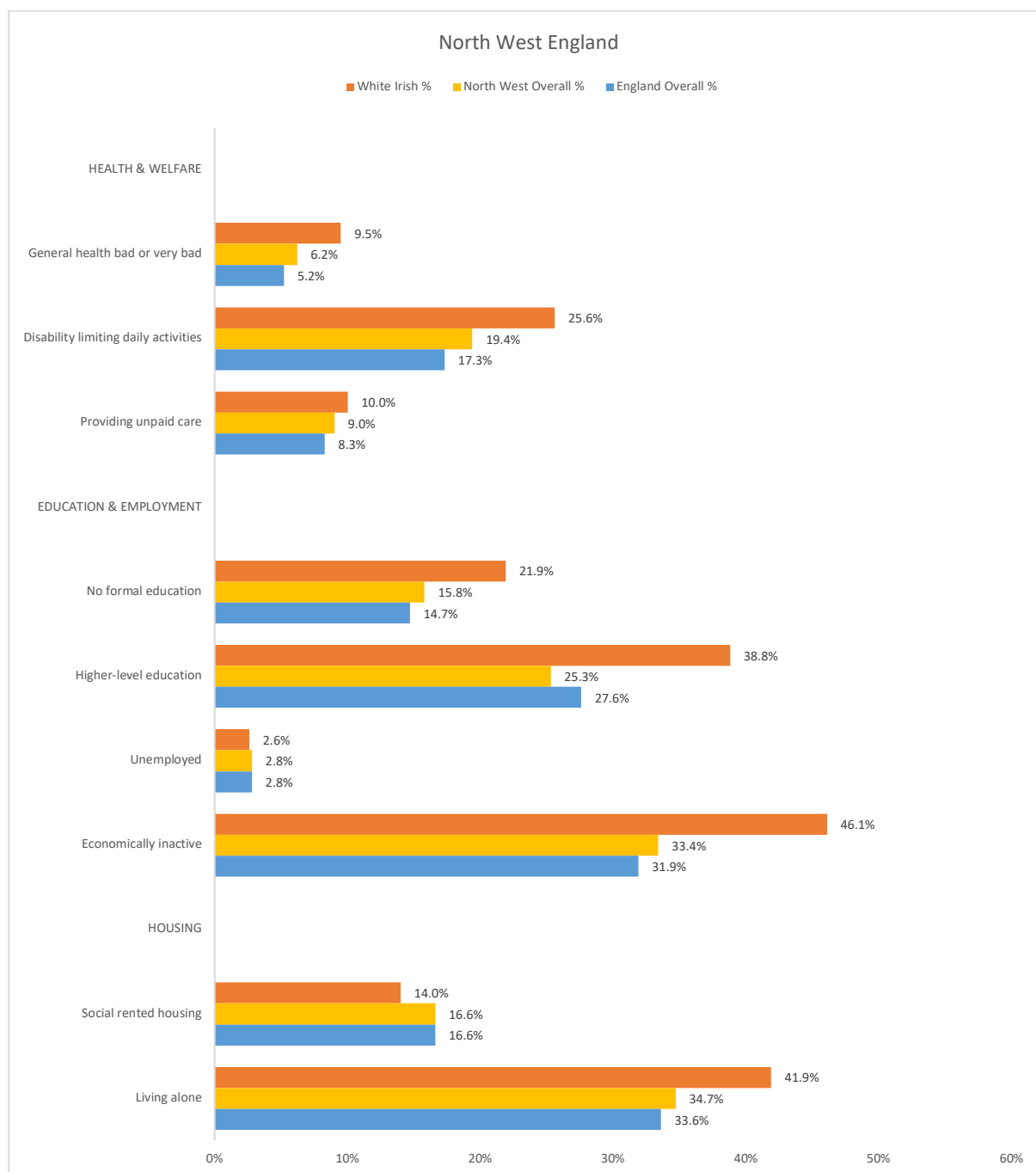
**Figure 19 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in the NORTH-EAST OF ENGLAND compared to the overall population**



### North-West of England

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 61,422 people in the North-West of England self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.8% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

