

# Not just another statistic

Life in Wales for Gypsy Travellers



Comisiwn  
Cydraddoldeb a  
Hawliau Dynol

Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission

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## Who we are

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.

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# Introduction

**“We’re nobody to them see, we’re just smelly dirty Gypsies that just throw rubbish everywhere to their eyes. They’ve got no trust in us”**

In October 2008 the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales published **Who do you see?** This was a report based on the first major survey of attitudes in Wales towards race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, transgender, age, disability and human rights.

The survey revealed a Wales that is largely comfortable with people from different backgrounds. But it also found significant pockets of negative attitudes and prejudice. The most persistent negative attitudes centred around four groups of people – one of these groups were Gypsy Travellers.

In responding to this the Commission in Wales undertook qualitative research to explore the real life experiences of Gypsy Travellers. This focused on the areas of life where Gypsy Travellers experience being treated unequally and to understand the impact of both actual and anticipated discrimination.

The findings have provided a fascinating insight into the lived experiences of Gypsy Travellers and how they are treated by society in a number of different settings.

## Participants

A total of 20 Gypsy Travellers participated in this research. Sixteen lived on dedicated Traveller sites – two in the south of Wales (near Cardiff) and one in the north (near Wrexham) – and four lived in social housing. Of the four sites visited, three were run by the local authority and one was privately owned by the community of Travellers who lived there.

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the individual experiences of Gypsy Travellers. Given the in-depth and qualitative nature of the research, the sample is not intended to be representative of the composition of the participant groups. Rather, it is intended to be broadly reflective of the different circumstances faced by Gypsy Travellers.

# Experiences of Gypsy Travellers

**“People say ‘oh a Gypsy site...we didn’t even know this was here.’ But when they come into your home it’s a different story...like you’re clean and whatever and all that there”**

**“But they don’t know until they come in, they’ve got prejudice against you as soon as you say it’s a Gypsy site”**

This section explores, in depth, the experiences of Gypsy Travellers and the impact of the discrimination they are faced with.

Gypsy Travellers’ stories cited numerous instances of how society and individuals had misconceptions of them and their way of life. Issues emerged around the standards and services in their sites; perceptions of discrimination from the police, the education system and in local authority service provision; abuse from individuals; and being unable to participate in society in the way they would like.

Many felt that the Gypsy Traveller way of life was under threat.

## Media portrayal and social stereotypes

**“So we’re blacklisted before we even start...what kind of people are painted in your minds before you start?”**

The media was seen as absolutely critical in shaping people’s attitudes. Participants felt that the negative portrayals of Gypsy Travellers were fuelling mistaken assumptions. This was seen to encourage misunderstanding and derision.

Gypsy Travellers told us of deep and wide held prejudices and misconceptions about them and their way of life. There was a feeling that only a few individuals had firsthand experience of how Gypsy Travellers lived and had based their assumptions on media portrayals and widely held social beliefs about Gypsy Travellers.

**“But if he had done something bad all people soon would have known about it do you know what I mean? Like a Gypsy person, like a Gypsy child who is good...there is nothing said about it. It is like the Travellers that they put on in the newspapers, the only thing what they shows in newspaper is badness. People stopping on the roadside...and rubbish dumped and whatever...that is only the bad side, like they never shows nothing good. The good side do you know what I mean?”**

**“At the end of the day you are still a person underneath the same as everyone else and you have still got body parts the same as everyone else just because you are brought up differently”**

**“Being called a Gypsy is not being classed as being discriminated against...it is not. They said ‘oh you have got to get on with it, that is what you are’ but it is not what you are... you are a person and they have got to realise that. It is not your ethnicity who makes you, it is you yourself”**

**“Oh yes, you get it called the whole way through high school and you get fed up with it...and then you think to yourself what is the point in telling anybody because nobody believes you... because apparently that is who you are but it is not who you are”**

**“We could go and dress ourselves up every day of the week and pretend...speak different ‘oh yes, alright, yes thanks how you doing?’ but that means we have to pretend we are not who we are. And that is like saying we are ashamed of who we are”**

**“But the signs are still up...it is wrong...it's like me putting on my door there - no town people allowed in my house. Know what I mean? I wouldn't do that, lady...I'll talk to anyone...I'll do anybody welcome”**

**“If people's alright with me, I'm alright back with them. You can't judge a person by looking at them...you've got to speak to that person first. It's not what they wear or how they are...it's what lays beneath, know what I mean? I don't know, I can't understand it. Have you ever heard the saying, Gypsies, tramps and thieves, there is a song out of that?”**

## **Community relations**

**“People don't come into this site...like it's not normal for the outsiders to come in. So in that way again back to discrimination about where the address was...I paid for a boiler with my guarantee and they didn't want to come out [to fix it]”**

Prejudice from people in the surrounding community was particularly pronounced for Gypsy Travellers. Many participants reported a high level of tension between themselves and other residents within their local area.

