

GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH

GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER PEOPLE, CULTURES, AND TRADITIONS THROUGHOUT HISTORY



People with Roma heritage travelled from northwest India as prisoners, slaves and soldiers.

Theories suggest 60,000 Roma people were forcibly enlisted to the army of Mahmud of Ghazni and after his death, were expelled from Indian territories and driven to nomadism.¹

Ancient laws in Scotland recognise a community of people called ‘tinklers’ from their occupation as tinsmiths.

They are viewed differently to mainstream society, seen to have their own customs and dialect.²

Roma people in the territories of modern day Romania were taken as slaves and forced to work in monasteries, mines and in fields.

Slaves were the property of their owners, bought and sold in their hundreds. It was not until 1856 that the Moldavian and Wallachian Assemblies abolished slavery within their principalities.³



Romany Gypsies first recorded in England were incorrectly thought to have travelled from Egypt.

In 1530, Henry VIII’s ‘Egyptians Act’ expelled Romany Gypsies in England. In 1554, Queen Mary ruled that being a Gypsy was punishable by death.

Irish people began to split from the general population around 12 generations ago in the 1600s - ‘an lucht siúil’ (the walking people) became known for storytelling and sharing songs from city to city.

998AD

1100s

1200s

1500s

1600s

Irish Travellers are recognised as a distinct ethnic group in Ireland, and recognised as Ireland’s only indigenous community.¹³

Scottish Gypsy Travellers recognised as an indigenous minority ethnic group in Britain.¹²

Following expansions of the European Union, there is an increase in migration of Roma people to the UK from across Europe.



Irish Travellers recognised in British law as an ethnic group, following a legal challenge in court brought by eight individuals refused service at five pubs in London.



The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy is the first systematic attempt by the Irish government to settle Travellers in Ireland, aiming to force families off the road, into bricks and mortar accommodation.⁹

Roma and Sinti people, sometimes called the ‘forgotten victims’ of the Holocaust were deported to concentration camps, subject to mass murder and horrific medical experimentation by Nazi soldiers. Over 200,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered or died as a result of starvation or disease.

2017

2008

2004 - 2007

2000

1963

1940s



Eileen Flynn becomes the first Irish Traveller to become a senator in Ireland.

The High Court rules that Local Authorities are no longer able to issue blanket bans on Gypsies and Travellers stopping on parcels of land, recognising that ‘the Gypsy and Traveller community have an enshrined freedom not to stay in one place but to move from one place to another’.¹⁴

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act becomes law. The new law means nomadic Gypsy and Traveller people are at risk of having vehicles (homes) confiscated, fines and imprisonment.

The planning definition of ‘Traveller’, which states anyone not travelling for more than 12 months, even if due to old age or ill-health, is not considered a ‘Traveller’, is declared ‘discriminatory’ by the Court of Appeal, in a case supported by Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT).



2021 Census has for the first time ever included ‘Roma’ as an ethnic category, with the official population declared at over 100,000 people.

Population increases are also seen for Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller people.

2020

2020

2020

2022

2022



The UN’s Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calls for repeal of PCSCA’s eviction powers against roadside camps.

Planning definition of ‘Traveller’ reverts to more-inclusive pre-2015 definition, which better reflects accommodation needs of many Gypsies and Travellers.

High Court declares parts of Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSCA) in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission finds Pontins Holiday Park acted ‘unlawfully’ against Irish Travellers, following an investigation into the holiday park’s blacklist of Irish-sounding names.

New powers brought in by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 challenged at the High Court by Wendy Smith, a Romany Gypsy, with FFT and Liberty acting as Interveners.



Supreme Court rules ‘Anti-Traveller’ wideinjunctions have a negative impact on Gypsies’ and Travellers’ ability to pursue a nomadic way of life, but rejected an appeal lodged by FFT, London Gypsies and Travellers (LGT) and Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group (DGLG), against the granting of wide injunctions against ‘Persons Unknown’.

March 2025

December 2024

May 2024

2024

2024

2023

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