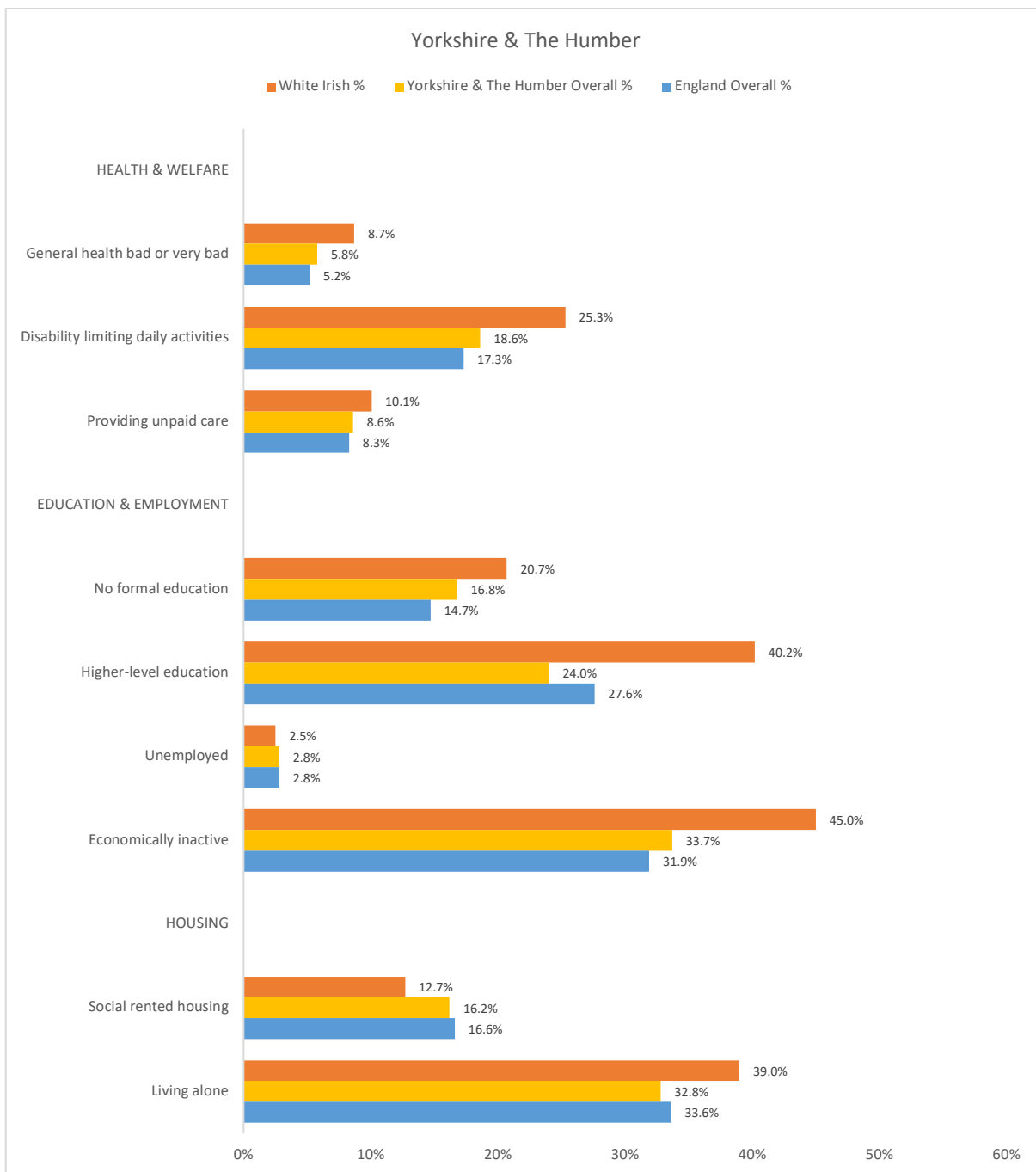
**Figure 20 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND compared to the overall population**



**Yorkshire and the Humber**

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 25,215 people in Yorkshire and the Humber self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.5% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

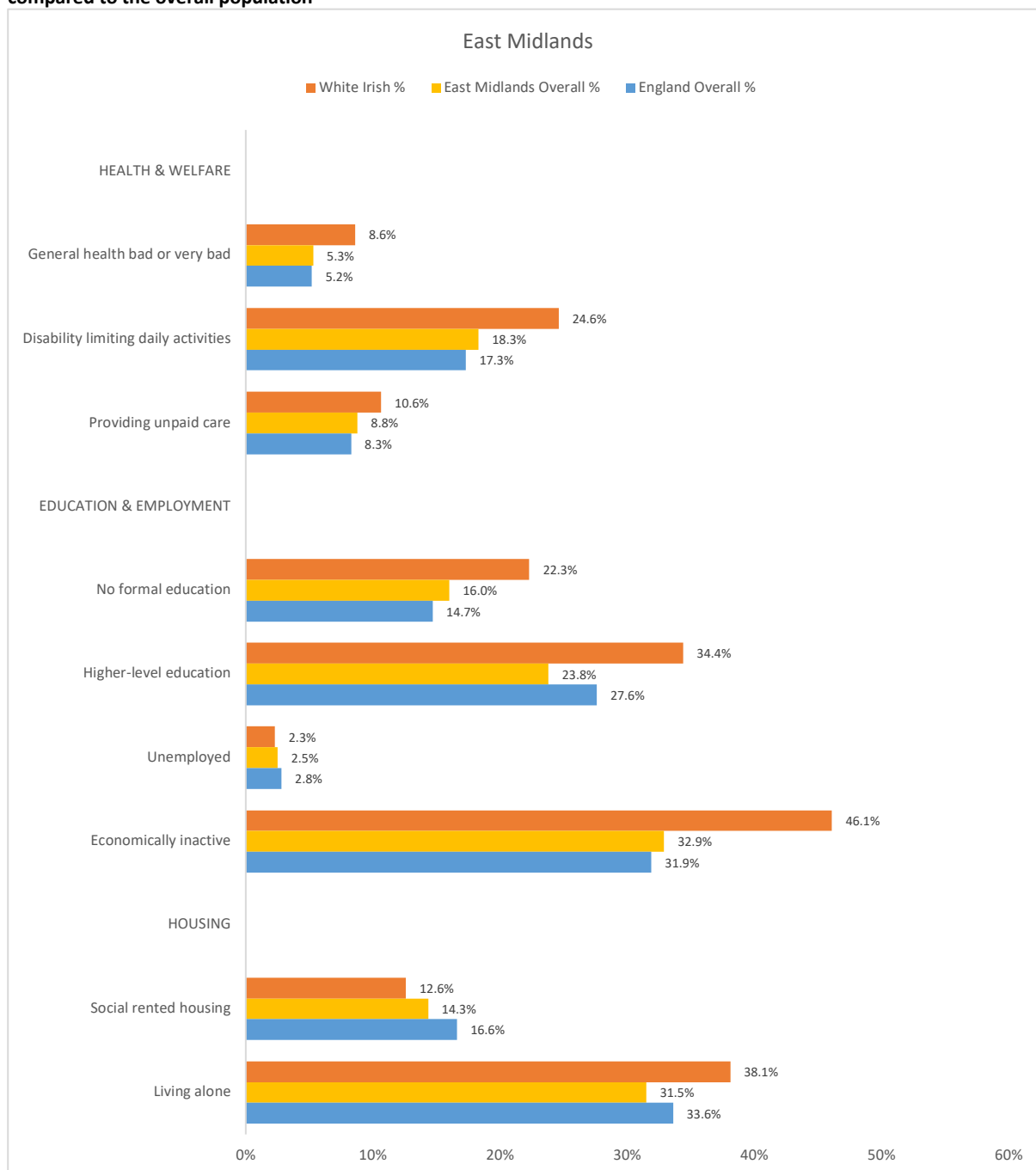
**Figure 21 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER compared to the overall population**



