



Know Your Rights

Working with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller clients

About The Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a UK charity challenging discrimination and promoting inclusion of ethnic Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. TM facilitates legal education, strategic litigation and direct advocacy to support their access to justice and fair treatment.

This factsheet is for professionals working with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.

Adopt a positive approach

- Be respectful, open-minded and knowledgeable about Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities' history, traditions and experience. This approach will gain trust and achieve better outcomes.
- Approach clients with genuine curiosity, patience and without judgment. Don't make assumptions about their culture or their education levels.
- Appreciate the importance of family, particularly the role of the extended family. The extended family network can exercise positive, and well as damaging, influences.
- Build rapport, work in a trauma-informed way recognising the adverse effects of a history of persecution, marginalisation and discrimination which has led to distrust of authority.

Things you should know

- Be aware of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities' history and how nomadic lifestyles, prejudice, literacy and language barriers, or negative experiences with authority might shape clients' engagement with your services.
- Understand that their daily experience of racism, hostility and prejudice can negatively affect clients' willingness to disclose information or advocate for themselves.
- Recognise that negative experiences with social services over generations may cause clients to fear sharing details about their living arrangements or family life.
- Clients may fear being judged, may have language and literacy difficulties, lack knowledge of their rights and have no confidence in official processes.
- Inform yourself about traditional gender roles, the role of elders, and cultural attitudes and taboos around topics such as sex, pregnancy, the body or bodily functions, mental health and LGBTQ+ issues.
- Be aware that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers have different histories, cultural traditions and languages.

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Things you should know (continued)

- When advising on issues such as divorce or domestic abuse, recognise the importance of reputation and the negative impact of 'shaming' or loss of reputation.
- Recognise that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers will always put loyalty to family first and this may affect clients' availability for appointments.
- Attendance at the traditional fairs in May and June may also affect clients' availability.

Practical steps

- Foster a safe, non-judgmental environment and explain everything clearly without legal jargon. A visibly inclusive and welcoming office will help.
- Use reassurance, empathy, and patience to build trust.
- Ask your client which is their preferred method of communication and whether they need an interpreter.
- Explain why you are gathering information and offer to show your notes to clients.
- Explain the meaning of 'consent' and 'confidentiality' clearly and check understanding.
- If police involvement is necessary, clearly explain why, and what will happen.
- If taboo topics are to be discussed, check with the client that they are willing to continue; offer interviews separately for men and women.
- Be flexible with appointments to accommodate family gatherings, fair dates and home schooling. Offer online appointments.

Best practice

- Ensure you and your staff understand the differences between Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers.
- Provide professional cultural competency training for staff to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes.
- Consider offering community-based outreach services, with access to interpreters or community advocates.

Contact The Traveller Movement on
020 7607 2002 for more help.