**Friends, Families and Traveller submission to Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry ‘Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristics’**

Sarah Sweeney and Abbie Kirkby | 30th April 2020

Gypsy and Traveller communities are at higher risk of being infected by COVID-19 and at greater risk of severe outcomes as a result of contracting COVID-19. We are deeply concerned that the needs of members of these communities is being overlooked or not considered a priority in the Government’s planning and policy relating to coronavirus. We ask the Women and Equalities Committee to provide scrutiny and hold the Government to account for their treatment of Gypsy and Traveller communities at this time.

**Key issues:**

1. The Government has not done enough to ensure families living on roadside camps have access water, sanitation and refuse collection.
2. The Government has failed to release guidance on how people living on roadside camps and on Traveller sites can self-isolate, given the communal and confined nature of nomadic living; such guidance is crucial.
3. The Government has failed to identify how and where extremely vulnerable nomadic individuals can shield, given the communal and confined nature of nomadic living; such guidance is crucial.
4. Support offered to individuals to shield is inaccessible to those with no fixed address and does not include essentials required for survival in nomadic households.
5. Local authorities still have powers to evict Gypsies and Travellers and some continue to utilise these.
6. Some local authorities are continuing to carry out Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments which will affect future delivery of sites, even though the assessments will be significantly flawed.
7. A significant number of parents are struggling to support their children’s education at home; this will ultimately exacerbate educational inequalities.
8. Ofqual proposals on ‘Exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020’ are disadvantageous to Gypsy and Traveller children and young people.

**Background**

Around 10,000 Gypsy and Traveller people are living roadside on unauthorised encampments at this time, around 70,000 people are living on Gypsy or Traveller sites and around 15,000 people are living on canals and waterways[[1]](#endnote-1)[[2]](#endnote-2)[[3]](#endnote-3).

As a result of pre-existing health inequalities, combined with poverty, overcrowding and historic issues related to accommodation, Gypsy and Traveller communities are at higher risk of being infected by COVID-19.

Added to this, Gypsy and Traveller communities are known to face some of the most severe health inequalities and poor life outcomes amongst the UK population, with higher rates of long‐term illness, health problems or disabilities, higher overall prevalence of reported chest pain and higher levels of respiratory problems[[4]](#endnote-4). This means that within Gypsy and Traveller communities, there is a disproportionately high representation of people at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus.

We support over 1300 Gypsy and Traveller families across the UK each year with issues they are experiencing related to accommodation, health, education, discrimination and more. Since lockdown, calls to our helpline have roughly doubled. We are concerned that a significant number of households are experiencing crisis during this period in time and don’t have the support from Government that they need.

**Issue 1 - Access to water, sanitation, showers and refuse collection**

Around 3000 families living on unauthorised encampments and developments have historic issues with accessing water and sanitation[[5]](#footnote-1). This has been exacerbated by events related to coronavirus, such as leisure centres and water points closing, making it harder or impossible in some cases to access. Lack of access to water, sanitation and showers makes it difficult to follow the Government guidance on handwashing and hygiene and difficult or impossible to follow the guidance on remaining indoors while self-isolating and shielding.

This has been addressed as a matter of urgency in Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, yet the Government was much slower off the mark in responding to the basic water, sanitation and showering needs of Gypsies and Travellers in England. The World Health Organisation declared coronavirus a pandemic on 11th March 2020 and lockdown began in the UK on 23rd March 2020, however, the Minister for Communities did not write to local authorities outlining that they could support people to access water and sanitation until the 11th April 2020[[6]](#footnote-2)[[7]](#footnote-3). At the time of writing this submission, the letter has still not been published publicly on GOV.UK.

Whilst the letter recognises some of the challenges that Gypsies and Travellers face when living on roadside camps, the Government is not going far enough to ensure amenities are provided. The direction to local authorities on provision of accommodation for rough sleepers was much stronger. We are still hearing from many families who want to self-isolate but do not have access to the most basic amenities. The experiences of our caseworkers is that within many local authorities, there is no clear team or actor responsible for meeting this need – this means that families who desperately need access to water are stuck in referral loops where everybody they speak to from the local authority feels it is the duty of another team to offer support.

In addition to the issues relating to water, showers and sanitation, the 3000 households who live on unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments do not normally benefit from refuse collection, but instead tend to use Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). We have heard news of HWRCs closing across the country, with Gypsies and Travellers having no place to put their rubbish.

