

GRT Representation: Media Response Toolkit

How to use this Toolkit:

This toolkit serves as a guide for any member of the public. The toolkit aims to provide guidelines and information on appropriate responses to programmes, articles and comments that proliferate negative stereotypes about the Roma, Gypsy, or Traveller (GRT) communities. It outlines when, where and to whom someone can make a complaint, in addition to describing what rules and procedures to follow. This toolkit will enable members of the public to identify discrimination as well as combat the inappropriate material being published or broadcast.

Content includes:

- 1) Background Information
- 2) Common misinformation and myths
- 3) How to respond to stereotypes in the media
 - a) Print Media
 - b) Television and Radio
 - c) Advertising
 - d) Social Media
- 4) Conclusions

1) Background Information

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK:

The expression 'Gypsies and Travellers' serves as an umbrella term that comprises a number of sub-groups. Encompassed in that phrase are several smaller communities, including Romani Gypsies ('Roma'), Irish Travellers, Occupational Travellers, and New Travellers. Although they go by a variety of names, Romani Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma people together constitute Europe's largest ethnic minority. They are also the most discriminated against.

There are approximately 120,000 Gypsies, Roma and Travellers currently residing in the United Kingdom.¹ Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised as distinct ethnic groups by UK law.²

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/what-does-the-2011-census-tell-us-about-the-characteristics-of-gypsy-or-irish-travellers-in-england-and-wales/-sty-gypsy-or-irish-travellers.html>

Recent studies have shown that GRT communities experience more racism and discrimination than any other group in the UK. A 2008 poll showed that a third of UK residents admitted to being prejudiced against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Some of us may express negative or discriminatory attitudes towards GRT communities without realising that we are being prejudiced. This prejudice plays out quite clearly in the mainstream media's representation of GRT communities and the popularity of programs such as 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' has reignited the debate on their representation. Many newspapers, magazines, radio and television programs have been accused of painting Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in an unfair or damaging light. Many of us read, watch and enjoy these stories without fully realising the harm they cause to the people they portray.

Romani Gypsy activist Jake Bowers describes our attitudes towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers as 'based on a mixture of romanticism, prejudice and ignorance'. Gypsy author Roxy Freeman states that the media's representation of Gypsies is 'outrageous', arguing that "Gypsies and Travellers are the only social group that it is still acceptable to insult'.

The socio-economic disadvantage that many Gypsies, Roma and Travellers experience, reinforced by the prejudice that the media perpetuates, has prevented them from fighting back against the negative things said about them. In Britain, GRT communities experience some of the poorest outcomes with regards to education, health and wellbeing. Illiteracy, and a lack of lobbying power, have allowed too many myths about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers to be circulated.

Below we tackle some commonly held myths about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

2) Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Facts and myths

Myth: *Gypsies are nomadic people who don't work and don't pay tax.*

FACT: The first part of this myth, that all Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are nomads, is demonstrably untrue. Today, approximately 50% of the UK's Gypsy communities live in bricks-and-mortar housing. Even so, nomadism is a fundamental part of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture – those who choose to retain this lifestyle often do so to maintain their connection to their culture. It is important to recognise that different people have different understandings of the way we should live our lives. The Traveller way of life is not illegal; some councils provide sites for Travellers to park.

All Gypsies, Roma and Travellers living on council or privately owned sites pay council tax and other bills, just like everyone else.³ It is only about 19% of GRT communities who live on unauthorised sites

² Romani Gypsies were recognised as a distinct ethnicity under the *Race Relations Act* in 1989; Irish Travellers were recognised in 2000.

³http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your_council/policies_and_performance/equality_and_diversity/gypsy_and_traveller_myth_bust.aspx

and they do so often because there are not enough authorised sites to park. While they don't pay tax, they generally also don't receive the services that taxpayers do.

Myth: *Gypsies aren't accountable to the law.*

FACT: Gypsies face the same consequences with regards to the law. In fact, the law is more likely to be skewed *against* Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. They often face institutional and personal discrimination, and are denied their rights.⁴

Myth: *All travellers are the same.*

FACT: The UK's travelling communities are incredibly diverse. Romani Gypsies are a community that trace their roots to northern India, and have been in Britain since at least the 16th century. Irish Travellers are an ethnic group from Ireland; they have their own language and history that is distinct from the Romani. There are also Scottish Travellers, Welsh Travellers, and other groups of people who have chosen a travelling lifestyle for various reasons.

