

# TRAVELLERS TIMES



## Travellers' Times Media Engagements Pack

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Produced by journalists to challenge unethical media representation

The Travellers' Times activist guide to challenging racist media

The Travellers' Times believes that the mainstream press and broadcast media is a major driver of the hostility and discrimination that the UK's Gypsies and Travellers face, and that it should not publish material that serves to stir up racial hatred. Here is our guide for GRT campaigners, activists and community members and supporters wanting to challenge racist and inaccurate TV broadcasts and press reports.

First of all – be realistic.

The UK national press is owned by some of the most powerful men in the world. Critics say that the owners of the press are more powerful than the Prime Minister. The press often sets the agenda and TV production companies then follow that agenda. For certain sections of the press attacking marginalised communities, like Gypsies and Travellers, brings in readers and makes money. The two main regulatory bodies – like the Independent Press Standards Organisation for the newspapers and Ofcom for the broadcast industry – do not have a good track record for dealing with complaints about racism, so don't expect too much help from them. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission do not take on racism and discrimination complaints against the media and the National Union of Journalists, although they promote good practice, are not listened to by the tabloid newspaper editors and *most* politicians – like MP's and councillors – won't take on the press either.

But with this in mind, you are not powerless, you have a right to be angry about the constant abuse of Gypsies and Travellers by the media and you have a right to try to do something about it. There are four ways to challenge the media that can sometimes work and make a difference:

- 1) Direct engagement with the newspaper or broadcaster/broadcast production company.
- 2) An official complaint through the regulator.
- 3) Direct action against the newspaper or broadcaster/broadcast production company.
- 4) A libel action through the courts.

So, what do we mean by this?? Below are some explainers:

### **1) Direct Engagement**

This is where you engage directly with the newspaper or broadcast company and make your objections and feelings known direct to the source.

All national and local newspapers and most local radio and TV broadcasters will have a 'contact us' page on their website. You might have to do a bit of Googling to find it – but it will be there. Most 'contact us' pages will list a telephone number for their editorial or news desk. Some local newspapers will also list an email and a telephone number for their editor and for individual journalists that work there. So, if you have the confidence, pick up the phone ring the news desk or editor and – without being abusive which is against the law – tell them calmly and firmly why you object to whatever it is they have just published. Ask for a right to reply. They don't have to give a right to reply, but they might - and if you don't ask you don't get.

This method works better for direct engagement with your local newspaper and TV and radio broadcasters than it does national press and TV and radio broadcasters. National Press and TV and radio broadcasters tend to have bureaucratic ways of contacting them and employ people whose job

it is to listen to your complaint – and then mostly do nothing about it, and if you were to telephone a busy national news desk the reporter who answers it is more likely to put the telephone down on you before you have even started than they are to actually listen to you and take on board what you are saying.

However, there is a way of **direct engagement** against racist or inaccurate TV and radio programmes about Gypsies and Travellers without going through the major broadcaster and this is to engage with the TV or radio production company that actually made it. Most TV and radio programmes shown by major broadcasters are made by independent TV production companies which are commercial businesses. They all have websites with their contact details on. Maybe give them a call if they have made what you think is a racist programme and you want to ask why?

Betty Billington gives a good example of direct engagement with her local newspaper when she went to have tea with the editor in this Travellers' Times article [here](#).

## 2) Using social media

You can create a social media backlash against what you believe is racist and/or inaccurate media by the clever use of social media. The best platform for this is Twitter. Facebook can also be useful for telling your friends about a racist article, but Twitter is better at getting your message beyond your friends and lots of influential people like politicians, campaigners and journalists use Twitter. An example of a successful use of Twitter was when the sportswear giant Nike was pressured through Twitter [into investigating the misuse of its brand](#) by companies selling racist T-shirts and rucksacks through Amazon using the Nike 'Swoosh' and the slogan 'P\*key - Just nick it'. Gypsy and Traveller campaigners first raised this on Twitter and Facebook and their tweets and posts were read and followed up by a BBC journalist.

When using Twitter it's more effective if you tag in or reply to a Tweet from the organisation you are targeting so that your tweet will be read by all their followers. A good and very recent example of this was when the Traveller Movement, working with Stop Funding Hate, targeted through Twitter the companies whose adverts were shown with Channel 4's controversial The Truth About Traveller Crime TV programme. Four advertisers, including the car giant Hyundai, immediately ordered Channel 4 to stop showing their adverts with this particular TV programme.



***(Picture: A Tweet from car giant Hyundai after Twitter activism from the Traveller Movement and Stop Funding led to advertisers withdrawing from the Channel 4 TV programme The Truth about Traveller Crime)***

### 3) An official complaint through the regulator

Most newspapers and all TV and Radio programmes are covered by regulations which are governed by the two main media regulators. Most national and local newspapers belong to the voluntary [Independent Press Standards Organisation \(IPSO\)](#), although a few belong to the rival press regulator [Impress](#). All TV and Radio programmes are covered by regulations set and governed by [Ofcom](#).

