



***Tackling Inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities***  
**An Inquiry by Women and Equalities Committee**  
**Submission from the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)**  
**27 January 2017**

Established in 1984, the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is an independent charity working with others across England and Wales to bring about a 'more just, more equal, more cooperative society.' CARJ has for a number of years organised and serviced a **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Support Network**. The Network meets three or four times a year and brings together some fifty individuals and organisations who have an interest in GRT communities.

The Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) is joining CARJ in making this submission. CSAN is an official agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. It is a family of social action charities working for the most vulnerable people in society.

We welcome the Inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee to look at progress over the past five years and what action the Government can take to tackle inequalities suffered by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Communities in the UK. As the Committee recognises, GRT communities are perhaps the most marginalised communities in the UK. While there have been a number of positive developments in some local areas, on the whole, **we do not believe that significant progress has been made** over the past five years in improving their situation. In fact, a case could be made that it has **worsened** during that period.

- The recent **EHRC Review (2016)**, *Healing a Divided Britain*, found GRT communities still suffer low rates of educational attainment, high rates of exclusion, low levels of economic activity, are less likely to be in work, are more likely to be self-employed, face accommodation difficulties, are over-represented in prison, suffer poor mental and physical health and poorer access to health care, and face stigma and discrimination from the general public and serious media racism, bias and stereotyping.
- **The Runnymede Trust's Submission to CERD (2016)** recalled the earlier recommendation by CERD that the UK Government should ensure that measures are taken to improve the access of GRT communities to education, health care and services, employment and adequate accommodation. Runnymede concluded that the UK Government had taken no substantive steps to address those inequalities and that in many ways the situation of the Travelling communities has **worsened rather than improved**. CARJ is a signatory to the Runnymede Trust Report.

- **The Traveller Movement's Submission to the UN Human Rights Council** (2016) noted that GRT Communities continue to experience some of the highest levels of discrimination and poorest life chances in the UK. Specifically, they highlighted the high percentages who experience hate crime and discrimination in education, accommodation, health care and employment. The Submission noted that GRT communities sometimes are an invisible minority because some services do not record GRT ethnicity. CARJ is a signatory to the TM Submission.

In addition to these Reports, we wish to share the following information, impressions and reflections which have been garnered from members of the CARJ GRT Support Network, based on their regular, first hand contact with GRT communities over many years. Some of the following falls outside the specific 28 Commitments of the Ministerial Working Group (noted in parentheses - Cmm) but we feel they are relevant to the underlying concerns of the Inquiry.

## **Education**

We welcome the acknowledgement that GRT pupils are a particularly vulnerable group (Cmm 1). The under-achievement of GRT pupils at primary and secondary school has complex roots which involve: school admissions, attendance, the need for time consuming support from school staff, literacy, aspects of Traveller culture, Ofsted grading and transition to secondary school.

We welcome the **commitment to pilot a Virtual Head Teacher for GRT pupils** in a small number of local authorities (Cmm 2). The results of the pilot in Kent seem promising and we would encourage the Government to consider expanding these pilots.

Attendance is a serious concern, but we are not convinced that the appropriate way to improve **attendance** of GRT pupils is through stricter legislation which could become punitive and counter-productive. (Cmm 3). There has been a noticeable improvement in some areas in settled GRT children's attendance at primary school. Attendance tends to fall off in secondary school and many GRT children start Secondary School but do not finish. Attendance is partly linked to **parents seeing the importance of education** for their children. The present generation of young Traveller parents largely accepts the benefit of at least primary education, but too often parents have had negative experiences of school themselves. Regular attendance is **also linked to Site provision**. There is a need for secure authorised sites to facilitate a stable relationship between home and school. Living on unauthorised sites under threat of enforcement and having to move on at short notice from temporary stopping places, undermine the hard work of education professionals, parental commitment and children's stability.

**Exclusions** are a common problem, even in schools that are succeeding with GRT pupils. We welcome the commitment to explore alternatives to exclusion. (Cmm 4)

We welcome the commitment to address **bullying** (Cmm 5), but we are concerned that in the wake of Brexit the spike in hate crime against GRT pupils is increasing.

