



MOVING FOR
CHANGE

Lost in transit: Gypsy and Traveller people's experiences of transit site provision (or its absence)

Report compiled by **Friends, Families and Travellers**,
on behalf of **Moving for Change** and partners

September 2026



“An Act to restrict the eviction from caravan sites of occupiers of caravans and make other provision for the benefit of such occupiers; to secure the establishment of such sites by local authorities for the use of [gipsies] and other persons of nomadic habit...”

Caravan Sites Act 1968
Chapter 52

“...He began by stating, baldly and inaccurately, as Ministers have done all the way along: ‘The 1968 Act has failed.’

It is not the Act that has failed but the Government's political will to make it work...”

Lord Avebury,
25 October 1994,
Lords Debate on the **Criminal Justice and Public Order [Bill] 1994**¹

“Support for more draconian enforcement powers and opposition to the existence of roadside camps is often coupled with opposition to the provision of permanent and transit sites in local areas. Gypsies and Travellers face hostility to their existence in either circumstance.

...The families that will be adversely affected by this legislation have been failed by the planning system.”

Written evidence submitted by Friends, Families and Travellers to the Public Bill Committee:
on Part 4 of the **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts [Act 2022]**²
Session 2021-22

¹[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1994-10-25/debates/451143e9-b7c6-4ceb-9f98-d37fbda1e43a/LondonLocalAuthorities\(No2\)BillHl](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1994-10-25/debates/451143e9-b7c6-4ceb-9f98-d37fbda1e43a/LondonLocalAuthorities(No2)BillHl)

²<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmpublic/PoliceCrimeSentencing/memo/PCSCB15.htm>

About Moving for Change

Moving for Change (MFC) aims to improve the quality of life for nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and the communities in which they live across the UK. Our primary focus is to secure the wellbeing and rights of Gypsies and Travellers living on roadside camps. MFC maintains a network of individuals and groups, including local authorities, dedicated to improving the lives of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

About Friends, Families and Travellers

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is the only national charity supporting Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, regardless of ethnicity, culture or background. We seek to end racism and discrimination against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma through an inclusive lens, and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life.

In all areas of our work, we support individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage and inequalities, with the issues that matter most to them. At the same time, we work to transform the systems and institutions which cause structural inequalities and disadvantages to exist in the first place.

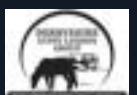
Acknowledgments

To all the people who took part in this research:

Moving for Change, Friends, Families and Travellers, and the project partners are eternally grateful for the trust you have shown to us by sharing your experiences. It is not easy to speak openly about the pain you have been through, especially when it can feel like it's never-ending, but your resolve and passion have helped strengthen our collective mission to fight for a fairer future for Irish Traveller, Romany Gypsy, New Traveller and Showman communities.

To the project partners:

Moving for Change is forever indebted to our data collection partners, and project partners **Violet Cannon, Armagh Roma Traveller Support, Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group, Gypsies and Travellers Wales, GATE HERTS, Traveller Space**, and **EMTAS** (in partnership with **Warwickshire Gypsy Roma and Traveller Engagement Working Group**) for the patience, support, and understanding you have demonstrated throughout this project's lifetime, and for your willingness to engage trusted relationships in the furtherance of this project's aims. While positive change can never be promised, this exercise has demonstrated that our small corner of civil society is healthier than ever, and more willing to stand for what's right than ever before.



Glossary

Abbreviation	Full title/name	Further information
PPTS	Planning Policy for Traveller Sites	Planning policy for Traveller sites.
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework	Planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
LPA	Local Planning Authority	Planning department for local government.
GTAA/GTAA	Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment	An assessment to identify the need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in a local authority area.
Transit Site		A site where occupiers have agreements to station a mobile home, typically only for periods under three months. Occupiers on transit sites are covered by the Mobile Homes Act (1983) but have more limited rights, including less security of tenure. ³
Transit Pitch		A pitch on which a person is entitled to station a mobile home under the terms of the site agreement, for a fixed period of up to three months.
Stopping Place		Informal or unofficial stopping/halting location where Gypsy or Traveller people may rest at while travelling.
Meanwhile Site		A vacant plot of land awaiting future development, and temporarily used as a stopping place.
Negotiated Stopping		A common agreement for Gypsies and Travellers to use an unused piece of land as a temporary stopping place.

Contents

<i>Glossary</i>	2
Introduction	5
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities	6
Methodology	
Why it matters	
What does it mean to travel?	8
Where are we now?	10
Commitment from local authorities towards provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities	12
Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments	12
In reality	
Welfare checks	14
Lack of transit site access	18
How people felt about their needs being met	24
For the people, by the people	26
A rippling effect	28
Conclusion	30
Recommendations	30
Appendix	32
<i>Methodology</i>	32
<i>Research approach</i>	
<i>Ethical Framework</i>	
<i>Sampling and recruitment</i>	
<i>Demographics</i>	
<i>Data collection</i>	
<i>Data analysis</i>	33
<i>Limitations</i>	
<i>Safeguarding and data security</i>	

Content note: *this report reflects the experiences of the research participants, and therefore features direct quotations of racist and discriminatory language, as well as descriptions of violence. Some readers, particularly those from Gypsy or Traveller communities, may find this content distressing. If you are affected by any of the issues raised in this report, support is available from **Friends, Families and Travellers** on **01273 234 777**.*

Introduction

Lost in Transit: Gypsy and Traveller people's experiences of transit site provision (or its absence) is a report coordinated by Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) with partners, and supported by [Moving for Change](#), exploring Irish Traveller, Romany Gypsy, New Traveller, and Showmen people's experiences of transit site provision in the UK. This report follows previous Freedom of Information (FOI) research, and an FFT-commissioned comprehensive literature review, into transit site provision.

