



# Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on the rights of Romani, Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the United Kingdom

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A report by the Traveller Movement



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## About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

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# Preface

This report presents the perspective of the Traveller Movement and our members to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). It offers a detailed examination of the state of race and racism in England, focusing specifically on the experiences of Romani, Roma, and Irish Traveller communities.

The report has been drafted following consultations with our Trustees, National Advisory Group, Youth Advisory Group, wider stakeholder networks, and individual members who are dedicated to promoting race equality and human rights. This collaborative effort ensures that the voices of those directly impacted by racial discrimination are central to our submission.

Our aim is to shed light on the systemic issues and barriers faced by these marginalized communities and to advocate for meaningful change. We hope this report contributes to the broader dialogue on racial equality and inspires concrete actions to combat racial discrimination in all its forms.

# Acknowledgements

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

We want to thank all those who contributed to this submission including all our Trustees, Advisory Group and Youth Advisory Group members, our sector network and individual members their insights, expertise and lived experience are essential to all the work we do at the Traveller Movement. In particular we want to thank our Trustee Judge Rosemary Lloyd without whom this submission would have been impossible.

# Introduction

This report compiled by the Traveller Movement aims to provide a perspective as to the systemic racism faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK). This report finds that the UK government is in breach of many articles of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and that the government has failed to ensure the adequate advancement of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people and that these communities do not enjoy on equal footing human rights and fundamental freedoms in any realm of public life.

## Note on terminology

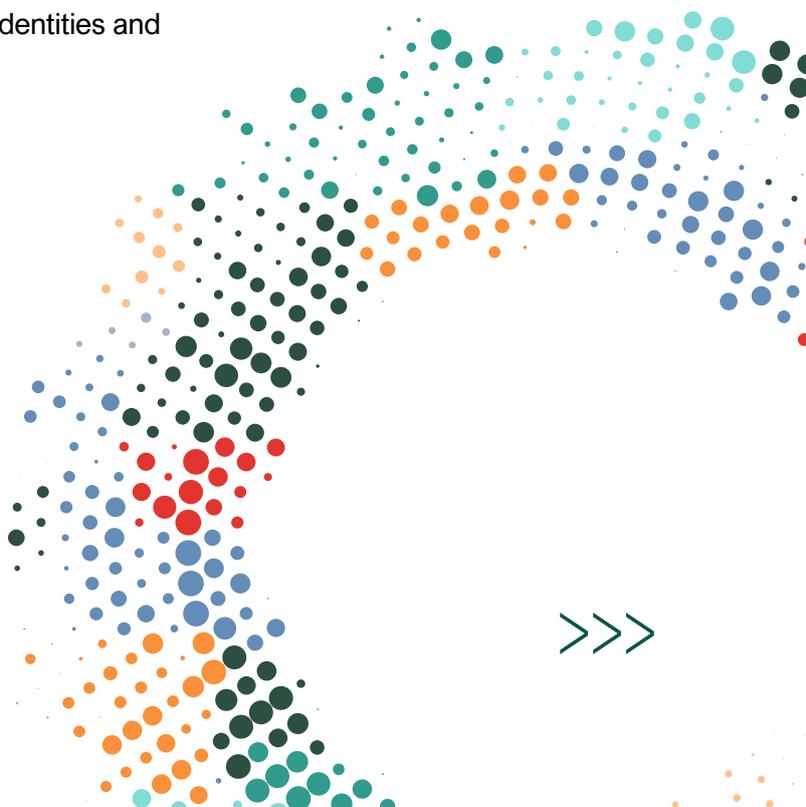
Throughout this document we use the term Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller to describe distinct ethnic groups which are protected under the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act'). The Act specifically protects ethnic 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' people providing a framework to protect the communities from unfair and discriminatory treatment. Most importantly the Act creates a duty for public bodies to monitor and tackle discrimination in the provision of public services.

Often the term Gypsy, Roma and Traveller is used to encompass Romani, Roma, Irish Travellers, Mincéirs, Pavees, Nachins/ Nawkens, Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, Welsh Romani, Showpeople, Boaters, and Bargees. This document acknowledges that any umbrella terms used to group together a wide and diverse range of distinct ethnic minorities with shared cultural norms, traditions and values, whose mostly common shared cultural norm is their nomadic traditions cannot be universal or wholly reflective of diverse communities. There are limits to categorisation and no categorisation framework can exhaustively take into account complex and interconnecting ethnicities, identities and communities.

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*“This report finds that the UK government is in breach of many articles of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and that the government has failed to ensure the adequate advancement of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people”*

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# Article 1: Defining discrimination

Effective ethnic data monitoring is a cornerstone of effective policy making at a government level, without so called ‘big data’ it can be very difficult to meaningfully tackle the disparities facing any ethnically minoritised community. In order for public bodies to discharge their duties under the Act they must have the ability to accurately capture the demographics of individuals accessing public services or otherwise interacting with public bodies. This is vital, insofar as that accurate data collection can effectively inform the approach of public bodies in both the commissioning and delivery of public services. A robust and inclusive framework which, as far as is practicable, reflects the ways in which individuals understand and navigate their own ethnicities will also help build trust in public bodies.

The current gold standard of ethnic monitoring the UK is the ONS 19+1 system which was first used in the 2021 Census. This data system captures ‘Gypsy or Irish Traveller’ and ‘Roma’ as separate ethnic groups under the White category.<sup>1</sup> This ONS system is not universal across all public bodies, whilst most public bodies have some form of ethnic monitoring and data collection in place, data collection as it pertains to Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller populations is often insufficient compared with other ethnic minorities. For instance, the NHS data dictionary does not include Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities meaning there is no ethnic data gathering for a group of communities with significantly worse health outcomes than the general population. A lack of consistent ethnic monitoring across all public bodies makes it very difficult to cross reference data and therefore difficult to make meaningful policy interventions which take into account the overlapping inequalities faced by the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. The Traveller Movement has repeatedly called for full disaggregated data collection across all public bodies and for these ethnic data categories to be consistent across all public bodies.