Some schools are doing remarkable work with GRT pupils, and this achievement is not always fully acknowledged. We are specifically aware of the **excellent work** done by **Crays Hill School in Essex where almost all pupils are from GRT backgrounds**. Ofsted has acknowledged their success but has called attention to absences and temporary exclusions. This is an illustration of the complexity of the situation, where schools which are very good at working with GRT pupils may still struggle with absences and exclusions. We believe a serious case study of Crays Hill and other schools with a similar record of success with GRT pupils would be helpful. (Cmm 6)

We would also suggest case studies of **extra-school support programmes** such as on-site homework programmes and internship programmes. (Cmm 6)

Finally, we are concerned at the **cuts in educational support services** related to GRT communities. One former Ethnic Minorities & Traveller Achievement Service has been reduced substantially and subsumed into a Countywide Traveller Unit, which has drastically affected staff ability to assist Traveller children transition to secondary education. It would be useful to know in what other areas similar services have faced serious cuts.

## **Health**

GRT communities suffer considerably poorer health (including mental health) and lower life expectancy than the majority community. These health problems are increased by difficulties accessing GP surgeries, travelling, lack of understanding of the health care system, illiteracy, and other factors.

**Unplanned moves** impact negatively on consistent care and monitoring by hard-pressed health professionals. While there is some consensus regarding the poor health of GRT communities generally, there appears to be a lack of research evidence into the physical and mental health impacts of enforced clearances and evictions.

The impact of forced moves on vulnerable individuals, especially women, within the Traveller community is apparent through increased reliance on medication, self-imposed withdrawal from social contacts within their community, reported feelings of despair about the future and suicidal thoughts. There also appears to be an over-reliance on prescription medicine and few referrals to psychological services. Within the Traveller community there is a cultural bias against disclosing mental health problems; but this is changing faster, especially among women, than health professionals appear to realise and facilitate.

## Accommodation

We are disappointed that the 28 commitments of the Ministerial Working Group include very few serious commitments relating to accommodation and planning. (Cmm 12 and 13) The **provision of a reasonable number of well maintained GRT Sites** in suitable locations is perhaps the most important support that UK society could offer to these communities. This is a mountain to climb and would require a serious commitment on the part of national and local government and improved relations between GRT communities, local authorities and local communities.

If we fail to address this challenge, the example of Dale Farm is likely to become more typical in the future. Members of the CARJ GRT Support Network have been involved in the protracted negotiations around Dale Farm which is a prolonged tragedy and a lesson in poor relations between GRT communities and local authorities. (see appendix)

We are not optimistic about the future in terms of Site provision. The *Housing and Planning Act 2016*, and the guidance documents related to it, have eased the obligation on local authorities to carry out accommodation needs assessments for GRT communities and restricted the definition of 'Traveller' to those who have a nomadic habit of life (thus excluding long term settled Travellers). It remains to be seen how these changes will affect GRT communities and their need for accommodation. Given the historic reluctance of local authorities to provide authorised Gypsy and Traveller Sites or approve planning applications for privately owned sites, the impact of these changes could be seriously undermining for GRT communities.

## Hate Crime

Hate crime has long been recognised as an important challenge. The UK has strong legislation to deal with it, dating back to the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*; and there have been a series of Action Plans relating to hate crime over the years. (Cmm 14)

We welcome the recent publication of ***Action Against Hate: the UK Government's Plan for tackling hate crime (Home Office, July 2016)***. The recent Plan does not give sufficient space to hate crime specifically against GRT communities, but we welcome the reference to working with organisations already present in GRT communities and to establishing third party reporting centres to encourage and support reporting among GRT communities (para 90). There is a need for such cooperation with local projects, as GRT communities often do not report incidents of hate crime because, on the whole, they do not trust authorities.

We also welcome ***True Vision***, the police-funded website designed to provide information about hate crime. (Cmm 16)

The submission of our partner organisation, the Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), to the Inquiry of the Home Affairs Committee into Hate Crime and Its Violent Consequences (2016) highlighted the **under-reporting** of incidents of hate crime against members of GRT communities. This under-reporting is often due to a lack of confidence that reports will lead to effective action and a mistrust of both criminal justice agencies and the police.

The primary requirement to increase the reporting of hate crime is the creation of trust amongst GRT communities in the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and those who scrutinise these bodies. The key to achieving this is showing that reports of hate crime from GRT communities will be treated with equal gravity to those from other communities.