Gypsy Travellers on two sites described how difficult it often was to get local trades people onto their site to do work. One family described having to approach the warden for her to help in persuading an engineer to visit the site and repair their broken boiler. The whole family agreed that getting trades people to visit their home was a continual problem, because local people thought the site to be unsafe.

Other participants described incidents of confrontations taking place between Gypsy Travellers and housed people living in the local area. In most locations participants described fights taking place between Travellers and other locals in pubs, and it was evident that tensions often ran high.

Service in pubs was a major source of frustration and distress for many Gypsy Travellers. Most told us of being refused entry or service in pubs at some point in the past and that some publicans in their local area had imposed a blanket ban on Gypsy Travellers. In some instances there were reports of signs on pubs around Wales saying 'No Gypsies/Travellers'.

One woman living in a house in south Wales said she had booked a function room in a local pub as a venue for a wedding reception but the owner cancelled the booking when she found out she was a Gypsy.

Overall, Gypsy Travellers often felt discriminated by those providing services in the local area. It was felt that this came from a long and deep-seated hostility toward Travellers in the surrounding housed/settled community. What's more there was a sense of often being 'looked down on' by service providers.

**"People that live in this country, normal people...they're afraid of different things, they're afraid of the Polish...they're afraid of us, they're afraid of everything. They're afraid of different people coming in and being higher than them. They're afraid in case we achieve more than what they achieve. That's what's wrong and that's not right...that's judgement on other people when you should praise other people"**

**"But the most prejudice...for Gypsies anyway is the pubs and that"**

**"...the publican looked at my husband... he's like 'I know who you are' he said 'Get out'...he wouldn't even give my husband a chance of speaking..."**

**"I gave her [owner] a deposit and then she rang me three days before the wedding and she said to me I am really sorry ...I can't give you the pub... she said well the reason I am saying is you can't have my place, I got a call last night saying that you are Gypsy. She told me then, out straight"**

# Institutional discrimination against Traveller way of life

There was a strong feeling that the Gypsy Traveller culture had been eroded over time and that modern Wales (and modern Britain as a whole) was not amenable to travelling people.

Areas of Gypsy Traveller life were seen as being under threat. Most respondents owned horses and saw horse ownership as being a fundamental part of their home and cultural life. Living on a contained site gave them little space to graze, rear and ride their horses and there was concern that even this aspect of their lives was becoming increasingly restricted.

Gypsy Travellers felt their ability to live nomadic lives, moving from place to place, had become less and less tenable. Most saw this as a result of a general prejudice in society against Gypsy Traveller people and some expressed resentment at the fact that they were increasingly forced to live static lives on designated sites.

Gypsy Travellers spoke of wanting respect and not to be judged on people's stereotypical views of them. Even where participants lived in static housing, they felt they were still discriminated against. One couple described living in a house and having their vehicles vandalised on a frequent basis. This, and the treatment they received from neighbours, had caused the children to become depressed and the mother to be prescribed anti-depressants, which she is still taking. In the end the couple decided to leave the house.

People's negative assumptions and stereotypes meant that Gypsy Travellers felt that their whole way of life was under threat.

**“Eventually the travelling life will come to an end, so the children will have an education where they can just live in the community”**

**“You should have the right to live your life the way you want to”**

**“...I had my horses for eight years on allotments...I have had letters to prove that the council knew they were there and then they came along one morning and took the horses and charged me a thousand pounds to get them back”**

**“I've got a horse...I can bring it here so my little boy can sit on it but when the warden sees it he wants it off [the site]...but they shouldn't do that because they're taking away your culture of life”**

**“What we would like done, if you want to know the truth...you know all these leaflets what's put up saying 'no Gypsies allowed in public'?... we'd like them took down”**

**“We tried to live in a house ...but it never worked because the people next door were hassling us; names the kids were getting called, I was arguing with the women and [husband] was arguing with the men...it was terrible”**

**“I can’t live in house, not with being a Gypsy and that. The kids are not used to it...”**

**“The Government have taken our culture away from us...we can’t travel anymore. You’re not allowed to stop at the side of the road...you can’t do it. Like that’s our way of living and then to live here permanently we’ve got to go outside to have a bath and to wash where if we had a house give to us with a piece of land we’d move to it but where’s the council going to give us that?”**

**“We can’t afford it so they won’t let us live our way”**

**“They think that beyond those gates [into the site] there’s a different world! They think we’re going to cage them in and lock them up!”**

**“They’ve got to accept that we’ve got a different way of life to people in houses...we’re different, completely, do you know what I mean?”**

## **Street level abuse**

**“They watch you like a hawk because they don’t trust you when you go into a shop because you’re a Traveller”**

**“Sometimes if I walk into a shop...they will follow you around or they’ll say you know...I’ve often heard them going on the walkie-talkie things and if I’ve left the store ‘Oh she’s making her way up to such a place’, but I’ve never taken anything. So like you know, I think it’s just the Gypsy alert when we’re on the town”**

Street level abuse was anticipated by many of those included within the study. Participants described often feeling unsafe and exposed to abuse and disadvantage within their local communities.

