



Pan-London Evaluation: Inclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller Communities In Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategies



January 2026

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Romani (Gypsy), 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.

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Acknowledgements

The Traveller Movement extends its sincere gratitude to all those whose contributions made this report possible. This research represents a significant collaborative effort to address systemic inequities faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities across London.

We are particularly indebted to the participating London Boroughs for their engagement and for providing the critical data that underpins this evaluation. Their willingness to reflect openly on local policy and practice has enabled an evidence-based assessment of both the challenges and opportunities for meaningful inclusion.

We are honoured that Caroline Russell, Green Party Member of the London Assembly, agreed to contribute the Foreword to this report. Her thoughtful and compelling advocacy reinforces the urgent need for political leadership and accountable action to translate commitments into tangible change.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge Propel, whose forward-looking support and funding were essential to the realisation of this pan-London research initiative. Their investment reflects a shared dedication to advancing equity, fostering genuine inclusion, and ensuring that marginalised voices are centred in policy and practice.

Foreword



This report lays bare a truth that should shame every public body in London: our systems are failing Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities. Not by accident, but by design.

The findings presented here are stark, consistent, and utterly damning. They paint a picture of profound institutional neglect, where communities are rendered invisible by outdated data, excluded by 'one-size-fits-all' strategies, and silenced by a lack of meaningful collaboration. In housing, education, health, and youth services, the pattern is the same: promises of inclusion dissolve into a reality of exclusion, inequality, and missed potential.

As a London Assembly Member, I see these failures reflected in the experiences shared with me by communities across the capital. Families facing a desperate shortage of safe, culturally appropriate places to live. Young people disengaging from an education system that does not see or value them. Parents fearing discrimination when seeking healthcare for their children. This is not marginalisation by misfortune; it is marginalisation by policy and practice.

The chronic shortage of sites, the educational disengagement, and the profound health disparities are not inevitable tragedies. They are the direct results of policy withdrawal and strategic neglect. They reveal that, amidst all the rhetoric on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the needs of these communities are consistently deprioritised.

This cannot continue. The recommendations in this report are not optional extras; they are the essential foundations for justice. We must move from universal approaches that perpetuate inequality to targeted, co-produced interventions. This means:

- Listening to and resourcing community-led solutions, ensuring Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller voices are at the heart of designing the services they need.
- Restoring the duty to provide sites and taking bold, urgent action to address the accommodation crisis.
- Investing in dedicated, culturally competent support in schools, GP surgeries, and youth services.
- Collecting and acting on robust data to make these communities visible and hold authorities to account.

The London Assembly, the Mayor, and every Borough leader must read this report and act. The moral, social, and economic case for change is overwhelming. We have the evidence. We have the solutions. What we need now is the political will.

This is a call to end the racism that has been normalised in our society. It is a call to build a London that truly includes and values all its people. Let this report be the catalyst for that long-overdue transformation.

Caroline Russell

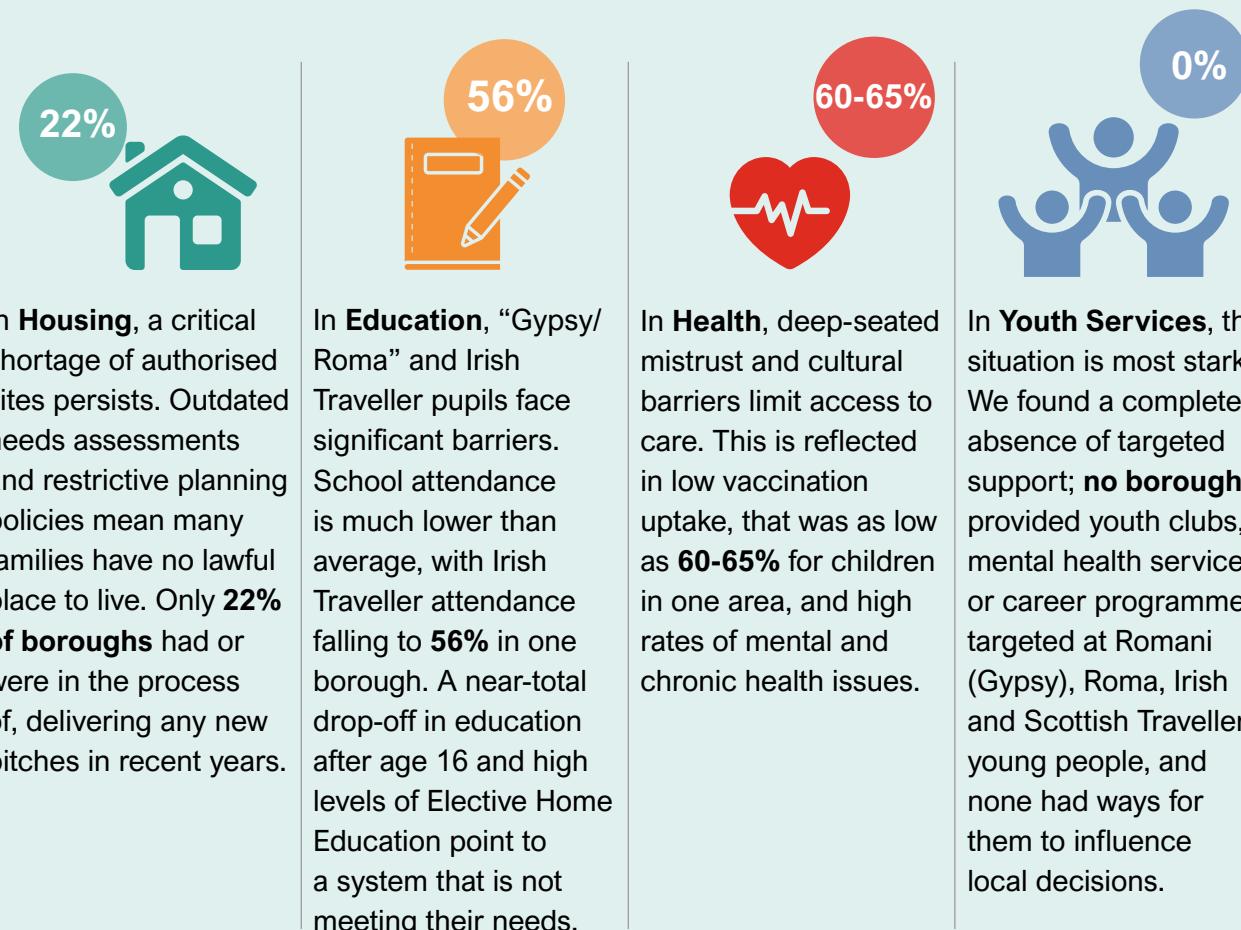
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Caroline Russell'.