### East Midlands

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 27,130 people in the East Midlands self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.6% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

**Figure 22 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in EAST MIDLANDS compared to the overall population**

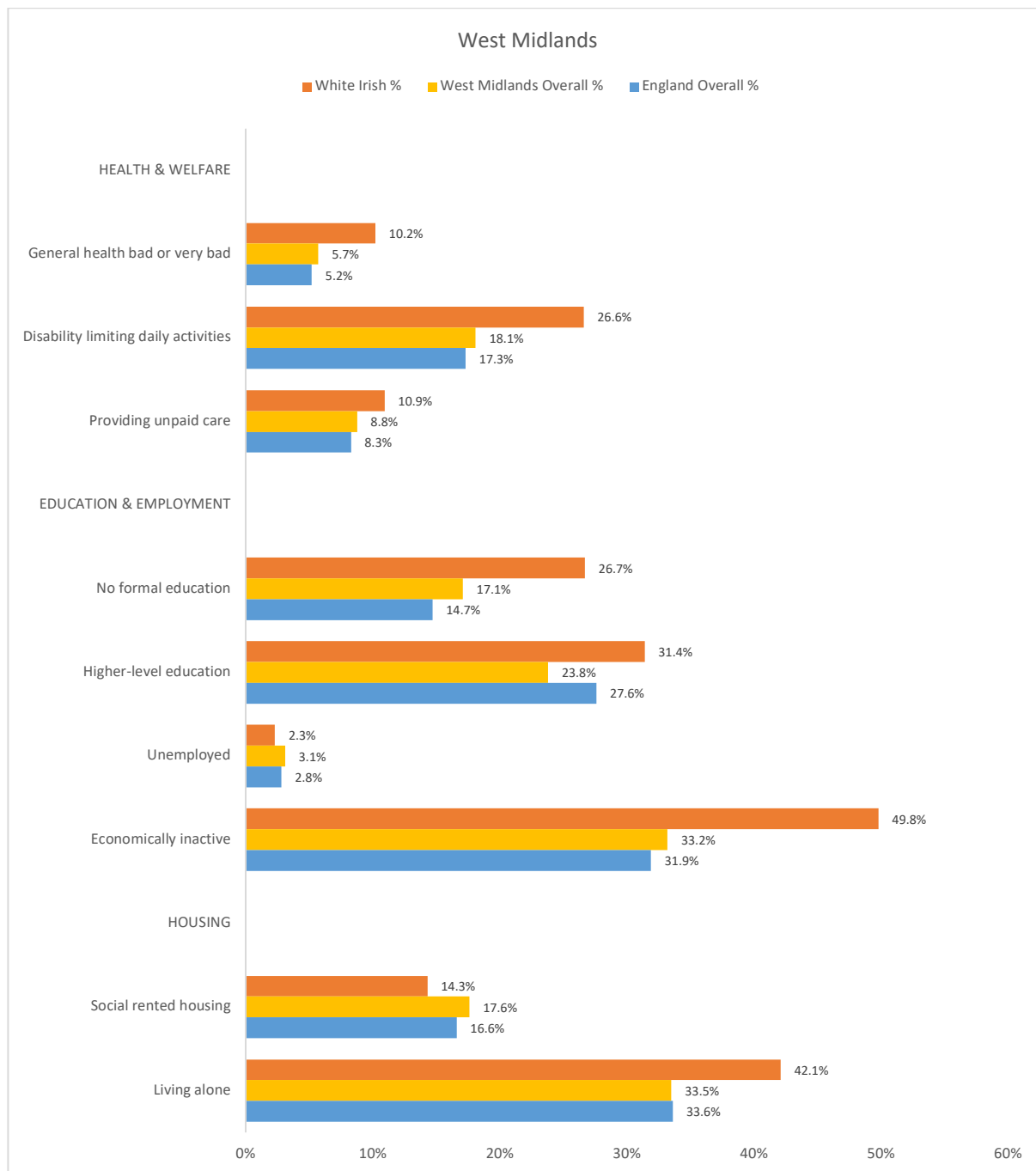




**West Midlands**

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 47,886 people in the West Midlands self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.8% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

