



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

March 2022

Alternative Report to the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

**Focus Report on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
communities**

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Despite the ratification of many human rights treaties, agreements and conventions, the United Kingdom remains a State in which Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people experience stark inequalities.

This report focuses on the Council of Europe Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities Recommendations and related Articles under the 4th cycle of scrutiny. Advisory Committee Recommendations are listed with their paragraph number as found in the 4th Cycle Advisory Committee Opinion¹. Under each theme, the current situation in the UK is outlined, before our recommendations are given for necessary changes the Government should address.

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¹ <https://rm.coe.int/16806fb9ab>

National Strategy to address the inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 4:

42. Ensure that policy documents, such as integration and race strategies, are complemented by appropriate action plans and adequate resources to ensure effective access to rights for persons belonging to minorities, in particular with regard to the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025.

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 15:

142. It also reiterates its call on the authorities to step up efforts to reduce inequalities experienced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in social and economic life, specifically implementing measures in close co-operation with those communities' representatives to prevent discrimination in employment and housing, health inequalities and inadequate social services interventions that result in undue taking of children into foster care.

Overview of the situation and Government position

In response to the Women and Equalities Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry into inequalities experienced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers², the Government announced its commitment to implement a cross-departmental strategy to address inequalities in June 2019³. However, to date no visible progress has been made on the Strategy, with no published Plan or Strategy outlining any aims, actions, lines of accountability or timelines.

Our recommendations

- The UK Government should take steps to urgently fulfil their commitment to implement a cross-departmental strategy to tackle entrenched inequality and improve the lives of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- The national strategy must include all key social indicators/policy areas and must have specific, measurable outcomes with coherent data collection, and adequate resources for the development and implementation.

² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-strategy-to-tackle-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-inequalities>

The development and implementation of a robust national strategy will help to address the inequalities outlined in the further sections of this report.

Equal access to the European Union Settlement Scheme and impact on Roma people

Advisory Committee recommendation under Article 4:

42. Ensure that policy documents, such as integration and race strategies, are complemented by appropriate action plans and adequate resources to ensure effective access to rights for persons belonging to minorities, in particular with regard to the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025.

Advisory Committee recommendation under Article 15:

142. It also reiterates its call on the authorities to step up efforts to reduce inequalities experienced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in social and economic life, specifically implementing measures in close co-operation with those communities' representatives to prevent discrimination in employment and housing, health inequalities and inadequate social services interventions that result in undue taking of children into foster care.

Overview of the situation and Government position

Roma face broad structural inequality in the UK in terms of access to services⁴ and Brexit has presented yet another challenge in terms of the accessibility of the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS), threatening the residency status of many Roma who have a right to live permanently in the UK.

Roma Support Group carried out research in order to explore some of the specific barriers faced by Roma in accessing the EUSS⁵. They found there was a general lack of awareness of the need to apply and the implications of failing to do so. In addition to this, a number of other barriers were identified:

- Limited access to reliable, trusted sources of information and support;
- Digital exclusion and language barriers;

⁴ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/themes/roma>

⁵ http://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/roma_brexit_euss_report_16.06.2020_final.pdf

- A lack of valid identification or proof of five years' residence due to informal work and/or unstable housing circumstance;
- The tendency to rely on a national identity card, rather than a passport, and a reluctance to send identification to the Home Office;
- 62% of Roma have the temporary Pre Settled Status (41% national average);
- Lack of awareness regarding the need of children to apply to the EUSS, especially those born in the UK.

To ameliorate some of these barriers, the Government provided funding to charities in order to support vulnerable communities to apply to the EUSS⁶. While the funding provided much-needed resources for organisations to support Roma to overcome the barriers identified, the Covid-19 pandemic has compounded barriers in accessing the EUSS, in terms of restrictions on face to face support and delays in obtaining documentation. Furthermore, many Roma experienced huge delays in obtaining identity documents from their embassies.