Green Party Member of the London Assembly
Jan 2026

Executive Summary

This report presents a pan-London evaluation of how London Boroughs are supporting Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities through their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work. The findings, gathered from nine boroughs, reveal that the communities are consistently being left behind due to three key issues: a lack of reliable data, strategies that fail to mention them, and not enough meaningful collaboration with them. This has led to poor and unequal outcomes in housing, education, health, youth and community services.

The evidence points to a pattern of exclusion across essential services:



The report concludes that the current ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to public services is failing the communities. To create genuine inclusion, a fundamental shift is required.

Our core recommendation is a move towards **targeted, co-produced interventions**. This means boroughs must work directly with the different communities to design and deliver services, invest in dedicated staff roles, and use robust data to track progress. By taking these practical steps, London’s boroughs can translate their commitments into tangible actions, ensuring that the communities are visible, heard, and equitably supported.

1. Introduction to the Report

Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities remain among the most marginalised and underserved ethnic groups in the United Kingdom. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has documented an “experience of inequality in a wide range of areas” and “a high level of stigma and prejudice” faced by these groups across all areas of life.¹ A subsequent inquiry by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee² starkly concluded that prejudice against the communities “is the last ‘respectable’ form of racism”, highlighting the depth of societal and institutional challenge.

This report examines how London Boroughs are responding to these challenges within their EDI strategies. By gathering data from nine boroughs across four critical areas – accommodation, education, health, and youth & community development – it identifies persistent structural failures and isolates areas where strategic intervention is most urgently needed. The analysis places local authority performance within the context of national policy and research, providing an evidence-based foundation for recommendations.



Accommodation continues to be one of the most pressing areas of inequality. National research³ reports that over 1,000 households in England are on unauthorised encampments due to the chronic shortage of authorised sites, while many existing sites are of poor quality, and “can lack even the most basic of amenities.”⁴ The enforcement led approach in some areas has contributed to increased hostility and displacement, further marginalising families. Government audits have highlighted that only a small proportion of local authorities have up-to-date Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTANAs), and even fewer have delivered new site provision based on those assessments.⁵



In **education**, “Gypsy/Roma”⁶ pupils continue to experience the lowest academic outcomes of any ethnic group. As of the 2022/ 23 school year, the average score for ‘Attainment 8’ (a measure of pupils’ performance in 8 GCSE-level qualifications) was 46.3 out of 90.0. “Gypsy/Roma” pupils had the lowest score of any ethnicity (20.3), followed by Irish heritage pupils (26.8).⁷ These statistics reflect a complex mix of factors including institutional bias, curriculum irrelevance, bullying, and lack of

1 Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Is England Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2016](#), (2016).

2 House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), (2019).

3 Friends, Families and Travellers, [Last on the list: An overview of unmet need for pitches on Traveller sites in England](#), (2021).

4 House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), (2019).

5 Richardson, J et al., [Challenging and improving planning policy for Gypsies and Travellers](#), (2020).

6 Government education data wrongly amalgamates Romani (Gypsy) and Roma communities as a homogeneous group, obscuring distinct needs and hindering targeted local action.

7 Department for Education, [Ethnicity facts and figures: GCSE results \(Attainment 8\)](#), (2024).

The poor outcomes and intersectional marginalisation experienced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities ... pose significant and enduring challenges for local authorities in London and across the UK.

cultural sensitivity in schools. A recent briefing⁸ found that families often struggle to access additional learning support, and that schools frequently fail to build meaningful relationships with the different communities.



The **health** of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities continues to be significantly worse than that of the general population. According to Office of National Statistics [ONS] research,⁹ members of these communities report high rates of anxiety, depression, chronic illnesses, and low access to preventative healthcare. A survey by Friends, Families and Travellers found that 43% of respondents experienced mental health issues, often exacerbated by discrimination, social exclusion, and housing insecurity.¹⁰ Poor oral health, higher infant mortality rates, and reduced life expectancy of up to 12 years less than the general population are well-documented and underscore the lack of culturally safe health services.



