



The Traveller Movement General Election Manifesto 2024



June 2024

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.

Foreword

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities face chronic democratic underrepresentation and huge levels of discrimination by elected representatives. Often used solely as a political football or as scapegoats by politicians, Operation Traveller Vote aims to demonstrate the democratic capacity of these communities. Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people are members of the wider electorate, and their priorities, concerns and disenfranchisement should be an essential facet of the agendas of all political parties of government.

This Manifesto aims to bring the priorities of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to the forefront of all political parties' election priorities and to empower Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people to engage with the political process.

We want to thank all community members who contributed to this work and to all our work throughout the years which this is a culmination of. Their lived-experience, insights, creativity, and hard work was essential to the writing of this manifesto.

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The use of 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 Equality 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.

We use the language of state or the Equality Act 2010 to ensure the protections afforded under the Act are relied upon for the communities we protect, while continuing to advocate for disaggregation of data and the acknowledgment of the unique experiences of each community.



Equalities

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities are among the most disenfranchised ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom with the worst outcomes across health, education, employment and criminal justice among others. Policymakers have been up to this point ignoring these communities, labelling these issues as unimportant or too difficult to deal with, leaving them voiceless. Although Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities are only a small number it is essential for the Government to tackle the inequality faced by the most disenfranchised groups in society.

It is therefore essential that the future Government develops a strong Strategic Cross-Governmental Action plan which wholesale tackles the discrimination and disenfranchisement faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the United Kingdom. A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2009 highlighted that the inequalities faced by the communities is so widespread but that the experiences and issues faced by these communities are invisible and ignored within wider agendas. This reality has not changed much since 2009.

Our Asks

Develop and fund a Cross-Governmental Action Plan to improve outcomes across all areas of public life for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the United Kingdom.

Calls on all parliamentary parties to develop campaign groups for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller rights (akin to the former Labour Party Campaign Group for Travellers' Rights).

Hate Speech and Discrimination

An overwhelming majority of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller community members experience extensive discrimination throughout their lives, with research published by the Traveller Movement in 2017 90% of Gypsies and Travellers have experienced discrimination.¹ The discrimination experienced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities is pervasive and occurs in all aspects of life and from all people, from being refused service at pubs and restaurants to prominent politicians using racial stereotypes to whip up hate in their communities. This means that an overwhelming majority of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people hide their ethnicity in their day-to-day life to avoid discrimination. The discrimination faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities is often not taken seriously and is sometimes even seen as acceptable. Politicians need to end this hierarchy of victimization that prioritizes certain groups while excluding the experiences of other communities.

Our Asks

A framework should be introduced for holding to account politicians who make inflammatory comments about Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers.

A campaign should be developed in connection with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller voluntary and community sector organisations to tackle anti-Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller discrimination.

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.

¹ The Traveller Movement, [The last acceptable form of racism?](#), 2017.



Data Gathering and Inclusion

The Traveller Movement has consistently called for better data gathering and representation of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in official statistics. In 2017 the Government's Racial Disparity Audit found that of the 130 public datasets that were audited only 27 included classifications for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. The majority of these used Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage which do not line up with 2021 census categories and therefore are hard to cross reference.

Without proper 19+1 disaggregated data collection by all public bodies the experiences and inequalities of these communities remain widely unknown and therefore the communities go on underserved and ignorable. Data is power and a lack of data renders the communities voiceless.

Our Asks

The Government must review all governmental, departmental and public datasets which do not use the 19+1 ethnicity classifications which disaggregates the community's data into Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller acknowledging their distinct ethnicities.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities must engage with grassroots Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller organisations to formulate a campaign which encourages self-disclosure.



Accommodation

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. The 2021 Census recorded a total of 168,748 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in England and Wales, 0.3% of the total population. However, the actual numbers are estimated to be about 300,000, and the highest estimates place the numbers at 500,000. It is estimated about one quarter of this population live on a site, either publicly owned by a local authority or privately owned, while the vast majority live in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation. While the vast majority live in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation this is often not by choice but rather because of a lack of appropriate site provision.

These sites are often in appalling condition lacking the most basic amenities often not fit for human habitation. A huge proportion of sites are placed near environmental hazards, pollutants are isolated from the settled community and often go totally ignored by the Local Authority.² Opposition to site building, which is required under the Public Sector Equality Duty of Local Authorities, forces the communities to be pushed to areas where no one should be expected to live.

Successive governments have failed to adequately uphold the rights of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998. Particularly in relation to the quality and nature of the accommodation provided by local authorities. It is essential that any future government addresses these infringements.

Our Asks

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.

Require Local Authorities to survey their housed Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller populations to determine the number willing to move onto dedicated sites.

Ensure Local Authorities develop inter-agency forums in conjunction with grassroots Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller organisations to ensure there are pro-active steps to develop community cohesion.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should do 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.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities must ensure it delivers on the promises made under the National Planning Policy Framework for the provision of a five-year supply of deliverable sites.

