



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

Desktop Research - Transition 2 Adulthood's Pathway for Change and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

INTRODUCTION

Children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are overrepresented in the youth justice system. In England and Wales, just 1.5% of the population identify as 'Romany Gypsy' or 'Irish Traveller', yet Gypsy and Irish Traveller children make up 12% of Secure Training Centres (STCs), 7% of Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) and 17% of the specialist YOI Keppel Unit in Yorkshire.¹

There is a lack of consistent data collected on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, creating difficulties in creating provision and commissioning services². FFT are therefore aware that official records are often a significant undercount, and Gypsies and Travellers are often less likely to ask for support in any stage of the Criminal Justice System (CJS), with community voices being seldom listened to. Quantitative data has only been collected specifically recording Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences and outcomes of the CJS, in recent recommendations by the Lammy Review.³

The purpose of the following document is to showcase the evidence and literature existing in relation to the 10-point T2A Pathway Framework and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences of the CJS. This document will be used to identify key areas where further research and evidence are needed, as well as provide a roadmap for FFT's project supported by Barrow Cadbury Trust, 'Friends, Families and Travellers: Hearing Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Young Adults in the CJS'.

This review draws from existing evidence to explore all the issues these communities face and how this affects their experiences of the CJS from start to end point. At the end of each section is a paragraph relating to gaps and issues identified, relevant to that area.

1) Policing and Arrest

A Traveller Movement report⁴ describes how the relationship between Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and the police is too often marked by mutual mistrust, poor communication and conflict limiting both the communities' ability to access justice, and the police's ability to protect citizens and fight crime. A long history of police harassment, the prioritisation of enforcement over engagement and a generational cycle of mistrust continue to hamper efforts to improve relations, resulting in many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities not being policed by consent.

Many young Gypsies' and Travellers' first experiences of the police have come from situations where they have been evicted from roadside camps (unauthorised encampments) and witnessed attitudes or actions by the police that begin a lifelong mistrust of sanctioned authority. These early negative

¹ The Traveller Movement (2017) [Sentencing GTR Children](#)

² Women and Equalities Committee (2019) [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#)

³ Lammy Review (2017) [An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁴ The Traveller Movement (2018) [Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and the police](#)

experiences may continue into adulthood, resulting in a potential lack of compliance with legal structures as they grow up. ⁵

*'...I remember when I was seven years old getting pulled over when we'd been travelling for 24 hours, looking for a place to stop. We were pulled over and I had to stand there and watch my dad getting a good hiding...It's all about trust. And there is none now. I've got no respect for the police because the police have no respect for us. We've been victimised from day one.'*⁶

When it comes to Roma people's experiences of the CJS, there is very little data across the board for the UK. A comprehensive study carried out in 2014 recommended as a priority that an amendment should be made in relation to the monitoring and annual reporting requirements of progress towards Roma integration. The study included research that found substantial data gaps in relation to the Roma population, and in the CJS Roma are overwhelmingly categorised as 'foreign nationals' and recorded by country of origin, despite ethnic category of 'Roma'. ⁷

For people from the wider Roma community, language is a huge barrier to interactions with statutory services and notably the police. Attempts to engage via interpreters is further complicated as not all Roma people share a common language and there are many different dialects. Sometimes Romani is confused with the Romanian language, although these are two separate languages with different origins. Due to the complexities of the language and cultural issues involved however, finding an appropriate Roma cultural mediator/interpreter is not always possible. ⁸

From the point of view of the police, in terms of attitudes and policies, only two forces in the UK describe having a targeted strategy for improving relations with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; both of which are situated in Wales. ⁹ Aside from these two forces, none in the UK have any strategy applicable to (but not *targeted at*) the communities. In addition to this, Gypsy Traveller Liaison Police Officer roles are more likely to prioritise enforcement, rather than proactive community engagement and strengthening of relationships, and as such, are rarely trusted by the communities. ¹⁰

There is also a major issue within police forces around attitudes towards the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, as various reports evidence feelings of negative bias, racism and discrimination, and an automatic assumption that all Gypsies and Travellers are taking part in criminal activity. A recent example is a 2022 case where a serving officer from Bedfordshire was sacked for sending racist comments about Travellers to fellow officers in a private chat group. ¹¹ A Special Officer from the

⁵ The Traveller Movement (2018) [Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and the police](#)

⁶ Traveller Equality Project. Cottrell-Boyce J. (2014) [Working with Gypsy and Traveller Offenders: A Thames Valley Probation Case Study](#).

⁷ Greenfields, M (2015) [Bridging the Gap between Academics and Policy Makers: Crime and Punishment: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in the criminal justice system](#)

⁸ Facing All the Facts (2019) [Guide to Roma Communities for Police](#)

⁹ The Traveller Movement (2018) [Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and the police](#)

¹⁰ The Traveller Movement (2018) [Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and the police](#)

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-61195048>



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Hampshire constabulary was also convicted of a similar offence and was fired in 2021¹², and a Police Officer who is from the Romani community, serving in the Met recently told a media outlet that,

*"You hear things like 'oh we got to go out to deal with bl**dy p*keys again' or 'gypp*s are causing problems', then when people find out your heritage you start experiencing micro-aggressions."*¹³

While it is commendable that community members from within the police force are speaking out against such behaviour, the examples above demonstrate how widespread these attitudes are in serving officers of all ranks.

