

# TRAVELLERS TIMES



## Travellers' Times press-pack

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Produced by and for journalists and editors

Travellers' Times 12 point guide produced to encourage more accurate and fairer reporting on the UK's Gypsies & Travellers

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### **1) Who are the UK's Gypsies and Travellers?**

**Romany Gypsies** are the descendents of a migration of peoples from Northern India in the 10-12AD, who spread across Eastern and Western Europe, reaching Great Britain in around the 1600's.

**Irish Travellers** – or Pavee – and **Scottish Travellers** - are the descendants of a nomadic people who have traditionally inhabited Ireland and mainland Britain.

**Roma** usually refers to the descendants of the migration of various groups of peoples from Northern India in the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century who settled in Eastern and Western Europe.

### **2) Should we use a capital letter to start 'gypsy and/or traveller'?**

Yes please. As the Travellers' Times recognises Romany Gypsies, Scottish, Welsh and Irish Travellers as ethnic minorities (as does UK law and the Irish government) our house style is to use a capital 'G' and 'T' for Gypsies and Travellers. If your house-style is to treat the names of ethnic groups with a capital letter (ie Cossack, Inuit, Maori) then you should capitalise Gypsy and Traveller for the same reason.

### **3) Lifestyle, ethnic group or 'community'?**

The academic evidence that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (Linguistic, anthropological, historical, even DNA based studies) should be seen as **ethnic groups** rather than **'lifestyles'** or purely **cultural groups** is overwhelming. All the different GRT groups in the UK have a shared language or dialect, some shared cultural practices, most will identify as an ethnic group, and all individuals from all groups are legally recognised as ethnic minorities under the Equalities Act 2010.

Although the concept of **community** is often used by journalists and media commentators to describe Gypsies and Travellers, and many Gypsies and Travellers would describe themselves as 'community members', the Travellers' Times is critical of this concept when used by non-Travellers, as it imposes a false perception of conformity and sometimes even implies a collective responsibility that does not exist in real life. For example, this statement is bad journalism and a lazy use of **'community'**: *'The Travelling community should sort themselves out and stop parking their caravans on playing fields and then they might face less prejudice'*.

### **4) How many live in the UK?**

In the 2011 Census, 58,000 people identified themselves as Gypsy or Irish Traveller, accounting for just 0.1% of the resident population of England and Wales. However this is almost certainly a serious undercount. In response to the 2011 Census, The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (now the Traveller Movement) published research that suggested that the Gypsy and Traveller population in 2012 for England, based on council accommodation assessment figures, was 122,785. However, the ITMB are keen to point out in their research, that this would be an undercount as well as it would be weighted towards mainly counting Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans.

## **5) Politics**

There is a cross-party parliamentary group called the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. The current Secreriat of the APPG GRT is the campaign charity Friends, Families and Travellers and the co-Chairs are Kate Green, MP for Stretford and Urmston, and Baroness Janet Whitaker. Some unions, such as ASLEF, have included Gypsy and Traveller members as part of their BME committees.

## **6) Where do they live? Caravans. Traveller sites and 'bricks and mortar' housing.**

The number of Gypsy and Traveller caravans in England and Wales is recorded in the twice yearly snapshot DCLG Caravan count. The vast majority of Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans stay on permanent public and private sites which have planning permission, waste collection and are subject to rent (unless of course the site is privately owned by the occupier), council tax and utility bills. A small minority of Gypsies and Traveller caravans are classed as unauthorised and staying on land that they do not own (roadside camps). This minority, which will include Gypsies and Travellers with no other place to stay and also Gypsies and Travellers moving of authorised sites to go 'travelling' during the summer, receives the vast majority of local news coverage, which is almost always negative.

