

RESEARCH

England's most disadvantaged groups: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

An *Is England Fairer?* review spotlight report (1 of 4)



Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com/IsEnglandFairer

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About this publication

What is the purpose of this publication?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's first-ever report on equality and human rights progress for England, *Is England Fairer?*, highlighted the plight of four of the country's most disadvantaged groups:

- Gypsies, Travellers and Roma
- Homeless people
- People with learning disabilities
- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

To facilitate further discussion, the Commission has drawn the key findings from the report to create a series of spotlight reports. This spotlight report focusses on the experiences of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma.

Who is it for?

This report is intended for policy makers and influencers across all sectors and the general public.

What is inside?

The report includes findings on the experiences of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in relation to:

- education
- work and standard of living
- health
- prisons, and
- stigmatising treatment.

When was it published?

The report was published in March 2016.

Why did the Commission produce the report?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission promotes and enforces the laws that protect our rights to fairness, dignity and respect. As part of its duties, the Commission provides Parliament and the nation with periodic reports on equality and human rights progress in England, Scotland and Wales.

What formats are available?

The full report is available in PDF and Microsoft Word formats at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/IsEnglandFairer

The experiences of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Some people in our society are being left further behind because they face particular barriers in accessing important public services and are locked out of opportunities.

There are several factors that may contribute to this, including socio-economic deprivation, social invisibility, poor internal organisation of the group, distinctive service needs that are currently not met, cultural barriers, stigma and stereotyping, small group size, and very importantly, a lack of evidence which limits us in our ability to assess the multiple disadvantages these people face.

Although there are many people facing multiple disadvantages in England, here we have focussed on the experience of one specific group: **Gypsies, Travellers and Roma**.

Research published by the Commission in 2009 presented evidence of Gypsies' and Travellers' experience of inequality in a wide range of areas and highlighted 'the extent to which many of their experiences remain invisible and ignored within wider agendas' (Cemlyn et al., 2009). Evidence that follows suggests that this is still the case in 2016.

Education

Although the educational attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in England improved between 2008/09 and 2012/13, the attainment gap between Gypsy and Roma children, and White pupils appears to have widened, while the gap between Travellers of Irish heritage and White pupils has not changed.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were less likely to achieve 'a good level of development' in their early years (EYFS) in 2013/14 (19.1% for Gypsy and Roma children, and 30.9% for Traveller children, compared with 61.8% other White children). Similarly, a lower percentage of Gypsy and Roma children (13.8%) and Traveller children (17.5%) achieved the GCSE threshold in 2012/13 compared with other White children (60.3%) and the attainment gap widened between 2008/09 and 2012/13.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were also among those most likely to be excluded from school. Their exclusion rates were four to five times higher than the national average in 2012/13: Gypsy and Roma (136.3 per 1,000) and Traveller (169.4 per 1,000) children compared with other White children (41.8 per 1,000) in 2012/13.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are particularly vulnerable in a school setting and subjected to bullying (DfE, 2014). Because of the transience of these pupils, head teachers report difficulties in quickly accessing funding, for example, the pupil premium, for new pupils. There was also a shortage of expertise to provide effective support to Roma pupils (Ofsted, 2014).

Work and standard of living

In 2011, Gypsy or Irish Travellers had the lowest recorded economic activity in England and Wales (47% compared with 63%). The most common reason given for those who were economically inactive was looking after the home or family (ONS, 2014). Over half of those who were economically active were employed, and high proportions were looking for work (20% compared with 7% for all adults in England and Wales) or were self-employed (26% compared with 14%). Roma were often in low-paid waged employment, faced discrimination in employment agency work, and worked informally for 'cash in hand' work (Ryder and Cemlyn, 2014).

The Government placed responsibility for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England with local authorities, on the basis that local authorities were best placed to assess the needs of their communities. The Government provided funding from 2011 to 2015 as part of the Affordable Homes Programme for the provision of new and refurbished Traveller sites, and gave incentives to local authorities through the New Homes Bonus Scheme to provide new housing, including Traveller sites.

However, some local authorities are reluctant to provide new sites or refurbish existing ones, and Gypsies and Travellers face difficulties when applying for planning permission for private sites (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 2011). In a recent legal case the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government was found to have acted unlawfully in Gypsy and Traveller planning applications on green belt land in England, in breach of the Equality Act 2010 and of Article 6 (*Moore & Coates v SSCLG* [2015] EWHC 44).

There is a twice-yearly count of Traveller caravans, which takes place in January and July. Since 2010, the number of Traveller caravans on unauthorised sites has decreased. The number on authorised private sites has increased and on socially rented sites has remained relatively stable. In January 2015, 20,123 Traveller

caravans were counted in England: 6,867 (34%) on socially rented sites and 10,585 (53%) on privately rented sites, with the remainder on unauthorised sites (DCLG, 2015).

Health

Compared with the general population, Gypsies and Travellers are more likely to suffer bad health. This includes lower life expectancy, high infant mortality rates, high maternal mortality rates, low child immunisation levels, higher prevalence of anxiety and depression, chronic cough or bronchitis (even after smoking is taken into account), asthma, chest pain and diabetes (DCLG, 2012), and higher rates of smoking (Aspinall and Mitton, 2014). This is exacerbated by the fact that many Gypsies and Travellers remain unregistered with GPs (RCGP, 2013).