Recent research carried out by the Office for National Statistics looked at community perceptions of the police and the CJS. Gypsy and Traveller participants described themselves or others they knew having had challenging experiences with the police, and there was a sense that the police tend to presume criminality of Gypsies and Travellers, with perceived differential treatment linked to this. Perceived disproportionality and a sense of injustice were common in participants' narratives of encounters with the justice system, including in the described use of force, presumption of crime and arrests, denial of bail and perceived over-representation of Gypsies and Travellers in prisons. As one young man participating in the ONS study described to interviewers,¹⁴

*"With the police you could be pulled over two or three times a week for no reason. You could be fully insured, you'd have tax on your car, you have everything. You'd be completely legal with everything, and you'd get pulled just because they know where you're from and if they see you coming out of [the site]."*¹⁵

The assumption that Gypsy and Traveller communities live a life of criminality and are perceived as 'high risk' when it comes to policing is another factor that may increase young Gypsies' and Travellers' negative experiences of policing. John Coxhead's 'The Last Bastion of Racism; Gypsies, Travellers & Policing' found that 'a predominant issue in police occupational culture repeatedly showed itself: the powerful perceptions of Gypsies and Travellers as a criminogenic community.'¹⁶ Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have historically always been pushed to the margins of society and their cultural way of life is often perceived as different and therefore somehow outside the law. Living nomadically, stopping roadside or without planning permission, not having a fixed address, lighting campfires, grazing and riding ponies are traits that all travelling communities (ethnic and cultural groups alike) share and are therefore under scrutiny from police and settled communities. The most graphic and extreme example of this treatment is that of the residents at Dale Farm in Kent; a high-profile eviction that was also prominent in the mainstream media at the time.¹⁷

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-60077734>

¹³ <https://www.mylondon.news/news/zone-1-news/im-met-police-officer-romani-24216658>

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, justice, England and Wales: 2022](#)

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, justice, England and Wales: 2022](#)

¹⁶ Coxhead, J (2007) [The Last Bastion of Racism; Gypsies, Travellers & Policing](#)

¹⁷ The Guardian Newspaper (2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/21/a-massive-injustice-ten-years-on-from-dale-farm-traveller-site-essex-evictions-pain-and-trauma-remain>



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The ONS study found that Gypsy and Traveller participants described themselves or others they knew having had challenging experiences with the police, and there was a sense that the police tend to presume criminality of Gypsies and Travellers, with perceived differential treatment linked to this. Participants in the study also told how laws were perceived as criminalising Gypsies' and Travellers' ways of life, exacerbating the sense of marginalisation and injustice. In addition to this, community members were not always aware of the introduction of such laws, including the Scrap Metal Dealers Act (2013)¹⁸ and the Control of Horses Act (2015),¹⁹ meaning that people could inadvertently face arrest for engaging in traditional activities and occupations.²⁰

Mainstream media also plays a huge part in perpetuating the criminality myth. Most recently, the 2020 Channel 4 documentary 'The Truth about Traveller Crime' demonised entire minority ethnic communities and led to a huge rise in reported hate speech against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.²¹

Some positive initiatives have been implemented since the publication of Coxhead's 2007 research. Legislation to protect the ethnicities and rights of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has meant police forces must adhere to Human Rights and Equality Acts that were made law in 2010 and 2014, and offer legal protection to people of Romany Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller status. Another initiative that was formed in 2014 is the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association (GRTPA). One of its main aims is to create a place where education and awareness around 'GRT' cultures & histories are key. This has ensured that members of the policing family have a better awareness of the key issues these communities face and helped to reduce the incidences of prejudice and racism.²²

There is also a common theme across any relevant studies carried out with Gypsy and Traveller communities around policing and crime whereby community members believe the police can do more to address issues like hate crime, and in doing so, increase their own awareness and understanding of discrimination and racism. Section 7 of the ONS study details community experiences in this area²³; Though predominantly these views are those of adults, many younger members of the communities may also harbour the same feelings, which can lead to a general mistrust and lack of concern about legal repercussions.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Evidence suggests there is a huge issue in terms of a proactive approach by police with regard to how people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (including non-ethnic) are treated. There appears to be an assumption that 'because' cultural practices and way of life are different (e.g., living roadside, travelling around, lighting campfires, riding ponies etc.) they 'must be breaking the law' or are 'about to break the law' and will therefore immediately be regarded with suspicion.

¹⁸ Scrap Metal Dealers Act (2013) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/10/enacted>

¹⁹ Control of Horses Act (2015) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/23/contents/enacted>

²⁰ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, justice, England and Wales](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/ethnicityandnationality/articles/gypsiesandtravellerslivedexperiencesjusticeenglandandwales)

²¹ The Guardian Newspaper (2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/02/truth-about-traveller-crime-channel-4-dispatches-show-accused-dehumanising>

²² GRTPA (2014) [Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association](https://www.grtpa.org.uk/)

²³ ONS (2022) [Gypsies' and Travellers' lived experiences, justice, England and Wales](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/ethnicityandnationality/articles/gypsiesandtravellerslivedexperiencesjusticeenglandandwales)

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are treated as ‘high risk’ by forces and the places they live are extensively policed. For example, police back up often takes the form of armed police when attending Traveller-related areas, as well as extreme over-policing at weddings and funerals. When Gypsies and Travellers need the support and help of the police with reporting a crime, there seems often lack of will from the frontline police to pursue further action.

There is confusion about Gypsy Traveller Liaison Police Officers and what their role is. This seems to be more about eviction and enforcement (along the same lines as local authority Liaison Officers) therefore there are blurred lines and lack of trust.