Defra issued guidance on prioritising waste collection services during the coronavirus pandemic, which categorised ‘black bag’ refuse collection as high priority and HWRCs as medium priority. The guidance fails to identify that for Gypsies and Travellers, this may be the only means of waste disposal. In addition, it is not clear how service points on canals and waterways will be affected by changes to refuse collection, nor does the guidance from Defra contain any call for local authorities to consider this.

**Issue 2 – Lack of guidance on self-isolation and shielding**

The Government has created clear guidance on self-isolation for people with symptoms of coronavirus or in a bricks and mortar household where someone has symptoms of coronavirus. The guidance is clear that the entire household must stay at home and not leave the home for a specific time period[[8]](#footnote-4). According to the guidance on self-isolation, those with symptoms of coronavirus, who also have a “vulnerable” member of their household are advised:

1. Minimise as much as possible the time any vulnerable family members spend in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas, and keep shared spaces well ventilated.
2. Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from vulnerable people you live with and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible. If they can, they should use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household. Make sure they use separate towels from the other people in your house, both for drying themselves after bathing or showering and for hand-hygiene purposes.
3. If you do share a toilet and bathroom with a vulnerable person, it is important that you clean them every time you use them (for example, wiping surfaces you have come into contact with). Another tip is to consider drawing up a rota for bathing, with the vulnerable person using the facilities first.
4. If you share a kitchen with a vulnerable person, avoid using it while they are present. If they can, they should take their meals back to their room to eat. If you have one, use a dishwasher to clean and dry the family’s used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly. If the vulnerable person is using their own utensils, remember to use a separate tea towel for drying these.
5. We understand that it will be difficult for some people to separate themselves from others at home. You should do your very best to follow this guidance and everyone in your household should regularly wash their hands, avoid touching their face, and clean frequently touched surfaces.

The Government has also created clear guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable[[9]](#footnote-5). The guidance is clear that extremely vulnerable people are strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact for a period of at least 12 weeks. The advice to those identified as extremely vulnerable mirrors the guidance on those with symptoms who are living with a vulnerable individual and includes:

1. Minimise as much as possible the time other family members spend in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas, and keep shared spaces well ventilated.
2. Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from people you live with and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible. If you can, you should use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household. Make sure you use separate towels from the other people in your house, both for drying themselves after bathing or showering and for hand-hygiene purposes.
3. If you do share a toilet and bathroom with others, it is important that they are cleaned after use every time (for example, wiping surfaces you have come into contact with). Another tip is to consider drawing up a rota for bathing, with you using the facilities first.
4. If you share a kitchen with others, avoid using it while they are present. If you can, you should take your meals back to your room to eat. If you have one, use a dishwasher to clean and dry the family’s used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly. If you are using your own utensils, remember to use a separate tea towel for drying these.
5. We understand that it will be difficult for some people to separate themselves from others at home. You should do your very best to follow this guidance and everyone in your household should regularly wash their hands, avoid touching their face, and clean frequently touched surfaces.

We have highlighted on a number of occasions to the Government that the confined and communal of nomadic settings means that is it highly difficult or impossible for households to follow the Government’s public health advice. Please find below a table which demonstrates just some of our concerns:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Government guidance** | **Challenges in applying in Gypsy and Traveller households** |
| “Minimise as much as possible the time any vulnerable family members spend in shared spaces” | The majority of nomadic households have only shared spaces. |
| “Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from vulnerable people you live with” | This is simply not possible in most nomadic households. Their confined nature means it is not an option. |
| “If you do share a toilet and bathroom with a vulnerable person, it is important that you clean them every time you use them” | Those living on unauthorised encampments and developments may have no access to a toilet or bathroom. They will be forced to use public bathrooms where they have no control over cleanliness or to use the outdoors.Those living on transit sites may only have access to communal facilities where they have no control over cleanliness. |
| “Consider drawing up a rota for bathing, with the vulnerable person using the facilities first” | Those reliant on public or communal toilets and bathrooms will need the facilities manager to co-ordinate this, but this has not been requested of any facilities managers. |
| “If you share a kitchen with a vulnerable person, avoid using it while they are present. If they can, they should take their meals back to their room to eat.” | The majority of nomadic households have only one communal space and little or no other place to go.  |
| “If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly.” | As noted earlier in the document, many households on unauthorised encampments and developments are struggling to access water. Those self-isolating or shielding may run out of water and have no way of going to refill this. |
| Do not leave the home while shielding or self-isolating | Those living on roadside camps may need to leave their home to buy supplies since they have no storage to stockpile, to buy food since supermarkets won’t deliver if they have no address, to buy a new gas canister if they run out, to challenge an eviction, to refill water butts, to dispose of rubbish or to be outside since vans etc. can be really cramped.Those living on Traveller sites may need to leave their home to buy a new gas canister if they run out, top up their electricity meter, use communal bathrooms, to buy supplies since many supermarkets won’t deliver to Traveller sites. |

