



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

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Bridges and deserts: Creating a solid foundation for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society

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Introduction

Between October 2020 and 2021, we carried out research into the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society micro-sector of the voluntary sector. This research sought to map this micro-sector to better our understanding of the type and size of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller equality organisations in the UK. This report outlines the main findings of our research, with the purpose of informing funders and others wishing to support, sustain and strengthen civil society and achieve real change.

Key findings

- The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society micro-sector comprises of just 0.03% of the voluntary sector with a turnover of just £6.7 million
- 27% of charities and organisations we identified as being a part, or partially involved, with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society micro-sector have now ceased to exist since 2005.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations are situated in just a small number of geographical areas, leaving large ‘deserts’ with no provision¹

Background and context

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are known to experience the worst life outcomes of any ethnic minority groups in the UK across health, education and accommodation, yet are often overlooked by the agencies responsible for ensuring service provision and poorly served by mainstream voluntary organisations²³.

We know from our advocacy and practice development work that many statutory agencies fail to deliver mainstream services in fair or equitable ways to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. Poor organisational knowledge and sometimes prejudice compounds this, resulting in poorer outcomes and higher levels of exclusion from

¹ Only 44 specific locations are explicitly listed as areas where active charities and organisations from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society are situated, across the whole of the UK

² Equality and Human Rights Commission, (2009). [Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review](#). p.5

³ Women and Equalities Committee (2019). [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#)

mainstream services, for example, registration refusal at GPs, disability benefits refusal due to digital exclusion and more⁴⁵.

Demographics may contribute to this in that Gypsy and Traveller people make up 0.5% or 1 in 200 of the UK population but unlike some ethnic minority groups, are not concentrated in any one area and so never make up a visible percentage of people in any one provider area⁶. As a small minority within any administrative area, it can therefore be hard to drive change and inclusive service delivery where this is lacking.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller voluntary sector organisations often attempt to fill the gap where mainstream agencies fail: bridging families into services, challenging discrimination and developing and sharing good practice models. With such a critical role in championing the rights of populations experiencing such significant inequalities, it is easy to assume that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller charities and support groups are found in all parts of the UK – but this is far from the case.

We have long been aware that Gypsy, Roma Traveller civil society is small and fragmented with far from complete cover across the UK.

The purpose of this report is to outline the extent and health of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller voluntary sector organisations, and underline the importance of sustaining and increasing these critical organisations. This report sets out the methodology of this research, followed by a breakdown of findings regarding types of organisation, turnover, geographical areas, staff numbers and areas of work, before analysing the trends for each of these areas.

Methodology

Starting out, we searched the website of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, the Scottish Charity Register, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and Companies House for the terms ‘Gypsy’, ‘Roma’ and ‘Traveller’ to compile a list of all charities that listed their serving Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in their organisation’s activities description. After this, we looked through our [Services Directory](#) to see if there were any other charities or organisations that should be

⁴ Sweeney and Stanbury (2019). [Experiences of Gypsies and Travellers in primary care: GP services](#)

⁵ Scadding and Sweeney, (2018). [Digital Exclusion in Gypsy and Traveller communities in the United Kingdom](#)

⁶ ONS (2014). [2011 Census analysis: What does the 2011 Census tell us about the characteristics of Gypsy or Irish travellers in England and Wales?](#)

included. Then, we reviewed this with our teams to identify any organisations we may have missed.

Once charities and organisations were identified, we looked into which type of charity or organisation they could be classified as, their turnover, which geographical areas they covered and areas of work. Then we looked into patterns and trends of charities and organisations within this micro-sector as a whole.

We excluded charities which had not submitted accounts for more than two years from the list of active charities and organisations in this report, and recorded them as having ceased to exist. Charities that had not submitted their accounts for an extended period of time were assumed to have ceased to exist and have not been included.

Our findings

Types of organisations

We identified 81 operating organisations in total from searching various Charity Commission websites, Companies House, our [Services Directory](#) and staff knowledge. Of these 81 organisations, 46 were charities or organisations reporting to serve Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, 14 reported to work solely on behalf of Roma people, and 21 were charities or organisations which conducted work on behalf on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities within their wider remit.