With **youth and community development**, young people face compounded barriers to accessing opportunities. Research shows that many disengage from formal education before the age of 16, limiting their access to youth services and post-16 training or employment pathways. A lack of targeted investment in culturally competent youth services has created a significant gap in provision, with many local authorities reporting limited understanding or engagement with these communities.¹¹ National charities have highlighted the need for peer-led models and co-produced youth programmes to improve participation and foster inclusion.

The poor outcomes and intersectional marginalisation experienced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities across the key domains of accommodation, education, health, and youth and community development, pose significant and enduring challenges for local authorities in London and across the UK.

8 House of Commons Library, *Gypsies and Travellers: educational outcomes* (Briefing CBP-10016, (2024)).

9 Office for National Statistics, *Gypsy and Traveller lived experiences and health, England and Wales*, (2022).

10 Friends, Families and Travellers, *Briefing: Health inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*, (2022).

11 Traveller Movement, *Roads to Success*, (2022).

2. Key Findings

The following section presents the key findings from the analysis of a survey conducted across nine London boroughs. It is structured to outline the major cross-cutting and thematic challenges identified.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

1 Data Gaps: <i>Inconsistent data collection and outdated assessments undermine strategic planning.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Accommodation: 78% of boroughs have a GTANA, but most are outdated (some from 2016); only one had a 2024 assessment.● Education: 87.5% collect disaggregated ethnicity data, but inconsistencies and partial data limit its use for interventions.● Health: Only 50% have conducted a dedicated Health Needs Assessment (HNA); only 50% produce disaggregated ethnicity data.● Youth & Community: 62.5% report poor Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller youth representation in leadership and decision-making roles; and 25% report no representation at all. Most boroughs lack participation data.
2 Systemic Barriers: <i>Deeply embedded policies and practices limit access to equitable services.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Accommodation: Roma in bricks-and-mortar housing are invisible in data, leading to systemic neglect of their needs.● Education: 62.5% report insufficient funding; 50% cite limited staff training, creating barriers to educational equity.● Health: 100% of boroughs identify fear/mistrust as a barrier; 75% report difficulty registering with GPs; 50% note culturally inappropriate provision.● Youth & Community: Only 12.5% have an EDI strategy explicitly referencing the different Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities. None have a specific youth development strategy.
3 Limited Engagement: <i>Insufficient and non-co-produced involvement of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Accommodation: When asked how they engage with the communities regarding accommodation planning and decision making only 11% have a dedicated Liaison Officer; with fewer than half (44%) engaging in public consultation.● Education: Only 37.5% report structured engagement with parents or communities.● Health: Only 25% collaborate with sector specific organisations or provide culturally competent outreach.● Youth & Community: 50% have no measures to include Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish or Scottish Traveller community voices. Only three boroughs (37.5%) have partnerships with community-led organisations. No borough has targeted and specific youth engagement infrastructure.

SPECIFIC THEMES

ACCOMMODATION



- **Planning Policy Misalignment:** A significant proportion of identified pitch needs do not meet the 2024 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites definition,¹² excluding many households.
- **Minimal Pitch Delivery:** Only 22% of boroughs reported they are currently, or in the process of, delivering new pitches. Monitoring and reporting are inconsistent.
- **Development Barriers:** Land costs (78%), planning restrictions (67%), and settled community opposition are critical barriers.
- **Outdated Evidence Base:** Only 33% have clear timelines for GTANA updates (ranging 2026-2029), hindering a coordinated response.

EDUCATION



- **Low Attendance:** “Gypsy/Roma” and Irish Traveller pupils have consistently lower attendance. Irish Traveller pupil attendance was as low as 56% in one borough.
- **Post-16 Drop-Off:** Only four “Gypsy/Roma”, or Irish Traveller pupils were recorded in Further Education across all eight boroughs.
- **High Elective Home Education (EHE):** EHE is disproportionately high (e.g., 68% of Irish Traveller secondary pupils in one borough), indicating mistrust and exclusion.
- **No Attainment Data:** No borough could provide usable GCSE data due to the small number of “Gypsy/Roma” or Irish Traveller pupils completing Key Stage 4.
- **Lack of Strategic Inclusion:** 75% of boroughs were unaware if schools had adopted the GTRSB School Pledge.¹³

12 The revised definition of “Gypsies and Travellers” included in the 2024 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites is “Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.”

13 The [UK GTRSB Pledge](#) is a commitment from educational institutions to support “Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showman, and Boater” students in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The pledge aims to create equitable spaces, tackle stigmas, and remove barriers to education for these communities. It is developed through consultation with community members, civil society organizations, university representatives, and education policy specialists. The pledge includes a range of measures such as improving data collection, empowering students to self-identify, and ensuring an inclusive workplace environment.

HEALTH



- **Health Inequalities:** Elevated rates of chronic conditions (diabetes, hypertension) and mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide risk).
- **Low Vaccination Uptake:** Childhood immunisation rates as low as 60-65% in one borough, versus a 92% national average.
- **Access Barriers:** Language barriers and digital exclusion (particularly for Roma populations) limit access to online services and information.

