



The Traveller Movement

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The Traveller Movement's submission to the EHRC's consultation on their draft strategic plan 2019-2022

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About the Traveller Movement

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

Policing of GRT communities

Within the EHRC's draft strategic plan, there is a critical gap in issues surrounding the policing of those with protected characteristics, particularly pertinent when the protected characteristic in question is minority ethnic status.

This year at the Traveller Movement (TM), a main policy focus has been criminal justice and policing. TM have found strong empirical evidence that there is discrimination and bias against Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers (GRT) across the police. It is TM's strongly held conviction that the police treat GRT ethnicity as a risk factor, and through their operations, link GRT ethnicity to criminality.¹

The Traveller Movement obtained information this year that the National Crime Agency has a database containing information categorised in to 'types of crime'. Of these categories,

¹ 'Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between the police and Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers' The Traveller Movement, 2018

there is one named 'Traveller', amongst other types of crime such as 'football', 'paedophilia' etc. The Traveller Movement believe that the category of 'Traveller' crime is the only ethnically defined category contained on the database.

Furthermore, the existence of Gypsy Traveller Liaison Roles (GTLOs) are the only ethnically focused liaison roles within police forces. Job descriptions for this role focus largely on enforcing against Gypsy and Traveller communities rather than actually working to improve the relationship between these communities and the police, again perpetuating the idea that GRT communities are somehow in need of more policing than other communities.

There is also a strong case that this bias permeates society and legitimises the widely held criminal stereotype of GRT people. TM research found that 91% of GRT people surveyed reported experiencing discrimination.² A poll formulated by the Traveller Movement and conducted by YouGov highlighted that over a third of parents in Britain said they would be unhappy with their child having a playdate at the home of a Gypsy or a Traveller, whilst four in ten said they would be unhappy with a close relative having a relationship with a Gypsy or a Traveller.³ The EHRC's own barometer of national prejudice illustrates that, of all the protected characteristics looked at, GRT people experience the lowest net positive feelings towards them at 20%, and the third highest net negative feelings at 44%.

As a result of the above, TM's position is that it is of critical importance that GRT people should feature prominently in the EHRC's strategic plan moving forward, with a particular focus on policing; there is much to be done in achieving more equity for these communities.

GRT communities have a right to equitable and fair policing. The Traveller Movement has observed that priority aim 5 of the strategic plan, 'access to essential public services' is where policing of GRT communities needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Mental health

Gypsies and Travellers suffer high levels of stress, anxiety and depression⁴ and have a six times higher suicide rate than the general population, seven time higher among young Traveller men.⁵

² 'The last acceptable form of racism' The Traveller Movement, 2017

³ 'YouGov poll finds shocking prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers' YouGov/Traveller Movement, 2017

⁴ EHRC, Cemlyn et al. (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

⁵ Keat & Rogers (2018) Improving access to health care for Gypsy and Traveller communities. Journal of Practice nursing, Volume 4, Number 4. <https://www.journalofpracticenursing.co.uk/files/downloads/articles/15---improving-access-to-health-care-for-gypsy-and-traveller-communities.pdf>

Gypsies and Travellers live on average 10 - 12 years less than the general population⁶, in some areas even 25 years less.⁷

We have specific concerns regarding the high rate of suicide in the Irish Traveller community. According to a new study, health issues affecting Gypsies and Traveller are complex, including loss of loved ones due to early death, marginalisation and experiences of hate crime and discrimination, lack of education and literacy, homelessness, insecure or inadequate housing and high levels of caring responsibilities for example. The study found that the key area of intervention was mental health, particularly depression and stress.

Recommendation:

Under Priority Aim 5 the commission should use its powers to influence local authorities to produce specific guidance for working with GRT communities. This includes supplying evidence, advice, and using its enforcement powers to require local authorities to take action.

There should be more effective engagement by local authorities as part of their strategic local health plans. This includes meaningful consultation with local community groups and related organisations.

Domestic violence and abuse

While there is no concrete evidence to suggest GRT communities suffer disproportionately from domestic abuse, there are particular intersectional disadvantages that affect GRT women that make exiting an abusive relationship more difficult. This includes racism and discrimination when reporting abuse to the police, experiences of discrimination at domestic abuse shelters, fears regarding social work intervention by abused women and fear of removal of children. Additional barriers include low literacy levels, poor access to solicitors and lack of kinship support once separation has occurred. Due to specific gender roles, separation and divorce is frowned upon and is highly stigmatised within the community.