These organisations were a mix of voluntary groups, registered charities and organisations that are in the process of becoming a charity and professional networks.

Turnover

Of the 81 identified, only 46 organisations were found to have a turnover specific to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society micro-sector. Therefore, we calculated the turnover of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society by finding the sum of the 46 charities with a turnover specific to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society. This calculation combined the latest published figure of turnover from individual accounts. There were variation in years of publication (figures range from 2018 to 2020 between organisations), so these accumulated figures can be considered to be estimates.

The total turnover sum of the 46 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller charities and organisations was just over £6.7m. Median and mode turnover figures were between £100,001 and £150,000. The categorisations of turnover for each individual charity and organisation in this report, can be found in Appendix 1.

The average turnover per charity or organisation, with available or estimated turnover figures, within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society is just £144,070, compared to the average turnover per charity or organisation across the whole voluntary sector of £209,849⁷. This suggests that the average Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society organisational is much lower than the average turnover per charity across the whole voluntary sector, although this may be simply because there are no large Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations.

Charities and organisations focussed solely on serving Roma communities have a total turnover of just under £660,000, with just one organisation making up 51% of this figure.

Organisations and charities that have Gypsy, Roma and Traveller centred work within their remit had not all explicitly stated their funds dedicated to these projects.

This means that, as a whole, organisations within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society in the UK have a turnover of around £6.7m per year, accounting for 0.034% of the voluntary sector's contribution to the economy, standing at £20bn⁸. With 38% of voluntary sector organisations stating their funding bid outcomes are mostly unsuccessful, issues accessing funding is causing a 'major crisis' which threatens the existence of this sector⁹.

Geographical coverage

The geographical coverage that charities and organisations cover are not always explicitly listed. Some areas are listed on their Charity Commission page, or are stated on their websites, but some do not state these at all. Where available, these locations give us an indication of where active Gypsy, Roma and Traveller charities and organisations are operating and supporting their local communities.

⁷ NVCO website (2019), [How do we classify subsectors? Ranking table](#)

⁸ NVCO (2021), [UK Civil Society Almanac 2021](#)

⁹ Baring Foundation and Voice4Change England (2015), [Funding for Black, Asian & other minority ethnic communities](#)

Some charities state that they cover England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in general, but there are some specific areas that are listed as being actively covered by various charities and organisations within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society. In the North West region, specific areas include Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Knowsley, Liverpool City, Sefton, St Helens, Wigan, Wirral, Manchester City, Salford City, Trafford and Lancashire. In the Yorkshire and Humber region, specific areas include Leeds City, Kirklees, Wakefield, Calderdale, Bradford, the City of York and Sheffield. In the West Midlands region, specific areas include Birmingham, Coventry City, Hereford and Warwickshire. In the East Midlands region, specific areas include Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Nottingham. In the East of England region, specific areas include Luton, Hertfordshire, Essex, Cambridge and Peterborough. In the South East region, specific areas include Hampshire, Sussex, Kent and Thames Valley. In the South West region, specific areas include Bristol, Kennet and Avon, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and Dorset. Other specific areas include London, Cardiff and Glasgow.

Although some charities and organisations state their remit covers the whole of the UK, or just England and Wales, they rarely have staff or volunteers present in more than one region. This means that there are 'deserts' where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are unable to access direct support from a local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisation. It is common for charities and organisations within this micro-sector to signpost clients to organisations that are physically closer to them for better support, but this is often not possible due to the lack of physical coverage by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations.

Staff and areas of work

Where the information was accessible¹⁰, our research analysed the numbers of paid staff that each charity or organisation employed; small and/or wholly voluntary groups were not included. We found that nearly two thirds of charities and organisations have between one and five employed staff. Only eight charities had more than six staff members.

We reviewed staff roles to identify the key areas of work for organisations. The most common area of work, with designated staff members for these roles, was outreach and direct engagement work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The second

¹⁰ This information has been gathered from the charity and organisations websites, the Charity Commission website, or has been estimated due to our knowledge of this micro-sector.

most common work area was improving education for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, closely followed by advocacy and advice services. Other areas of work involved policy work, health, accommodation, employment, fighting racism, arts, youth work and criminal justice.

