



UN Special Rapporteur for Poverty and Human Rights

A Traveller Movement submission

This submission will outline issues affecting Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers (GRT) in relation to poverty and human rights.

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Pervasive discrimination

Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers are three distinct ethnic groups as recognised by UK law. Despite this, much of the population do not accept or realise that Gypsies and Irish Travellers are ethnic groups. In 2017, the Traveller Movement conducted a [Yougov survey](#) which showed that only a third – 34% - of the population of Great Britain considered Gypsies and Irish Travellers to be ethnic groups. Therefore, it is difficult to tackle this discrimination when a significant minority of people do not believe that these are ethnic group; people seem to feel instead that being a Gypsy or an Irish Traveller is a 'choice', which in turn leads to the sentiment that disadvantages faced by Gypsies or Irish Travellers are brought on purely by bad 'choices'.

The fact of the matter is, Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers are ethnic groups, and generalising/stereotyping against them is racist. This racism towards Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers is often referred to as 'the last acceptable form of racism', the name of our [2017 report](#) which documented Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller people's experiences of discrimination, with 91% of respondents reporting being the victim of discrimination in some form. People reported having to hide their ethnicity to get jobs, being picked on by teachers for being a Traveller, and being turned away from registering at GP surgeries.

Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers have distinct and different cultures to each other, but they share a major thing characteristic: all experience incredibly poor outcomes across all social indicators here in the UK when compared to the rest of society; they experience economic inequality, poor educational and health outcomes, and an over-representation within the criminal justice system.

At present, Eastern European Roma are not monitored in any governmental data, despite suffering some of the worst poverty and inequalities. A key recommendation is to ensure that data on this ethnic group is captured.

Recommendations from 'the last acceptable form of racism?':

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month should be supported by the Department for Education and rolled out across all schools in the UK.
- Greater communication with primary health care providers is needed to ensure they understand that they cannot refuse to register GRT individuals because they do not have proof of their address.
- NHS England should update their data monitoring systems, as a matter of urgency, to include Gypsy and Irish Traveller categories, as per the 2011 Census.
- Discrimination and harassment training programmes in workplaces should refer to derogatory comments about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers as potential disciplinary offences so that employers and employees understand that such comments will not be tolerated.
- Development of resources and funding streams to support GRT NGOs and groups to assist GRT communities to challenge and engage on these issues.
- The police should take steps to ensure that they are fully complying with their statutory and equality duties in their treatment of complaints by GRT individuals or communities, thereby increasing GRT communities' confidence in their police service.



[Economic inequality](#)

[Employment and training](#)

Traditional methods of making a living for Gypsies and Travellers have diminished over the years, either becoming outlawed or outdated.

When compared with the general population, double the percentage of Gypsies and Travellers were in elementary employment (construction, sales, or service)¹

According to figures from the 2011 census:

“Over half of those who were economically active were employed (51 per cent compared to 75 per cent for the total of England and Wales) and 20 per cent were unemployed (compared to 7 per cent for the whole of England and Wales). Gypsy or Irish Traveller had the highest proportion of self-employed out of the ethnic groups at 26 per cent compared to 14 per cent for England and Wales”²

In 2012/13 0.1% of Gypsy or Irish Travellers aged 19 or over were participating in the Skills System. This compares to 22% of Black, Asian or Minority Group adults aged 19 or over³.

840 Gypsies and Irish Travellers started apprenticeships in England in the five years between 2011/12 and 2015/16, with between 150 and 200 starting in each academic year. Over this period, there were 2.5 million apprenticeship starts in total, meaning 0.03% of all apprenticeship starts were Gypsy or Irish Traveller apprentices⁴. In the 2011 census, around 55,000 Gypsies and Irish Travellers were counted, accounting for 0.01% of the population (though this is widely seen as an undercount, with the council of Europe predicting that there are around 150,00-300,000 Gypsies and Travellers living in the UK).

There are no specific, wide-scale government plans at present to address directly the lower-than-average economic inactivity.

Benefits

When the universal credit was proposed, the Traveller Movement warned in a [2014 report](#) that it would likely disproportionately and negatively affect Gypsy and Traveller families, due to: (i) larger family sizes (ii) insecure accommodation (iii) bank account access, discrimination and cultural, educational and skills barriers.