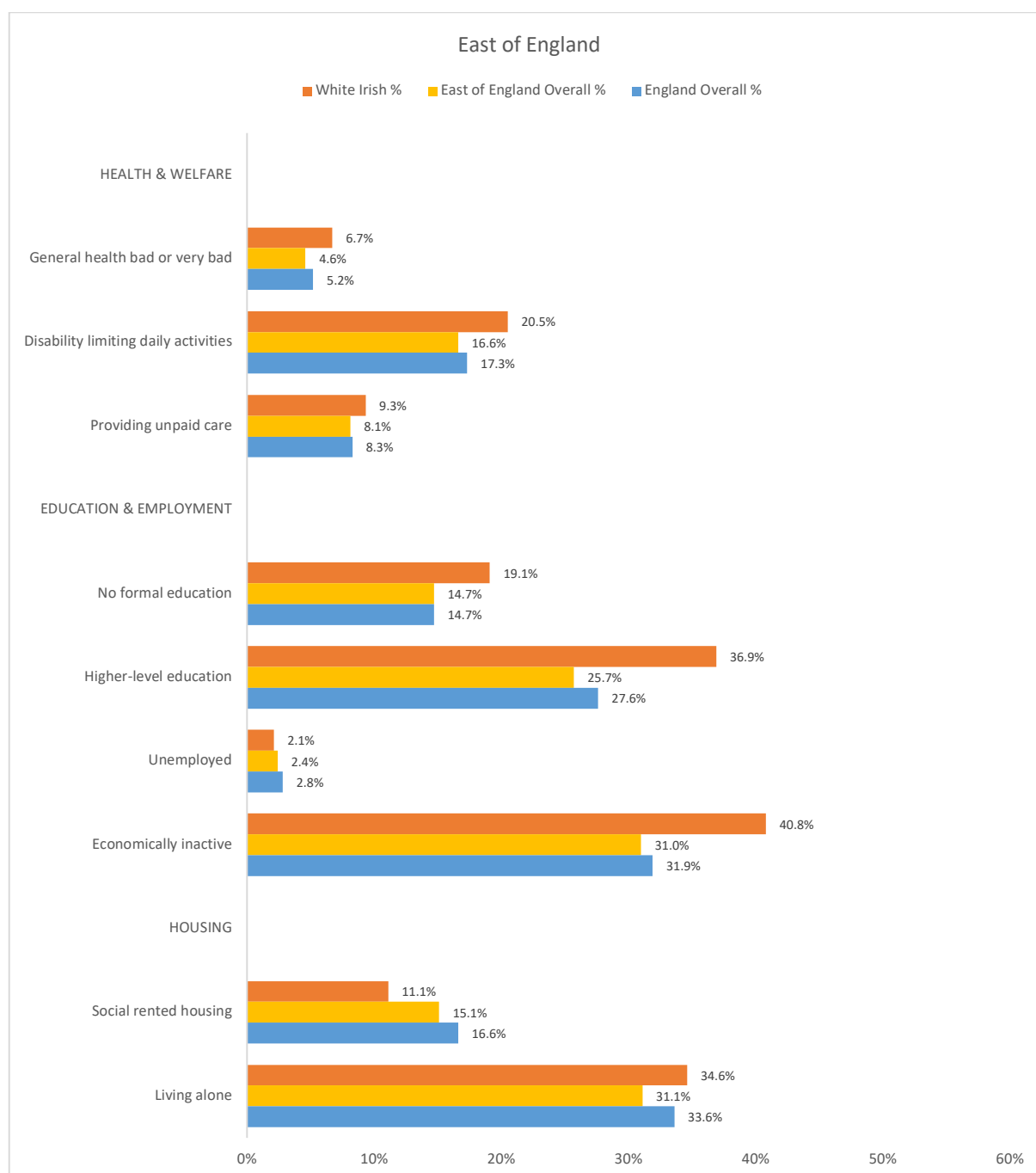
**Figure 23 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in WEST MIDLANDS compared to the overall population**



### East of England

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 57,964 people in the East of England self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.9% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

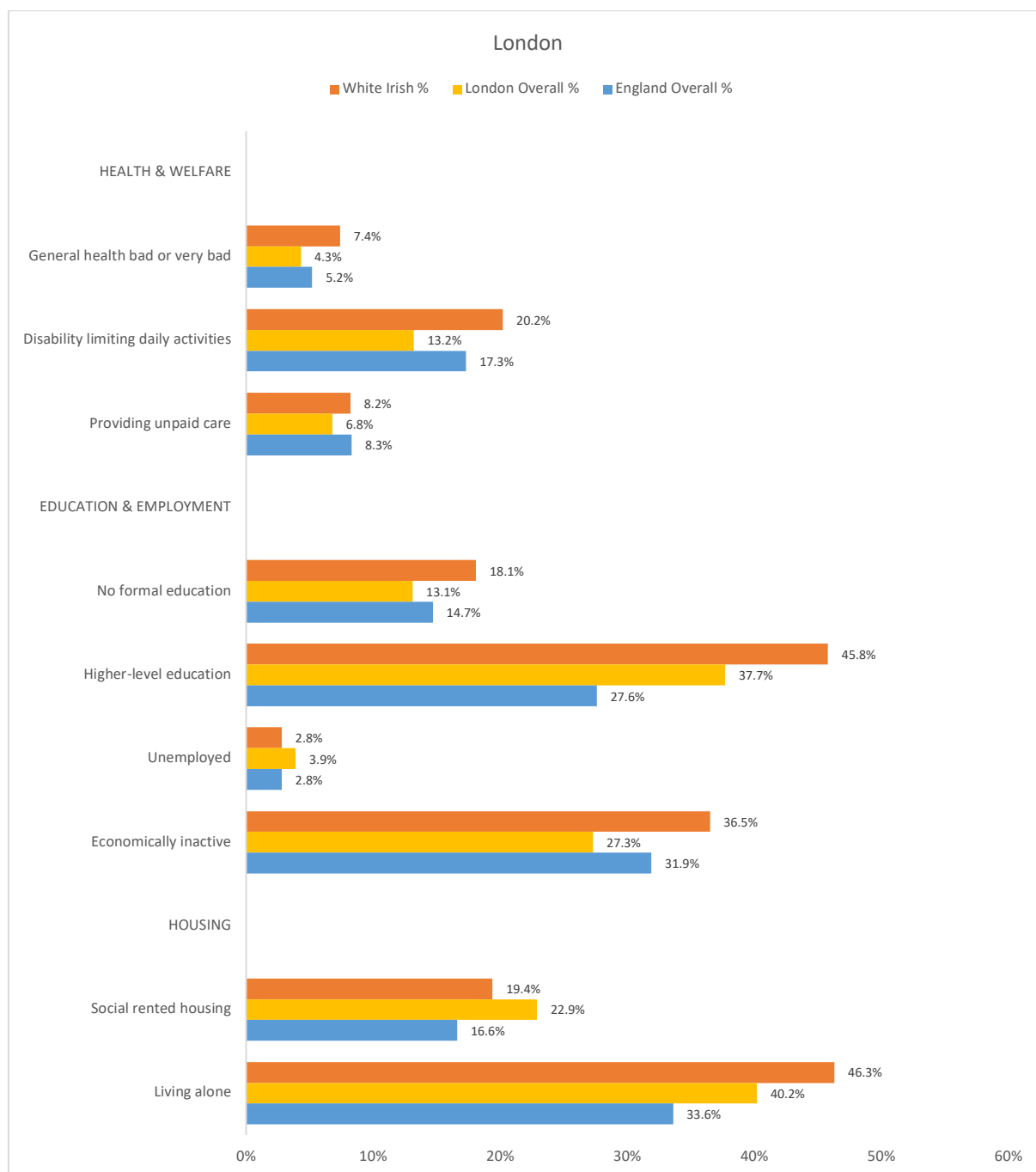
**Figure 24 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in EAST OF ENGLAND compared to the overall population**