In our experience, few domestic abuse shelters are sufficiently trained to engage in a culturally sensitive manner.

Local authorities must have a duty to consider these intersectional disadvantages when supporting GRT women. This includes widening access to services that can support Traveller women's safety and working in a way that is open, transparent and culturally appropriate. Where literacy is an issue, social workers should be obliged to provide additional means of communicating effectively so arrangements are understood, especially around safeguarding agreements.

⁶ Baker, M, (2005) Leeds Baseline Census 2004-2005 Gypsies and Travellers. Leeds: Leeds Racial Equality Council

⁷ Leeds Community Healthcare, NHS Trust (2018) Gypsy and Traveller Community and a Queen's Nurse tackle health inequalities in Leeds. <https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/gypsy-and-traveller-community-and-a-queens-nurse-tackle-health-inequalities-in-leeds1/>

Recommendation:

Under Priority Aim 9 the commission should use its powers to influence local authorities to produce specific guidance for working with GRT communities. This includes supplying evidence, advice, and using its enforcement powers to require local authorities to take action.

We support the commission's decision to conduct an inquiry to examine effectiveness of special support services.

Education

The commission addresses GRT education in Priority aims 2 and 5. Given the stark educational inequalities faced by GRT children these inclusions are welcome. However, we feel specific and measurable actions would demonstrate a clear commitment to addressing the widespread discrimination and systemic disadvantages faced by GRT communities.

According to the [Race Disparity Audit](#), GRT children have the highest rates of school exclusion and the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups. In 2016/17, Gypsy/Roma pupils and Travellers of Irish Heritage pupils had the highest rates of temporary exclusions at 17.29% and 16.72% respectively and the highest rates of permanent exclusions, at 0.45% and 0.36% respectively. This heavily impacts on the ability of GRT young people to participate in the labour market, with high rates of economic inactivity prevalent in the community. According to the 2011⁸ **census**, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller of all ages have the highest rates of economic inactivity - men 39% and women 60%; 14% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people (16-24) are unemployed, the **highest for any ethnic group** by almost a third and also not in education or training.

The experience of GRT pupils in education is frequently characterised by discrimination, social isolation and racism. In fact, discrimination is so frequent that 76% of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma have hidden or hide their ethnic identity in order to avoid discrimination and racism in the UK (Traveller Movement, 2017).

The Traveller Movement run the only GRT specific advocacy service in the UK. We support parents with school exclusions, admissions, mediation, and general administrative support. We also conduct research, participate in high-level stakeholder groups and submit position papers to public consultations on GRT education. Our service is over-subscribed with demand outstripping supply. With cuts to legal aid, access to justice and accountability in education cases is poor.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandthelabourmarket2011censusenglandandwales/2014-11-13#young-people-aged-16-24-in-the-labour-market>

Recommendation:

The commission should make specific commitments within Priority Aims 2 and 5 to commit time, expertise and resources to tackling these inequalities. This includes a dedicated advocacy team to take legal cases, making academies accountable for not following statutory guidance and conducting an inquiry into elective home education.

The commission should use its powers to educate schools on their public sector equality duties. Schools should have equality policies where they set out how they tackle racial bullying. Equality duties should also explicitly demonstrate an understanding that Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers are distinct ethnic groups.

Digital exclusion in education

In our opinion, digital exclusion is an emerging human rights issue that particularly affects GRT communities. We are glad to see this addressed in Priority Aim 3.

In our experience, many clients do not have sufficient access to Wi-Fi and do not possess sufficient computer literacy to access education. Most local authorities insist that all applications be made on line, and schools are often reluctant to assist parents with online applications. This effectively discriminates against computer illiterate parents, denying their children an available school place.

The majority of our case work each September involves supporting parents to complete online applications regarding:

- School admissions
- Requests for school transport
- Requests for school dinners
- Requests for in-year transfers

Recommendation: Under Priority Aim 3 the commission should create specific goals that address digital exclusion for GRT communities. In our experience, parents are often turned away from schools if they are unable to complete online applications.