

Evidence submitted by the Traveller Movement to the Civil Society Submission to the UNs (CRC) list of issues

1.1. Executive Summary

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity committed to the fulfillment of Human Rights for ethnic minority Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) people.

The Traveller Movement's mission is to develop a platform and voice for Travellers, working in solidarity with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities to achieve equality through self-determination and proactive participation in influencing and shaping policy.

1.2. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) people are distinct ethnic groups yet they rarely receive the same recognition as other BAME communities, notwithstanding data that shows they experience multiple inequalities in society. Compared to the general population, GRT people, including children, are more likely to suffer mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse issues. They are at greater risk of infant mortality, maternal mortality, and suicide. At school, they are more likely to face bullying or exclusion, and less likely to attain qualifications. They encounter discrimination throughout their lives and, more often than not, their experiences of authority are negative ones.

1.3. Since the last set of concluding observations, the Women and Equalities Committee carried out an extensive 18-month inquiry¹ into tackling inequalities in Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller communities. The committee recommended that the government implement, without delay, a cross-government strategy aimed at tackling these inequalities. While this strategy was announced² by the Communities minister in June 2019, it has yet to materialise.

2. List of specific issues affecting Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children:

Education and economic exclusion

- Pupils from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller backgrounds have the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years³.
- Gypsy and Traveller children leave school at a much earlier age than children in other ethnic groups.

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36002.htm>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-strategy-to-tackle-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-inequalities>

³ Race Disparity Audit, 2018

- After key stage 4 (usually aged 16), a quarter of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children neither go into education nor employment⁴.
- Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils have the highest rate of school exclusion, permanent and fixed period, among all ethnic groups. In the 2017 to 2018 school year, the highest permanent exclusion rates were among Gypsy and Roma pupils (0.36%, or 36 exclusions per 10,000 pupils) and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils (0.29%, or 29 per 10,000 pupils)⁵.
- GRT pupils experience high levels of racist bullying, with many leaving school early for this reason⁶.
- A lack of engagement and cooperation between local authorities, schools, regulators, and families contributes to these poor outcomes and early exits.
- Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the highest percentage of people with no formal qualifications at 60% compared with 23% for the general population, whilst youth unemployment and economic inactivity was the highest of any ethnic group at 47%⁷.

Recommendations

- Reinstate legal aid for cases involving school exclusion, admissions and bullying. GRT children are disproportionately impacted by all three, and are unable to access legal representation.
- The government should embed targeted funding to get more NEET GRT children and young people back into education and training. This could form part of the national strategy to tackle GRT inequalities.

Racism and discrimination

- GRT experience high levels of discrimination affecting leisure time, integration and mental health.
- 91% of the respondents in a study reported they had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity and over half had been refused service in restaurants, shops, pubs, cinemas, gyms, petrol stations, churches etc. because of their ethnicity⁸.

⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/after-education/destinations-of-school-pupils-after-key-stage-4-usually-aged-16-years/latest>

⁵ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest>

⁶ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=170:2020-barriers-in-education-for-young-travellers-in-london>

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21#qualifications>

⁸ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/reports?download=88:sep-2017-the-last-acceptable-form-of-racism-the-pervasive-discrimination-and-prejudice-experienced-by-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities>

- A poll by YouGov found that only four in ten parents in Great Britain would be happy for their child to have a playdate at the home of a child who is a Gypsy or Traveller⁹.

Recommendations

- Senior leaders in all public service bodies be trained in the Public Sector Equality Duty and that each body have a Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller “champion”, similar to the role that exists in the National Police Chiefs Council.
- This could form part of the national strategy to tackle GRT inequalities.

Health and mental health

- Gypsy or Irish Travellers had the lowest proportion of any ethnic group rating their general health as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ at 70 per cent compared to 81 per cent overall of the overall population of England and Wales.
- Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma were found to suffer poorer mental health than the rest of the population in Britain and they were also more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression¹⁰.
- Lower life expectancy, coupled with high infant and maternal mortality rates¹¹, and a suicide rate six times higher than average¹², means it is not uncommon for Gypsy and Traveller children to experience multiple difficult bereavements in their lives.
- Very often grief is not spoken about, leading to high levels of anxiety and depression among Traveller girls and boys.
- Many Gypsy and Traveller girls have unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, excessive use of sunbeds, plastic surgery, poor diets, crash dieting and diet pills. Insufficient provision of information and education, combined with the pressure to look and behave a certain way, contributes to this¹³.

