



Irish Traveller Movement in Britain
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IRISH TRAVELLER MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

Policy Briefing to Advisory committee on framework convention for the Protection of National Minorities



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1. Introduction

1.1 This report seeks to highlight the range of policy concerns that ITMB have in relation to the treatment of Travellers in the UK. Combined with the deficiencies in policy implementation as required under the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, ITMB are concerned by the pervasive prejudices, stereotyping and resulting racism towards Travellers in this country and a failure by the authorities to intervene.

2. Context

2.1 The situation of Irish Travellers is very complex. Due to the fact that Irish Travellers are the victims of a deeply entrenched negative society-wide perception. This often results in decisions being taken by Government which aim to placate the wider settled community, rather than addressing the fundamental socio-economic disadvantages and multi-faceted discrimination which the Travellers face. Whilst there has been a significant change in the perception of the wider Irish communities living in Britain since the relative stability of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in recent times, this has not in turn translated into an equally positive and tolerant perception of Irish Travellers also living in Britain.

2.2 There are a number of characteristics related to the unique position of Irish Traveller which is alluded to in this report. The recommendations are focused on addressing the need for an urgent re-evaluation of Government policy which is committed to ensuring action and investment is made to rectify the situation of Irish Travellers.

3. The Irish Traveller Community in Britain

3.1 Estimates of the size of the Gypsy and Irish Traveller population are problematic in the absence of ethnic monitoring, administrative statistics and their current exclusion from census categories, which is set to change in the 2011 Census. In 2000, it was calculated that there were approximately 300,000 members of these communities in the UK.¹ However the ITMB believes that this may be an underestimation, research carried out by Pat Niner has found that with the high rate of population increase, estimated at 3 % per annum², the community is still growing.

¹ 'Common Ground: Equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers', A Report by the Commission for Racial Equality (2006) at p4. See also, in this regard the report carried out by Morris R and Clements L, **At what cost? The cost of managing unlawful Gypsy encampments**, Policy Press, Bristol (2002)

² Niner P, *Local Authority Gypsy / Traveller Sites in England*, (2003) ODPM,

- 3.2** Irish Travellers in Britain are recognised as a distinct ethnic minority group since 2000 with a landmark ruling in ruling in ***O’Leary & Others v. Allied Domecq & Others (2000)***, in which the Court recognised Irish Travellers for the first time fell under the Race Relations Act (as amended 2000) which is now superseded by the recently enacted Equality Act 2010.
- 3.3** The Irish Traveller community in Britain are represented by The Irish Traveller Movement (ITMB) a National policy, voice and community development charity, which is working to raise the capacity and social inclusion of the Traveller communities in Britain. The organisation was established in 2000 and is a registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. ITMB act as a bridge builder bringing the Traveller communities, service providers and policy makers together, thereby stimulating debate and promoting forward-looking strategies to promote increased race equality, civic engagement, inclusion, service provision and community cohesion.
- 3.4** ITMB have an established track record of active policy development, campaigning, community engagement, training and awareness raising and social cohesion work. We have an established Traveller Advisory Group (TAG), which leads on the strategic direction and development of our policy engagement. This TAG is made up entirely of members of the Traveller communities with nationwide representation. ITMB are shared custodians of the ***Liberty Human Rights Award 2004***.

4. Future for Irish Travellers in Britain

- 4.1** Irish Travellers living in Britain face an uncertain future. Considering that the Irish Traveller community have some of the poorest social outcomes of any group in Britain, it follows that the impending cuts to public services will have a disproportionate affect on the community which will result in a variety of adverse effects on the children in particular.³.
- 4.2** In considering recent policies proposed by the Coalition Government it is clear that a commitment to improving the outcomes of Travellers is not forthcoming. The proposed abolition of regional spatial strategies has left many Travellers and local authorities in a policy vacuum, uncertain as to how a localism approach to Traveller accommodation provision will meet the chronic shortage of Traveller sites.

³ As the Coalition Government implements its spending review, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has stated that it is the most marginalised and disadvantaged in society who will fair the worst.

