



Gypsy & Traveller

Myth Buster



No one knows how many Gypsies & Irish Travellers live in England and Wales due to the exclusion of this community as a separate category in the census. A bi-annual caravan count is carried out but does not produce reliable data. Estimates put the number of Gypsies & Travellers living in caravans in the UK at between 90,000 and 120,000 (Niner 2002) with up to three times this number living in conventional housing (Ivatts 2005) It is generally accepted that Doncaster has the largest Gypsy & Traveller population in the country, estimated at between 4,000 and 6,000 people, about 2% of the population of Doncaster Borough (Doncaster Gypsy & Traveller Strategy, 2006)

Do all Gypsies & Travellers travel?

Not all, Planning law defines Gypsies & Irish Travellers as people with a travelling way of life. Whilst this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies & Travellers around the world now live in houses. Even when Gypsies & Irish Travellers live in houses their culture and heritage stays with them.

I thought the whole point of being a Gypsy or Traveller is that you travel? Why do they need permanent sites?

Although Gypsies & Travellers travel for some of the year (mainly during the summer months to accommodate work patterns), most people need a place to stop during the winter months. Many families prefer to have a safe and secure base from which to travel, this also allows families to access services that others would take for granted e.g. GP's, Schools, Dentists etc. Gypsies & Travellers will also stop travelling for periods in order to care for sick or elderly relatives and/or children.

What is the legal definition of Gypsies & Travellers?

Gypsies & Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic groups for the purposes of the Race Relations Act (1976), identified as having a shared culture, language and beliefs. Case law established Gypsies as a recognised ethnic group in 1988 (CRE v Dutton) and Irish Travellers in England and Wales in August 2000 (O'Leary v Allied Domecq)

Do Gypsies & Travellers work?

Yes, traditionally finding work as licensed hawkers or pedlars, basket makers, horse dealers and seasonal agricultural labourers, many Gypsies & Irish Travellers are now landscape gardeners, tarmacers, motor trade workers, scrap metal dealers, tree fellers and so on. It is also more common nowadays for Gypsies & Irish Travellers to be employed as teachers, academics, and health workers, whilst others work in the financial sector and in the sport,

leisure and entertainment industries. Unfortunately, there are no national employment figures, since Gypsies & Travellers are not included in the Labour Force Survey, and no comprehensive research has been conducted in this area.

Do Gypsies & Travellers pay taxes?

Yes, Gypsies & Travellers do pay taxes. All Gypsies & Travellers living on a local authority or privately owned site pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity, and all other associated charges. These vary between sites but are often higher than comparable charges for conventional housing. Those living on unauthorised encampments, generally speaking, do not pay council tax rates, but they also do not generally receive services. This is not because they are avoiding paying the tax, but because encampments need to be in place for one year before tax becomes payable, and most encampments are far more temporary in nature.

Do Gypsies & Travellers have to send their children to school?

Yes, Gypsy & Traveller children have a legal right to be educated along with other children. All parents have the same obligation to educate their children as others do. Families facing problems at school will be visited by the Traveller Education Service who will work in partnership with the families and local schools to place children in a school nearby.

Why do Gypsies & Travellers stop on the side of roads?

Local authorities used to have a legal duty to provide sites for Gypsies & Irish Travellers. In 1984 this obligation was removed following the Public Order Act and, as a result, and along with a change in the use of land and more land being identified for housing, there are now too few sites to accommodate all Gypsies & Travellers. The lack of permanent and transit sites throughout the country has forced Gypsies & Travellers to camp wherever they can.

Why are Gypsies & Travellers allowed to use our hospitals and doctors?

Everyone in the UK is entitled to a health service, whether people are travelling or not. However, Gypsies & Travellers tend not to access mainstream health care services as much as the settled community, this leads to grave disparities e.g. levels of prenatal mortality, stillbirths and infant mortality are significantly higher than the national average. It is estimated that, on average, Gypsy & Irish Traveller women live 12yrs less than women in the general population and Gypsy & Irish Traveller men 10yrs less than men in the general population.

Why are many Gypsies & Travellers criminals, stealing and trespassing on other people's land?

Criminal justice agencies do not collect information about Gypsies & Travellers as separate ethnic groups but there is no evidence that offending is any higher among these groups than among others. Setting up an unauthorised encampment on some else's land is not in itself a crime. Either the Council (under section 77 of the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994) or the police (under section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994) can serve the trespasser with a notice. The occupants of the encampment will only have committed a criminal act if they breach the terms of the notice.