

# Gypsy Travellers In Scotland

A resource for the media

Updated June 2013

# Introduction: Reporting sensitive situations responsibly

Although there are no official figures on the number of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland, **numbers are estimated at between 15- 20,000 people**, or less than 0.5 per cent of the Scottish population. This estimate includes those living on Council/Registered Social Landlord Sites (RSL), private sites and unauthorised encampments as well as those who live in ordinary housing<sup>i</sup>. Despite these relatively small numbers, there is significant coverage of this group of people in the media. A recent study by Amnesty International shows that a disproportionate amount of that coverage is negative.<sup>ii</sup>

**Negative attitudes and ingrained prejudices within parts of wider society can be hard to tackle.** Most people living in Scotland have never had any direct contact with a Gypsy Traveller, and therefore the information they receive through the media has a significant impact on their opinions and understanding.

The Equality & Human Rights Commission has a statutory remit to promote and monitor human rights and to protect, enforce and promote equality. We believe that journalists are supportive of this aim and report responsibly, presenting the facts in ways that are accurate, informative, balanced and relevant. However the Commission also recognises that:

- many stereotypes about Gypsy Travellers already exist
- journalists may not always have direct contact with Gypsy Travellers
- policy issues (in particular around accommodation, encampments and travelling) are complex and can impact significantly on public opinion at local and national levels and cause tension with settled communities

The Commission supports the **National Union of Journalists' guidance** on race reporting and its affirmation that press freedom must be balanced by a responsibility not to unfairly target sections of any community or to encourage discrimination.

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**The Press Complaints Commission Code says:** “The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual’s race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.” The National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct is even clearer: “A journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination, ridicule, prejudice or hatred.”

As with other ethnic groups, journalists should not give details of a Gypsy Traveller’s ethnicity unless it is genuinely relevant to the story and they should avoid making assumptions about Gypsy Travellers based on stereotypes.

For example, in 2009 the Press Complaints Commission upheld a complaint against the Daily Mail from the Double Dykes Tenants Association on the Double Dykes Gypsy site in Perth, who disputed the claim in an article that none of the Travellers who agreed to be interviewed by the journalist paid council tax. Whilst the PPC accepted that it would be difficult to prove this complaint, the newspaper did accept that there would be residents on the site who did pay council tax and annotated its notes accordingly. This example shows how assumptions about Gypsy Travellers can inadvertently lead to reporting which reflects stereotypes about the community which are not based on fact.

**Balanced media coverage can help to foster greater understanding between and within communities.** The Commission does not want to stifle discussion or media stories about Gypsy Travellers.

Instead, it seeks to encourage a more accurate, fair and inclusive discourse about the issues involved that will help the understanding and protect the well-being of all those affected – whether Gypsy Travellers or the settled population.

The Commission acknowledges that there will be individuals in any given section of the population who behave unlawfully. In this, Gypsy Travellers are no different from any other group of people.

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We would expect the authorities to deal appropriately with any unlawful or antisocial behaviour, and the media to report on it as they would with any other community.

**Protection from discrimination:** Gypsy Travellers are a defined ethnic group protected by equality legislation. Over recent years, a number of test cases have established that Gypsy Travellers are a distinct ethnic group, and as such protected in law. (In Scotland, the most recent case was a Tribunal judgement in 2008, K MacLennan v GTEIP)<sup>iii</sup>.

It is worth remembering that the Equality Act 2010 affords Gypsy Travellers the same protections as all other ethnic groups, and the same standards of reporting should apply.

## Digital Publishing

For many people, their only information about Gypsy Travellers comes from the media. Increasingly, interactive media also allows people to share their own views.

Editors face the challenge of not only ensuring that their own reporting is appropriate, fair and accurate but must increasingly take **a moderator's responsibility** to ensure that what is published on message boards etc. does not constitute harassment or incitement to racial hatred.

**Examples** of negative/offensive comments left unmoderated on Scottish newspaper bulletin boards:

*"So you're taking away a refuse centre where good taxpaying people take their unwanted rubbish to be disposed of properly and replacing it with travellers, who dump their unwanted rubbish anywhere!"*

*"Give the locals a free hand to go down and welcome these vagrants with petrol bombs, either that or go play dodgems in the car park with a forklift truck and their mobile homes".*

*"...all scum, we have a lot of pikies down here but are usually moved on within 24 hours but the mess they leave..... shower of thieving scum."*

# **Gypsy Travellers: A part of Scotland in history and today**

**Gypsy Travellers have been part of Scotland's economic and cultural life since at least the 12th century**, and within that have always celebrated a strong sense of their own culture, traditions and community. As with any ethnic group, there is considerable diversity within the Gypsy Traveller population and it would not be accurate to present them as a single group. There are, however, usually strong and distinctive family and clan relationships amongst those who share a common heritage and many prefer to live and work in extended family groups.

