

2024



DATA inclusion Briefing



Overview

To meet legal obligations and combat discrimination effectively, public bodies should establish strong data collection policies for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities. This guide aids public bodies in creating and executing such policies, ensuring consistency, accuracy, and efficacy in discrimination monitoring and prevention.

Ethnic monitoring is essential for public service delivery, allowing public bodies to fulfil their Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) confidently. However, ethnic monitoring for GRT populations often lags behind other ethnic minorities due to several key factors:

Lack of Cultural Awareness

- Public bodies may lack understanding of the diverse cultural identities within GRT communities, leading to inadequate data collection.
- Staff should receive training to improve cultural competence and sensitivity in engaging with GRT individuals.

Limited Community Engagement

- Insufficient efforts to involve GRT communities in data collection processes result in low participation rates.
- Establishing outreach initiatives and community partnerships can foster trust and cooperation within GRT communities.

Language and Literacy Challenges

- Language barriers and low literacy levels among some GRT individuals hinder their participation in data collection.
- Providing language support, accessible materials, and alternative communication methods can enhance engagement and inclusion.

Fear of Discrimination

- Historical discrimination experiences may make GRT individuals reluctant to disclose their ethnicity.
- Public bodies must prioritise confidentiality, privacy, and non-discrimination assurances to encourage participation.

Inadequate Data Collection Infrastructure

- Existing systems may not cater to the specific needs of GRT communities, resulting in underrepresentation or misclassification.
- Investing in technology, resources, and methodologies tailored to GRT demographics is crucial for comprehensive and accurate data collection.

Addressing these factors is crucial for building trust and ensuring inclusivity in public bodies' data collection efforts for GRT communities, ultimately advancing equality and combating discrimination effectively.

The Equality Act 2010

In 2010, The Equality Act consolidated 116 pieces of legislation into one comprehensive Act. This legislation offers a robust legal framework safeguarding individuals from unfair and discriminatory treatment while promoting equal opportunities for all. Notably, the Act explicitly identifies ethnic Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers as distinct ethnic minorities. It expands upon prior race relations laws, establishing a definitive legal obligation for public bodies to monitor and address discrimination in public service provision.



The Public Sector Equality Duty

Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 establishes the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which mandates public bodies to consider several fundamental principles in exercising their functions. These principles include:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other prohibited conduct outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

Advance equality of opportunity between individuals who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Foster good relations between individuals who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Remove or minimise disadvantages faced by individuals due to their protected characteristics.

Taking steps to address the specific needs of individuals from protected groups, which may differ from those of others.

Encourage participation of individuals from protected groups in public life or activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Public bodies subject to the requirements of the Act must give 'due regard' to these principles. In this context, 'Due regard' means considering these principles as part of the decision-making process, ensuring they are actively considered and prioritised to promote equality and prevent discrimination effectively.

Defining those included in the umbrella term GRT:

The terms Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller are used by policymakers and researchers to refer to various ethnic groups or those with nomadic lifestyles without specific ethnic identification. In the UK, distinctions are made between Gypsies (including English, Scottish, Welsh, and other Romany groups), Irish Travellers with specific Irish roots, and Roma, more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. In continental Europe, all nomadic groups are categorised as "Roma," a broader term that includes Gypsies and Irish Travellers, but may not align with how British communities identify themselves.

The term "Traveller" can also encompass various nomadic groups such as New Travellers, Boaters, Bargees, and Showpeople. While these communities face similar barriers to those ethnically Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller, addressing all groups in a single inquiry may not adequately recognise their unique needs. The recommendations in this report aim to benefit the three focused groups and everyone who leads a nomadic lifestyle or is not part of the settled community.

Gypsies and some Traveller ethnicities have been recognised in law as being ethnic groups protected against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010. Others, such as New Travellers, have either been deemed unprotected or have yet to test their rights in court. Migrant Roma are protected both by their ethnicities and their national identities.

In simpler terms, categorisation has limitations, and no framework can fully encompass the complexities of ethnicities, identities, and communities under the GRT umbrella term. However, viewing the GRT community as consisting of two distinct yet interconnected groups can be useful.

Ethnic Travellers

The term "ethnic Traveller" specifically denotes members of the GRT community recognised as an ethnic minority under the Equality Act 2010, distinct from those whose lifestyle is a matter of choice. This includes:

Irish Travellers (also known as Pavee or Minceir) trace their presence in Ireland back to the 12th century, with substantial migrations to Great Britain since the early 19th century.

Scottish Gypsy Travellers (also referred to as Nachins or Nawkins) are an indigenous sub-group with a history of nomadism, though many have transitioned to settled living since the 1950s.