The continuing low rates of transit and permanent site provision have become well-established and semi-permanent agenda items in policy and public affairs circles. There is lots of existing research highlighting the accommodation issues affecting Gypsy and Traveller communities, including the seminal Dr Simon Ruston MRTPI-authored *Kicking the can down the road: The planning and provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England 1960-2023*.⁴

Last year's FOI and the more recent literature review make the policy argument for better transit provision, and they do it well. Now, this report aims to strengthen the conversation by centring the voices of Gypsy and Traveller people, whose lived experiences will shine a blistering light on what it means to seek a safe stopping place, today.

Key findings from FFT's previous Freedom of Information research into local authority transit provision showed that of 362 (95%) local government authorities:⁵

- **332 (92%) had no local authority owned or managed transit sites or pitches;**
- Only **31 (9%)** had transit provision within their area;
 - **39%** of these stated that the police have used Section(s) 62A-E of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to direct people to the site;
 - **50%** indicated that people staying on those sites were **charged extra fees for the use of facilities**, on top of potential **deposits** ranging from **£100 to £500**, as well as **pitch fees**.

Similarly, the literature review conducted by Dr Nicola Hay and Professor Colin Clark of the University of West Scotland, revealed a stark gap between policy and practice.⁶ While every local authority had documented transit provision plans embedded in *policy*, most remained unbuilt, incomplete, or were deprioritised to the point where failure is baked in and accountability takes a quiet retirement.

This report illustrates the experiences of Gypsy and Traveller people, with key information and themes on transit provision ranging from a brief explanation of what transit provision is, to what transit provision should be. Alongside Friends, Families and Travellers, co-production partners included [Violet Cannon](#)[^] (as independent), [Armagh Roma Traveller Support](#), [Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group](#)[^] (DGLG), [Gypsies and Travellers Wales](#)[^], [GATE Herts](#)[^],

[TravellerSpace](#)[^], and [EMTAS](#)[^] (in partnership with Warwickshire Gypsy Roma and Traveller Engagement Working Group). *Lost in Transit: Gypsy and Traveller people's experiences of transit site provision (or its absence)* provides useful information for anyone working with Gypsy and Traveller communities in accommodation provision, planning and development, hate and discrimination, and healthcare.

⁴ https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Oak-Project-Report_links-2.pdf

⁵ https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/FFT-TransitProvisionFOIReportNov2024_FINAL-1.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/FFT-Literature-Review-Updated-Draft-24-02-25.pdf>

[^] These partners also took part in the interviewing process outlined in the methodology section.

^{*} Romany Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and Romani people more widely), Irish Travellers, and Roma, are all considered minority ethnic groups under the Equality Act 2010.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

The broad term ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ encompasses various distinct communities, and is often used to refer to people from Romany Gypsy*, Irish Traveller*, New Traveller, Liveaboard Boater, Showman and/or Roma* communities. The term ‘Gypsy’ can include English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy/Travellers and Welsh Gypsies.⁷

These communities are sometimes compounded under the umbrella term ‘GRT’, and the use of this abbreviation presents similar issues to the use of ‘BAME’, as it arguably fails to reflect the true diversity of the communities referenced.⁸ For the purposes of this report, we have avoided its use. However, you may find the term used in other policy documents.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have a shared history of nomadism, although members of these communities have increasingly moved into bricks and mortar housing, with an estimated 78% living in ‘conventional’ housing.⁹ In the UK, Roma people are not included in contemporary nomadic accommodation considerations, and this report only explores the experiences of Romany Gypsy, Irish Traveller, New Traveller and Showman communities, hereby referred to collectively as ‘Gypsies and Travellers’, with specific references to communities made where relevant.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative, community-centred approach to explore Gypsy and Traveller experiences of transit site and pitch provision across the UK. Developed and delivered in partnership with peer researchers and community organisations, the study sought to ensure that the perspectives, priorities and lived realities of Gypsy and Traveller communities were central to the research process.

Data was collected between January and April 2025 through 106 peer-to-peer interviews and 13 online survey responses, involving participants from a range of Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Participants included people who are currently using, or have recently used, or are unable to access transit provision, as well as people stopping on the road.

Questions explored access to sites, site conditions, safety, treatment by authorities and the wider impacts of transit provision on daily life. Findings were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, with peer researchers contributing to interpretation and validation. While limited transit provision restricted recruitment opportunities, the use of co-production, community-led engagement and diverse regional sampling strengthens the credibility and relevance of the findings.

Why it matters

People from Gypsy or Traveller communities have formed an important part of Britain’s population across centuries, contributing heavily to its national identity, heritage and social fabric. Despite repeated attempts throughout the centuries at erasure, Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Showmen and New Travellers have demonstrated a resilience borne of struggle, tradition, unity and community.

Vardos, bender tents, caravans, converted vans, and other forms of ‘mobile’ homes are often considered as much a cultural tenet as travelling itself—it has been shown that for many Gypsy or Traveller people, there is a cultural aversion to bricks and mortar (or ‘conventional’) housing.¹⁰ According to the 2021 census, over 78% of Gypsy or Irish Traveller people currently reside in bricks and mortar housing.¹¹

⁷ GOV.UK (2022) Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary. Section 2.

⁸ <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2022/05/19/why-weve-stopped-using-the-term-bame-in-government/>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/gypsioririshtravellerpopulationsenglandandwales/census2021>

¹⁰ 2Per Clarke J at para 34 of Clarke v Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions [2002] JPL 552.

¹¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/gypsioririshtravellerpopulationsenglandandwales/census2021>

Yet, people who are still able to travel do so for work, for culture and for family events, and some are forced to travel because there is nowhere to stop.

Historically, Romany Gypsy communities relied on thousands of ancestral stopping places, moving with the seasons for agricultural work (like fruit and hop picking), barn painting and hawking. Records show Romany presence in the UK as early as the 1500s. Many Irish Travellers, who form Ireland's indigenous minority ethnic group, arrived in the UK in the mid-1800s, following the Great Famine. A further wave of migration took place in the 1950s and 60s, with many working as labourers and builders during the post-WWII rebuild period. Ireland's Housing (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2002 is widely considered the main law that criminalised halting on roadsides or unused land, leading to a further wave of emigration.

