



The Traveller Movement

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Position paper – Anti-Gypsyism

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About The Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity, working in partnership with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, service providers and policy makers developing forward-looking strategies to challenge discrimination and promote increased race equality, social inclusion and community cohesion.

About Martin Gallagher

Martin Gallagher is an activist and an academic from the Irish Traveller community. He is an advocate for Travelling Ahead's Advocacy Service in Wales. He is also a member of the Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) advisory board at the Traveller Movement.

Introduction

In 2004 Sir Trevor Phillips described discrimination against Gypsy and Traveller communities as “the last respectable form of racism”. Although Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised as distinct ethnic minorities under the Equality Act(s), they continue to experience some of the highest levels of racism and discrimination of any ethnic group. Anti-Traveller rhetoric, or **Anti-Gypsyism**, is not often viewed as a form of racism, however Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have become racialised through negative stereotyping and, like all forms of racist rhetoric Anti-Gypsyism is intrinsically harmful.

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Anti-Gypsyism is recognised as “a specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as 'Gypsies' in the public imagination¹” and by the Council of Europe as “an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among others, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most blatant kind of discrimination²”.

If Anti-Gypsyism is interpreted exclusively as direct insults, racist abuse or the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, its wider manifestations are overlooked or ignored. Longstanding misconceptions of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has led to widespread intolerance and discrimination which has been embedded in institutions and systems, and has a devastating impact on their life chances. For decades Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have been sidelined or discarded across all policy areas, including planning and accommodation, education, health and social care, and are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Anti-Gypsyism is so severe that it prevents Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people from voting or engaging in democratic processes, or revealing their ethnicity for fear of discrimination³.

Attempts toward Gypsy, Roma and Traveller integration have to date been piecemeal. Currently, the UK does not have an implementable national Traveller or Roma inclusion policy, and whilst a cross-government strategy was announced in 2019⁴, one is yet to materialise. It is the view of the Traveller Movement, and other stakeholders, that the Government should implement a national strategy as a matter of priority; not only will this improve the life chances of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, it will also benefit the wider society and improve community cohesion by enabling greater social and economic inclusion.

Key issues and recommendations

Anti-Gypsyism in Politics

Anti-Gypsyism, or anti-Traveller rhetoric has for decades been a staple of British politics. Similar in its manifestations to Islamophobic or anti-Semitic discourse, its prominence in parliamentary debates is a cause for concern as the consequences are worryingly similar.

Politicians have a tendency to shy away from discussing Gypsies, Roma and Travellers altogether, as they view support for community members as ‘political suicide’. Or, there are those that use Gypsies and Travellers as political footballs in the run up to elections, with many often failing to recognise members as their constituents or potential voters. In refusing to represent community members as constituents, elected representatives enable Anti-Gypsyism to manifest in all areas of society.

¹ <http://Anti-Gypsyism.eu/>

² European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) 2011

³ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/equality-human-rights?download=69:sep-2017-the-last-acceptable-form-of-racism-the-pervasive-discrimination-and-prejudice-experienced-by-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-strategy-to-tackle-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-inequalities>

Politicians are frequently the source of discriminatory or racist abuse against Gypsies, Roma or Travellers. When MPs and other parliamentarians refer to Gypsies, Roma or Travellers in the chamber as an [invasion](#) or [like a disease](#) they serve only to dehumanise and increase the public's opposition towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This is extremely harmful. Research has shown that racist or derogatory language by politicians against minority groups can lead to [a spike in hate crimes](#), whilst racist and irresponsible reporting in the media can lead to [a backlash against all community members](#).

Parliamentary debates should be solution focused, and not merely a platform for venting prejudice against ethnic minority groups. The role of an elected representative is to represent all their constituents, inclusive of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The Government must revise the Parliamentary Code of Conduct to include specific references to hate speech. This has worked effectively in the Welsh Assembly⁵. Parliamentarians who abuse their position by using hateful language must face sanction. This sets an example to other parliamentarians, but also to wider society about what is or isn't acceptable to say when discussing minority ethnic or religious groups.

Political parties/independents should also make similar changes and adjustments to include specific references to hate speech in the Codes of Conduct for their own parties.

Hate Crime and Discrimination

Traveller Movement research⁶ found that 91% of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity, 77% of respondents had experienced hate speech or hate crime, and 77% had not sought help after suffering discrimination. A survey conducted by YouGov⁷ on behalf of the Traveller Movement found that over a third of parents in Britain would be unhappy with their child having a play date at the home of a Gypsy or Traveller.

