



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

Updated October 2023

Race hate and prejudice faced by Gypsies and Travellers in England

Friends, Families & Travellers

Race hate and prejudice faced by Gypsies and Travellers in England, March 2023

Compiled by Abbie Kirkby, Ivy Manning, Emma Nuttall, Elvira Popenko

Key facts

- There are an estimated 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers and 200,000 Roma in the UK.
- Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Roma, and Scottish and Welsh Gypsy Travellers are all recognised ethnic groups under the Equalities Act 2010¹.
- The [National Barometer of Prejudice and Discrimination](#) found Gypsies and Travellers to be the ethnic groups that people held the highest level of prejudice towards compared with other protected characteristic groups.

Key issues

- Race hate towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is common but hate crime and incidents are under-reported, with low levels of confidence in the effectiveness of reporting race hate.
- There are difficulties in achieving appropriate and consistent outcomes in dealing with reported race hate against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.
- Police forces do not consistently ethnically disaggregate and record reports, which hides the full extent of race hate against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.
- Media outlets and platforms fuel prejudicial views against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, and lack effective mechanisms for addressing and removing hate speech.
- Elected officials normalise and legitimise racial hatred through the use of inflammatory language.
- Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children experience racist bullying at school, with more work needed to challenge prejudice from a young age in educational settings.

¹ Travelling Showpeople, New Travellers and Boaters also experience hate as part of the travelling communities, despite not being recognised under equality legislation.

Prevalence of prejudice and race hate towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people

The 2018 Equalities and Human Rights Commission report [Developing a National Barometer of Prejudice and Discrimination in Britain](#), found that more people expressed openly negative feelings towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (44%) than any other group, double that towards Muslims (22%), and transgender people (16%), which were the next highest groups. This figure is borne out in [other surveys](#), showing that the level of prejudice and negativity held towards Gypsies and Travellers is high, and significantly higher than that held towards other groups in the UK.

A [YouGov poll commissioned by Friends, Families and Travellers in 2021](#) highlighted some of the prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers. The results showed that of those surveyed:

- 45% of people would be uncomfortable with a Gypsy or Traveller moving next door to them.
- 38% of people would be uncomfortable with their child meeting up with a Gypsy or Traveller child at their home.
- 33% of people would be uncomfortable with a family member marrying a Gypsy or Traveller.
- 34% of people would be uncomfortable having a Gypsy or Traveller in their home, in either a social setting or as a tradesperson.

Research by GATE Herts in 2020, [Hate: 'As regular as rain'](#), found that hate crime against Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities is described as almost a daily occurrence, 'as regular as rain', as one respondent stated. When asked how commonly Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people experience hate speech or hate crime, 78% of the survey respondents said that 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 media. The research also found that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are the number one target of online hate speech in the UK, accounting for 15% of racist or discriminatory slurs overall.

The independent race hate reporting site [Report Racism GRT](#) established by GATE Herts, received 435 cases between October 2020 – October 2021, and of those 182

cases were reported to the police. In the '[Policing by Consent](#)' report (2018), the Traveller Movement found that police officers they spoke to from 45 police forces in England, Scotland and Wales, considered hate crime to be the most common issue Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people report to the police.

In 2023, the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity published its [Evidence For Equality National Survey report](#). The results quantified the extreme levels of racism that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers experience. The report showed that: 62% of Gypsies and Travellers had experienced a racial assault, which was the highest out of all minority ethnic groups surveyed, and 47% of Roma people had been racially assaulted (35% of which was a physical attack).

Under-reporting and recording of race hate

An evaluation of submissions to the Report Racism GRT reporting website, '[Recognise, Report, Resolve](#)', found that the majority of Gypsies and Travellers who reported through the site were reluctant to report these crimes to the police. The most common reason given was lack of confidence that the police would act. Decades of over-policing has resulted in a longstanding mistrust of the police and other elements of the criminal justice system. There is greater trust and confidence in disclosing hate to independent third-party reporting sites, who play a crucial role in raising awareness of the importance of reporting race hate and in addressing those incidents and crimes.

However, the full extent of hate crimes and incidents committed against Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people is hidden, as many police forces do not record the ethnicity of victims in line with the Census 2021 categories. Responses from Freedom of Information Requests sent by Friends, Families and Travellers to police forces showed that whilst many said they recorded some ethnicity data for victims, this was often not disaggregated and done in a free text box, with no effective mechanism to analyse or report on the data.

Work on reporting race hate has also shown variable approaches from police forces in investigating race hate against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. Equally, engagement work with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), including through scrutiny panels, has highlighted issues with both appropriate levels of investigations into race hate against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, as well as inconsistencies in approaches in investigations and referral rates to the CPS.