Showmen communities and traditions date all the way back to the Middle Ages, as early as the 1200s, with travelling performers, actors, and shows—many traditional fairs have received a royal charter. More recently, New Travellers emerged from the free festivals of the 1970s, with more than one generation now living this way of life.

The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 fundamentally transformed British land use by establishing that owning land no longer inherently granted the right to develop it. Instead, all land use and development became subject to strict local discretion.

The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 made it unlawful to use common land without the relevant licenses, which greatly reduced the number of available stopping places. The Caravan Sites Act 1968 brought in a duty on councils to build 'official' sites; however, this duty was removed by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (which also brought in stronger eviction powers).

For many, travelling and living nomadically may not be possible, but this does not erase the desire to do so. For people who manage live on the road, evictions can be a common experience.

Providing well-designed and managed permanent and transit sites for Gypsy and Traveller people supports co-existence, communal cohesion and happy communities. As with all communities, having access to safe and secure accommodation can lead to significant improvements in wider determinants of health, education and employment for Gypsy and Traveller people. Sadly, while transit sites are intended to support travelling and safe stopping, many fall short of the mark.

The history of planning and infrastructure legislation and policy in relation to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation issues, including site provision, is a long and complicated one. Dr Simon Ruston MRTPI's *Kicking the can down the road: The planning and provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England 1960-2023*, for Friends, Families and Travellers, offers a landmark compilation of contemporary planning policy changes and developments.⁴

¹⁰ 2Per Clarke J at para 34 of *Clarke v Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions* [2002] JPL 552.

¹¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/gypsioririshtravellerpopulationsenglandandwales/census2021>

What does it mean to travel?

Reasons for travelling can be many and few, complex and simple. There is no singular all-encompassing reason for travelling and this can be wholly dependent on individual, familial, or communal needs.

*"We all travel if a family member gets unwell. The reason why I am saying this, to explain it to the person who is listening...If a family member gets ill, our culture and belief is that **we travel no matter where we are in the world**: America, Scotland, Ireland, England...We all gather to support that family to help them in anything that they need, **looking after one another**."*

"I don't like living in houses...been in trucks and boats all my life. My dad's side was always living in caravans."

Respondents gave social and work commitments as significant reasons for travelling, with economic pressures, fair and festival attendance or gathering with friends and families as key drivers of travel. Several people stated that travelling was important to upholding cultural and heritage pillars.

"My heritage really...my family were Irish Travellers then they became Showmen Travellers...it's our heritage to travel around, and on the way to Appleby etc. stop and sell things at local markets."

“I travel as it is my culture.”

Many Gypsies and Travellers who took part in the study stated that travelling and being constantly on the move was also a result of a lack of suitable stopping places, drawing attention to the impact this has on the ability to maintain a culturally pertinent way of life:

*“Should be more transit sites—this will **keep my culture alive.**”*

*“We stopped travelling because there is **nowhere to go.**”*

*“I want to live my life how I always have. Just leave us alone. It’s getting harder though. We will need to find either a yard or a house I think in the next few years...We are on bits of land here and there most of the year, it’s getting more and more insecure. **We have no right to life. No right to live as Travellers.**”*

The ongoing lack of action to tackle the accommodation crisis affecting Gypsy and Traveller communities has evolved into a sense of fatalism about travelling, with many echoing that, *“being roadside is insecure—it’s just a fact”*, and that, *“it’s never going to change, it is what it is”*.

Where are we now?

Just under half (42%) of research participants reported parking up roadside due to a lack of choice, with the next largest cohort stopping on land owned by friends or family. 26% of people had used a transit site in the last 12 months, and only **18%** reported using a transit site at **some point in their lives**.

"I've been moved on at nighttime; it was scary for the children. I was handcuffed to a hospital bed as I was taken poorly."

Responses showed that regardless of location, people are **unable to reside in an area for long periods** and are **forced to move on**—only a third of respondents had been able to remain in their area for a year or more.

When asked where people were currently residing, a **picture of desperation** was painted:

"Landlord keeps threatening to evict us."

We're in a constant state of worry."

"Always that feeling

of being moved on in the night"



*“Been moved on many times over the last few years. If there had been a transit site in the area, **we would have moved onto it straight away.** In Warwickshire, we have been moved on **over 30 times.**”*

“I worry about eviction. Sometimes I work away and have to leave my van so I worry about losing my home.”

“Most recently, a local skip company came on council orders to evict me...they blocked me in and threatened me...The local councillors say that I am not part of the community, and I am not welcome here...”

“I get evicted a lot, never a have anywhere permanent to stay.”



Commitment from local authorities towards provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities

Local authorities have a range of obligations towards accommodation provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities, such as assessing accommodation needs (devolved powers dependent).

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTAA) are used by local authorities to determine the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities. GTAA's look at unmet need, expected household growth, and more. GTAA's *should* provide the data that underpin local planning policies, pitch-targets and decisions about the development of permanent and transit sites, as well as identification of a 5-year supply of deliverable sites.

In England, specific guidance on GTAA's was withdrawn in 2016, following the revocation of sections 225 and 226 of the Housing Act 2004. This was replaced by a generalised duty on local authorities, *"to consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to their district with respect to the provision of sites on which caravans can be stationed"*, which in turn created a policy vacuum for the assessment of need. Currently, there is no duty to provide sites since its revocation in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJPOA).¹²

Since the CJPOA's introduction, only 30 socially provided sites have been built in the local authorities surveyed in England (see note 4, previous).