An analysis of the reporting website Report Racism GRT⁸ found that only 20% of reported incidents were passed to the police, with reasons being a lack of trust the police would act, or the incidents were far too common. Additionally, whilst the UK Home Office has made a commitment to implement 18+1 census categories in their monitoring systems, but progress has been far too slow. This must be urgently addressed.

Race hate crime amounts to 82% of all reported hate crimes nationally. It should be mandatory for all the UK CJS agencies to include the 2011 Census racial,

⁵ See Brown and Sinclair (2019) The Politics of Hate Speech Laws

⁶ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/userupload/reports/last-acceptable-form-of-racism-traveller-movement-report.pdf>

⁷ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/equality-human-rights?download=68:oct-2017-yougov-poll-finds-shocking-racism-toward-gypsies-and-travellers>

⁸ <http://www.gateherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Recognise-Report-Resolve.pdf>

ethnic and national group categories in their monitoring systems. This would ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller hate crime is recorded correctly. This sends a message that crimes committed against them will be accurately reflected in statistics.

Education

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children continue to have the worst educational outcomes of all ethnic groups⁹. School experiences tend to be marred by racist bullying, low expectations from teachers and senior leadership, and poor understanding by school teams regarding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and heritage.

Research¹⁰ by the Traveller Movement found that poor responses to racial harassment and weak anti-bullying policies undermines teachers, diminishes trust in pupils and their parents, and prevents children from flourishing at school. Unaddressed racist bullying is also a significant contributor to school exclusion and early school leaving. Nothing is taught about the communities in school, so negative stereotypes live on.

It is therefore no surprise that these children continue to have negative experiences of education and far worse outcomes compared to other children. Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma ethnic groups have the highest rates of both fixed period and permanent exclusions. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils also underperform in SATs, and again at GCSE's with less than 20% of Irish Travellers and less than 10% of Gypsy/Roma students achieving 5 GCSE's at A* - C.

The Department for Education must commit to the curricular inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, as well as a national education framework to improve educational outcomes and to raise attainment.

Police and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Traveller Movement research *Policing by Consent*¹¹ found that the relationship between Police and Traveller communities is fraught with difficulty and mistrust, with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ethnicities treated as a risk factor. Not only are Travellers less likely to report crime to the Police, there is evidence to suggest that Police officers use racist or derogatory language toward Traveller communities. Further Traveller Movement research found that, of the 44 police forces in the UK, only 9 record Gypsies, Roma or Travellers as ethnic groups, meaning that they cannot therefore be ethnically recorded as victims of crime. This is institutionally racist, and must be rectified as a matter of priority.

Police forces should implement the 18+1 census categories across all 44 police forces nationwide as a matter of priority.

⁹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/latest>

¹⁰ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=122:a-good-practice-guide-for-improving-outcomes-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-in-education>

¹¹ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/criminal-justice?download=49:jun-2018-policing-by-consent-understanding-and-improving-relations-between-gypsies-roma-irish-travellers-and-the-police>

Police forces must build trust and confidence among the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities by improving the police's commitment to respond effectively to complaints of crime, including hate crime.

Recommendations

- The Government must revise the Parliamentary Code of Conduct to include specific references to hate speech. This has worked effectively in the Welsh Assembly¹². Parliamentarians who abuse their position by using hateful language must face sanction. This sets an example to other parliamentarians, but also to wider society about what is or isn't acceptable to say when discussing minority ethnic or religious groups.
- Political parties/independents should also make similar changes and adjustments to include specific references to hate speech in the Codes of Conduct for their own parties.
- Race hate crime amounts to 82% of all reported hate crimes nationally. It should be mandatory for all the UK CJS agencies to include the 2011 Census racial, ethnic and national group categories in their monitoring systems. This would ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller hate crime is recorded correctly. This sends a message that crimes committed against them will be accurately reflected in statistics.
- The Department for Education must commit to the curricular inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month.
- A national education framework should be devised and implemented to improve educational outcomes and to raise attainment.
- Police forces should implement the 18+1 census categories across all 44 police forces nationwide as a matter of priority.
- Police forces must build trust and confidence among the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities by improving the police's commitment to respond effectively to complaints of crime, including hate crime

¹² See Brown and Sinclair (2019) The Politics of Hate Speech Laws