The Government failed to address the barriers experienced by those digitally excluded. The EUSS is completely digital. Research by New Europeans, supported by Roma Support Group, identified that 73% of respondents do not know when to update their temporary status to the permanent one and 68% do not know how to prove their EUSS immigration status⁷. This leads to situations in which Roma people will not be able to access their rights in the UK and may lose their immigration status once their temporary one expires.

We are concerned that a significant proportion of Roma have fallen through the gaps of the EUSS or are not able to exercise their rights due to its inaccessibility and inadequate Government action to address this in a timely manner. As a result, we fear many Roma who have the right to residency in the UK may face deportation. We consider this to be in conflict with the Framework Convention.

Our recommendations

- Government should ensure long-term support for EU citizens and their family members. This could take the form of local authority-coordinated EUSS support centres, where:

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-boost-for-people-applying-for-eu-settlement-scheme>

⁷ <https://new europeans.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Digital-Status-Handle-with-care-report-NEUK.pdf>

- EUSS holders could get support to access their EUSS status and prove it;
 - those who will be identified by authorities as not having EUSS yet could get support to make their EUSS applications;
 - those still awaiting a decision could get support to complete their applications;
 - those with the temporary Pre-Settled Status could get support with updating to permanent status.
- Government should reconsider its position on the EUSS Digital Immigration Status. EUSS status holders should get a physical proof of status.

Accommodation for Gypsy and Traveller Communities

Advisory Committee Recommendation for immediate action:

Revert to previous legislation in England addressing specifically the provision of permanent and temporary site needs of the Gypsies and Travellers minority, and reinstate a duty for local authorities to provide these sites when the need has been identified in order to ensure adequate availability; reintroduce a compliance duty for local authorities as regards the provision of sites in Scotland; and set up a multi-agency taskforce on Traveller sites in Northern Ireland to cater to the needs of Irish Travellers.

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 5:

53. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that support for cultural activities of all national and ethnic minorities is increased across the country and procedures improved, so that their representatives may participate in decision making on the allocation of grants.

Overview of the situation and Government position

Despite the existence of 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' (PPTS), the policy designed to specifically address the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, the national shortage of culturally appropriate accommodation for

Gypsies and Travellers persists^{8 9 10}. Research demonstrates that the majority of local authorities are failing to comply with requirements on land allocation for Gypsy and Traveller site provision under PPTS¹¹.

The situation has deteriorated, with a dramatic reduction of assessed need for more pitches based on the revised 2015 planning policy definition of a Gypsy or Traveller. This planning policy definition is much more restrictive than previously, and excludes those from protected characteristic groups who are less able to travel, including the elderly, those with a disability and those caring for them (predominantly women). The impact of the definition change has resulted in a significant proportion of Gypsies and Travellers being excluded from the definition, regardless of ethnic status, who are therefore facing insurmountable barriers in accessing culturally pertinent accommodation.

Research conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2019 showed that, across the 20 local planning authorities they inspected, the pre-2015 definition total requirement was for 1,584 further pitches, but after the revised definition was introduced, the assessed need fell to just 345¹².

Analysis of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities figures shows there has been an overall 13.36% decrease of pitches on local authority Traveller sites from July 2011 to July 2021, as highlighted in the table below.

Local authority/Registered Social Landlord Gypsy and Traveller pitches:

	July 2011	July 2021	% difference
Transit pitches	291	399	+37.11%
Permanent pitches	4700	3920	-16.59%
Total pitches	4991	4319	-13.36%

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891229/Traveller_caravan_count_2020_stats_release.pdf

⁹ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Lack-of-Increase-in-Affordable-Pitches-Dec-2017-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Availability-of-pitches-on-Traveller-sites-in-England_FINAL.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/planning/no-place-to-stop-only-8-of-68-local-authorities-in-south-east-england-have-identified-enough-land-for-travellers-to-live/>

¹² https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/190909_gypsy_and_traveller_sites_-_impact_of_the_revised_definition_-_final.pdf

Whilst there has been a 37.11% increase in transit pitches alone, this only amounts to an increase of 108 pitches nationally, the equivalent to roughly 11 pitches per year over 10 years, with an overall decrease of 16.59% of permanent pitches on local authority/Registered Social Landlord sites. This shows that the situation regarding accessing culturally appropriate accommodation under the planning system, in the form of socially-rented pitches, has considerably worsened in the last decade.