Trends

Turnover trends

We analysed the turnover across the past five years for charities and organisations, to assess whether Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society is growing or shrinking. From analysing published accounts, it was clear that income was on a general theme of incline, but subject to dips in some financial years. Although it seems that this micro-sector is growing, it is clear that this is not necessarily a steady motion. For most organisations within this micro-sector, income is generally dependent on short term grants and small contracts, rather than earned income, endowments or individual giving as is common for “unpopular” causes. This leaves Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society vulnerable to economic volatility and political whim.

Geographical trends

We analysed where in the UK was geographically covered by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society organisations. Trends that emerged from this analysis showed high concentrations of organisations in certain areas, and a lack thereof in others. For example, there are several Gypsy, Roma and Traveller charities, organisations and voluntary groups in the South of England, as well as the North West, whilst there was some overlap of geographical distribution of organisations in Wales. Although some organisations state they seek to represent and help Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people across the UK or England and Wales, there is often a lack of physical presence in areas where their headquarters are not based, or they do not have remote paid staff or representatives.

There are gaps where organisations which have ceased to exist used to serve local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, but no longer do. Some of these areas include Bromley, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-On-Tees and large areas of Northern Ireland.

Staff trends

Trends that emerged while analysing employed staff and their work areas showed that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller charities and organisations are often trying to cover several areas of work in response to the inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people across Accommodation, Discrimination, Education, Health and Criminal Justice and an absence of positive images in the Culture sector.

The emphasis on outreach is telling, as this expensive and intensive method of working has long been recognised as the most effective for engaging with and supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Advocacy featured strongly, reflecting the need to get fair access to services. Education was also key area, reflecting the need and challenges for young people. However, with small numbers of staff, most commonly between one and five paid staff, organisations are very stretched and can rarely keep pace up with demand.

Fragility of the sector

In total, during our research, we found 111 charities, organisations or voluntary groups apparently involved in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society. After a closer look, we found 30 of these had folded and no longer exist.

A staggering 27% of organisations from 2005 no longer exist. Some organisations that have recently been either removed from the Charity Commission website, or lacked recent financial accounts, had been active and supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people for decades.

We are aware of only two trusts offering Gypsy, Roma and Traveller specific funding, for small charities only, meaning that charities and organisations are competing with much larger and more specialist organisations for funding and are likely to be at a disadvantage.

This micro-sector also seems to be striving to achieve huge things with incredibly limited resources. The range of expertise and activities within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society is vast when the small numbers of employed staff by each individual charity or organisation are considered. Attempting to cover all of these staff areas with limited staff is another factor which impacts the fragility of the sector negatively, where one individual may cover several areas of work and/or support all the families in a county.

Infrastructure support

There is no ongoing funded infrastructure support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society. At Friends, Families & Travellers (FFT), we maintain a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller specialist Services Directory for the UK and provide second tier advice for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations and mainstream advice organisations, but both of these are unfunded. At FFT, we also provide a channel for organisations to raise issues with policymakers and politicians through our Secretariat role for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, and as the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society member of the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

In addition, Travellers Times (part of Rural Media) is a specialist online paper and newsletter for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

Some organisations within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society are members of race equality umbrella organisations and this has been a useful mutual support for overlapping issues. Yet, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society would greatly benefit from more focussed infrastructure support to enable growth.

Dedicated infrastructure support would strengthen and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations and enable new organisations to develop, but infrastructure support needs to be supported by funding – otherwise, civil society micro-sectors may fall apart¹¹.

Conclusion

Our research has shown that there are significant and definite gaps in the provision of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller specific support. Although the current functioning charities, organisations and voluntary groups are trying to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across the UK, it is unrealistic that all people who may wish to avail of their services can access support given there are such big geographical and support ‘deserts’ nationwide.