Myth: *The media portrayal of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in television shows such as 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' is a completely accurate representation of the lives of these communities.*

FACT: Members of GRT communities have expressed anger at their portrayal in this television show, saying that it presents a distorted image of them. It focussed on a very small proportion of the population, who are not representative of the entire communities. Additionally, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers have faced an increase in discrimination, and their children have faced an increase in bullying following the airing of the show.⁵

3) How to Respond to Prejudice and Discrimination in the Media:

Discrimination can manifest when we reinforce the acceptance of racist stereotypes. This can happen when we use words that paint GRT communities in a negative light in our daily conversations, such as 'gyp' or 'pikey'. Individuals who use these words may not even realise that they are saying anything wrong. In other circumstances, individuals may be more aware of the nature of what they are saying, for example, when telling stories about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers which are influenced by popular images of these groups. It can be helpful to point out the harm caused by such language when you hear it used by the people around you.

⁴ <http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/newsevents/newsevents-pressreleases/newsevents-pressreleases-item.htm?id=283804>

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/feb/12/travellers-ofcom-big-fat-gypsy-wedding-channel-4>

You may also come across examples of derogatory language or upsetting stories in the media. It can be difficult to call out discriminatory behaviour or language that has been written or perpetuated by someone you don't know. If you have read something online, in a newspaper or magazine, seen something on television or heard it on the radio, you can use this toolkit to find out how to make a complaint.

It is important that we challenge generalised portrayals of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers as there is a direct correlation between negative stereotypes and active discrimination. Regulators and editors rely on your input as a consumer to shape their content, and complaints can affect these ideas. Generally, the codes for broadcasting and advertising are quite broad so a broad complaints will be effective if you persist. The procedures for print are a little trickier but have a look at the relevant sections to find out the right procedure. If you are not comfortable filing a complaint on your own, you are welcome to get in touch with us to talk it over, and find out how we can help you.

Contact us at:

E: info@renecassin.org

T: 020 7443 5130

A: René Cassin, JHub, Haskell House, 152 West End Lane, London, NW6 1SD

a) Print media

Here are some examples of written material about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers that could be considered problematic. These were all recently taken from UK newspapers.

'Bling, shire horses, ornate Romany caravans and dogs holding up queues of traffic - it can only be the annual Appleby Horse Fair'⁶

'Did gypsies cut off man's penis in revenge for him sleeping with one of their girlfriends? Police search A-road for missing manhood after arrest of suspect, 22'⁷

'Maria 'was groomed to be a child bride': Police claim girl found in gipsy camp was set to be married off at the age of 12 by couple who adopted her'⁸

'Back in time for the Christmas rush: 'Aggressive' Roma gypsies return to Marble Arch to beg from wealthy tourists and shoppers'⁹

⁶ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2643819/Bling-shire-horses-ornate-Romany-caravans-dogs-holding-queues-traffic-annual-Appleby-Horse-Fair.html>

⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2580115/Did-gypsies-cut-Middlesbrough-mans-penis-revenge-Police-search-A66-missing-manhood.html>

⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2474417/Maria-groomed-child-bride-Roma-Gypsy-couple.html>

'Revealed: The rundown home where the four-year-old 'Greek Maddie' lived with her gypsy 'abductors'... Unidentified girl can only speak obscure Roma language'¹⁰

'David Cameron: We'll come down on illegal gypsy camps 'like a ton of bricks''¹¹

'Cops found our stolen caravan then let gypsy family keep it'¹²

'How Roma Gangs 'TRAFFIC CHILDREN ACROSS EUROPE TO STEAL'¹³

'Second blonde girl seized from gypsy family in Ireland 'looks nothing like siblings and speaks much better English''¹⁴

These headlines all paint GRT communities in a negative light, making specific reference to their ethnicity. This encourages the public to make generalised, unfair assumptions about entire communities. Many of these headlines are also written to incite excitement and anger, which blurs the readers' perceptions of the story. The hard facts of many of these stories have been lost in the sensationalism with which they are written.

