

A Report by the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition which assesses the Progress made by the UK Government on Gypsy/Traveller issues in relation to the:

concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD): United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. 10/12/2003.

The Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition (GTLRC) is an alliance of Gypsies, Irish Travellers and New Travellers who come together to lobby for reforms to increase Traveller sites provision and to raise their level of social inclusion. The GTLRC is recognised as the principal point of contact with the Gypsy/Traveller community by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The GTLRC recently won the prestigious Liberty human rights award for 2004/5.

The GTLRC has the following comments to make on the progress of the UK Government on Gypsy/Traveller issues in relation to passages of the CERD report (which are in italics), and makes a number of other relevant points which have human rights implications.

(CERD report para 5) The Committee commends the State party's efforts to address more stringently the issue of incitement to racial hatred, including the introduction of a mechanism whereby the Metropolitan Police will provide a central advice point for all forces in England and Wales in relation to possible offences of incitement to racial hatred, as well as the increase in the maximum penalty for incitement to racial hatred from two to seven years' imprisonment under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.

Incitement to Racial Hatred

In October 2003 villagers in a Sussex village called Firle burnt a caravan with the word 'pikey' written on the caravan (a pejorative term for Gypsy/Traveller). There were also effigies of a Gypsy family inside the caravan. This event and action was organised by the Firle bonfire society as part of their bonfire celebrations, lead members of the group including a local councillor chanted "burn them out" as the caravan was torched. Later it was claimed this action was a protest in response to a recent unauthorised encampment.

Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, called for the perpetrators to be prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred. Trevor Phillips stated (BBC report November 2004)

"Gypsies and Travellers probably suffer the most discrimination in this country. This is clearly an example of incitement to racial hatred. You couldn't really get more provocative than this. The police have to take it seriously. If we are asked at the CRE, we will say this case should be pursued and the people involved should be punished - which can lead to seven years in prison. The idea that you can carry out an act like this and then apologise and get away with it, is exactly what produces a culture that says racism and discrimination and victimisation of people, because of what they are, is OK."

The Crown Prosecution Service initiated an investigation but surprisingly decided there was insufficient evidence to proceed further. The Reviewing lawyer Patrick Stevens said that for anyone to be prosecuted, it could only be on the basis of their own words or acts. He said the general picture which emerged from the evidence was of a "fairly disorganised group of individuals playing different parts in the event". The GTLRC is

deeply concerned by this the Firlle bonfire Society is an organised group and we would have thought there would have been some level of planning and cooperation in this event. There may be a need to review legislation on incitement to racial hatred and ask if there are 'loopholes' that allow those responsible for incidents such as the one at Firlle to escape what we consider is a legitimate prosecution.

(CERD Report para 12) The Committee also reiterates its concern over the fact that the State party continues to uphold its restrictive interpretation of the provisions of article 4 of the Convention. It recalls that such interpretation is in conflict with the State party's obligations under article 4 (b) of the Convention and draws the State party's attention to the Committee's general recommendation XV according to which the provisions of article 4 are of a mandatory character. In the light of the State party's recognition that the right to freedom of expression and opinion are not absolute rights, and in the light of statements by some public officials and media reports that may adversely influence racial harmony, the Committee recommends that the State party reconsider its interpretation of article 4.

Regarding the media the report also states

(CERD Report para 13) The Committee is concerned about the increasing racial prejudice against ethnic minorities, asylum-seekers and immigrants reflected in the media and the reported lack of effectiveness of the Press Complaints Commission in dealing with this issue.

The Committee recommends that the State party consider further how the Press Complaints Commission can be made more effective and can be further empowered to consider complaints received from the Commission for Racial Equality as well as other groups or organizations working in the field of race relations.

The Media

The past year has seen some of the worst race reporting witnessed in the UK. In March 2004 the Express played upon racist stereotypes against Gypsies/Roma and claimed that when the East European accession states entered into the EU hundreds of thousands of Roma/Gypsies would "flood" into the UK "to leach of the UK". Journalists on the Express called upon the Press Complaints Commission to assist them in resisting the instructions of their editors and management to write such articles which they believed to be in breach of the National Union of Journalists code of conduct. The Minister for Europe described the reporting as a 'rancid hate campaign'.