4.3 Recent ITMB submissions made to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee on Traveller accommodation issues on both the abolition of RSS's and the Localism Bill have highlighted the threats posed by these policy changes in which it is likely that the implications of decisions being taken at local level will result in planning decisions related to Travellers are likely to be strongly opposed.⁴

5. Health Issues

5.1 As the Government has itself acknowledged there is strong evidence to suggest that the health outcomes of Travellers are among the poorest in the country. ITMB believe that the government should be doing more to rectify these outcomes.

5.2 All academic literature specific to the Traveller community strongly indicates that as a group their health overall is poorer than the general population and also poorer than others in socially deprived areas.⁵ They also have poor health expectations and make limited use of health care provision.⁶ The disparities between Travellers and the general population, are shown in the Leeds Report:

Travellers are dying 10 -12 years earlier than the average life span of a person living in Britain today. They also experience an infant mortality, which is three times higher than the national average and are also eighteen times more likely to experience the death of a child. (The Leeds Baseline Census 2004-2005 - Maureen Baker MBE 2005)

5.3 The Sheffield Report also shows that Irish Traveller men and women experience chronic ill health; often with more than one condition that secrecy about depression keeps it hidden and increases the burden. Travellers also face high levels of depression; poor psychological health is often seen in the context of multiple difficulties, such as discrimination, racism and harassment, as well as frequent evictions and the instability caused by this. Alcohol consumption is often used as a coping strategy and drug use among Traveller youths is also widely reported and feared.⁷

⁴ Please refer to ITMB website for ITMB submissions on abolition of Regional Spatial strategies and the Localism Bill.

⁵ **Parry et al (2004)** The Health Status of Gypsies and **Travellers**: Report of Department of Health Inequalities in Health Research, University of Sheffield.

⁶ Van Cleemput P, Parry G, Thomas K, et al (2007). The health related beliefs and experience of Gypsies and Travellers: a qualitative study, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 61(3), pp 205-210.

⁷ See also, Appleton, L. Hagan, T. Goward, P. Repper, J and Wilson, R. (2003) Smail's contribution to understanding the needs of the socially excluded: the case of Gypsy Traveller Women. *Clinical Psychology*. (24), 40-6, Bowers, J. (2004). Travellers' tales. *Health Service Journal* Dec. 114 (5936) 26-8 and Clohessy McGinley, A. (2002). Determining Factors Influencing Traveller Men to Access or Avail of Health Services: An Exploratory Study.

5.4 ITMB successfully lobbied and campaigned with the support of other NGO for a national framework to address the health needs of Travellers. The Pacesetters programme a partnership between local communities who experience health inequalities, the NHS and DH. Pacesetters was delivered through the Equality and Human Rights Group (EHRG) within DH. The programme was delivered by working with six Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) to deliver equality and diversity improvements and innovations. Unfortunately and very worryingly all this initial ground work to begin addressing the health issues of the Traveller community have been abandoned by the new coalition government.

5.5 ITMB recommend that the Government need to be doing more to address the inequalities in relation to health at all stages experienced by Travellers.

6. Culture and education

6.1 The issue of improving educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils has been a focus of research and policy for some time and is particularly serious for secondary age pupils. Evidence suggests that where Gypsy and Traveller pupils do transfer successfully to secondary school, their attendance is unlikely to continue beyond the age of 14.⁸ Ultimately, recent figures have found that only 38% of Irish Travellers reach statutory leaving age.⁹

6.2 In the most recent research to date carried out by the Department for Education, using an analysis of the National pupil database over a five year period, higher rates of Free School Meals eligibility were found with Irish Travellers, suggesting a connection between poverty and disrupted educational experience. Irish Traveller pupils are reported to have the highest level of Special Educational Needs of all ethnic minority groups, and this may be the result of families lacking information or experiencing problems accessing appropriate health care, or schools failing to respond appropriately to cultural difference. Overall, the fact such pupils tend to have low prior attainment, have Special Education Needs and are entitled to Free School Meals was found likely to have been affected by cultural factors.¹⁰

⁸ See Department for Education and Skills, *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5-16 (2006)*. See also, Derrington, C. and Kendall, S. (2004). *Gypsy Traveller Students in Secondary Schools: Culture, Identity and Achievement*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

⁹ Department for Education, *Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils: final report (Oct 2010)*

¹⁰ Ibid.