In the fifth headline, for example, the 'gypsy 'abductors'' were later found to be the four-year-old's adoptive parents. A formal adoption was not carried out, but it is not uncommon for informal adoptions to take place in societies where children are raised collectively by the community.¹⁵

In the last headline, the 'blonde girl seized from gypsy family in Ireland' was later proven to be their biological child using a DNA test.

Readers are encouraged to make assumptions, or in some cases blatantly misled, to express prejudiced attitudes towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

How should we respond to prejudice in print media?

If you see something in print that discriminates, follow these steps:

⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2521868/Roma-gypsies-return-Marble-Arch-aggressively-begging.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2465942/Inside-camp-blonde-girl-abducted-gypsies.html>

¹¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10230915/David-Cameron-Well-come-down-on-illegal-gypsy-camps-like-a-ton-of-bricks.html>

¹² <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/5040676/Cops-found-our-stolen-caravan-then-let-gypsy-family-keep-it.html>

¹³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2465942/Inside-camp-blonde-girl-abducted-gypsies.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/greece-girl-maria-found-second-2481967>

¹⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/22/angel-kidnapped-by-gypsies-libel-replayed>

1. Email or write to the editor of the publication concerned. If they do not respond within a week, or you are not satisfied with their response, consider proceeding to the next step.
2. Consider lodging a complaint with the **Press Complaints Commission (PCC)**; an independent body that deals with complaints about coverage in print media and websites.
 - a. First check that what you have seen falls under the Commission's coverage:
 - i. Articles and pictures
 - ii. Words and pictures (including video) on newspaper and magazine websites
 - iii. Audio material on newspaper and magazine websites
 - iv. Readers' letters
 - v. Edited or moderated reader comments on newspaper and magazine websites
 - b. Then check that what you have seen breaches the Commission's Code of Practice. This code lays down the standards that print journalists must adhere to when reporting. If you want to lodge a complaint, it has to be judged against this code.
 - c. Note that while the PCC includes a 'discrimination' clause (12), this is only effective if an individual in the article is identified, discriminated against (i.e. called a 'pikey') and that individual files the complaint.
 - d. The only effective clause in the PCC is the 'accuracy' clause (1). If a newspaper gets an unqualified factual statement wrong (and this includes a quoted factual statement) then anyone can complain first to the editor and then to the PCC itself, which will take up the complaint.
 - e. Do it in time! Complaints should be made within two months of the date of publication, or within two months after correspondence between you and the editor. If the article is still available on the publication's website, you can lodge a complaint as long as it exists.

b) Television and Radio

There are many things you see or hear on television and radio that you might find offensive. The below link to popular Channel 4 program, 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding', is illustrative of the sort of program that people have taken offense to in the past.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1EXsZrDewo>

This link to National Geographic program, 'Born to be a Criminal: Gypsies in the Modern World', has also stirred conflict.



How should we respond to prejudice in television and radio?

OFCOM

The Office of Communications, or OFCOM, has responsibilities across television, radio, postal, telecommunications, and wireless communications services and licences all UK commercial television and radio services. OFCOM also publishes an extensive series of rules which all broadcast content on television and radio must follow. Complaints are judged against this [Code](#).

The OFCOM Broadcasting Code¹⁶

The most recent version of the OFCOM Broadcasting Code took effect on 21 March 2013. The Code was drafted in light of the Human Rights Act 1998 and The European Convention on Human Rights, which enshrine the rights to freedom of expression, private and family life, freedom of thought, and conscience and religion. It also includes the right to freedom from discrimination on grounds including sex, race and religion.

The Code applies to radio and television content, however, there are some exceptions as is the case with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which is exempt from certain sections. You can read more about these exemptions [here](#).

The Code aims to protect members of the public in general, and minors in particular, from harmful and/or offensive material. Material that might cause offence includes offensive language, violation of human dignity or discriminatory treatment.

In case the Code is breached, OFCOM usually publishes a finding and explanation as to why the broadcaster was in breach of the Code. It may impose statutory sanctions if a broadcaster violates the Code intentionally, seriously or repeatedly. Any member of the public who cannot access the internet can request OFCOM to send them a copy of the procedures by post.

