



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt, Hon, Harriet Harman M.P.  
Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*20th July 2020*

*David Harriet*

**Re: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities**

We write as Co-chairs of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. May we congratulate on your work as part of the Inquiry into the Government's response to COVID-19: human rights implications, which valuably draws attention to the protection of rights during this troublesome time.

The Inquiry report helpfully acknowledges that some groups have been more affected by the Government's response than others, which leads us to draw attention to the experience of Gypsies and Travellers during the pandemic. As you may be aware, Gypsies, Travellers and Roma experience some of the starkest inequalities, in health and educational outcomes, in criminal justice and in accommodation deprivation, which had been highlighted in the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry of 2017-19.

We are concerned that these inequalities and barriers to accessing basic rights will be compounded by the pandemic, particularly for Gypsy and Traveller communities living a more nomadic way of life who experience difficulties in accessing the most basic facilities such as water and sanitation. For these Gypsies and Travellers, following the public health advice and staying safe during the pandemic has been incredibly difficult.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes MP**

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We are also concerned about the impact school closures has had on the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, who are well documented as experiencing alarmingly poor educational outcomes.

A fuller picture of the threat to accessing basic rights for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities during the pandemic are outlined in the submission of Friends, Families and Travellers (the APPG's Secretariat organisation). We would very much welcome the opportunity to meet with you to learn why these issues were not included in the Committee's report.

On a separate note, we are pleased to see the JCHR is scrutinising the Police Powers and Protections Bill. There is one particular element of the Bill that concerns us and that will disproportionately affect Gypsy and Traveller communities;

*"Potential measures to criminalise the act of trespassing when setting up an unauthorised encampment in England and Wales, and the introduction of new police powers to arrest and seize the property and vehicles of trespassers who set up unauthorised encampments."*

We remain deeply alarmed by the Home Office proposals to criminalise trespass or strengthen police powers to evict Gypsies and Travellers. The proposals pose the biggest threat to nomadic Gypsies and Travellers this country has seen for decades. Given the context of a chronic national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites, and the right to a nomadic and cultural way of life, the proposed powers to criminalise unauthorised encampments gives rise to a conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights and the Equality Act 2010. We are encouraged to see that the JCHR will be scrutinising this legislation.

Perhaps we could meet with you (via Zoom) to discuss the issues raised in this letter? We look forward to hearing back from you.

Yours ever,



Martin Docherty-Hughes M.P.



Baroness Janet Whitaker

Co-chairs, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers and Roma