YOUTH & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



- **No Targeted Youth Services:** **No borough** provides targeted services (e.g., youth clubs, mental health support) specifically for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish or Scottish Traveller young people.
- **Overreliance on Universalism:** Universal services are used to justify a lack of targeted programming, failing to ensure equitable outcomes.
- **No Education/Employment Pathways:** Only one borough had a dedicated education support worker. **No borough** offered tailored apprenticeships or employment pathways.
- **Inaction on Discrimination:** **No borough** reported offering anti-bullying or hate crime policies specifically protecting Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish or Scottish Traveller youth. Only 25% indicated that they collaborate with police to address hate incidents against the communities.
- **Tokenistic Cultural Inclusion:** While three boroughs support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, only one had uncertain plans for 2025.
- **Lack of Dedicated Infrastructure:** Roles like community Liaison Officers are absent or vacant, highlighting a lack of dedicated, culturally competent infrastructure.

3. Recommendations

CROSS CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS:



Data Integrity:

London Boroughs must systematically collect, disaggregate, and utilise ethnicity data for all Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities, to inform all strategic planning.



Co-production:

Boroughs should embed mandatory co-production with Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller-led organisations in the design, delivery, and evaluation of all relevant policies and services, backed by long-term, flexible funding.



Cultural Competence:

Implement mandatory anti-racism and cultural competence (may also be referred to as cultural humility) training for all elected members and officers in frontline services, developed in partnership with Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller organisations.



ACCOMMODATION:

The **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)** must develop a comprehensive Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Strategy, that re-introduces a mandatory duty on local authorities to meet their GTANAs with clear oversight and enforcement mechanisms for non-delivering local authorities. This statutory duty to build sites should be accompanied by culturally informed guidance that regulates local authorities to avoid sites being placed in undesirable locations.

The **London Plan** should be revised to reinstate pan-London pitch targets and impose a statutory duty on boroughs to meet the needs identified in their GTANAs.

To ensure trusted engagement, boroughs should establish permanent Advocacy Officer roles within housing and planning. Crucially, these officers must act as the central point of a wider, departmental responsibility, coordinating efforts and ensuring a strategic, corporate-wide approach to supporting Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities.



EDUCATION:

Boroughs, in partnership with the **Greater London Authority (GLA)**, must develop and fund targeted transition support programmes for “Gypsy/Roma” and Irish Traveller pupils aged 14-19, focusing on vocational pathways, mentoring, and careers advice.

Boroughs should actively promote, track, and report on school adoption of the **GTRSB School Pledge**, integrating it as a key performance indicator within local EDI strategies.

Establish dedicated, culturally sensitive Elective Home Education (EHE) outreach teams to ensure children outside mainstream schooling have access to education and are safeguarded

Boroughs should implement a robust, accountable framework for educational inclusion, with dedicated outreach to support Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils and their families. This should include targeted interventions to improve school attendance, reduce elective home education (EHE) rates, and hold schools accountable for promoting an inclusive environment.

HEALTH:



NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and local authorities should jointly commission and fund a comprehensive Health Needs Assessment for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities in every London borough, to be updated on a five-year cycle.

Invest in community-led health advocacy, by commissioning Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller-led organisations to provide outreach, health navigation, and advocacy services to bridge the trust gap with mainstream provision.

Co-produce and commission tailored mental health and wellbeing services, including psychological therapies and preventative programmes, that are accessible and culturally appropriate.

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:



Develop and implement a pan-London co-produced youth strategy for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller young people, with dedicated funding for targeted services in mental health, education, and recreation.

Establish a pan-London Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller Strategic Partnership, modelled on the Kent 'Community of Practice'. This multi-agency board, comprising community leaders, voluntary sector advocates, and senior decision-makers from borough councils, accommodation, health, education, and policing, should coordinate strategy, share best practice, and drive accountable action across the capital.

Create structured youth participation pathways in every borough, including Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller youth advisory boards, to ensure their voices directly influence policy and service design.

Embed explicit anti-bullying, anti-racism, and hate crime policies within all youth settings and schools that specifically name and protect Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller young people.

4. Research Methodology

This evaluation is based on data collected through a structured survey conducted between February and May 2025. The survey was initially distributed by email to the Lead Member or Mayor of each London Borough. Where responses were received and key officers identified, follow-up communication was undertaken directly with those officers to support completion.

The original response deadline of 12 April 2025 was later extended to 11 May 2025 to accommodate boroughs requiring additional time. Reminder emails were issued in March and April, with the revised deadline communicated as part of this follow-up.

Of the 15 London boroughs that initially agreed to participate in the survey, only nine submitted responses. Eight boroughs completed the full survey, while one responded solely to the accommodation section. This results in a partial or full response rate of 28.13% (9 out of 32 boroughs), with a full completion rate of 25% (8 out of 32 boroughs). The level of engagement across multiple boroughs provides a meaningful insight into local authority approaches and priorities regarding Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller inclusion across key service areas.

While elected representatives in all 15 boroughs demonstrated clear political commitment to participating, the lower final response rate highlights a possible disconnect between political intent and operational delivery. Though not explored in detail, likely barriers at officer level include time constraints, the perceived complexity of the survey, or challenges related to internal coordination across departments.

The survey was delivered through SurveyMonkey and covered four thematic areas: Accommodation, Health, Education, and Youth & Community Development. Due to the nature of the questions, completing the survey required collaboration across multiple departments within each borough, which posed varying degrees of administrative difficulty. A key limitation of the survey platform was that it did not allow respondents to save progress and return later, which created additional challenges for busy local authority teams. In response to this, some boroughs opted to complete a PDF version of the survey, which was returned via email to the Traveller Movement.

Responses were submitted in a variety of formats. While some boroughs provided detailed narrative responses, including where quantitative data had been requested, others offered brief or incomplete answers. To ensure consistency and meaningful interpretation, the Traveller Movement undertook a thematic analysis of the responses, grouping the data to identify common trends, challenges, and areas of good practice.