In 2011, 14.1% of Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England and Wales rated their health as bad or very bad, compared with 5.9% of White British and 9.2% of White Irish people (ONS, 2013).

While the variability in general health among different ethnic groups can sometimes be explained by an older age profile, this is not the case for Gypsies and Irish Travellers, of whom only 6% were aged 65 and above in 2011 and who had a low median age of 26 (ONS, 2014). Improved life expectancy of Gypsy and Traveller communities appears to be associated with the availability of established site provision and access to medical care (Cemlyn et al., 2010). A recent report for the Department of Health noted that accommodation insecurity, the conditions of Gypsies' and Travellers' living environment, low community participation and discrimination all play key roles in exacerbating these poor health outcomes (The Traveller Movement, 2016). It suggested that these factors also hold the key to effectively addressing and improving health and wellbeing. It called for long-term, joined-up working at both local and national level to address the wider social determinants of Gypsies' and Travellers' ill-health.

There is emerging evidence that health inequalities of Roma people are similar to those identified among Gypsies and Travellers, including a high prevalence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature myocardial infarction, obesity, asthma and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression (EC, 2014). Poor familiarity with healthcare provisions and language barriers may make it difficult for them to access health services (EC, 2014; Lane et al., 2014). Cultural norms may prevent some Roma people from accessing services for support with mental health, sexual health, and drug and alcohol misuse (EC, 2014). Infrequent contact with

health providers may also be exacerbating the health problems of some Roma patients (Social Marketing Gateway, 2013).

Although the Department of Health in England pledged in 2012 to identify gaps in data and research, and to highlight interventions that lead to positive health outcomes (in DCLG, 2012), concerns remain about the extent to which NHS services collect data on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma patients (Aspinall, 2014).

Prisons

Gypsies, Roma or Travellers are considerably over-represented in prison. In 2013–14, 4% of the prison population identified as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller in the HMIP prisoner survey, whereas only 0.1% of the population identified as such in the 2011 census (HMIP, 2014).

The exact size of the population in prison is not known because levels of self-reporting were low and the option to record a prisoners' ethnicity as 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' was only added to the Prison National Offender Management Information System monitoring system for the first time in 2011 (PPO, 2015).

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were more likely to report feeling unsafe in prison (46%) compared with other prisoners (33%), and more likely to say they had been victimised by other prisoners (36% compared with 23%) and by staff (40% compared with 27%). They were also more likely to report that they had been physically restrained or had been in segregation in the previous six months (14% compared with 6%) (HMIP, 2014).

Their vulnerability in prison may further be heightened by separation from their families, high levels of mental illness, lack of adequate mental health support and not being able to read or write (PPO, 2015).

Stigmatising treatment

Negative attitudes towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities were still widely held.

- According to the Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey, 50% of people in Britain reported having an unfavourable view of Roma (Pew Research Centre, 2014).
- Discrimination and harassment of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers was common across Britain, not only on the part of the general public but also by the police and other authorities (Lane, Spencer and Jones, 2014).
- Evidence from a study carried out in Devon found that some people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities had hidden their ethnic identity in order to

access employment and services, and others said their children were bullied at school and that they had been refused entry to pubs and cinemas (Devon and Cornwall Police, 2013).

- Britain has failed to make progress on all of the measures aimed at fighting discrimination that are part of the European Commission's Framework for National Roma Integration (EC, 2013).

Hostility towards individuals and groups on the basis of ethnicity is often channelled through political rhetoric and the media, which has been criticised by human rights monitoring bodies and highlighted by the Leveson Inquiry:

- The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain provided numerous examples of bias, racism and stereotyping in the media in relation to the reporting of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller issues and claimed that it was making the integration of these communities more difficult (Irish Traveller movement in Britain, 2012).
- There were many examples of 'prejudicial or pejorative references' to particular races or ethnicities in the press. For example, in 2013 an opinion piece in *The Spectator* described Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people as lazy, criminal and unintelligent. The author Rod Liddle claimed that usage of the terms 'gyppo' and 'pikey' were a 'useful means of lumping them all together' (Liddle, 2013).
- Channel 4's series 'Big Fat Gypsy Weddings' has also been found to have perpetuated negative stereotypes. In 2012, the broadcaster was criticised by the Advertising Standards Agency for an advertising campaign which featured posters with the words 'Bigger. Fatter. Gypsier'. The decision that the complaints did not warrant investigation was challenged by the Irish Traveller Movement and eight other complainants, and an independent review of the agency's decision led to the case being re-opened. The Advertising Standards Agency took advice from the EHRC and upheld that the adverts were offensive because they were racist, denigrating and portrayed Gypsies and Travellers in a negatively stereotypical way. It also stated that the adverts were irresponsible because they depicted negative stereotypes of Gypsies and Travellers, and endorsed prejudice against them (Advertising Standards Agency, 2012).

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Contacts

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