Many complained about being followed around supermarkets by security guards or shop assistants, which made those we spoke to feeling singled out and targeted.

Participants suspected that the security guards could identify them as Gypsy Travellers from the way they spoke and dressed. Some felt that staff often assumed they visited the shops in order to steal from them.



These instances often aroused strong feelings and for some led to confrontation. One woman described taking her children shoe shopping and being approached by a store assistant. A second store assistant told the first to watch the Gypsy Traveller woman 'in case she starts trying to rip us off'. This led to an argument and the Gypsy Traveller woman leaving in distress without buying any shoes.

There was a sense from some participants of being treated as inferior to other racial groups. One person felt if a Black person had been treated in a discriminatory way, the law would have protected them. Gypsy Travellers also told us that owing due to widely-held assumptions about them, they are often all judged on one individual's negative actions.

Many participants described being discouraged from going into town and their local communities. One woman told us that if she has to go to town then she dresses up and alters her accent, so not to get identified as a Gypsy Traveller.

**“When you go into town, as soon as they [security guards] hear your voice they know that you’re a Traveller...you go into a shop and they follow you around the shop”**

**“When you go into the shops in town, the moment you walk into town you’ll hear a beep and them people come and watch you...to warn staff that it’s Travellers coming in”**

**“People come and watch you...pretending that they’re not watching you”**

**“They just don’t trust you because you’re a Traveller...it makes you feel very bad because I’ve never had a record in my life, I’ve never been arrested for thieving”**

**“Because I’m a Traveller that’s why you’re watching us”**

**“If you’re in town someone might come up to you and say ‘fuck off you bloody Gypsy bastard, go back to your own country’. People have said it loads of times”**

**“Sometimes you can be in a shop and that shop can be packed full and people are all just staring at you”**

**“If one person does something wrong then we all get the blame”**

**“I love Wales, this is my children’s home, this is where I’ve been all my life, but I just don’t like the way we’ve been treated here. It’s completely different...like in Liverpool now, if you walked into a shop, if a security guard followed you or people call you names, if you reported them, they’d get done for it. They can’t go and be prejudiced about people, but here it’s okay to be prejudiced...”**

# Housing and site provision

**“We haven’t got no facilities for our children to go into a crèche or nursery or anything like that”**

The quality of sites provided for Gypsy Travellers varied widely and there were some stark differences in participants’ attitudes to their sites. Those who were content with their sites regarded them as safe, with good quality facilities and a communal atmosphere.

However, this was not true for all participants. There were some unhappy with the lack of basic amenities and decent sanitation, unsafe access roads and an absence of facilities for children on their sites.

A local authority run site in south Wales and another in the north were criticised particularly strongly. The majority of Gypsy Travellers living on these sites felt they were dangerous for children. Residents were also critical of the lack of basic amenities for children, such as play areas or community halls. There was also extensive criticism of sanitation facilities at both sites.

In one instance a woman resorted to taking her children to the local swimming pool to use the showers but was refused entry because she was identified as a Gypsy Traveller.

Most of those living on council run sites felt that the local authority was reluctant to improve these sites. However, the views of those living on the privately run site in north Wales were more positive. Residents there owned the land and were responsible for building and maintaining their own facilities. As a result, participants felt there was a far greater degree of autonomy over how the site was set up. Residents also agreed that the site was safe and were far more upbeat about the provision of basic amenities.

The main difficulty facing those living on this site was around planning permission, as residents wanted to build on the land but were unable to obtain permission from the local authority.

Some residents on sites felt imprisoned, not only because of the facilities, but because of the access and people’s attitudes. Another area of frequent complaint was the attitude and behaviour of some Gypsy Traveller site wardens. Relations were clearly often strained with a number of residents suspecting that one warden opened their mail, and another reporting the warden had threatened to have their benefits taken away.

Most people were aware of officials at the local authority who could be contacted to discuss issues concerning the sites. However there were also those who described being unaware of who to register a complaint with. Most Gypsy Travellers sensed there was a reluctance to improve Traveller sites within local authorities and while they were able to get themselves heard, rarely believed this had much effect.

Residents were reluctant to complain in case of repercussions, and felt nothing would be done anyway as it might also threaten their place on the site.

