



YOUTH ACCESS

Championing Youth Advice and Counselling

Equity scoping

Addressing inequity in service provision for

**Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
young people**

February 2024

About Youth Access

Youth Access exists to ensure that every young person has access to the support they need, when and where they need it, to thrive on their journey into adulthood.

Alongside our member network of 128 youth advice and counselling services, we champion young people's right to access high-quality services providing a range of support, from mental health and wellbeing to housing and employment, all under one roof, in their local community.



Introduction

All young people deserve access to support that respects their rights and meets their needs. Yet, too often, the very systems created to support young people perpetuate inequality and reproduce systems of oppression. Put simply, many young people remain under-heard and under-served, facing barriers to services often not designed for or reflective of them.

Addressing entrenched inequalities in service access and experience is complex, requiring a sophisticated understanding of the needs, cultures and help-seeking behaviours within each specific group as well as the reasons for the shortcomings within services.

This is one of five accompanying briefings covering the key findings from our equity scoping review, which focus on addressing inequity in service provision for the following young people:

- **Black young people and young people from racialised communities**
- **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people**
- **Refugee and asylum-seeking young people**
- **Trans and gender-diverse young people**
- **Deaf young people**

Whilst young people with shared identities or with shared experiences often have a distinct pattern of needs that must be understood in depth by any service attempting to address their marginalisation, our broader mapping also identified some common factors useful to consider in developing an appropriate approach. These findings are featured in our [overview report](#).

About

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people is used to describe people from a range of ethnicities, or people with nomadic ways of life who are not from a specific ethnicity. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people encompass a range of groups with different histories, cultures, and beliefs.

These groups are distinct, but are often reported together. Where they are differentiated in data collection, the following groups are commonly identified separately:

- Gypsies (including Romany Gypsies, English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romany people)
- Irish Travellers (who have specific Irish roots)
- Roma, understood to be more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. (NB: The term Roma has nothing to do with Romania.)

The term Traveller can also encompass groups that travel or practice nomadism and are generally regarded as 'cultural' rather than 'ethnic' Travellers and occupational travellers. These include, but are not limited to, New Travellers, Boaters, Bargees and Showpeople.

Historically, there has been a lack of robust data on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. For the first time, the 2011 Census included an ethnic category to collect data on Gypsy, Traveller and Irish Traveller communities.

In total around 63,000 people in the UK identified themselves as members of these groups, of which 58,000 were living in England and Wales. The South East region of England had both the largest number of Gypsies and Irish Travellers and the largest number per 10,000 people. Other sources suggest the 2011 Census figures may be underestimates. Friends, Families and Travellers estimate there are 300,000 Gypsy and Traveller people in the UK, and another 300-500,000 migrant Roma people.

Service needs

People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience some of the worst outcomes of any group, across a wide range of social indicators, and their general experience of society is one of exclusion. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people experience extremely high levels of racial assault, poor health, precarious employment and socio-economic deprivation (The Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CODE), 2023).

Poverty and inequality

- People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ethnic groups experienced the highest levels of socio-economic deprivation and financial difficulties (CODE, 2023).

Racism and discrimination

- 78% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller respondents suggested that incidents of hate speech/crime happen very often, with some suggesting this took place on a constant or daily basis. The most common forms of hate speech/crime experienced were: exclusion and discrimination from and within services (experienced by 94% of respondents); reinforcement of negative stereotypes (89%); social media abuse (87%); and media incitement to racial hatred (82%) (Greenfields and Rogers, 2020).

- More than 9 in 10 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity, most commonly exclusion or discrimination from services (Traveller Movement, 2017).
- More than 6 in 10 Gypsy or Traveller people had experienced a racial assault, a higher rate than any other ethnic minority group. One in three experienced a physical racist attack. Of Roma people, 47% had experienced a racist assault, while 35% had been physically attacked (CODE, 2023).

60%

**Gypsy or Traveller
people had experienced
a racial assault**

(CODE, 2023)

Education and employment

- Young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience low educational attainment rates, and high rates of school exclusion, early school leaving, and literacy difficulties.
- Young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities can be subject to bullying at school due to pupils' and teachers' racism.
- Irish Traveller young people are more likely to be eligible for Free School Meals than other groups (AYPH, 2023 a).
- Exclusion rates for Gypsy and Roma young people are 4.5 times the national average (Department for Education, 2023). 51% of Gypsy Traveller adults and 55% of Roma had no educational qualifications. (CODE, 2023)
- The 2011 Census found Gypsy or Irish Traveller was the ethnic group with the lowest employment rates and the highest rates of economic inactivity.