The lack of a cross-departmental action plan tackling the overlapping inequalities faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the UK has been consistently recognised as a pressing issue. Previous reports by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have called upon the government to develop a cross-departmental comprehensive strategy which ensures a systemic and coherent approach to address the challenges these communities face. The UK government in response to the landmark 2019 report by the Women and Equalities Committee committed to the development of a ‘cross-governmental strategy to improve outcomes for GRT communities’.<sup>2</sup> There has been widespread acknowledgement of the need for special measures to tackle the discrimination faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people and the persistent poor outcomes they experience in a wide range of areas such as health, education, criminal justice, housing and access to services. Yet in 2024 the Government stated that there were no plans to develop a standalone cross-departmental strategy.<sup>3</sup>

The answer given by the government reflects the new approach to tackling inequalities which looks at going beyond ‘the narrow focus of protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010, focusing instead on socio-economic situation and geographic inequalities’<sup>4</sup>. An approach such as this one does nothing to discharge the governments responsibilities under ICERD and reflects the government’s failure to incorporate ICERD into domestic law which disallows petitions being brought when aspects of the ICERD are breached.



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1 gov.uk, Ethnicity Facts and Figures, [List of ethnic groups](#) (2021).

2 The Women and Equalities Select Committee, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), (2019).

3 Question for Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Travellers: Equality](#), (14 May 2024).

4 Press Release, [‘Fight For Fairness’ speech to set out government’s new approach to equality](#), (17 December 2020).

## Recommendations<sup>5</sup>

Develop a comprehensive cross-governmental action plan which addresses the systemic inequalities faced by the communities across all public bodies and in all aspects of public life.

Incorporate the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) into domestic law. This will allow individuals and organizations to take legal action under ICERD when aspects of the convention are breached.

Ensure that all public bodies adopt the ONS 19+1 system for ethnic monitoring, which includes 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' and 'Roma' as separate ethnic groups under the White category. This will enable accurate demographic data collection and facilitate meaningful policy interventions.

Implement a consistent and comprehensive framework for ethnic data monitoring across all governmental bodies to address the insufficient data collection for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller populations.

## Article 2: Legal mechanisms for ensuring equality

The Act brought together 116 distinct pieces of legislation together under a single Act. The Act provides a clear legal framework that protects the rights of all individuals from unfair and discriminatory treatment and promotes equality of opportunity for all. The Act specifically recognises ethnic Romani (Gypsies), Roma, and Irish Travellers as distinct ethnic minorities, and builds on previous race relations legislation to establish a clear and unambiguous legal duty for public bodies to monitor and tackle discrimination in the provision of public services. The Act establishes the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which makes public bodies subject to the requirements of the Act in the exercise of their functions. However, the PSED only requires public bodies to have 'due regard' to the requirements under the Act this means that while public bodies must consider the potential impacts of their decisions on protected groups, they are not legally obligated to conduct formal impact assessments or to demonstrate that they have mitigated any negative effects.

The Traveller Movement through its work often finds that many people who work in public services are not aware that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities are protected under the Act. This is demonstrated by a 2017 YouGov poll conducted by the Traveller Movement which found that two-thirds of the population do not believe that Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller are legally protected ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> This has widespread ramifications in the lives of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller particularly in their interactions with public services. Further research conducted by the Traveller Movement found that 90% of Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Travellers had experienced discrimination while accessing public services.<sup>7</sup> These figures demonstrate that public bodies are failing to discharge their duties under the Act.

The experience and work of the Traveller Movement shows that the Act is breached without challenge, often because those who experience the discrimination do not understand their rights under the Act, nor do they understand how to enforce those rights. What little enforcement does occur is insufficient to tackle the widespread and often 'routine' discrimination which Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people experience in their day-to-day lives. An active effort must be made to ensure people are aware of their rights and recourses when they are experiencing discrimination, and also that those who work within the public service are aware of their obligations under the Act.

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<sup>5</sup> All recommendations are aimed at the UK government.

<sup>6</sup> YouGov/Traveller Movement, [Polling Results](#), (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



There are no in-built enforcement measures for the PSED, often leaving the Act toothless, and leaving it down to individuals to take legal cases against public bodies when their rights have been breached. It is also clear that the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) robustly fails in its role as an enforcer of equality law.<sup>8</sup> It is clear without increased powers which allow the EHRC to sanction public bodies who breach equality law there will remain an undue burden on individuals. Because of the nature of standing under the legislation only an individual who has experienced discriminatory practices can act. This often requires individuals to have in-depth knowledge and understanding of complex equalities legislation and their rights under it and more importantly in some cases to have the resources to tackle it. This individualistic approach does nothing to tackle entrenched and systemic inequalities. There is a lack of public funding to help discrimination victims bring claims to challenge the discrimination they have experienced.

## Recommendations

Reform the Act to place an explicit duty on governmental departments to consider the potential impact on protected groups, ensuring that policy decisions and public services are inclusive and equitable.

To ensure the effective enforcement and accessibility of the Act, it is crucial to provide public funding for individuals and for organisations pursuing strategic litigation pursuing discrimination cases under this legislation.

Alter the standing rules under the Act to reduce the burden on individuals and enable meaningful strategic litigation aimed at tackling systemic racial discrimination. This will empower marginalized communities to seek justice and hold institutions accountable.

Take all appropriate steps to encourage the EHRC to use its powers more effectively to secure greater compliance with the PSE). This will ensure that public bodies are held accountable for their responsibilities under the Act.

## Article 4: Media and hate speech

The media plays a large role in the image of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities held by a large part of the UK, particularly because most people have limited contact with the communities outside of this portrayal. Therefore, media framing of the communities plays a huge role in the discrimination faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people. A seminal report called 'Media that Moves' conducted by LEEDSGATE and London Gypsies and Travellers found that in three years of coverage of the 12 biggest online newspapers, there were 365 news stories, features and opinion pieces about the communities. This, the report argues, shows that the issue is both overrepresentation and misrepresentation. Much of this overreporting is distorted and exaggerated, often depicting community members as criminals (pixelating their faces) and linking stories about the communities with stock images of waste and rubbish. This follows a trend with media sources to link racialised communities with waste products.