English and Welsh Romany (Romani, Romanichal, or Welsh Kale) have been documented in the British Isles since at least the 16th century. Recent archaeological findings suggest Romany presence as early as the 11th century. The term "gypsy" originates from "Egyptian," reflecting a misnomer attributed to their dark complexion. Linguistic analysis suggests Romany language roots in North India around the 12th century.

European Roma share ancestry with Romany Gypsies, but their UK presence is primarily a result of contemporary migration patterns, notably influenced by the Romani genocide (Porajmos) and EU expansion into Eastern European countries. Many European Roma reject the term "Gypsy" due to its negative connotations in Eastern Europe.

Cultural Travellers

The term "cultural traveller" refers to individuals who have opted for a nomadic lifestyle due to occupation or personal lifestyle preferences. Unlike Ethnic Travellers, cultural travellers are not officially recognised as an explicit ethnic minority under the Equality Act 2010. However, like their ethnic counterparts, many cultural travellers encounter adverse outcomes across various indicators.

Occupational Travellers

Showpeople (also referred to as fairground or circus people). Fairgrounds, circuses, and other travelling events have been an important part of British culture for centuries. As such, showmen have a long history of owning and working on fairgrounds in the UK and often travel with their families in a seasonal working pattern. Bargees (also referred to as boat dwellers). Bargees live on narrow boats or barges that can navigate canals and other man-made waterways. There is a long historical trend of Bargees travelling for employment.

New Age Travellers

New Age travellers are people who have adopted the nomadic lifestyle, but are not ethnic Travellers.

Differences and similarities:

In Europe, the grouping of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers under the term "Roma" is common, while in Britain, they are collectively known as "GRT" (Gypsy, Roma, Traveller). Alongside other nomadic groups like Scottish and English Travellers, Show People, and New Travellers, these communities share several common characteristics: strong family and community networks, a nomadic lifestyle, a preference for self-employment, and experiences of disadvantage resulting in the poorest health outcomes in the UK.

Roma communities, originating from India around the 10th to 12th centuries, have historically faced persecution, including slavery and genocide. They continue to be marginalised and ghettoised in many Eastern European countries, where they are often the largest and most visible ethnic minority group, constituting up to 10% of the population in some areas. However, "Roma" is a political term and self-identification for many Roma activists. In reality, European Roma populations consist of various subgroups, each with its language, customs, religion, and heritage. For example, Gypsies are believed to have originated in India, and the Romani language, also spoken by Roma, comprises at least seven distinct varieties, each considered a separate language.

Family and extended family connections hold immense significance within Gypsy and Traveller communities, distinguishing their way of life from settled populations. They come together for significant life milestones such as birthdays, weddings, and funerals, often accompanied by religious ceremonies. Despite common misconceptions, cleanliness is a priority for them. Many Irish Travellers adhere to the Catholic faith, while others increasingly embrace Evangelical Christianity.

Economic shifts have brought challenges exacerbated by a lack of designated sites and legal barriers to their nomadic culture. Research indicates elevated rates of suicide and lower life expectancy among Travellers, reflecting the hardships they face. However, there's a growing acknowledgement of the importance of modern tools like social media, particularly among younger generations, and an increasing recognition of the value of education.

Supported by their families, many are finding success in mainstream professions. Additionally, Gypsies and Travellers have a history of entrepreneurship, with some running well-known businesses, albeit sometimes concealing their ethnic identity. They also contribute significantly to sports and entertainment, enriching these fields with their talents and skills.



The 18+1 categorisation

The UK Government suggests using 18 ethnic categories, which fall under broader groups like White, Mixed, Asian, Black, and Other ethnicities. The inclusion of "Gypsy or Irish Traveller" as a distinct ethnicity in the White category began with the 2011 Census, signifying progress. However, there are still issues with accurately capturing data, especially concerning the European Roma population.

Individuals may choose different ways to identify themselves without a specific category for Roma, complicating data collection. This leads to concerns about data reliability and comparability, making it challenging to address Roma-specific issues effectively.

The recent inclusion of Roma as a separate category in the 2021 census acknowledges their vulnerability and the need for accurate representation. Public bodies need to adopt similar frameworks to ensure inclusive data collection and address the specific needs of the Roma community. The Traveller Movement advocates for an "18+1" ethnic categorisation framework that explicitly includes Roma.

Why the need for ethnic categorisation?

Public bodies should adopt similar frameworks for ethnic categorisation to ensure inclusive data collection and effectively address the specific needs of various communities, including marginalised groups.

