

# Gypsy and Traveller information sheet

## Groups

Gypsies and Travellers are among the most disadvantaged groups in our society. Social exclusion experienced by Gypsies and Travellers is one of the drivers for higher infant mortality rates, poor educational and health outcomes in comparison with the wider settled community and other BME groups.

- **Romany Gypsies or English Gypsies** have been in the British Isles since around 16<sup>th</sup> century. Roma people originated from north-west India, the Punjab (not Egypt as originally thought, to which they owe their name). They were recognised as an ethnic group in 1989.
- **Irish Travellers** are thought to have an indigenous origin as a nomadic group in Ireland. They were recognised as an ethnic group in England in 2000.
- **Showpeople** are a cultural minority with a long history of providing travelling entertainment. Families have a busy calendar between April and October and have a system for ensuring that everything runs smoothly at each location. They are not protected under EHRC legislation.
- **New Travellers or New Age Travellers** are members of the indigenous settled British community who have adopted a nomadic lifestyle some time since the 1960s. There are now second or third generation New Travellers. They are not protected under EHRC legislation.

## History

Humankind has only settled in permanent settlements for the last 5,000 years in Britain and maybe 8,000 years worldwide.

'Gypsies and Travellers' include diverse communities who, to a greater or lesser extent, share cultural and lifestyle characteristics; particularly an historic tradition of nomadism or semi-nomadism.

## Arrival in the UK

Gypsies first appeared in England in 1514; within 40 years a statute had been passed making it a capital offence to be a Gypsy. In the 16th and 17th century when Gypsies were banned on pain of death from Scotland and several were hung just for being Gypsies.

In recent years there has been considerable, often adverse, press coverage of Roma families coming to Britain from Eastern Europe and the Balkans as asylum seekers or refugees, or as migrant workers. To date there is no evidence that Roma families, most of whom have been 'settled' in housing for decades, are seeking to resume a nomadic life or live in caravans in Britain.

## Definitions

Definitions based on ethnicity. For the purposes of race relations legislation both Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers have been accepted by the courts as ethnic groups. While not formally tested in court, it is likely that other groupings such as Scottish Travellers would be accorded ethnic group status. Showpeople or New Age Travellers are not recognised as a separate ethnic group although they could meet both the Housing Act and planning definitions.

Definitions based on self-ascription include aspects of both ethnicity and lifestyle, but birth and family links are most important.

## Current population

In part because of definitional issues, the *precise* number of Gypsies and Travellers in England is not known; they are not distinguished by either the Census or many ethnic record systems. The best estimates are between 180,000 and 350,000 Gypsies and Travellers in England, the majority of whom live in bricks and mortar housing.

It is believed that the population is similar in size to that of the Bangladeshi community.

- The population is relatively youthful. Children up to 16 often make up between about a third and a half of the population on a site. Older persons (60 or over) often make up about 10% to 15% of the population.
- Families with children are usually the most common type of household, and average household size is between about 2.5 and 4.0 persons.
- Gypsies and Travellers tend to marry and start families early. The length of a generation is rather below that of the population as a whole; household formation is relatively rapid.
- Among Irish Travellers in particular, extended family linkages are important. There is often a desire for extended families to live close together for mutual support.
- The indications are that there is a wide range of wealth, from families dependent on benefits to millionaire businessmen.

## Figures

Local authorities carry out a twice yearly count of Gypsy and Traveller caravans each January and July. The latest 5 Counts are published by Communities and Local Government at local authority level.

The January 2006 count showed that there were over 16,000 Gypsy and Traveller caravans in England. Around 79% (12,474) were on authorised sites, many of which are well-managed. 21% are effectively homeless. 14% (2,154) were on

unauthorised developments, where Gypsies and Travellers own the land but do not have planning permission. 7% (1,118) were on unauthorised encampments, where Gypsies and Travellers do not own the land and planning consent has not been given for use as a Gypsy and Traveller site.

In July 2007 the count recorded 17,134 caravans in England.

Many Gypsy and Traveller families occupy more than one caravan (for example having a mobile home and touring caravan, or separate caravans to provide sleeping accommodation for older children), suggesting a population of around 10,000 to 11,500 caravan dwelling households.

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (G&TAAs) show that a significant minority of those surveyed do not 'travel' (with a caravan) at all in the course of a year, and many others travel only to fairs or festivals, for family events (weddings, funerals), to visit relatives and for holidays. It is a minority of Gypsies and Travellers who have no fixed base and travel throughout the year, or for most of the year, usually between Easter and autumn.

## **Mobility and settlement**

Among the settled community, mobility is associated with moving house. Because caravan-dwelling Gypsies and Travellers travel with their home, the distinction between 'moving' and 'travelling' is sometimes less obvious for Gypsies and Travellers. However, it is clear that many residents on social rented Gypsy and Traveller sites have lived there for many years and seem no more mobile, on average, than social tenants in mainstream housing. It follows that turnover on residential sites is often quite low.

There are indications that mobility and travelling have reduced over the years for both positive (convenience, better accommodation and access to health and education) and negative (nowhere to stop safely, fear of losing a site place) reasons. Relative 'settlement' does not, however, mean that many Gypsies and Travellers want lose their identity or to move to bricks and mortar accommodation. Living in caravans in small communities with others sharing their culture and lifestyle is still very attractive. There are no indications that demand for good, safe Gypsy and Traveller sites is likely to fall in the near future.

## **Sites**

There are just over 300 sites owned by local authorities or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) which in July 2007 accommodated about 6,600 caravans. There were approximately 1,500 privately owned sites accommodating around 6,500 caravans. Although there are a number of large private sites providing rented pitches, most are small sites owned and occupied by one or two (extended) families.