In Wales, local authorities are required to not only assess but also *meet* the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. There is no statutory framework explicitly obliging local authorities to regularly conduct GTAA's in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

This patchwork approach to accommodation provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities has translated to a severe lack of available accommodation, with a chronic under-delivery and a series of knock-on impacts.

*"WE CAN'T GET ANY SERVICES AS WE HAVE NOWHERE
TO LIVE."*

In reality

75% of Gypsy and Traveller respondents said they had **never been asked to complete a GTAA**.

In fact, there is a perception that GTAA's are only performative in nature and not a genuine policy of social improvement, with one family having *"always travelled in this area, my mum, my dad, sisters, brother, all their families...our families are all over Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire. We are well known, yet there has never been no sites made for our families, going way back, to now—nothing."*

Many of the people interviewed emphasised a deep sense that where (and if) consultations take place, their voices are not and would not be listened to, and their needs not met.

"Every time they do the GTAA, they still come out and end up not building any sites, there are lots of old and sick people out here with nowhere to go..."

Some New Traveller respondents said they were often not included in any site provision considerations, and wholly excluded from GTAs:

“...THERE ARE A LOT OF US TRAVELLING ALL YEAR AROUND AND WE DON'T GET CONSIDERED AT ALL. TRYING TO FIND WATER IS REALLY HARD. GETTING RID OF RUBBISH AND RECYCLING IS HARD TOO...WE HAVE TO CARRY THAT AROUND WITH US UNTIL WE CAN FIND BINS THEN WE GET DIRTY LOOKS TRYING TO USE THEM. WATER SHOULD BE FREE FOR EVERYONE. WE DON'T NEED MUCH OR WANT MUCH FROM TRANSIT SITES REALLY.”



Welfare checks

Welfare checks have to be carried out by law before any intervention by authorities to prevent further harm for people who come into contact with statutory services. The failure to conduct a welfare check can have a devastating knock-on effect for the wellbeing of people and communities. According to statutory guidance provided by the Home Office:

Police should ensure that, in accordance with their wider equalities and human rights obligations, proper welfare enquiries are carried out to determine whether there are pressing needs presented by those on unauthorised encampments...

However, the guidance continues that, *“it is for the police to decide on proportionate enforcement action based on the circumstances and evidence of each case.”*¹³

When discretion is left to individual police officers, this can lead to inconsistent applications of welfare checks, as this research shows—60% of respondents and interview participants had **never received a welfare check** when living on roadside camps.

One person described how the police were joined by bailiffs for the eviction, forcing the respondent to leave there and then.

There were widespread assumptions that police forces were used in lieu of social support programmes, significantly damaging individuals’ trust of statutory services. One person spoke of never receiving a welfare check despite living with ill health in a damp trailer, adding, *“I used to stop at...an old Gypsy stopping site in Worthing. I was parked there for three 3 months. Council said they would do a welfare check, but they never did. **Police came and tried to search my trailer for drugs and weapons as a welfare check!** They try and use powers they don’t actually have! **They had no search warrant.**”*

“THEY NEVER LISTENED AND DON’T TAKE MENTAL HEALTH SERIOUSLY...I WAS WAITING FOR A MENTAL HEALTH NURSE TO ASSESS ME, THEY STILL EVICTED ME.”

“NO OFFERING OF HELP, JUST THE THREATENING NOTICE.”

When welfare checks do take place, there is a clear lack of consistency, with irregular timings, approaches and outcomes.

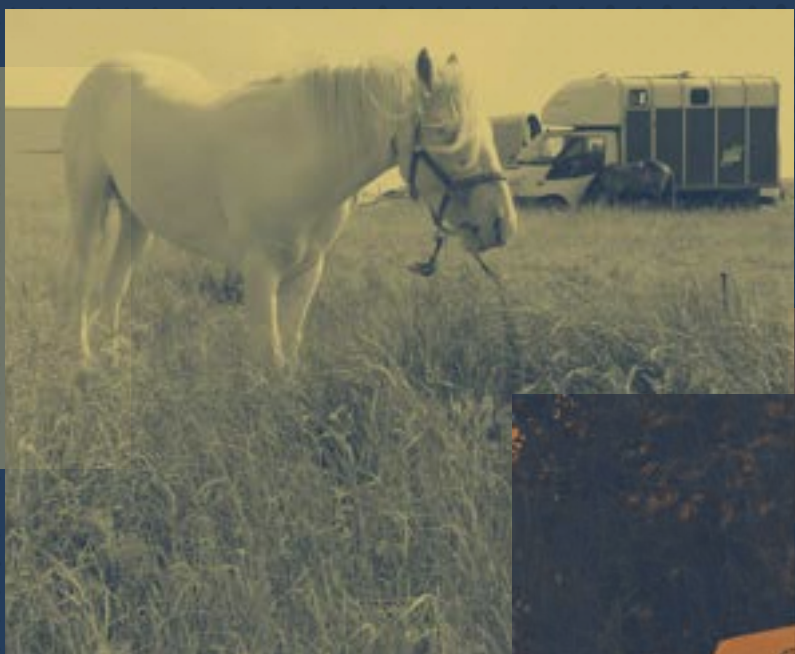
“THEY ARE MEANT TO DO WELFARE CHECKS, BUT THEY DON’T DO THEM UNTIL THE LAST DAY OR DAY AFTER...”



“WELFARE CHECKS—IT’S JUST A LETTER ON THE GATE SAYING CALL US...OR IF WE MOVE ON, THEY COME AND SAY ARE YOU OKAY?”

“THE POLICE ASK IF WE ARE OKAY BUT IT’S NOT A WELFARE CHECK, IS IT?!”





The lack of consistency means Gypsy and Traveller people are forced to navigate a tangle of half-measures and mixed signals, with blame creeping around every corner. One research participant put it succinctly:

*“The welfare checks are only done before we get evicted! **Just a tick box exercise...** They don’t tell us **why they are doing them**. It means nothing and **nothing gets done either...**”*

This sense of almost-pointlessness about welfare checks is common, with many respondents describing how welfare checks do not seem to lead many significant outcomes.

