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The Importance of accurate ethnic monitoring and data inclusion for GRT communities

A briefing paper by the Traveller Movement

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About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity, working in partnership with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, service providers and policy makers. Together we develop forward-looking strategies to challenge discrimination and promote increased race equality, social inclusion and community cohesion.

The Equality Act

In 2010, The Equality Act brought together 116 distinct pieces of legislation together under a single Act. The Act provides a clear legal framework that protects the rights of all individuals from unfair and discriminatory treatment, and promotes equality of opportunity for all.

The Act specifically recognises ethnic Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers as distinct ethnic minorities, and builds on previous race relations legislation to establish a clear and unambiguous legal duty for public bodies to monitor and tackle discrimination in the provision of public services.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 establishes the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Public bodies subject to the requirements of The Act must, in the exercise of their functions, have “due regard” to [1]:

- 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.

These may be thought of as the broad overarching aims of the PSED. The Act also explains that having “due regard” means:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

[1] <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Effective ethnic monitoring is foundational in ensuring public bodies can work effectively to discharge their PSED. A robust framework gives public bodies confidence that they are accurately capturing the demographics of individuals accessing public services or otherwise interacting with public bodies. This is vital, insofar as accurate data collection can effectively inform the approach of public bodies in both the commissioning and delivery of public services. A robust and inclusive framework which, as far as is practicable, reflects the ways in which individuals understand and navigate their own ethnicities will also help build trust in public bodies.

Whilst all public bodies have some form of ethnic monitoring and data collection in place, data collection as it pertains to Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller populations is often insufficient compared with other ethnic minorities. This is generally, but not universally, attributable to five key factors [2]:

- A lack of knowledge and confidence regarding GRT terminology, definitions, and categorisations.
- Misconceptions and ignorance around GRT 'identity', i.e. norms, values, and culture
- Ineffective design of monitoring of design frameworks which does not accurately capture and reflect the complexity and non-homogeneousness of 'GRT' as an umbrella term.
- An unwillingness or inability within public bodies to drive cultural and organisational change, and to effectively embed the PSED into all decision-making processes in service delivery, procurement, and commissioning.
- The ability of some community members to 'hide' their ethnicity in a way that other minority ethnic people may find difficult. Traveller Movement research indicates 76% of GRT people have hidden their ethnicity in order to avoid discrimination or prejudice.

This guide is intended as an aid for public bodies to ensure their data collection policies with regards to Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities are effective and consistent with the statutory requirement to monitor and tackle discrimination.

[2] [Inclusion of Gypsies & Travellers in ethnic monitoring systems of Police forces in the UK, Traveller Movement](#)

Defining Gypsy, Roma, Traveller

The Term Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) is not used to describe a single ethnic group, but is rather an umbrella or collective term for a wide and diverse range of distinct ethnic minorities with shared cultural norms, traditions and values. The most commonly known nominator is their shared history of nomadism. Whilst this history remains culturally relevant and important to many people, it is important to note that in the UK an estimated 75% of GRT people live in bricks and mortar accommodation and approximately 20% on permanent caravan sites. Roughly 2% - 5% of ethnic GRT people live nomadically today. To our best knowledge, there are no Roma people living nomadically in the UK[3].

The acronym GRT is often loosely used to include non-ethnic traveller communities in the UK, namely new travellers, showmen, bargees and van-dwelling people. It is important to note that there are no universal definitions with which every member of the community subscribes. This briefing paper uses commonly accepted terms, but many individuals may conceptualise and define their race, ethnicity, and identity in different ways. Practitioners and frontline workers engaging with GRT people should endeavour to remain mindful of this.

In other words: there are limits to categorisation, and no categorisation framework can exhaustively take into account complex and interconnecting ethnicities, identities, and communities grouped under the umbrella term GRT. Nevertheless, it is helpful to consider the GRT community as being comprised of two distinct but interrelated groups.

Ethnic Travellers

The term ethnic Traveller refers specifically to members of the GRT community who are explicitly categorized as an ethnic minority in the Equality Act 2010, and not as the result of a lifestyle choice. These include:

[3]

Travellers

- *Irish Travellers* (also referred to as Pavee or Minceir) are of Celtic descent. An Irish Traveller presence on the island of Ireland can be traced to the 12th century, with large scale migrations to Great Britain becoming more commonplace from the early 19th century onwards [4]. Nomadic Irish Travellers often move between the UK and Ireland. Per census data, there are around 30,000 Irish Travellers permanently resident in Ireland and as many as 300,000 Irish Travellers resident in the UK; but it is likely these figures are an underestimate [5].
- *Scottish Gypsy Travellers* (also referred to as Nachins or Nawkins) Scottish Highland Travellers are an indigenous sub-group with a long history of nomadism. Beginning in the 1950s, a trend away from nomadism began and today most Scottish Travellers live in some form of settled accommodation [6].