5. Accommodation

A secure and stable home is an essential foundation upon which individuals and families can build a thriving life. However, for too many Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller families, finding a culturally appropriate place to live is their single biggest challenge in London. Our findings show a system that is failing at every stage: it uses outdated information, is struggling to adapt to policy changes, and as a result, delivers far too few new places to live. This leaves many families in a state of permanent housing insecurity.

The problem starts with outdated evidence.

To plan effectively, councils need an accurate, up-to-date picture of need. This is done through a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA). While most boroughs surveyed (78%) have an assessment in place, the vast majority are years out of date, with some as old as 2016. In fact, only one borough had an assessment from 2024. This means councils are trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's data. This goes against official government guidance, that recommends these assessments be updated at least every five years to be a reliable basis for planning.¹⁴ Without a current and coordinated evidence base, it's impossible for London to address this crisis strategically.

A fairer policy, but a problematic transition.

The recent revision to the national Planning Policy for Traveller Sites in December 2024 was designed to be fairer. The revised policy includes a new definition of the term 'Traveller.' The new definition rightly acknowledges that families should still be considered for site provision even if they have stopped travelling which is a positive change from the old rules.

However, the revised planning definition now includes '[p]ersons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin.' This perhaps obscures the specific accommodation needs arising from the cultural identity and historic disadvantage of the ethnic groups the policy was originally designed to protect.

This well-intentioned shift has created a critical short-term problem. As most boroughs are using outdated GTANAs conducted under the old definition, they have not yet properly assessed the needs of this newly included group. One borough's data highlights this gap: they identified a need for 92 new pitches, but a staggering 84 of those households fall into this category of need that was not fully captured under previous assessments. Until boroughs complete new needs assessments, using the updated definition, a significant number of families, who are now intended to be included, remain in a planning limbo, effectively locked out of the system. This transition period risks perpetuating the very exclusion the policy change sought to fix.

14 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Planning policy for traveller sites](#), (2024).

Delivery is minimal, and barriers are high.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the delivery of new pitches has almost ground to a halt. Only 22% of boroughs reported having delivered or were in the process of delivering any new pitches. When asked what the problems were, councils pointed to a familiar set of challenges: the high cost of land (78%), a simple lack of available land (67%), and complex planning restrictions. This lack of progress has a real human cost, contributing to the over 1,000 households in England living on unauthorised encampments due to the chronic shortage of official sites.¹⁵

This lack of delivery is very much commonplace across the UK. The decision to remove the statutory duty on councils to provide sites in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act has had a devastating impact. A recent survey of 100 Local Planning Authorities found that of the 149 local authority owned sites, 119 had been built before 1994 and only 30 since then (i.e. after the statutory duty to build sites was revoked).¹⁶ With every delay and denied planning application for Romani (Gypsy), Irish and Scottish Traveller sites, local authorities are deepening the trench of social exclusion that surrounds these communities, isolating them from the stability that a permanent base provides.

Roma families are being left in the shadows.

This crisis isn't only about site provision. Roma families living in standard bricks-and-mortar housing are almost completely invisible in borough data and planning. Their specific struggles, such as the affordability of private rents and a desperate lack of temporary accommodation should they become homeless, are going unseen and unaddressed. 67% percent of boroughs surveyed acknowledged these issues, but without proper data to capture Roma-specific housing status, as recommended by the Roma Support Group, they cannot develop the targeted policies needed to help.¹⁷

In summary, the accommodation situation for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities in London is at a breaking point. Councils are working with outdated information, are caught off-guard by a significant policy transition, have no statutory duty/incentive to build sites, and the result is that families are being failed by the very system designed to provide them with a home.



Only 22% of boroughs reported having delivered or were in the process of delivering any new pitches.

15 Friends, Families and Travellers, Last on the list: An overview of unmet need for pitches on Traveller sites in England, (2021).

16 Rushton, S., Kicking the can down the road: The planning and provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England 1960-2023, (2023).

17 Roma Support Group, Roma Housing in London: Barriers and Inequalities, (2025).

6. Education

The education system is failing Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils. Our research reveals a journey that begins with significant absence in primary school and ends in a near-total drop-off after GCSEs. This isn't just about individual choices; it points to a system that is not equipped to support, include, or retain these pupils, ultimately pushing them towards isolated educational pathways and limited employment opportunities.

A Pattern of Disengagement and Absence

The problem starts early. We found alarmingly low attendance rates for “Gypsy/Roma” and Irish Traveller pupils compared to their peers. In one borough, Irish Traveller attendance in Secondary Education was just 56%, and in another, “Gypsy/Roma” pupil attendance fell to 78%, both significantly below borough averages of around 95%.

This is not an isolated London issue. It reflects a persistent national crisis. According to the UK Government “Gypsy/Roma” and Irish Traveller pupils have the highest rates of persistent absence of all ethnic groups in England.¹⁸ This chronic absence is often a symptom of deeper problems, including bullying, a lack of cultural relevance in the curriculum, and families’ historical mistrust of statutory services.

The Post-16 Vacuum

Perhaps the most telling finding is what happens after secondary school. The transition to post-16 education represents a critical systemic failure. Across all eight boroughs that provided data, we found only **four** “Gypsy/Roma” or Irish Traveller pupils recorded as being in Further Education. While it is recognised that some of this statistical invisibility may be due to young people’s reluctance to self-identify, the sheer scale of the underrepresentation, amounting to a near-total absence in formal further education, remains an alarming statistic that points to a profound disengagement from the educational system.