Along with this strong emphasis on **family and kinship**, Gypsy Travellers see travelling and a nomadic identity as an important part of their traditional and contemporary culture and can be part of a Gypsy Traveller's sense of self. This does not, however, mean that to be defined as a Gypsy Traveller, they **must** live in caravans on the road - nor indeed do most live permanently in this way. Changing patterns of employment and social circumstances – such as educating children or caring for older relatives – mean that Gypsy Travellers may live in mobile homes or caravans on permanent pitches, they may live in houses or they may travel for all or part of the year.

This strong sense of **group identity** and **travelling culture** shared by Gypsy Travellers is not always well understood or accepted within the wider settled population and can, in some cases, result in clashes of cultures and social tension between groups. For Gypsy Travellers and settled populations, this can be accentuated when other factors such as changes in land use, demographics and employment patterns create new points of contact.

The Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee most recent investigation into the situation of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland was published in the spring of 2013.

**The concluding paragraph** sums up the Committee's frustration at the lack of progress on this issue:

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*'Twelve years on from the first Scottish Parliament inquiry into Gypsy/Traveller life, and it is galling to see that the appalling situation of many Gypsy/Travellers is little changed. We are staggered to find ourselves hearing the same issues and making the same recommendations that were heard and made in the 2001 inquiry. We share our witnesses' frustration, not least that of Gypsy/Travellers, that a positive and collaborative way of providing culturally appropriate accommodation for Gypsy/Traveller people has not yet been found. Where we have heard of commendable initiatives, such as in the North East, they have been dogged by deeply disappointing outcomes – by lack of action in particular.'*

## Accommodation issues

**Where and how Gypsy Travellers live - whether on permanent or temporary sites, in houses or on roadside encampments - is the single issue that generates the greatest amount of media coverage.**

Accommodation affects access to health and social care, education and other public services. Where there is any gap between accommodation supply and demand, challenges are likely to occur. The background context is therefore important to good reporting and in relation to the inequalities that Gypsy Travellers experience in other areas.

Through the Housing (Scotland) Acts of 2001 and 2010, local authorities have a range of statutory responsibilities for the accommodation needs of all groups in society. The particular needs of Gypsy Travellers are explicitly recognised. Gypsy Travellers require a range of accommodation encompassing socially rented and privately owned sites, temporary halting places and fixed housing to meet their individual needs and circumstances.

Some local authorities have worked hard and tried to develop appropriate site provision. However, in many parts of Scotland, the accommodation needs of Gypsy Travellers have not been consistently addressed. In 2012 Amnesty International<sup>iv</sup> examined the Local Housing Strategies of 27 mainland local authorities. Of these, 9 suggested good planning for Gypsy Travellers, 14 were vague in their plans and 5 included no accommodation plans for this group. This has contributed to accommodation shortages, breakdowns of trust between Gypsy Travellers and local authorities, and sometimes tensions with settled communities.

### **Permanent sites**

Permanent sites can be provided by a local authority/registered social landlord, by private landlords or set up on a Gypsy Traveller's own land.

On **local authority-provided sites** in Scotland, Gypsy Travellers must apply for a place which is either 'first come, first served', or subject to the local allocations policy. If no pitches are available, they will be put on a waiting list.

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Across Scotland, the **occupancy rates** on the current 25 permanent sites are not consistently or centrally monitored, but the current trend is for demand to be greater than availability, particularly in the summer months. The average weekly rent for a pitch is £62 (2012)<sup>v</sup> which secures the tenant a place to park their own residential trailer caravan and vehicle, and access to a basic amenity unit containing bath/shower, and toilet facilities. Council tax is part of the rent on some local authority sites, but charged separately on others. Electricity is charged according to use. Some Gypsy Travellers might need/prefer to have a second caravan on their pitch to ensure living space for the whole family.

On sites, local authorities are expected to address housing issues such as adaptations for disabled tenants, repairs, safety, anti-social behaviour etc. in the same way as they would in any other social housing provision, but evidence given to the 2012 parliamentary inquiry<sup>vi</sup> suggests this is not consistently the case. Some sites are also of poor environmental quality (under pylons, near industrial land or major transport junctions) and suffer from poor access and badly maintained approaches, making it hard for residents to get to local services and for local services to reach them. Facilities for children and older people can also be inadequate.

**Private sites** might be run commercially or may have been established by Gypsy Travellers themselves. If run by a commercial business, there may be few protections of tenure for Gypsy Travellers. Where a Gypsy Traveller seeks to live permanently on their own land, they need planning permission and a site license from the Council, but it has been suggested that Gypsy Travellers experience disproportionate difficulty getting planning permission for private occupancy of their own land compared to the rest of the population<sup>vii</sup>.