Romany Gypsies

- *English and Welsh Romany* (also referred to as Romani, Romanichal or Welsh Kale) have a long history of living in the UK, with historical sources indicating a Romany population in the British Isles as early as 1515, before the formulation of the United Kingdom. Recently, the excavation of a graveyard in Norwich uncovered mitochondrial DNA markers unique to Romany people, suggesting a Romany presence as early as the 11th Century [7]. The term “gypsy” is derivative of “Egyptian”, which is what the settled population considered them to be based on their dark complexion. This is misnomer, and linguistic analysis of the Romani language suggests origination in North India C.12th Century [8]
- *European Roma* share the same ancestry as Romany Gypsies, though their population in the UK is much more attributable to contemporary, rather than historical, patterns of migration. In particular, the impact of Romani genocide (Porajmos) and later the expansion of the EU into Eastern European countries, has significantly influenced Roma migration into the UK. Many European Roma reject the term ‘Gypsy’, due to the pejorative connotations associated with the word in Eastern Europe [9].

[4] Genomic insights into the population structure and history of the Irish Travellers, Gilbert et al

[5] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata>

[6] The Appleby Rai: Travelling People on a Thousand-year Journey

[7] <https://www.culture24.org.uk/places-to-go/east-of-england/norwich/art37392>

[8] The Damned Fraternitie': Constructing Gypsy Identity in Early Modern England, Timbers

[9] Origin of Roma, Hübschmannová

Cultural Travellers

The term cultural traveller refers to those who have chosen to be a traveller as a result of occupation or lifestyle choices. As with Ethnic Travellers, many cultural travellers face adverse outcomes across a range of indicators; but they are not considered an explicit ethnic minority under the Equality Act 2010. These include:

Occupational travellers

- *Showpeople* (also referred to as fairground or circus people). Fairgrounds, circuses, and other travelling events have been an important part of British culture for centuries. As such, showmen have a long history in the UK of owning and working on fairgrounds, and often traveller with their families in a seasonal working pattern.
- *Bargees* (also referred to as boat dwellers). Bargees live on boats, generally narrowboats or barges which can navigate canals and other man-made waterways. There is a long historical trend of Bargees travelling for employment.

New or New-Age travellers

- *New or new age* travellers is used to differentiate cultural travellers who have adopted a nomadic lifestyle - generally within in their own lifetime, though some new traveller families claim a heritage spanning at least 3 generations. The new traveller culture grew out of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 70s.

Differences Between ethnic Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are often categorised together under the “Roma” definition in Europe and under the acronym “GRT” in Britain. These communities and other nomadic groups, such as Scottish and English Travellers, Show People and New Travellers, share a number of characteristics in common: the importance of family and/or community networks; the nomadic way of life, a tendency toward self-employment, experience of disadvantage and having the poorest health outcomes in the United Kingdom.

The Roma communities also originated from India from around the 10th/ 12th centuries and have historically faced persecution, including slavery and genocide. They are still marginalised and ghettoised in many Eastern European countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania etc) where they are often the largest and most visible ethnic minority group, sometimes making up 10% of the total population. However, 'Roma' is a political term and a self-identification of many Roma activists. In reality, European Roma populations are made up of various subgroups, some with their own form of Romani, who often identify as that group rather than by the all-encompassing Roma identity.

Travellers and Roma each have very different customs, religion, language and heritage. For instance, Gypsies are said to have originated in India and the Romani language (also spoken by Roma) is considered to consist of at least seven varieties, each a language in their own right.

Values and Culture of GRT Communities

Family, extended family bonds and networks are very important to the Gypsy and Traveller way of life, as is a distinct identity from the settled 'Gorja' or 'country' population. Family anniversaries, births, weddings and funerals are usually marked by extended family or community gatherings with strong religious ceremonial content. Gypsies and Travellers generally marry young and respect their older generation. Contrary to frequent media depiction, Traveller communities value cleanliness and tidiness.

Many Irish Travellers are practising Catholics, while some Gypsies and Travellers are part of a growing Christian Evangelical movement.

