



The Traveller Movement

Resource for London

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A Profile of prisoners in the Adult Prison Estate.

About the Traveller Movement

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

Gypsy Roma and Traveller (GRT) ethnic groups

Gypsies and some Traveller ethnicities are protected by law against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010. The term 'Traveller' incorporates several different groups, and it is common to see the acronym 'GRT' used when referring to Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller people. In 2011 Gypsies and Travellers were recognised for the first time as distinct ethnic groups in the national census.¹ Migrant Roma from central and eastern Europe are also included in this acronym, and the category 'Roma' will be added to the next census in March 2021. Migrant Roma are protected by virtue of their ethnicity.

It is important to remember that similar to the acronym BAME, (used to refer to Black Asian and Minority Ethnic people), the acronym GRT refers to different ethnic groups and cultures.

The background for each of these three ethnic groups should be considered on an individual basis, as people within this defined category will have different experiences of discrimination based on their specific cultural, ethnic, and religious background.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are included under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, that gives a **Public Sector Equality Duty**, to ensure a public authority must in the exercise of its functions:

- *Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;*
- *Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- *Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*²

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21>

² Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Equality Act 2010

However, the lives of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are blighted by discrimination and social exclusion. A Traveller Movement report from 2017 showed that 91% of GRT surveyed had experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity.³

In 2019 an inquiry by the Women and Equalities committee found that successive governments had comprehensively failed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.⁴ The committee's inquiry found that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a range of areas, including education, health, and employment. This, along with evidence of systemic discrimination and over-policing are all causal factors that have led to GRT people being overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Travellers in the Criminal Justice System

The [2017 Lammy review](#) helped bring GRT people into the broader discourse surrounding the disproportionality, treatment, and outcomes of BAME experiences of prison and the criminal justice system. Although none of the 35 recommendations were aimed at Gypsies, Roma or Travellers, it did highlight that these groups experience some of the worst outcomes.

Statistics and ethnic monitoring

Due to weak ethnic monitoring across the criminal justice system, it is difficult to know the exact number of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers (GRT) in prison or on probation. According to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons' (HMIP) prisoner survey, in 2019/20 6% of men and 7% of women of the prison population in England and Wales identified as Gypsy/Irish Traveller. Roma is not yet recorded across HMPPS, but the 2021 census will include the category and we hope it will allow us to further understand Roma experiences of the criminal justice system.

However, levels of self-reporting are low. In prisons, it has only been possible to record ethnicity as "Gypsy or Irish Traveller" since the introduction of the P-NOMIS prison record system in 2011 (which included this as an ethnicity for the first time). Therefore, Travellers in prison prior to 2011 will not have their ethnicity correctly recorded. At the last census only 58,000 people identified as Gypsy or Traveller in England and Wales, representing just 0.1% of the general population, and the smallest ethnic minority in the UK. While this is widely considered to be an undercount, with more estimates being far closer to 0.7-0.8% of the UK population identifying with Gypsy, Roma or Traveller identities, it nonetheless indicates that GRT are over-represented in the criminal justice system.⁵

³ <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>

⁴ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/360.pdf>

⁵ Irish Chaplaincy, Voices Unheard: A Story of Irish Travellers in Prison, (2011) https://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Voices-Unheard-June-2011_SMALL.pdf

Further, what data we do have is not without barriers. The recent HMIP Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation and release planning report highlighted that GRT prisoners were routinely misidentified across the system.⁶

There are several causes for this. Firstly, a lack of confidence in disclosing ethnicity for fear of discrimination from staff or insecurities around what the data is used for. Further, from preliminary findings of the Zahid Mubarak Trust and the Traveller Movement's [A Record of Our Own](#) campaign, we believe there is confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the white ethnic category, especially for Roma who are not included in W3 Gypsy/Irish Traveller (Research forthcoming, 2021).

This desperately needs improving. To do so, trust needs to be built around data collection. There needs to be greater education around what, when, and how the data will be used. Further, measures should be taken to ensure that there are protections in place for those that disclose information.

Experiences in Prison

Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers tend to have worse experiences in prisons compared to non-Travellers. They are more likely to report feeling unsafe, more likely to report having mental ill health or mental illness and are kept in isolation more frequently than non-Travellers. Additionally, the pain of family separation is felt more acutely among Travellers than non-Travellers. Travellers are more likely to have children under-18 and be organising care for these dependents. Travellers are also less likely to submit complaints due to general mistrust, and /or poor understanding of the prison complaints system.⁷ Poor literacy may also be a barrier to issuing a complaint.

Further, according to the 2019/2020 HMIP prisoner survey some notable comparative data stands out:

- 64% of Travellers recorded having mental health problems, compared to 46% of non-Travellers.
- 53% recorded having a disability, compared to 35% of non-Travellers.
- 66% have children under the age of 18, compared to 47% of non-Travellers.
- 37% said they had been prevented from making a complaint when they wanted to, compared to 28% of non-Travellers.
- 29% of Travellers recorded drug and alcohol problems compared to 17% of non-Travellers.
- 24% had spent one or more nights in the segregation unit in the last 6 months, compared to 9% of non-Travellers.

