

Gypsy Travellers in Scotland

A resource for the media



Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

Scotland

HRE/ED/3/2

“People get upset with the myths in the media, don’t tar us all with the same brush.”

Traveller Woman, Grampian



Foreword

Gypsy Travellers are no longer a ‘forgotten minority’. Both the local and national media regularly cover stories relating to Gypsy Traveller issues and while the majority of people in Scotland have probably never knowingly met a Gypsy Traveller they often still hold firm opinions about them.

Although the media does cover Gypsy Traveller issues, we at the The Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland are concerned that this coverage is often unbalanced. Gypsy Travellers are as diverse as any other ethnic group and we recognise that, as with any other ethnic group, there are a small minority of individuals who engage in unlawful behaviour. However, the tendency of the media to focus on these incidents can result in increased prejudice. We do not think that most

journalists intend to foster stereotypes but rather, that their lack of engagement with Gypsy Travellers results in coverage which is both one-sided and inaccurate. This then serves to validate the idea that somehow Gypsy Travellers are ‘fair game’ - that it is not racist to stereotype or discriminate against a Gypsy Traveller.

Media coverage has a real impact on individual people’s lives. There have been many specific incidents where erroneous reporting of Gypsy Traveller issues in Scotland has resulted in people, including children, being harassed, bullied and even beaten up. Equally, balanced media coverage can help to foster greater understanding between and within communities and encourage action to address the issues that impact on both Gypsy Travellers and the settled community.

We ourselves do not represent any particular group or groups. Our remit is to support the eradication of inequalities and to encourage good race relations between all groups. We have produced this leaflet as a resource for journalists and others about Gypsy Travellers. It contains facts and figures about the key issues that affect Gypsy Travellers, advice about terminology and how to handle issues of concern, and contact details for organisations who work with Gypsy Travellers in Scotland. Obviously it is impossible to produce a complete guide to any ethnic group, but in putting this leaflet together we have spoken to individual Gypsy Travellers and have tried to reflect their voices within it. We do not want to dissuade journalists from covering stories about Gypsy Travellers but rather to encourage a more accurate, fair, open and inclusive discourse about the issues involved.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland, 2010

Contents

8	Terminology	19	Education Issues
10	Origins of Gypsy Travellers	21	Law
11	Economics	22	Dealing with Issues of Concern
12	Culture	24	Contacts
14	Accommodation Issues	26	Resources
18	Health Issues		

“People criticise Travellers without knowing anything about them. Some say, we harm the environment. That’s not true. Travellers are country people, they love the countryside. I’ve never been to a police station in my life, never to court, have never had a conviction and have never lost a point on my licence in 45 years of driving. Not too many people can say that. But it doesn’t stop us always being the first to get the blame if anything goes missing. What people don’t understand is that a travelling person is not a thief.”

Gypsy/ Traveller Man, Perthshire

Terminology

The Commission advocates the use of the following terminology, as used by the Scottish Government, which acknowledges the social and cultural differences between Traveller communities in Scotland. As with all communities there are differences of opinion about terminology and we recognise that each individual has the right to self-define. Terms should always be capitalised, as below.

Gypsy Traveller (plural Gypsy Travellers)

Those groups of Travellers in Scotland who variously refer to themselves as Travellers, Scottish Travellers, Gypsy Travellers and Gypsy Traveller people. This includes English Gypsies, Irish Travellers and European Roma. This term refers to all travelling communities who regard 'travelling' as an important aspect of their ethnic/cultural identity. Gypsy Travellers are the only of these groups to be protected by equalities legislation.

Occupational Traveller

People who define themselves in terms of their businesses, for example Showpeople, Fairground people, Circus People.

It is misleading to refer to them as Travellers and may cause confusion.

Showpeople

Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circus's or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such people who on the grounds of their own or the families or their dependents more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but which exclude Gypsies or Travellers (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2007).

New Age Traveller

People who comprise social groupings that advocate alternative life-styles, frequently for political or issue based reasons.