The UK has also witnessed a spate of media reports on planning cases involving Gypsies and Travellers. The reports have often been one sided and grossly inaccurate, also emotive language has been used Travellers being referred to as "thugs" and "rural terrorists" and "outlaws",

The Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition and others have made numerous complaints to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) about these reports. None have been upheld or acted upon bar

one complaint regarding a site in Cottenham. On several occasions the Daily Mail claimed that 750 Travellers were living on a site called Cottenham in Cambridgeshire and that thousands more were poised to move in. Given the tensions in this village such claims were greatly unhelpful to community relations. Traveller support groups supplied the PCC with evidence that there were in reality only about 200 Travellers on the site. Journalists from a number of newspapers have complained to the CRE about pressure from their editorial staff to write reports such as those that we are concerned about.

In 2003 Stonewall wrote a report 'Understanding Prejudices', it found (page 8) in a survey of people who admitted to being prejudiced towards minorities that 14% of the respondents expressed dislike of Gypsies/Travellers, slightly greater than asylum seekers who registered a 13% disapproval rating. The report (page 12) found that those who expressed prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers cited a number of stereotypes to justify their prejudices such as claims that Gypsies and Travellers don't pay taxes, have unreliable business practices and don't respect the environment. We believe that the media, both locally and nationally, has created many of these harmful stereotypes. In May 2003 an Irish Traveller teenager called Johnny Delaney was kicked to death in Ellesmere Port amidst racist taunting. It is our fear that continued negative media reporting will increase intolerance towards Gypsies and Travellers and increase the frequency of racial attack.

The GTLRC firmly believes that the self regulating Press Complaints Commission is failing. A more independent PCC needs to be established, we would also like to see the Equality and Human Rights Commission given representation on the PCC. It is our fear that if the media does not show greater caution and fairness then relations between the Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities will be further strained, which could have dangerous results. Already there is amongst some members of the settled community a state of hysteria about Gypsies/Travellers for which we hold the media responsible.

CERD Report para 7. The Committee welcomes the establishment of a Community Cohesion Unit within the Home Office, tasked with carrying forward the Government's programme to encourage the building and strengthening of cohesive communities.

The Home Office

The GTLRC has held a number of meetings with the office of the Deputy Prime Minister over the past two years and there has been a flow of information between the two. We would like to see the establishment of a similar relationship with the Home Office and call upon it to be more proactive in developing dialogue with the GTLRC, in particular we believe that the Community Cohesion Unit could play an invaluable role in combating the growing tensions between the Traveller and settled communities. This unit would benefit by learning about the reconciliation work the GTLRC initiated in Cottenham a village which has attracted national headlines. There Travellers and villagers, as represented by the residents association, signed a joint statement which noted common ground between the two groups on a number of areas. This has helped ease community tensions.

CERD Report para 14. The Committee remains concerned at reports of attacks on asylum-seekers. In this regard, the Committee notes with concern that antagonism towards asylum-seekers has helped to sustain support for extremist political opinions. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt further measures and intensify its efforts to counter racial tensions generated through asylum issues, inter alia by developing public education programmes and promoting positive images of ethnic minorities, asylum-seekers and immigrants, as well as measures making the asylum procedures more equitable, efficient and unbiased.

Roma Coming Into The UK

We would like to bring to your attention that the Law Lords have ruled that the government's immigration rules racially discriminated against Roma (Gypsies) seeking entry into the UK.

The Home Office moved to cut asylum claims by stopping people, mostly Roma, from boarding flights to Britain from the Czech capital, Prague. The Civil rights group Liberty said it exposed "racism at the heart of the government's asylum policy".

(CERD Report para 22). While reiterating its satisfaction in connection with the enactment of the Human Rights Act of 1998, the Committee notes that no central body has been established to implement the Act. The Committee considers that the absence of such a body may undermine the effectiveness of the Act.

The Committee refers to the earlier commitment of the State party to consider establishing a Human Rights Commission in order to enforce the Act and the possibility of granting such a commission comprehensive competence to review complaints of human rights violations, and recommends an early decision in this regard.

A Single Equalities Commission

A new single equalities Commission (Equality and Human Rights Commission) is to be created. The CRE has prioritised the tackling of prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers as a key aim. We are fearful that this objective could be diluted when the CRE enters into the new Single Equalities Commission in 2007. We believe that tackling discrimination must be a key objective of the new Single Equalities Commission when it takes responsibility for race issues. Tackling racism against Gypsies and Travellers is one of the most pressing race relations issues in the UK and will require a long term programme of action. We welcome the fact that the CRE has created a Gypsy commissioner and Gypsy/Traveller steering group to help guide its work in this area. The new Single Equalities Commission should strive to maintain such representation. The CRE should have an immediate budget increase and the new Single Equalities Commission should be allocated greater resources for race work than what the CRE presently has as the CRE is clearly under funded, a fact which sometimes impedes its effectiveness.