**“There’s been loads of accidents...I can’t get out there [out of the site] with a car never mind him [the son] to cross the road. I can’t even go...There’s not even traffic lights, nothing at all”**

**“We haven’t got no facilities for our children to go into a crèche or nursery or anything like that”**

**“You’ve got to wash children every day...they’re out playing, you’ve got to wash, there’s rats. We’re over-run by rats. You’ve got no water, you’ve got no toilets, you’ve got no showers, you’ve got no facilities, you’ve not got a thing, nothing”**

**“There was no way...they knew we was Travellers and so no way”**

**“I’ve lived here years and I still like it here...you’ve got everything you need”**

**“They won’t let us build on the site, the council always blocks it”**

**“Nothing been done...like we’ve had all this in the past. We’ve had meetings with the doctors...we’ve had meetings with the MPs...they goes out, does a little bit of a report, waits for our votes and goodbye, forget about you...we’re still waiting”**

**“All we have is a camera and a fence...It’s like we’re in a cage”**

**“You haven’t got as much privacy as you had before...everyone’s more strict, they want to know everything that goes on in your life”**

**“When [warden] was here it was completely different, you could put what you want where you want...metal on the plot”**

**“There’s a warden on this site that’s got the right to hit children... this is their ground and they can do what they like in this ground. And the trouble is that we can’t complain about it because it’s a waste of time complaining. One child has been threatened with a metal pole and smacked in the face by a warden”**

**“I said to the mother if it was my child I’d go to the head of the council, I’d go to a solicitor...but it’s a waste of time, if you complain about things they’d only make things difficult”**

**“You’re afraid to complain about the wardens in case you get kicked off and you’ve nowhere else to go”**

## **Council**

**“We’ve always had hassle from the council...they are always trying to push you from one community to the next”**

Most Gypsy Travellers are dependent on the local council for the maintenance and the standards of their sites. Those we spoke to often felt that this was problematic because of perceptions about Gypsy Travellers.

It was felt that where there were confrontational and unhelpful relationships with the council which were damaging and costly for both sides.

Many participants felt little notice was taken of their communities’ needs and what were seen to be reasonable requests. There was a sense of receiving a poor service in comparison to what ordinary residents received.

Access to shops and basic public services was seen as problematic by many Gypsy Travellers. Although many had cars and accepted living on a Traveller site meant living out of town, access to bus services and supermarkets was seen as inadequate. Many believed their sites were overlooked when facilities such as pavements or bus stops were installed in the local area.

Due to the location of sites, the surrounding traffic and controls were seen as major safety issues, particularly for children. These were not felt to be taken seriously or addressed by the council.

**“In the long run, it would be better for the council to provide sites for us because they wouldn’t spend so much money on court orders or clearing up after us”**

**“We’ve got no public transport here”**

**“If you want to get a bus into town from here you’ve got to walk down into the village”**

**“There’s no traffic lights...there’s traffic lights by the estate of houses for safety of kids, but there’s none here”**

**“The council...they don’t think of our safety...because we’re just Travellers, we’re just Gypsies in their eyes”**

**“On the road outside I would love for there to be traffic lights out there. Or even just for signs you know, to slow down, children or horses. Anybody could be driving along that road, a child in the road or a horse could go like across”**

**“There’s been loads of accidents...even my child ...he said ... go to the shop. I can’t get out there with a car, never mind allow him to cross the road. I can’t even go...there’s nowhere here for a child to go...there’s not even traffic lights, nothing at all”**

**“Not even a crossing. They’ve got traffic lights at the shop. ...signs up for the shop. The site’s been here before that shop. What’s the difference of having them up there for them and not where there is children constant like. Only because parents looks out for each other’s children. Like that road there’s nothing stopping a child from going into that road, only for parents being aware of the dangers of the road and watching for each other’s children. Do you know like going out the gate or like we know if there’s a child gone out or if there’s a child missing we know straight away”**

## **Police**

**“The police can be very abusive as well towards Travellers”**

**“When there’s trouble it’s always the Gypsies door knocked down”**

**“They [police] don’t believe Gypsies”**

A number of Gypsy Travellers reported instances of strained relations with the police where some felt unfairly victimised and stigmatised by officers.

On two of the sites visited, Travellers reported being stopped and searched on roads around the site where they lived and described violent confrontations with the police during parties on nearby land.

Travellers living in a site in south Wales reported how police had reacted violently when they had a bonfire party on an adjoining piece of land. The police had cleared Travellers away using truncheons and with a level of force that was not felt to be necessary.

Where Gypsy Travellers had experienced stop and search procedures, participants felt these were usually unjustified. There was a strong feeling that the police carried out these activities on the roads around Traveller sites so as to target Gypsy Traveller communities.

Where incidents took place in the local area, Gypsy Travellers felt often there was an assumption amongst the police that they were involved. Sometimes this was felt to be overt. The impact on the Gypsy Traveller communities was profound. Not only did it increase suspicion and hostility but in some instances affected the health and well being of individuals.