The settled community

The population outwith that of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

“There seems to be tolerance of other cultures but not ours. People believe that you should do exactly the same as them because your skin is white.”

Gypsy Traveller Woman, Perthshire

Origins of Gypsy Travellers

Gypsy Travellers belong to Scotland and continue to make a rich and valuable contribution to the country's economic and cultural life. They have a long shared history with references to the presence of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland dating back to the 12th century. There are a number of theories about the origin of Gypsy Travellers. Some people argue that they trace their roots to a Celtic or possibly pre-Celtic population in Scotland. Others suggest that Gypsy Travellers may have descended from Roman slaves who were brought over to Britain as armourers. It is thought likely that over time the populations may have intermixed with other groups, such as the Gypsies who migrated from India. As with any ethnic group, there is considerable diversity within the Gypsy Traveller population and individuals are proud of their own distinct family histories.

In addition to speaking English and/or Gaelic Gypsy Travellers have a common language, Cant, which is said to come from the Gaelic 'cainnt' meaning 'speech'. Cant vocabulary comes from a range of sources including: Gaelic, Sanskrit, Scots and Romany.

The current population of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland is unknown. The most recent Scottish Government estimate being 1,547 people¹, but this is acknowledged to be a severe underestimate as it excludes the thousands of Gypsy Travellers living in housing for some or all of the year. Many people are afraid to identify themselves as a Gypsy Traveller because of the extreme discrimination and prejudice they have experienced in the past. Consequently Gypsy Travellers estimate that their community actually includes more than 15,000 people.

One of the most common misrepresentations of Gypsy Travellers is that if they do not live in a caravan they cannot be classed as being a Gypsy Traveller. The reality is that many Gypsy Travellers in Scotland overwinter in housing (often privately rented) and that for family or social reasons – such as bringing up children or caring for older relatives – many Gypsy Travellers have temporarily given up life on the road. That does not mean that they are no longer Gypsy Travellers or continue their own culture, just that for the moment they are not travelling. Just as Indian people do not lose their “Indianess” when they leave India, neither do Travellers lose their identity when temporarily or permanently housed.

Economics

Although people tend to associate Gypsy Travellers with rural-based economic activities, such as farm work, like any sector of the population Gypsy Travellers are engaged in a wide variety of employment from forestry to teaching. In addition, many Gypsy Travellers still pass their traditional skills on to the next generation. Famous Gypsy Travellers include: Charlie Chaplin, Rita Hayworth, Bob Hoskins and Shayne Ward. It is even claimed that Bill Clinton, former President of the United States is descended from the Faa Blythe Scottish Gypsy Kings and Queens.²

Gypsy Travellers contribute to society economically and socially. On official sites council tax is always collected.

Culture

Gypsy Travellers have a very strong sense of their own culture, traditions and community. They are also proud of their Scottish identity, often emphasising the role that their relatives played in the armed forces and the land effort during the two world wars. But as one man puts it: “they’ll recognise us when we sign up to fight for our country, but they won’t recognise our right to live here.”

Gypsy Traveller music, story-telling and art have long been part of Scotland’s wider cultural heritage. Story-tellers such as Duncan Williamson and Jess Smith and singers such as Sheila Stewart and Martin Taylor continue to contribute to Scotland’s cultural life today.

Extended family ties are very important to many Gypsy Travellers. Recent peer research by young Gypsy Travellers showed that nearly half of those surveyed identified being close to their family or other Gypsy Travellers as being the ‘best thing’ about life.³

“Nobody objects to 850,000 members of the caravan club, but it’s not acceptable for me to travel. They can stop, we can’t.”

Gypsy Traveller Man, Perthshire

Accommodation issues

For decades the accommodation needs of Gypsy Travellers have been largely ignored. Gypsy Travellers require a range of accommodation provision encompassing sites, housing and road-side camps in order to meet their individual needs and circumstances. For many Gypsy Travellers travelling is not a 'life-style' choice, but a strong part of their cultural heritage and an integral part of their being. Traditionally many Gypsy Travellers had a wintering place and then travel throughout the rest of the year. Some Gypsy Travellers still follow a similar pattern today, living in one place during the winter, so for example their children can go to school, and travelling during the summer.