One of the most prominent cases relating to injustice in the Criminal Justice System, is the prosecution of the killers of Johnny Delaney. Johnny, a 15-year-old Irish Traveller boy, was kicked to death in 2003. Despite witnesses hearing racial slurs and it being recorded as a racially-motivated attack by the police, the [judge ruled](#) the attack not to be racially-motivated, cleared them of the murder charge, and sentenced the killers to 4.5 years for manslaughter.

The role of the media in fuelling hate speech and prejudice

Local and national media coverage of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are invariably negative, with coverage tending to play upon ideas of criminality and

focussing on the existence of encampments. Inflammatory reporting on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has normalised bigotry and intolerance against these groups within society. The Equality and Human Rights Commission's 2016 '[Is England Fairer? spotlight report](#)', outlined numerous examples where UK media used prejudicial or pejorative references, or promoted bias, racism and stereotyping.

An example of misleading and inflammatory coverage in broadcast media includes the Channel 4 show (April 2020), 'Dispatches: The Truth About Traveller Crime', which 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 complete but [found no breaches](#).

Another example of media outlets fuelling intolerance and ethnically hostile behaviour, is an article in the 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 Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities. This went as far as to describe the cultural pertinence of nomadism as a 'doomed mindset'. Existing mechanisms for challenging discrimination in print media through the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) are ineffective and inefficient, with the process for addressing discrimination being so lengthy that millions of people are able to read an article before it is amended or taken down. Inflammatory press pieces are also frequently accompanied by a comments section, which creates a forum for people to express hateful views against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

More recently, Netflix aired Jimmy Carr's 'His Dark Material' (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 against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This incident also highlights the lack of sufficient regulation of streaming services.

Social media platforms are also rife with hate speech, including inciting racial hatred and violence. The complaints processes for reporting hate to social media platforms are also challenging, with both algorithms and moderators not effectively detecting and assessing hate against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. Our work on

reporting race hate has shown that moderators often do not fully understand the content and context of race hate on social media posts, meaning many racist posts do not get removed.

The role of elected officials in fuelling prejudicial views and hate speech

Hostile and prejudicial language is frequently used among public officials against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This normalises and legitimises race hate towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. 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’.

There is a lack of accountability and absence of effective recourse to challenge such prejudicial language. For example, Friends, Families and Travellers submitted nine complaints regarding discriminatory language used by Conservative Party Members of Parliament between 2018-2021. 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 . . .”’

Experiences of bullying of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children experience racist bullying and prejudicial treatment within educational institutions. [A survey](#) conducted by Friends, Families and Travellers in 2019 asked Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people what the biggest challenge they faced in school was. 86% of pupils reported the biggest challenge at school is bullying, followed by racism at 73%.

In our research with the Anti-Bullying Alliance '[Bullied, Not Believed and Blamed: The experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils: Recommendations for Schools and Other Settings](#)', the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people included:

- Being negatively labelled, judged and having presumptions made about them being trouble-makers or not willing to learn;
- That they felt they were treated differently from other pupils and could not access additional support when they needed it;
- Racist and offensive language about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and communities was going unchallenged;
- Not being believed when they report bullying;
- Presumptions about them having a tendency to bully others;
- Feeling they had to retaliate or hide that they are Gypsy, Roma or Traveller;
- That they had learned to expect bullying because no action was being taken to prevent or respond to it.

Recommendations

- The Government should include robust measures to tackle race hate against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in any national strategy or action plan on addressing hate.
- National and local governments and public officials should promote positive narratives about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.
- All police forces should effectively record and disaggregate their hate crime statistics to include the categories of Romany Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller.
- Training for police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service on race hate should include the experiences of race hate towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.
- The UK Government should work with IPSO and Ofcom to review and strengthen the IPSO Editor's Code of Practice and the Ofcom broadcasting code to ensure discriminatory media coverage is addressed in all its forms, including online content, in a timely manner.

- Social media companies should ensure a zero tolerance policy for online hate speech against minorities, including Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, and ensure moderators undertake regular training to understand the emerging trends of hate, rigorously monitor race hate speech and quickly and consistently remove it.
- Political parties should review their Codes of Conduct for elected officials and ensure that hate speech and prejudicial language is not tolerated.
- Schools should explicitly name Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in their anti-bullying policies, and ensure there is zero tolerance of bullying of and racism towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Schools should promote inclusive and positive narratives about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

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.

www.gypsy-traveller.org | **Telephone** +44 (0)1273 234 777

Email fft@gypsy-traveller.org | **Twitter** [@GypsyTravellers](https://twitter.com/GypsyTravellers)

Facebook [@FriendsFamiliesandTravellers](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsFamiliesandTravellers)