

Better  
Housing  
Briefing

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**Gypsies,  
Travellers and  
accommodation**

Margaret Greenfields

A Race Equality Foundation  
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## Key messages

- 1 Ensuring access to appropriate accommodation is key to engaging with the diverse inequalities and barriers to service provision experienced by Gypsies and Travellers
- 2 One in four Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans does not have a legal place on which to park their home. They are thus, in law, homeless
- 3 Gypsies and Irish Travellers live in or pass through 91 per cent of local authority areas in England and Wales, but in 2003 over 70 per cent of local authorities did not refer to Gypsies or Travellers within their Homelessness Strategies
- 4 The great majority of applications for Gypsy sites are refused at first hearing, often following orchestrated campaigns by local residents, leading to community tensions
- 5 Recent multi-agency policy drives are beginning to have an impact on addressing site shortages, although the majority of new pitches are on 'private sites' funded by owner-occupiers
- 6 Those Gypsies and Travellers who reluctantly resort to living in housing, in the absence of site provision, experience excessively high levels of anxiety and depression. They are frequently victims of racist abuse, threats and discrimination and experience 'cultural trauma'.

## Introduction

Gypsies and Travellers are one of the most marginalised, vulnerable and socially excluded populations in the UK today (CRE, 2006, p. 1). Of the diverse travelling communities in the UK, only Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are currently recognised in law as minority ethnic communities (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). Estimates of the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population (including Scottish Gypsy-Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and New Travellers) are problematic in the absence of ethnic monitoring, administrative statistics or their inclusion within census categories. In 2000, it was calculated that there were approximately 300,000 members of these communities in the UK (Morris and Clements, 2002). With a high rate of population increase, estimated at 3 per cent per annum (Niner, 2003), the community is growing and in need of appropriate accommodation to meet its requirements.

It is believed that over half of Gypsies and Travellers live in housing (CRE, 2006). Emerging evidence from Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs), undertaken under the Housing Act 2004, supports findings from a number of earlier studies of Gypsies/Travellers in housing (see Clark and Greenfields, 2006, Chapter 5). These indicate that many community members are resident in housing as a result of inadequate supply of 'Gypsy caravan sites'. In circumstances where Gypsies and Travellers experience psychological distress as a result of settlement into housing or cannot rent a 'licensed pitch' or afford to purchase land with existing planning permission for an 'authorised Gypsy site', the shortfall in site provision is often met by resort to 'roadside accommodation' (Niner, 2004; Clark and Greenfields, 2006; CRE, 2006). Alternatively, some families purchase land and set up 'unauthorised developments' (private sites) contrary to planning legislation, often leading to considerable friction between Gypsies, Travellers and neighbouring sedentary populations. Community tensions are frequently exacerbated by grossly irresponsible and racist media reporting (Morris, 2006).

## Ensuring access to appropriate accommodation is key

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Accommodation is key to understanding the numerous inequalities and barriers to accessing public services that are experienced by Gypsies and Travellers (CRE, 2006; Van Cleemput, 2008; Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009, forthcoming). Access to appropriate accommodation (whether on sites or in housing) is fundamental to enabling people to avail themselves of health, education and other public services, which the majority population takes for granted. Residents of roadside sites in particular are frequently unable to access appropriate facilities, with predictably negative impacts on population well-being.

From the 1990s onwards, as a result of changes in government policy, the stock of available publicly funded pitches declined steeply, while the supply of residential private sites remained too small to meet demand (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). Despite explicitly sedentarist state policies in recent decades, which have actively encouraged Gypsies and Travellers to settle on to permanent sites or into housing (Crawley, 2004; Richardson, 2006), many families continue to have difficulty in self-funding, applying for or receiving planning permission for private sites (Morris and Clements, 2002; Niner, 2003; Greenfields, 2008). In the absence of adequate supplies of licensed sites, the visibility of Gypsies and Travellers living at unauthorised roadside sites (CRE, 2006; Richardson, 2006) has led to considerable public and policy debate. The ability of minority ethnic and cultural groups to follow their traditional lifestyle is a fundamental human right (see Johnson and Willers, 2007). This fact, coupled with government recognition that a significant number of Gypsies and Travellers wish to actively 'nomadise' on a full-time basis or reside at residential caravan sites, either permanently or for some months of the year, has led to a major policy review of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