Since then, the universal credit is in the process of being rolled out, and a [2017 Friends, Families and Travellers report](#) on the topic has come to the same conclusions; that Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers who are on benefits will be pushed further in to poverty as a result of the universal credit.

¹ ONS, 2014 – [what does the census tell us about Gypsy and Traveller communities?](#)

² Ibid.

³ DCLG, *Reducing Inequalities for Gypsies and Travellers: Progress Report*, 4 April 2012, Chapter 7

⁴ Department for Education and Skills Funding Agency, FE data library: apprenticeships



Young people

According to the 2011⁵ census:

- GRT of all ages have the highest rates of economic inactivity - men 39% and women 60%
- 14% of GRT young people (16-24) are unemployed, the highest for any ethnic group.
- At almost a third, Gypsy and Irish Travellers were also most likely to be inactive (and not a student) at 31%.
- Only 30% of GRT young people are students, the lowest proportion for any ethnic group.

Recommendation:

- The Department for Work and Pensions needs to urgently consider the impact that universal credit will have on GRT communities specifically.
- The Department for Work and Pensions need to target GRT unemployment and hypothecate funds for GRT training and employment.



Education

Low educational attainment and progress is closely associated with economic disadvantage⁶. Pupils from an Irish Traveller background were most likely than any other ethnic group to be eligible for free school meals with 3 in 5 Key stage 4 pupils eligible in 2016. They are also most likely to be excluded from school, and to leave school without any formal qualifications.

Exclusions from School

The main facts and figures from the Race Disparity [Audit](#) show that in 2015/16, pupils from the Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma ethnic groups had the highest rates of both fixed period and permanent exclusions.

Fixed period exclusions by ethnicity:

- in 2015/16, Gypsy/Roma pupils and Travellers of Irish Heritage pupils had the highest rates of temporary ('fixed period') exclusions at 22.15% and 18.03% respectively

Permanent exclusions by ethnicity:

- in 2015/16, Traveller of Irish heritage pupils and Gypsy/Roma pupils had the highest rates of permanent exclusions, at 0.49% and 0.33% respectively

Percentage of fixed period exclusions by ethnicity and type of school

- in 2015/16, more than half of Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils received temporary ('fixed period') exclusions at secondary schools – the highest rate for any ethnic group
- Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils had the highest rate of temporary exclusions compared with all other ethnic groups at primary (5.66%), secondary (55.59%) and special schools (38.39%)

A report⁷ by the Children's Commissioner in 2012 highlighted the fact the Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) children are four times more likely to be excluded from school than the whole school population. The research also found that 100% of appeals against the exclusions of GRT pupils were successful, suggesting that a large number of exclusions were unfairly given.

A recent report⁸ by Traveller Movement found that 70% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) people had experienced discrimination in some form of education. The research found that GRT people, at all levels of education, were confronted with ill-informed stereotypes and in many cases blatant

⁶ Cabinet Office, 2017, Race Disparity Audit <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/static/race-disparity-audit-summary-findings.pdf>

⁷ Office for the Children's Commissioner, 2012 Never giving up on you <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/They-never-give-up-on-you-final-report.pdf>

⁸ <http://travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TMreport1J-FINAL.pdf>



racism. In our experience as an organization exclusions are often occur after a sustained period of unaddressed racist bullying⁹.

Educational attainment and outcomes

The poor outcomes for GRT communities in health and social integration have an impact on ability to access education. Educational outcomes are then likely to have an impact on the health and social integration of GRT community members.

GRT children underperform at every key stage. At the end of key stage 4 only 10.3% of Gypsy and Roma children and 21% of Irish Travellers *still in school* achieve GCSEs. For those who left formal education early, the figure is unknown but is almost definitely less than the percentages for those still in school.

