



## The Traveller Movement

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# Child poverty in the Gypsy and Traveller communities



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**About TM:** The Traveller Movement (TM) was established in 1999 and is a leading national policy and voice charity, working to raise the capacity and social inclusion of the Traveller communities in Britain. TM act as a bridge builder bringing the Traveller communities, service providers and policy makers together, stimulating debate and promoting forward-looking strategies to promote increased race equality, civic engagement, inclusion, service provision and community cohesion. For further information about TM visit [www.irishtraveller.org.uk](http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk)

## Introduction and background

- 1.1 The 2012 Minister Working Group report on inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers (MWG) noted that these communities ‘experience, and are being held back by, some of the worst outcomes of any group, across a wide range of social indicators.’<sup>1</sup> These outcomes include:
- low educational attainment<sup>2</sup>
  - health outcomes that are much poorer than the general population<sup>3</sup>
  - high levels of homelessness<sup>4</sup>
  - employment disadvantage<sup>5</sup>
  - marginalization and experiences of hostility and discrimination.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.2 All these factors are indicative of high levels of child poverty. To date there has been limited focus by the Government on child poverty in the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, despite its acknowledgment of the poor social indicators experienced by these groups.
- 1.3 This briefing paper will summarise the key indicators, current Government policy and outline recommendations to effectively address child poverty in these communities.

## Key indicators

- 2.0 The key indicators used in this briefing are based on the Government’s child poverty strategy indicators 2011-14.<sup>7</sup> These indicators use three overarching themes; children’s life chances, family resources and family circumstances.

## Children’s life chances

### Low birth weight and child development

- 2.1 From anti-natal to neo-natal and through into early childhood, children from Gypsy and Traveller communities are more likely to experience early death, poor childhood development and limited uptake and access of health services, as evidenced by the MWG report:

*‘There is an excess prevalence of miscarriages, stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Gypsy and Traveller communities and high rates of maternal death during pregnancy and shortly after childbirth’<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers, p. 5

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-inequalities-for-gypsies-and-travellers-progress-report>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 17

<sup>5</sup> ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), September 2013, *Dynamics of diversity: Evidence from the 2011 census*, p. 1  
<http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/census/CoDE-Employment-Census-Briefing.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> DCLG, MWG report, 2012, p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Dept. for Education, 2011, *A new approach to child poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families’ lives*, p. 68

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-new-approach-to-child-poverty-tackling-the-causes-of-disadvantage-and-transforming-families-lives>

<sup>8</sup> DCLG, MWG, 2012, *tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers*, p. 12

*'Other health issues such as high infant mortality rates, high maternal mortality rates, low child immunisation levels, mental health issues, substance misuse issues and diabetes are also seen to be prevalent in the Gypsy and Traveller communities.'*<sup>9</sup>

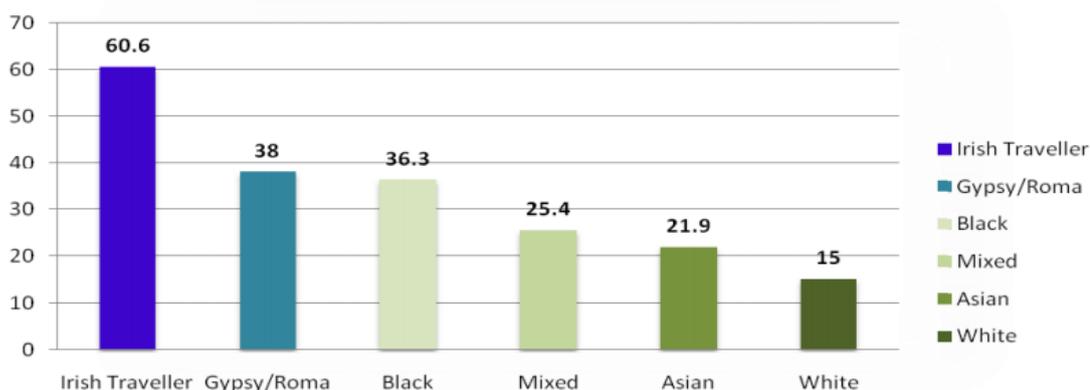
## Attainment at school, further education, progression to higher education

2.2 According to data from the national pupil census Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are among the lowest-achieving groups at every key stage of education:

*'In 2011 just 12% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with 58.2% of all pupils.'*<sup>10</sup>

2.3 We know that there is a particularly strong link between deprivation and underachievement and in primary schools, 43.2 per cent of all registered pupils registered as either Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller are currently eligible for free school meals; this figure rises to 45.3 per cent in secondary schools and 57.5 per cent in special schools.<sup>11</sup>

### Percentage of pupils eligible for and claiming free school meals by ethnic group



Based on maintained primary, state-funded secondary and special schools in England:  
January 2010