⁶ HM Inspectorate for Prisons, *Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: A thematic review*, (2020) Section 7. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners: identification, relationships with key staff and rehabilitative work at <https://www.justiceinspectores.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspections/minority-ethnic-prisoners-experiences-of-rehabilitation-and-release-planning/>

⁷ https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/ppo-prod-storage-1g9rkhjhkimgw/uploads/2015/01/PPO_LLB_FII7_Final.pdf

- 62% of Travellers reported feeling unsafe, compared to 47% of non-Travellers.
- 41% of Travellers had problems contacting family, compared to 29% of non-Travellers, and 60% of Travellers stated they needed support getting back in contact with family on release.⁸

On a more positive note, in 2018/19 there was a high uptake of Travellers taking Offending Behaviour Programmes compared to non-Travellers (64% to 49%).⁹ This reflects a trend we have seen at The Traveller Movement of eagerness across the Traveller community to engage with, and uptake educational programs.

Traveller Women in Prison

Women in prison are likely to have acute needs and accentuated vulnerabilities.¹⁰ Traveller Women are no different and will likely have accentuated needs arising from the intersection of being a woman, a convicted offender and the racial discrimination and hate crime they may have experienced for being a Traveller.

Coercion is a causal factor to many Women's crimes, and nearly 60% of Women in prison experience domestic abuse.¹¹ We know Traveller Women experience Domestic abuse differently than other women due to reduced services and specific boundaries they face with reporting, due to lack of trust in police or police perceiving domestic violence as a 'cultural' aspect of Traveller life.

Education and skills

Education levels among Gypsy and Traveller prisoners are also low. Research by Thames Valley Probation Service found that:

- 59% of Traveller offenders in that area had problems with numeracy, compared to 9% of other offenders according to OASys data.
- 65% of Travellers problems with reading and writing compared to 14% of other offenders.
- only 12% of Traveller offenders possessed any such qualifications, compared to 57% that had some form of educational or professional qualification¹²

⁸ HMIP report https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/HMI-Prisons_Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2019-20-WEB.pdf

⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814689/hmip-annual-report-2018-19.pdf

¹⁰ Lord Farmer (2019) *The importance of strengthening female offenders' family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime*, London: Ministry of Justice

¹¹ http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic_abuse_report_final_lo.pdf

¹² https://www.irishchaplancy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Working_With_Gypsy_and_Traveller_Offenders_Final_15_7_14_x.pdf

A report from the Irish Chaplaincy proposed actions for change.¹³ These include providing entry level literacy and numeracy, embedding literacy and numeracy in vocational courses, facilitating Traveller prison forums, appointing a Traveller Prisoner Representative to foster interest in courses and disseminate information, and encouraging Travellers to participate in educational and vocational initiatives more generally.

High rates of suicide and self-harm

The Prisons and Probations Ombudsman wrote a learning lessons report in 2015 which flagged a number of issues specific to Irish Travellers.¹⁴ Anxieties caused by lack of family contact; unaddressed mental health needs in prison and wider society; high levels of suicide and self-harm; low levels of literacy; lack of access to suitable education provision; and bullying and discrimination.

Most recently, the [2019-2020 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report](#) contained survey data regarding the Mental Health of Prisoners. This showed shocking disparities in the extent GRT prisoners suffer with mental health problems when compared to the wider prison population.

- 64% of Travellers that responded stated they had Mental Health problems.
- 45% of Travellers felt depressed, compared to 35% of non-Traveller respondents.
- 22% said they were feeling suicidal when compared to 12% of non-Traveller respondents.
- 31% of Travellers also stated they have other mental health problems, compared to 23% of non-Travellers.¹⁵

Young Gypsies and Travellers

GRT people, including children, are more likely to suffer mental and physical ill health and substance misuse issues compared to the wider population. They are at greater risk of infant mortality, maternal mortality, and suicide. At school, they are more likely to face bullying or exclusion, and are less likely to attain qualifications.¹⁶ They encounter discrimination throughout their lives and often have negative experiences of authority.

Research by the Traveller Movement in 2017 found that young Gypsies and Irish Travellers are over-represented in the youth justice estate.¹⁷

- In the three Secure Training Centre's (STCs) surveyed during 2015-16, (12%) identify as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT).
- 15% of girls in STCs considered themselves to be GRT, the figure for boys was slightly lower at 12%.

¹³ <https://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Traveller-Ed-Report-Nov-2015.pdf>

¹⁴ PPO, n6

¹⁵ HMIP, n8

¹⁶ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=122:a-good-practice-guide-for-improving-outcomes-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-in-education>

¹⁷ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/userupload/criminal-justice/Overlooked-and-Overrepresented-Gypsy-Traveller-and-Roma-children-in-the-youth-justice-system.pdf>

- The number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children under 16 was 12% and the number of those aged 16-18 (13%).

After considerable advocacy from civil society groups, the Youth Justice Board have now begun to roll out the 18+1 census categories across the entire youth justice estate. This is a positive move in the right direction, and one we hope to see replicated across the Criminal Justice System.

Our proposed way ahead

As we continue to embed our CJS work programme, we want to develop our partnerships with other experts in the field. The key elements for us are:

- People from GRT communities who have, or have had, experience of the CJS
- Third sector colleagues
- Policy makers

Our focus will be on how we can address the longstanding issues facing GRT people across every stage of the criminal justice system – from relationships with the police, first arrest, contact with the courts systems and with legal practitioners, probation services, and the prison system. We will continue to scrutinise the practices that drive GRT disproportionality and call for greater accountability from government and policymakers.

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a leading national charity committed to the fulfilment of human rights for ethnic minority Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller (GRT) people. This is achieved by a proactive community advocacy strategy, capacity building and acting as a bridge between the GRT sector, service providers and policy makers. Visit: <https://travellermovement.org.uk/>

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