



**Westminster Hall Debate, Outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers in the youth justice system: Wednesday 1 February, 11.00am to 11.30am**

[The Traveller Movement analysed data from HM Inspectorate of Prisons 'Children in Custody' report](#), and once again found that Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) children remain “hugely overrepresented” and overlooked in the youth criminal justice system. The research also found poorer outcomes and worse experiences for GTR children in youth custodial institutions.

Just a year ago the then HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick stated that:

*“With any other group such huge disproportionality would have led to more formal inquiry and investigation into what part of their backgrounds or interaction with the criminal justice system had led to this situation. Children from a Traveller background reported greater levels of need and worse experiences in custody than other children”.*

Sadly, Mr Hardwick’s words are as true today as they were a year ago, with GTR children remaining “hugely overrepresented” and overlooked.

The most significant barrier to addressing and understanding the differences in outcomes for GTR children is that the youth justice system still uses ethnic monitoring systems based on the 2001 Census and therefore Gypsies and Travellers do not appear in official data.

Currently, there is no pressure on Secure Training Centres (STCs) and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) to ensure GTR children progress, rehabilitate or are even kept safe whilst they are incarcerated. In schools, every Headteacher knows the exact ethnic breakdown of their pupils and are therefore able to adapt strategies and policies to correct any disadvantages that occur.

Yet, in youth custodial institutions, where disadvantages and differences in outcomes are arguably even more critical for the life chances of these children, those running the institutions have no definitive answer as to the number of GTR children they hold let alone the disadvantages they may face.

Most mainstream reviews and inquiries ignore the experiences of GTR communities; take the Charlie Taylor Review as an example – despite several representations from GTR groups the report did not mention the communities and their experiences of custody at all.

It is therefore no surprise that these children continue to have worse experiences of custody and far worse outcomes compared to other children. Until ethnic monitoring is introduced, the necessary priority will never be given to Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children and they will continue to be failed.

**Key stats and findings from the research**

- 12% of children in STCs and 7% in YOIs identified as GTR.
- Just 51% of GTR boys in YOIs said it was their first time in custody: clearly these institutions are not doing enough to work with these children to ensure they can lead positive, constructive lives upon release.

**Local authority care**

- **Almost half of all GTR children in Secure Training Centres, and a third of GTR boys in Young Offender Institutions have been in local authority care.** There has rightly been public outcry at the number of children in care who end up in the criminal justice system; yet GTR children in care receive little to no attention.

## Education (failure by institutions to educate)

- Despite the research finding that **over half of GTR boys had been 14 or younger the last time they were in school**, it also found that there is a real willingness among Gypsies, Travellers and Roma to seek education in prison. GTR boys had a more positive outlook toward education, **70% of those who had taken part in education believed it would benefit them when they left**.
- In YOIs, **GTR boys were far more likely than the other boys to be in education or purposeful activity (taking part in vocational training or a job)**; however in STCs GTR children were far **less likely to say they have been able to learn skills for jobs that they'd like to do in the future**. This adds further weight to the Irish Chaplaincy research, '[The Right Type of Education](#)', which called for more targeted education programmes for GTR in custody.

## Health

- GTR children were almost **twice as likely to report having unmet health needs** in STCs, while almost **a quarter of GTR in YOIs considered themselves to be disabled**.
- Research, entitled 'Voices Unheard', by the Irish Chaplaincy first identified that a significant proportion of GTR prisoners suffered mental health issues. This sadly remains true today, with **a quarter of GTR boys in YOIs reported having mental/emotional health issues**.

## Safety

- In both STCs and YOIs GTR children were significantly more likely to report that they had **either been victimised or felt unsafe whilst in custody**: from both staff and other young people. GTR detainees were also three and five times more likely to have their 'canteen/property' taken off them by other young people in YOI and STCs respectively.

## Isolation

- The data from the Children in Custody report highlights the social isolation faced by GTR children on release. GTR respondents were **less likely to know who to look to for help when opening a bank account, finding accommodation or continuing health services when released**.

**These findings underline why ethnic monitoring is urgently needed in the youth justice system.**

As a consequence of ethnic monitoring in the adult prison estate, many GTR groups have been established. As organisations such as the **Irish Chaplaincy** and **Leeds GATE** testify, these groups are absolutely vital in improving outcomes for GTR prisoners. Without ethnic monitoring it is difficult to imagine such groups being established, hence why they are still not present in the youth justice system.

[The National Police Chiefs' Council have called for youth justice to adopt the change](#). Deputy Chief Constable and NPCC lead for GTR issues, Janette McCormick said: "*Updating the ethnicity monitoring systems in youth justice to include Gypsies and Irish Travellers would be an integral step in helping us to address the disproportionate number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in both Secure Training Centres and Youth Offender Institutions*".

**If this Government is serious about addressing differences in outcomes and reducing reoffending, it must make GTR communities a priority and finally include them in the ethnic monitoring in youth justice.**