### London

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 156,333 people in London self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 1.8% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

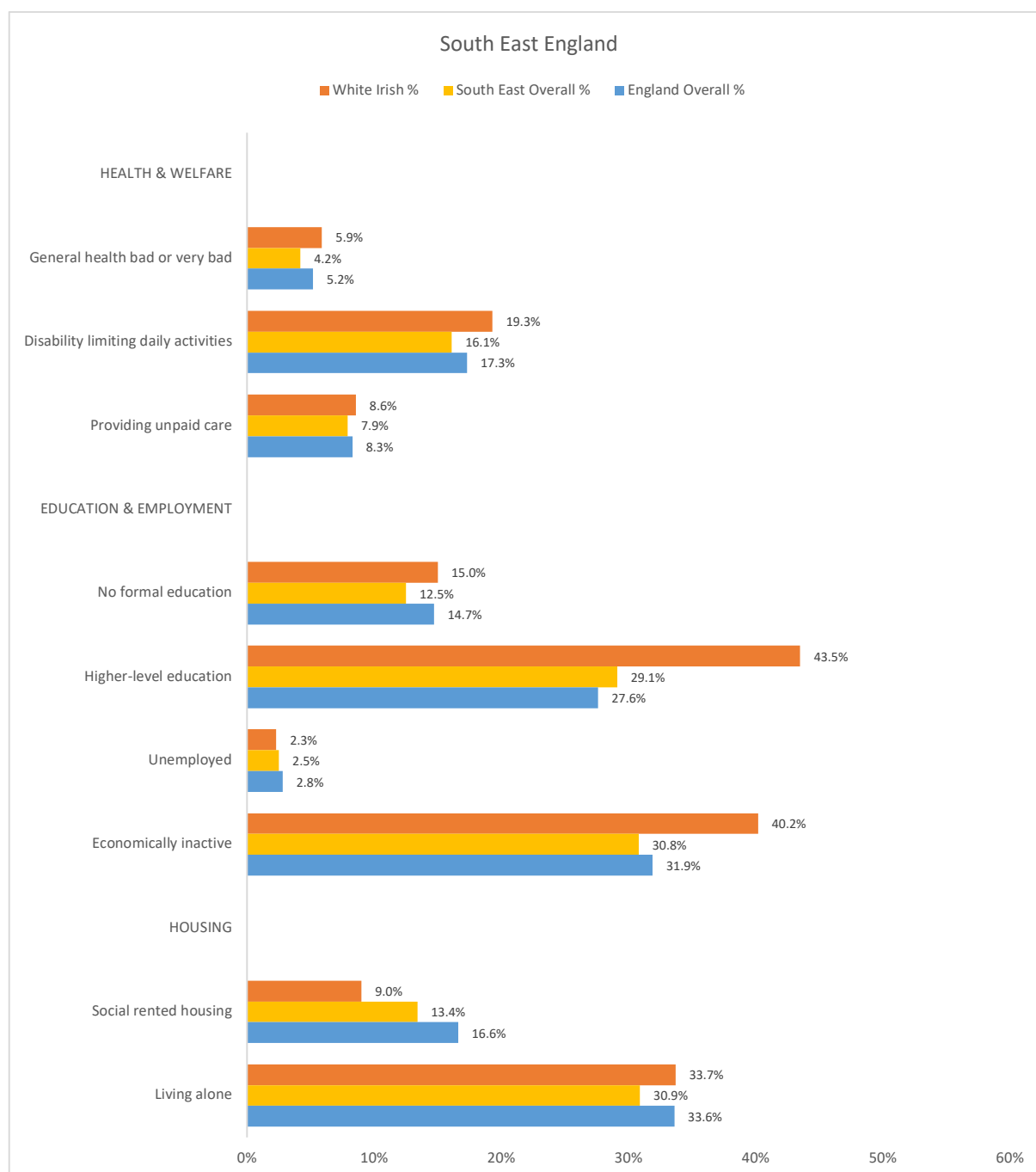
**Figure 25 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in LONDON compared to the overall population**



### South-East of England

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 78,219 people in the South-East of England self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.8% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