- 6.3 All of this evidence therefore suggests that radical investment in the education of Irish Travellers is long overdue, in order to address their low education attainment level. Related to this, further commitment must be made to tackle the root causes of these problems and priority given to the welfare of Traveller children, including measures to tackle the prevalent bullying of Irish Traveller children (due to cultural differences) and detrimental harm related to the instability of their living arrangements, which both impact upon attendance figures.
- 6.4 In addition, ITMB is very concerned by the withdrawal of funding to support Traveller Education Services which have been the only dedicated resources funding Traveller education working towards promoting higher attainment levels. As the Government have itself acknowledged in its state report, the Traveller education services have successfully raised participation of Travellers and in considering that their educational attainment is still lagging far behind all other groups, the withdrawal of support for TESS will have a huge negative effect.
- 6.5 Linked to this, the announcement of the withdrawal of Government funding for the annual Gypsy Roma Traveller history month, which was instrumental in portraying the positive image of Traveller culture and traditions is another worrying development.
- 6.6 Finally, another recent and worrying concern, there have been indications about the proposed removal of the duty of community cohesion from the OFSTED inspection criteria. This will represent a significant hurdle in ensuring that specialist provision is made for Traveller children as there will be no impetus to provide measures to improve Traveller outcomes.

7. Homelessness

- 7.1 Official Government figures show that 26 percent of Britain's Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies living in caravans are officially categorised as homeless.¹¹ Such a high incidence of homelessness has a major impact on Irish Travellers access to health care services, Traveller children's educational opportunities and employment and training prospects for adults. The prevalence of homelessness amongst the Irish Traveller community has been attributed to the severe shortage of authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites in Britain.

¹¹ Dept. for Communities and Local Government, Caravan Count January 2010
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/caravancountjan2010>

- 7.2** This shortage has been widely documented by Gypsy and Traveller organisations, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). A 2009 research report conducted by the EHRC concluded that ‘the lack of secure accommodation for nomadic groups remains the lynchpin of a plethora of other inequalities.’¹²
- 7.3** Many of Britain’s homeless Irish Travellers also face the trauma of repeated evictions from unauthorised sites or stopping places. Evictions often involve high levels of violence and have been proven to cause extreme stress, especially for Traveller children.¹³ Considering the root cause of homelessness and evictions is the chronic shortage of authorised Traveller sites, it follows that pro-active government measures should be taken to address the shortage of sites in consultation with the Traveller community.
- 7.4** In relation to the impact on Traveller children, repeat evictions have a number of effects which cut across all areas of life for the children affected. First and foremost, there is a long lasting and deep psychological impact caused by evictions given at short notice in which children lose their sense of security from living in a relatively stable environment. Alongside this, there will be a knock on effect in terms of the disruption to the children’s education of an eviction and longer term health impacts.

8. Economic Exclusion

- 8.1** Gypsies and Travellers continue to suffer from high rates economic and social inclusion. From 2003 onwards there have been reports of growing unemployment and welfare dependency amongst Gypsy and Traveller communities.¹⁴ It is recommended that the UK Government need to do more in counteracting this economic exclusion.
- 8.2** In common with other (non-Gypsy/Traveller) sectors of society who experience deep social exclusion and deprivation, evidence is suggestive that there has been an increase in involvement in crime, alcohol and drug abuse amongst marginalised Gypsies and Travellers.¹⁵
- 8.3** A 2010 report by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) found that 78 per cent of respondents had experienced racism in their adult lives. The report found that such racist experiences negatively impacted on interviewee’s educational,

¹² EHRC, 2009, *Gypsies and Traveller: Simple Solutions for living together*, p.11
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/gypsies_and_travellers.pdf

¹³ EHRC, 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, p. 31
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

¹⁴ Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, 2010, *Roads to Success Report*.