CERD Report para 23. The Committee expresses concern about the discrimination faced by Roma/Gypsies/Travellers that is reflected, inter alia, in their higher child mortality rate, exclusion from schools, shorter life expectancy, poor housing conditions, lack of available camping sites, high unemployment rate and limited access to health services.

The Committee draws the attention of the State party to its general recommendation XXVII on discrimination against Roma and recommends that the State party develop further appropriate modalities of communication and dialogue between Roma/Gypsy/Traveller communities and central authorities. It also recommends that the State party adopt national strategies and programmes with a view to improving the situation of the Roma/Gypsies/Travellers against discrimination by State bodies, persons or organizations.

Accommodation

The report by Pat Niner 'The Provision and Condition of Local Authority Sites In England, 2002'. Stated that there was a shortage of Traveller sites and a need for approximately 4,500 transit and residential pitches. The shortage of Traveller sites is universally recognised as one of the chief obstacles in raising the social inclusion and life chances of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

Over the past eighteen months the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has been conducting a policy review into Gypsies/Travellers and at last new policies are emerging. The Government has issued a new draft circular to replace circular 1/94 and through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 created Regional Spatial Strategies that will not only create conventional housing but also Traveller sites. The Government also inserted into the Housing Act amendments creating a duty on councils to assess Gypsy/Traveller accommodation needs and create strategies to meet that assessed need.

We welcome the apparent pro-active role local authorities have to take in housing needs assessments. We hope this lays the new policies of councils open to challenge even long after they have been formulated where they have failed to consult. Statements of Community involvement (SCIs) will set out how councils intend to involve groups in the planning process and consultations will be scrutinized by planning inspectors to ensure that such consultation and involvement will take place. We hope that where Gypsies and Travellers are unhappy with SCIs some mechanism will be available whereby they can lodge their dissatisfaction with councils and even the planning inspectorate.

With reference to the early stages of preparing RSSs and DPDs, para 21 of the draft circular declares " Gypsies and Travellers should also be proactive in ensuring that they engage with local planning authorities to ensure their views are taken into account". We hope that the ODPM will organize or give generous support and assistance to initiatives to train Gypsies and Travellers/and their representatives on a regional and national level to understand the new planning system and be made aware of their rights. To this end we recommend that the ODPM in association with Regional Housing Boards organize a series of regional training events which bring together representatives of the Gypsy/Traveller community, planning officials and other stakeholders. Not only will this raise awareness of the new planning system but it will forge useful links between different stakeholders.

With regard to the transitional arrangements outlined in the draft circular, it is useful that local authorities are being required to undertake what one might call 'interim needs assessments' for Gypsy and Traveller sites, and to produce the results in the documentation for appeals. The transitional arrangements should suggest that the local authorities should get on with the task of identifying suitable land for sites immediately. Why should this be left until they have to produce the DPD (Draft Planning Document)? The new planning system may take several years for councils to identify a sufficient number of sites. We believe it would be preferable for local authorities in areas under pressure from unlawful developments, to identify suitable locations for sites immediately, instead of merely reacting to each successive application on land, which is more or less unsuitable. This would enable families facing eviction and homelessness the option of securing land where

development would be approved. It would also enable families and councils to avoid a number of legal challenges and enter into a process of land exchange (land swap) where Travellers can vacate land, considered inappropriate for development, for land where permission would be granted. The Government has stated such arrangements are a matter for councils to consider on a voluntary basis but has expressed concerns about the price differentials in such land exchanges. We believe the differentials can be minimised by councils using their powers of compulsory purchase to create affordable parcels of land.

Regarding affordability the draft circular states (para 32) that councils should consider including a 'rural exception policy' in the relevant LDD (Local Development Document) where there is a lack of affordable land. Again in order to promote affordability we would recommend that councils use their powers of compulsory purchase to create affordable land for Traveller site development. Also councils could consider establishing loans systems whereby Travellers can pay councils back to purchase land. Measures such as these will avoid price inflation whereby land becomes too expensive for most Traveller families and minimises the danger of land speculators buying strips of available and designated land and attempting to sell plots on unreasonable terms. There is a danger that price inflation, if unchecked, will discourage families from trying to secure land for site development, through the new processes of the planning system. There is a need for more detailed advice and guidance on creating affordable sites. We strongly suggest that support is given to some of these proposals on a trial basis as pilot projects run by councils but monitored by the ODPM.