By not pursuing prosecutions in cases of anti-Traveller racism, the police and the CPS can reinforce a 'them and us' mindset in Travellers. Successful prosecutions should be publicised in order to give victims the confidence that their complaints will be taken seriously and perpetrators will be prosecuted.

We welcome the commitment that the Home Office will promote better recording of all hate crimes (Cmm 15), but progress on this remains to be seen.

There is **limited data** on the prevalence of hate crime against GRT communities and the efficacy of the authorities in dealing with it. Whilst police forces are required by the government to record the ethnicity of users and employees, 81% of UK police forces do not currently have a category for GRT communities (See: *Inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in ethnic monitoring systems of Police forces in the UK* by the Traveller Movement 2016).

Criminal justice sector agencies should be required to include the GRT communities in their ethnic monitoring systems. Furthermore, we believe the issue can only be properly identified and then tackled if the Government disaggregates the available data, which it does not currently do. In the CERD Report from August 2016, they recommend that the UK Government systematically collect disaggregated data on hate crimes against GRT communities.

Finally, CARJ is hearing from a variety of its networks of the **post Brexit spike in hate crime**. We would encourage the government and others to look more closely at the link between Brexit and hate crime, and the IPPR Report *Roma Communities and Brexit* is a step in the right direction.

## **Criminal Justice**

Over representation of those from GRT communities in prisons is long established. The CARJ Network has included prison chaplains and representatives from the **Irish Chaplaincy** which is known for its important work with Travellers in prisons. Their educational work (including a **literacy training programme**) is a model of good practice.

Another model of good practice is the recently established **Travellers Forum at Chelmsford Prison**. This bi-monthly event, supported by management, seems to be very successful.

Crucial to offering better support to GRT groups in prison is adequate ethnic monitoring within the criminal justice system.

In 2011 the code 'W3 -Gypsy or Irish Traveller' was added to the P-Nomis monitoring system for the first time in the adult prison estate. The Irish Chaplaincy found that the introduction of this ethnic monitoring led to many prisons holding Traveller groups, appointing Traveller reps and holding Traveller history month events in an effort to promote inclusion.

Research from the Irish Chaplaincy's Traveller Equality Project also found that there is a real appetite among adult GRT prisoners to engage with education programmes and that they are more likely to see the benefit of education and vocational programmes for resettlement. Thus the identification of GRT prisoners will make it more likely that they will be offered the available educational support.

Similar improved outcomes for GRT children could be achieved with the introduction of such ethnic monitoring in the youth justice system, where education and support is even more vital.

## **Financial Inclusion and Credit Unions**

We welcome the commitment to improve financial inclusion among GRT communities and specifically to ensure that GRT communities are aware of the services that Credit Unions can offer. (Cmm 27) The Church of England and most of the main stream Churches are committed to financial inclusion and Credit Unions. We think there may be considerable potential in a project to create Church supported Credit Unions specifically for GRT communities.

## Other Public and Voluntary Sector Support for GRT Communities

There are a variety of ways in which Public and Voluntary Sector organisations can support GRT communities in regard to education, health, accommodation, hate crime, criminal justice and financial inclusion. We are especially aware of the support currently being offered by members of the CARJ GRT Support Network – including on-site ministry, advocacy, lobbying, accompanying people, etc. The following are just a few examples of public and voluntary sector projects:

- The **Basildon SOS Bus Project** goes to a site and the bus is used as a base for several services including a children's centre, NHS health checks and local council officials who come on to help improve standards of living for the Travellers. Volunteers regularly offer arts and crafts, help with passport applications, literacy, health checks, etc.
- Some years ago a Catholic Children's Society ran an **on-site homework and adult education project** on a local site in London.
- One religious sister oversees a **flat in north London** where Travellers can find a listening ear and time for prayer
- **Police Community Support Officers** made daily patrols on an Essex site until their numbers were cut.
- A **parish in Essex** was generally welcoming to Travellers and **sponsored meetings for GRT communities** in the parish hall which were also attended by Councillors and Council Staff .