This persistent hostile treatment has a real impact in the experiences and lives of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers. Not only does it feed into the wider negative image of the communities enhancing risks of experiencing institutional racism, following the release of programmes such as My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding, Gypsies on Benefits and Proud, and The Truth About Traveller Crime there is a reported uptick in hate crime and hate speech.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Women & Equalities Committee, *Enforcing the Equality Act: the law and the role of the EHRC inquiry*, (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Greenfields, *Hate as Regular as Rain*, (2012).



This negative coverage is rarely challenged by the UK Government and is often fuelled by political representatives from across the political spectrum. Prominent politicians engage in hate speech whipping up hatred in their constituencies when local councils attempt to discharge their legal duty to provide site provision,<sup>10</sup> or using dehumanising and othering language to describe the communities in public settings<sup>11</sup>. This kind of hate speech has real world consequences for these communities and often whips up hatred in constituencies where Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people live. Occasionally the Traveller Movement has complained to the Parliamentary Standards Committee or to the leader of parliamentary parties but there have been no consequences to these parliamentarians. 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 Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.

## Recommendations

Revise the Parliamentary Code of Conduct to include specific references to hate speech. 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.

# Article 5:

## a. Hate crime

In 2016 the Traveller Movement commissioned a MORI discrimination survey which found that 98% of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller respondents had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity, yet despite this experience 74% did not seek legal advice or advocacy.<sup>12</sup> There are many reasons for the underreporting of hate crimes by these communities, but it is also important to note that the official hate crime statistics released which cover 2022/23 did not include Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities.

This highlights a major issue with the underreporting of hate crimes for these communities which is the lack of consistent ethnic data monitoring which is inclusive of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities. Although it is a requirement under their PSED the majority of UK police forces do not capture Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities in their data systems. This lack of data gathering means that criminal sector agencies have no data with which to develop clarity on the extent to which these communities experience hate crime. It also reinforces the idea that crimes committed against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people are not taken seriously. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the British Crime Survey does not survey those who live on sites only those who live in bricks and mortar accommodation.

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10 Traveller Times, 'Traveller charity hits back at MP over claim that its complaint was "politically motivated', (2024).

11 PoliticsJOE, 'Reform's only MP Lee Anderson stands by his anti-traveller comments on International Romani Day', (2024).

12 The Traveller Movement, Briefing: Hate Crime, discrimination and the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, (2016).



A significant barrier to the reporting is the historical mistrust of authorities of the state and the increasingly hostile relationship between police and the communities has not been alleviated by the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 ('the Police Act') which essentially criminalises the traditional way of life of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. The introduction of this Act is the culmination of many years of the legislative stripping back of the right to live a traditional way of life – such as the introduction of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013. Such targeted legislation increases the tensions and distrust between Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities and the police. This distrust stems from many years of negative experiences with authority figures, including local authorities, the police and even schools. In addition, the distrust is exacerbated by contact with the police usually being in the form of police enforcement action, e.g. enforcement of eviction notices and the exercising of search warrants.

Underreporting by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities is fuelled by the lack of action in resolving the crime, not just by the police but also the courts. In the event Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people report racist offences against them, courts rarely – in our experience – impose increased penalties for such offences. This largely seems to be because there is little political pressure on the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to prosecute, or to see such discrimination as a racially aggravated offence.

## Recommendations

The UK government should actively work to improve relationships between Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities and the police.

The UK government should ensure that hate crime data is collected by the 19+1 ethnic data monitoring system.

## b. The right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice

### Policing

Research<sup>13</sup> by the Traveller Movement on policing Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the UK found that of the 45 territorial police forces only two had targeted strategies and/or plans for improving relations with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. Police officers and community members who participated in the research described the protected ethnicities being treated as a risk factor by the police, indicating that there is an entrenched discriminatory approach to policing these communities. In addition to these findings, TM regularly receives reports from police officers, community members and service providers that the police have at times advised them to deny Romani (Gypsies) or Irish Travellers access to their establishments (e.g. restaurants, pubs, bars). Within this research, police respondents reported Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities being associated with crime and/or violence and recounted higher police turnouts to calls regarding incidents involving Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people compared to other communities.

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13 The Traveller Movement, [Policing by Consent](#), (2018).



This research also highlighted the prevalence of discriminatory and racist language used by police officers to describe Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people. This language often goes unchallenged; police forces are failing to eliminate unlawful discrimination and instead are perpetuating it. The report attributes this widespread discrimination to a systemic issue within police forces with interviewees noting that disciplinary procedures are not applied equally to instances of anti-Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller hate.

Despite the widespread discrimination faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller people within police forces, there has been little targeted action or review by the government to address this issue. The Baroness Casey Review which looked the Metropolitan Police Departments culture and standards of behaviour and concluded that there is institutional racism, sexism and homophobia, inside the organisation there was no mention of the organisations treatment of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people.

## Recommendations

A root and branch review of each police force should be conducted by HM's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. This should include an assessment of the extent of institutional bias within individual police forces and take account of the findings from this research that Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities experience policing differently from non-Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities.

A neighbourhood policing approach should be developed to better support a positive relationship between officers and Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller individuals and communities.

Police training packages are important. They should be focused less on 'cultural competency' and more on change impact assessment, produced and delivered in liaison with community organisations and members. This would allow police to evaluate the impact of everyday practice on the confidence and trust of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities, as well as providing an opportunity to work together to improve relations and promote institutional change.

## Sentencing

Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller people are overrepresented at almost every part of the criminal justice system. Minority ethnic defendants are more likely to receive custodial sentences and less likely to receive community sentences than White British defendants.<sup>14</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that people from a Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller background may be more likely to be placed on remand and refused bail, with a lack of use of diversionary schemes and community sentences. A lack of understanding by probation officers, youth justice officers, magistrates and judges about the fact that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people are distinct ethnicities protected under the Act and the complex array of factors that have led to such overrepresentation of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers in the criminal justice system. This issue persists throughout all age groups; the disproportionate representation of young Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers in the youth prison estate continues to grow.

It is well documented that short-term custodial sentences with supervision on release are associated with a higher instance of reoffending than community sentences or suspended sentence orders. There has been a 46% decline in the use of community sentences in the last ten years in England & Wales.<sup>15</sup> Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people, alongside those from other ethnic minority backgrounds, tend to be given custodial sentences over diversionary programmes. The overuse of remand, and lack of opportunity to partake in community-based schemes and rehabilitative programmes, disadvantage already marginalised communities and increases existing ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system as a whole.