- Most sites are classed as 'residential' or 'permanent' sites where there is no limit on the length of time residents can stay. Most socially rented sites are designed to provide such long-term accommodation. A much smaller number of sites (or pitches on sites) are designed for transit use while travelling. The maximum length of stay on transit sites/pitches is usually limited in theory if not in practice. Only about 6% of pitches on socially rented sites were classed as 'transit' in July 2007.

On most Gypsy and Traveller Sites provided by local authorities and RSLs, site residents provide their own caravans (also known as trailers) and/or mobile homes (also referred to as chalets). These homes may be owned by the resident or rented from a specialist company.

The caravans are stationed on 'pitches' provided by the site owner and let to residents. A pitch will always include an area of hard-standing for the caravan(s) and other vehicles. It may include a small garden area and/or an area for clothes drying, work or play. On many sites, pitches are clearly delimited by walls or fences which ensure a degree of privacy to the occupiers. An outside tap is provided and electric hook-up points. On some sites, pitches allow chalets to be directly connected to electricity, water supply and drains.

Each pitch normally also has an 'amenity unit' (known by a variety of local names) which is part of the accommodation let to the resident. This is normally built of bricks or blocks and looks like a very small bungalow. It comprises bathroom and/or shower facilities, a WC, a kitchen sink and (usually) space for kitchen equipment; it usually has provision for heating.

Some amenity units provide more space in a 'day room' where residents can sit and eat if they wish. Larger amenity units are usually popular with residents. Amenity units are provided because it is culturally unacceptable to bathe and go to the toilet within the main living accommodation (although this is changing on some sites where residents use the facilities provided in their chalet and use the amenity unit primarily for cooking, clothes washing or storage). Amenity units should be seen as a form of specialist living accommodation.

Sites vary widely in size, ranging between a single pitch and more than 40. The average size is around 15 pitches and most have 20 pitches or less. Pitches also vary widely in size. A survey in 2002 found that median pitch size was just under 200 square metres. Trends toward having chalets or other larger living units and additional vehicles suggest that there will be pressure for more space on larger pitches in future.

Pitches are normally accessed from an internal site roadway which must be wide enough to allow safe access for large vehicles, including emergency services.

Sites should be lit for safety, and traffic calming measures introduced to reduce vehicle speed within the site.

Given the extent of hard surfaces on most sites, drainage is important. Water is provided to each pitch and amenity unit and may be individually or communally metered. Many local authority sites provide electric card meters for each pitch and sell cards to residents; on some sites residents have supply and meters direct from the supply companies. Very few sites have mains gas but the use of liquefied petroleum gas is widespread.

Sites operated by RSLs are subject to site licensing by the local authority (under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960). There are no Model Standards issued specifically for Gypsy and Traveller sites although some aspects of general Model Standards for residential caravan sites will be applicable. Licence conditions will be set by the local authority and will, among other things, require minimum spacing between caravans and other fire precautions. Sites may be subject to regular inspection by the local authority and/or the Fire Service to ensure licence conditions are being complied with.

Many existing social rented sites have no communal facilities as such with only a minority having an office or other communal building. Despite the presence of large numbers of children, only a quarter of sites in 2002 had a formally designated play area. A small number of sites provide grazing for horses and ponies. It is important to stress that this is a statement of fact, not of good practice; community facilities can help community development.

G&TAAs are beginning to fill some of the information gaps about the demographic features of the Gypsies and Travellers. In very general terms they show:

It is important to be aware of distinctions which can underlie differences in lifestyle and accommodation needs and preferences. While there are examples of successful sites which have mixed Gypsy and Traveller populations, it is often thought that sustainable community is easier to achieve when a single group is housed on a site.

## **Legislation**

### **1960 Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act**

General legislation not G&T specific. Introduced to regulate the building and running of caravan sites; gave Councils powers to develop caravan sites.

### **1968 Caravan Sites Act**

Consolidated 1960 Act and introduced a duty on Councils to provide Gypsy Sites. The Act defined a Gypsy as person of 'nomadic habit a way of life regardless of race or origins.' Most Councils were very slow to fulfil this duty. It did not ensure full accommodation provision was made available; hence why 21% is still

homeless. The duty was abolished in 1994, private site provision was supposed to fill the gap

### **1976 Race Relations Act**

Made racial discrimination unlawful but did not define minority ethnic groups or Gypsies, it was not until later case law that definitions were introduced.

### **2000 Race Relations (Amendment ) Act**

Placed a duty on Councils and other public bodies to actively combat discrimination and promote equality of opportunity

### **Duty Under the 2004 Housing Act**

Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004 requires that local authorities 'carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers residing in or resorting to their district'. The G&TAA will result in the calculation of sites required, expressed as a number of pitches. LAs need to have a strategy in place which sets out how any identified needs will be met as part of their wider housing strategies, came into force on 2 January 2007.

### **Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act**

Duty for planning authorities to ensure that planning policies fulfil the level of identified need for G&T accommodation.

### **Sources**

- [http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/Gypsy\\_and\\_Traveller\\_Toolkit\\_20080801101515.pdf](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/Gypsy_and_Traveller_Toolkit_20080801101515.pdf)
- <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/history/>
- Steve Staines of FFT: "Travellers and the Built Environment."
- [http://tash.gn.apc.org/trav\\_fft.htm](http://tash.gn.apc.org/trav_fft.htm)
- Ian Holding: G&T Team, BCC
- Communities and local Government data

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