In 2003, local authorities were encouraged to use 'Best Value' methodologies to encourage site delivery (Home Office, 2003). The following year a full review of all aspects of government guidance and policy was announced, including a replacement to planning guidance (implemented as Circular 01/06 [ODPM, 2006], which specified how local authorities should respond to planning applications and identify land for new sites). Guidance on GTAAs was subsequently issued, which provided detailed advice on the conduct of assessment of need for Gypsy and Traveller communities (CLG, 2007a). Importantly, housed Gypsies' and Travellers' needs for site provision were also to be considered and built into Local Development Frameworks and Regional Spatial Strategies (see Richardson, 2007; Greenfields, 2008). Numerous government reports, recommendations and guidelines (e.g. CLG, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a) have followed, aimed at clearing the blockage on site provision, simplifying planning procedures and ensuring that Gypsies and Travellers who wish to reside on sites are facilitated in meeting their accommodation needs.

## One in four Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans is, by law, homeless

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Despite recent policy activity, currently around one in four Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans does not have a legal place on which to park their home. They are thus, in law, homeless (Johnson and Willers, 2007; Richardson, 2007). Not all such families are resident on roadside sites. A significant percentage of homeless families are living on their own land without planning permission. So while generally they are able to access education and health services, they remain under threat of eviction, seizure of their homes and even imprisonment if they fail to comply with directions to leave their land (Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Johnson and Willers, 2007).

The high percentage of unauthorised private sites results from the fact that the majority of applications for private sites have (until very recent policy changes) only been granted on appeal. Williams (1999) found that over 90 per cent of applications for Gypsy sites were refused at first hearing, often following orchestrated campaigns by aggrieved (settled) local residents.

The situation of 'roadside' Gypsies and Travellers is even more precarious. Home and Greenfields (2006) and Thomason (2006), in studies in diverse areas of the UK, found patterns of repeat evictions for Gypsies and

## Resources 1

### Bristol City Council

[www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Environment-Planning/Parks-and-open-spaces/gypsies-and-travellers/gypsies-and-travellers-myth-buster.en;jsessionid=3D1EF2692131E59FECAD70E7AC507F1D.tcwwwaplaws3](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Environment-Planning/Parks-and-open-spaces/gypsies-and-travellers/gypsies-and-travellers-myth-buster.en;jsessionid=3D1EF2692131E59FECAD70E7AC507F1D.tcwwwaplaws3)

This local authority is noted for its community development work and for reducing costs of policing unauthorised encampments by developing new local authority sites. Its booklet *Myth Busting: Gypsies and Travellers* has been replicated across the country. Available at the website above.

### Communities and Local Government

[www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/gypsiesandtravellers](http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/gypsiesandtravellers)

Policy guidance, consultation documents and links to key agencies are available at the dedicated 'Gypsies and Travellers Housing' resource page on the website above.

### Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group

[www.dglg.org](http://www.dglg.org)

DGLG is a Gypsy-led and staffed policy and advice organisation. Recent publications include planning advice and consultation leaflets for local authorities, and a range of health resources.

### Friends, Families and Travellers

[www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)

FFT engages with all types and communities of Travellers. Recent FFT web publications on planning and community engagement include: Staines, S. (2007) *Planning Policy Development and Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Sites in England* ([www.gypsy-traveller.org/pdfs/planning FFT\\_survey.pdf](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/pdfs/planning FFT_survey.pdf)).

Travellers resident on the roadside. Over one-third of respondents in both studies stated that they had been evicted on at least thirty occasions within the previous five years. [Thomason \(2006\)](#) found only a low number reporting being asked about their needs or personal circumstances before they were moved on. [Richardson \(2006\)](#) refers to the social control of Gypsies and Travellers through the development of multi-agency proactive strategies that explicitly seek to contain Gypsies and Travellers within certain defined locations.

## 3 Absence from local authority Homelessness Strategies

Despite high rates of homelessness among the Gypsy and Traveller population, [Avebury \(2003\)](#) found that over 70 per cent of local authorities did not include these populations within their Homelessness Strategies. Additionally, very few strategies referred to local authority Race Equality Statements. Of particular concern, the Homelessness Strategies reviewed *all* failed to consider 'the Race Relations (Amendment) Act itself, which imposes a duty on all local authorities to ensure that in the delivery of their services they promote racial equality' ([Avebury, 2003, p. 3](#)). These findings are particularly shocking given that the then Commission for Racial Equality ([CRE, 2006, p. 24](#)) found that 'Gypsies and Irish Travellers live in or pass through 91 per cent of local authority areas in England and Wales, and 13 per cent of authorities say they are the largest ethnic minority groups in their area.'

