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National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups: submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the UK 2017

1. About the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

- 1.1. Formed in 2005 the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups is currently made up of 21 groups predominantly across England, Scotland and Wales. We are the only Gypsy and Traveller membership-based infrastructure organisation in the UK. Membership is open to any new or existing GRT group within the UK where at least 60% of the management committee is of GRT origin – groups where less than 60% of the management committee is of GRT origin can join as “Associated Members”. Key areas of our work include capacity building and development of member organisations to increase their resilience and sustainability and local/national policy-focussed work (including planning, accommodation, health, education and criminal justice).
- 1.2. Our submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the UK 2017 concentrates on the UK Government’s performance with regard to 4 key areas: Equality and discrimination; Planning and accommodation; Education and Health.

2. Equality and Discrimination

2.1 Relevant recommendations made to the UK in 2012:

- Review national legislation to ensure equality and non-discrimination
- Consider strengthening policies to combat discrimination in all areas, notably in employment and education
- Continue stepping up its efforts in tackling discrimination and inequality for all its citizens
- Take effective measure to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race, religion and nationality and to guarantee the rights of... Roma people.
- Take all appropriate measures to combat prejudices and negative stereotypes, which may result in racial discrimination or incitement to racial hatred
- Awareness raising campaign about rights of migrants and against racial discrimination

- Strengthen data collection and maintain disaggregated data to better understand the scale and severity of hate crimes towards women, immigrants, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, and children

2.2 Evidence:

Research for the “Experts by Experience” report ¹ and previous studies, has shown that discrimination and racism toward Gypsies, Irish Travellers and the Roma community continues across the UK. This can involve verbal abuse through to violent and even fatal physical attacks. Abusive media coverage and overtly racist statements from local and national politicians add to the ignorance and prejudice of many members of the settled population, while those in authority frequently fail to challenge them. As a result anti-Gypsyism can be described with accuracy as “the last acceptable form of racism”.

- 2.3 Negative coverage of the communities by certain sections of the media, coupled with the “localism” agenda, an active “anti-gypsy” stance on the part of certain national and local politicians and the change in definition under Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) and its “knock on” impact on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs] have helped to worsen the situation since 2012. This needs to be set against real improvements that had been made in previous years.
- 2.4 In 2012, the UK Government published an action plan to tackle hate crime in England, Wales and Northern Ireland entitled ‘Challenge it, Report it, Stop it’ (2012) that set out key delivery areas until 2015. The Action Plan notes that there may be a significant problem of under reporting of hate crime amongst Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Roma communities although there is little disaggregated data. The European Commission² noted the prevalence of discrimination in the UK and states that “hostile attitude and negative stereotyping of Gypsies and Travellers and newly arrived Roma should be carefully addressed. Effective measures should be taken to combat anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech”
- 2.5 In 2011, the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) noted that drastic inequalities and discrimination continue to be faced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma communities across the UK. CERD was particularly concerned about site provision, which they identified as the lynch-pin to many of the inequalities suffered by these communities and the Equality and Human Rights Commission has shown examples of how local communities have mobilised to oppose legal Gypsy and Traveller sites. Housed Gypsies and Travellers are also exposed to racism from neighbours and this can have a negative impact on their health and well-being.
- 2.6 Lack of consistency in CJS data collection means that it is hard to give statistically accurate data regarding incidence of recorded hate speech and discrimination.

¹ Lane, Spencer and Jones, “Gypsy, Traveller and Roma: Experts by Experience - Reviewing UK Progress on the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies”, Anglia Ruskin University, October 2014

² European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice Report on the implementation of the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. European Union 2014 - page 55, 2014

“Word of mouth” data indicates that there has been an increase in all forms of hate crime

2.7 Recommendations:

- 1. As mainstream approaches have failed to facilitate equal opportunities for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities we recommend that the UK Government establish a National Roma Integration Strategy (as recommended by the European commission and exemplified by the Welsh Government).**
- 2. EU structural funds have been allocated to the UK to support all disadvantaged people, including the ‘Roma’. Targeted fundings should be allocated to Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community organisations in order to build capacity and promote civic engagement with authorities. This will help to support the integration of the communities and ensure they have equal access to services and civil society.**
- 3. While the UK government has adopted policy measures to eliminate hate speech, a clearer strategy is needed to take action against the media or individuals that incite discrimination and racism against Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities and individuals. Both the European Court of Human Rights and the UN have drawn attention to the discrimination that Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people face in the UK. The media needs to take urgent action to address the discriminatory reporting against Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people and refrain from stereotyping. Any media that incites direct or indirect discrimination, hatred or violence against these communities should be condemned and legal action needs to be taken against them.**
- 4. There is a need to ensure that ALL Police Forces include Gypsy/Traveller/ Roma in their 16+1 categories. Also they should appropriate cultural awareness training.**
- 5. As there can be reluctance on the part of the communities to report hate crime to the Police (given previous negative experiences) more use should be made of Approved 3rd Party Referral Agencies and on-line reporting mechanisms**