The role of faith communities should be recognised. There are churches across the country who can influence their local communities. With the Irish Traveller community in particular either actively practising or retaining strong links to Roman Catholicism, parishes and schools can play an important role in welcoming the Traveller community into the local area.

Unfortunately, it is our impression that a number of public and voluntary support services for GRT communities **have been cut back** in recent years. It would be very useful to have a survey of such projects (public, voluntary and faith-based), with information on whether they have been sustained and what effect they have had over a period of years.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Despite considerable good will on all sides, there remains in UK society a widely held negative attitude towards GRT communities. For a variety of reasons, these communities remain perhaps the most marginalised communities in our society. Their situation has not generally improved in the past few years, and it may have worsened. The following are a few areas that need serious and immediate attention:

- Adequate and suitable site provision is perhaps the highest priority. This will require action at national and local government levels.
- Schools must be supported to respond creatively to the challenge of young people and families from GRT backgrounds. Regular attendance is important, but must be encouraged rather than coerced through punitive and counter-productive legislation.
- Out of school projects to support GRT education should be encouraged and supported.
- The serious health needs of GRT communities must be addressed. The health service should be alert to these needs and third party support should be encouraged.
- Recognition should be given to the link between forced movement and health, especially for women, in GRT communities.
- Hate crime must become unacceptable across society both socially and legally, and law enforcement must take the rise in hate crime against GRT communities seriously.
- The criminal justice system should become aware of the presence of prisoners from GRT backgrounds and provide support for their rehabilitation – literacy programmes and initiatives modelled on the Chelmsford Travellers Forum should be encouraged.
- The possibility of credit unions as a resource for financial empowerment of the GRT community should be seriously explored.
- It is vital that public services which support GRT communities are adequately funded and sustained. Also, it is important, when services are devolved to cities like Manchester, that these recommendations and commitments are taken into account. It would be a shame if positive new initiatives were restricted to certain areas.

Finally, it is important to build a partnership between the public and voluntary sector in supporting GRT communities. The Churches should be an important part of that partnership.

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## Appendix - Dale Farm

The tragic story of Dale Farm, in which members of the CARJ Network have been involved, is not typical. However, it contains key elements that are present widely in the GRT experience across the UK. This is a brief historical reflection. The Committee might want to look at the Dale Farm experience more closely in order to learn lessons for the future.

Dale Farm had been operated as a scrap yard and impounded vehicles site for over 20 years. The owner sold the land to Travellers following Basildon Council's refusal to give him approval to expand the site. The Travellers constructed hard-standings and capped the contaminated land which was subdivided into 53 individual yards eventually housing some 86 families. Some families moved to Dale Farm because of clearances and evictions from other unauthorised sites and kinship ties to existing residents. Residents sought retrospective planning permission which had been already granted to a number of pitches and yards on the adjacent previously open green-field Oak Lane site.

In 2011, a clearance operation took place. After the clearance, many of the displaced families returned to live on the Traveller owned private road bordering Oak Lane having failed to find alternative sites and also because they wished their children to resume at Crays Hill primary school. The younger children repeatedly asked their parents when they could go back to their Dale Farm homes, the older ones used the devastated site as an adventure playground.

The Environment Agency eventually declared the area unsafe for children. The Red Cross visited and had a number of concerns.

Basildon Council declared the former Dale Farm and the authorised Oak lane site as unfit for human habitation and identified the entire area as open to applications by private developers for 500 houses subject to the developers remediating the land and bringing the infrastructure up to standard. Early in 2016 the Travellers were approached by developers and are now under pressure to sell their contaminated land and move on. If they do sell, they will have made themselves homeless; and the Council will have no responsibility to assist. They will have freed up the green belt land and will be better able to meet their new build targets. This whole saga has further exacerbated the distrust between Travellers, the local Council and the settled community.

While Dale Farm may have appeared an untidy settlement lacking in some amenities, it was a vibrant community situated in a secluded area at some distance from settled residents. Over the years many Travellers, especially the women and children, became involved in the wider community joining in local parish fund-raiser social events for local and international charities and humanitarian appeals. Thus Travellers in Dale Farm and Oak Lane sponsor children overseas while living in harsh conditions themselves. Travellers do not seek recognition of their generosity but it is regrettable that official and media attention focuses on behaviour which reinforces negative stereotypes and prejudice.