¹⁵ Power, C. (2004) *Room to Roam: England’s Irish Travellers*. London: Community Fund
<http://www.statewatch.org/news/2005/feb/Room-to-Roam-England%27s-Irish-Travellers.pdf>

Matthew, Z. (2008) *The Health of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. A Race Equality Briefing Paper*. London: Race Equality Foundation

employment and training opportunities. The study found evidence that G/IT interviewees living on Traveller sites faced ‘address based’ discrimination with a number of interviewees referring to potential employers being unwilling to offer them jobs due to their place of residence. The ITMB study also found evidence that the low educational attainment of Gypsies and Travellers in school has the result of making it harder for them to develop and maintain their own businesses and secure waged employment.

- 8.4** Gypsies and Travellers are not categorised as an ethnic minority group in the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) despite being an ethnic minority group in UK law. Not acknowledging Gypsies and Travellers ethnic minority status has resulted in them being excluded from DWP research focused on ethnic minority groups. This has resulted in a severe lack of economic and social support for the Gypsy and Traveller communities from the UK Government. The Department for Works and Pension should provide cultural awareness training for frontline and managerial staff who are working with GRT customers.
- 8.5** There is a need for targeted initiatives to raise awareness of, and access to, training opportunities amongst those Gypsy and Traveller community members in low waged and low skilled employment. Hand in hand with the latter there needs to be initiatives to reduce the occurrence of informal work practices/unemployment and encourage ‘regularisation’ of work situations.
- 8.6** Linked to the impact on children, children living in poverty cause by unemployment will suffer a variety of effects. As aforementioned in this report, there is a strong evidenced link between the poverty of Traveller children and low education attainment.

9. **Media**

- 9.1** Gypsies and Travellers continue to suffer from discriminatory and racist reporting in both the local and national UK media. It is recommended that the Government should take a more interventionist role in helping to combat racism in the UK media and press as recommended by CERD¹⁶.
- 9.2** Highly offensive terminology continues to be used in respect to the Gypsy and Traveller communities without always being deemed unacceptable by the press, statutory bodies and the wider public.¹⁷ Headlines such as the Sun newspapers ‘Stamp on the Camps’ and ‘War on Gypsy Free for All’ were deemed by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to not incite racial hatred, because no direct link could be found between the reported acts of racial abuse following the reporting and the reports themselves.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Para 12 and 13, UN CERD 2003 recommendations.

¹⁷ ITMB media monitor <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/media/>

¹⁸ Richardson & Ryder, 2009, Stamp on the Camps, p. 13

- 9.3** The Press Complaints Commissions (PCC) code of practice still allows for ‘prejudicial or pejorative’ references to be made to a group’s ‘race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or any physical or mental illness or disability.’¹⁹ The code has remained unchanged despite the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recommending that ‘the Press Complaints Commission should revise their rules to allow for class/group complaints to be made.’²⁰
- 9.4** Anecdotal evidence from the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain’s online media monitor indicates that the majority of coverage of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK media is negative and is dominated by the issue of accommodation.²¹
- 9.5** In terms of the impact of the racism in the media, ITMB have become aware of increasing bullying experienced by children who are suffering taunting. This was particularly clear to us in the aftermath of the airing of the “big Gypsy Wedding” channel 4 documentary series.
- 9.6** ITMB believe that the UK Government should be doing more to intervene where there is persistent and sustained attacks on the Traveller community in the media. The government has already been urged to take action both in previous recommendations by FCNM and ICCERD.

10. Conclusion

As this report has highlighted, there is a substantial body of evidence highlighting the various forms of discrimination in access to health, education, and accommodation services experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller Communities. This is combined with wider racism and prejudices of these communities in the media.

As a result, ITMB believe that the Government is not meeting its obligations under the FCNM. The Government should be doing more to address these problems and taking pro-active action to promote and maintain the Traveller culture as well as ensuring equality, all of which are the core objectives of the Framework Convention.

¹⁹ Press Complaints Commission code of practice, Clause 12

²⁰ EHRC, 2009, Simple Solutions Report

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/good-relations/gypsies-and-travellers-simple-solutions-for-living-together/>

²¹ ITMB media monitor <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/media/>

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