## 4 Refusal, hostility and tension

[Niner \(2003, 2004\)](#) noted that the main barrier to provision is the planning system and, more fundamentally, resistance from the settled population to the idea of new sites for Gypsies and Travellers. The [CRE \(2006\)](#) inquiry into equality, race relations and site provision endorsed these findings. It found evidence of tensions between settled and travelling people; discrimination and racism; breaches of equality legislation; and weak local leadership, with elected officials often driven by political fear over their careers and their own lack of knowledge or their discriminatory beliefs. The [CRE \(2006\)](#) and [Richardson \(2007\)](#) were unequivocal in noting that political resistance to engaging with the controversial issue of planning permission could create significant local-level barriers to site provision.

A number of reports (e.g. [Niner, 2004](#); [CRE, 2006](#); [Greenfields and Home, 2006](#); [Richardson, 2007](#)) have identified that the most effective way of ensuring social inclusion and meeting Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs is for local authorities to engage with members of the travelling communities to plan and deliver good-quality, well-designed services. There are pockets of good practice and proactive engagement with Gypsies and Travellers and, indeed, the wider sedentary community to deliver appropriate services ([CRE, 2006](#)). However, all too often the needs of Gypsies and Travellers are either overlooked or ignored by politicians and local authority staff.

Lack of adequate site supply is directly related to a decline in community relations between sedentary populations and travelling people (Niner, 2004; CRE, 2006; Richardson, 2006). Gypsies and Travellers resident at unauthorised sites are often subjected to racist abuse and threats of violence (Power, 2004; Morris, 2006; Richardson, 2007). This is in addition to living with the constant insecurity (Goward *et al.*, 2006) of not knowing when they will be required to move or face eviction, with consequent disruption to family, education and medical treatment (Van Cleemput, 2008).

For families who are evicted, the human cost of the eviction is high (Power, 2004; CRE, 2006). Clark and Greenfields (2006) reviewed the impact of eviction on Gypsies and Travellers, citing references and eye-witness accounts of damage, trauma and injury caused during eviction from both unauthorised roadside and self-owned sites. The CRE (2006, pp. 146-9) reported on council approaches to eviction and the sometimes brutal behaviour of bailiffs when carrying out such work. Police responses to eviction are largely more nuanced, with a clear reluctance expressed by many officers to use their powers of eviction, and an awareness of the pointlessness of continually churning families from one location to another (Coxhead, 2005; CRE, 2006).

Richardson (2007) reported that four prerequisites must exist for site provision to be addressed positively at a local level. These are: a positive context for exploring the debate, including from local media; effective management of existing authorised and unauthorised sites; effective consideration of new sites, with clear, well-managed communication of proposals; and strong political leadership to set the context for action, including recognition of the 'business case' for local authorities to consider alternative approaches to eviction. Substantial evidence exists that repeated eviction and 'clean-up' of unauthorised encampments costs tax payers significantly more than would the provision of permanent residential or transit sites (Crawley, 2004; CRE, 2006; Richardson, 2006). Morris and Clements (2002) demonstrated that the financial costs to local authorities of policing and evicting Gypsies and Travellers exceeded £6 million per year at the beginning of the century.

## Recent multi-agency policy drives are beginning to impact

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Since 2004, a plethora of guidance and consultations has been issued by government departments and other key policy players (e.g. CRE, 2006; LGA, 2006). The Local Government Association report detailed examples of good local authority practice. It also made a series of policy recommendations that included enhanced central government funding for refurbishment of poor-quality existing public sites; the development of tools and guidance to assist local authorities in dealing with unauthorised encampments; strengthened powers for agencies working on enforcement issues; and the use of local development frameworks to deliver greater numbers of authorised sites (LGA, 2006). The government-mandated Independent Task Group on Gypsy and Traveller issues, which reported in 2007 (ITG, 2007), made thirty-six recommendations covering the roles of both central and local government and other stakeholders. The most urgent focused on the need to monitor delivery of sites within the new planning regimes. In the government response to the Task Group (CLG, 2008a), all recommendations were (broadly speaking) accepted and will be subject to further partnership working to deliver appropriate sites. The Government has made clear its determination to oversee and monitor local delivery of additional sites for those Gypsies and Travellers who wish to live in caravan accommodation (CLG, 2007a, 2008a). The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI, 2007) produced best practice guidance for its members on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. This highlighted the need for continuous monitoring of baseline caravan count data for robustness and reminded planners that estimates of need should be regularly reviewed in partnership with Gypsy and Traveller community members. Further best practice recommendations on engaging with Gypsies and Travellers have been produced by voluntary sector agencies such as Shelter (2007) and the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (2006).

