

Greater Manchester

GM = EqAL

Equality Alliance

**Inclusive Language
Subgroup**

**Gypsies,
Roma and
Travellers
(GRT+)**

Preamble

- This guidance is the product of discussion and research by members of the GM=EqAl Inclusive Language Subgroup.
- It is part of a series created to help GM=EqAl members and staff be respectful and consistent in how we talk and write about the issues we work on.
- It sets out our agreed definitions and terminology around **GYPSIES**, **ROMA** and **TRAVELLERS (GRT)** and the UK's other (**GRT+**) nomadic communities. More than in other guidance in this series, the focus is on defining and explaining the communities, which are little known in many circles. Where there is little ambiguity as to their acceptability, we have not bothered to list derogatory terms used historically to smear and oppress travelling communities.
- GM=EqAl is keen for others to share and adopt our guidance, and welcomes dialogue with partners in order to keep evolving the documents along with our understanding.
- This guidance has been robustly generated but does not claim absolute authority on any topic.

Short version

DO

- Ask people for their preferred term for their identity, e.g. Gypsy, traveller, showman

DON'T

- Refer to Roma people as Gypsies

UK Gypsies and Travellers

The phrase 'Gypsy and Traveller' encompasses a range of groups with different histories, cultures and beliefs. In the UK they include:

- **Gypsies:** Romani people who originally left India over a thousand years ago and dispersed across the globe. Along the way they were defined by others as being 'Egyptian', which became shortened to Gypsy. They have historically faced persecution, including slavery and genocide.
- **English Gypsies / Romany Gypsies / Romanicals:** a recognised ethnic minority group in UK law (Equalities Act 2010).
- **Scottish Gypsy Travellers:** travelling people in Scotland, who, while they share much in common with other travelling groups, are recognised as a separate ethnic group in Scotland. There are distinct lowland and highland groups.
- **Kalé / Welsh Gypsies:** Romani people based mainly in Northwest Wales.
- **Irish Travellers / Pavee / Mincéirs:** whilst having much in common with other nomadic groups, Irish Travellers have different ethnic roots and do not originate from India. They are recognised in UK law as a distinct ethnic group and protected from discrimination under the Equalities Act 2010.

UK Gypsies and Travellers

- Although most Gypsies and Travellers see travelling as part of their identity, they can choose to live in different ways including:
 - moving regularly around the country from site to site and being 'on the road'
 - living permanently in caravans or mobile homes, on sites provided by the council, or on private sites
 - living in settled accommodation during winter or school term-time, travelling during the summer months
 - living in 'bricks and mortar' housing, settled together, but still retaining a strong commitment to Gypsy/Traveller culture and traditions
- The 2011 Census indicated that around 75% of Gypsies and Travellers in England live in bricks and mortar accommodation, whilst around 25% live in a caravan or other temporary structure.

UK Gypsy and Traveller languages

- English Gypsies spoke a variant of the Indic language **Romani** until the 19th century, when it was replaced by English and **Angloromani**, a mixed language that blends Romani vocabulary with English syntax.
- There are two dialects of Angloromani: **Southern Angloromani** (spoken in the Southeast, Southwest, Midlands, East Anglia, and South Wales) and **Northern Angloromani** (spoken in the Northeast, Northwest, Yorkshire, Scottish Borders, and Northeast of Wales).
- **Scottish Cant** (a mixed language, primarily Scots and Romani) is spoken by Lowland Traveller groups. Highland Traveller's Cant (or **Beurla Reagaird**) is a Gaelic-based cant of the Indigenous Highland Traveller population. The cants are mutually unintelligible.
- The language of the Irish Travellers is not linked to Romani. It is known as the **Cant** or **Gammon**, but often referred to as Shelta by linguists and academics.
- Historically the Kale in Wales spoke **Welsh Romani**, though they were also (and remain) an important part of the Welsh speaking societies of the areas they have traditionally inhabited.

The Roma

- Roma is a broad term used in the UK for the Romani groups, descended from those who left India between 900 and 1100 AD, who settled in Central and Eastern Europe. Traditionally, they travelled from place to place, but most are now 'sedentary'.
- Roma are still marginalised and ghettoised in many countries. They are often the most visible ethnic minority group, sometimes making up 10% of the total population. The largest populations are in Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and the former Yugoslavia.
- Roma people first came to the UK as asylum seekers. They were subject to strict immigration and work restrictions, which contributed to distrust towards questionnaires and detailed questions about themselves. After the EU accessions of 2004 and 2007, until Brexit changed things, they began coming to the UK as economic migrants.
- Roma in the UK face a unique set of challenges as recent migrants who have experienced centuries of discrimination elsewhere in Europe.
- Many speak one of the many Romani dialects as a first language, usually with the language of their country of origin as a second language (e.g. Polish or Romanian).

GRT and GRT+

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are often categorised together under the acronym **GRT** in Britain. The wider - **GRT+** - travelling community includes:

- **Showmen / Show people**: families with a tradition of living and working in travelling fairs are usually described as Showmen.
- **Circus people**: can be regarded as similar to Showmen, although the trades are often different.
- **Bargees**: people who live on the canals in the UK. Some Bargee families can trace their families back many generations. Some families have Romani roots, while others have taken to the canals in more recent decades.
- **New Travellers / New Age Travellers**: people who live a travelling lifestyle but who are not ethnically defined as Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy Travellers or Irish Travellers. While many have taken up nomadic life in their own lifetime, some families have been on the road for three consecutive generations. The New Traveller culture grew out of the hippie and free-festival movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

GRT+ communities share common characteristics, such as the importance of family and/or community networks; a nomadic way of life in their history or present, a tendency toward self-employment, experience of disadvantage and having the poorest health outcomes in the UK.

Other definitions

- Under English planning law, 'Gypsies and Travellers' includes Romany gypsies, Irish Travellers and New (Age) Travellers, whether or not they have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently.
- However, it excludes "members of an organised group of Travelling Showpeople or circus people travelling together as such".

[\[www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites\]](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites)

- The 2021 Census had a 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' category, and a new 'Roma' category.

Language guidance

- 'Gypsy' is commonly used in the UK, where many or most Romany people embrace it, though some may consider it an insult.
- Gypsy is considered a highly discriminatory term by many Roma people.
- It is therefore best to ask individuals how they like to be referred to, and follow their lead.

More information

- A short film telling the history of GRT people in Britain
www.travellerstimes.org.uk/heritage/roads-past-short-history-Britains-Gypsies-Roma-and-Travellers
- House of Commons Library briefing paper on Gypsies and Travellers
www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/roma-info-leaflet.pdf
- Equality Act protections of Gypsies and Travellers
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/protected-characteristics/gypsies-and-travellers-race-discrimination
- House of Commons Committee report explaining inequalities faced by GRT communities
publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html
- NHS briefing on Roma service users
www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/roma-info-leaflet.pdf