This severe decline in participation is a well-documented national issue. A profound lack of targeted careers advice, mentoring, and culturally relevant vocational pathways means that even high-achieving Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils are often left with no clear progression route after GCSEs, severing their connection to formal education and training. As a recent Traveller Movement report concluded the *“systemic exclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller children from the education system, driven by both overt and subtle institutional factors, demands urgent and comprehensive reform.”*¹⁹



¹⁸ Department for Education, Ethnicity facts and figures: Absence from School, (2024).

¹⁹ Traveller Movement, Fought not Taught Addressing Coercive Exclusions of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller Children, (2024).

Elective Home Education (EHE): A Symptom of a System Under Strain

When a system fails to be inclusive, families look for alternatives. The data on EHE is startling. In one borough, 68% of Irish Traveller secondary-age pupils were being home-educated. In another, the number of Irish Traveller pupils registered for EHE was higher than the number registered for schooling.

This high rate of EHE is a clear indicator of a breakdown in trust. Research from The Traveller Movement²⁰ has directly linked rising EHE numbers to “coercive exclusions” within the school system, including persistent bullying, cultural customs, philosophical or lifestyle choice and a failure to adequately support pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), which collectively create an environment where families feel they have no other choice. It is important to recognise that while EHE can be a positive choice for some, when it is a response to this type of exclusion, it risks leading to educational isolation. Pupils in these circumstances often face challenges like digital poverty and lose access to vital specialist resources, which can widen the attainment gap.

Invisible in the Data, Absent from Strategy

A recurring theme is the statistical invisibility of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils. No borough could provide usable GCSE attainment data, as the number of pupils completing Key Stage 4 was so small it fell below the reporting threshold. This creates a vicious cycle: without data, it is difficult to argue for targeted resources or to measure progress, which in turn perpetuates the problem.



This strategic neglect is further evidenced by the lack of awareness around key inclusion tools. A significant 75% of boroughs were unaware if any schools in their area had adopted the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boaters (GTRSB) School Pledge, a framework designed to foster an inclusive ethos. This highlights a critical disconnect between borough-level EDI commitments and what is happening on the ground in schools. It echoes findings from The Traveller Movement’s “Roads to Success” report, which emphasised that without clear leadership and accountability from local authorities, inclusive practice in schools remains patchy and underfunded.²¹

**68% of
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In summary, the educational experience for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils in London is one of disengagement and exclusion. The system is currently defined by what it lacks: a lack of early intervention to ensure attendance, a lack of support to enable post-16 progression, a lack of cultural safety to keep pupils in school, and a lack of strategic oversight to make their progress visible and valued.

20 *ibid*

21 Traveller Movement, [Roads to Success](#), (2022).

7. Health

When it comes to health, the data reveals a simple and stark truth: Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities experience some of the worst outcomes in the country. Their poorer health isn't due to chance; it's the direct result of significant barriers that prevent them from accessing timely, respectful, and effective care.

A Heavy Burden of Illness

The health challenges facing Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities are both deep and wide-ranging. Our survey found that in one borough, a striking **62% of Irish Traveller respondents, replying to the borough's Health Needs Assessment**, lived with at least one long-term condition like diabetes, hypertension, or heart disease.

Perhaps even more alarming is the state of mental wellbeing. Nearly two-thirds of boroughs (62.5%) reported high levels of anxiety, depression, and suicide risk within their local Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities. This isn't just a London issue; it reflects a national crisis that has been well documented for many decades.

A comprehensive review by Cemlyn et al (2009)²² postulates that "Gypsies and Travellers [are] being resigned to the experience of discrimination and of low quality of life, health and well-being." This profound distress is often linked to the daily experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and insecure living conditions.

A System Failing on Prevention

A functioning healthcare system protects people from getting sick in the first place. For Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities, this preventative safety net is full of holes. Our survey uncovered childhood vaccination rates as low as **60-65%** in one borough, a frighteningly low figure compared to the World Health Organisation recommended national average coverage of **95%**.²³

The low uptake of services is not due to parental indifference, but rather a systemic failure to build trust and ensure accessibility. As Bell et al (2020)²⁴ notes, reversing this trend requires proactive, community-led outreach to address deep-seated mistrust. Without such efforts, entire communities face a heightened risk of outbreaks from preventable diseases like measles and whooping cough.



62.5%
reported high
levels of anxiety,
depression, and
suicide risk within
their communities

²² Cemlyn, S. et al., *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, (2009).

²³ House of Commons Library, *Childhood Immunisation Statistics*, (2025).

²⁴ Bell et al., *What have we learnt from measles outbreaks in 3 English cities? A qualitative exploration of factors influencing vaccination uptake in Romanian and Roma Romanian communities*, (2020).

The Wall of Barriers to Access

The obstacles to receiving care are multifaceted, starting with a fundamental crisis of trust. All surveyed boroughs (100%) identified deep-seated mistrust, often stemming from discrimination or fear of other authorities as a major hurdle. This is compounded by practical challenges, with 75% of boroughs reporting that GP registration is difficult due to administrative inflexibility or staff bias. Finally, cultural and digital exclusion, including language barriers and low digital literacy, particularly locks out many Roma communities from an increasingly online healthcare system.