2) Diversion (into services to divert from offending)

A major issue that may influence whether young Gypsies and Travellers receive custodial sentences over bail, for example, is around lack of postal addresses. Participants interviewed in the ONS study found that aspects of sentencing, bail and remand were perceived as disproportionate and unfair towards Gypsies and Travellers, such as being denied bail following arrest because of living on a Gypsy and Traveller site or having no fixed address.²⁴ Not having an address or giving an address when stopped and questioned by police can lead to automatic arrest. Anecdotal evidence from participants of the study also suggested that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are more likely to be given custodial sentences, due to assumptions that they would abscond if given community sentences.²⁵

Any arrest and subsequent criminal record can result in a detrimental impact on young people’s futures, especially when it comes to employment. Young Gypsies and Travellers already face huge barriers to entering employment, with many having not been in full time education or having left school prior to gaining the qualifications or skills that improve entry to mainstream employment opportunities. The 2016 Review of the Youth Justice System report states that: “Though children’s backgrounds should not be used as an excuse for their behaviour, it is clear that the failure of education, health, social care and other agencies to tackle these problems have contributed to their presence in the youth justice system.”²⁶

A research project specific to Thames Valley regions found that low literacy was said to narrow options of what you can do with offenders, most significantly excluding offenders from accredited programmes which had a written element to them. Overall, it was felt that probation interventions were less likely to be successful with people with low literacy.²⁷

The most effective means of breaking the school-to-prison pipeline starts with schools. As so many young Gypsy and Traveller people are either excluded or do not attend school, this often leads to further harm and deprivation and puts more barriers in place when accessing employment and

²⁴ ONS (2022) [Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lived experiences, justice, England and Wales](#)

²⁵ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Working with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children and young people: Effective practice for Youth Offending Teams](#)

²⁶ Ministry of Justice. Taylor, C. (2016) [Review of the Youth Justice System](#)

²⁷ Traveller Equality Project (2014) Cottrell-Boyce, J. [Working with Gypsy and Traveller Offenders: A Thames Valley Probation Case Study.](#)



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broader positive life outcomes. An end to the use of exclusion from school will divert children away from the CJS at the earliest possible stage.²⁸

In 2015, Nick Hardwick, former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons stated;

“Both STCs and YOIs continued to hold a hugely disproportionate number of children who described themselves as being from a Traveller or Gypsy background.... a hundred times greater than the 0.1% which is the estimated proportion in the population as a whole. We have repeatedly raised our concerns about this issue – with any other group such huge disproportionality would have led to more formal inquiry and investigation into what part of their backgrounds or interaction with the criminal justice system had led to this situation.”²⁹

Literature highlights that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are more likely to suffer mental and physical ill health, have special educational needs, and be taken into care compared to the general population, and these disparities are born out in the justice system with Gypsy Roma and Traveller children in custody significantly more likely to report physical and mental health problems, and having been in care.³⁰

As previously mentioned, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children often do not trust authorities and may refuse to engage with services. Many of these disadvantages carry through if they enter the Youth Justice System.³¹

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

There seems to be a lack of will to try and engage young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in programmes and support initiatives that keep them out of custody or prevent them from getting a criminal record from a young age. T2A recommends that Police and Crime Commissioners fund programmes to support young people and while there are likely to be some programmes out there aimed at Black and Minority Ethnic communities, serious consideration needs to be given as to the much-needed inclusion of Gypsy and Traveller young people.

Due to many young Gypsy and Traveller children not being able to access appropriate levels of education and the mistrust that has been fostered between these communities and statutory authorities, additional support needs to be available to ensure people fully understand the processes and consequences involved in their journey through the criminal justice system. Overall knowledge of the system and what is happening to them need to be taken into account, as well as consideration to mental health issues (such as undiagnosed ADHD and autism) that may be negatively impacting young people’s actions, particularly within stress-inducing environments.

²⁸ The Traveller Movement (2021) [Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline](#)

²⁹ The Traveller Movement (2017) [Sentencing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children](#)

³⁰ Alliance for Youth Justice (2023) [Young People in Transition in the Criminal Justice System](#)

³¹ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Beyond Acronyms: Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the Criminal Justice System](#)

3) Restorative Justice

Diversion from custody through schemes that offer Restorative Justice (RJ) are recommended as being used depending on the gravity of the crime committed. In 2001, the UK government funded a £7 million, seven-year research programme into RJ.³² The independent evaluation, published by the Ministry of Justice, found that:

- Most victims chose to participate in face-to-face meetings with the offender, when offered by a trained facilitator;
- 85% of victims who took part were satisfied with the process;
- Restorative Justice reduced the frequency of reoffending, leading to £9 in savings to the CJS for every £1 spent on restorative justice;
- Restorative Justice reduces the frequency of reoffending by 14%.³³

There is little evidence however, to suggest that young Gypsies and Travellers are offered access to RJ and therefore are denied the opportunity to avoid custodial forms of justice. A Ministry of Justice report into Youth Justice found that one of the reasons for the overrepresentation of children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups in the youth justice system is a tendency for children from these communities to answer “no comment” when interviewed by the police. This could mean that people are being prosecuted where they don’t need to be. This may be the result of a mistrust by children from these communities of the police and the criminal justice system.³⁴

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

There is little evidence to suggest young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are offered restorative justice programmes. Does this reflect an attitude by the system that people from these communities should be punished by custodial sentences rather than offered a chance to take up restorative justice programmes? Or is it that young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are not taking advantage of these programmes due to fear and not understanding the process? This is something that needs to be investigated more fully.

4) Prosecution

The *‘Overlooked and Underrepresented’* report recommends that courts should consider the reasons why a child or young person may conduct themselves inappropriately in court; for example, due to a belief that they will be discriminated against³⁵. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are significantly underrepresented as victims in the criminal justice processes and overrepresented as offenders;³⁶ there is subsequent mistrust of criminal justice processes and personnel among the communities, as

³² Restorative Justice Council (2001) (2009) <https://restorativejustice.org.uk/resources/evidence-supporting-use-restorative-justice>

³³ Ministry of Justice Research Series 10/8 (2008) [Implementing Restorative Justice Schemes](#).

³⁴ Ministry of Justice. Taylor, C (2016) [Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales](#)

³⁵ The Traveller Movement (2017) [Sentencing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children](#)

³⁶ The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented](#)

explored in Section 1. Again, it is likely that lack of access to education influences why young Gypsy, Roma or Traveller people may enter the CJS. More than half of Gypsy and Traveller boys in YOIs were 14 or younger the last time they were in education, and 84% had been excluded from school.³⁷ A lack of formal education, coupled with negative experiences with authority can result in inappropriate behaviour in formal situations, for example in court, which may in turn lead to greater chance of prosecution.