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14 The Traveller Movement, *Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women in Prison*, (2021).

15 Centre for Justice Innovation, *Smarter Community Sentences*, (2020).



In a 2023 report by the Traveller Movement<sup>16</sup> it was highlighted the role Pre-Sentence Reports (PSR) play in this discriminatory sentencing. PSRs represent an important form of communication between probation officers as report writers and judges as report readers. They form part of the sentencing process and give the sentencing judge (or magistrate) an idea of the defendant's background and the most suitable course of action in light of their offence. A good PSR should give the court a full and well-balanced picture of who the offender is, their background, and any needs they have and should be a chance to address any discriminatory bias that may exist before passing a sentence. But the Traveller Movements report highlights how these reports are often biased against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people – reinforcing stereotypes and misinformation about the communities. Over the last number of years there has been an effort to increase the number of Fast Delivery Reports and move away from more detailed standard reports and to have more PSRs produced by Probation Service Operators rather than Probation Officers. The target being that 10% of reports should be Standard Delivery, and there should be a 60/30 split between oral and written fast reports.

## Recommendations

Increase the availability and use of diversionary schemes and community-based programs for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller offenders. These programs should be culturally sensitive and designed to address the specific needs of these communities.

Conduct a comprehensive review of remand practices to ensure fair and equitable treatment of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller defendants. Encourage the use of bail and reduce the over-reliance on remand, especially for non-violent and first-time offenders.

Ensure that PSRs are free from bias and stereotypes. Establish a review mechanism to regularly assess the quality of PSRs for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller individuals, ensuring they provide a balanced and accurate portrayal of the defendant's background and circumstances.

Establish a monitoring system to track sentencing patterns and outcomes for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller individuals. This data should be used to identify and address disparities, ensuring accountability within the criminal justice system.

## Prisons

As one of the smallest ethnic groups in the UK, Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system. In surveys distributed around all prisons in England and Wales for the 2019/20 HMIP Annual Report, 5% of male prisoners and 7% of female prisoners reporting that they came from an Irish Traveller background.<sup>17</sup> The number of Roma people in prison is currently not accounted for. The absence of Roma people from official monitoring has meant, for example, that it is impossible to analyse whether sentencing decisions or reoffending rates for Roma people are proportionate. Anecdotal evidence from prison staff reports exceptionally high rates of Roma and migrant Roma people in UK prisons. Roma people can find themselves isolated with English often not being a primary language.

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller youth in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs) are even more disproportionately represented. The 2019/20 Children in Custody report highlighted that nearly 10% of children in the youth estate came from a Traveller background.<sup>18</sup> Those who self-identified as Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers were more likely to report feeling unsafe while in custody, more likely to report having drug problems, and were significantly more likely than those from non-Traveller backgrounds to report that they had been forced to assault another young person.

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16 The Traveller Movement, [Fair Sentencing for Romani \(Gypsy\), Roma and Irish Traveller People](#), (2023).

17 HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons, [Annual Report 2019-20](#), (2020).

18 HM Inspectorate of Prisons, [Children in Custody 2019-20](#), (2021).



In both the adult and youth estate Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers are more likely than the general population to be engaged in purposeful activities such as employment and vocational training. However, as the Traveller Movement reports in *Available but not Accessible*<sup>19</sup> although the communities are engaging these activities are rarely suited to the needs of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller individuals, and therefore, are not acting as effective tools for rehabilitation and for improving mental wellbeing in prisons. Many prisons in the UK have continued to operate under Covid-19 style restrictions even after the pandemic has subsided. These measures were initially implemented to curb the spread of the virus, but some facilities have maintained strict protocols, citing ongoing health concerns and logistical challenges. These ongoing measures have raised concerns among human rights organizations, families of inmates, and prison reform advocates. Arguing that prolonged restrictions are detrimental to inmates' mental health, rehabilitation prospects, and overall well-being.

## Recommendations

The Ministry of Justice must adopt a racial justice action plan across the youth secure estate.

HMPPS should undertake mandatory tailored assessments of purposeful activities to address the needs of minoritised communities.

Cultural competency training programmes for HMPPS staff should be targeted and mandatory. Training should reflect the specific prison populations of each establishment.

## c. The right to employment

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people are economically inactive at a higher rate than their White British counterparts in every category other than retirement, reflecting the very small proportion of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population aged 65+. The high rates of economic inactivity, particularly for the reason of long-term unemployment, reflect the poor rates of overall educational attainment, and further evidence the long-term impact of negative experiences and outcomes in schooling. The 2021 Census data found that only 37.4% of 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' are economically active in comparison to 74.4% of the White British population. However, 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' have higher rates of self-employment than their White British counterparts reflecting the cultural preference for self-employment, although many traditional forms of self-employment have been cut off due to restrictive legislations such as the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013.

'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' people are economically inactive through sickness or disability at more than 3 times the rate of the White British group, which strongly reflects the poorer levels of general health, and higher levels of limiting disability, outlined in previous sections. Whilst the percentage of Roma who are economically inactive due to sickness or disability is lower than for the White British group, it is still relatively high when compared with the very low incidence of disability reported by Roma respondents to the 2021 census. However, Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people are much more likely to be self-employed than the White British population.

In a report published by the Traveller Movement it is evidence that discrimination plays a large role in economic inactivity, with many young Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people saying that they chose to hide their ethnicity when accessing employment opportunities.<sup>20</sup> Many of those young people who hadn't had jobs said they knew they would be discriminated against and therefore didn't even want to try applying for jobs.

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19 The Traveller Movement, *Available but not Accessible*, (2023).

20 The Traveller Movement, *Roads to Success*, (2022).



## Recommendations

Develop employment services and apprenticeships specifically tailored to the needs of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller job seekers. These services should provide career counselling, job placement assistance, and support in navigating the job market.

There is an active need to include targeted support for self-employed Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller individuals, including access to business grants, loans, and training programs on financial literacy and business management.

Establish business incubators and mentorship programs to further foster entrepreneurship within these communities.