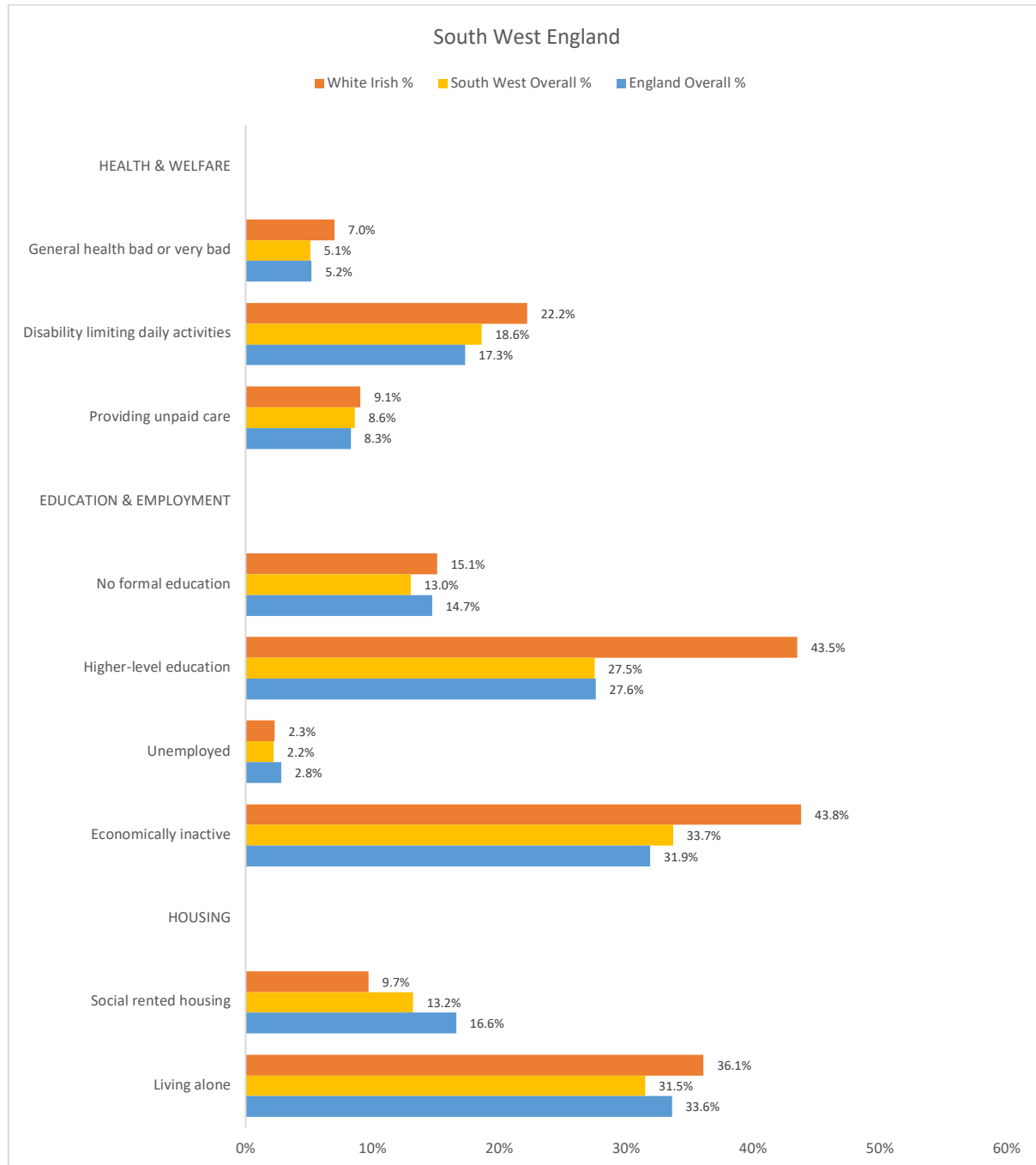
**Figure 26 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in the SOUTH-EAST OF ENGLAND compared to the overall population**



**South-West of England**

At the time of the latest Census 2021, 31,698 people in the South-West of England self-identified as ‘White: Irish’, that represents 0.6% of the overall population in region. The table below presents a summary of key social indicators for these people compared to the regional and English overall.

**Figure 27 - Social indicators for White: Irish population living in the SOUTH-WEST OF ENGLAND compared to the overall population**



## Appendix 2: Focus on Wales

### Size and structure of the Irish population in Wales

Between 1981 and 2011, the size of the Irish-born population in Wales remained consistently around 20,000 people, constituting around 0.7% of the population. A notable fall can be observed between the latest two censuses, with 17,800 individuals living in Wales in 2021 reporting to be born in Ireland (either in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland), a reduction of almost 13% since the previous census. As far as ethnicity is concerned, the number of ‘White Irish’ people has also seen a significant reduction between 2001 (when collection of detailed ethnicity data began) and 2021.