Deferred prosecution is a process recommended for offenders by the Lammy Review, offering structured interventions – meaning those successfully completing a personalised programme would see the prosecution dropped, while those who did not would face criminal proceedings; while no disaggregated data is given for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people, the latest published information indicates that almost as many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic offenders took part in a pilot scheme for deferred prosecution as White offenders.³⁸

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Programmes that defer prosecution have been found to be taken up as much by Black and Minority Ethnic communities as White, but no data exists to identify the uptake for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The position seems to be that attendance would be low but perhaps there needs to be more to address why Gypsy, Roma Traveller people might not be able to attend such programmes. Factors such as transport when accessing programmes, cultural appropriateness of the programmes, literacy and digital literacy should be considered.³⁹

5) Sentencing

Since 2017, new sentencing guidelines for children and young people placed increased focus on the background, circumstances and vulnerability of children in the youth justice system. The guidelines also require courts to consider the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (including Gypsy, Roma or Traveller) children in the system and to consider particular factors arising in the cases involving children from these groups.⁴⁰

A briefing by The Traveller Movement outlines key welfare considerations raised by the Sentencing Children and Young People Guidelines, and their application to young people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and the life experiences they may have encountered due to their ethnicity.⁴¹ These points include considering time spent in the care system, mental health and trauma related issues (perhaps around domestic abuse, bereavement or suicide of family members), exposure to

³⁷ The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented](#)

³⁸ The Lammy Review (2017) [An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁴⁰ The Traveller Movement (2017) [Sentencing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children](#)

⁴¹ The Traveller Movement (2017) [Sentencing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children](#)

alcohol or drugs (either themselves or in the home), conduct in court (due to lack of literacy, fear and not understanding processes), discrimination and negative experiences of authority.⁴²

When it comes to sentencing and the numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people who experience this part of the CJS, the issue is simply that many may choose not to identify as 'Travellers' when they enter prison, out of fear of bullying and racism from prison officers and from other prisoners. Information obtained through the Freedom of Information process revealed that on 30 June 2018, a total of 1443 prisoners in all prison establishments (including Immigration Removal Centres operated by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) in England and Wales self-identified as either Gypsy or Irish Traveller (under the code 'W3'), and this included those held on remand, those serving a sentence and non-criminal prisoners.⁴³

A 2017 Traveller Movement survey found that generally, 76% of the 196 'GRT' respondents interviewed had, at some point, hidden their ethnicity to avoid discrimination.⁴⁴

The Lammy Review written submission to the call for evidence from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsy, Travellers and Roma stated "*Given the serious issues raised over recent years we believe the least the Government can do is monitor the apparently significant population of Traveller children in custody.*"⁴⁵

The Lammy Review Update mentions how in September 2019, the revised Equal Treatment Bench Book was launched to include a new section on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. The Equal Treatment Bench Book gives the judiciary important information about the lives of disadvantaged groups and makes suggestions for how they can be helped with the Court process.⁴⁶

The Review called for better ethnic monitoring of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities within the CJS, and the Review Update published three years later was able to state that this issue was being addressed, and since June 2018 HMP and the Youth Justice Board have collected that data.⁴⁷

However, the Update expresses concerns around lack of data and poor experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in youth offending settings. It is possible that the COVID-19 pandemic has meant these concerns have yet to be fully addressed. At the time of compiling this literature review, Friends, Families and Travellers has filed a Freedom of Information request to the Youth Justice Service asking if the concerns and recommendations around data collection for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have been addressed.

⁴² The Traveller Movement (2017) [Sentencing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children](#)

⁴³ Irish Probation Journal Vol.16. Gavin, P. (2019) '[Prison Is the Worst Place a Traveller Could Be': The Experiences of Irish Travellers in Prison in England and Wales.](#)

⁴⁴ The Traveller Movement (2017) [The Last Acceptable Form of Racism?](#)

⁴⁵ The Lammy Review (2017) [An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁴⁶ Lammy Review Update (2020) [Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁴⁷ Lammy Review (2020) [Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System: 2020 Update](#)

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The Lammy Report recommended better disaggregation for these communities be implemented but this was only a few years ago and nothing was found during the literature search specific to this. Anecdotal evidence found in various reports and given by community members during conversations around this project strongly suggests that Gypsy and Traveller people are treated more harshly and are more likely to receive custodial sentences, rather than non-custodial ones.

A Freedom of Information request was put to the Youth Justice Board regarding data held around Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and to find out what progress had been made on the 'GRT Handbook'. The table below was part of the YJB response, and although the cohort numbered is a different age range to the one in this project, it perhaps offers an insight into children's experiences of the Criminal Justice System up to the age of 18 and may impact their behaviour after reaching adulthood.

Cautions and court sentences by type for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children (aged 10-17)

Year ending March	Pre-Court	First Tier	Community	Custody	Total
2018	33	50	9	4	96
2019	24	88	29	8	149
2020	34	92	29	10	165
2021	30	48	22	9	109
2022	25	104	19	8	156
2023*	22	58	16	3	99

- As at time of request

6) Community sentences

Sentences under six months are known to be an ineffective measure of reducing crime; the traumatic experience of imprisonment often outweighs any beneficial access to rehabilitation or education and, consequently, the likelihood of reoffending is high.⁴⁸ A Kent Probation Area study was the first in attempting to obtain empirical evidence, 'to support the hypothesis that Gypsies and Travellers receive differential treatment in the criminal justice process'.⁴⁹

In a 1994 report referenced in footnote 50, pre-sentence recommendations for Travellers were compared to other offenders and concluded that probation officers were 'less likely to consider alternative community sentences for Travellers other than community service' due to assumptions that Travellers' 'lifestyle' would make them unsuitable for probation orders. Proposals for community

⁴⁸ The Traveller Movement (2022) [Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline](#)

⁴⁹ Williams, LP, (1994). Gypsies and Travellers in the Criminal Justice System. The Forgotten minority? As referenced in https://www.academia.edu/64063571/Working_with_Gypsy_and_Traveller_offenders

service orders for less serious crimes then increased ‘the likelihood of custodial sentence for a subsequent offence’⁵⁰.