⁹ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/equality-human-rights?download=68:oct-2017-yougov-poll-finds-shocking-racism-toward-gypsies-and-travellers>

¹⁰ EHRC, Dec 2017: Race report: Healing a divided Britain, EHRC report on the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy.

¹¹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) *Inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers: A Review* https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research_report_12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

¹² All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010) https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/AITHS_SUMMARY.pdf

¹³ <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-report-2020pdf/download?token=42bpRbf8>

- Unchallenged racist bullying in schools negatively affects GRT boy's mental health with often serious consequences¹⁴.

Recommendations

- Gypsy, Irish Traveller, and Roma categories should be added to the NHS data dictionary as a matter of urgency.
- A mental health strategy aimed at GRT must be implemented as a matter of urgency.
- These recommendations must form part of the national strategy to tackle GRT inequalities.

Accommodation

- Gypsy or Irish Travellers were more than twice as likely to live in social housing than the overall population of England and Wales (41 per cent compared to 16 per cent) and less likely to own their accommodation outright (21 per cent compared to 26 per cent).
- Roma families mostly live in insecure private rental sector accommodation, and are exposed to regular evictions¹⁵.
- Nomadic Traveller children are at persistent risk of eviction impacting on school attendance but also impacting on their social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

Recommendations

- The government must include the needs of housed and nomadic Travellers, as well as Roma in the national strategy to tackle inequalities.

Poverty and Social exclusion

- The 2011 Census showed¹⁶ high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, among older and younger Travellers.
- Just over half of Gypsy or Irish Travellers, who were 16 and over, were economically inactive.
- Poverty impacts GRT children's social, physical and emotional development.

Recommendations

¹⁴ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/briefings?download=166:march-2019-traveller-movement-submission-to-women-and-equalities-committee-inquiry-into-the-mental-health-of-men-and-boys>
<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/grt-report-published-17-19/>

¹⁶

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censusstellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21>

- Government should embed targeted funding to get more NEET children and young people back into education and training. This could form part of the national strategy to tackle GRT inequalities.

Policing and criminal justice

- Traveller ethnicity is treated as a risk factor by the police, and GRT communities experience both direct and indirect discrimination by police forces¹⁷.
- GRT children are overrepresented in the youth justice system¹⁸. Despite just **0.1%** of the population of England and Wales identifying themselves as Gypsy or Irish Traveller, their children make up **12%** of Secure Training Centres (STCs), **7%** of Young Offender Institutions (YOIs).
- A quarter of GTR boys in Young Offenders Institutions reported having mental/emotional health issues¹⁹.
- Almost half of the Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma children in STCs a third in YOIs have been in local authority care²⁰.

Recommendations

- A formal inquiry should be launched into what has led to Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma children being overrepresented in the youth criminal justice system.

Gender roles and expectations

- The education of boys and girls in Gypsy and Traveller communities is heavily gendered, with boys being removed from school to join their fathers in business and girls being removed to look after younger children and to become homemakers²¹.
- There are still girls that do not go to secondary school because they are not allowed to attend sex education classes or mix with boys, but this is slowly changing; Catholic girls' secondary schools are seen as a good option for many girls today.²²

¹⁷ <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>

¹⁸ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/criminal-justice?download=52:dec-2016-overlooked-and-overrepresented-gypsy-traveller-and-roma-children-in-the-youth-justice-system>

¹⁹ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/criminal-justice?download=52:dec-2016-overlooked-and-overrepresented-gypsy-traveller-and-roma-children-in-the-youth-justice-system>

²⁰ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/criminal-justice?download=52:dec-2016-overlooked-and-overrepresented-gypsy-traveller-and-roma-children-in-the-youth-justice-system>

²¹ <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-report-2020pdf/download?token=42bpRbf8>
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- Community groups run highly successful training programmes addressing these outdated attitudes, but they are largely unfunded.
- Due to a lack of familiarity with GRT communities, there are gaps in service provision to address domestic abuse in GRT communities.

Recommendations

- Schools should meet GRT parents to discuss their concerns in relation to sex and relationships education.
- The Home Office should fund civil society groups working with GRT communities to tackle outdated attitudes towards men and women's roles. This includes domestic violence prevention programmes, and LGBT support services.

Final comments

The Traveller Movement and others firmly believe that if the inequalities experienced by GRT people are to be meaningfully addressed, the government must act without delay and implement a comprehensive and well-resourced national action plan, with specific, measurable, and targeted outcomes across all government departments. This includes healthcare, education, housing inequalities, the criminal justice system, data monitoring, and discrimination and hate crime. Without this targeted intervention, GRT communities will continue to experience some of the worst inequalities of all UK ethnic groups.

About the Traveller Movement

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