As part of our role on the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance, we developed a piece of guidance which Public Health England could use to communicate with Gypsy, Traveller and Boater communities on self-isolation. In order to remain consistent with public health principles in the mainstream Government messaging on self-isolation, this required sign off from a number of Departments, including MHCLG and Defra. The guidance was submitted to our contact at NHS England who was responsible for liaising with Public Health England’s external guidance team on 13th March 2020. However, as a result of the slow pace of cross-Government decision making on this matter, the piece of guidance remains unpublished. It is unclear whether the piece of guidance will be published before lockdown ends.

It is clear that the uniqueness of the living situations of Gypsies and Travellers requires a unique Government response. We fear that in the absence of Government intervention, vulnerable individuals will not be able to shield and that when coupled with the stark health inequalities in Gypsy and Traveller communities, this will lead to avoidable deaths.

**Issue 3 – Enabling vulnerable individuals to shield**

In a letter from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma to the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness on 30th March 2020, Kate Green MP and Baroness Janet Whitaker highlighted the parallels between the support which has been offered to people experiencing homeless and the support needed by Gypsies and Travellers[[10]](#footnote-6). The letter included the following excerpt, which we have been echoing in our conversations with MHCLG:

“*We are deeply concerned that people living on unauthorised encampments, those living on Traveller sites and those living on boats require information and support from MHCLG at this time, but have not received it. On 25 March 2020, we wrote to the Secretary of State highlighting these issues.*

*On 26 March 2020, you wrote to local leaders with specific guidance and principles on how they can and should safeguard homeless people during the emergency. The principles outlined include the following statements:*

* *“focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres”*
* *“make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities”.*

*The challenges faced by people experiencing street homelessness hold clear parallels with the challenges faced by those living in caravans, chalets, vans and canal boats. Because of the confined and communal nature of nomadic homes, it is difficult to self-isolate, as is the case in shelters and assessment centres. We are particularly concerned that the vast majority of people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 cannot follow the Government guidance on shielding and protecting.”*

The APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma highlighted the parallels with the accommodation types of nomadic households and raised the question, “The Government has set a precedent with rough sleepers. We therefore have the following request - can you work to put in place the same support for nomadic households?” At the date of writing this submission, there has been no response.

The Government must urgently identify how and where extremely vulnerable nomadic individuals can shield, given the communal and confined nature of nomadic living, as well as the multi-generational composition of many households.

**Issue 4 – Support offered to shielding individuals**

We welcome the support the Government have offered to those who need to shield. Without this support, doubtlessly, many would not be able to shield. However, we hold concerns about how accessible this support is for Gypsies and Travellers who have no address.

The Government form to register for support as an ‘extremely vulnerable’ individual is not accessible for those without a fixed address. We raised this with relevant Government officials over a month ago who have said that it has been raised with the relevant team, but it still remains unresolved. We have been clear that this is a clear breach of the Equality Act, but the issue seems to be considered low priority.

In addition, the support for essentials being offered to those who need to shield focusses on the essentials needed for those living in bricks and mortar accommodation – this includes food and medication. However, people living on roadside camps will also need support with refilling water butts if they are to successfully shield. People living on roadside camps and on Traveller sites will need support with refilling gas canisters and/or other fuel in order to successfully shield. In order to enable all households to shield, this will need to be addressed. Until this is addressed, Gypsies and Travellers from extremely vulnerable clinical condition groups will be forced to break shielding.

**Issue 5 – Roadside households continue to experience evictions**

We welcome the steps the Government has made to ensure the UK population is able to remain in stable accommodation during this national crisis and protection for renters in particular. When we heard a Government announcement of a “complete ban on evictions” we had hoped that Gypsy and Traveller communities, in particular families living on roadside camps, would be included in this.