A Welsh Kale respondent described no longer being able to drive due to deteriorating health, something that has **already been covered in welfare checks**, and yet **they are evicted once every three weeks on average**:

“My children move my caravan when I get evicted.”

To access essential services for their health, the research participant is instead forced to **orbit around an area**.

**“HAVE NO
HOME,
FEEL
TERRIBLE,
CANNOT LEAVE
TRAILER
ANYWHERE.”**

Lack of transit site access

“IT’S A CONSTANT CYCLE OF STRESS AND *NOWHERE TO GO.*”

The overwhelming majority (80%) of people who engaged with this research had **little to no experience** of transit site provision due to **no suitable transit provision in their area** in the previous 12 months.

**“I DON’T
KNOW OF ANY,
ANYWHERE!”**

**“THERE IS NO
INFORMATION..
I WASN’T EVEN
SURE THEY EXISTED...”**

**“MOSTLY THERE ARE
NO TRANSIT SITES
AND IF THERE ARE,
THEY ARE
OFTEN FULL.”**

Around a fifth (21%) desired a plot on a permanent site but were unable to find any spaces, leading to exhaustion, burnout, and desperation:

**“I HAVE HAD TO MOVE
A LOT OF TIMES,
SOMETIMES EVEN IN THE
*MIDDLE OF THE
NIGHT.*”**

**IT’S DRAINING
THOUGH, *RUNNING BACK FROM
WORK FOR EVICTIONS,
LOSING YOUR JOB,* THE OLDER
I GET THE MORE TIRING IT
IS...*IT’S TAKING ITS TOLL...*”**

**“WE GO AS SOON
AS THEY TURN
UP WITH THEIR
LETTERS. *IT’S GETTING
SHORTER AND
SHORTER THESE DAYS.*”**

Across the responses from Gypsy and Traveller people who took part in this research, there is a strong and consistent sense of instability, frustration, and neglect.



**“I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
EVICTED ROADSIDE ALL MY LIFE,
BECAUSE THERE
ARE NO SAFE PLACES AND
NOT ENOUGH GOOD TRANSIT SITES”**

**“WE WANT TO TRAVEL SO IT
MAKES NO SENSE THAT
THERE ARE NO
TRANSIT PITCHES”**

**“I’VE NEVER HEARD OF TRANSIT SITES SO
THERE CAN’T BE ENOUGH,
THEY’RE NOT PUBLICISED OR
MAYBE THEY’RE AWFUL SO
NO ONE TALKS ABOUT THEM”**

*“THERE IS **ONLY ONE FOR THE ENTIRE COUNTY**, THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE*

MOVEMENT **ROADSIDE LIVING** FREQUENT EVICTIONS
CONSTANT

...WHY LEAVE PEOPLE HOMELESS?”

The lack of transit sites leads to entire **regional deserts** where suitable transit provision is effectively non-existent, and **accessing essential care not only feels but is impossible**. Insecure accommodation is an ongoing challenge for many Gypsies and Travellers on the road; *“I don’t think there has ever been a time when I have not felt insecure in where I am living.”*

“Not enough stopping places—all of them are closed down.”

*“We need transit sites in Wales as **there are none**, they need to be close to shops.”*

This instability has serious consequences, particularly for Gypsies and Travellers who are older, disabled, or caring for vulnerable family members. Even where sites exist, they are frequently described as poorly maintained, unaffordable, or inaccessible.

*“There is **just one transit site in the whole of West Midlands**...Nothing else. So many families...who are **ill or have sick people in the family** and they get put on the transit site but there is nothing else. It’s so **insecure** for everyone.”*

*“No sooner had we pulled on and feeding the kids, **bailiffs were there to get us off**. With no time to get settled, it **caused problems for schooling and doctors**. It’s affected me a lot over the years, with a disabled son who **couldn’t get the attention he needed**...If there was a transit site available it would stop these problems and we would have used it straight away.”*

For a family where the father and three children are registered blind, they:

*“...Had nowhere to go and the kids needed medication for their eyes from the hospital. Wife had gallstones and **hospitals kept turning her away**, sometimes with morphine.*

*Walsall transit site finally helped us. There are **no usable sites** apart from Walsall in the West Midlands, East Midlands, and Warwickshire.”*

Another family who took part in this research had managed to negotiate stopping in a car park and relied on a leisure centre for shower facilities, which became very expensive. A member of this family has a need for a dedicated shower cabin, but they're unable to access this in the current environment:

*"We are waiting for a site here in this area. Over the past few years, we have been on three different places, here in this area. If I wasn't looking after ill people, I would still like to be travelling up and down, but **need a place now as have to go for hospital visits regularly.**"*

Many people are made to choose the least of all possible evils, ending up in situations 'that will do for now' but are wholly unsuitable for the longer term. Some Gypsies and Travellers have to double up on pitches with friends and family, as in this case of someone who lives with a disability:

*"I feel we need to get somewhere because I need it with the way I am. I'm frightened **I might get worse.**"*

Similarly, the knock-on effects of the lack of transit sites and stopping places impacts individuals, the people around them, and their wider community.