Where resistance occurs to delivery of new pitches (whether privately provided or publicly funded) there is a mechanism for requiring a review of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation issues at Regional Spatial Strategy level. Based on emerging data, this seems an effective way of ensuring that GTAA and local authority approaches to planning and delivery of sites are subject to independent scrutiny. Where, after scrutiny, concerns exist over the

## Resources 2

### Housing Corporation

[www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.14707](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.14707)

A government agency replaced in November 2008, the Housing Corporation published a social landlord's *Gypsies and Travellers Financial Toolkit for RSLs* (2008) on providing and managing pitches for Gypsies and Travellers. Available at the website above.

### Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

[www.irishtraveller.org.uk](http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk)

The ITMB is the UK branch of the major Irish movement, working mainly with Irish Travellers. ITMB advocates in terms of Traveller accommodation, health and community development and holds frequent conferences on general Traveller well-being. Publications are available from the website above.

### National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

[www.nationalgypsytravellerfederation.org](http://www.nationalgypsytravellerfederation.org)

This is a network site containing details of local Gypsy and Traveller community groups actively engaged in accommodation, health, education and other projects. The website is divided into regions and provides information on the expertise of each group. A number of satellite networks meet on a regular basis to facilitate contact and disseminate local good practice to and with Gypsies and Travellers across each region.

### Royal Town Planning Institute

[www.rtpi.org.uk/item/441/23/5/3](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/441/23/5/3)

The RTPI is the professional body for town and country planners. In 2006 the RTPI published a 'good practice note' detailing a series of recommendations and examples of best practice in consulting with Gypsies and Travellers and planning for site provision. Available from the website above.

robustness of GTAA findings on pitch requirements, the imposition of a 'formula' (Niner, 2007), while controversial (Greenfields, 2008), is effective in ensuring that provision will be met in due course, despite the potential for 'foot-dragging' by reluctant authorities.

Self-provided private sites remain the preferred option for the majority of Gypsies and Travellers interviewed for GTAA's and other associated studies (e.g. Niner, 2003; Greenfields and Home, 2006; Thomason, 2006). However, financial and planning constraints often mean that the only feasible alternative to housing is residence on public sites. Long waiting lists (Niner, 2003; Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Richardson, 2007; various GTAA's) and the very poor condition of a number of public sites (e.g. see Niner, 2003; Crawley, 2004; CRE, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Van Cleemput, 2008) are all factors that may increase movement into 'bricks and mortar' accommodation or residence at unauthorised locations.

In 2007, with the intent of disseminating best practice on appropriate (publicly funded) site design and enhancing partnership and consultation methods, the Government issued draft guidance on the design of both residential and transit sites (CLG, 2007b). Lishman and Richardson (2007, p. 7), in a review of the impact of new planning policies, found that Circular 01/06 (ODPM, 2006) has had an impact on the provision of private (self-funded) residential sites, which are being passed at a faster rate than before its implementation. Greenfields and Home (2006), however, suggest that progress on the development and provision of public sites is likely to remain slow in contrast to that of private sites.

Under the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grant (2006-2008), the Government made the sum of £56 million available to local authorities and registered social landlords for the refurbishment of existing public sites and development of new facilities. Figures published in December 2008 (CLG, 2008b) demonstrated that applications for grants have been spread unevenly across the country and anecdotal evidence suggests that considerable variation exists in terms of local authorities' willingness to apply for such funding. While it could be argued that the sum available is small in relation to identified need, local authorities should be actively encouraged by stakeholders to apply for such grants to meet the shortfall in sites and to improve existing facilities.