Gypsy and Traveller culture has always adapted to survive and continues to do so today. Rapid economic change, recession and the gradual dismantling of the 'grey' economy have driven many Gypsy and Traveller families into hard times. The criminalisation of 'travelling' and the dire shortage of authorised private or council sites have added to this. Some Travellers describe the effect that this is having as "a crisis in the community". Traveller Movement research indicates that the suicide rate for Ethnic Travellers is up to 6.6 times higher than that of the non-Traveller population, and House of Commons Library search estimates the life expectancy for Travellers is 10-12 years than that of the general population [10]

[10]<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36005.htm>

Gypsies and Travellers are also adapting to new ways, as they have always done. Most of the younger generation and some of the older generation use social network platforms to stay in touch and there is a growing recognition that reading and writing are useful tools to have. Many Gypsies and Travellers utilise their often-remarkable array of skills and trades as part of the formal economy. Some Gypsies and Travellers, many supported by their families, are entering further and higher education and becoming solicitors, teachers, accountants, journalists and other professionals.

There have always been successful Gypsy and Traveller businesses, some of which are household names within their sectors, although the ethnicity of the owners is often concealed. Gypsies and Travellers have always been represented in the fields of sport and entertainment.

Ethnic Categorisations and ‘18+1’

The UK Government currently recommends the usage of 18 distinct ethnic categories grouped under broader categories of: White; Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups; Asian or Asian British; Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British; Other ethnic group [11].

This framework recommends the usage of “Gypsy or Irish Traveller” as a specific ethnicity group under the broader group of White. This has not always been the case, and was rooted in the inclusion of Gypsy & Travellers as distinct ethnic groups for the first time in the 2011 Census [12]. Census data remains the keystone of public and demographic statistical data, and this significant change has led to a slow but gradual adoption of specific inclusion of Gypsy or Irish Traveller as a distinct ethnic identity across the vast majority of public services.

Whilst the current system of 18 categories is an improvement on the framework that preceded it, there are still significant gaps in accurate and reliable data recording; most notably for European Roma populations. The lack of a specific category for Roma means that Roma may choose to record their ethnicity in a number of ways:

[11] <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups>

[12] <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8083/CBP-8083.pdf>

- Those who strongly feel a shared identity and culture with Gypsies and Travellers may tick that box, though many feel excluded by the use of Gypsy/Traveller but not Roma – given the pejorative context in which ‘Gypsy’ is often understood in Eastern Europe
- Some Roma select may selected Mixed or multiple ethnic background
- Some Roma select “Any other ethnic group” – and may or may not specific their ethnicity as Roma if there is an option to “fill in” a blank box

This raises significant concerns with the robustness of data and statistics relating to the Roma population, as what data is held by public bodies may be disaggregated across 3 different ethnic groups, making reliable comparisons across and between groups extremely difficult.

In instances where Roma do select Gypsy or Irish Traveller, a perverse outcome is reached in which data for an explicitly non-White ethnic minority is erroneously included within data for the overarching “White” category. This is clearly not appropriate.

For the first time, Roma has been included as a distinct category in the 2021 census following consultation. The ONS specifically identified concerns with the population being undercounted, as well as the need to gather information pertaining to a vulnerable group, as key factors for the inclusion.¹³ This is an important development, and the Traveller Movement strongly recommends that public sector bodies adopt the same framework as the ONS, and moves to an “18+1” ethnic categorisation framework which explicitly and specifically includes Roma.

Conclusion

A reliable ethnic monitoring framework, and one which aligns with the best practice implemented by the ONS, adds value to the work of public bodies across a number of areas; positively impacting both public bodies and the GRT community they serve.

When an accurate snapshot of the demographics of service users is available to frontline delivery staff, public bodies can more accurately target different groups and identify skills and capacity gaps in order to continually improve the accessibility of service provision.

An effective ethnic monitoring framework should also inform commissioning models. Central Government funding for GRT advancement is available for local authorities and public bodies across a range of policy areas, and this is expected to increase as work on the National Strategy for GRT Inequalities resumes in 2022. If public bodies can demonstrate their need of ringfenced funding for GRT advancement has the possibility to reduce budgeting pressures across the organisation; leading to an improvement in the quality-of-service provision not only for GRT people but for all.

A multi-agency approach is significantly enhanced where public bodies are applying the same frameworks for ethnic monitoring, and the implementation of an 18+1 framework on a uniform basis would greatly enhance the ability of public bodies to collaborate and share data effectively.

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