The need for a healthy Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society sector is clear, given the extreme inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. These inequalities need to be addressed and challenged by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

¹¹ Baring Foundation, (2015). [Bridging the gap in funding for the BAME voluntary and community sector](#). p.16

civil society, but this is difficult within a largely hostile political and media environment.

It is important to pinpoint the change needed for this to occur, however, in this instance it is evident that building links between funders and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society micro-sector charities, organisations and voluntary groups is a large step in the right direction. Once this has begun, it can then be discussed which projects would be best suited to aiding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. In turn, these steps would help to improve the performance and effectiveness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller charities, organisations and voluntary groups, as well as effectively direct resources where they are most needed, and strengthen relationships between funders and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society organisations.

The fragility of this sector is clearly negatively affected by the financial insecurities it faces. With 27% of charities, organisations and voluntary groups having ceased to exist since 2005, it is clear that further provision of support from funders is needed to help it survive, and most importantly help Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people across the UK tackle inequalities on a wider scale.

Moreover, the fragility of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society has been revealed at a time when the needs for services are so great. For this micro-sector to survive, it is important to upkeep infrastructure support, increase charity and organisation support and funding, and for funders to maintain awareness about this micro-sector's position in the voluntary sector.

Recommendations

- Funders recognise the clear need for a healthy Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society sector to address and challenge the extreme inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.
- Funders plan to invest in a strengthened Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society, including infrastructure support.

Appendix 1: A table showing the turnover brackets for active Gypsy, Roma and Traveller civil society micro-sector charities and organisations

Turnover brackets	Organisations
Volunteer run membership groups	National Association of Boat Owners National Bargee Travellers Association Kennet and Avon Boating Community Thames Valley Gypsy Council Romany and Traveller Family History nfATs & Supporters Traveller Pride Sussex Travellers and Gypsies Hampshire Romanys Gratton World Roma Congress Future 4 Fairgrounds
Organisations with no income recorded	IHT Indigenous Highland Travellers One Call Away RAJPOT Sheffield Roma Network Roma Support Nottingham Roma Community Care Gypsy Travellers Essex Bristol Vehicles for Change Churches Network Floaty Boat Drive 2 Survive Romany Community Archaeology STEP Education
Professional Networks	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association

	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Police Association Equity's Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) Network
£5,000 - £50,000	Kushti Bok Romani Slovak Czech Community ACERT London Gypsy Orchestra Roma Education Support Trust Bryson Intercultural COMPAS Peterborough Romany Theatre Company Showmen's Mental Health Awareness Charity ¹²
£50,001 - £100,000	Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group Margaret Clitherow Trust Southwark Travellers Action Group Luton Roma Trust Waterways Chaplaincy
£100,001 - £150,000	Gypsies and Travellers Wales Limited TravellerSpace Craigavon Travellers Support Committee The Romani Cultural and Arts Company York Travellers Trust Showmen's Guild of Great Britain The Roma Project
£150,001 - £250,000	GATE Herts Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative One Voice 4 Travellers Moving for Change
£250,001+	Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange London Gypsies and Travellers The Traveller Movement Roma Support Group Friends, Families and Travellers

¹² Accounts not included in overall sum as public finance information was not available.

<p>Organisations with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller centred work within wider organisations¹³ 24</p>	<p>Irish Community Care Birmingham Irish Association Irish Chaplaincy Article 12 in Scotland Oblique Arts TGP Cymru (Travelling Ahead Project) MECOP (Minority Ethnic Carers of People) Travellers Times (Rural Media) Romano Lav Roma Life CIC Crossroads Youth and Community Association Red Zebra Citizens Advice York HWLincs Irish Dispora Foundation Dukes Theatre Project Julian House QNI Open Doors Education and Training Durham Area Youth Macmillan School Bus Project Hereford Care for Young People's Future CIC Pathway</p>
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These figures have been gathered from the Charity Commission website and the Friends, Families and Travellers Services Directory. Where figures were not published, we made estimates based on our knowledge of the sector and organisations.

¹³ The estimate turnover for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller specific work has been estimated to include in the total turnover sum.

About us

Friends, Families and Travellers is a leading national charity that works to end racism and discrimination against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life.

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