On release, women are more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner, than those who served community sentences.⁵¹ Yet, figures show that women’s prison population consists of shorter custodial sentences and the use of community sentences have halved in the past decade.⁵²

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

No data was found during the literature review and only the information from the YJB response to the Freedom of Information request has revealed any statistics around community sentences for young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. Community sentences appeared to be gaining in terms of figures up until the Covid-19 pandemic but have since dropped back.

Additional barriers to young Gypsies and Travellers being able to access community sentences could also be issues with transport and getting to where programmes work, due to many Gypsy and Traveller sites being located away from public transport links.

7) Managing the Transfer Process

It is general practice for some 18-year-olds to be kept longer in child custody for pragmatic or safeguarding reasons, for example, young adults on remand who are due to be sentenced and those that are due for release within a few months of their 18th birthday. However, figures published in 2023 suggest that there has been an exponential increase in young adults held in custodial places meant for children: the number of young people aged 18+ in the children’s estate has increased by 63 (91%) in the last year.⁵³

Inspections have found inconsistency in when young people are transferred to adult services versus remaining with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), and it is not clear that these decisions are based on professional judgment and assessment of individual needs and circumstances, rather than operational processes and general expectations. While some YOTs try to retain 18-year-olds, particularly if a young person is deemed vulnerable, for example due to disability or care experience, others aim to transfer all eligible cases to adult services as soon as they turn 18. Young people are not always adequately informed or involved in these decisions. Issues around insufficient timely sharing of information between YOTs and Probation, as well as with other agencies the young person is engaging with – a

⁵⁰ Williams, LP, (1994). Gypsies and Travellers in the Criminal Justice System. The Forgotten minority? As referenced in https://www.academia.edu/64063571/Working_with_Gypsy_and_Traveller_offenders

⁵¹ Prison Reform Trust (2020) [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)

⁵² Prison Reform Trust (2020) [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)

⁵³ T2A Barrow Cadbury (2023) [Letter to Damian Hinds Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation](#)

concerning lack of contact with YOTs after transfers occurred, and a lack of oversight, poor organisation and poor recording impacting the smoothness of transitions.⁵⁴

Racial disparities in the CJS and wider society mean children from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be criminalised and receive longer sentences, and thus are disproportionately likely to experience the transition from youth to adult justice systems: racial inequalities experienced in childhood mean they may be more likely to transition from a point of greater vulnerability, and mean they are less likely to be appropriately supported through the transition to adulthood.⁵⁵ Services lack cultural competency and support offered may not be suitable for the specific needs of racially minoritised young people and specialist voluntary and community sector organisations, that can play a key role in addressing these shortcomings and providing tailored support, are often not available.⁵⁶

As many young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have experienced factors such as disruption to education or exclusion from school, time in local authority care, situations of domestic violence, mental health or disability issues, it is likely that many are being kept in youth settings after their 18th birthday.⁵⁷

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

No data for this aspect of the CJS was found for young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. Given that evidence shows many young people are being kept back in YOI and STC settings after the age of 18 due to issues with the transfer process generally, this could be disproportionately affecting young Gypsies and Travellers. However, there could also be issues with the fact that they are being transferred to adult prison settings when perhaps they are not mentally and emotionally prepared for such a transition.

8) Custody

The survey on which the HMIP Children in Custody report was based had an overall response rate of 84%. It found that 21% of children across the two types of youth custody settings self-declared as being from a Traveller background. This comprised 13% of the children in STCs and 8% of the children in YOIs.⁵⁸

The report found that amongst the children interviewed for their study;

- 53% of Traveller children said they felt they were well treated on arrival at prison reception compared to 72% of non-Traveller children.

⁵⁴ Alliance for Youth Justice (2023) [Young People in Transition in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁵⁵ Alliance for Youth Justice (2023) [Young People in Transition in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁵⁶ Alliance for Youth Justice (2023) [Young People in Transition in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁵⁷ The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in the youth justice system](#)

⁵⁸ All figures from HMIP (2019) [Children in Custody](#)

- 42% of Traveller children said they had any form of sentence plan compared with 65% of non-Traveller children.
- 30% of Traveller children said they felt unsafe in custody compared to 12% of non-Traveller children.
- 20% of Traveller children said they felt victimised by their peers, including being forced to bully other children, compared to 5% of non-Traveller children.
- 20% of Traveller children said they've had their property or canteen stolen, compared to 5% of non-Traveller children.
- Almost a quarter felt they were victimised by staff and other children because they were from a Traveller community.
- 90% of GRT children are less likely to find it 'easy' to keep in contact with their family or carers outside the centre, compared to 60% non-GRT.⁵⁹

Other examples of experiences in custodial settings include restraint. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people in STCs were far less likely to report that they had been physically restrained (7% compared with 31%). Unlike their adult counterparts, they were also far more likely to report that they felt too scared or intimidated to make a complaint (27% compared with 7%).⁶⁰

Out of 42 responses from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children who took part in the Traveller Movement's Overlooked and Overrepresented report, it was found that almost half in STCs had been in local authority care and found it significantly more difficult to maintain contact with their family. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were almost twice as likely to report unmet health needs. 29% reported experiencing physical abuse from staff and were almost twice as likely to report having felt unsafe at some point during their stay. They were significantly more likely than other children to be afraid to make a complaint due to fears about what would happen to them.⁶¹

For those Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in YOIs, a third had been in local authority care. A quarter said they had emotional/mental health problems but less than half reported receiving help for these issues. 25% considered themselves as living with a disability. Over half reported that they had been victimised by other young people whilst in the YOI. They were less likely to know who to contact for help in opening a bank account, finding accommodation, and continuing health services when they were released.⁶²