**Figure 28: Irish population of Wales - Irish-born (1981-2021) and White: Irish ethnic group (2001-2021)**

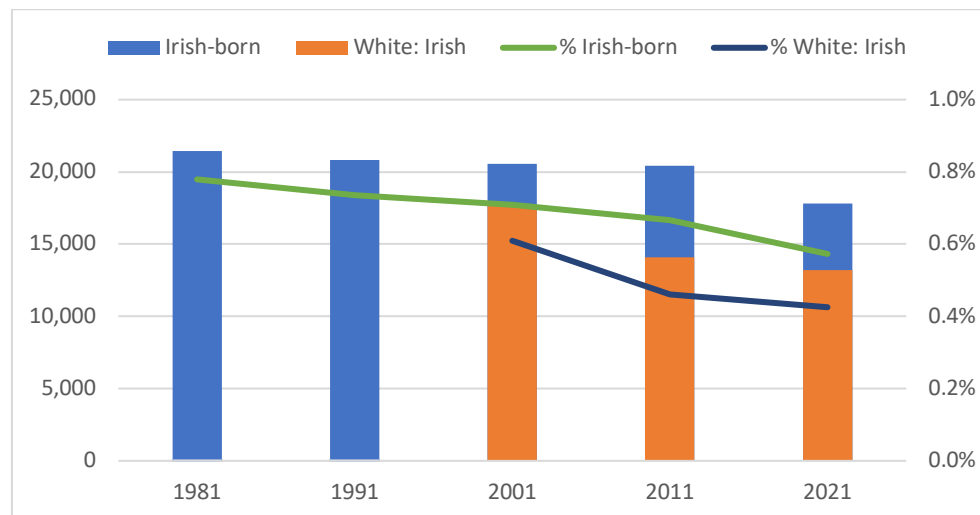
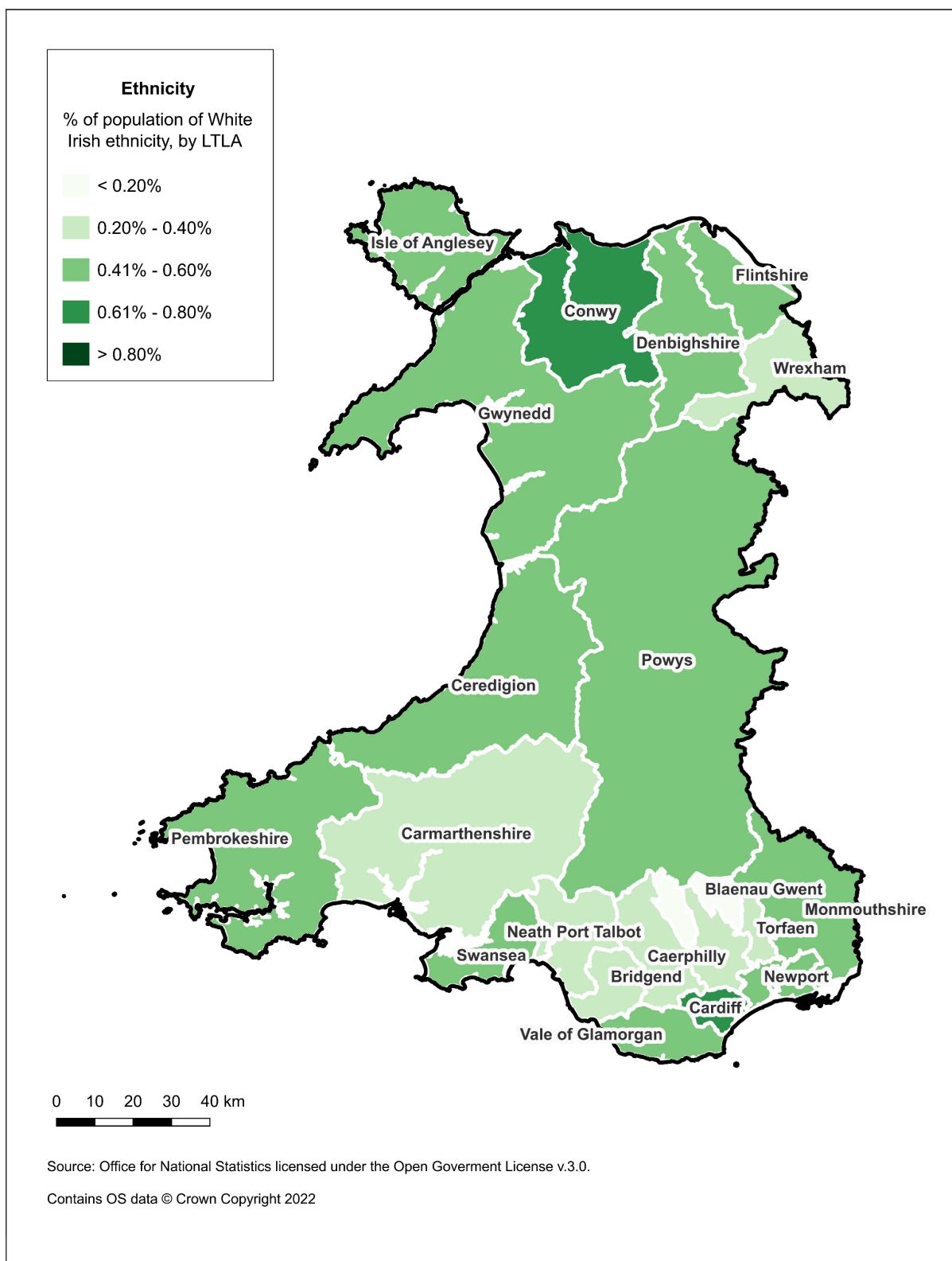


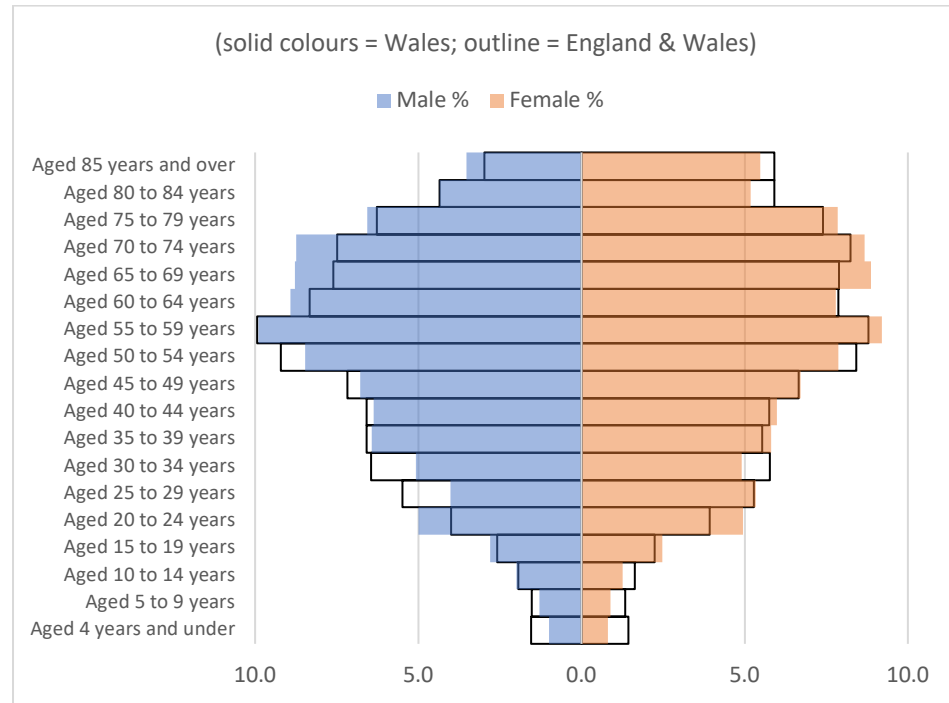
Figure 29: 'White Irish' as a percentage of total resident population (2021)





The composition of the White: Irish population in Wales closely mirrors the age and sex distribution seen across England and Wales as a whole, with this population structurally significantly older than other ethnic groups.