Health and wellbeing

- There are significant health disparities between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and the rest of the population. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have greater prevalence of indicators of ill health, including lower life expectancy, higher suicide rates and higher levels of anxiety and depression (AYPH, 2023).
- Gypsy or Traveller men were 12.4 times as likely to suffer from two or more physical health conditions as white British men, while Roma men were five times as likely – both were higher figures than for any other ethnicity (CODE, 2023).
- Gypsy and Traveller communities are nearly three times more likely to be anxious than others, and just over twice as likely to be depressed. In addition, the All Ireland Traveller Health Study found that the suicide rate for Irish Traveller women is six times higher than the general population, and seven times higher for Irish Traveller men (Friends, Families and Travellers, 2022c).
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children on average reported lower levels of happiness than their peers, which is likely to be related to the high rates of discrimination they experience (Children’s Commissioner, 2022).

“greater prevalence of indicators of ill health, including lower life expectancy, higher suicide rates and higher levels of anxiety and depression”

(AYPH, 2023)

Housing

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people's human rights have been undermined by recent changes in planning rules and new powers in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 which criminalise stopping without permission and increase enforcement action against nomadic Gypsies and Travellers (Friends, Families & Travellers, 2022a).

Immigration

- It is important to recognise that unlike the Gypsy and Traveller communities, which have lived in the UK for centuries, the Roma in the UK are a migrant community, and may need immigration advice to help secure their status.
- Brexit is having a continued impact on Roma people attempting to settle in the UK from Central and Eastern Europe (Roma Support Group, 2022).

Barriers to access to services

Young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities encounter a wide array of barriers to accessing services, and may be reluctant or unable to access support when they need it.

- The overarching issue is a lack of **trust** in services.
- Concerns that they will encounter **discrimination** can make young people reluctant to engage with health and care services, and previous **poor experiences** on accessing services can further damage trust.
- The important role of **family** in young people's identity can also act as a barrier to building trust with services. Relationships and trust may be more easily built with specific individuals rather than a whole service.
- There is considerable **stigma** and shame in many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities around mental health and suicide. Men in particular may find this subject difficult because of their traditional role as providers for the family.
- Those visiting, living or residing on sites that have been situated on the periphery of communities may experience additional barriers related to social or rural **isolation**.

Young people may have limited knowledge and awareness of services.

- Unplanned travel patterns, lack of permanent accommodation or regular evictions can make it impractical to access services. Even though many young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities live in houses, they may still move around a lot, e.g. for seasonal work.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people face longstanding barriers to registering with GPs due to unlawful requirements for proof of address or identification.
- Young people within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are more likely to experience digital exclusion as a result of a lack of broadband access, limited technical skills and literacy barriers.
- When young people manage to access services, they are likely to encounter a lack of cultural understanding amongst professionals. Many services have not made serious attempts to include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in their service development, and this can perpetuate mutual mistrust and misunderstanding (NFER, 2008).

These factors can cause young people to feel anxious, stressed, uncomfortable or defensive when accessing services.

- Many services do not monitor for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ethnic groups, meaning they are often **invisible within datasets**, their needs are not identified and services may design services that are unwittingly exclusionary.
- Even where services are collecting data, many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people may be reluctant to disclose their ethnicity, or even change their accent to **hide their identity**, for fear of experiencing discrimination.

- Cultural factors can cause significant communication barriers when accessing services. Mental health, sexual health, cancer, disabilities and special educational needs are culturally taboo subjects and must be approached in a culturally sensitive way. Professionals' jargon can close down lines of communication, whilst culturally specific words or phrases are often misunderstood or ignored.

The recent research by The Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity found that access to health and social care services was a larger issue for Roma people than any other ethnic group (CODE, 2023). Roma face particular challenges related to language barriers and navigating UK public service systems.