There were also reports of some participants feeling harassed by the police. One woman said that her brother-in-law had been severely beaten by the police. The beating reportedly left a dent in the caravan. The couple who owned it did put a claim against the police for the damage but she said this never went anywhere.

Most participants showed an awareness of how to register complaints with and/or against the police and many reported having done so in the past. Even when cases of mistreatment were reported, there was little confidence in the system or in getting things put right.

**“We had police coming here before didn’t we?...we was on another pitch and we had a tourer trailer, smaller trailer and he was looking for somebody...he said can I come in? I said yes, of course you can come in... who are looking for? He wouldn’t tell me...He said can I search your caravan? I said ‘well tell me what you’re looking for.’ I said yes, go in, I said the door’s open. He went in, he searched, he seen his own reflection in the mirror and thought it was somebody in there that he was looking for”**

**“We goes to our solicitor’s to make the complaint about them [the police] but it still is never taken no further because their word is, like, against us. Our word’s against them”**

**“They’ll follow you for ages and pull you up...and every time my son went out, they’d pull him up. So I reported them and I went to a solicitor but still they carry on doing it, so it’s a waste of time isn’t it?”**

**“They were suspicious because they couldn’t understand why my son was a Traveller and didn’t have a criminal record”**

**“The policeman said to me, ‘if it takes 20 years I will get you...I will find out what you’re doing. I know’, he said, ‘you robs old people, you go around robbing old women but you are never caught...if it runs for 20 years, I’m going to get something against you’...”**

**“I know that you robs he said, there’s never one of you people, there never ever was one of you people who didn’t have a bad record”**

**“My child was getting depressed by it...for nine months they [the police] mentally abused my child”**

**“If they get a warrant for one plot they will then try and search the other plots with the same warrant... ‘Oh we have a warrant to do whatever we want’ they’ll say... ‘because we can get away with it’...that’s exactly what they’ll say...and they’ll push you out of the caravan”**

# Education

**“I went to primary school and secondary school ...and college at the moment. But I do find they discriminate against you a lot... I remember being in the high school and you would be sat in a classroom and you would get called ‘Gypsy, Gypsy, Gypsy’, but you are not allowed to call them names back”**

Many Gypsy Traveller parents were unhappy about the way in which their children were treated within the education system. While there was acknowledgement that Traveller children often dropped out of education early, those who wanted their children to stay in education felt their children often received a lower level of attention than children of people from other communities.

Many Gypsy Travellers thought teachers had low expectations of Traveller children and did not push them to succeed. One woman believed her son, who had struggled at primary school and was later diagnosed with dyslexia, was not diagnosed early enough because the school took his low achievement for granted.

Another mother described how on one occasion she believed teachers had neglected her daughter’s welfare. When her daughter cut her head she was not allowed to see the school nurse immediately. The girl thought her teachers assumed that she just wanted to get out of her lesson.

Discrimination was also experienced outside of the classroom from other parents and children. One Gypsy mother felt unable to challenge the abuse because she wanted her children to have the benefits of education. It was also thought that complaining would actually make their situation worse.

Other participants described children within schools refusing to play with their children. Many participants reported feeling helpless and powerless in these situations and again, that Gypsy Travellers had few or no effective rights.

The Gypsy Traveller way of life was also seen as a barrier to their children’s education. Moving around meant Gypsy Traveller children had inconsistent access to schooling, with reports of a reluctance to send children to school for fear of what would happen to them while there. One woman told of how the school segregated Gypsy Traveller children.

The impact of these experiences leads Gypsy Travellers to mistrust the education system and staff. As a consequence of this participants were more reluctant to send their children to school for fear of the discrimination being repeated.

As with the police, many Gypsy Travellers we spoke to felt that their word was less likely to be believed than those in authority or employment. One woman described speaking to the head teacher on a number of occasions about the treatment of her children. However, she found the head teacher to be unpleasant and unwilling to help.

**“The primary school said they hadn’t done anything [to find out the reasons for low academic attainment] because they were assuming that he wasn’t going to high school”**

**“Like when Travelling children has the problems with reading and writing in school, they [the school] don’t do the thing that they should do... teaching them, like to send him for a one-to-one...they think it is a waste of time”**

**“I went to the teacher and told her ‘miss, I’ve hurt myself, I just fell’. She looked at my head and said ‘It’s okay, go back to class’...so I went back to class and then at dinner time, I started getting all dizzy spells in me head...I told miss that I didn’t feel well and I’m going home..., [she said] ‘Oh, that’s your excuse, you’re not going anywhere, sit in the corner’...”**

**“I told her not to go to school anymore because you’re prejudiced. Not one of you would look at my child’s head...you were afraid to touch her so you must be prejudiced...because she’s a Traveller”**