*“I NEED TO BE IN BASINGSTOKE TO **HELP CARE FOR MY ELDERLY MUM** BUT **THERE IS NOTHING AROUND**. I AM TOO ILL TO REALLY TO LIVE ON SITE BUT I'M DOUBLING UP ON HERS **AS I CAN'T GET HOUSED**.”*

*THERE IS NO HELP FOR US. **I FEEL FOR THE YOUNGER ONES**. IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO TRAVEL NOW.”*

*“I WOULD LIKE OTHER PEOPLE TO HAVE SOMEWHERE TO STAY. A LOT OF PEOPLE TRAVEL IN THE SUMMER AND HAVE **NOWHERE TO GO**.”*



“THEY SHOULD BE *HELPING US OUT MORE* AND TREATING US LIKE *HUMAN BEINGS!*”

How people felt about their needs being met:

In general, local authorities are considered to not be doing enough to meet the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities, leading to perceptions of a lack of care for Gypsies and Travellers by the research respondents. Responses ranged from *“there is no help offered”* to *“all talk and nothing changes”*. One particular comment summed up the support

available—*“Nothing is ever available for Travellers.”* This lack of care can mean that identified needs are not acted upon:

“We get no help at all; we don’t get any water or bins brought to us...they just tell us to move and don’t say where we are supposed to go.”

A constant sense of dehumanisation was expressed by the people who shared their time with the researchers; succinctly and depressingly summarised by one participant as, *“if my child and a dog was being kicked to death in that road...they would go save the dog.”* This particular respondent also added, *“these people see us as scum. We are wasting the air around them.”*

The reality of scarcity politics (that one must lose out for another to gain) can increase inter-communal tensions. This is commonplace across communities in the UK who experience chronic underfunding and an overall lack of support, whether in urban centres or rural outers.

“There is a transit site, but the local authority use it like a permanent site and most people have been there for years.”



*“THEY TREAT YOU LIKE
YOU ARE THE SHIT ON THEIR SHOE
AND JUST NEED YOU GONE. **THEY
DON’T CARE HOW.**”*

*“YOU FEEL OTHERED ALREADY, SO
ACCESSING SERVICES FEELS LIKE A
**LUXURY YOU ARE NOT
ENTITLED TO.**”*

*“THEY DON’T SEE US AS SOMEONE
TO LOOK AFTER;
WE ARE A PROBLEM
THEY HAVE TO PUT UP WITH.”*

“BETTER IF IT’S CLOSE TO THINGS YOU KNOW, BUT *ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN NOTHING.*”

For the people, by the people

Rightly so, the overwhelming majority (94%) believed that there should be **community involvement in the design of sites**. The phrase ‘nothing about us without us’ summarises the need for co-development of sites *with* Gypsy and Traveller communities, made up of the people who will use them and *“built with people with experience and knowledge of the [communities].”*

This approach ensures that **what’s provided is what’s needed** and can **positively impact the overall health and wellbeing** of site residents. Like Walsall, *“Middlewich transit site in Cheshire had a site manager on site and was very helpful. Any problems would be fixed and sorted immediately...”*

As with any form of accommodation, there are key fundamentals that should be covered in the design of sites; proper sanitation blocks, easy and reasonably priced access to water and energy (something that is currently extremely costly for site residents)¹⁴, and timely and consistent refuse collection. All of these may be taken for granted in bricks and mortar accommodation but can have a long-lasting impact people's lives.

*“They don’t build sites or care for them...I know people who pay **£30 a day on electricity** because sites are classed as business and they can’t afford it.*

*I know Travellers who have no running water and the council tell them we can’t find anyone who will go on to the site and so **refuse to help.**”*

*“Just the water would be nice, you know I’m supposed to have a shower every day and I **can’t do that**, it’s too expensive to go to the leisure centre.”*

Similarly, other considerations covered a range of areas:

- **Site management**; *“Making sure you have the right management – this is key. They listen to what the community need.”*
- **Safety**; *“Transit sites are not safe and secure for families with young children...”*
- **Design and disrepair**; *“Our own site is not fit to live on and should have been shut down 20 years ago...”*
- **Space and capacity**; *“...Big enough if you are traveling with some family, clean and with the services on it.”*
- **Access and length of stay**; *“24-hour access, because a lot of them, now, you have to give notice before and there has to be someone there the next morning. You could be hours waiting at the gate, waiting to get in.”*
- **Location**; *“They are always in bad locations! They don’t put them in places where we need them...Just want to hide us away...”*

Fundamentally, people simply want to live somewhere **safe and secure, without the threat of being evicted over and over again**. The widespread pessimism as a result of decades of inaction means that people had come to **expect little from local authorities**, suppressing expectations and seeking alternative, self-reliant methods to fulfil needs; *“I don’t know what we need, we need what a Gorja person would get. But I don’t know what that is.”*

“Even just some lay-by where there is an understanding it is okay for us to park there would be nice. Under most councils, I feel like I need to be careful not to be seen or I’ll be treated as a criminal.”

As with any form of accommodation, **location plays a major role** in the suitability of sites. Access to shops, public transport, open spaces, and schooling are clear necessities and yet seemingly play little consideration in what little site provision does exist; many have referred to this as *environmental segregation*.¹⁵

Importantly, over a quarter of respondents believe that **having their own yard**, or generally a piece of land, to live as they want, would contribute to feeling **happier and healthier**. Some went as far as to describe sites as feeling like *“getting put on an Indian Reservation”*.

Specifically, planning applications made by Gypsies and Travellers are disproportionately rejected.¹⁶ And yet, many of these rejections are overturned on appeal; much of the land is already owned by the applicants.

*“We need more places to **call home** or a bit of **freedom with our own places**. It’s not fair.”*

*“Had my own land for a bit but **we got kicked off as someone built a house opposite** and **dobbed us in...Everyone else loved us**, we were a small farm, but the council had to act...”*

Getting planning permission for additional land can help ease the accommodation crisis experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities, through private provision to plug public provision gap. And yet, many are exposed to extensive planning restrictions, like this young family:

*“We would love our own yard one day. If we could stop on some of our families’ places, **we would be happy**. But they need planning, which mean we can’t stay there. Even on his mum and dad’s place, **we knew they would come one day and ask us to leave**. Their planning is only for three trailers and two chalets.”*

¹⁵ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/travellers-unsuitable-transit-sites-council-contaminated-land/>

¹⁶ https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Briefing_Accommodation-issues-facing-Gypsies-and-Travellers-in-England-2.pdf

A RIPPLING

There are **multiple intertwined barriers** for people who find themselves with nowhere to stop, which has a knock-on impact on the ability to live fulfilling, healthy lives:

“There need to be more transit sites...I want to do some college courses but no point as I need somewhere more secure to stay...”

An example where the lack of targeted and effective support has a significant impact on the life outcomes of Gypsies and Travellers is education, where many young Gypsy and Traveller people *“...can’t get schools roadside, the schools will not take them”, and “with no place to go, you can’t get into schools.”*

“It was hard to get my daughter into school as I didn’t have a care of address in the area ...”

A statutory framework under the ‘T-code’ enables travel for work purposes **only**, which fails to offer educational support for other reasons for travelling, such as attending important cultural events.¹⁷

A commonly reported experience is that *“if you went to a school and said I am only here for six months, if you put in your kids and you want to pull them out, you’re not allowed to and that’s a lot of hassle for Travellers.”*

Parents fed back that exclusion, racism and bullying within education left them with little choice and so, *“children are taken out [of schooling]...due to the way the other children treat them due to being Travellers.”*

Along with education, it can be, *“very hard to access services when you are travelling as **everybody wants to proof of address** and sometimes, we do not have an address”,* such as in the case of booking GP appointments.

Despite the NHS’ constitution allowing for care at the point of access for all, many medical centres still request proof of address, which can lead to missed diagnoses of physical or mental health conditions. It can be particularly, *“difficult for disabled people at the side of road as **there are no facilities.**”*

*“The Red Cross helped us **persuade the council to let me stay in the trailer** down the side of a house on a dead-end lane **because my daughter has had 12 years of brain treatment** in hospital...”*

*“I was in hospital recently with suspected heart attack, but **when they found out I was living roadside they wouldn’t let me go home** so I had to get someone to come and collect me and take me home as otherwise the hospital wanted me to go into bricks. **I never lived in bricks. I can’t do that.**”*

65% of respondents have experienced evictions, with some people reporting moving on after receiving eviction paperwork but prior to the actual eviction, due to the negative

EFFECT

impact on mental health, or nerves:

*"Frequently being evicted made it **impossible to lay roots** and made me feel **unstable**."*

Highlighting the widespread 'silent' epidemic unfolding within Gypsy and Traveller communities, many people spoke of *"living in fear"* and ongoing bad feelings about not having *"anywhere to live or go."* One particular respondent spoke of being *"very depressed"* as they get older, and being unable to cope like they used to, adding that things are, *"getting a bit much...I am **desperate** for my own place now, I have got to get **security for the children**."*

One person expressed suffering *"the worst mental health"* and even attempting to take their own life, *"lots of times"*.

A Romany Gypsy participant, in a particularly saddening and shocking situation drew attention to his and his wife's health:

*"I am 78 with **heart** and **blood pressure** problems. My wife is 72 with **dementia** and **arthritis**, she can't walk. For 6 years, **we can't get a transit or permanent site**. We can't get a doctor, nor medication, **no help**."*

The community interviewer who engaged with the 78-year-old, added:

*"...**Not all Gypsies die young**. The elderly need help with sites, medical attention, carers benefits. The wife has dementia and is non-mobile. The husband has had triple heart bypass, strokes, blood pressure issues and depression."*

These experiences are further compounded by discrimination; over 84% reported experiencing **at least one form of discrimination**. In fact, for many people discrimination is considered a part of everyday life.

*"Our daily life is racism, **we are classed as not human**, not deserving basic respect. Everything I do, **I hide what I am** or I get treated differently!"*

*"**Followed in the local shops**...Had doors in restaurants shut with managers standing in front of them **allowing in settled people but telling us we can't come in** even though it was practically empty."*

Many respondents gave examples of threats to *"**burn us while we sleep**", "getting called **pikeys**" or booking a table at a restaurant and then "when you turned up, they would try and make out **they can't find you on the system**."*



Conclusion

The feeling of pessimism towards the likelihood of increased transit site provision is clear. Many people felt that effectively, **anything is better than nothing**—a place to stop, rest and feel safe is something that everyone deserves, yet many are denied.

Widespread experiences of **discrimination and racism have marred daily life**, impacting Gypsy and Traveller people from cradle to grave, and the lack of hope can often be as bad as the suffering itself.

The commitment to making things better, like speaking out and sharing your experiences, is testament to the resilience of Gypsy and Traveller people. The people who took part in this survey all agreed that things have to get better.

Of course, not all transit sites are poor. Research participants spoke highly of two ‘very good’ examples in Walsall and Middlesbrough. Perhaps this research’s limitations mean more examples of Good Practice have been missed, but the sentiments, needs and desires shared by the research participants are extremely common. Nothing said so far is radical or unrealistic, **yet good practice remains the exception, not the norm**.

Gypsy and Traveller people have been clear about what is needed: safe, accessible spaces where people can stop, rest and live with dignity. This research does not point to a lack of understanding, but a **lack of action**. The persistent failure to provide adequate transit provision reflects not just oversight, but **inequality and injustice**.

The resilience shown should not be mistaken for acceptance of the status quo, and Gypsies and Travellers should not have to endure discrimination, insecurity and a lack of safety simply for the right to live. Exclusion has been designed into the system, and change is not only possible but overdue. This research is the clarion call to start now.

Recommendations

These recommendations are informed by the FOI research and literature review that formed the basis of the wider study, and by the community engagement that took place.¹⁸

These recommendations are prioritised to address immediate harms experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities, while setting out the structural and legislative changes required to deliver sustainable and equitable provision:

Immediate actions to reduce harm and address urgent inequalities:

1. Access to basic needs and crisis response:

- a. Ensure emergency access to **water, sanitation, waste disposal** and **healthcare** for people living roadside, recognising that many are currently unable to meet even basic needs such as drinking water or washing.
- b. Introduce **local authority protocols** to provide temporary amenities where no sites are available, preventing situations where families are left without any safe or lawful place to stop.

2. Evictions and welfare:

- a. Issue national guidance to ensure **evictions are a last resort**, particularly given evidence of frequent, repeated displacement with nowhere else to go.
- b. Require authorities to identify **suitable alternative stopping options** before enforcement action is taken.
- c. Standardise **welfare checks** so they are meaningful, timely, and supportive—rather than as a ‘tick-box’ exercise linked to eviction.
- d. **Prohibit night-time evictions and intimidating practices**, which contribute to fear, trauma, and instability, especially for children, older people, and those with health needs.
- e. Issue **new national guidance on conducting GTAAs**, in consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities.

3. Transparency and information:

- a. Publish **accessible, up-to-date information** on site availability, costs, and facilities, addressing the current lack of awareness and inconsistent access to information.
- b. Establish **clear points of contact** (e.g. site managers or wardens) so families can find and access stopping places without relying on informal or unreliable channels.

4. Engagement and trust-building:

- a. Begin **immediate, meaningful engagement** with Gypsy and Traveller communities to identify urgent needs and rebuild trust.
- b. Provide **anti-racism and inclusive services training** for frontline staff to address reported discrimination and improve day-to-day interactions with services.

Structural improvements to systems, services and provision:

1. Increase and diversify provision:

- a. Develop a **network of transit sites and safe stopping places** across regions, reflecting actual travel routes, community networks, and service access.
- b. Pilot and expand **negotiated stopping and low-impact models**, recognising that some families do not want formal sites but still require safe, serviced places to stop.

2. Site quality and standards:

- a. Introduce and enforce **minimum national standards** for all sites.
- b. Improve **site design**, responding to concerns about unsafe and unsuitable environments.

3. Co-production and governance:

- a. Embed **co-production in all aspects of policy and provision**, moving beyond consultation towards shared decision-making with communities.
- b. Establish **formal engagement structures** to ensure Gypsy and Traveller people shape local and national strategies on an ongoing basis.

4. Health, education and wellbeing:

- a. Remove **address-based barriers** that prevent access to GP registration, schooling, and other essential services.
- b. Expand **targeted health and mental health support**, acknowledging the cumulative impact of constant movement, insecurity, and discrimination.
- c. Develop **flexible education approaches** to support children whose schooling is disrupted by lack of safe stopping places, including support for home schooling.

5. Site management and allocation:

- a. Improve **site management practices and allocation policies**, ensuring staff are trained, culturally competent, and accountable.

Appendix

Methodology

This research used a qualitative, community-centred design to explore Gypsy and Traveller people's experiences of transit site and pitch provision in the UK. The report seeks to demonstrate not only whether sites are available, but how their presence, absence and quality shape the lived experiences of Gypsies and Travellers up and down the country.

Research approach

The study adopted a participatory and culturally informed approach, recognising the longstanding mistrust many Gypsy and Traveller families feel towards statutory authorities and formal research processes.

To ensure the work reflected the priorities, language and realities of the communities involved, peer researchers and community engagement staff from Friends, Families and Travellers and partner organisations contributed to the development and execution of this report.

Ethical framework

All research activities were conducted in line with FFT's ethical and safeguarding policies.

Survey and interview respondents were provided with clear and accessible information about the study and the voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent was obtained verbally or in writing, depending on preference and literacy needs. Strict procedures were followed to protect anonymity and confidentiality, particularly for participants who discussed sensitive issues such as roadside stopping, enforcement activity or interactions with police.

Sampling and recruitment

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure representation of a broad range of experiences. Participants included individuals and families who:

- were currently staying on a transit site, or had recently used a transit site, or had attempted to use transit provision but were unable to access it;
- made use of roadside stopping places.

Recruitment was carried out through FFT's community networks, partner organisations, on-the-ground engagement, and social media outreach. Efforts were made to include participants from areas with and without transit provision, capturing regional variation and the consequences of uneven provision. In total, the research features responses from 119 people; 106 through peer-to-peer interviews and 13 online survey respondents

Demographics

This research features input and responses of men and women from Romany Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Scottish Gypsy/Traveller, Welsh Gypsy, Showman, English Traveller, or New Traveller backgrounds, 18+ years old, and across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Data collection

Data was collected through an online survey distributed via SurveyMonkey, and structured interviews carried out between January and April 2025 by FFT alongside the partners specified in the introduction and including Abiline McShane (as independent), [Craigavon Travellers Support Committee](#), and [Leeds GATE](#).

Questions across the interviews and survey explored access to sites, site conditions, safety, treatment by authorities, impacts on daily life, and perceptions of what good provision should look like. Interviews took place in various locations, over the phone and in-person.

All methods were designed to be inclusive and accessible, with options for oral participation and targeted support for participants with limited literacy. With support from partner organisations, the questions were developed as part of a co-production process, to ensure relevance and pertinence to Gypsy and Traveller people.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed or recorded through detailed notes and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Researchers first coded transcripts inductively, identifying recurring ideas, experiences and concerns. Codes were then refined into broader themes through team discussion, with peer researchers contributing to sense-checking and interpretation to ensure cultural accuracy and contextual depth. Researcher positionality and potential bias were explicitly reflected upon throughout analysis.

Limitations

This research has been subject to a number of practical limitations. The extremely limited number of transit sites restricted opportunities to engage and recruit a large number of individuals with direct transit provision experience. Participants who are highly mobile or fearful of enforcement may be harder to identify, introducing potential self-selection bias.

Nonetheless, the combination of co-production processes, community-led recruitment and diverse regional sampling strengthens the overall credibility of the findings.

Safeguarding and data security

All project partners were informed of the importance of safeguarding and correct data protection. All protected data was held by the partners who conducted interviews, with information uploaded to SurveyMonkey as anonymous.



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