2.4 Gypsies, Roma and Travellers record an escalating scale of poor progression throughout their education. Approximately 20% of GRT pupils fail to transfer from primary to secondary school with over half of pupils dropping out of secondary school, consequently impacting on poor uptake of higher education and limited job opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

## Young offending

2.5 Research has found that there is an overrepresentation of Gypsies and Travellers in the criminal justice system and that 46.3% of all Irish Traveller prisoners are young adults (between 18 and 21 years of age).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>10</sup> DfE website, 2012, *Gypsy Roma Traveller achievement*  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/inclusionandlearnersupport/mea/improvingachievement/a0012528/gypsy,-roma-and-traveller-achievement>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> DfE SFR37-2010

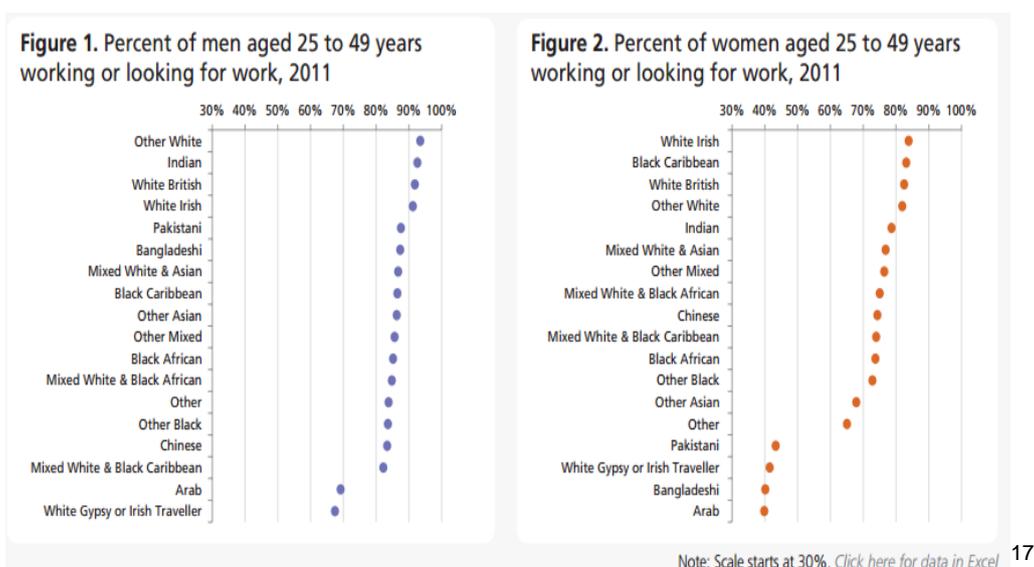
## Family structures

- 2.6 Gypsies and Travellers on average have larger families than the settled population with Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments showing that ethnic Gypsy and Traveller women have between 3.5 and 5.9 children compared to the national average of 1.9.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence the Government's welfare reforms (particularly the benefits cap) are having a disproportionate impact on children and families in these communities (see 2013 Institute of Chartered Housing research in Haringey).<sup>15</sup>

## Family Resources and Family Circumstances

### Income, children in workless households and transition from childhood to labour market

- 2.7 Data from the 2011 Census shows that Gypsies and Irish Travellers face particularly disadvantaged in the labour market. Both men and women from these groups have very low rates of economic activity (67% for men and 41% for women) and very high rates of unemployment (16% for men and 19% for women).<sup>16</sup>



- 2.8 The census data is supported by 2003 research from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) which found that of seven out of ten sites a minority of households work (based on a sample of approximately 80 local authority Traveller sites).

<sup>13</sup> Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, 2011, *Voices Unheard: A study of Irish Travellers in Prison*, p. 84-85

[http://www.iprt.ie/files/Voices\\_Unheard\\_June\\_2011.pdf](http://www.iprt.ie/files/Voices_Unheard_June_2011.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> EHRC, 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, p.228

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/12inequalities\\_experienced\\_by\\_gypsy\\_and\\_traveller\\_communities\\_a\\_review.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> CIH, 2013, *Benefit cap struggling to meet its aims, CIH research shows*  
[http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Benefit\\_cap\\_struggling\\_to\\_meet\\_its\\_aims\\_CIH\\_research\\_shows](http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Benefit_cap_struggling_to_meet_its_aims_CIH_research_shows)

<sup>16</sup> ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), September 2013, *Dynamics of diversity: Evidence from the 2011 census*, p. 1  
<http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/census/CoDE-Employment-Census-Briefing.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

## Material Deprivation, Persistent and Severe poverty

2.9 A key factor determining child poverty and the poor socio-economic outcomes experienced by Gypsies and Travellers are the high levels of accommodation insecurity many of these communities face:

- Between 16%-20% of Gypsies and Travellers (equivalent to 3,000-4,000 families) live in caravans on unauthorised sites,<sup>18</sup> many subject to repeated evictions and legally classified as homeless. This is largely due to a national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites as a result of decades of undersupply.
- The MWG has noted that 'Gypsies and Travellers living on unauthorised sites can face additional difficulties accessing health and education services and the precarious nature of their homes can further exacerbate inequalities and stifle life chances.'
- Research by the ODPM has also found that 70% of local authority sites were located in fringe areas of towns and villages with half of the sites suffering from environmental problems relating to adjoining land or activities.<sup>19</sup> These factors may be indicative of material deprivation, poverty, discrimination and marginalization.