This decrease in socially rented pitches has occurred during a period of availability of Government funding for the building of local authority sites. In 2021 Homes England (who administer grants under the Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme) responded to FFT's query asking about applications to the scheme for grants for Traveller sites. In their response they confirmed that only two schemes had been allocated funding under the programme 2016-2021. Both of these were for transit sites (30 pitches in total) and included no new permanent pitches at all.

The Government have not only failed to implement the Advisory Committee 2017 recommendations, including the recommendation for immediate action, they have put forward hostile legislation which seeks to criminalise Gypsies and Travellers living on encampments^{13 14}. Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill¹⁵ introduces a new criminal offence where trespassers reside or have the intent to reside. Failure to comply can lead to the police exercising powers to seize a vehicle (someone's home and possessions) as well as imprisonment and a fine. Part 4 also strengthens current police powers of eviction in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994¹⁶.

The seizure of Gypsy and Traveller homes and possessions, and potentially pushing anyone over 18 into the criminal justice system, would be catastrophic for an individual or family. This would also affect the long-term prospects and welfare of an individual or family and severely impact children who would lose their home and face Children's Services intervention, possibly breaking up the family. The proposed measures pose a direct threat to the rights of Gypsies and Travellers to lead a nomadic way of life.

¹³ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/briefing-on-part-4-pcscbill/>

¹⁴ <http://www.communitylawpartnership.co.uk/news/the-criminalisation-of-trespass>

¹⁵ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0268/200268.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/33/contents>

The Government have failed to implement the Advisory Committee recommendations to prioritise the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites and stopping places. This and the proposals to criminalise trespass and introduce tougher police powers conflict with Articles 3, 4, 5 and 15 of the Framework Convention.

Our recommendations

- The UK Government should withdraw Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which relates to the criminalisation of trespass and strengthening of police powers.
- The national strategy to tackle Gypsy, Roma and Traveller inequalities must include a strand on supporting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. This should include:
 - the reintroduction of pitch targets and a statutory duty on local authorities to meet the assessed need for Gypsy and Traveller sites;
 - support for a programme of ‘negotiated stopping’¹⁷ arrangements so Gypsies and Travellers have more safe stopping places with access to basic amenities such as water and sanitation;
 - amendment of the 2015 Planning Policy for Traveller sites definition of a Traveller to include all Gypsies and Travellers who need a pitch to live on.

Health inequalities and access to healthcare

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 3:

20. Authorities should also pay attention to the specificities of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma as distinct groups to reconfigure statistics and effectively tailor policy making to their needs and in consultation with their representatives.

¹⁷ <https://www.negotiatedstopping.co.uk/ns-explained>

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 4:

49. The authorities in England should start collecting disaggregated data on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, and should devise policies targeting the specific needs of persons belonging to those groups.

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 15:

142. It also reiterates its call on the authorities to step up efforts to reduce inequalities experienced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in social and economic life, specifically implementing measures in close co-operation with those communities' representatives to prevent discrimination in employment and housing, health inequalities and inadequate social services interventions that result in undue taking of children into foster care.

Overview of the situation and Government position

- Gypsy and Traveller people are estimated to have life expectancies of between ten and 25 years shorter than the general population^{18 19}.
- Almost a third of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers responding to an online survey in 2016-17 reported that they had experienced discrimination within the health care system²⁰.
- In 2021 the University of Manchester found that a Romany or Traveller man in his 60s has health more comparable to a White British man in his 80s²¹.
- Gypsy and Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely to experience the death of a child than those from the general population²².
- 42% of Gypsies and Travellers are affected by a long-term condition, as opposed to 18% of the general population¹⁸.