These challenges are well-recognised at a national level. The NHS Advancing Mental Health Equalities Strategy²⁵ highlights that certain communities face barriers to accessing care due to experiences of fear, stigma, and discrimination. It emphasises the need for services to be designed and delivered in ways that are culturally sensitive and responsive, advocating for tailored approaches to ensure mental health support reaches everyone, particularly those from under-served or marginalised groups.

The Way Forward: Community-Led Solutions

The evidence is clear: the standard approach to healthcare is failing Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities. The solution lies in moving away from a one-size-fits-all model and instead investing in community-led health advocates. These trusted individuals can bridge the gap between communities and clinics, providing culturally competent support, translation, and navigation.



Childhood immunisation rates as low as

60-65%
in one borough, versus
a 92% national average.

Furthermore, the **Core20PLUS5** framework, a national NHS England approach to reducing health inequalities, explicitly identifies the different communities as a key group («PLUS») for targeted support.²⁶ This provides a clear mandate for local health systems to develop specific action plans, co-produced with local communities, to tackle the stark inequalities in mental health, childhood vaccination, and chronic disease management.

Without this dedicated, culturally informed effort, the profound health inequalities facing the communities will persist, undermining the very principle of a National Health Service that is there for all.

In summary, this chapter reveals a health crisis defined by stark inequalities and systemic failure. Romani(Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities experience a heavy burden of physical and mental illness, exacerbated by a “wall of barriers” to care, including deep-seated mistrust, administrative inflexibility, and digital exclusion. Tackling these profound challenges demands a decisive move away from standard practice, pivoting instead to community-led, co-produced strategies that directly dismantle these barriers and embed lasting equity.

25 National Health Service, Advancing mental health equalities strategy, (2020).

26 NHS England, Core20PLUS5 (adults) – an approach to reducing healthcare inequalities, (n.d.) Retrieved 20 October 2025

8. Youth and Community Development

When we examine how systems support Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities, from children to adults, a clear picture emerges of significant gaps and missed opportunities. The data reveals a pattern of strategic oversight where the specific needs of residents are often not explicitly considered in both youth services and broader community planning. This has tangible consequences for inclusion and outcomes.

Strategic Invisibility from the Start

With Youth Development for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller young people, the pathway to a thriving adulthood is filled with obstacles that targeted support could help overcome. The ecosystem of services, available to their peers, is often not accessible or designed with them in mind.

The challenge often begins with a lack of a dedicated strategy. Our data shows that none of the boroughs have a dedicated youth strategy for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller young people. While some boroughs employ a universal Youth Strategy, evidence consistently shows that without proactive outreach, such approaches can fail to engage the most marginalised. This oversight is at odds with the London Mayor's Strategy for 'Building strong and inclusive communities: Promoting a sense of belonging and community cohesion across London.'²⁷ Further, it is contrary to the Council of Europe recommendations, which urges targeted measures for "Roma and Traveller" youth.²⁸

A Concerning Vacuum of Services and Support

This lack of strategic focus translates into a stark absence of services. Our survey listed ten different types of youth provision from youth clubs and mental health support to mentoring and sports programs. The result was that not a single borough (0%) offered any of these services targeted specifically for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller youth. In fact, 87.5% of boroughs confirmed they have no specific youth services for these young people at all. In education and employment, the picture was similar: only one borough (12.5%) had a dedicated education support worker for young people, and none offered tailored apprenticeships or mentoring. This lack of equitable, inclusive entry routes fails to align with the Youth Futures Foundation's vision for a system that recognises and nurtures the diverse talents of all young people.²⁹

... only one
borough had a
dedicated education
support worker for
young people



27 Greater London Authority [GLA], The London Plan: The Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London, (2021).

28 Council of Europe, CM/Rec(2023)4 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2023, at the 1462nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies), (2023).

29 Youth Futures Foundation, Annual Review 2024, (2024).

Silenced Voices and Inconsistent Safeguards

A particularly concerning finding is the lack of formal channels for youth voice. No borough had established youth forums, advisory groups, or co-design initiatives for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish or Scottish Traveller youth. This makes it difficult to uphold the principle of participation enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This exclusion extends to safety. Half of the boroughs (50%) had no specific measures to address bullying and hate crime targeting Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils, with none having anti-bullying policies that explicitly mention these young people. This is a missed opportunity to implement the robust safeguarding envisioned in national Department for Education guidance.³⁰

Community Development: A Need for Deeper Engagement

The need for more intentional inclusion isn't limited to young people. Efforts to engage the wider Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller community in shaping local services and cultural life are often inconsistent.

While the data shows more effort to engage the wider adult community than for youth, these initiatives are often fragile. When asked how they include Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller voices in community planning, 50% of boroughs still had no specific measures in place. A minority are taking positive steps: 37.5% reported collaborating with sector-specific organisations, and 25% had dedicated consultation forums. However, these efforts can be vulnerable. One borough revealed a Liaison Officer post was now "vacant" and had "proved hard to recruit to," demonstrating how tenuous such engagement can be without sustained commitment, and a wider council approach.

A Lack of Investment in Community-Led Solutions

Effective community development often involves partnering with and funding community-led organisations. Here, the data indicates a significant gap. 62.5% of boroughs do not provide funding or grants to any Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish or Scottish Traveller-led organisations. One borough noted a lack of funding applications, which may point to barriers in application processes themselves. This limits the potential for the kind of grassroots, culturally competent work that organisations like The Traveller Movement, London Gypsies and Travellers and others advocate for.