On 27th March 2020, the Court and Tribunals Judiciary updated their rules on some eviction methods, namely Civil Procedure Rules Part 55, stating; *‘All proceedings for housing possession brought under CPR Part 55 and all proceedings seeking to enforce an order for possession by a warrant or writ of possession are stayed for a period of 90 days from today, 27th March 2020.’[[11]](#footnote-7)*

This was positive news as CPR Part 55 is used for Gypsy and Traveller sites and unauthorised encampments. However, on 20th April 2020, the Master of the Rolls and the Lord Chancellor signed an Amending Practice Direction which withdrew and updated the rules so households living on unauthorised encampments were no longer protected[[12]](#footnote-8).

In contradiction of the Government messaging on “no unnecessary travel”, a “complete ban on evictions” and staying at home, we are aware that a number of local authorities continue to evict Travellers from pillar to post. We are aware of at least 11 local authorities who have either carried out evictions or threatened eviction action against families living on roadside camps.

Each time a family is evicted, they will need to start from scratch in getting access to water, sanitation and refuse collection. Being forced to travel and engage with enforcement agents puts the whole household at risk of catching coronavirus. It is of great importance that the Government issue guidance which is clear that all evictions must be suspended at this time. The alternative is inhumane and creates a risk to public health.

**Issue 6 - Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments**

As highlighted throughout the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, there is a chronic national shortage of Traveller sites in England. As part of their planning duties, local authorities carry out accommodation needs assessments of people residing or resorting to their district, including Gypsies and Travellers to identify accommodation needs of nomadic groups.

In the majority of places, this is referred to as a “Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment” (GTANA) and is conducted by analysis of local population data as well as engagement with Gypsies and Travellers in a particular area. In producing their local plan, local authorities should use the figure in GTANAs to identify a target for new pitches needed then identify and update a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide 5 years’ worth of sites against their locally set targets and developable sites for years 6-10.

We are aware that despite the nationwide lockdown and consequent difficulties of engaging with Gypsy and Traveller communities, a number of local authorities in England have continued to commission research organisations to carry out inherently flawed GTNAs. This will inevitably lead to low targets for identification of land for Travellers to live on, whilst we know there is a chronic shortage of Travellers sites across the country. Whilst we have highlighted this to MHCLG, there is yet to be any guidance issued to local authorities which advises to suspend all such practice.

**Issue 7 – Supporting children in remote education**

Of almost any group in England, young Gypsies and Travellers face some of the greatest issues in accessing and benefiting from the education system. Pre-existing issues in how schools engage with Gypsy and Traveller communities coupled with long-standing educational inequalities within the communities means that there is a real risk that Gypsy and Traveller pupils will be left behind during the country’s lockdown response to the coronavirus pandemic.

According to statistics released as part of the Race Disparity Audit, pupils from the Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller ethnic groups had the lowest average score in GCSEs of any ethnic group in 2016/7[[13]](#footnote-9). Inequalities in educational attainment start at a young age, with figures released just last week revealing that only 34% of Gypsy/Roma children and only 37% of Irish Traveller children met the expected standards in maths in year 2, compared to 76% of pupils in the general population[[14]](#footnote-10).

Supporting children with their education during lockdown presents challenges in the vast majority of households with school aged children and young people at this time. However, we are concerned that a number of issues place Gypsy and Traveller pupils are significant risk of falling behind. These include:

* Qualification level of parents or carers – 60% of people over the age of 16 years old in Gypsy and Traveller communities have no formal qualifications[[15]](#footnote-11). This means that many parents may be in a position where they are being asked to support their children with a level of education which they themselves have not been taught to, or may have been taught to, but not received a qualification in.
* Levels of literacy of parents or carers – At Friends Families and Travellers, we support over 1300 families each year with issues relating to accommodation, education, welfare and much more. Based on our routine data collection, we have calculated that 40-45% of our service users have low or no literacy. There is a concern that this will act as a severe limiting factor for parents aiming to support children with their education during the pandemic.
* Levels of digital inclusion – In 2018, we conducted research with 50 members of Gypsy and Traveller communities which found that one in five Gypsy and Traveller participants had never used the internet; over half of Gypsy and Traveller participants said that they did not feel confident using digital technology by themselves; and only 38% of Gypsies and Travellers (33% if housed) had a household internet connection, compared to 86% of the general population[[16]](#footnote-12). The most popular way to access the internet amongst interview participants was through mobile data. Over half of participants said that this was how they accessed the internet and three out of 50 participants said that their only way to access the internet was through public wifi. In addition to issues highlighted in relation to literacy and confidence levels, the key barriers to digital inclusion identified were data running out, cost and signal (Gypsies and Traveller are the ethnic groups most likely to be living in rural locations). We asked participants which devices they owned and found that 32% of those surveyed did not own any devices which could connect to the internet, only one person out of 50 surveyed owned a desktop computer, only one in five people surveyed owned a laptop, only one in five people surveyed owned a tablet and 32 out of 50 respondents surveyed owned a smartphone. This has clear and immediate ramifications for delivering teaching online.
* Overcrowded learning environments – By nature, nomadic homes are necessarily small, however, their inhabitants often spend lots of time in the outdoors. Current Government restrictions on staying at home make this more difficult, especially when we take into account the large family size typical of Gypsy and Traveller communities. This can create an environment where it is difficult to home-school children due to the increased risk of distraction and lack of space.