## d. The right to education and training

### School Exclusions

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children have the lowest attainment rate of all ethnic groups across all schooling years. This is due to several compounding disadvantages within the education system, one of which is the high level of exclusions. The Timpson Review of School Exclusions highlight how overlapping disadvantages place pupils at an increased risk of being excluded, highlighting in particular ethnicity, economic disadvantage and being diagnosed SEND. Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children are five times more likely to be excluded from school than the wider population.<sup>21</sup> The figures from 2021/22 show that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils have the highest suspension rate<sup>22</sup> of all ethnic groups with 'Gypsy/Roma' being recorded at a rate of 25.63 and 'Traveller of Irish heritage' being recorded at a rate of 19.34.<sup>23</sup> The rate of permanent exclusions is similarly disproportionate with the rate of permanent exclusions of both 'Gypsy/Roma' and 'Traveller of Irish heritage' being recorded at 0.31%.<sup>24</sup>

The impact of school exclusion on a child's life can be profound, and the stark ethnic disparities in who experiences this impact create ripple effects that influence the lives of everyone in the affected communities. Depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, psychological distress, and an increased likelihood of psychopathology may all be experienced as a direct result of exclusion from school.<sup>25</sup> Further to this, the connection between permanent or temporary exclusion from school and future contact with the criminal justice service is undeniable. With the former Director-General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey saying in 2001, "the 13,000 young people excluded from school each year might as well be given a prison sentence".<sup>26</sup>

There appears to be no efforts by the government to tackle this large-scale ethnic disparity with a recent question being put to the Department for Education showing that there are no targeted efforts to reduce the disparity in attainment.<sup>27</sup> Without focusing specifically on tackling widespread issue with institutional racism there can be no real changes to the attainment gap.



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21 Ellie Mulcahy et al., *The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils*, (2017), 21.

22 number of pupils per 10,000.

23 Ethnicity Facts and Figures, *Pupil Exclusions*, (2022).

24 31 exclusions for every 10,000 pupils. Ethnicity Facts and Figures, *Permanent Exclusions*, (2022).

25 T. Ford et al., 'The relationship between exclusion from school and mental health: a secondary analysis of the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 and 2007', *Psychological Medicine*, 48:4 (2017), 629-641.

26 Common Sense, "Pupils excluded from school might as well be given a prison sentence" – former Director-General, (2020).

27 Question for Department for Education, *Education: Travellers*, (2024).

## Persistent Absence

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children have the highest percentage rate of absence of any ethnic group. The average percentage rate of absence for the year 2021/22 was 7.6%. For 'Gypsy/Roma' children this figure was 17.8% and for 'Traveller of Irish heritage' children this figure was 22.1%. This figure is continuously increasing with the figures in 2017/18 being 13% for 'Traveller of Irish heritage' children and 18.8% for 'Gypsy/Roma' children.<sup>28</sup> To put this into perspective Irish Traveller children were losing on average almost one full day of education per week, compared to approximately one per month which is the national average. Persistent absenteeism is often an early indication that something is not right and that an adverse factor is causing that child to not want to attend school. Whilst the reasons can be varied, in many cases we have found that a lack of attendance is due to a negative experience that child may be having in school.

High levels of persistent absence demonstrate the wider issue facing Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils which is schools either through action or inaction create a persistent toxic educational environment which forces children and their families to withdraw from formal educational environments. This environment makes it untenable or unsafe for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children to remain enrolled in the school. Further to this it includes the behavioural management systems and formal exclusion processes which are disproportionately used against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children.

A significant issue many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families face is where schools and local authorities issue non-attendance fines or refer quickly to attendance legal panels and fines without sufficiently communicating with their pupils and families to solve the issues behind the persistent absenteeism. This punitive way of dealing with persistent absenteeism only punishes parents for attempting to protect their children without making meaningful steps to combat underlining issues.

## Racist Bullying

The Traveller Movements casework and wider advocacy work over a number of years has consistently demonstrated the link between racist bullying, exclusions, low attendance and low attainment. This racist bullying comes in all forms and from every aspect of the school community, this in the Traveller Movements experience is at the heart of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children's low attainment rate. In our view the stigma associated with being a member of the communities, along with exclusionary and bullying behaviour from peers and staff, causes Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children to see school as a place that is not for them. Our casework also reveals that teaching staff often have low expectations of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children, often stating that the children 'will be taken out of schools anyway' and so they do not have to address issues the child is having.

It is reasonable to understand that negative experiences based on a child's ethnicity would encourage them to avoid attending school, this in turn results in several compounding experiences which often leads to poor/distressed behaviour. From distressed behaviour we see a regular pattern of children becoming placed on behaviour management plans, either until the point of exclusion or with their removal from school in favour of home education.

Although schools are required to have behaviour policies which include strategies to address ethnicity-based bullying these policies are often not seen as relevant when dealing with incidents involving Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children. This lack of intervention by schools often leads to retaliation by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children. Schools have a responsibility to safeguard children and address incidents of racist bullying before they escalate to violence, but this frequently does not happen.

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28 [Pupil absence in schools in England: 2017 to 2018](#), Published 21 March 2019.



There is currently no statutory requirement for schools, academy trusts or local authorities to monitor, record, and report instances of racism or racist bullying in schools.<sup>29</sup> Many institutions have implemented schemes for such monitoring to take place at a local level. This approach is welcome but a lack of clearly defined national frameworks leads to patchy implementation with different institutions working to different systems of accountability. This has created a 'postcode lottery'. The support that children and families can access varies significantly across, and sometimes even within, different geographic areas.

## Elective Home Education

Due to the cumulative effects of these issues Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller parents often opt to home educate their children. The issue with home education is that there is no central way of tracking which children are being home educated, there is no home education register. Home education can be a great way to protect a child, but feeling forced to home educate your child with no assistance from the educational system can be problematic. Many parents in these communities have low literacy levels, making it challenging for them to provide a comprehensive education. This situation jeopardizes the child's right to receive a quality education and limits their future opportunities, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and social exclusion. Without proper support and resources, these children may fall behind their peers academically and socially, which can have long-term effects on their personal development and integration into broader society. The lack of a formal education framework also means that these children might miss out on crucial social interactions and extracurricular opportunities that are essential for holistic development. Therefore, it is crucial to address these systemic issues to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have access to quality education and the necessary support to succeed.