We have also noted that John Prescott MP, Secretary of State at the ODPM, declared at the Labour Party conference in 2004 that Labour would help create affordable housing by releasing government owned land for development. We hope that this will be extended to the Gypsy and Traveller community for site development.

Annex C (6) of the draft circular states that sites should not be located on significantly contaminated land but apparently this does not rule out locations near or adjoining motorways, power lines, landfill sites or railway lines or motorways anymore than it does for conventional housing. The ODPM will be aware though that in the past a significant number of public sites have been located in highly marginal space. We ask for the Government to be highly vigilant about the quality of the land identified for public and private sites. Where councils fail in due consideration of identifying appropriate land swift intervention by the Government will set an invaluable precedent. However, if councils do identify hazardous land, which unfortunately will be likely in some cases, and there is no intervention then other councils will follow such examples and large numbers of Travellers will be consigned to living in highly marginal space, which will have a negative impact on their social inclusion and general life chances. A Task Force may be of assistance in ensuring such vigilance is maintained. The circular should make it clear that the Secretary of State will use their powers of intervention where inappropriate land is identified for development.

The Secretary of State has various powers of intervention in the new planning system. Annex D (9) of the draft circular describes for example how under section 21 (1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the Secretary of State has the power to modify the draft DPD. If they fail to do so the Secretary of State can under section 21 (4) of the Act direct that the relevant part of the document be submitted to him for approval. Furthermore, where a local planning authority has not prepared a DPD in the first place then under section 26 (2) of the Act the Secretary of State can direct them to prepare the necessary document – if they fail to do so then ultimately the Secretary of State can exercise their default power under section 27 and identify the necessary sites, proceed to an examination, and then approve the document. Councils in the past have proved to be reluctant to fulfil the most minimum of requirements regarding Gypsies and Travellers. It is likely that many councils will attempt to shirk their new responsibilities. The Secretary of State will therefore have to use their powers of intervention at the earliest possible opportunity. Swift intervention will set an example and will encourage councils to meet their responsibilities. However, failure to intervene on a sufficient level will lead to large numbers of councils shirking their responsibilities and many of the ills associated with the present planning system will continue.

On a more general level we still contend that the new planning guidance and Regional Spatial Strategies should be complemented by a statutory duty to provide/facilitate sites. The report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (Moving Forward, 2004) declared that such a duty would send out a clear message to councils and reinforce the effectiveness of Regional Spatial Strategies. This measure is still supported by the Commission for Racial Equality, National Farmers Union, Local Government Association amongst others. It should also be noted that the recent ODPM Select Committee report on Gypsy/Traveller Sites (November 2004) , after reflecting on the Government's proposals re Regional Spatial Strategies, continued to advocate the need for a duty. We hope that the Government will reconsider this option or failing that introduce the amendment tabled by Lord Avebury to the Housing Bill in November 2004 which proposed that the Secretary of State may, if at any time it appears to him to be necessary to do so, give directions to a local housing authority requiring it to exercise its powers under S 24 of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, to provide such sites for Gypsies, for the accommodation of such numbers of caravans, as may be specified in the directions. The Secretary of State would not give any directions under subsection (1) unless either:

- (a) there were Gypsy caravans on unauthorised sites in the area of the local authority at the previous January count, or
- (b) Gypsy families had been evicted from unauthorised sites in the area of the local authority during the previous calendar year.

This would come into operation on the day two years after the final publication of the Housing Act, thus giving councils ample time to respond to new government guidance and other requirements and recommendations related to Gypsy/Traveller accommodation.

Transit sites

We believe that the ability of Travellers/Gypsies to continue to enjoy a nomadic way of life is a basic human right. The European Court of Human Rights stated in its judgement on the case of Connors V UK (page 41).

“An unknown proportion of Gypsies and other Travellers still actively travel whether throughout the year, seasonally or on special or family occasions. Those who travel throughout the year may have no fixed base at all. There is little formal provision to accommodate Travellers and their trailers while on the road. There are just 300 transit pitches provided on local authority sites. Recent Gypsy counts have shown roughly ten times as many caravans on unauthorised encampments. Even taking into account the unknown number of private transit pitches, it is clear that ‘nomadism’ is currently mostly accommodated informally and often – from the viewpoint of both the settled community and Travellers – unsatisfactorily”.

The ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) has established a site refurbishment grant of eight million pounds for 2005/6. Given that this money is to be used for the refurbishment of local authority sites and creation of new transit sites it is woefully inadequate.

Security of Tenure

Many Travellers on local authority sites have limited security of tenure, they can be given as little as 28 days notice to leave a site. In the case of Connors V the UK the European Court of Human Rights found that the Connor family’s human rights under article 8 had been contravened in the way they were evicted from a local authority site. Following this judgement the UK Government will need to review security of tenure on local authority Traveller sites. We believe that Gypsies and Travellers should be given the same rights as mobile park home residents.

Homelessness

Local authorities have duties under the Housing Act 1996 to offer accommodation to Gypsies/Travellers who reside in a caravan but who have nowhere appropriate to place their caravan. The Homelessness Act 2002 also created a duty on local authorities to formulate a homelessness strategy. However, Lord Avebury supervised a piece of research which found hardly

any of the 157 authorities which had homeless Gypsies in their area even mentioned Gypsies in their initial strategies. Clearly local authorities need to be reminded of this responsibility.

The GTLRC also believes that offering bricks and mortar accommodation, which is usually bed and breakfast accommodation, is unsuitable for homeless Gypsies. Many Gypsies and Travellers have an aversion to bricks and mortar having lived all their lives in caravans, living in conventional housing has been found to cause anxiety and depression for Gypsies/Travellers. We believe that local authorities should offer culturally appropriate accommodation to Travellers namely places for them to place their caravans.

Enforcement

The temporary stop notice provisions in part 4 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 inserted sections 171E to 171H to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The Act gives local planning authorities a new discretionary enforcement power to be able to issue a temporary stop notice at the start of unauthorised development, before an enforcement notice is served, speeding up the process of enforcement.

The GTLRC believes that existing enforcement powers are already extremely harsh and have led to the imposition of large fines up to (£20,000) and even imprisonment. Given the focus of such measures against Gypsies/Travellers as opposed to their direction against the settled community they are probably discriminatory. We believe that the temporary stop notices are incompatible with article 8 and article 1 of the protocol (the right to peaceful enjoyment of one's property) but also article 6 because there is no right of appeal and judicial review is likely to prove an inadequate remedy when the temporary stop notice can be issued without notice and lasts only 28 days.

If the temporary stop notice is introduced it should only be used in extreme situations as para 13 of the draft circular suggests and not as para 33 of the partial regulatory impact assessment suggests - simply in order to protect land that is classed as valuable eg green belt.

The Conservative Party has indicated that it wishes to see even more stringent enforcement powers than those the government are recommending and has claimed that Gypsies/Travellers are abusing the Human Rights Act in planning cases. We have deep concerns about these policy positions, which we contend are misinformed and opportunistic.

In recent years there have been a number of evictions against Traveller sites where planning applications have failed. In such evictions there have been claims by Gypsies/Travellers of excessive

force being used by bailiffs, we have serious health and safety concerns about the manner in which the evictions are conducted. As outlined above we believe land swap could offer a mutually beneficial alternative to eviction.

The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2004 created new powers where Travellers on unauthorised encampments could be directed by the police to an alternative vacant pitch/site. Once a Traveller has been directed to an alternative site if they do not move to that site they are not allowed to return to that authority for three months, if the Traveller returns in that time their vehicles can be seized. The GTLRC fears that local authorities will identify sites that occupy marginal sites and have minimal facilities, supervision and poor access to services, there are also dangers of inter group tensions on such sites. Hence, some Travellers will choose not to move onto these sites and will be forced to move to another authority where the same process could be repeated. This will have an extremely negative impact on Gypsies/Travellers access to services and social inclusion.

Scotland

The Scottish Parliament will need to consider a number of reforms to match those initiated and proposed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and to fully implement the recommendations of its equalities working group which produced a report on Gypsy/Traveller issues in 2002. The GTLRC has received funding from the Rowntree Charitable Trust to draft a Scottish Traveller Law Reform Bill, which will propose reforms on Gypsy/Traveller accommodation and raising their social inclusion. We hope that the Scottish Parliament will assist us where possible in this process.

Communication between Central Government and Gypsies and Travellers

Para graph 23 of the CERD report calls for appropriate modalities of communication and dialogue between Roma/Gypsy/Traveller communities.