62.5% of boroughs do not provide funding or grants to any Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish or Scottish Traveller-led organisations

³⁰ Department for Education, Keeping children safe in education Statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding children and safer recruitment, (2025).

A Gap Between Recognition and Meaningful Action

There appears to be a disconnect between acknowledging Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller culture and embedding its celebration into practice. While 37.5% of boroughs say they recognise cultural events like Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, this commitment seems uncertain. When asked about concrete plans for June 2025, only one borough (12.5%) had anything planned, and even they were “unsure” of the details. This suggests an area where intention has not yet fully translated into meaningful action. It is therefore understandable that boroughs rate their own effectiveness modestly, with 37.5% admitting their community development initiatives are “somewhat ineffective.”

In Summary: Closing the Gap Through Intentional Inclusion

The evidence indicates that Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities face significant disparities in both youth development and community engagement. For young people, the combination of strategic oversight, a lack of targeted services, and limited avenues for participation means many are not benefiting from the support systems available to their peers. For the wider community, engagement, while present in some areas, is not yet consistent or resourced enough to build strong, trusting partnerships.

The call from several boroughs for more “funding,” “training,” and “specialist posts” signals a clear recognition of these gaps and a desire to address them. The challenge now is to move from ad-hoc initiatives to a more systematic approach. This means creating dedicated strategies, investing in both targeted youth services and Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller-led organisations, and building robust, permanent structures for participation. By learning from existing good practice and aligning with London-wide and national goals for inclusion, boroughs can begin to close this gap and ensure that Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities are fully included in the social, cultural, and civic life of the city.



50% of the boroughs had no specific measures to address bullying and hate crime targeting Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller pupils



Conclusion

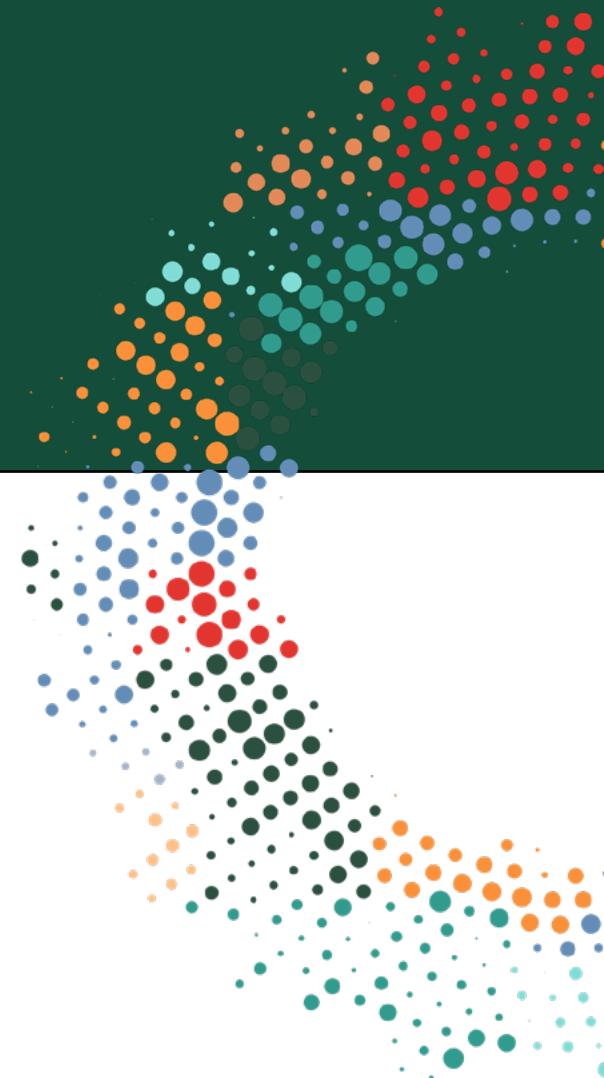
This evaluation presents an unequivocal and urgent case for transformative change. The consistent patterns of data invisibility, strategic omission, and exclusionary practices across London boroughs have created a system that fails Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities at every turn. The overreliance on universal approaches, while seemingly equitable, in practice perpetuates and deepens existing inequalities for groups with distinct cultural identities and experiences of marginalisation.

Addressing this requires more than marginal adjustments; it demands a fundamental reorientation of strategy and resource allocation. It necessitates centring the voices of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities as equal partners in co-production, embedding cultural competence as a non-negotiable standard, and building robust accountability frameworks to ensure delivery. The recommendations outlined provide a clear roadmap for London's boroughs, the GLA, and national government to begin this essential work. The moral and legal imperative to act is clear; the time for implementation is now.

The core findings of this report were presented at the Pan-London Propel Partnership event in June 2024, hosted at the Mayor's Office, catalysing crucial dialogue with boroughs across the capital. The event showcased transformative good practice, including Hackney's Community Health Inclusion Programme, Haringey's strategic site development, and innovative models from Merseyside and Kent. We are now actively engaged in follow-up conversations with participating boroughs and are keen to open further dialogue with others committed to change. To support this, The Traveller Movement is committed to providing targeted Continued Professional Development for council officers and members, focusing on the development of a robust Gypsy and Traveller Strategy as the essential cornerstone for any borough's transition to becoming a truly inclusive EDI authority.



The recommendations outlined provide a clear roadmap for London's boroughs, the GLA, and national government to begin this essential work. The moral and legal imperative to act is clear; the time for implementation is now.



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