Given the above, it is likely that remote education will exacerbate existing inequalities in the education system. It is absolutely essential that resources are invested into catch up education and remote tutoring for those hardest hit.

**Issue 8 - Ofqual proposals on exam grading and assessment**

On 15th April, Ofqual published a consultation on grading specified general qualifications in 2020: GCSEs, AS, A levels, Extended Project Qualifications and Advanced Extension Award. Broadly, the proposals are that students’ grades will be based on evidence of their likely performance if the exams had gone ahead.

Schools and colleges will be asked to submit to exam boards, for each student and for each subject for which they were entered, make judgements on the grade the student would most likely have received had the exams taken place and then rank order of each student at each grade in each subject in that centre. Students who feel that the grade does not reflect their ability or for whom it was not possible to issue a calculated grade, will be able to take exams in the additional exams series which will be scheduled for this autumn or, if they prefer, next summer.

The consultation explicitly recognises that Gypsy and Traveller students who are not attending schools/colleges (as they are home educated) or who have not been attending their school for long enough for teachers to form a secure judgement (perhaps if travelling) may be disproportionately impacted. Students will be able to take exams in the planned autumn series, so will ultimately have an opportunity to obtain the qualifications they have been studying for. But in the short term they could be significantly disadvantaged. Unlike the majority of their peers (with whom they may be competing for opportunities), they may not have results they might need for progression to employment, post-16 study or higher education. We are deeply concerned about this for two reasons.

Firstly, given the educational inequalities faced by Gypsy and Traveller children, it is fair to say that many young Gypsies and Travellers who have progressed as far as GCSE level or above have demonstrated hard work and commitment. For some students, they will be the first person in their family to have received a qualification. We are very concerned that after significant amounts of work, how discouraging it would be for a young person to see all peers and members of their class being allocated a grade and proceeding to further education or employment whilst they are stuck in limbo until later examinations.

It is absolutely essential that every child has the same chance and that members of Gypsy and Traveller communities, many of whom already feel disenfranchised with the education system, feel that they are treated fairly and that their way of life is valid and accepted within schools. It is also important that those who have worked hard and progressed to GCSE, AS-Level and A-Level are able to receive a qualification and that the hard work is perceived to have paid off. This will impact upon their peers’ perception of the education system and how worthwhile it is to invest time now.

Secondly, we are concerned that low expectations of teachers will impact on the grading awarded to Gypsy and Traveller children. According to the Equality Impact Assessment Literature Review, *“Studies of potential bias in teacher assessment suggest that differences between teacher assessment and exam assessment results can sometimes be linked to student characteristics like gender, special educational needs, ethnicity and age. However, such effects are not always seen, and when they are present, are small and inconsistent across subjects.” [[17]](#footnote-13)*

We are concerned that despite this assertion, there is no evidence in the literature review relating to Gypsy or Traveller children, nor any consideration that children from Gypsy and Traveller communities experience greater levels of discrimination than any other protected characteristic groups in Britain.

According to a social barometer research study conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2018 on prejudice in Britain, 44% of respondents expressed prejudice against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities – more than any other protected characteristic group[[18]](#footnote-14). Whilst all forms of prejudice are unacceptable in our society, when we compare this, for example, with the fact that the EHRC found that 5% of the British population expressed prejudice towards black people, there is a concern that existing evidence on teacher bias in assessment of minority ethnic groups may be based on groups who do not experience as significant levels of discrimination. This may in turn mean that data modelling based upon these assumptions will not fully take the high levels of prejudice faced by Gypsies and Travellers into account.