**“I...went to school and all that and had a great time with some of the lads who wasn’t Travellers in school, playing football, learning things that we didn’t learn, but as soon as you would fall out with one of them, first thing that comes into their head is ‘you dirty, rotten, stinking Traveller’...”**

**“I could complain to the other teachers but it’s no good because it’s their word against you...and because we’re Travellers no-one believes us. That’s why Travellers don’t complain as much, because they know people don’t listen to us; people think we’re liars because we’re Travellers”**

**“The council don’t realise how it affects people’s lives, like the children now, they’re in school getting an education, they’re getting in the community and maybe, one day, when they’re grown up, they’ll be able to get a job”**

**“I get hassle when picking up the kids...I don’t go round the back to take them or drop them off...I have to go through the front doors because they stare a lot, and then I get hassle with their parents and their kids calling my kids names”**

**“My other girl was crying...she said ‘I’m sick Mum, I don’t want to go to school because every day I have to fight them [other children]’. She feels that she has to keep fighting other children and can’t make friends – she is quite badly bullied at school. They tell her she is a ‘dirty Gypsy’”**



**“They usually put Travelling children, try to get them all in one group...and I don’t think that is nice. They put them all into one class....you had two reception classes and you will notice that they put all the travelling children to one class. It is like, they wouldn’t put like all Black children in one class yet how can they do that?”**

## **The workplace**

**“If you do want to get off benefits and you do go and look for a job in that town, as soon as they [see] your address, that’s it...the interview is cancelled”**

Although some participants were not working, some Gypsy Travellers commented on discrimination in relation to employment. There was concern that Gypsy Travellers were discriminated by employers when applying for work and when their address was put on application forms, this would alert employers to the fact that they lived on a Traveller site.

## **Access to justice**

**“Travellers are still not going to fight for human rights because they are afraid that they don’t get anything”**

Some Gypsy Travellers thought on top of the disadvantage created by prejudice and discrimination against them, their lack of education and ability to read also prevented them from being able to access justice.

Most of all they expressed a lack of faith in the various systems and those who operated them. They felt that their word would never be taken seriously or truthfully against somebody else’s.

Sometimes even the Gypsy Traveller traditional language and terminology was seen to increase this disadvantage. A sense of hopelessness and powerlessness pervaded the stories when Gypsy Travellers spoke of trying to seek redress.

**“Sometimes we pull out of a street and then sometimes when the Travelling people or the Gypsy people take their own, start to fight back, it always ends up the Travellers are the ones that are blamed for doing it all. If it goes to court it ends up with the other one seems to get away and saying they do it first”**

**“Yes but that is the problem...like it is word against word and even in a court, I could put a hundred pound bet on it, right, that the court is going to believe somebody that has, say, got an education and this that and the other, over a Traveller”**

“Say you were rude to me right and I was rude to you...I would say then to you ‘you are a very knifey person’... knifey means cutting at me. They turn around and said I said I would knife him. I said I didn’t say that...I meant in my language... in my world they were like knifey, like snapping at me and they were...but they think you meant something else”

“There is nothing that you can do...we gives up hope because we don’t know where to turn to and at the end of the day you haven’t got much rights in our eyes... the ways we looks at it you know?... We have got the same rights of everybody else, do you know what I mean?”

“But people don’t look at that way because you are a Gypsy...you are down to earth, you are what you get, ‘settle what you got and F off’ isn’t it? It is not much that you can change because they knows that we are not very well educated”

## Practical measures and solutions

**“Us being Gypsies we don’t know our rights. We don’t know what law we’ve got...we don’t know”**

As the people we talked to described the prejudice they encountered on a daily basis, solutions also emerged. Significantly, the ideas on what needs to change match closely with priorities identified by many other groups the Commission has engaged with over the past three years.

Clear, simple information was seen as a critical first step in increasing awareness and improving relationships between people. Participants described the need for awareness raising to change attitudes and behaviours towards Gypsy Travellers. In particular Gypsy Travellers wanted people to better understand their lives and to trust them more. Some participants felt that this solution could be around building trust and better relationships within communities through personal contact.

Several solutions were suggested for helping people to have better access to justice. This included the government telling people clearly where to turn for advice and who to approach for help in accessing rights but also having a better understanding of rights.

Gypsy Travellers spoke of wanting equal legal rights the same as other racial groups. Some Gypsy Travellers wanted to law to be strengthened and for there to be bigger penalties for discrimination.

Others felt that service providers should try to change the attitudes and behaviours of staff by issuing guidance and showing how relationships and results could be better.