## **7) Criminal Justice System**

Far too many Gypsies and Travellers are in prison, as many as 5% of the population according to government research. The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain works with Gypsies and Travellers in custody. Some prisons have their own GRT Prisoner Groups. The Travellers' Times Magazine is delivered free to many UK HMP's and the editor receives many letters from prisoners. Research has shown that police services often hold prejudiced views about Gypsies and Travellers – despite there being a member organisation for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller police officers and staff – the GRT Police Association.

## **8) Nomadism**

It's important to note that nomadism is a shared heritage of Gypsies and Travellers and not a present reality. Not all Gypsies and Irish and Scottish Travellers 'travel' – or may only 'travel' to traditional cultural events like Appleby Horse Fair.

## **9) Prejudice, oppression and the Holocaust**

Many Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face daily prejudice based on negative stereotyping and misunderstanding. The perceived 'anti-social actions of a few are usually projected onto the whole population by the wider public, journalists and politicians. In some Eastern and even Western European countries, Roma are segregated and live in camps and slums isolated from the rest of the population. Roma where enslaved in some Eastern European countries. Roma where –arguably – the only other racial group specifically singled out for extermination by Nazi racial policy. Historians estimate the number murdered by Nazi and axis regimes during the Second World War to be approx. ¼ - ½ million, although some historians say it is closer to a million.

## **10) Media representation**

In 2010, the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (now the Traveller Movement) produced a [submission](#) to the Leveson Inquiry into the Press, and their contribution was referenced in the final Leveson report. The ITMB's main findings were that the press coverage of Gypsies and Travellers was often marred by:

**Disproportionality:** A story about a crime or a perceived negative behaviour that would usually only make an inside page of a local newspaper could often be elevated to the front page of a national newspaper if the perceived miscreant was a Gypsy or Traveller.

**Negativity:** Articles often explicitly linked Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity to crime and anti-social behaviour, often in the headline. "Traveller Slavery" being a major example. Government figures suggest that too many Gypsies and Travellers are in prison (see point 7), but they also show that the majority of your Gypsy and Traveller readers and viewers will not be, or have never been, in prison. Some of them may even be police officers.

**Accuracy:** Facts are sacred, yet many articles about Gypsies and Travellers are inaccurate and would fall foul of clause 1 of the editor's code of practice. In 2014 a local newspaper fell foul of the Editor's Code of Practice for uncritically publishing a statement saying that: 'Gypsies and Travellers do not pay taxes'. This statement was inaccurate, a complainant to the now defunct Press Complaints Commission claimed, because some Gypsies and Travellers do pay taxes. The press regulator resolved the complaint between the complainant and the newspaper and the newspaper printed a correction and an apology.

**Name-calling:** If you are a local or national newspaper that has decided to run a piece on a young Gypsy or Traveller getting a degree or a Gypsy or Traveller doing anything; do you really need to headline it 'My Big Fat Gypsy degree!'?

**Lack of 'voice':** Many articles were about Gypsies and Travellers but included no quotes from them. This is beginning to change the TT notes, but still too many articles do not include quotes.

**Capitalization** of Gypsy and Irish Traveller (See above point 2 above).

**Comment threads:** Many comment threads under articles published on newspaper and broadcaster's websites are incredibly racist. Please check your comment threads and delete those that suggest gassing the UK's Gypsies and Travellers or that say that Hitler didn't go far enough with the Holocaust – or similar.

- 11) **Part of the big picture:** Although lots of reports focus on Gypsies and Travellers, they are very rarely included as case studies in articles about wider issues. An honourable exception to this was made was in the [CH4 News' reporting](#) of the 2016 EU referendum.

- 12) **Never forget that some of your readers and viewers will be Gypsies and Travellers themselves.**

## **Contacts & Further reading**

There are a number of organisations/ charities / NGOs working nationally to improve the lives of Gypsy and Traveller people and their information and contact details can all be found on the Travellers Times website on the Get Advice page <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/advice/support>

The Travellers' Times website publishes news and features daily as well as hosting other information and resources [www.travellerstimes.org.uk](http://www.travellerstimes.org.uk)



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