

Children's Rights Alliance for England

28 September 2018

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: State of Children's Rights in England 2018.

We are a national charity working with Gypsies and Travellers.

We have seen no positive progress on the state of Gypsy and Traveller children's rights since the Children's Rights Alliance for England's report of 2017.

Since the last report of 2017 was published, new information regarding Gypsy and Traveller children has been published.

General Measures of Implementation and General Principles

Despite various recommendations from international bodies such as the United Nations, the UK government still has not introduced a Roma Integration Strategy, with an aim to reduce the severe deprivation and exclusion faced by Roma, Gypsy and Irish Traveller families in the UK.

The government have also rejected calls from the Women and Equalities Committee to develop a cross-government race equality strategy to act on the disparities which the data from the Race Disparity Audit reveal.

Poverty and Homelessness

The London School of Economics and Political Science published a report in February 2018, Experience of multiple disadvantage among Roma, Gypsy

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and Traveller children in England and Wales, which analysed the secure microdata from the last Census of 2011. Disadvantage in each of four dimensions - housing, household economic activity, education and health was examined in turn before computing a multiple deprivation count. It found that nearly a quarter of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children in England and Wales aged under 19 are deprived on 3 or more dimensions, compared to just two per cent of other children. And conversely, only a small minority (15%) of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children are not deprived in any dimension, compared to the majority (67%) of all other children. Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children across Europe experience high levels of disadvantage and have repeatedly been identified as a priority in European Commission policy documents, yet they are often missing or invisible in the large-scale statistical analyses of children at risk of poverty and deprivation that drive policy development and monitoring. The paper argues that population Censuses, and other administrative sources, many of which already record Roma ethnicity, are under-utilised as a source of robust and comparable data, allowing the scale, intensity and multi-dimensionality of the challenges facing Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children to be investigated and tracked. This is illustrated through the descriptive analysis of secure microdata from the 2011 Census:

<http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper208.pdf>

The most recent Traveller Caravan Count figures, for January 2018, published by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), show that Gypsies and Travellers still experience the highest level of homelessness out of any ethnic group in the UK, with 13% of caravans on unauthorised encampments or developments, meaning they have no authorised place on which to reside.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717854/TCC_June18_Stats_Release.pdf

The government published a consultation this year on whether to increase eviction powers of unauthorised encampments, yet what is needed is sites, but pushing these forward is not happening, unlike in Wales which recently introduced a duty on local authorities to provide sites, and we are now told that progress on site provision will not be included in the Housing Delivery

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Test (which measures net additional dwellings provided in a local authority area against the homes required, using national statistics and local authority data. The Secretary of State will publish the Housing Delivery Test results for each local authority in England every November, under the newly revised National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018), alongside progress in housing, though previously in a Parliamentary Question the government said it would be.

Local authorities are making little or no progress in providing sites. They are not complying with their requirement, under PPTS, to allocate a five year supply of land for sites, despite there being a government grant under the Affordable Homes Programme which covers building new sites. MHCLG are not adequately promoting that the grant also covers sites, and many local authority Gypsy and Traveller Liaison officers that we've spoken to are not aware that it does. We have urged MHCLG to properly promote that the grant covers sites, but they have not taken any action to date. The grant also needs to cover the refurbishment of existing sites, not just the building of new ones, as some local authorities are selling off and closing down their sites as they cannot afford to refurbish them. The grant also needs to be 100% as the fact that it is a partial grant has been another barrier to local authority take-up. Site provision is extremely unpopular politically; everything possible needs to be done to incentivise it.

The benefit cap, and the two child rule, disproportionately affects Gypsy and Traveller families, who tend to have larger than average families. For more information on this and other issues see our submission to the United Nations on extreme poverty and human rights;

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/EPoverty/UnitedKingdom/2018/NGOS/FriendsfamiliesandTravellers.pdf>

Universal Credit, with its requirements for online and digital access, has created accessibility problems for Gypsy and Traveller families, who have less access to the internet than the general population and higher rates of illiteracy (<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Digital-Inclusion-in-Gypsy-and-Traveller-communities-FINAL-1.pdf>)

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Education, Leisure and Cultural Activities

The Department for Education's figures published on 26 July 2018 found that Pupils with SEN (Special Educational Needs) are more likely to be on free school meals or from Traveller families

- Pupils with SEN remain more likely to be eligible for free school meals at 25.8 per cent compared to 11.5 per cent of pupils without special educational needs.
- Pupils with statements or EHC plans are also more likely to be eligible for free school meals than pupils on SEN support (30.9 per cent compared to 24.5 per cent).
- SEN is most prevalent in Travellers of Irish heritage and Gypsy or Roma pupils, at 30.9 per cent and 26.8 per cent respectively.
- Travellers of Irish heritage and black Caribbean pupils had the highest percentage of pupils with statements or EHC plans, at 4.5 per cent and 4.3 per cent respectively, while Indian pupils had the lowest percentage of pupils with statements or EHC plans at 1.8 per cent, compared with 2.9 per cent of all pupils nationally.

Source:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729208/SEN_2018_Text.pdf

Gypsy and Traveller children continue to have the lowest educational attainment out of any ethnic group in the UK, a fact that has been highlighted in the government's recent Race Disparity Audit. Yet no measures are being taken to address this, and local authority Traveller Education Services, which were set up to try and remedy this issue, have been cut to nearly non-existence. Educational outcomes for Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children of Irish heritage in England are now reported separately in key Department for Education publications, based on National Pupil Database records. Both groups continue to have the lowest attainment levels, across all stages of school, and the gap between them and other

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White children widened between 2008 and 2013, as the latter saw larger improvements

In 2008 the government introduced Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, for the month of June, to promote a positive portrayal in schools of Gypsy and Traveller culture and encourage positive self-esteem in Gypsy and Traveller pupils. At the time the government provided funding for related activities, but this has since ceased. Funding needs to be reintroduced as Gypsy and Traveller pupils still experience high levels of bullying, the highest level of exclusions out of any ethnic group, and the lowest attainment.

Immigration, Asylum and Trafficking

The Home Office have outlined in their recent Statement of Intent that Roma, and other European citizens, who are applying for settled status, have to pay the adult fee for children aged over the age of sixteen. We feel this is an inconsistency given that children are not given adult rights on other issues in the UK until they are aged eighteen, for example, the right to vote.

Kind regards

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