**“But we’re not different...we just live a different life, we live in a caravan and they live in a brick wall, that’s it. There’s a bit of bad in everybody...a lot of people do nick, a lot of people do wrong...but they’re prejudiced towards us”**

**“Why won’t they take our word for it, and do something about it?”**

**“It is different there...people get a warning, fine, prison for being racist...that’s the only way to stop it”**

**“Let them know that it’s wrong”**

**“You’ve got to take everybody as they come and respect them for what they are”**

**“There was a lady who I spoke to at the school, who came to pick her granddaughter up...we started talking and I told her. She said I should set up a time to go into the school and talk to the children about who we are, what we believe in – let them know more about us. She was real worried that I had been standing on my own all the time with no friends and that”**

**“I do understand that they [locals] don’t know us, they’re going to be a little bit scared, they’re reading the papers every day about other Gypsies doing wrong so they think we’re doing the same. So if we can stand up and just tell them what we’re doing and where we’re from and how we live, that would be perfect...we’re trying then, for the people to get to know us”**

## Next steps

The evidence gathered in this research gives a voice to people who are seldom heard and paints a vivid picture of life for those experiencing prejudice and negative attitudes on a daily basis.

Despite the challenges, everyone we spoke to suggested improvements that could be made, how attitudes could be changed and what steps could be taken to make lives better.

As a top priority, everyone highlighted the need to change attitudes and behaviours through awareness-raising and through education. People feel that changing public perceptions of the issues is a task for a wide range of players.

These include the media, government, public service providers and employers. Making a concerted effort to promote positive images in all of these areas would transform lives.

People spoke about the good stories that could be told about the contributions they make to society and how these are rarely promoted. They spoke about the media and the workplace as key areas where this could make a difference. Personal contact is seen as the key to building understanding, trust and better relations within communities.

Most people talked about how important staff attitudes are in relationships with public services. They said that simpler systems acknowledging one size doesn't fit all would be a big step forward.

Many people spoke about the role of advice and advocacy as a life-line in coping with everyday tasks and in understanding rights. Finances are very stretched for everyone. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for a broad range of individuals and organisations to take actions and make significant progress in achieving the positive next steps highlighted by those who participated in our survey.

The Commission's priorities are evidence based and outcome focused.

The Triennial Review, 'How Fair is Britain' will underpin all of our future work and the findings from this research add to our evidence in Wales and will contribute to shaping our priorities.

We will use our regulatory powers under equality and human rights law and this includes promoting understanding and effective practice. We will be sharing the findings from this research with a wider audience. We are organising conferences and events with specific audiences, such as the media, to promote change.

But the solutions that emerge do not necessarily lie in the Commission's hands. In many areas it is for other organisations and individuals to make the small changes necessary to tackle these issues. Together these will enable us all to make progress towards a fairer Wales – a Wales where everyone is confident and treated with dignity and respect.

# Appendix 1

## Methodology

GfK NOP conducted individual interviews with 20 Gypsy Travellers.

Interviews took place between 7 January and 10 February 2010 in various locations across Wales. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. The interview approach encouraged open and honest responses and was best suited to the hard-to-reach nature of the sample.

Interviewees were recruited via organisations working with the different participant groups in Wales. Some of these organisations were activist in nature and some were support groups. Researchers made contact with these organisations and set up interviews with the participants through them. Given the in-depth and qualitative nature of the research, the sample was not intended to be representative of the composition of the participant groups. Neither was it intended to reflect their geographic dispersal. Rather, it was intended to be broadly reflective of the different circumstances faced by people from each of the participant groups.

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Location</b>		<b>No. interviews</b>
Gypsy Travellers	South	Cardiff	5 paired
	North	Wrexham	5 paired

Given this method of recruitment, researchers were limited in the quotas they could set on the sample.

Overall 10 participants were female and 10 were male. Given the way in which recruitment was conducted, it was not possible to consistently record the socio-economic group (SEG) of the participants in this research. A good spread of ages was achieved across the sample, as shown in the following table.

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Age</b>				
		<b>16-21</b>	<b>22-34</b>	<b>34-49</b>	<b>50-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Gypsy Travellers	20	2	4	8	5	1

A discussion guide was used in all interviews to direct the conversation and ensure key questions and areas for discussion were covered. This guide was developed by GfK NOP and the Commission and is included in appendix 2.

All participants were provided with a £35 incentive for taking part in the research. This was intended to thank them for their time and to cover any travel costs incurred in attending the interview. During the interviews, all participants were provided with an information sheet directing them to support services should they require these. This is also included in the appendix 2.