Low expectations of teachers in the performance of Gypsy and Traveller children is common and well documented. For example, when giving evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee in September 2018, Brian Foster of the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers (ACERT) gave an example of how schools can be so entrenched in their stereotypes that, in their minds, being a Gypsy or Traveller equates to poor attainment:

*“There was a school that described itself as having 15 children who were Travellers. There were actually 45 Travellers in that school, but 15 had poor attendance and bad behaviour, and they were regarded as the Travellers. The other families, who were quietly getting on and whose kids were progressing through education, were no longer regarded as Gypsies and Travellers, because they were like us.”[[19]](#footnote-15)*

It is fundamentally important that any opportunity for discriminatory grading is mitigated against for any ethnic group. However, any data modelling must take into account the extremes of prejudice experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities. This must be subject to rigorous examination and scrutiny. It is important not only that young people receive fair grades, but also that they feel that the grade is fair in order to maintain trust in the education system.

**Recommendations**

1. The Government should appoint an advisor to spearhead their response to COVID-19 in Gypsy and Traveller communities, as has been the case for homeless communities.
2. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should issue clear and detailed guidance to local authorities on how to support families who have no access to water, sanitation, showers and refuse collection. This should follow the format of MHCLG’s letter to local authorities regarding homelessness which sets out clear principles and a programme of action.
3. Each local authority should establish a named individual who will be responsible for co-ordinating support for Gypsies and Travellers at this time.
4. Public Health England and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should release guidance on how people living on roadside camps, on Traveller sites or on boats can self-isolate, as a matter of urgency.
5. The Government should offer support with culturally appropriate accommodation to people who need to shield but do not have the space or facilities to do so.
6. The Government officials managing the GOV.UK form where people vulnerable individuals can register for support should ensure it is accessible for people with no fixed address.
7. The support with essentials offered to individuals who are shielding should include help with refilling water butts, refilling Calor gas bottles, restocking up on fuel and disposing of household waste where this involves visiting a public space.
8. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice should send clear guidance to all local authorities halting all evictions.
9. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should send clear guidance to all local authorities halting all Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments.
10. All children whose parents have no formal qualifications and/or low levels of literacy should have optional access to a home tutor for the duration of lockdown.
11. The Department for Education should fund schools to deliver catch up education for those children and young people disadvantaged by the lockdown.
12. All households with insufficient access to digital devices for the period of lockdown, should be offered a tablet or laptop for each school aged child or young person.
13. All households with insufficient access to internet to support education at home during lockdown, should be offered a dongle or other means of accessing the internet at no cost.
14. All households with no access to a printer or paper resources for home education should have these delivered to them.
15. Children and young people from households where overcrowding may make it difficult to learn at home should be eligible to continue to attend school.
16. The Department for Education should formulate a clear plan on how all Gypsy and Traveller children and young people can be fairly graded in the absence of the option to take an assessment.
17. Any modelling on impact of teacher bias on the grades of children should take into account the most extreme instances of prejudice and discrimination and mitigate for these.
18. Ofqual should act upon the recommendations set out by Runnymede Trust and others in relation to fairness of grading students from minority ethnic groups.

**Conclusion**

We are deeply concerned that the unique needs of members of Gypsy and Traveller communities is being overlooked or not considered a priority in the Government’s planning and policy relating to coronavirus. This will require strong leadership from the Government. The consequences of failing to act will be severe for Gypsy and Traveller communities. We ask the Women and Equalities Committee to provide scrutiny and hold the Government to account for their treatment of Gypsy and Traveller communities at this time.

**Please see below relevant letters sent to Government Departments:**

* [A letter from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma to the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness](https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/APPG-to-Luke-Hall-2.pdf) (30 March)
* [A letter from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma and to the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government](https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/APPG-to-Secretary-of-State-MHCLG.pdf) (sent 25 March).
* [A joint civil society letter from 30 organisations](https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/health/covid-19-uk-government-must-lay-out-clear-plan-to-support-gypsies-travellers-and-boaters/) (sent on 24 March).

**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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1. There are around 3000 households living roadside, so we have estimated 3.3-3.5 people per household. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. There are around 20,000 households living on sites, so we have estimated 3.3-3.5 people per household. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.rboa.org.uk/q-a/ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\_fs/1.43714!/file/GT-final-report-for-web.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/848868/TCC\_November19\_Stats\_Release.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
6. https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
7. https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-MITIGATING-IMPACTS-ON-GYPSY-TRAVELLER-COMMUNITIES.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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