



The Traveller Movement

Resource for London

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Gypsies, Travellers and Traveller sites

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About The Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity, working in partnership with the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, service providers and policy makers challenging discrimination and promoting inclusion.

Background/summary

In the UK Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are both legally recognized ethnic minority groups with a centuries old cultural tradition of nomadism. It is estimated that between **one-half to two-thirds¹ of the UK's approximately 300,000² Gypsies and Travellers live in 'bricks and mortar' housing**, many of these against their will as a result of the national shortage of Traveller sites. Those not in housing mainly live in caravans and/or mobile homes. In England the **vast majority of caravan dwelling communities (approximately 86%) live on authorised sites**, with a majority of these being privately provided. Approximately 14% of Gypsies and Travellers live on unauthorised sites (land owned but without planning permission) or encampments (land not owned without planning) and are as such legally classified as homeless and often highly vulnerable.

Urgent action is required by Government to address the inequalities Gypsies and Travellers face in accessing suitable accommodation. This can be achieved by:

- Ensuring the adequate provision of authorised Traveller sites in England
- The effective and sustainable management of unauthorised encampments
- Promoting improved health, education, and employment opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers in houses and on sites
- Ensuring all Traveller sites are located in environments which promote good health and social inclusion
- Recognise Gypsies' and Travellers' culture and ethnicity for the purposes of planning
- Supporting community cohesion and social inclusion initiatives in local areas

¹ Shelter, 2008

http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/57772/Working_with_housed_Gypsies_and_Travellers.pdf

² Council of Europe, 2012

http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/archive/documentation/strategies/statistiques_en.asp

Key issues and Recommendations

Provision of Traveller sites

There is a chronic shortage of Traveller sites in England. In 2010 EHRC research found that it would take local authorities 27 years to meet their 5 year Traveller site pitch requirements based on their progress between 2006 and 2009.³ Since 2010 there has been limited progress in developing sites in-line with the identified need. As a consequence of this many Gypsies and Travellers have no option but to live on unauthorised sites and/or encampments which often has a detrimental impact on their health, education and socio-economic inclusion.

*A national policy needs to be introduced that ensures the adequate provision of environmentally and socially sustainable Gypsy and Traveller sites in England. Such a policy should be robustly monitored and evaluated by Government. The Welsh Government recently introduced a model which places 'a duty on local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers where a need has been identified.'*⁴

Unauthorised Encampments

Many Gypsies and Travellers living on unauthorised encampments want to live on a permanent authorised site but often struggle to get planning permission for a private site or cannot get pitches on local authority sites as a result of the national shortage. Other Gypsies and Travellers want to continue travelling, however very few authorised stopping places and/or transit sites remain.

*Government should promote the use of Leeds City Council's and Leeds GATE's Negotiated Stopping Places (NSP) model that has been proven to effectively address unauthorised encampments. NSP promotes community cohesion, enhances Gypsies and Travellers access to healthcare and education services and saves councils significant sums of money on legal and eviction costs.*⁵

Government proposals to re-define Gypsies and Travellers

The Government are currently deciding whether to 'change the planning definition of travellers so that it includes only those who travel.' They are also considering 'making sure the housing need definition of gypsy and traveller matches the planning definition of traveller.'⁶ If implemented, this would effectively re-define Gypsies and Travellers out of existence and TM believe make it even harder to meet the accommodation needs of these communities.

We need a revised definition of Gypsies and Travellers for the purposes of planning which recognises the culture and heritage of traditional Gypsies and Travellers. This could be in line with the current definition introduced by the Welsh Government. It is also very important that the Government, media etc always refer to Gypsies and Travellers with capital letters.

Community cohesion and social inclusion initiatives

Despite the vast majority of Gypsies and Travellers being born and raised in local communities in Britain, many are still not recognised by councils and local communities as having a legitimate right to live and raise their families on Traveller sites in these locales.

The Government should introduce a community cohesion initiative with a specific focus on promoting greater dialogue and understanding between Gypsies, Travellers and settled communities, specifically on planning and accommodation issues.

³ EHRC, 2010

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/research/gt_research_report_68_exec_summary_english.pdf

⁴ Housing (Wales) Act, 2014

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-regeneration/legislation/housingbill/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://www.leedsgate.co.uk/?s=negotiated+stopping>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-and-travellers-proposed-changes-to-planning-policy-and-guidance>