Elective home education can also hide unlawful practices adopted by schools. The most common route of off-rolling experienced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families is when a school strongly encourages or even forces parents to opt for home education. This can happen for several reasons, such as poor attendance, bullying challenges, difficulties integrating, staff not understanding Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families, or becoming frustrated with transient families. Regardless of the reason behind schools off-rolling Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children to home education, all are unlawful.

To combat this issue the Traveller Movement is recommending the Department for Education implements a policy which requires schools to centrally report the instances of children who are registered at school and then opt for home education. Additionally, the reason for opting for home education and the background of the child (race, age, pupil premium, SEND) should also be captured. The policy should also place a duty on schools, encouraging them to retain existing children whose families are seeking to opt for home education, to ensure that all necessary support is given, and disputes resolved so that children are not being withdrawn from school due to a lack of support or engagement from the school.

## Recommendations

Urgently adopt a strategy to tackle the disproportionality faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children in exclusions.

Develop a statutory framework to ensure that all incidents of racism and racist bullying in schools are monitored, recorded and reported centrally to both the DfE and relevant local authority.

Ensure a Race Equality & Diversity Policy is made a statutory element of the PSED for all schools.

Amend the Act to enable First Tier Tribunals to hear claims of discrimination by a school on grounds of a pupil's ethnicity any other protected characteristic.

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29 Question for Department for Education, [Schools: Bullying](#), (2024).



# e. The right to public health, medical care, social security and social service

## Physical and Mental Health Inequalities

One of the biggest barriers in health access for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the UK is that the NHS data model and data dictionary is not inclusive of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities. This means there is no comprehensive governmental data on the health outcomes and experiences for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities apart from the 2021 Census data. Although the health inequalities for these communities have been researched extensively by academics and civil society organisations and therefore the non-Governmental evidence base is comprehensive, it is insufficient to assess the full extent of negative health experiences of the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller populations.

Through this extensive research gathered through non-governmental organisations we know that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller have some of the worst health outcomes of any ethnic group even when controlling for other factors, such as socio-economic background. The 2021 Census tells us that while most of those who identified as 'Gypsy' or 'Irish Traveller' reported being in good health they were also more than twice as likely to report bad or very bad health (12.5%) compared with the full England and Wales population (5.2%).<sup>30</sup> The life expectancy of these communities is 10 to 12 years lower than the general population. Further to this, a report by the University of Bedfordshire found that 42% of Romani (Gypsies) report having a long are affected by a long-term condition, as opposed to 18% of the general population<sup>31</sup> with the 2021 Census reporting that those who identify as 'Gypsy' or 'Irish Traveller' were almost twice as likely to provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week than the England and Wales population (5.2% and 2.7%, respectively).<sup>32</sup>

Research conducted by the Traveller Movement in 2017 found almost a third of respondents experienced discrimination when accessing health care.<sup>33</sup> This discrimination comes in many different forms including mistreatment by primary care providers and staff to refusal to register them at the primary care provider because they had no permanent address or their address was on a caravan site. This leaves many community members without primary health care provision and disrupted healthcare provision often leaving preventative care difficult to administer.

While some healthcare providers have targeted provision it is localised and fragmented<sup>34</sup> and is based on the good will of individual service providers rather than a universal experience for all community members. This persistent experience of discrimination in accessing healthcare provision has bred mistrust between communities and healthcare providers. As the Women & Equalities Committee pointed out in 2019 '[d]espite the fact that information and guidance has been available to frontline healthcare staff for some time, discriminatory practices are more widespread than they should be. This leads to a vicious cycle in which a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller individual has a poor experience while trying to access a service, and the word spreads, leading to scepticism and mistrust, which further exacerbate the health inequalities.'<sup>35</sup>

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30 Office of National Statistics, [Gypsy or Irish Traveller: General Health and Unpaid Care](#), (2021).

31 Women & Equalities Committee, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), (2019).

32 Office of National Statistics, [Gypsy or Irish Traveller: General Health and Unpaid Care](#), (2021).

33 The Traveller Movement, [The Last Acceptable Form of Racism](#), (2017).

34 Women & Equalities Select Committee, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), (2019).

35 Women & Equalities Select Committee, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), (2019).



There is no official data on deaths by suicide among the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller population of the UK. The Irish Traveller organisation Pavee Point conducted a longitudinal study on the mental health of Irish Travellers in Ireland and found that Irish Travellers experience a 6.6 times higher suicide rate when compared with non-Travellers, accounting for approximately 11% of all Irish Traveller deaths.<sup>36</sup>

Traveller Movement believe that accommodation insecurity, poor living environment, low education attainment, economic exclusion, community isolation and discrimination all have a negative impact on Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers physical and mental health. Approximately 14-20% of Romani (Gypsies) and Irish 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.<sup>37</sup>

## Social Care

In the context of social care specifically the fear and distrust of public bodies results in a belief, for some community members, that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children being taken into care represents an unofficial state policy of forced adoption of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children with the objective of assimilation. This belief is at least partly attributable to cultural awareness of the system of forced adoptions that took place in 20th century Ireland, as well as many other countries across Europe.

Through its confidential domestic abuse helpline, and more broadly through the equality and social justice unit programme of work, the Traveller Movement is aware that the fear of a social services referral – and subsequent removal of children – is a significant barrier for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women engaging with public or third sector services; particularly with regard to seeking support for presumed mental health conditions or domestic violence.