3. Planning and Accommodation

3.1 Relevant recommendations made to the UK in 2012:

- Guarantee the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, particularly health, education and adequate housing

3.2 Evidence:

Key failures by the UK government are:

- Failure to provide sufficient sites
- Inequality in the Planning System, exacerbated by the change of definition regarding “gypsy Status” in the “Planning Policy for Traveller Sites”, (Department for Communities and Local Government, August 2015) and the

abolition of the specific duty on local authorities to carry out a separate assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

3.3 As the recent Equality and Human Rights Commission report “Race rights in the UK”³ states:

“In 2013, the OHCHR Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living officially visited the UK at the invitation of the UK Government. The Special Rapporteur noted the stigma and discrimination Gypsies and Travellers face and how this underpins their lack of residential and transit accommodation and a range of other problems, including access to education, work, healthcare and inclusion in community life. She also noted the EHRC’s evidence that many Gypsies and Travellers did not have access to sufficient accommodation or sites and that using unauthorised sites could lead to evictions, or to violence and threatening behaviour”.

3.4 The revised PPTS definition of “traveller” will lead to community members no longer qualifying as “travellers” for planning purposes. The EHRC report cited above notes that (para 144, page 55):

“The Department for Communities and Local Government recognised in its consultation paper that the change would impact on those Gypsies and Travellers who have given up travelling permanently for whatever reason, but in particular on ‘the elderly who no longer travel due to reasons related to ill health or disability. Similarly, it would also impact on children and young people including those with disabilities or special educational needs who use a settled base in order to access education; as well as women who have ceased to travel in order to care for dependents”

The ethnicity of Gypsy people is recognised within the Equalities Act as a protected group however the issue of “gypsy status” means that it is extremely difficult to obtain culturally appropriate planning for family sites. “gypsy status” is determined at the time of the planning application and can alter over a person’s lifetime. This is totally unacceptable and needs to be addressed urgently the category of Gypsy has disappeared under “traveller”. This is also unacceptable as identity is an important aspect of Gypsy culture.

The abolition of the specific Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments and their replacement by S124 of the new Housing and Planning Act means that the cultural heritage of communities living in caravans is no longer recognised. We are already seeing evidence of the revised definition being used to reduce the extent of need identified by GTAAs.

3.5 With regard to Roma the “Experts by Experience” report cited above (page 28) notes that:

“Roma are often located in poor and deprived areas and because of the shortage of social housing, tend to end up renting in the private sector. A number of respondents in this report highlighted that unscrupulous landlords are charging

³ “Race Rights in the UK: Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in advance of the public examination of the UK’s implementation of ICERD”, EHRC, July 2016) para 139 page 53

Roma tenants high rents for low quality and overcrowded accommodation. There is very little research on the accommodation needs, or experiences of Roma communities”

3.6 Recommendations:

- 1. The Government should work with the Gypsy and Traveller communities to devise a mutually acceptable definition and take steps to ensure that the voices of the Gypsy and Traveller communities are at the forefront of any review of the Planning Definition of “travellers”.**
- 2. The Government should work with Local Authorities to ensure that more sites are provided. Central government needs to ensure that local authorities actually deliver site provision.**
- 3. An independent body should be established to monitor and benchmark needs-assessments and site delivery and monitor the outcome of Gypsy and Traveller planning applications across the UK.**
- 4. For Roma there is a need for rent control, landlord registration and prosecution of “bad” landlords**

4. Education

4.1 Relevant recommendations made to the UK in 2012:

- Guarantee the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, particularly health, education and adequate housing
- Consider strengthening policies to combat discrimination in all areas, notably in employment and education

4.2 Evidence:

Gypsies and Travellers have the highest proportion of people with no qualifications for any ethnic group -60 %⁴. In 2011, just 25% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved national expectations in English and Mathematics at the end of their primary education, compared with 74% of all pupils. At the end of secondary education, just 12% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with 58.2% of all pupils⁵. As the EHRC report previously cited states “since 2009/10, Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller pupils in England have consistently remained the lowest achieving ethnic groups in schools at all key stages.”

