

Useful contacts/reading

Friends, Families - Travellers is a national charity based in Brighton. They work on behalf of Gypsies and Travellers offering resources, activities, practical guides, DVD's and training.
www.gypsy-traveller.org

Travellers' Times - A national magazine for Gypsies and Travellers and people who work with them. Also on-line at www.travellerstimes.org.uk

Books

Gypsy and Traveller Law - Chris Johnson and Marc Willers. ISBN: 190330752X-This book has a 5* rating from Amazon and brings together all areas of law affecting the travelling community. It also aims to empower Gypsies and Travellers to secure their rights and challenge prejudice.

Research Reports

Common Ground; Equality, good relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers, published in 2006 by the Commission for Racial Equality, accessed at their web site. www.equalityhumanrights.com
The health of Gypsies and Travellers in the U.K. by Zoe Matthews, can be downloaded from www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk

Providing Gypsy and Traveller sites: contentious spaces, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation - download the report from www.jrf.org.uk

Out in the Open; Providing Accommodation, Promoting Understanding and Recognising Rights of Gypsies and Travellers. Published by the Building and Social Housing Foundation at www.bshf.org

Acknowledgments

This fact sheet was commissioned by the Dorset Equality Partnership, and funded by South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, as a tool to use when undertaking Equality Analysis. This fact sheet was authored by South West Alliance of Nomads (SWAN)

The fact sheet reflects the views and opinions of the authors, which may vary from others sharing this protected characteristic, but will help to give you a starting point on which to base your analysis.



Gypsies & Travellers factsheet

There is a tendency to refer to all nomadic people in the UK as 'Gypsies and Travellers', but this masks the vast differences between the varied groups of travelling people. Within the UK, there are many types of travelling people, including:

- Romany Gypsies
- Roma
- Scottish Gypsies and Travellers
- Welsh Travellers (Kale)
- Irish Travellers
- New Travellers
- Bargees
- Showmen and Circus People

In Dorset the main travelling groups are Romany Gypsy, Irish & Scottish Travellers, New Traveller, and Circus and Showmen. An understanding of their history and culture makes it easier to meet the needs of our present day travelling community.

History and Culture of Dorset Travelling People

Romany Gypsies

This is the largest group of travelling people in the UK. Originally thought to have originated from Egypt, they therefore became known as Gypsies. However, linguistic studies of English Romany in the 19th century suggested that their origins were from Northern India, as the language was mainly Sanskrit with words from other languages added as a result of contact with other cultures. There are still Roma tribes living in India who share the same linguistic and cultural roots.

Early records show that Romany Gypsies arrived in Britain in the early 16th century. By the end of the century, however, laws were being passed forbidding Gypsies to enter the country as a Gypsy, and if Gypsies did not give up their way of life they would be put to death. Despite this, Romany Gypsies survived persecution and were used for seasonal labour by the farming community. Their itinerant lifestyle made them invaluable for this type of work

For Romany people, the family is very much their support system. They observe strict hygiene laws known as

Mochadi, which consist of important principles about, for example, hand washing prior to handling food or dishes, after getting dressed in the morning and before going to the kitchen. Latrines are kept at a distance from the living area. Most Gypsies find modern housing difficult as it breaks Mochadi, and a house can seem a dark and depressing place because they are very much "out of doors" people.

Irish Travellers, or Pavee

These are one of the oldest Travelling people of the British Isles and some scholars believe them to be the descendents of the original hunter gatherer people of these islands. They speak two languages: Gammon, in the south of Ireland, and Cant, spoken in the north and the west of Ireland. Originally tinsmiths and peddlers, they brought information from place to place, which was much valued as before 1700 Dublin was the only Irish town to have a newspaper. They share the same hygiene laws as Romany, despite having little to do with each other with intermarriage rare even to this day.

Scottish Travellers

Scottish Travellers developed between 1500 and 1800 from Scottish craft workers, who married into migrant Romany groups from France and Spain. In 1969 one third of them were still living in tents. Much of Scotland's traditional music has been collected from Scottish Traveller families, have their own language known as Cant. In 2008 a landmark ruling in the court identified Scottish Gypsy/ Travellers as a distinct ethnic group bringing them within the protection of the Equality Act 2010.