Sites

The first council-owned site in Scotland was only established in Argyll and Bute in 1978. During the 1980s and early 1990s local authorities made use of a Scottish Office grant scheme to build sites, but since then some sites have fallen into disrepair and others have closed. In spite of Scottish Government guidance stating that

planning authorities must identify Gypsy Traveller sites, the number of all-year council-owned pitches for Gypsy Travellers in Scotland has declined from 560 in 2003 to 480 in 2006.⁴

Current council site provision does not meet the needs of Gypsy Travellers. Although three-quarters of council-owned Gypsy Traveller pitches are currently let,⁵ three mainland councils still do not provide any sites and half of the councils who responded to a recent survey about services for Gypsy Travellers indicated that their sites are poorly located. Some are crossed by electricity pylons; others are within 300 metres of a motorway; on land liable to flooding; close to a large electricity substation or close to active landfill sites.⁶ Pitch rents are also high, with one Scottish site currently charging £67.93 a week. More than half (58%) of councils charge higher rents for Gypsy Traveller pitches than they do for council houses.⁷ In return for their rent Gypsy Travellers receive an area of hard standing and an amenity unit with bath/shower, toilet facilities and limited space for domestic appliances/

household storage. Pitches have space to accommodate a large residential trailer caravan and vehicle parking space for a van or lorry.⁸ Many families also need, or prefer, to have a second caravan to provide sufficient living space for the whole family. Recent research commissioned by the Commission (2010) suggests that despite being required by Government to provide accommodation only 1 in 5 Local Authorities could actually quantify the amount of pitches required in their area.

Other Gypsy Travellers prefer to access privately-owned caravan sites, including those that have been established by Gypsy Travellers themselves or touring caravan sites which will occasionally accommodate Gypsy Travellers at certain times of the year. Some Gypsy Travellers are keen to establish their own sites, but feel that the planning system discriminates against them. Although there are no figures for Scotland, in England over 90% of planning applications by Gypsy Travellers are refused compared to only 20% of planning applications by the settled community.⁹

Road-side camps

In recent years councils have blocked off many of the traditional stopping places used by Gypsy Travellers. As a result Gypsy Travellers have ended up being compelled to camp in places that are closer to the settled population and this has often become a source of tension. Given the inadequate provision of council-owned sites and the difficulties in getting planning permission for private sites, road-side camping can be the only option for some families.

Road-side camping is often blamed for causing mess which can incur clear-up costs. Yet, there are good examples of councils providing skips and portaloos for road-side camps, a service which the Gypsy Travellers on the camp pay for. Many Gypsy Travellers are concerned by the tensions caused by the current situation and have suggested a number of solutions. These include the establishment of a network of transit sites (areas with hard-standing, skips and portaloos which Gypsy Travellers can pull on to for a short period of time) and

agreeing a charter of traditional stopping places which Gypsy Travellers can use.

The Commission research (2010) confirms that there is a significant shortfall of supply in summer months when the community tends to “hit the road.” This shortfall is largely to blame for the persistence of roadside encampments, with Gypsy Travellers simply having nowhere suitable to go.

Housing

There is no estimate of the numbers of Gypsy Travellers living in housing in Scotland. Many Gypsy Travellers choose to live in house for significant periods of time, to look after young children or to care for older members

of the community. Others feel that they are forced to do so, either because they are unable to find a suitable pitch or because it is the only way to avoid the widespread discrimination which they would otherwise experience at work, at school or in the provision of services, such as access to a GP. Studies have shown that Gypsy Travellers who move into houses suffer poorer health than those who are living on a site or on the road.¹⁰ However by choosing, or simply having to live in a house, Gypsy Travellers do not give up aspects of their cultural or legal identity.