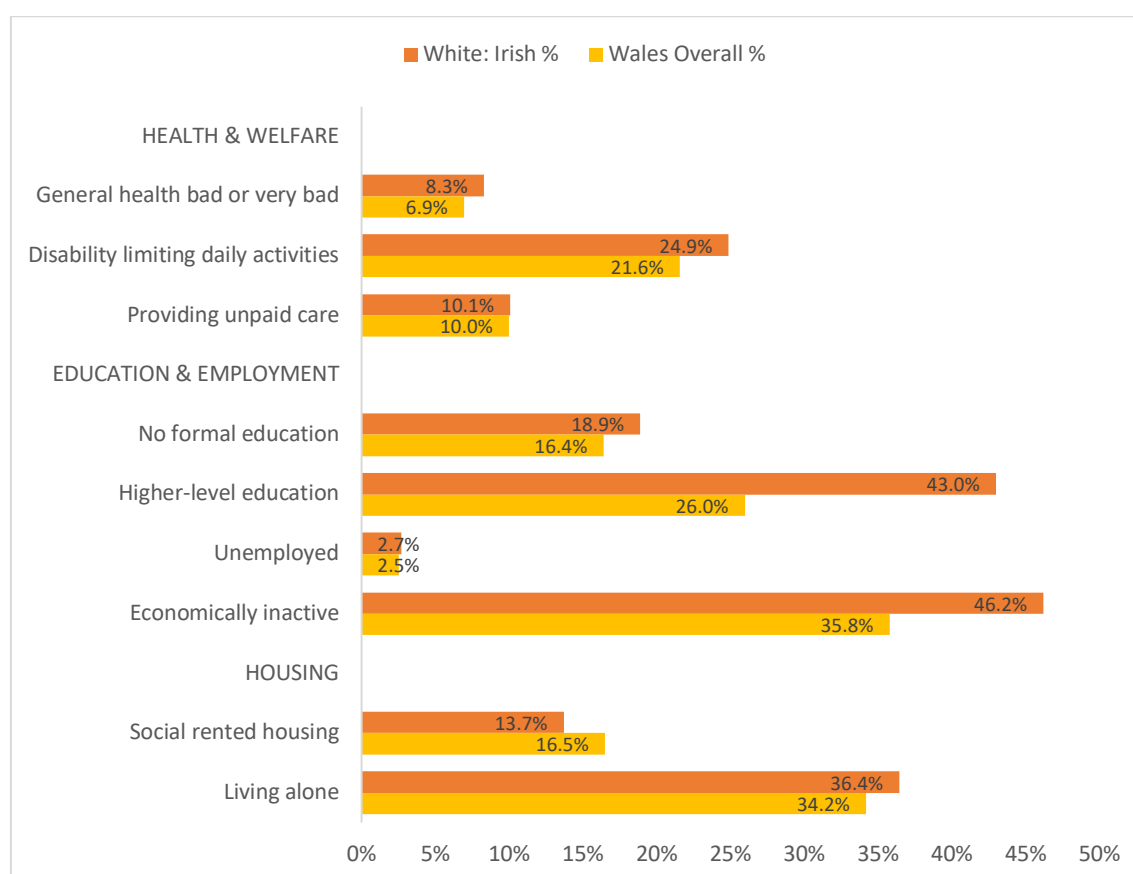
**Figure 30: White Irish population by age and sex (2021)**



## Socio-economic characteristics of Irish people in Wales

Figure 31, below, presents an overall summary of key social indicators from the 2021 Census, comparing the ‘White: Irish’ population with the overall population of Wales. More details about each of these dimensions are provided further down.

**Figure 31: Social indicators for White: Irish population living in Wales compared to the overall population**



### Health and welfare

Compared to the overall population resident in Wales, a greater proportion of those identifying as White: Irish report being in bad or very bad health. White: Irish respondents were also more likely to report a disability that limits their daily activities, whilst the proportion providing unpaid care is broadly comparable to the national average for Wales (see table 25 below).

**Table 25: Health & welfare indicators for White: Irish population living in Wales compared to the overall population**

	White: Irish		Wales Overall	
	#	%	#	%
General health: bad or very bad	1,097	8.3%	215,869	6.9%
Disability limiting daily activities	3,285	24.9%	670,257	21.6%
Providing unpaid care	1,331	10.1%	310,738	10.0%

### Education and employment

Census statistics on education show a mixed picture. Whilst a slightly higher proportion of White Irish people reported no formal education, the percentage who have higher-level education is significantly greater than seen in the Welsh-resident population overall. In terms of the labour market, unemployment is low for the White: Irish—almost as low as the overall rate for Wales. The proportion of White: Irish people who are economically inactive is significantly higher, however, largely due to a higher proportion of retired people.

**Table 26: Education & employment indicators for White: Irish population living in Wales compared to the overall population**

	White: Irish		Wales Overall	
	#	%	#	%
No formal education	1,914	18.9%	509,679	16.4%
Higher-level education	5,681	43.0%	806,770	26.0%
Unemployed	357	2.7%	78,892	2.5%
Economically inactive	6,106	46.2%	1,112,069	35.8%

### Housing

In Wales, relatively fewer White Irish people live in social rented housing compared to the national average. Slightly more White Irish people are living alone as a proportion of the total population compared to the rate seen across Wales.

**Table 27: Housing indicators for White: Irish population living in Wales compared to the overall population**

	White: Irish		Wales Overall	
	#	%	#	%
Social rented housing	1,036	13.7%	222,093	16.5%
Living alone	2,721	21.3%	429,558	14.1%





THE IRISH IN BRITAIN—Findings from the 2021 Census of England and Wales

D'Angelo, A., Kaye, N. (2024), 'The Irish in Britain—Findings from the 2021 Census of England and Wales', The Irish in Britain, Commissioned Report, January 2024