New Travellers

Sometimes wrongly called New Age Travellers, they started to form in the 1970s. Mostly from the settled community, some chose the way of life for environmental reasons. Others have been forced through economic and social circumstances to live on the road. For example, in the 1980s, many homeless young people from areas where poverty and unemployment were high took to the road looking for employment.

Showmen and Circus People

This group probably travel the most out of all the Travelling people. In the middle ages, traders from Europe brought goods to trade from all over the world. Travelling entertainers such as jugglers, musicians and tumblers performed wherever people gathered to buy their goods. In 1889 the fairground people formed the Showmen's Guild. Some of the guild members are from Gypsy descent, others are not.



Legislation and Gypsy and Travellers

In 1968 the Caravan Sites Act stipulated that local councils had an obligation to provide sites for Travellers. However, the sites that were provided were often redundant waste sites or under flyovers, places no one else would want to live. In 1994 the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act abolished the obligation for local councils to provide sites. Gypsies and Travellers were advised to find their own suitable sites and request planning permission. The reality was that many families had to go into housing, as Gypsies found it hard to overcome local opposition in order to get planning permission granted.

More recently, the Human Rights Act of 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 have given Gypsies and Travellers greater protection against discrimination. Case Law has established that Gypsies and Irish /Scottish Travellers can constitute an ethnic group within the definition of the race protected characteristic, and many New Travellers can also be afforded protection under the religion and belief characteristic introduced in the new Equality Act 2010.

Nevertheless, many of the traditional stopping places such as commons, old roads etc. are now being sealed up, making it more difficult to live traditionally. Families that chose to take housing have reported discrimination from the settled population and many have been diagnosed as clinically depressed. Many young Gypsies living on estates have lost their cultural roots and have ended up with a dysfunctional family life.

Some facts about Gypsies and Travellers:

- Some facts about Gypsies and Travellers
- It is difficult to count how many Gypsies and Travellers there are in the UK because they move so often, but it is thought that there are around 120,000.
- Romany Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers are legally recognised as ethnic minority groups.
- In terms of health and education, Gypsies and Travellers are one of the most deprived groups in Britain. 20% of Gypsy and Traveller mothers will experience the death of a child (this figure is less than 1% for the settled community), and Gypsies and Travellers have the highest mortality rate - life expectancy being 10 years lower than the national average.
- It would take less than one square mile to accommodate every unauthorised caravan in England.
- It costs the taxpayer over £20,000,000 a year to evict travelling people from one place to another, which could be used to build many sites. One South West authority saw their enforcement bills reduced from £200,000 a year to £5,000 a year, by providing a legal stopping place. Authorised sites can make economic sense - by reducing enforcement charges, and receiving rent and council tax.
- ¾ of Gypsy and Traveller caravans in England are on authorised, legal sites.
- Over 90% of all the local authorities in England have Gypsies and Travellers living in them, or travelling through them.
- Travellers like to provide their own power, and do not rely on the national grid - their requirements are low impact and eco-friendly.
- A New Traveller site in Dorset is being designed which will include a living roof on the utility block and will be incorporating eco-friendly building methods.
- The average size of an unauthorised encampment is 4 caravans. Large unauthorised sites are uncommon.
- 90% of Gypsy and Traveller planning applications are turned down on first request, compared with 10% of first planning applications from the settled community.
- Not all Gypsies and Travellers travel. 2/3 of the U.K.'s Gypsy and Traveller population live in houses.
- There is no evidence that the crime rate for Gypsies and Travellers is higher than for other groups.
- Gypsies and Travellers start work younger than settled communities and have a strong work ethic. They are traditionally self employed and work in trades that are mobile, such as building services. Only a small number of Gypsies and Travellers receive benefits.
- Over one quarter of Gypsies and Travellers are homeless and don't have a legal place to stop. Many have to use stopping places that are dangerous, unsuitable and squalid with no access to amenities.

