

Challenging social media hate speech

SOCIAL MEDIA HATE SPEECH

Social media hate speech is when a person is attacked online on the basis of their:

- Race (such as being a Gypsy, Roma or a Traveller)
- Religion or belief
- Disability
- Sexual orientation or
- Gender identity.

What kind of social media hate speech is illegal?

- Threats to kill or cause you violence
- Threats to damage property
- Grossly offensive or indecent messages
- Threatening or abusive words intended to distress you
- Harassment or stalking messages intended to make you fear violence.

If these crimes have been motivated by hostility or prejudice because you are a Gypsy, Roma or a Traveller, then the court can increase the punishment on conviction.

Our right to freedom of expression means that, while something on social media may shock, offend or disturb you, it may not necessarily be illegal.

SOCIAL MEDIA HATE SPEECH SHOULD BE REPORTED TO THE POLICE

Even if the police cannot take action, it will help to keep a record of social media hate speech against the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. You can contact your local police by phoning 101 or by visiting your local police station.

If you don't want to go directly to the police yourself, you can use the True Vision website or you can contact one of the following organisations which can help: <http://travellermovement.org.uk/index.php/hate-crime/third-party-reporting/>.

If you are unsure or have literacy problems, contact Traveller Movement which can assist you to make a complaint and support you. See the contact details below.

Reporting social media hate speech to Facebook and Twitter

Here are the links to report hate speech on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/help/263149623790594/> and on Twitter: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/15789>.

Follow the instructions and give an explanation of why you think the message is offensive; say that Romani Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma people are ethnic groups whose rights are protected by law.

IF YOU WANT TO CHALLENGE THE SENDER YOURSELF HERE ARE

- Your response should be short and polite – it may be repeated and read by many other people
- Explain that you are offended because the message is a negative and false stereotype of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- For example:

The comment you posted describes Gypsy/Roma/Traveller individuals and communities in a negative offensive way. English Romani Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma people are recognised ethnic minorities whose human rights and the right to equality of treatment are protected by law. I am proud to be a Gypsy/Traveller/Roma person and your comments are hurtful to me and my community. The words you used are unacceptable and keep alive negative stereotypes about communities which are already marginalised in our society. I ask you to remove the comment immediately as it only spreads misunderstanding and misinformation.

Some facts you might add:

- Nomadism is a fundamental part of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture – those who choose to retain this lifestyle often do this to maintain their connection to their culture; UK law protects their right to do so.
- Gypsies, Travellers and Roma people have a rich and diverse history and culture.
- Romani Gypsies are a community which trace their roots to northern India and have been in Britain since at least the 16th century.
- Irish Travellers are an ethnic group with a distinct history and language.
- The UK also has communities of Scottish Travellers and Welsh Travellers and new groups of Roma people who live throughout the country.
- **[If the issue is about unauthorised encampments]** The majority of Gypsies and Travellers live in bricks and mortar homes or on council-run authorised sites; those who live on unlawful encampments are a tiny minority and are often forced to do so because of the lack of authorised sites.

SEE ALSO TM'S INFORMATION GUIDES:

- ▶ Have you been affected by hate crime?
- ▶ Challenging written hate speech
- ▶ Race discrimination by service providers

The information in this information guide refers to the law in England & Wales. It summarises the main points and is intended for guidance only. While every effort is made to ensure it is correct at time of publication it should not be used as a substitute for legal advice or for individual advice about your case. If you have any specific questions about any legal matter you should consult a solicitor.

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