Recommendations from Traveller Movement report 'never giving up on them', 2016

- DfE and the Children's Commissioner for England need to review how and why schools are excluding GTR pupils at such high levels.
- Government needs to ensure local authorities support, not cut, TESs or other educational support services who work with GTR at the local level.
- Full assessment of needs should be carried out before any exclusion for persistent disruptive behaviour and permanent exclusion to be used only as a last resort.
- In local authorities where the exclusion rate of any ethnicity is more than double the average for all pupils, the Local Authority should conduct a full review of those exclusions. This review should involve academy schools as well as schools under the control of the LA.
- Schools with Gypsy, Traveller or Roma pupils should form links with relevant local community groups to develop best practice for inclusion and cultural awareness.
- We agree with the view of the Children's Commissioner that Independent Review Panels should be given back the power to reinstate excluded pupils.
- Schools and local authorities need to place a specific emphasis on community and family learning initiatives.
- A national GRT community mentor scheme should be developed.

⁹ <http://travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Never-Giving-Up-On-Them.pdf>



Health inequalities

Gypsies and Travellers have a life expectancy of over 10% less than the general population (10-12 years). Other health issues such as high infant mortality rates, high maternal mortality rates, low child immunisation levels, mental health issues, substance misuse issues and diabetes are also seen to be prevalent in the Gypsy and Traveller communities.¹⁰

Furthermore, the European Commission sees similar health inequalities with Roma; “a high prevalence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature myocardial infarction, obesity, asthma and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression”¹¹

Wider social determinates of health

Accommodation insecurity, poor living environment, low education attainment, economic exclusion, community isolation and discrimination all have a negative impact on Gypsies’ and Travellers’ physical and mental health. Approximately 14-20% of Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans are situated on illegal sites and as such are legally classified as homeless, whilst half of all local authority Traveller sites in England suffer from environmental problems relating to adjoining land. These communities also experience low rates of economic activity and have the highest proportion with no qualifications for any ethnic group (60 per cent) – almost three times higher than for England and Wales as a whole (23 per cent). All these factors are compounded by high levels of discrimination and marginalization.

Recommendations from a Traveller Movement parliamentary health briefing, 2018

- Effective commissioning of health services to these communities
 - Each CCG should have a lead/champion for the four groups vulnerable to poor health (as classified by the NIHB and inclusive of Gypsies and Travellers).
- Update data monitoring systems and research
 - The NHS data dictionary should be updated to include Gypsies and Travellers.
 - MHCLG should commission a large scale epidemiological study similar to that undertaken by University of Sheffield in 2004.
- Community participation and community engagement training to frontline staff
 - Community engagement training should be provided to all frontline service providers, including social care, housing and planning officers, health professionals who are working with Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, and with an emphasis on face to face interaction rather than classroom training
 - Support third sector organizations to increase the number of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma employed/engaged in health and social care initiatives.

¹⁰ Ministerial Working Group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers, 2012, p12
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-inequalities-for-gypsies-and-travellers-progress-report>

¹¹ European commission (2013) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0454&from=en>



Conclusion

There is much to be done in regards to addressing inequalities for Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers. These groups experience poverty, insecure accommodation, poor health and educational outcomes and an over-representation in the criminal justice system.

The British Government are not doing enough, if anything, to address these systematic imbalances. Austerity has hit services catering to Travellers hard, with Traveller Education Support Services and the celebrating of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month cut in schools.

A Ministerial Working Group (MWG) was set up in 2012 to address GRT inequalities and it came up with 27 commitments to tackle inequalities.

The MWG's commitments are a selection of steps that may or may not make a tangible difference to the disadvantage and discrimination that GTR deal with on a daily basis.

They are not a strategy or an action plan – indeed, eight of them simply tag GRT groups onto existing mainstream policies¹². Nor are they comprehensive; for example, they do nothing to address the chronic shortage of Traveller sites across England, despite the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) concluding in 2009 that a lack of secure accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers remains “the lynchpin of a plethora of other inequalities”¹³.

Nothing was put in place to monitor compliance with the commitments and/or assess their impact. This is evident from the somewhat cursory response given by the MWG to an FOI request in 2014, which represents the only progress update on the MWG's 2012, and was only provided following an order from the Information Commissioner's Office.

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¹² Commitments 4, 5, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 27.

¹³ [Gypsies and Travellers: simple solutions for living together](#), ECHR, 2009