Methods of improving access and service quality

The evidence review and interviews with managers and practitioners in frontline organisations identified a number of ideas for ways of improving access to information, advice, counselling and support and the quality of services for young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Data and planning

Analysis of data already held by services can help to identify unmet needs or gaps in data collection itself. Organisations should aim to align their data collection with the ONS' best practice for ethnic monitoring.

Further research with local communities may be needed. It is important to also look beyond the data and ensure Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are routinely included as high-risk groups in services' planning.

Develop cultural awareness

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural awareness and competency training may be required to ensure that all staff recognise the additional barriers and inequalities these young people may face due to their ethnicity; and that young people encounter respect, acceptance of difference and understanding of their culture.

Build trust with local communities

It is important that services undertake significant, concerted action to build trust with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including by engaging with parents, care-givers and extended family members.

Develop partnerships with local organisations

Making links or more formal partnerships with local community groups or services (e.g. welfare advice, healthcare services or Traveller Education Support teams) that are already working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities helps to build trust and engagement.

Build capacity in the community

Due to the difficulties of securing access for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people to city centre services, a community development approach may be more effective. This may involve building the capacity of community members to work alongside professionals to develop and deliver services and increase their own skills.

Offer a range of interventions

Generally, face to face services and contact via Whatsapp may be the most effective modes of contact with young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Many parents would prefer provision for children and young people to be made available on sites, and outreach may be the most effective method in any event.

The extent to which workers are trusted by the community, and whether or not the intervention method is negotiated, both have clear impacts on intervention success.

It is necessary to build explicitly on long-established, trusting relationships. Any flexibility built into the intervention in terms of negotiating intervention topic can contribute significantly to the outcome.

Interventions which might be considered include:

- **Peer support groups** – e.g. engaging young people in culturally sensitive conversations about mental health, and in projects which celebrate their identity and develop cultural confidence
- **Health advocacy projects** (see Roma Support Group, 2021).
- **Advice pop-ups**
- **Mentoring**

Develop culturally-sensitive comms

This should include information and leaflets aimed specifically at young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; and informational films and videos.

Key sources & further reading

- Association for Young People's Health (2022) Key Data on Young People. <https://ayph-youthhealthdata.org.uk/key-data/population/>
- Carr et al (2014) Outreach programmes for health improvement of Traveller Communities: a synthesis of evidence, Public Health Research Volume 2, Issue 3.
- Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (2023), Racism and Ethnic Inequality in a Time of Crisis: Findings from the Evidence for Equality National Survey.
- Department for Education (2023) Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england>
- Friends, Families and Travellers FAQs: <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions/>
- Friends, Families & Travellers (2023) Race hate and prejudice faced by Gypsies and Travellers in England.
- Friends, Families & Travellers (2022a) Briefing: Accommodation issues facing Gypsies and Travellers in England.
- Friends, Families & Travellers (2022b) Briefing: Health inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- Friends, Families & Travellers (2022c) Tackling Suicide Inequalities in Gypsy and Traveller Communities.
- Greenfields and Rogers (2020) Hate: "As regular as rain": A pilot research project into the psychological effects of hate crime on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) communities.
- House of Commons Library (2019) Briefing Paper: Gypsies and Travellers.

- House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2019) Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) (2008) Approaches to Working with children, young people and families for Traveller, Irish Traveller, Gypsy, Roma and Show People Communities: A Literature Review report for the Children's Workforce Development Council.
- NYA training course 'Working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Young People'.
- Roma Support Group (2021) Roma Mental Health Advocacy Project Self-Evaluation Report.
- Roma Support Group (2022) Financial Inclusion Project: Summary of the Self-Evaluation of the project.
- The Traveller Movement (2022) Roads to Success for Gypsy Roma and Traveller Youth: A peer led research project to identify barriers and propose solutions for youth education, training and employment.

Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our thanks to specialist YIACS consultant James Kenrick (Email: jkenrick1@gmail.com), who undertook the review upon which this briefing is based on behalf of Youth Access.

Thank you to MAP (Norfolk) and The Mosaic Project (The Junction, in collaboration with Multi Cultural Family Base, Edinburgh) for sharing their expertise and experiences to inform this accompanying briefing.

Registered Charity No. 1042121 Company number 02967126

Copyright 2024

www.youthaccess.org.uk