



The Traveller Movement

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Submission to Covid-19 Committee Inquiry - *Life Beyond Covid*

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity committed to the fulfillment of Human Rights for ethnic minority Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) people.

The Traveller Movement's mission is to develop a platform and voice for Travellers, working in solidarity with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities to achieve equality through self-determination and proactive participation in influencing and shaping policy. The Traveller Movement provides direct support and advocacy across a range of issues, including education, hate crime, discrimination and provides access to justice through early legal remedy. The Traveller Movement is also a leading charity in research and policy advocacy and works in partnership with community, voluntary and statutory organisations to bring about lasting social change for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Introduction

In 2019 the Women and Equalities select committee found¹ that policymakers had comprehensively failed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in the UK. It also found there had been a persistent failure to tackle long standing inequalities facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in any sustained way. Given this starting point, it is unsurprising that GRT communities are deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers require a cross-government strategy to tackle the long entrenched inequalities experienced in their communities. This was announced on 6th June 2019 by then communities Minister, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth². Please find a template for that national strategy here³, gathered in consultation with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members at the Traveller Movement's annual national conference in November 2019.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Gypsies, Roma and Irish Traveller communities have suffered greatly. They require urgent assistance in the following areas, in the both the immediate and the long term. Please find a breakdown of the issues below:

Education

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were left without educational support and resources during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the last few months, the Traveller Movement (TM) has been inundated with requests for support, including: requests for tuition; educational resources; access to tutors; access to laptops, data; advice about school exclusion. TM has set up a tutoring project¹ in partnership with Kings College London's Widening Participation team where we link tutors with GRT pupils who require educational support. Read a short description of the project [here](#)

Traveller children are already three years behind White British pupils at GCSE level². Given the enormous attainment gap, it is critical that pupils from GRT communities receive catch up funding in the next academic year.

What needs to change:

- The Department for Education must provide ring-fenced funding for GRT pupils in academic years 2020/21, and 2021/22.
- Digital inclusion must be a priority for this government if Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are to continue their education in the event of a second lockdown.
- These recommendations must be included in the national GRT strategy.

¹ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=227:june-2020-tutors-for-grt-project>

² <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-in-england-annual-report-2020/>

Health

Gypsies and Travellers experience some of the poorest health outcomes in the UK, including the lowest life expectancy of any group⁵. This makes these communities more vulnerable to Covid-19. Having high rates of respiratory problems, diabetes, disabilities, maternal mortalities, and low child immunisation levels means that many Gypsies and Travellers have a high risk of getting seriously ill or even dying from Covid-19.

What needs to change:

- The NHS must include GRT in its data dictionary. Without accurate data, the needs and health inequalities of GRT communities cannot be meaningfully addressed.
- This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy.

Mental Health

In its December 2017 update the EHRC reported that: *'Gypsies, Travellers and Roma were found to suffer poorer mental health than the rest of the population in the UK and they were also more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression.'* It is highly likely that mental health problems within Gypsy and Traveller communities will intensify while self-isolating and socially distancing during Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions.

There is a great deal of anxiety in Traveller communities in relation to Covid-19 transmission, but also misinformation in relation to its elimination. We've heard worrying accounts of Travellers using bleach, Dettol and Zoflora excessively on their skin and in washing standard household items. There is a real risk of poisoning, especially among those with lower levels of literacy. Approximately 25% of Gypsies and Travellers live on sites, while the remainder live in bricks and mortar accommodation⁷ (ONS, 2014; WEC, 2019).

What needs to change:

- Work with the GRT community to develop a GRT mental health strategy which targets resources and funding at suicide prevention and support; addresses accessibility of services; improves access to information about available services; collects data on access, experience and outcomes from health service users; ensures healthcare professionals understand the different needs of GRT communities; and trials interventions to assess what works in improving the healthcare experience for GRT populations.
- This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy.

Access to Information

Accessing information and keeping up to date on public health messages and other information about Covid-19 is difficult for those who have limited literacy skills and are digitally excluded. Some Gypsy and Traveller people rely solely on information they see on social media. Even

when GRT organisations are doing their best to produce targeted and legitimate information, false news and information about Covid-19 can spread fast.