As previously stated, members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have also shared their impression that they are disproportionately given custodial sentences because of the fear they will abscond when supervised in the community.⁶³ Once in custody however, there is an opportunity to engage positively with offenders and provide interventions and education that greatly reduce the chances of reoffending once released. In comparison to the wider population, Gypsy, Roma and

⁵⁹ All figures from HMIP (2019) [Children in Custody](#)

⁶⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Youth Justice Board (2013) [Children and young people in custody, 2012–13: an analysis of the experiences of 12–18-year-olds' perceptions of their experience in secure training centres. Elwood, C](#)

⁶¹ The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in the youth justice system](#)

⁶² All figures from The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in the youth justice system](#)

⁶³ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Beyond Acronyms: Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the Criminal Justice System](#)



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Traveller young people had a significantly more favourable outlook toward education, with 70% stating they believed it would benefit them when they left, with vocational skills being more popular.⁶⁴

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children may be willing to engage with education, if given the right support. Feedback from the communities suggests that education and training that catches their interest will be far more effective in engaging these children. Modular learning, with rewards at the end of each module, is also a helpful way of encouraging them to succeed. Support with literacy can also make a significant difference for some. This is guidance taken from good practice, from a report published in 2020.⁶⁵

There is emerging evidence that good practice is being followed with regard to equality and diversity leads in prisons setting up community support groups, and churches who have links with the Gypsy and Traveller communities working inside prisons to support members with practical and emotional issues.⁶⁶

HMP Ford in Sussex employs a representative from the Skills for Life team. One of their main responsibilities is to meet and greet new offenders into the prison and this has been particularly useful as it allows the offenders to have a feeling of belonging. When people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are sent to prison, they lose important support structures from their wider community. Having a representative who can explain the prison regime to them is beneficial to both the offender and officers alike, as offenders are then more likely to follow prison procedures.⁶⁷ The prison representative also works with other prison staff to spread cultural awareness and the needs of Gypsy and Traveller inmates. This is vital given that in a recent study Inspectors found that prison staff underestimate the cultural requirements of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.⁶⁸

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have additional difficulties in maintaining family ties during their prison stays, impacting on mental health. A report by HMIP found high numbers of incarcerated Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller people stated they had not seen their children while detained and were unable to contact other family members adequately.⁶⁹ Data also indicates that a much higher proportion of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller young people in the Youth Justice System (YJS) have children; a trend that is likely to be replicated in the adult estate. Between 60-92% of Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller people, who were due for release in the next three months, stated that they needed help to contact their families. These figures are around double that than those for other ethnic groups. The research by HMIP also found that 60% of the Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller people who required

⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Beyond Acronyms: Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁶⁵ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Beyond Acronyms: Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁶⁶ Ministry of Justice (2019) [Working with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children and young people: Effective practice for Youth Offending Teams](#)

⁶⁷ Friends Families and Travellers with HMP Ford (2017) <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ford.pdf>

⁶⁸ Prison Reform Trust (2023) [Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile](#)

⁶⁹ HMIP (2020) [Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: A thematic review by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.](#)



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help to contact their families were not receiving the support needed. This is important as reoffending rates are significantly higher for people who do not adequately maintain family ties.⁷⁰

Both men and women will suffer with the pain of separation. However, the negative consequences are accentuated when Traveller women go to prison. Traveller women are at the centre of family and community life. They are also likely to have care responsibilities from a young age, meaning a support network may be removed when they are imprisoned. Statistically, Travellers are more likely to be parents with 66% of Travellers in prison having children under the age 18, compared to 47% of non-Travellers, 7% of Traveller prisoners were arranging care for dependents compared to 3% of general population, and 41% of Travellers were still contacting family compared to 29% of non-Traveller respondents.⁷¹

Currently, Gypsy and Traveller women make up 6% of the prison population. This is higher in some prisons, for example, 9% of women at HMP Foston Hall, 9% at HMP Bronzefield, and 10% at HMP Peterborough self-identified as Gypsy or Traveller, as part of HMIP survey responses.⁷²

There are also additional trauma related experiences that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women face whilst in prison, around domestic abuse, separation from young children and family, low literacy, less frequent visits from family (due to locations of women's prisons) and lack of culturally appropriate refuges after release.⁷³

Many Gypsies and Travellers are reluctant to officially declare their ethnic background because of past experiences of discrimination. In prison, this reluctance is even greater because of the risk of name-calling or bullying, from both staff and other non-Gypsy, and Traveller prisoners.⁷⁴ Discrimination impacts upon mental health, especially when isolated from usual support networks as people in prison experience. Mental ill-health is one of the most prevalent and challenging issues in prisons and is closely associated with the unsettlingly high rates of suicide and self-harm in custody. Contributing factors such as lower levels of literacy also impact on ability to access education opportunities, leading to greater time in cell or to feelings of isolation and more likely to be bored or unhappy, compounding poor mental health.⁷⁵ Key factors which exacerbate the poor mental health of Traveller prisoners are lack of access to services, disruption of community and family support, prejudice within the system, discrimination and loss of self-respect.⁷⁶

A HM Inspectorate of Prisons report found that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners were also more likely to report having a range of other problems on arrival in prison. 27% reported feeling depressed or suicidal on arrival compared with 15% of other non-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners. 30% (compared with 23%) had issues with contacting family members. 23% (compared with 16%) had worries around money. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners were also less likely to report receiving

⁷⁰ HMIP (2020) [Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: A thematic review by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.](#)

⁷¹ The Traveller Movement (2020) [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women in Prison](#)

⁷² Prison Reform Trust (2017) [Counted out Black, Asian, Minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system](#)

⁷³ The Traveller Movement (2021) [Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women in Prison](#)