¹⁸ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/gypsies-and-travellers-simple-solutions-living-together>

¹⁹ Baker, M, (2005) Leeds Baseline Census 2004-2005 Gypsies and Travellers. Leeds Racial Equality Council

²⁰ Traveller Movement (2017) The last acceptable form of racism? The pervasive discrimination and prejudice experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_80949-6_0.pdf

²¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33516278/>

²² Parry et al (2007) 'Health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England'. J Epidemiol Community Health. 2007 Mar; 61(3): 198–204

- Gypsies and Travellers suffer higher levels of stress, are three times as likely to suffer from anxiety and twice as likely to suffer from depression compared the general population^{18 23 24}.
- The suicide rate in the Irish Traveller community in Ireland is six to seven times higher than in the general population²³ and anecdotally we believe the same to be true for Gypsy and Traveller people in Britain¹⁹.

In recent years, the Government has taken a number of steps to address inequalities in access to and availability of quality healthcare services to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. This includes the allocation of funding to Friends, Families and Travellers to support policymakers with more inclusive policy making, the creation of a tool to support Primary Care Networks with more inclusive service to those experiencing the greatest inequalities, the launch of cards to support patients in communicating their rights to be registered in general practice and more. Despite this, severe inequalities remain.

While, in principle, everyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK has a right to access primary healthcare, our support work and research shows this not to be the case. When we mystery-shopped 100 GPs across England in 2021, by a 'patient' calling to register with no proof of address or identification, asking for alternatives to online registration and help completing registration forms²⁵, only 6 out of the 100 surgeries would have allowed them to register. This shows a significant worsening of inequalities in registration for people living nomadically since previous research published in 2019²⁶, suggesting that the adoption of many healthcare services of digital-by-default approaches to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic has meant greater barriers to healthcare for many. When services refuse to register Gypsy and Traveller people, or offer digital-only options to people who cannot utilise these, there is a huge impact on the individual but very little accountability for the service.

²³ University College Dublin (2010) 'All Ireland Traveller Health Study: Our Geels'.

https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/AITHS_SUMMARY.pdf

²⁴ EHRC, Cemlyn et al. (2009) Inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers: A Review.

https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research_report_12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Locked-out-A-snapshot-of-access-to-General-Practice-for-nomadic-communities-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/No-room-at-the-inn-findings-from-mystery-shopping-GP-practices.pdf>

Whilst the NHS collects data broadly on ethnicity and how people from various ethnic groups experience healthcare services, no such data is collected for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The categories of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, based on the old 2001 census, are in place in the NHS Data Dictionary, but this recording capability is not used. This makes the categories defunct as they are not being used or updated. As a result, frontline healthcare services are often unaware of the severe inequalities that exist and are not able to measure whether or not they have been successful in addressing them.

This issue has been particularly acute during COVID-19. Chronic exclusion across the wider determinants of health coupled with pre-existing health inequalities in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities mean that there is a disproportionately high representation of people at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus. However, the absence of NHS data collection on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people means we do not know how many people have had COVID-19, how many have died as a result or what specific interventions might be most effective in protecting people at risk from harm.

Despite the data on high suicide rates in the Traveller community, Gypsy and Traveller groups are not recognised as high-risk or mentioned in the Government's 2019 National Suicide Prevention Plan²⁷. Only 5 out of the 79 local authority suicide prevention plans we assessed in 2020 mentioned Gypsy and Traveller communities and only 2 listed any action to address the high suicide rate in their local Gypsy and Traveller communities²⁸. The Government has included Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in its most recent progress report²⁹, but the 'ongoing' work mentioned is minimal and puts the responsibility onto local and voluntary services.

While the Government has taken steps in some areas, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers continue to experience barriers in accessing healthcare including mental health support, in conflict with Articles 3, 4 and 15 of the Framework Convention.

²⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772210/national-suicide-prevention-strategy-workplan.pdf

²⁸ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Suicide-Prevention-Report-FINAL.pdf>

²⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973935/fifth-suicide-prevention-strategy-progress-report.pdf

Our recommendations

- The UK Government should strengthen accountability where healthcare services directly or indirectly discriminate against someone and this affects the individual's ability to access healthcare.
- The Government should introduce and ensure routine data collection within healthcare settings for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.
- The Government should make a clear commitment to ensure that patients who choose registration through non-digital means should be able to access all NHS healthcare settings.
- The Government should ensure the development of clear guidance and standards for providing accessible communications and appropriate support to people with low or no literacy in healthcare settings.
- Training should be mandatory for practice managers and GP receptionists to ensure marginalised communities, including Gypsies and Travellers, are not excluded from primary healthcare services.
- Gypsy and Traveller communities should be listed as a high risk group in the Cross-Government Suicide Prevention Plan, with actions identified to address this inequality.
- Part of the Government's additional £25 million investment for suicide prevention projects should be targeted at reducing suicide in Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Protection against hate: hate crime and hate speech

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 4:

49. The authorities in England should start collecting disaggregated data on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, and should devise policies targeting the specific needs of persons belonging to those groups.

Advisory Committee Recommendations under Article 6:

76. The authorities should intensify their efforts to counter the increasing climate of inter-ethnic prejudice and hate speech by stepping up efforts and initiatives to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue, firmly condemning derogatory and racially hostile language in public discourse and calling on all political parties to refrain from using it. The Advisory Committee also calls on

the authorities to engage with media outlets to promote a more nuanced understanding and reporting of facts to avoid fuelling intolerant and ethnically hostile behaviour while promoting the use of less derogatory language.

83. The Advisory Committee also calls on them to further improve training of law enforcement to detect, investigate and bring to justice all hate speech and hate-motivated offences, and to monitor more closely hate crime against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Overview of the situation and Government position

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face widespread prejudice and race hate³⁰. Research³¹ in 2020 found that 78% of 88 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survey respondents said incidents of hate speech/crime happen very often. This included discrimination from and within education and health services, racial bullying and victimisation within school, online racial hatred and incitement of racial hatred within the media³².

A 2017 report found that 91% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people surveyed had experienced discrimination³³, while a YouGov poll found that one in four British parents found it unacceptable for their child to have a playdate with a Gypsy or Traveller child, and one in four would be unhappy if a close relative had a relationship with a Gypsy or a Traveller³⁴. The Equality and Human Rights Commission's Barometer of Hate also found that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were the protected characteristic group towards whom the highest number of people expressed openly negative feelings (44% of those surveyed)³⁵.

Research by GATE Herts, who established and run the independent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller race hate reporting site 'Report Racism GRT', found that the majority of Gypsies and Travellers who reported through the site were reluctant to report

³⁰ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/national-barometer-of-prejudice-and-discrimination-in-britain.pdf>

³¹ Commissioned by GATE Herts and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/Hate%20-%20E2%80%9CAs%20regular%20as%20rain%20E2%80%9D%20report.pdf>

³² <https://gateherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rain-Report-201211.pdf>

³³ https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_80949-6_0.pdf

³⁴ <https://www.irishpost.com/news/nearly-half-british-people-unhappy-relative-relationship-irish-traveller-new-poll-136321>

³⁵ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/national-barometer-of-prejudice-and-discrimination-in-britain.pdf>

these crimes to the police³⁶. The most common reason given was lack of confidence that the police would act. There is a longstanding mistrust of the appropriateness of responses from police based on decades of experiences of mistreatment and discriminatory practices.

Data on hate crimes are not disaggregated sufficiently and many Police Forces do not record the ethnicity of victims in line with the Census 2021 categories, making the extent of anti-Gypsyism practically invisible. Currently, we rely on small-scale research and third sector data collection on hate crime and incidents committed against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. 'Report Racism GRT', was established to address some of the gaps in data and to promote reporting of anti-Gypsyism^{37 38}.