² Bloch, A., & Quarmby, K. (2024). Environmental racism, segregation and discrimination: Gypsy and Traveller sites in Great Britain. *Critical Social Policy*, 0(0).



Violence against Women & Girls

The work the Traveller Movement does with women & girls aims to empower and support them to advocate for themselves, their families and their communities. Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women have played a significant role in the development of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller organisations and have made a valuable contribution to the improvement of the lives of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people in the United Kingdom. Many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women throughout their lives experience many overlapping forms of discrimination which continues to compound as issues go unaddressed.

Violence against women affects women from all ethnic and social groups. The level of domestic violence in Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities is unknown. As a result of discrimination, poor health, high illiteracy levels and a historical mistrust of services, Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women face additional barriers to accessing information, services and protection from violence, which place them at further risk of domestic and sexual violence.

Our Asks

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should ring fence funding to allow Local Authorities to re-establish Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller Liaison Officers who can combat many of the barriers which face Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women & girls accessing services.

Ensure there are culturally specific and targeted resources available for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women & girls experiencing domestic violence or any other forms of gender-based violence.

The Government must encourage local authorities and schools to actively engage with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller parents about what relationship and sex education involves in line with official RSE Guidance.



Youth

This disadvantages all young people but the disproportional effect on young Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people, who already experience multiple and compounding inequalities in housing, education, the criminal justice system, health, and the labour market, is pronounced. A specific Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller youth strategy, either as an element of a broader youth strategy or as an element of the National Strategy to reduce inequalities, is urgently needed.

Too many young people are leaving compulsory education without the prerequisite qualifications needed to pursue further training or education, particularly those with pre-existing challenges in their lives. Nowhere is this more pronounced, however, than among Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities, in which 53% are economically inactive – the highest of any ethnic minority group – and those who are employed are significantly overrepresented in routine and semi-routine occupations,

Our Asks

Create a National Youth Strategy with specific and targeted provision for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller young people.

Establish new and enhance existing youth partnerships and employment and skills boards, to ensure support services and enhanced opportunities for skills development for minoritised groups of young people.

The UK Government should undertake a root and branch review of the efficacy and limitations of employment assistance programs for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.

Education

Those from a Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller background have the lowest educational attainment of all ethnic groups throughout all schooling years. Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller youth face several compounding disadvantages within the education system: low educational attainment, high rates of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and are five times more likely to be permanently excluded from school.

Successive governments have failed to address the problems faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in exercising their rights to access education. A new government must prioritise the attainment rates of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people. A system which comprehensively fails its most vulnerable children is one which needs to be comprehensively different.

Our Asks

The first priority for any new government is to ensure that the legal right to an education is not denied to any child, including Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children.

The Department for Education must drive behavioural change in schools, beginning with the implementation of a mandatory and standardised requirement for schools to monitor, record, and report instances of race/ethnicity-based bullying and discrimination; including in circumstances in which the threshold for a hate crime has not deemed to have been met.

The Department for Education should conduct a complete audit of all local authorities to ensure that they have robust policies and procedures on children potentially missing from education.



Health

The Traveller Movement has been campaigning for the inclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnic groups within the NHS data dictionary for several decades. There needs to be routinely collected, disaggregated data collected on the different ethnic groups to improve inclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish (or ethnic) Traveller groups.

There needs to be a determined effort made to improve the availability of disaggregated health data to open the door to governmental and non-governmental long-term funding streams to support cases for targeted health initiatives and outreach programmes. More data on mental health and suicide rates, for example, are needed to address the endemic mental health crisis we know is affecting our communities.

National government needs to work with the voluntary and community sector and local authority health services to improve data collection on Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers to illustrate and sufficiently address the severe health inequalities experienced by members of these communities.

Our Asks

The terms Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller must be added to the NHS dictionary with immediate effect.

The Government must commission voluntary and community sector Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller organisations to fully review and sufficiently address the severe health inequalities experienced by members of these communities.

The Department of Health and Social Care should ensure the adoption of a trauma-informed approach specifically tailored to meet the needs of racialized communities, working with community organisations to ensure that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities participate in decision-making processes.



Criminal Justice

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller some of the most disproportionately represented ethnic minority groups in the criminal justice system. The path to entering the criminal justice system is facilitated by a number of interconnected inequalities including poverty, ethnic and social inequalities, mental ill health, and exclusion from school.

Like many other minority ethnic communities in the United Kingdom Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers have a distrustful and sometimes hostile relationship with the police. The Traveller Movements research points to the fact that the majority of police described Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity being treated as a risk factor by the police, indicating that the police are not only failing to eliminate discrimination but have thereby entrenched a discriminatory approach to policing these communities. Further to this the Baroness Casey report which investigated racism, sexism and homophobia in the Metropolitan Police Department did not mention Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicities a single time.

Our Asks

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

A root and branch review of each police force should be conducted by HMICFRS to access institutional bias against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.

The Ministry of Justice must ring-fence funding to commission Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller voluntary and community sector to support initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and reporting of hate crimes targeting these communities.





The Traveller Movement

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