“You can live in a house, but it
doesn’t take the Gypsy out of you.”

Gypsy Woman, Edinburgh

Health issues

Many of Scotland's health services continue to exclude Gypsy Travellers. Some GPs surgeries refuse to register Gypsy Travellers as patients and doctors are reluctant to visit sites. As a result Gypsy Travellers sometimes have no alternative but to seek care through accident and emergency clinics. Research among young Gypsy Travellers has shown that 84% feel that access to a doctor or dentist has not improved or has got worse since 2001.¹¹ Mainstream health education and preventative programmes rarely include Gypsy Travellers and the NHS has done little to engage directly with Gypsy Travellers about their needs and how to meet them.

Inadequate accommodation provision also has an impact on the health of Gypsy Travellers. Living conditions have a direct impact on health - over 50% of Gypsy Travellers have spent at least part of their life without access to running water. However, wider accommodation issues, such as insecurity of tenure, limited access to services and distance from extended family can also affect the health of Gypsy Travellers.

There has been little Scottish specific research into the healthcare needs and experiences of Gypsy Travellers, but English data shows that Gypsy Travellers have significantly poorer health than other UK-resident english-speaking ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged white UK residents.¹² Gypsy Travellers are more likely to suffer from selfreported anxiety, respiratory problems and chest pain than other ethnic groups within the UK population. They also have one of the highest maternal death rates in the UK. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Gypsy Travellers experience a similar level of health inequalities as their English counterparts - one Scottish GP estimates that the average life expectancy of Gypsy Travellers is only 55 years.¹³

The recent introduction of hand-held health records for Gypsy Travellers was viewed as a step forward however, at the time of writing there appear to be difficulties with the implementation of this system.

Education issues

Attempts to meet the educational needs and concerns of Gypsy Travellers are, at present, patchy. Gypsy Travellers view education in a broad sense, which includes the skills they learn from their parents or other elders within the community¹⁴ as well as formal schooling. Most Gypsy Travellers value the skills that they can gain at school. However, others are unable to attend school because they are concerned about their safety. In a recent survey three-quarters of young Gypsy Travellers said they have been picked on by other school pupils because of their background.¹⁵ Some parents have even been advised by teachers to tell their children not to let the other pupils know that they are a Gypsy Traveller.¹⁶

Many young Gypsy Travellers also feel that their culture and heritage is not recognized or valued in school and some suggest that the secondary school curriculum will not equip them with the skills they need. Research among young Gypsy Travellers has shown that some are keen to gain experience and accreditation in fields such as mono-blocking, landscape gardening and forestry work - skills which are not currently taught in schools.¹⁷

Interrupted learning, as a result of travelling may also have an impact on Gypsy Traveller children's ability to access mainstream education. Few schools keep formal contact with travelling pupils or record information about the attainment of Gypsy Traveller pupils.¹⁸

Forty-three percent of Scottish education authorities have appointed staff to work specifically with Gypsy Traveller children and young people.¹⁹ While some teachers only provide support within schools, others provide teaching on sites or at roadside camps. The Scottish Government is also taking action by funding work to develop online learning opportunities for Gypsy Travellers who are travelling or cannot attend school. However, parents and pupils remain concerned that the majority of teachers do not understand Gypsy Traveller culture, doubt that the curriculum can meet their needs and believe that the pervasive bullying of Gypsy Traveller children is not being dealt with effectively.

“We deserve respect and we deserve
a voice - just like anybody else.”

Gypsy Traveller Woman, Perthshire

Law

The Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA) prohibits discrimination on racial grounds in employment, education, in many public services and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. In 2001 amendments to the RRA came into force which place pro-active race equality duties on listed public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Racial grounds are defined in the RRA as being on grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origin. The RRA also defines a racial group as meaning a group of persons defined by reference to colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins. However, the RRA does not stipulate which particular groups of people constitute a racial group. Issues arising under the RRA, such as whether an individual has protection against discrimination on racial grounds or whether a particular group of people are a racial group in terms of the RRA, must be decided by case law in the courts.

