

## FACTSHEET: Travelling People in the United Kingdom

- The terms 'Travellers' or 'Travelling people' could usually be taken to include Gypsies, whether English, Welsh or Scottish; Irish Travellers; so-called 'New' Travellers – some of whom are third generation; Roma people from Europe who have obtained refugee status; fairground families; and Bargees and other boat-dwelling people. In other words, people who are, or have traditionally been, associated with a nomadic lifestyle: around 200,000-300,000 individuals.
- Some of these people will be living in housing but are still Travelling People. Travelling is as much a state of mind as it is a way of life.
- Confrontation and conflict are key themes in the relationship between Travellers and the state. Substantial numbers of Romany Gypsies first arrived in England in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Henry VIII (1509-1547) passed laws against frauds carried out by these 'outlandyshe People, callynge themselves Egyptians'. Philip and Mary (1553-1558) passed laws making it a felony punishable by death to remain in Britain as a 'Egyptian', unless such a person went into service; Elizabeth I (1558-1603) extended this to disguised persons found in their company. From their arrival Gypsies were also affected by legislation relating to vagrants and vagabonds.
- Planning and other land control laws (from the Commons Act 1876 to the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960) have made it more difficult for Gypsies and Travellers to remain mobile. It is estimated that 90% of their traditional stopping places, such as green lanes, have been blocked off or in some other way made inaccessible in the last 20 years.
- Gypsies and Irish Travellers are minority ethnic groups protected under the Race Relations Act 1976 as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; as proper nouns the words should thus be capitalised like 'Jewish' or 'English'.
- Gypsies and Irish Travellers are in many ways culturally different, but may have shared characteristics including a strong family unit, with great value placed on the care and socialisation of children and the care of the elderly and infirm; a sense of pride and resilience; entrepreneurial skills and occupational adaptability; and a strict code of cleanliness with regard to interior living spaces. A strong cultural identity is retained by those who are pushed or pulled into housing.
- Many Gypsies speak the inherited language of Romanes; Irish Travellers may speak Gammon or Shelta.
- The 1968 Caravan Sites Act 1968 placed a duty on local authorities in England and Wales to provide static sites for Gypsies. Many authorities did not attempt to meet this duty, or were prevented from doing so by strong local anti-Gypsy sentiment. The Secretary of State had a power to compel authorities to carry out their duty, but used it only a few times when forced to do so by judicial decisions.
- In the early 1990s there was a moral panic over 'raves' and New Traveller encampments, following which the conservative Government issued a consultation document which proposed to remove the duty to provide sites and to give greater powers of eviction to local authorities and the police. Despite an overwhelmingly negative response from bodies such as the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Country Landowners Association, the Government made these policies into law through the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

- Many Travellers are attempting to buy their own land as part of the 'privatisation' of site provision aimed at by the current and the last Government. However, while 80% of all planning permissions are granted, 90% of Gypsy applications are refused. The reasons for this are many, but have much to do with the extreme outcry from a local population whenever a Traveller site is proposed, regardless of the suitability or otherwise of the location.
- Around 2/3 of Gypsy Travellers reside on or resort to publicly or privately provided permanent sites; for the former, (sometimes very high) rents and local charges are paid. Some private landowners would like to provide temporary or permanent sites for Travellers but are unable to due to the licensing and planning requirements of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960.
- The shortfall in sites means that one-third of Gypsy Travellers, and the majority of other Travellers, are forced to camp on unauthorised sites. These Travellers are evicted and moved from place to place, authority area to authority area. TLRU research (forthcoming) suggests that the resulting costs to taxpayers (including other, settled, Travellers) may be twice as much as it would cost to build, or enable to be built, more sites.
- The estimated number of Travelling children<sup>1</sup> in England is much higher than previous estimates at approximately 50,000. Access to schooling for primary age children has improved over time, and involvement by younger children in pre-school activities is better, although still below-average compared to settled children. There are still many secondary aged children who are not receiving adequate secondary education, or even in many cases registered with a secondary school. School attendance by Travelling children of all ages is improving but still unacceptably low. There is likely to be less than 12 Gypsy students in further or higher education in Britain at any one time. Higher exclusion rates for Traveller children are due more to racism and bullying than bad behaviour, according to OFSTED.
- Gypsies have a higher infant mortality rate and lower life expectancy rate than the settled population in Great Britain, due in part to difficulty accessing health services; this is also true of Travellers in the North and the Republic of Ireland.
- Gypsies have also suffered a history of persecution on the European continent, where they are better known as Roma. It is estimated that between 250-500,000 and more died in the Nazi extermination camps. Compulsory sterilisation was 1970s Czechoslovakian policy for Roma. In 1993 the new Czech and Slovakian republics rendered resident Gypsies stateless via new citizenship policies.
- Some 'New Travellers' have been on the road since at least the 1960s. Most will live on unauthorised sites as there was never a statutory duty to provide for them; some will live, at least periodically, on their own land or on land belonging to family and friends. Reasons for choosing a nomadic way of life to which they were not born may include poverty and unemployment, and/or dissatisfaction with the mores of settled, industrialised consumer society.
- The range of wealth and income, the level of legality in behaviour, and the types of human needs and desires of people from the Travelling communities, are believed by most police and local authority officers to be the same as those of the settled population.

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