⁷⁴ Irish Chaplaincy in Britain. [Gypsy and Traveller Prisoners: A Good Practice Guide. Mac Gabhann, C and Cottrell-Boyce, J](#)

⁷⁵ The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain. Mac Gabhann, C. (2011) [Voices Unheard A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison.](#)

⁷⁶ The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain. Mac Gabhann, C. (2011) [Voices Unheard A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison.](#)

information about what support was available for this (35% compared with 44% on non-Gypsy, Romany and Traveller prisoners).⁷⁷

With regard to accessing support for drug and alcohol misuse, the latest Children in Custody report found that whilst both Gypsy and Traveller and other groups reported drug/alcohol misuse, 0% of Gypsy and Traveller youth reported receiving required help for their drug/alcohol use whilst in custody, compared to 40% of non-Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller young people.⁷⁸

For Roma communities, no data was found for young people in custodial settings. However, a comprehensive study carried out in a women's prison in 2011 highlighted the high number of Roma women prisoners incarcerated for theft and the women were largely distinct from other prisoner groups in terms of low levels of education/literacy, distinct language needs and similarity of offences. They overwhelmingly perceived of themselves as disadvantaged and discriminated against within prison by fellow prisoners and by the prison system in terms of reduced access to early release because of predominantly being of no fixed abode.⁷⁹

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The biggest issue seems to be regarding accessibility of appropriate educational and vocational training and accessing support for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in prison. There was plenty of anecdotal evidence found in the literature review to suggest that these communities would like to be able to access more of the above, but also the barriers they face around literacy and self-confidence meant that many were unlikely to access these courses. There needs to be more in terms of support groups for these communities and support with accessing training and support.

9) Resettlement

As most reoffending by young adults occurs in the first three months of release from prison it is important for prison and probation services to work together to make the resettlement arrangements for a young adult leaving custody. However, evidence from this T2A finds that this is rarely the case.⁸⁰

According to the 'Overlooked and Overrepresented' report, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller boys interviewed raised concerns around finding somewhere to live, obtaining ID, accessing benefits and bank accounts and getting a job. In many instances, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller boys were less likely to know who to contact for support should they encounter problems on release. Non-community members were more than twice as likely to say they knew who to contact should they encounter problems opening a bank account (20% compared to 8%) and three times more likely to know who to contact to continue health services (15% compared to 6%). Non-community members were also slightly more likely to know who to contact for help to find accommodation (26% compared to 19%)

⁷⁷ All figures from HMIP (2014) [People in prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers](#)

⁷⁸ HMIP (2022) [Children in Custody](#)

⁷⁹ Yildiz, C., and Bartlett, A., (2011). [Language, Foreign Nationality and Ethnicity in an English Prison: Implications for the quality of health and social research. Journal of Medical Ethics. 37, 637-640](#)

⁸⁰ Transition to Adulthood Pathway Framework (2023) <https://t2a.org.uk/resettlement/>

and getting a job (28% to 25%). Interestingly, 44% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller boys reported that they would have difficulty securing a job on release, compared to 52% of others. This may be accounted for because many Gypsy and Traveller boys enter employment in family businesses, so having a criminal record is not usually a barrier.⁸¹

The findings of 'Overlooked and Overrepresented' identify some alarming trends and show there are opportunities to help Gypsy, Roma Traveller children lead constructive, positive lives upon release. Children in both STCs and YOIs had a positive outlook toward education and believed it would benefit them when they left. However, the institutions are not doing enough to build on this appetite and engage constructively with these children. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were significantly less likely, in STCs, to report that they had learnt skills for jobs they would like to do in the future.⁸²

Evidence for young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women leaving the Criminal Justice System is scant, though some anecdotal evidence suggests many female Traveller prisoners needed help to sort out accommodation for release but were not receiving the support needed.⁸³ It may, however, be assumed that younger Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women would automatically return to the main family home. However, figures included in a 2020 report state that in general, 6 in 10 women that leave prison face homelessness. Key drivers in this include the lack of release planning and the distance between women's homes and where they end up in prison, effectively severing family ties and previous support networks.⁸⁴ 58% of women are reconvicted within one year of leaving prison. This rises to 73% for sentences of less than 12 months and to 83% for women who have served more than 11 previous custodial sentences.⁸⁵

The Irish Chaplaincy's *Traveller Resettlement Project* started in 2019 and has helped meet the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners around accessing support, education and obtaining ID both inside prison settings and upon release. However, the project workers have noted that,

*'In terms of resettlement with this group, in some ways they have never been settled as they have never had ID documents, claimed benefits or even been registered with a GP. As many of them have experienced discrimination in prison and on release by Probation staff who sometimes view their ethnicity as a risk factor, they are reluctant to engage with authorities. Due to problems with literacy, they find it impossible to undergo required courses both in prison and in the community and therefore do not progress in their sentence plans or community licenses. There are also high rates of mental health issues, self-harm and suicide in this group both in prison and the community.'*⁸⁶

Prison staff who were questioned as part of a 2023 report into meaningful activities in prison settings for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people found many felt embarrassed to participate in education due to their low literacy and there was particularly an issue with engaging girls and women;

⁸¹ The Traveller Movement (2017) [Overlooked and Overrepresented: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in the youth justice system](#)

⁸² The Traveller Movement (2017) [Overlooked and Overrepresented: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in the youth justice system](#)

⁸³ HMIP (2020) [Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning A thematic review](#)

⁸⁴ Prison Reform Trust (2020), [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)

⁸⁵ The Traveller Movement (2021) [Gypsy, Roma Traveller Women in Prison](#)

⁸⁶ HMIP (2020) [Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning](#)

“When I think of examples about younger girls, they’re point-blank: “I’m not going to school to learn anything, I want to work and do a job, I can’t read or write and I’m not going to any education because I don’t do it in the community”. The inference is almost that we’re impacting on their culture negatively by making them go to education. But, of course, our whole ethos is rehabilitation and education is a massive part of that ... They could work full-time, but some of the good jobs that will aid them on release, we’ve set them up in such a way that they require that level of literacy and numeracy.”