More needs to be done to improve monitoring and strategies to tackle anti-Gypsyism in line with the Advisory Committee's Cycle 4 recommendations, and in support of Article 6 of the Framework Convention.

Our recommendations

- The UK Government and Police Forces should disaggregate their data on hate crimes/incidents in line with the 2021 Census ethnic categories.
- The UK Government should include robust measures to tackle anti-Gypsyism into in the next Hate Crime Action Plan.

Protection against hate: public discourse

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 6, recorded as a recommendation for immediate action:

76. The authorities should intensify their efforts to counter the increasing climate of inter-ethnic prejudice and hate speech by stepping up efforts and initiatives to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue, firmly condemning derogatory and racially hostile language in public discourse and calling on all political parties to refrain from using it. The Advisory Committee also calls on the authorities to engage with media outlets to promote a more nuanced

³⁶ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Recognise-Report-Resolve.pdf>

³⁷ <https://reportracismgrt.com/>

³⁸ https://gateherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Annual_Report_14_05_18.pdf

understanding and reporting of facts to avoid fuelling intolerant and ethnically hostile behaviour while promoting the use of less derogatory language.

Overview of the situation and Government position

Not only do we continue to see hostile and prejudicial language used among public officials toward Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, there is a lack of accountability and absence of effective recourse to challenge this. For example, Friends, Families and Travellers submitted eight complaints regarding discriminatory language used by Conservative Party Members of Parliament between 2018-2020. Every one of these complaints were dismissed on the following grounds:

‘The Code of Conduct states: “In no way should anything in this Code interfere with an elected representative carrying out his or her duties and exercising his or her judgement in relation to his or her work . . .”.’

Examples of the nature of language used include:

- *‘These people think the normal rules of civilised society do not apply to them’;*
- *‘...a big Traveller problem’;*
- *‘...an expensive menace...’;*
- *‘...people in the UK who repeatedly suffer from being besieged by Gypsy and Traveller communities’;*
- *‘This year Surrey has been particularly plagued by groups who descend on open land’.*

Racist or derogatory language by politicians against minority groups can lead to a spike in hate crimes, whilst racist and irresponsible reporting in the media can, and often does, lead to a backlash against all community members. Parliamentary debates should be solution-focused and not a platform for prejudice.

The Government have failed to implement the Advisory Committee’s 2017 recommendations to firmly condemn provocative language in political discourse, in conflict with the Framework Convention.

Our recommendations

- The UK Government should take steps to address hostile and prejudicial political discourse surrounding Gypsies, Roma and Travellers as part of a wider plan to address race hate against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Protection against hate: the role of the media in fuelling hate speech and crime

Advisory Committee Recommendation for immediate action:

Counter the climate of inter-ethnic prejudices and hate speech by stepping up efforts and initiatives to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue; continue to firmly condemn provocative language in public discourse; engage with mass media outlets to promote a more nuanced understanding and reporting of facts that risk fuelling intolerant and ethnically hostile behaviour and reduce the use of derogatory language; and endeavour to establish an independent press regulator responding to the criteria enunciated by the Leveson Report

Overview of the situation and Government position

In 2018, the UK Government signed up to the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which contains a commitment from all signatories to stop, ‘allocation of public funding or material support to media outlets that systematically promote intolerance, xenophobia, racism and other forms of discrimination towards migrants, in full respect for the freedom of the media.’ However, since signing the Global Compact on Migration, the UK Government has continued to invest in newspapers which promote racism and other forms of discrimination towards migrants, including Roma communities³⁹.

Existing mechanisms for challenging discrimination in print media through the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) are ineffective and lengthy. The discrimination clause in IPSO’s Editors’ Code of Practice is ineffective in tackling most forms of discrimination and even where a breach of the code does take place, the process for addressing this is so lengthy that millions of people are able to read an article before it is amended or taken down.