## Temporary sites

When Gypsy Travellers are '**on the road**' or away from 'home base', they are faced with a limited range of temporary accommodation. Historically, there was an informal network of stopping-off places used on a regular basis. Changes in land use and hardening attitudes towards roadside encampments have meant that Councils and private owners have either used or blocked off such places.

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Gypsy Travellers have therefore turned to ‘unauthorised encampments’ in what can sometimes be very visible and high profile public spaces. This shortfall of accommodation, particularly in the key travelling period over the summer, is a key cause of community tensions and negative media coverage.

*‘The simple solution to this problem is the creation of sufficient permanent and short term Gypsy Traveller halting sites .... Until this happens, this cycle of Gypsy Travellers parking on unauthorised sites, being harassed by local residents and repeatedly moved on by the Councils will continue.’*

**Equality Officer Health Board - Scottish Parliament Official Report 2013**

*‘There has been a lot of work to try to identify potential locations for sites. It is unfortunate that proposals often meet with community resistance, negative media coverage and so on.’*

**Equality Officer Local Authority - Scottish Parliament Official Report 2013**

Conflict and stress arising from this lack of suitable accommodation affects both Gypsy Travellers and settled communities. Approaches have been undertaken in some local authorities to mitigate this, including providing waste disposal and portaloos for road-side camps to support the wellbeing of occupants and minimise clear-up costs, but provision can be reactive or ad hoc, which can make community relations and individual situations worse.

## Housing

Many Gypsy Travellers live in houses. Exact numbers are unknown, as this data was not captured until the 2011 census and some do not identify themselves as Gypsy Travellers for fear of harassment. For some, moving into a house is not a choice, but instead because of personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities. For others, it may be a last resort if they are unable to find a suitable pitch, experience harassment living on a site or cannot access essential services such as education, health or social care. Gypsy Travellers living in houses do not give up their cultural or legal identity. However, many report a sense of disconnection from family and community and experience less good health than those living on sites or travelling.

## SUMMARY

- Most readers or viewers have no direct contact with Gypsy Travellers and base their opinions on what they see in the media. The information they receive through the media, therefore, has a significant impact on their opinions and understanding.
- Where and how Gypsy Travellers live - whether on permanent or temporary sites, in houses or on roadside encampments - is the single issue that generates the greatest amount of media coverage. In many parts of Scotland, the accommodation needs of Gypsy Travellers have not been consistently addressed. This has contributed to accommodation shortages, breakdowns of trust between Gypsy Travellers and local authorities, and tensions with settled communities.
- Many stereotypes about Gypsy Travellers already exist, and negative attitudes and ingrained prejudices within parts of wider society can be hard to tackle. The media can play a positive role in tackling these prejudices.
- Editors face the challenge of not only ensuring that their own reporting is appropriate, fair and accurate but must increasingly take **a moderator's responsibility** to ensure that what is published on message boards etc. does not constitute harassment or incitement to racial hatred.
- Gypsy Travellers are not 'outsiders'. They are full citizens of Great Britain and Ireland and are a defined ethnic group protected by equality legislation.
- Sensationalising or exaggerating issues involving Gypsy Travellers can have an adverse impact on the relations between Gypsy Travellers and the settled community.

# Terminology

The following terms are used to recognise broad social and cultural differences between different travelling communities in Scotland. However, identity is complex and as with any groups, there are differences of opinion about terminology. Individuals of course have the right to self-define:

## **Gypsy Traveller (plural Gypsy Travellers)**

This is the broad term for people in Scotland who might variously refer to themselves as Travellers, Scottish Travellers, Gypsy Travellers and Gypsy Traveller people. As a generic term, it also encompasses English Gypsies, Irish Travellers and European Roma. It is important to remember, though, that despite sharing many aspects of common heritage, these groups may also identify some clear differences between themselves. Gypsy Travellers regard ‘travelling’ as an important aspect of their ethnic/cultural identity, although they might not literally be ‘on the road’ all of the time. Gypsy Travellers as an ethnic group are protected by equalities legislation.

## **Occupational Travellers and Showpeople**

These are people who define themselves in terms of their businesses which move from place to place, often following regular, planned routes. It includes, for example, Fairground and Circus People. They are not defined as separate ethnic groups and to refer to them as Travellers may cause confusion.

## **Roma migrants from European accession countries**

As a result of European enlargement, people from the European accession (A10) countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria) are able to live in the UK. Historically, Roma people have been well represented in the populations of some of these Central and Eastern European countries, but have not necessarily lived a travelling or nomadic life there. This pattern tends to continue as these new migrant populations arrive in Scotland.