GfK NOP and the Commission would like to thank the following organisations for their interest in this project and the support they offered throughout it:

- Friends, Families and Travellers
- Cardiff Gypsy and Traveller Project
- Welsh Assembly Government
- Travellers Education Service
- Cardiff County Council
- Wrexham County Council
- Wrexham Local Health Board
- Welsh Refugee Council

# Appendix 2

## Discussion guide

### 1. CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES 10mins

(Aim: to introduce the subject and find out about the respondent)

#### Moderator

- Thank respondents for taking part in the research, introduce self and GfK NOP
- Interview will last 1 hour, explain purpose of research:
  - > *GfK NOP are carrying out research for the Equalities and Human Rights Commission Wales to explore your real life experiences of discrimination and prejudice as well as your thoughts on solutions.*
- Reassure re: confidentiality, recording and MRS Code of Conduct
- Explain importance of being able to say what they think, no right or wrong answers, need for honesty, validity of opinions, any questions?
- Reassure that it's OK to say if they don't understand a question and to ask for it to be said differently.
- Provide recognition that this is a sensitive area and if you want to stop interview / need to take a break, this is absolutely fine.

#### Respondent

- Name, are you working or not working at the moment, what are your main activities during the day (if not working) , interests, where do you live
- Tell me about living in this area – what do you like/not like about living here?
- Tell me about the things that are important to you at the moment?  
Prompt: events, relationships, activities, interests, housing, education, money, work, etc

### 2. EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE 15mins

#### Understanding

As you know, this research is to explore your real life experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Thinking about this:

- What do you understand by discrimination and prejudice?
  - > How would you describe discrimination and prejudice?
  - > Where does discrimination and prejudice happen?
  - > When does it happen?
  - > What type of people face discrimination?
- *Moderator: Show Card B*
  - > What do you think of these definitions?



- > How would you change them?
- Do you believe you have ever experienced discrimination and/or prejudice?
  - > Tell me about these situations – what happened, where did they take place?
  - > How often does this happen?
  - > Why do you think this happened?
  - > How did this situation affect you?
  - > What impact did it have on your life?
  - > *Moderator: Show Card A*
    - Have you experienced discrimination and/or prejudice in any of these areas of life?
    - Question as above...

## Impact

- Thinking about the impact of discrimination and prejudice, how has being discriminated against and/or experiencing prejudice made you feel?
  - > How has it affected you?
  - > In what ways does the worry of being discriminated against and or facing prejudice stop you from doing things you want to do?
  - > In what ways does it make you do things differently?
  - > To what extent has this ever made you:
    - Do things you would otherwise not have done?
    - Not do things you would otherwise have done?
- Does the thought of being discriminated against and/or experiencing prejudice worry you?
  - > If yes, in what situations / which areas of your life?
    - *Prompt using Show Card A if necessary*
  - > If no, in what situations might being discriminated against and/or experiencing prejudice worry you?
    - *Prompt using dartboard / Show Card A if necessary*

### 3. OUTCOMES OF DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE 20mins

- Thinking about the situations where you experienced discrimination and prejudice:
  - > Did you tell anyone?
    - If yes: Who did you tell? Why them? What happened?
    - If no: Why didn't you tell anyone? What made it difficult to tell someone? What would make it easier?
  - > What action did you take? (What action did the person you told take on your behalf?)
    - If took action:
      - What prompted you to take action?
      - What was the result of this?

- How happy were you with this result?
- What result would you have wanted?
- How could you have got this result?
- If did not take action:
  - What prevented you from taking action
  - What could have helped you take action
- How can people who are treated unfairly because of who they are get the result they want?
  - > What would have been the result you wanted?
  - > How could you have got the result you wanted?
  - > How confident would you have been in being able to get the result you wanted in that situation? What would have stopped you?
  - > If you were in the same situation again, what would now prompt you / prevent you from trying to get the result you wanted?
  - > What would prompt you to take action in future .what might prevent you from taking action in future?

#### 4. PRACTICAL MEASURES & SOLUTIONS 15mins

- Thinking about the situations where you experienced discrimination and/or prejudice :
  - > What could have been done to prevent these arising in the first place?
- In each situation, what could have helped you to challenge the discrimination and/or prejudice?
- How could it have been made easier for you to challenge the discrimination and/or prejudice and got the outcomes/result you wanted?
- *Moderator: read out Show Card C:*
  - > What action would you advise this person to take?
  - > How would you advise them to get the result they want?
  - > What should the result of this situation be?
  - > What do you think you would have done?
- Why might people not challenge the discrimination and/or prejudice they experience?
  - > What might prevent them from doing this?
  - > What concerns might they have?
- What action could the following people have taken:
  - > Those behaving/treating you unfairly
  - > You (the one being treated unfairly because of who you are)
  - > The law / courts
  - > The government
  - > Any other individuals / organisations involved
  - > Citizens Advice Bureau
  - > Employer

- > School, college etc
- > Shop
- > Other

**6. SUMMARY** **5mins**

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- Overall, how fairly do you think people in Wales are treated today?
- Overall, how fairly do you feel you are treated at the moment?
- Is there anything else you would like to say before we finish?
- Check whether respondent would like details of local support organisations. Leave card with details in case they want to add anything or get in touch

**Thank & close**

## Contact us

You can find out more or get in touch with us via our website:

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

or by contacting our helpline:

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

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