³⁹ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/FFT-and-GATE-Herts-Submission-to-the-UN-Convention-against-Torture-3-1.docx>

The issue is reflected in TV and broadcast media also. For example, in April 2020, Channel 4 aired a show, 'Dispatches: The Truth About Traveller Crime', which was misleading, encouraged hate towards Gypsy and Traveller people and reinforced false stereotypes. Over 7,000 people complained and Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, launched an investigation in May 2020 which took 503 days to investigate but found no breaches. Information from the show is now quoted by other media outlets as fact, although the content is misleading.

Another example of media outlets fuelling intolerance and ethnically hostile behaviour is an article in national newspaper, the Times, in which columnist Matthew Parris' article titled 'It's time we stopped pandering to Travellers' called for the removal of special protections afforded under the Equality Act 2010 for the Romany Gypsy community and the Irish Traveller community. This went as far as to describe the cultural pertinence of nomadism as a 'doomed mindset'. The columnist wrote:

'...we should stop forcing local authorities to create Traveller sites, phase out the "ethnic minority" rights of people who are not a race but a doomed mindset, prioritise with the utmost generosity the offer of social housing to Traveller families; and, to those who refuse it, begin a gradual but relentless squeeze on anyone who tries without permission to park their home on public property or the property of others.'

More recently, Netflix aired Jimmy Carr's 'His Dark Material' in December 2021, in which the comedian made a joke describing the deaths of 'thousands of Gypsies' during the Holocaust as a 'positive'. Netflix's approval and funding of this material legitimises and perpetuates discrimination and racism. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities continue to face systematic discrimination. This incident also highlights the lack of regulation for streaming services.

The UK Government have failed to implement the Advisory Committee's 2016 recommendation for immediate action, in conflict with the Framework Convention.

Our recommendations

- The UK Government should stop allocating public funds to media outlets which promote racism, in line with commitments made in the UN Global Compact for Migration.

- The UK Government should review and strengthen the IPSO Editor's Code of Practice and the Ofcom broadcasting code to ensure racist media coverage is addressed in all its forms, including online content, in a timely manner.
- The national strategy to tackle the inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities should include a strand on addressing anti-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller racism in the media.

Education inequalities and access

Advisory Committee Recommendation under Article 5:

53. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that support for cultural activities of all national and ethnic minorities is increased across the country and procedures improved, so that their representatives may participate in decision making on the allocation of grants.

Advisory Committee Recommendations under Article 12:

115. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to effectively monitor the measures adopted to guarantee equal access to, and enhance achievements of, pupils belonging to national and ethnic minorities, with particular attention to Gypsies, Travellers and Roma children to ensure they are not left behind.

[Specific to Northern Ireland]

120. It also calls on the Executive to monitor the Traveller Education Support Service to ensure that access and attendance of Traveller children to education is effective and that funds provided to schools in relation to children belonging to ethnic minorities are used to improve their attainment.

Advisory Committee Recommendations under Article 13:

122. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that, in co-operation with minority groups, curricula, textbooks and other teaching materials reflect appropriately the ethnic diversity and historical presence of all national and ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. Staff of all schools shall be effectively trained to accommodate diversity in the classroom and promote intercultural respect and understanding in schools.

Overview of the situation and Government position

The most recently published Race Disparity Audit⁴⁰ and the more recent figures available on the Government Ethnicity Facts and Figures website⁴¹ highlight the critical inequality between the educational outcomes of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and the general population. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children have the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years. For example, the average score at GCSE attainment 8 level⁴² is just 23.3 out of a possible score of 90 for Gypsies/Roma and 31.8 for Irish Travellers. This compares to combined average of 50.2 out of 90 for 2019/20⁴³. In 2014, only 3 to 4% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people aged 18 to 30 accessed Higher Education⁴⁴.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, existing issues have become exacerbated and we have seen the emergence of new needs. While the Government are providing some funding⁴⁵ to support the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, this is insufficient and only reached a limited number of schools and pupils. Wider work needs to be done address prejudice and to improve outcomes nationally. Failure to address outcomes could see Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils being set even further behind than many already are.