- **Accurate Representation:** By including specific ethnic categories, such as "Gypsy", "Irish Traveller", and "Roma," public bodies can accurately represent the diversity within their populations. This helps prevent underrepresentation and ensures that these communities' unique needs and experiences are accounted for in policy-making and resource allocation.
- **Addressing Inequities:** Collecting accurate data on minority groups allows public bodies to identify and address systemic inequities and disparities they may face. For example, if data reveals disproportionate barriers to education, healthcare, or employment, targeted interventions can be developed to address these issues effectively.
- **Tailored Services:** Inclusive data collection enables public services to tailor their offerings to meet the specific needs of diverse communities. For instance, understanding the cultural preferences and linguistic requirements of the Roma population can help improve access to healthcare, social services, and education.
- **Monitoring Progress:** Having comprehensive data allows public bodies to monitor progress in addressing inequalities and improving outcomes for marginalised groups over time. It facilitates accountability and helps track the effectiveness of interventions and policies promoting equality and inclusion.
- **Building Trust:** When public bodies demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity through data collection practices, it helps build trust and confidence among minority communities. They feel seen, heard, and valued, which fosters greater engagement and participation in public services and democratic processes.

Why should we move away from the umbrella term GRT:

The term "GRT" (Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller) has been used as an umbrella term to refer to diverse ethnic groups with nomadic or semi-nomadic traditions. However, there are several reasons why it may be more beneficial to move towards ethnic categorisation instead:

- **Recognition of Diversity:** The GRT umbrella term oversimplifies the diverse ethnic identities and cultures within these communities. Each group—Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers—has its distinct cultural practices, languages, histories, and experiences of discrimination. Ethnic categorisation allows for a more nuanced understanding and recognition of this diversity.
- **Cultural Autonomy:** Ethnic categorisation respects the autonomy and self-identification of different groups. While some individuals may identify with the GRT label, others may prefer to identify specifically as Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller, or another ethnic subgroup. Recognising these distinct identities acknowledges the rich cultural heritage of each group.
- **Accurate Data Collection:** Ethnic categorisation facilitates more accurate data collection and analysis. By collecting data on specific ethnic groups, public bodies can better understand each community's needs, experiences, and outcomes. This allows for targeted interventions and policies to address disparities and promote equality.
- **Effective Policy Development:** Tailoring policies and interventions to specific ethnic groups is more effective in addressing their unique needs and challenges. Ethnic categorisation enables policymakers to develop targeted initiatives that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the realities faced by Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.
- **Combatting Stigmatisation:** The GRT umbrella term can perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatisation by lumping together diverse communities under a single label. Ethnic categorisation helps challenge stereotypes and discrimination by highlighting each group's distinct identities, cultures, and contributions.

Overall, moving towards ethnic categorisation allows for a more accurate, respectful, and practical approach to understanding and addressing the needs of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. It promotes cultural recognition, data accuracy, policy effectiveness, and combatting stigma and discrimination.



Recommendations

- **Educational Campaigns:** GATE Herts recommends launching educational campaigns to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of ethnic categorisation among public bodies, stakeholders, and the general public. These campaigns could include workshops, webinars, or informational materials explaining the benefits and rationale behind ethnic categorisation.
- **Capacity Building:** GATE Herts advocates for capacity-building initiatives within public bodies to equip staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement ethnic categorisation effectively. This may involve training sessions on cultural competency, data collection methodologies, and ethical considerations.
- **Community Engagement:** GATE Herts encourages public bodies to engage directly with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities to gather input and feedback on implementing ethnic categorisation. This could involve establishing community advisory boards or conducting consultation sessions to ensure that the voices of these communities are heard and respected.
- **Policy Integration:** GATE Herts recommends integrating ethnic categorisation into existing policy frameworks and guidelines to institutionalise its use across different sectors and departments. This could involve updating policies related to data collection, equality, and diversity to reflect the importance of ethnic categorisation in addressing the specific needs of marginalised communities.
- **Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms:** GATE Herts suggests implementing mechanisms for evaluating the impact of ethnic categorisation initiatives and soliciting feedback from stakeholders on an ongoing basis. This could involve conducting regular reviews of data collection practices, monitoring the effectiveness of policies targeting marginalised communities, and incorporating feedback into future decision-making processes.
- **Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Encourage public bodies to collaborate with other organisations, research institutions, and international partners to share best practices and lessons learned in implementing ethnic categorisation. This could involve participating in networks or forums that advance inclusive data collection practices and exchange knowledge and expertise.

About Us...

GATE Herts is a representative organisation for Gypsy and Traveller people across Hertfordshire.

Our aim is to improve quality of life for our communities. We work in partnership to address the issues which affect our Accommodation, Health, Education and Discrimination.

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