In Britain there have been three cases relating to Gypsy Travellers and the RRA, which could be described as test cases, in the sense that they each establish legal precedent for that sub-group of Gypsy Travellers being a racial group under the RRA. All these cases came before courts in England.

The first test case, the *Commission v. Dutton* (1989), was heard by the Court of Appeal, which established that Gypsies are a racial group under the RRA. The second test case, *O'Leary v. Allied Domecq* (2000) was heard by the Central London County Court. It established that Irish Travellers are a racial group under the RRA. The third case, *ERRC and Immigration Officer at Prague Airport v The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Another* (2003) established that Roma are a racial group under the RRA. As this is a judgement from the House of Lords, it has binding legal authority on the courts in Scotland.

A recent Tribunal judgement (*K McLellan v GTEIP* 2009) held that Gypsy Travellers are an distinct ethnic group and therefore covered by the RRA 1976.

Dealing with issues of concern

The Commission recognises that as in any given sector of the population there may be some Gypsy Travellers who behave unlawfully, for example by engaging in anti-social behaviour, such as fly-tipping. The fact that a small minority of the population may act unlawfully, makes Gypsy Travellers no different from any other group of people and as with anybody else, we would expect the authorities to deal with this behaviour accordingly and the media to report on it in the same way as they would in relation to other examples of the same behaviour.

However, it is important to distinguish between unlawful behaviour and prejudice against behaviour which is seen to be 'different'. It is also important to recognise where stereotypes are advanced in the absence of any specific behaviour.

Gypsy Travellers need the same services as anybody else, but as a distinct ethnic group they have particular cultural traditions, including a tradition of nomadism, which can

only be accommodated by adapting these services. Where members of the settled community express opposition to issues, it is important to distinguish between genuine concerns, for example to a Gypsy Traveller site being built on green belt land, and objections that are based purely on stereotyping and prejudice, for example the assumption that the establishment of a new site will result in a rise in crime.

Reporting on Gypsy Travellers

As with other ethnic groups, journalists should not give details of a Gypsy Traveller's ethnicity unless it is genuinely relevant to the story. For example, court reports should not usually give details of the ethnicity of someone who has been convicted of a criminal offence.

In 2009 the Press Complaints Commission upheld a complaint against the Daily Mail from the Double Dykes Tenants Association on the Double Dykes Gypsy site in

Perth, who disputed the claim in an article that none of the Travellers who agreed to be interviewed by the journalist paid council tax.

Whilst the PPC accepted that it would be difficult to prove this complaint the newspaper did accept that there would be residents on the site who did pay council tax and annotated its notes accordingly.

This example shows how assumptions about Gypsy Travellers can inadvertently lead to reporting which reflects stereotypes about the community which are not based on fact.

Contacts

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland

The Commission works towards the elimination of racial discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity and good race relations between and within ethnic groups.

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Our helpline can be contacted:

Call: 0845 604 5510

Textphone: 0845 604 5520

Email: scotlandhelpline@equalityhumanrights.com

Post: Freepost RSAB-YJEJ-EXUJ, ehrc,

PO Box 26961, Glasgow, G2 9DU

Interpreting service available through Language Line, when you call our helpline.

Lochaber Routes

Lochaber Routes is a community development project working alongside Gypsies and Travellers living in, or travelling through the West Highlands.

An Drochaid

Claggan Rd

Fort William

PH33 6PH

t. 01397 701313

Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP)

STEP is funded by the Scottish Executive to develop and support inclusive educational approaches for Gypsy Travellers.

Department of Educational Studies
Moray House School of Education
The University of Edinburgh
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh
EH8 8AQ
www.scottishtravellered.net
t. 0131 651 6444
Office Hours: 9.30 to 3.30
Monday, Thursday and Friday
e. STEP@education.ed.ac.uk

Travellers Education and Information Project (TEIP)

TEIP aims to advance the education and relieve the poverty of Travellers in the North-East whether they are travelling, sedentary or semi-sedentary.