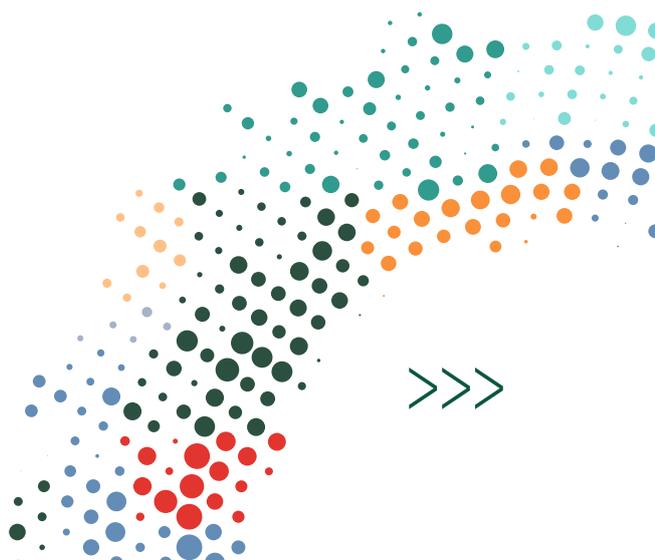
The Traveller Movement has been hearing about increasing numbers of Traveller women taking their own lives after having been approached by child protection services in relation to domestic abuse in the family. It is often essential for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women that their children are raised in their own culture, the fear and shame of children being raised in transracial environments is immense. It also has a lasting effect on the children in question who grow up disconnected from their culture, language and people. It is essential while developing care plans that there are meaningful opportunities for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller to experience pride in their own cultural identities.

It is essential to point out that discriminatory attitudes towards Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities is widespread and is often referred to as the 'last acceptable form of racism'. In the context of social services this often means that social workers make decisions during care proceedings which are informed by uneducated and unchallenged prejudices. These prejudices often lead to incorrect and unsubstantiated value judgments and an over inflation in the perception of risks. For instance, for the 'settled' community a site is seen as an innately dangerous place – this is because it is not a way of life they are familiar with, if children have grown up on a site it is all the know and they have a clearer perception of risks.

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36 Pavee Point, *Mental Health Handout*, (2015).

37 The Traveller Movement, *Mental Health and Suicide Briefing*, (2019).



A breakdown of communication and misunderstandings often occur because professionals within the social care system have no specific education or training in the particular needs of these communities. The Traveller Movement have heard of pockets of good practice in social care across the country but because of overstretched services there is a postcode lottery of care provision. The widespread cutbacks to community-based work (such as Traveller Education Teams) has a detrimental impact on these communities, the lack of specialist resources (including translators, Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Service workers, community-based advocates, mediation services, family support work-community-based advocates, mediation services, family support work- advocates, mediation services, family support workers and early help teams) places additional pressure on child protection practitioners who struggle to cope with cuts to vital community and early help preventative resources.

## Recommendations

Ensure that the NHS and other health services include Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller ethnicities in their data collection systems. This will address the significant health disparities faced by these communities and enable targeted health interventions.

Commission voluntary and community sector Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish (or ethnic) Traveller organisations to fully review and sufficiently address the severe health and care inequalities experienced by members of these communities.

Work with the Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities to develop a Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller mental health strategy which targets resources and funding at suicide prevention and support; addresses accessibility of services; improves access to information about available services; collects data on access, experience and outcomes from health service users; ensures healthcare professionals understand the different needs of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities; and trials interventions to assess what works in improving the healthcare experience for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller populations.

## f. Right to housing and the right to own property alone as well as in association with others

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers have a historical and cultural relationship to particular ways of living, this includes living in caravans which is as much connected to the cultural of the communities as travelling. However, due to a failure by the Government to provide adequate site provision today the majority of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers live in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation. The Traveller Movement knows anecdotally that most Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers would prefer to live in more traditional accommodation set-ups rather than amongst the settled community, but this is not possible because of the lack of site provision.

This chronic shortage of sites nationally is widely recognised as one of the most pressing issues facing Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers, the lack of secure accommodation for Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers was described by the ECHR as the lynchpin that underpinned all the other inequalities faced by the communities. There is also an undeniable relationship between the level of insecure accommodation experienced by the communities and their overall poor health outcomes.



Although local authorities are required to identify land to meet the need for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pitches, there are no consequences if they do not. This failure to meet the accommodations needs reflects not just a lack of will but an ingrained prejudice and efforts by elected representatives to put a halt to any efforts by local authorities to provide site accommodation. This ingrained prejudice is demonstrated in polling such as the one conducted by YouGov which found that 45% of the general population would be uncomfortable with a Romani (Gypsy) or Irish Traveller moving next door to them.<sup>38</sup> This ingrained prejudice is often exploited by political representatives who will openly oppose any plans for site provision in the area, citing concerns for the safety of residential areas.<sup>39</sup> Implicitly saying that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller sites are not suitable for residential areas.

There have been a number of legislative changes over the last ten years which have further limited the ability of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people to live their traditional way of life. In 2015 the UK Government updated its Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (the policy) changing the definition of 'Gypsy' or 'Traveller' so that those who had permanently ceased to travel were no longer classed as Gypsies or Travellers, regardless of the reasoning for ceasing travel. Following this change the EHRC conducted research which looked at the needs assessment conducted by local authorities before and after and found that the requirement fell by almost 75%.<sup>40</sup> This demonstrates how many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people who require culturally appropriate accommodation are now not being considered for such.

The Police Act, which has now been ruled as discriminatory by the Courts, was a further act by parliament to criminalise and eradicate the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller traditional way of life, by banning roadside living. The Police Act granted the police the authority to ban Gypsies and Travellers from an area for up to 12 months, an increase from the previous three months. Additionally, the Police Act included powers to fine, arrest, imprison, and seize the homes of Gypsies and Travellers in roadside camps. However, a High Court judge has ruled that these powers unjustifiably discriminate against these communities, violating their rights to respect for private and family life and causing a "significant intrusion" on their lives.

Successive acts by government demonstrate a lack of care for and in some cases outright efforts to eradicate the traditions, cultures and heritage of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers. These efforts directly infringe upon the rights of the communities and damage the wider public's perceptions.

## Environmental Racism

The long history of legislative action against a nomadic way of life has culminated not just in the Police Act but also in a situation where most sites are segregated from the settled community and close to environmental hazards. Exposing community members to marginalisation, stigma and poorer health outcomes, this it has been argued by Bloch (2024) is a form of environmental racism. Bloch (2024) finds that when you map all permanent and transit sites across the UK you find that 'a sizeable proportion of sites present a risk to residents' health due to their geographical proximity to pollutants and that many are infested with vermin and flies and separated from settled communities which can result in isolation and exclusion'.<sup>41</sup> Many sites were developed following the Caravan Sites Act 1968 which means that up to four generations of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers have been subjected to environmental racism and its resulting health impacts. Further to this, the paper finds that this is not a historical legacy of governments gone by but rather continues to this day with new sites being placed next to pollutants.