Digital exclusion has become an ongoing issue for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families following the pandemic. Larger family groupings, extended families and small living-spaces have led to huge challenges (e.g. accessing online schooling). Schools have moved almost exclusively to online systems – for consent, lunch/trip payments etc. For families with limited literacy, this has been troublesome, and at times has led to disengagement from schooling altogether.

Race Disparity Audit figures tell us that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers continue to experience the highest rates of temporary and permanent exclusion compared to

⁴⁰https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

⁴¹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training>

⁴² Pupils' average score out of 90, based on the results of 8 GCSE level qualifications

⁴³ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/gcse-results-attainment-8-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest>

⁴⁴ https://www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_proof3.pdf

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-million-education-programme-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-announced>

other ethnic groups in the UK⁴⁶ ⁴⁷. Furthermore, research published in 2020 on the effects of hate crime and discrimination on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities revealed: '*School bullying was highlighted by 78% of [88] survey respondents as one of the most common forms of hate speech/crime experiences*'.⁴⁸

Bullying remains a serious issue and contributes to early school leaving and exclusion numbers, due to retaliation after schools fail to act. Bullying from peers and teachers, along with a lack of representation in the curriculum, results in pupils feeling a lesser sense of belonging⁴⁹.

In February 2022, over 40 civil society organisations and three All Party Parliamentary Groups wrote to the Secretary of State for Education, urging the Department to address the pressing need for a more inclusive teaching and learning environment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children⁵⁰. The letter highlighted that, while the Holocaust is on the curriculum, inclusion of Roma and Sinti people as victims of that genocide is not compulsory. There is also a desperate need for positive narratives about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to be taught, and an important and achievable step would be for the Department for Education to support schools to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted the inclusion of Roma and Traveller history as a recommendation in 2020, which the UK Government has yet to address⁵¹. This fails to recognise that a greater understanding of cultural diversity and difference is the strongest approach to reducing prejudice – education is key.

Despite these continuing educational inequalities the Government has cut vital funding to local authority Traveller Education Services, which were set up to improve relationships, address exclusion rates and attainment gaps. Due to the

⁴⁶ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest>

⁴⁷ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/permanent-exclusions/latest>

⁴⁸ <https://www.bucks.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/Hate%20-%20E2%80%9CAs%20regular%20as%20rain%20E2%80%9D%20report.pdf>

⁴⁹ https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/TTM%20Barriers%20in%20education_web.pdf#

⁵⁰ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/appg-for-gypsies/cross-party-parliamentary-groups-call-on-secretary-of-state-for-education-to-include-roma-and-sinti-in-holocaust-teaching/>

⁵¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/-/schools-should-include-roma-and-traveller-history-in-teaching-curricula-council-of-europe-recommendation>

discontinuation of Government funding, the vast majority of Traveller Education Services no longer exist.

The Government have failed to address the Advisory Committee's Cycle 4 concerns in relation to race hate, equal access, achievement and representation within the school setting, in conflict with the Framework Convention.

Our recommendations

- The Government should support schools to mark Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and culture should be included across the curriculum.
- Mandatory teaching on the Holocaust should include the genocide of Roma and Sinti.
- The UK Government should reintroduce ring-fenced funding for Traveller Education Services.
- A properly funded national catch-up programme should be established and part of this should be ring-fenced for Gypsy and Traveller children.
- The UK Government should take steps to address the high exclusion rates experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.
- The UK Government should take steps to address ethnicity-based bullying.
- The national strategy needs to include recommendations and support in education in order to bridge the attainment gap, drive down exclusions and improve future opportunities.

Summary

Despite claims in the Government's 5th cycle State Report, the United Kingdom remains a State in which Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people experience stark inequalities. We consider the Government to be in breach of at least Articles 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 15 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, as they have failed to deliver on 4th Cycle Advisory Committee recommendations under those Articles, as well as several Advisory Committee recommendations for immediate action.

About us

Friends, Families and Travellers is a leading national charity that works on behalf of all Gypsies, Roma and Travellers regardless of ethnicity, culture or background.

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