

## Fact Sheet



### Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

#### Who are Romani Gypsies?

This group includes English, Welsh and Scottish Gypsies and European Roma. Romani Gypsies have been in Britain since at least 1515 after migrating from continental Europe. The term Gypsy is a corruption of "Egyptian" which is what the settled population perceived them to be because of their dark complexion. In reality, linguistic analysis of the Romani language proves that Romani Gypsies came from India.

#### Who are Irish Travellers?

Irish Travellers are a separate and distinct ethnic group that come from Ireland. They share some of the same cultural values as Romani Gypsies, such as a preference for self-employment and living and traveling in caravans or "trailers", but there are also big differences. For example most Irish Travellers are Catholic and their language - Cant - is not related at all to Romani. Irish Travellers were first recorded in the UK in the early 1300s.

Both groups are recognised as ethnic minority groups under Equalities legislation

Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic groups for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010. Additionally, the Equality and Human Rights Commission considers Gypsies and Travellers to be amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised minority groups in Britain.

Romani Gypsies were recognised in 1989 (CRE v Dutton) because of a case involving a 'No Travellers' sign; Irish Travellers were recognised in 2000 (O'Leary v Allied Domecq) in a case brought in a similar vein. Gypsies have a shared culture, language and belief system, as do Irish Travellers, both groups may be referred to as Travellers and are often referred to together as the Travelling Community / Communities.

#### New Travellers

The term New Travellers refers to people sometimes referred to as "New Age Travellers". They are generally people who have taken to life on the road in their own lifetime, though some New Traveller families claim to have been on the road for 3 consecutive generations. The New Traveller culture grew out of the hippie movements and free-festival movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Because of this New Traveller vehicles are generally more colourful and self-built than other Travellers.

## **Showmen**

Showmen are a cultural minority that have owned and operated funfairs and circuses for many generations. Though culturally similar to Romani Gypsies, their identity is connected to their family businesses. They operate rides and attractions that can be seen throughout the summer months at fun fairs. They generally have winter quarters where the family settles to repair the machinery that they operate and prepare for the next traveling season.

## **Do all Gypsies and Irish Travellers travel?**

The planning system defines Gypsies & Irish Travellers as people with a travelling way of life. Whilst this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies & Irish Travellers around the world now live in houses. When Gypsies and Travellers live in houses their culture and heritage stays with them, you do not have to travel to be part of these ethnic groups.

Some groups are highly mobile, moving on when work opportunities have been exhausted and others live permanently in one area or only travel for a few weeks or months of the year.

Most Gypsy and Traveller families live within close-knit communities, whether in housing or on caravan sites, with strong family and social networks. Gypsies and Travellers now use modern, good quality vehicles and caravans.

The main reasons for travelling are to work, to follow fairs and visit family.

## **Travelling Patterns**

Travelling patterns are linked to the seasons and the work associated with the seasons. Gypsies and Travellers do not travel on a daily basis all year round. Families require safe and secure places from which to do their travelling. The 'base' site (if they have one) will usually be where they access GPs, Dentists, schools etc.

As Gypsies and Travellers grow older and become less able to travel on a regular basis, some require a safe and secure stopping place where they can maintain the cultural traditions of being a Gypsy or Traveller. Gypsies and Travellers also sometimes stop travelling for periods of time to care for sick or elderly relatives or to continue a child's education within a supportive school environment. Families will then take up the travelling way of life again following these critical events.

Information supplied by Cheshire Constabulary. More information about Gypsy – Traveller related issues can be found on the Cheshire Police website; [www.cheshire.police.uk](http://www.cheshire.police.uk)