Complaints about a TV or radio programme should go to the broadcast regulator Ofcom. You can access their online complaints form [here](#). Numbers count so individual complaints are more effective. However, the regulations, especially around discrimination and racism, are pretty weak so don't expect too much of a result. But they can sometimes work and a newspaper will get a slap on the wrist and a broadcaster might sometimes be ordered not to show a TV or radio programme again if the complaint is successful. To make the most of the complaints system it's useful to have a working knowledge of the Ofcom broadcasting code, which can be accessed [here](#).

To make a complaint to the press regulator about a newspaper article, first check if the newspaper or online news platform is governed by a regulator, and which one. You can quickly do that by calling IPSO or Impress who will tell you if the newspaper is one of their members. The process of making a complaint is on their website but, basically, you have to complain direct to the newspaper first. All newspapers governed by IPSO or Impress should have an email address for complaints to go to on their website, so email your complaint to that address. They then have four weeks to reply and if they do not, or you are not satisfied with their reply, you can then complain to IPSO. As with Ofcom, to make a successful complaint through IPSO or Impress, it's useful to have a working knowledge of the regulations they enforce, in this case both IPSO and Impress use the same [Editor's Code of Practice](#). **Do be aware that the discrimination regulation (It's called 'Discrimination clause 12') for the Editor's Code that IPSO and Impress use only comes in to play if you, yourself, are named in the story and called a racist slur. So it not much use if you want to complain about an article that is racist about Gypsies and Travellers in general.** IPSO and Impress do accept and sometimes uphold complaints about accuracy, so look for something that might be inaccurate in the story. For example, IPSO once resolved a complaint about a local newspaper article that published a statement saying that Gypsies don't pay tax. The complainant argued that it was inaccurate to say that all Gypsies paid no tax – he certainly did and he could send the local newspaper his tax return to prove it!!

### 4) Direct action against the newspaper or broadcaster/broadcast production company

Ok, so you have written to the producer or editor about the TV programme or newspaper article that you think is discriminatory or inaccurate, and you don't fancy reading media regulation hand books as a hobby and find the complication of an official complaint through a regulator a bit daunting, then what about some direct action? This is where you and some fellow activists turn up at the offices of the media organisation responsible for the offending TV show or press article to tell them exactly how you feel. You can bring banners or even hand out leaflets to passers-by and shame the organisation you have targeted. **However, although you have a right to protest peacefully, do not use any abusive or threatening behaviour towards the employees of the organisation as this will get you arrested by the police and you could end up with a criminal record.**

An example of direct action occurred in May 2014, when the Traveller Movement organised a protest outside the offices of the Spectator magazine over an article the magazine had published in which an opinion writer had used the racial slurs 'g\*ppo' and 'p\*key'. Members of the Traveller Movement met with supporters from Travellers' Times magazine, Sussex Gypsy and Traveller Action Group, Haringey Travelling People and the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association, amongst others. All made their way to the Spectator's offices near St. James' Park in London to hand in a petition demanding its editor Fraser Nelson make a public apology. Although Fraser Nelson did not apologise, he did agree to publish a positive article about Gypsies and Travellers and, as far as we are aware, the Spectator has never published another article with those offensive racial slurs in them.

### **5) A libel action through the courts**

Sometimes people can sue a newspaper or broadcaster in the civil courts for libel. Libel is where a newspaper prints something about someone that is both damaging to their reputation and untrue. This option is normally only open to the rich and famous as libel court cases are extremely expensive if the newspaper or broadcaster decides to defend against your claim for libel, however ordinary people can and sometimes do win libel victories, so it may be worth checking with a lawyer if you have been named and shamed in a national or local newspaper or in a TV programme.

In 2015, A Gypsy man from Lancashire [won "substantial damages"](#) after a the Daily Mail settled out of court in a libel claim and apologised for running a headline that falsely accused him of lying in court.

The Gypsy man approached a national campaign charity, the Traveller Movement after inaccurate stories about him and his family started to be published in the national newspapers. After challenging several of the articles and reaching resolutions with the Daily Mail and the Telegraph through the press regulator, yet failing to stop the continuing press abuse, the charity flagged up an article that appeared in the Daily Mail that it believed to be libellous to Howe & Co. (the law firm famous for winning a [discrimination case for Gypsies and Travellers](#) against the pub giant Wetherspoons). The law firm agreed to take the Gypsy man's case pro-bono – or on a fixed costs agreement – and filed a claim for libel which Daily Mail eventually agreed to settle out of court and apologise, publish a correction and pay damages in a settlement agreed with the Gypsy man's legal team after a year-long battle. So it can be done.

### **Traveller's Times**

*(Front cover: Gypsies and Travellers protest outside the office of the Spectator in 2014)*



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