4.5 The DfE’s “Statistical First Release. Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England: 2013 to 2014” (DfE, 2015) shows that Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller children have the highest rates of both permanent and fixed-period exclusions

4.6 The most common reason for the reluctance to send Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children to school is the prevalence of racist bullying. The “Experts by Experience” report notes (page 31) that this: “can range from generalised abuse to physical

⁴ “What does the 2011 Census tell us about the Characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales”, ONS, 2014

⁵ “Reducing inequalities for Gypsies and Travellers: progress report”, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012

attacks. Nearly 9 out of every 10 children and young people from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background have suffered racial abuse and nearly two thirds have also been bullied or physically attacked”.

4.7 There is very limited data on the educational experiences and attainment of Roma children and young people in the UK and this is mainly on account of them being included within the national data collected for Gypsy children and young people

4.8 Recommendations:

- 1. Given the experiences of many Gypsy, Traveller and Roma school children of racist bullying; all schools should have clear policies on prevention of bullying. The Department for Education and local authorities should ensure that specific policies are used effectively in relation to the bullying of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children.**
- 2. Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children should be included as a specific group receiving Pupil Premium payments in England and Wales. This should also apply to the Early Years Premium and to free pre-school education for disadvantaged two year olds.**
- 3. To improve inter-cultural understanding and overcome negative stereotyping we would recommend that central funding of Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month should be re-established. In addition, the culture and the history of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children should be included in the broader curriculum.**
- 4. Schools and education services should rigorously track and monitor the progress of all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children. Local authorities should ensure that Traveller Education Services are appropriately funded and supported.**

5. Health

5.1 Relevant recommendations made to the UK in 2012:

- Guarantee the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, particularly health, education and adequate housing
- Consider strengthening policies to combat discrimination in all areas

5.2 *Evidence:*

Significant health inequalities exist between Gypsies and Travellers and the general population in England. Their life expectancy has been estimated to be between 10 and 12 years less than the general population.

5.3 There are lower rates of GP registration, poor general health, higher rates of long term illness, higher smoking prevalence, poor birth outcomes and maternal health and low child immunisation rates.

5.4 There is an excess prevalence of miscarriages, stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Gypsy and Traveller communities and high rates of maternal death during pregnancy and shortly after childbirth⁶. Infant mortality rate is three times higher than the

⁶ DCLG, MWG, (2012) Tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6287/2124046.pdf

national average. Children from Gypsy and Traveller communities are more likely to experience early death, poor childhood development and limited uptake and access of health services.

- 5.5 Gypsies and Travellers are significantly more likely to have a long-term illness or disability and suffer poorer health than members of the general population⁷, over twice as likely to be depressed, and almost three times as likely to suffer from anxiety⁸. They are repeatedly found to experience disproportionate diagnoses of diabetes and other preventable conditions and show very limited knowledge of risk factors or implications.
- 5.6 Low levels of literacy, together with stigma, poor access to health information and some widespread health-beliefs increase the likeliness that they will not seek treatment, or will underestimate the seriousness of the condition.
- 5.7 There is a lack of systematic and consistent collection of health data regarding GTR communities given the lack of relevant ethnicity categories in the NHS dataset.
- 5.8 Research on the Roma population and their access to health care in the UK is sparse. Once in the UK, many Roma lack familiarity with the NHS and face language barriers which can make it difficult to access health services.

5.9 Recommendations:

1. The NHS dataset should include separate categories for Gypsies, (of English, Welsh or Scottish origin) Irish Travellers and Roma.
2. The Department of Health should fund a national Gypsy, Traveller Roma in depth health survey, in order to understand the health status and needs of the communities in the UK.
3. Health and Wellbeing Boards in all local areas should ensure that Gypsies and Travellers are included as key stakeholders. These boards will be relying on the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments to inform their work. It is therefore critical that local Gypsy, Traveller and Roma health assessments are conducted and that these communities are fully involved in this process
4. Clinical Commissioning Groups, General Practitioners and health watchdogs should be proactive in developing services to ensure that Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities can access health services and that their health needs are met within the NHS. Easier access to GPs and primary healthcare services is needed as is training for all GP practice front line / reception staff, with backup written guidance.
5. There is a need to raise awareness of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller culture among health service providers and staff and of services available and healthy living among community members.
6. More community health advocates (trained members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities who work alongside healthcare professionals to deliver health promotion messages to their local population should be employed

⁷ Clark, C. and Greenfields, M. (eds) (2006) Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press

⁸ Parry et al (2004) The Health Status of Gypsies and Travellers: Report of Department of Health Inequalities in Health Research Initiative, University of Sheffield

7. A practical multi-agency approach to health provision is needed. Long-term, joined-up working is required at both local and national level to address the wider social determinants of Gypsies' and Travellers' health.

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