The GTLRC welcome the fact that the ODPM Select Committee recommended the creation of a Task Force on Gypsy/Traveller issues. In a recent letter from John Prescott MP, Secretary of State at the ODPM to Rodney Bickerstaffe, Prescott stated that this proposal was being actively considered by the ODPM. Such a Task Force will allow Gypsies and Travellers and other stakeholders to actively advise the Government and civil servants on the effectiveness of the new planning circular and other measures to increase site provision and raise social inclusion. The Task Force would facilitate constructive input into further refinement of these measures and empower Gypsies and Travellers helping them to further develop key policy formulation skills.

Health and Education

The CERD report raises a number of serious concerns about the health and education of Travellers. Recent research suggests these continue to be a great cause of concern.

An important new study by Parry G, Van Cleemput P, Peters J, Moore J, Walters S, Thomas K, and Cooper C 'The Health Status of Gypsies and Travellers In England': A report of Department of Health Inequalities in Health Research Initiative Project 121/7500. 2004. University of Sheffield demonstrates the need for continued concern in this area.

The report notes that Gypsy Travellers have significantly poorer health than samples of age and sex matched comparators, from different ethnic and also socially deprived groups on nearly all indicators. The scale of inequality between the study population and the UK general population was large with reported health problems being between twice and five times more prevalent. Correlations with age, education and smoking did not solely account for the poorer health status. There was some evidence of an inverse relationship between health needs and service use. Qualitative analysis showed the impact of environmental stress and cultural and health beliefs and attitudes on service use.

The report found accommodation was the overriding factor, mentioned by every respondent, in the context of health effects. These effects are seen to be far-reaching and not exclusively concerned with actual living conditions, although these are clearly seen as crucial. For most respondents the ability to choose their style of accommodation and to decide for themselves whether, or how, they continue to live a traditional travelling lifestyle is of fundamental importance and crucial to their sense of independence and autonomy. The lack of choice or the intolerable conditions, mentioned by the majority of respondents, are an indication to them of the negative way in which they are viewed by the non-Traveller society.

The report noted that in relation to Gypsy Travellers' experiences in accessing health care and the cultural appropriateness of services provided, there are widespread communication difficulties between health workers and Gypsy Travellers, with experiences of, and also defensive expectation of racism and prejudice.

The report makes a number of recommendations. If improvements are to be made in Gypsy Traveller health, clearer lines of responsibility and accountability are needed, as currently there is lack of central guidance, fragmentation of services, and a low priority given to Gypsy Traveller health. The general implication for policy and health provision is that methods are needed to improve access and services. However, planning for improvement of health service provision and access is likely to be ineffective until the central problem of the 'invisibility' of Travellers is tackled.

However, including a category for Gypsies and Travellers on ethnic monitoring forms should be done in consultation with their communities, and requires careful staff training. Improving the cultural competence of health service staff is a priority but with little or no evidence to support the efficacy of cultural awareness training currently provided, any such development should be evaluated in terms of

its effectiveness at changing negative attitudes that are at the root of much discrimination. Finally the report concluded that many of the determinants of health status are outside the remit of the Department of Health, inter-Departmental co-ordination with regard to Gypsy Traveller health seems advisable. The Traveller Health Strategy 2003-2005 of the Republic of Ireland is an example of such an approach, developed in response to a key recommendation of the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community. A similar inter-departmental Task Force in England would command wide support.

The OFSTED (Office for Standards In Education) report 'Provision and Support for Traveller Pupils' (ref HMI 455) published November 2003 stated

"The vast majority of Traveller pupils linger on the periphery of the education system. The situation has persisted for too long and the alarm bells rung in earlier reports have yet to be heeded" (page 3).

On the core issues of access, attendance and attainment, the report estimates;

- secondary enrollment rates of Traveller Education Services (TESs) visited average just over 60% at secondary (47% at Key Stage 4). The numbers not enrolled have 'probably' increased from 10,000 in 1996 to 12,000 now (page 8).
- Average attendance rates are 75% (page 2). 73% at secondary (page 9).
- "Traveller pupils generally performed worse than...any other minority ethnic group" (page 12).

The report largely praised the work of TESs but says; "The apparently intractable problem of increasing enrolment and attendance at secondary level stretched to the limit the resources of each Traveller education service. It is increasingly being recognised that such issues demand co-operation and concerted efforts by various agencies across an authority" (page 10).

Contact

Andrew Ryder

Coordinator

The Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition

Tel 07 985 684 921

romanistan@yahoo.com