2.10 An EHRC 2009 review of inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers found that 'employment rates are low, and poverty high.'<sup>20</sup> The review also noted that 'without decent accommodation, and the ability to live in a manner which supports communities through the upheavals caused by transitions brought about by globalisation, changing employment markets, financial insecurities and altering gender roles, Gypsies and Travellers risk being pushed further and further into poverty, social exclusion and 'cultural shock'.<sup>21</sup>

## Policy context

3.0 The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's first annual report was published in October 2013 and concluded that the Government's child poverty strategy is failing and that child poverty is starting to rise.<sup>22</sup> The report issued a number of key recommendations pertinent to Gypsies and Travellers:

- Adults being supported to be warm authoritative parents actively engaged in their children's education, particularly in the early years;
- High-quality, affordable and universal childcare that enables more parents to work and helps improve children's early development;

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<sup>18</sup> DCLG, July 2012 Caravan Count

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/11710/caravan.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11710/caravan.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Niner, ODPM, 2003, *The provision and condition of local authority gypsy/traveller sites in England*, p. 75

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/138832.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> EHRC, 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, executive summary, p. vi

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/12inequalities\\_experienced\\_by\\_gypsy\\_and\\_traveller\\_communities\\_a\\_review.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 5

<sup>22</sup> Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2013>

- High-quality schools and teachers relentlessly focused on raising standards, building social skills and closing attainment gaps;
- Clear accessible routes into work for those pursuing both vocational and academic education and training;
- Plenty of high-quality jobs throughout the country with good progression opportunities and fair recruitment processes;
- Family incomes that are supported by decent levels of pay and the right incentives to find employment and work enough hours;
- Society becoming less unequal over time and individuals with little wealth being supported to build assets.

3.1 The Government is currently consulting on its 2014-2017 child poverty strategy. Likewise the Ministerial Working Group on inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers will be drafting a progress report in 2014 which will be outlining the Government's policy approach on the key indicators outlined in this briefing.

## Concluding observations

- 4.0 The Government's existing child poverty strategy 2011-2014 raised particular concern regarding the educational attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.<sup>23</sup> However, many Government policies, such as cuts to local authority budgets (resulting in cuts to Traveller Education Services), welfare reforms and the localism agenda are having a disproportionate impact on Gypsies and Travellers. These have been highlighted in Traveller Movement reports on cuts to Traveller Education Services in London,<sup>24</sup> the impact of welfare reforms<sup>25</sup> and the impact of localism on planning and accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers.<sup>26</sup>
- 4.1 If the Government is serious about addressing child poverty in the Gypsy and Traveller communities it will have to consider the impact of its broader policies on outcomes for these groups.

## Recommendations

- 5.0 In developing its 2014 strategy we urge the Government to consider the following recommendations to reduce the high incidence of child poverty in the Gypsy and Traveller communities:
- The strategy should make specific reference to the high levels of child poverty experienced by Gypsies, Travellers, Roma and the wider social determinates impacting on these levels, especially in the context of housing/accommodation.

<sup>23</sup> DWP and DfE, 2011, *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives*, p.18

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/177031/CM-8061.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/177031/CM-8061.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://irishtraveller.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ITMB-report-on-London-Traveller-education-support-service-staffing-levels.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <http://irishtraveller.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Universal-Credit-and-Gypsies-and-Travellers-report.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/ITMB-Planning-for-Gypsies-and-Travellers2.pdf>

- The Government should reinstate targeted provision that provides young Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and other groups with clear accessible routes into work through schemes with a proven financial return on investment.
- The Government should assess the impact of welfare reforms on child poverty in the Gypsy and Traveller communities. A step towards doing this would be to ensure Gypsies and Travellers are included in local authority child poverty needs assessments and strategies, in line with the duties laid out in the Child Poverty Act 2010.
- In line with Commitment 27 in the MWG progress report, the DWP should establish a joint working group with the Department for Education and BIS to address the root causes and bring forward policy solutions to the inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers in employment, education, skills training, access to benefits etc. It should be noted that the MWG previously established a cross-departmental working group to address broader inequality issues which was discontinued in 2012.