## **The settled community**

The population outwith that of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

## Contacts

**Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP):** *STEP is funded by the Scottish Government to develop and support inclusive educational approaches for Gypsy Travellers.*

**Telephone:** 0131 651 6444    **Email:** step@ed.ac.uk

**Article 12:** *Article 12 in Scotland is a young person-led network, working with some of the most marginalized young people in Scotland, including Gypsy Travellers, to promote their participation, rights and access to information.*

**Telephone:** 01674 674086    **Email:** respond@article12.org

**MECOPP:** *MECOPP works to challenge and dismantle barriers that deny Black and Minority Ethnic carers access to health, social work and other social care services in Edinburgh, the Lothians and further afield. They work specifically with Gypsy Traveller communities in rural and urban areas of Scotland.*

**Telephone:** 0131 467 2994

**Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC) :** *GREC employ a Gypsy Traveller Liaison Worker for Aberdeenshire whose role is to promote good relations between Gypsy Travellers and settled communities and to provide information and advice on local services such as healthcare, education, housing, recycling etc. They also support and encourage the participation of Gypsy Travellers in public life.*

**Telephone:** 01224 595505    **Email:** info@grec.co.uk

**Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS):** *PAS promotes and facilitates better public engagement with the planning system in Scotland. PAS was commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake a study into barriers to Gypsy Travellers' engagement with the planning system and to pilot means of addressing these.*

**Telephone:** 0131 220 9730    **Email:** office@planningaidscotland.org.uk

**Equality and Human Rights Commission:** *The Commission works towards the elimination of discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity.*

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

**Email:** scotland@equalityhumanrights.com

Gypsy Travellers

# Resources

**Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT):** An organisation with online and downloadable copies of resources relating to Gypsy Travellers.  
[www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)

**Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS)**  
Gypsy Travellers in Contemporary Scotland  
A report into the 2001 'Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies':  
Ten Years On (2011)  
[http://bemis.org.uk/docs/gypsy\\_travellers\\_in\\_contemporary\\_scotland.pdf](http://bemis.org.uk/docs/gypsy_travellers_in_contemporary_scotland.pdf)

**Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee**  
Inquiries; Published evidence, reports and Scottish Government response:

Where Gypsy Travellers Live (2013)  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/49027.aspx>

Gypsy Travellers and Care (2012)  
[www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/eor-12-03w-rev2.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/eor-12-03w-rev2.pdf)

[www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/130129\\_Scottish\\_Government\\_response3rd\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/130129_Scottish_Government_response3rd_Report_2012.pdf)

**Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review.**  
S. Cemlyn Et Al. University of Bristol, Buckinghamshire New University. Published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009  
[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)

**Scottish Government**  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/gypsies-travellers](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/gypsies-travellers)

*Please contact us if you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language. Website: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)*

## Gypsy Travellers

### REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> In July 2009, the Scottish Government carried out its last bi-annual count of Scottish Gypsy Travellers and found that there were around 2,120 people living on Council/Registered Social Landlord Sites (RSL) sites, private sites and unauthorised encampments in Scotland. It is accepted that this figure is a significant underestimate as;

- it does not include Gypsy Travellers who live in houses
- local authorities are not consistent with data on Gypsy Travellers on Council / RSI sites
- it is unlikely to fully reflect all those who were travelling or away at the time of the count
- it is a difficult population to survey both in terms of reach and in terms of those who self-identify as Gypsy Travellers

Organisations and services working with Scottish Gypsy Travellers estimate that the figure is between 15-20,000 people. The 2011 census in Scotland included Gypsy Traveller as an ethnic group for the first time, but final data is not yet available.

<sup>ii</sup> CAUGHT IN THE HEADLINES - Scottish media coverage of Scottish Gypsy Travellers. Amnesty International April 2012

[http://amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_22449.pdf](http://amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_22449.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> <http://archive.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/pdfs/PE1363.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> ON THE MARGINS - Local authority service provision for Scottish Gypsy Travellers. Amnesty International April 2012

[http://amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_22450.pdf](http://amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_22450.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> SPICe Research Briefing – Where Gypsy Travellers Live. Scottish Parliament November 2012

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/SPICe\\_briefing\\_Where\\_Gypsy\\_Travellers\\_live.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/SPICe_briefing_Where_Gypsy_Travellers_live.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Where Gypsy Travellers Live Equal Opportunities Committee Enquiry 2012

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/49027.aspx>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.yourrights.org.uk/yourrights/rights-of-gypsies-and-travellers/planning-permission-for-caravan-sites/index.shtml>

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)