What needs to change:

- All GRT communities must be included in any digital inclusion strategy going forward.
- This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy.

Data Monitoring

Race Disparity Audit found that, among the 130 datasets that were audited in October 2017, only 27 included classifications for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people³. Not recording Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity makes it difficult to ensure that agencies are providing needed services in a fair way and that they are fulfilling their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

There are considerable difficulties in commissioning services and planning budgets when there is insufficient information about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations in a local area.

- All public statutory agencies should include 18+1 census categories with immediate effect
- This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy.

Discrimination and Policing

In 2017 TM's online survey on the levels of discrimination experienced by 214 GRT community members across the UK found that 91% respondents had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity, and 30% had experienced discrimination in relation to accessing health care. As noted by the AITHS (see below), the experience of discrimination or the perception of discrimination, *'is likely to lower a sense of efficacy and self-esteem and this is damaging to mental health and wellbeing'*.

Of the 48 territorial and special police forces in the UK, only 9 (19%) included a code for Gypsies and Travellers in their ethnic monitoring systems⁴. Further, research conducted by TM in 2018 found⁵ that police tend to view Traveller ethnicity as a risk factor, and inherently criminogenic. Research by Gate Herts⁶ found that of the 20% of cases through Report Racism GRT were also reported to the police. GRT do not have confidence in the police.

³ https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36007.htm#_idTextAnchor025

⁴ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/Ethnic-recognition-of-Gypsies-and-Travellers-in-Police-Forces-in-the-UK.pdf>

⁵ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/criminal-justice?download=49:jun-2018-policing-by-consent-understanding-and-improving-relations-between-gypsies-roma-irish-travellers-and-the-police>

⁶ <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/Recognise-Report-Resolve.pdf>

What needs to change:

- All UK police forces must include GRT in their ethnicity data. To date, only 6/43 record GRT ethnicity, which means GRT hate crime goes under the radar. This is unacceptable given 90% of GRT have experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity.
- We support the call by the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association for a national review into the service provision by police to GRT communities

Accommodation and housing

Gypsies and Travellers who live on sites can be faced with overcrowding, having to share kitchens, bathrooms and toilets. Self-isolation and social distancing will be extremely hard in these conditions. If one person gets infected by Covid-19, it is highly likely that many other if not all people living on that site will get it too.

Gypsies and Travellers who are homeless, will face the constant threat of eviction, poor living conditions at the side of the road without access to clean water or electricity and are thus the most vulnerable community members.

What needs to change:

- All local authorities must commit to providing adequate sites throughout the country.
- This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy

Domestic Abuse

The level of domestic abuse increased within Gypsy and Traveller communities during Covid-19 lockdown. This is extremely dangerous for Gypsy and Traveller women who even in normal times are faced with numerous barriers in accessing help. Domestic abuse services are not always aware of the specific dangers and cultural issues of Gypsy and Traveller women and therefore not able or willing to support them. The close-knit nature of their families and communities means that the women have to be extra careful when seeking help from family members as their loyalties might be with their husband. Furthermore, the historical discrimination experienced by these communities and therefore distrust towards social services and the police means that many women will not contact these authorities in fear of losing their children.

What needs to change:

- Commit funding to GRT training for front line providers.
- This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in prison

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 survey⁷, in 2018/19 5% of men and 6% of women of the prison population in England and Wales identified as Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller. However, levels of self-reporting are low and, 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 .1% of the general population, and the smallest ethnic minority in the UK. While this is widely considered to be an undercount, nonetheless it indicates that GRT are over-represented in the criminal justice system.

What needs to change:

- Improve CJS data collection and ethnic monitoring categories to consistently and routinely include Roma people
- MoJ to continue to consider alternatives to custody, to reduce the prison population. This should involve the Police, Courts, Prisons and Probation
- Arrangements in place for early releases to be monitored by ethnicity, including GRT people
- Parliamentary discussions underway to review and reform sentencing, with a view to continually reducing the prison population, particularly for over represented groups.
- Discussions underway regarding how to effectively improve cultural awareness of GRT people among CJS practitioners.

For more information please visit our website or contact us on the details above.