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Little evidence or data was found regarding what support there is for young Gypsies and Travellers after they leave custodial settings. The only issue that was clear was around knowing who to contact for ongoing support to access benefits, healthcare and other support they might need post-custody. Effective signposting to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Advocacy charities and other support such as mental health may be lacking.

There also seems to be some evidence suggesting women may need additional support with resettlement, especially where children are involved, and domestic abuse is an issue.

10) Enabling Desistance from Crime

Young people from minority ethnic groups face ongoing systemic issues of oppression and racism both inside and outside of the CJS, which impact day-to-day interactions and experiences and may block pathways to desistance. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are disproportionately excluded from school, and once children have entered the CJS evidence shows significant deficits in educational provision in the community and in custody.⁸⁷

However, 63% of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in Youth Offending Institutions said that they had either done something or that something had happened to them that will make them less likely to offend in the future (compared to 51% of non-Gypsy, Traveller and Roma).⁸⁸ Being able to access intervention programmes while in custody also help address offending behaviour needs. For example, substance misuse treatment, psychological therapy and offending behaviour programmes. In a 2020 survey, a higher proportion of male prisoners from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller background stated they had completed non-offending behaviour programmes than non-Traveller populations (58% compared with 45%). In fact, all the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers prisoners interviewed in this study had completed some form of intervention during their current sentence.⁸⁹

Engagement with education can significantly reduce reoffending. The proven one-year reoffending rate is 34% for prisoner learners in general, compared to 43% for people who don’t engage in any form of learning.⁹⁰ There are opportunities to help Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children lead constructive, positive lives upon release, and children in both STCs and YOIs had a positive outlook toward education and believed it would benefit them when they left. However, the institutions are not doing enough to

⁸⁷ Alliance for Youth Justice (2023) [Young People in Transition in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁸⁸ The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented](#)

⁸⁹ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Minority Ethnic Prisoners and Rehabilitation](#)

⁹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2016) [Exploring the outcomes of prisoner learners: analysis of linked offender records from the Police National Computer and Individualised Learner Records](#)



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build on this appetite and engage constructively with these children. They were significantly less likely, in STCs, to report that they had learnt skills for jobs they would like to do in the future.⁹¹

A recently published study by the Alliance for Youth Justice found that racial inequalities experienced in childhood mean young adults from minority ethnic backgrounds may be more likely to transition from youth custody settings to adult settings from a point of greater vulnerability which can also leave them facing additional barriers to desistance. Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds may therefore see the effects of the cliff edge at 18 compounded by deficits in support before, during, and after transition, which may leave them more vulnerable to continued contact with the Criminal Justice System.⁹²

The Traveller Resettlement Project was set up in April 2019 to target what was described by a project worker as ‘a marginalised, difficult-to-engage group who have high rates of recidivism and have largely been ignored and discriminated against by the Criminal Justice System’. The project offered pre- and post-release mentoring and support, including in meetings with the probation service, job centres and drug/alcohol rehabilitation services. The project work was most advanced at HMP/YOI Isis, which was the only prison where a project worker had succeeded in engaging well with Prison Offender Managers and key workers and had attended pre-release meetings.⁹³

In a recent Ministry of Justice report, 81% of female Traveller prisoners surveyed felt that the education, vocational skills or training that they had gained in custody would help them when released. In the survey all female Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners who had received one-to-one work felt that it would help them when released.⁹⁴

The charity Clinks submitted written evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee study about barriers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners who have low literacy levels. Services in prison are requested through a written form, often leaving illiterate prisoners to rely on other prisoners to access any healthcare, education, housing or employment services. Similarly, access to services and employment post-release in the wider community often relies on a good level of literacy, creating additional barriers to desistance from crime.⁹⁵

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Opportunities around accessing education seem to be key here. Anecdotal evidence from prisoners suggest that specific projects targeted at Gypsy, Roma and Traveller literacy improvement have been popular, but these seem to have been discontinued. There is also some evidence to suggest that Gypsies and Travellers access non-offending behaviour programmes with good success rates but again data was not found in the public domain.

⁹¹ The Traveller Movement (2016) [Overlooked and Overrepresented](#)

⁹² Alliance for Youth Justice (2023) [Young People in Transition in the Criminal Justice System](#)

⁹³ Irish Chaplaincy (2019) [Traveller Support Project](#)

⁹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2020) [Ethnic Minority Prisoners and Rehabilitation](#)

⁹⁵ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2019) [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#)



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Since embarking on this project and word getting out around prisons, FFT has been contacted on several occasions by prison librarians, asking for reading and educational material suitable for their Gypsy and Traveller prisoners. FFT have also recently visited a local prison in Sussex and joined a support group session that prisoners enrol on to help them with behavioural and emotional change. From attending this session, we were made aware that only recently have Third Sector support organisations been permitted back into the prison to work with people after the Covid pandemic. No doubt this is also likely to be the case elsewhere, meaning that little in the way of support, behaviour change, or other education programmes offered by external organisations has been taking place for the past three years or so.

CONCLUSION

The paucity of available research and reporting into the experiences of young Gypsies, Roma and Traveller people demonstrates the urgent need for further study. . The project running alongside this literature review seeks to delve into the thoughts and experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people aged 18-25 years old, with particular focus on the transition from youth custody settings to adult prisons. It may be that beyond the conclusion of this project, other specific gaps are identified that require further research. For example, data seems to be completely lacking for Roma communities and there is very little for young women. In this review, key gaps have been identified for each section of the T2A Pathway Framework, and the forthcoming project will seek to explore these gaps in detail and draw out the experiences of young people who have been through each step of the Framework and suggest ways in which improvements can be implemented to better support young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.