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38 YouGov/Friends Families Travellers, *Survey*, (2023).

39 BBC News, 'Traveller charity accuses Dorset MP of inciting discrimination', (1 March 2024).

40 EHRC, *Planning Policy Briefing*, (2015).

41 Alice Bloch, *Environmental racism, segregation and discrimination: Gypsy and Traveller sites in Great Britain*, (2024).



As previously discussed in this submission, health outcomes for Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers are some of the poorest of all ethnic groups in the UK. With Bloch (2024) highlighting survey research conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic which found that 'Gypsy and Traveller men were 12 times more likely than their white British counterparts to report multimorbidity, defined as two or more physical conditions of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease and cancer or another clinically diagnosed chronic health condition'.<sup>42</sup> In 2018 the World Health Organisation (WHO) released housing and health guidelines acknowledging that poor housing is a main determining factor in health outcomes and that 'poor housing conditions are one of the mechanisms through which social and environmental inequality translates into health inequality'<sup>43</sup>. The WHO looked at four elements of housing the house, the home, the neighbourhood and the community, Bloch (2024) argues that when looking the sites where Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers live they are undeniably what the WHO would label as 'unsatisfactory'.

Importantly, sites are more often than not totally segregated and isolated from the wider community, which inevitably has wider implications for community cohesion. The hostility from wider communities, media and politicians to the proposed building of new sites leads to situations such as the one referred to by Bloch (2024) where a new site was to be located 'around a quarter of a mile from the rest of the community with a separate entrance, no vehicle access, along a track with no footpath and next to the sewage pumping station'. Demonstrating how Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers are seen as undeserving of access to public funds and services.

## Recommendations

Introduction of a statutory duty on Local Authorities to provide permanent sites and negotiated stopping sites and robust funding to ensure the provision is in line with need.

A full investigation to assess the minimum standards of basic amenities and sanitation on sites. Following this the department should explore ways to hold Local Authorities to account for their own sites.

## g. The right to equal participation in cultural activities

### Transit sites and the criminalisation of nomadic ways of life

Living roadside and travelling for work, horse fairs, religious events and other key aspects of a nomadic way of life are core parts of the cultural traditions of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers. The Police Act after being challenged in the courts has been found to pose a 'significant intrusion' on the lives of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers particularly because of the lack of availability of transit sites which makes it difficult to comply with the three-month deadline. However, the effects of the Police Act have already had an impact on the communities.

Firstly, there was a rush on the part of councils to provide more transit sites to ensure that community members who do travel can do so without risk of having their property confiscated or face criminal charges. However, those sites are again in places of environmental hazard and are often without good standard amenities and without green spaces for children to play. With transit sites usually being placed in even worse locations than permanent sites. The lack of transit sites coupled with the Police Act has rendered the traditional nomadic way of life of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers essentially illegal, this situation is exacerbated by the lack of long-term sites where they can sustain their traditional ways of life.

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42 Alice Bloch, *Environmental racism, segregation and discrimination: Gypsy and Traveller sites in Great Britain*, (2024).

43 World Health Organisation, *WHO Health and Housing Guidelines*, (2018).



This slow eradication and criminalisation of the rights of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers to fully enjoy and participate in traditional cultural activities has been an active work by successive governments and is a serious infraction on their rights under ICERD and under the Human Rights Act 1998. Travelling and living roadside are key aspects of this lifestyle, as is attending events like the Appleby Horse Fair. However, the inability to engage in these activities, due to successive governments' failure to provide adequate accommodations and often actively opposing them, is a repeated and unaddressed infringement on the rights of Romani (Gypsies), Roma, and Irish Travellers.

## Demonisation of cultural events and activities

Alongside legislative oppression there is an active demonisation of cultural events and activities of all kinds, this is a significant issue that manifests in various ways, including media portrayals, and societal attitudes. This negative treatment often revolves around deep-seated stereotypes and prejudices that cast these communities in a harmful light, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and discrimination. For example, just this year, ahead of the prominent Light and Life Festival, a Christian Evangelical event, the Conservative MP for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston wrote on a local Facebook page "DISRUPTIVE ... gypsy and traveller light and life festival" should not go ahead again, calling on the local council to "step in and stop this". He went on to say that the year before it had left the towns economy worse off because local businesses had been 'forced to close' sharing a petition to have the event shut down.<sup>44</sup>

The closing of pubs, shops and local businesses during Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller events is a common occurrence. With businesses and pubs often saying that police forces have advised them to close their doors during these events, reports from Northamptonshire show a pub issuing a statement that "At the advice of local police we will be closing all day on Friday 21st, Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd due to an event in Market Harborough"<sup>45</sup>. With reports that at this years Appleby Horse Fair every pub in the nearby town of Kirkby Stephen shutting its doors ahead of the fair.<sup>46</sup> This association with crime, violence and the generation of rubbish are all negative stereotypes which further serve to dehumanise communities and often serve to further generate fear among the wider community about these communities' cultural events.

The right to enjoy and participate in cultural activities is a fundamental aspect of human rights protections for ethnic minority groups. Denying or disrupting these activities infringes upon these rights and contributes to the erosion of cultural heritage and identity. Efforts to protect and promote the cultural expressions of all communities are essential for fostering social inclusion and mutual respect.

## Recommendations

Repeal the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 which make the traditional way of many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities illegal.

There should be collaboration between the police, local licencing authorities and national Pubwatch to ensure that a non-discriminatory policy is employed in all pubs to ensure that no groups, including Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller groups, can be refused entry to an establishment based on their ethnicity.

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44 Traveller Times, [Backlash after MP calls for local Romani-led Pentecostal Christian gathering to be banned](#), (3 May 2024).

45 Northamptonshire Telegraph, [Pubs across Northamptonshire villages close their doors this weekend over concerns around large Light and Life Christian Travellers' festival nearby](#), (21 July 2024).

46 The Daily Mail, [Travellers and gypsies arrive on horses ahead of Appleby fair as locals vow to close pubs and board up shops in bid to avoid repeat of last year's chaos](#), (5 June 2024).



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