The Bridges Centre
4 Poynerook Road
Aberdeen
AB11 5RW
t. 01224 596156
e. teip@btconnect.com

Resources

Come look at us

The website of Young Gypsy Travellers in Scotland.

www.comelookatus.org

Families, Friends and Travellers

An English organisation seeking to address the problems facing the Traveller and Gypsy community.

www.gypsy-traveller.org

Having our Say 2005

Peer research by young Gypsy Travellers.

Available from Save the Children (see page 33)

Scottish Government Strategic Group on Gypsy Travellers

Information about the short-life working group set up by the Scottish Government to examine specific issues highlighted by its recent race equality review.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/gypsiestravellers/strategy

Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee

Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies 2001.

www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/historic/equal/reports-01-eor01-01-vol01-01.htm

Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee

Preliminary Findings on Gypsy Travellers - Review of Progress 2005.
www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/equal/reports-05/05-05.htm

Scottish Parliament reports are also available from its partner libraries, which are located across Scotland. To find out where your nearest library is ring the Scottish Parliament on 0131 348 5000.

Services for Gypsy Travellers

A follow up study by Communities Scotland.
www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs_013730.pdf

Also available from:
Communities Scotland
Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HE
t. 0131 313 0044
f. 0131 313 2680

Time Travellers

a new website currently being developed by young Gypsy Travellers.
www.time-travellers.org.uk

“As a Traveller, mess bothers me. If you’re in a house you’re not expected to be responsible for everyone in your community, so why do you expect Travellers to be?”

Traveller Woman, Grampian

Resources

- 1 www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2008/07/17140725/1
- 2 Chisholm W (2004), Rare chance to buy a tiny cottage that is truly palatial, Scotsman 28th October.
- 3 Save the Children (2005), Having our Say - peer research by young Gypsy Travellers.
- 4 Scottish Government (2006) Gypsy Travellers in Scotland: The Twice-yearly Count - No. 9: January 2006 (web-based) and Scottish Government (2004) Gypsy Travellers in Scotland: The Twice-yearly Count - No. 4: July 2003 (web-based).
- 5 Scottish Government (2006) Gypsy Travellers in Scotland: The Twice-yearly Count - No. 9: January 2006 (web-based).
- 6 Communities Scotland (2006) A review of Services for Gypsy Travellers, Edinburgh.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Scottish Government (2006) Gypsy Travellers in Scotland: The Twice-yearly Count - No. 9: January 2006 (web-based).
- 9 Families, Friends and Travellers, Guide to Planning www.gypsy-traveller.org/planning/index.htm.
- 10 University of Sheffield (2004), The health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England.
- 11 Save the Children (2005), Having our Say - peer research by young Gypsy Travellers.
- 12 University of Sheffield (2004), The health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England.
- 13 Scottish Parliament Press Release (2001), Parliament Committee Calls For Ethnic Minority Status For Gypsy Travellers.
- 14 STEP (2004), Issues in school enrolment, attendance, attainment and support for learning for Gypsy Travellers and school-aged children and young people based in Scottish local authority sites.
- 15 Save the Children (2005), Having our Say - peer research by young Gypsy Travellers.
- 16 Equal Opportunities Committee (2005), 5th Report - preliminary findings on Gypsy Travellers - review of progress.
- 17 STEP (2004), Issues in school enrolment, attendance, attainment and support for learning for Gypsy Travellers and school-aged children and young people based in Scottish local authority sites.
- 18 *ibid.*
- 19 *ibid.*

“I want to travel, but there aren’t
enough sites and you can’t get peace.”

Young Traveller Woman

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language please contact the relevant helpline to discuss your needs. All publications are also available to download and order in a variety of formats from our website:

www.equalityhumanrights.com



**Equality and
Human Rights**
Commission

Scotland