Overall, the key message emerging from central government, professional associations and voluntary sector agencies is that the only effective way to break the cycle of inter-community tension is through consultation and partnership working with Gypsies and Travellers to engage with initiatives that support the development of new high-quality sites in appropriate locations. Consultation and planning between community members and service providers is often mediated through community support groups or developed through the mechanism of setting up specialist multi-agency forums, such as those developed to support GTAA research (Greenfields and Home, 2006; Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009, forthcoming). In particular, effective, culturally appropriate consultation methods will ensure that individuals' voices are heard and that health, education, social inclusion and accommodation support becomes available to marginalised community members. Such techniques also provide a forum for families resident in housing who, while ably supported in a few locations by specialist local authority housing officers, may be profoundly disadvantaged through isolation, lack of literacy and unfamiliarity with the administrative and economic requirements of residence in such accommodation.

## The human costs of enforced residence in housing

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Although there is little published research into the experiences of housed Gypsies and Travellers, the wealth of anecdotal data on experiences of racism, discrimination and poor health outcomes is compelling. Emerging GTAA findings indicate that between half and two-thirds of Gypsies and Travellers in housing report that they moved into such accommodation as a result of inadequate site provision and exhaustion caused by a constant cycle of eviction, or to meet the health or educational needs of family members. Isolation from relatives and community structures, resulting from enforced movement into housing and repeated experiences of high levels of racism and discrimination, has a profoundly negative impact on well-being, social functioning and both mental and physical health (Parry *et al.*, 2004; Power, 2004; Goward *et al.*, 2006; Thomason, 2006; Greenfields and Smith, 2007; Karlsen, 2007; Shelter, 2007).

Power (2004) and Cemlyn *et al.* (2009, forthcoming) report that the transition into housing, coupled with low self-esteem as a result of experiences of racism and discrimination, can lead to a breaking away from Gypsy/Traveller constraints and conventions in urban situations. This in turn may result in high rates of marriage break-up and alcohol abuse due to 'cultural trauma'. Reports from community workers and anecdotal evidence from within Gypsy and Traveller communities indicate that individuals may seek to distance themselves from experiences of racism, discrimination, unemployment and poor life chances through substance abuse, leading to a negative cycle of contact with the criminal justice system and high rates of suicide (Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009, forthcoming).

Parry *et al.* (2004) found that the health impacts of residence in housing were profound, with travelling acting as a protective factor in terms of both physical and mental health. In contrast, Gypsies and Travellers living in housing, who rarely travelled, had the worst health status of all groups, reporting the highest levels of anxiety.

Numerous GTAAs have reported housed Gypsies and Travellers experiencing hostility from neighbours. For children, the regularity of experiences of racist abuse, when coupled to a lack of positive images of Gypsies and Travellers, can lead to negative self-image and fear of revealing their ethnicity. *The Ormiston Trust Children's Voices research* (2006, p. 3) indicated that *'for those living in houses a lack of safety often meant exposure to racism from neighbours. Indeed houses were the type of accommodation where children felt they were most likely to experience racism.'*

## Conclusion

Eradicating the legacy of generations of racism, discrimination, neglect and enforced sedentarism of Gypsies and Travellers will be a slow process even if full support exists from public bodies and politicians to redress the wrongs experienced by these communities.

Good practice guidance in terms of consulting with Gypsies and Travellers on accommodation needs has been published by a number of statutory and voluntary sector agencies. In the wake of GTAAs a number of localities have established forums for engaging with Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople in terms of accommodation, community cohesion and needs planning. Accommodation needs and desires vary across different communities of Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople, and by regional and local area. There is no definitive set of requirements for any one locality and the needs of each local community must be consulted on, met wherever possible and respected. Above all, however, sound community development practice and respectful partnership working must be undertaken in the spirit of reconciliation and equity.

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Margaret Greenfields initially trained as a lawyer before transferring to the field of social policy research. Her PhD consisted of an exploration of Travellers' engagement with family law proceedings. Margaret has over twenty years' experience of working with Gypsy and Traveller communities and is a Trustee of the Travellers Aid Trust. She is currently employed as a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Buckinghamshire New University.

Readers  
**Trevor Diesch**  
**Pat Niner**  
**Charmaine Valley**

We welcome feedback on this paper and on all aspects of our work. Please email [briefings@racefound.org.uk](mailto:briefings@racefound.org.uk)

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Race Equality Foundation  
 Unit 35  
 Kings Exchange  
 Tileyard Road  
 London N7 9AH  
 T: 020 7619 6220 F: 020 7619 6230  
[www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk](http://www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk)