Examples of successful complaints include one made against radio station 4FM's The David Harvey Show that was upheld by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.¹⁷ Presenter David Harvey made comments that essentialised black people as "very lazy" and labelled Filipinos as "scammers." The authority concluded that 4FM failed to oblige with statutory requirements. A recent investigation launched in early 2014 by OFCOM itself involves motoring show Top Gear in which presenter Jeremy Clarkson used the derogatory term "slope" to refer to a south-east Asian man while filming in Burma and Thailand.¹⁸ Ofcom will now investigate whether the clip breached content standards. The authority also publishes short weekly overviews of audience complaints [here](#). You can also get an overview of ongoing investigations [here](#).

Making a complaint prior to broadcast:

¹⁶ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/background/>

¹⁷ <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/racism-complaint-against-4fm-show-upheld-246775.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/may/06/ofcom-investigate-top-gear-accusation-casual-racism-slope>

OFCOM only deals with complaints about programmes after the programme in question has aired. Therefore, if wanting to make a complaint about a programme that has not yet aired, you will need to contact the broadcaster directly. Many broadcasters will have information about how to complain on their websites.

Making a complaint post broadcast:

You can still complain to the broadcaster directly when a programme has already aired. OFCOM recommends, but does not require, that you make your complaint to the broadcaster first.

The BBC allows you to complain online but also has phone numbers and a post address through which complaints can be made. While it provides all this information and assures its clients that possible breaches will be investigated, other broadcasters such as Independent Television (ITV) make complaining a little more difficult, providing only general contact details.

OFCOM has compiled a useful overview of different complaint procedures [here](#). Make sure you check the relevant website of the broadcaster when preparing your complaint.

Alternatively, you may make a complaint to OFCOM itself. OFCOM has a duty to examine complaints about programmes broadcast on channels it licenses. OFCOM does not, however, oversee unlicensed channels. OFCOM's online complaint form is available [here](#). You can also draft your own complaint.

For example:

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am writing to you in response to [insert name of programme], aired on [insert date and channel or radio station].

The programme painted Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in a negative light. [Elaborate on nature of offence.]

I find this unacceptable and believe it perpetuates negative stereotypes about communities that are already marginalised in our society and often misunderstood.

Hoping for an immediate action in this matter from your side.

*Kind regards,
[Signature]*

c) Advertising



This ad was banned after a complaint to the ASA who argued that the boy's aggressive expression perpetuated negative stereotypes about Traveller children



This ad was approved by the ASA

Complaints with regards to something that you saw, read or heard in an advertisement must be lodged separately.

The **Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)** deals with most types of advertisements, including:

- Magazine and newspaper advertisements
- Radio and TV commercials
- Television Shopping channels
- Internet advertisements
- Commercial email and SMS text message ads
- Posters on legitimate poster sites
- Leaflets and brochures
- Cinema commercials
- Direct mail
- Door drops and circulars
- Ads on CD ROMs, DVD and video, and faxes
- Sales promotions

You can also complain about an overseas ad as a cross-border complaint. If your complaint doesn't come under the remit of the ASA, they can help you find the appropriate authority.

The ASA's complaint form is available [here](#).

d) Social Media

Some individuals or groups use social media as a vehicle to perpetuate stereotypes or hate against other people. Social media functions a little differently to mainstream media outlets. If you're angry about something you've seen on social media, there are a few different paths of action that you can take.

Facebook

If you have a Facebook account, there are a number of steps you can take to have a message, picture or something else you consider abusive removed.

Before pursuing the actions below, consider messaging the individual or the group responsible for the abuse directly, and explain why you find their actions offensive and ask them to take it down. This might be appropriate if you think the person making the comment is unaware of the negative impact of what they are saying. Keep the message civil and to the point. Remember that any messages you send can be accessed and used by the people who receive them, so it is always better to sound calm and reasonable – even if they send you a rude or abusive response.

For example:

Dear John,


The picture/comment you posted painted Gypsy, Roma and Travelles communities in a negative light. I think this is unacceptable and believe it perpetuates negative stereotypes about communities that are already marginalised in our society and often misunderstood. I would greatly appreciate it if you could perhaps take the picture down, as it only serves to perpetuate misunderstanding and misinformation.

Kind regards,

[Signature]

If this doesn't work, consider taking one of the steps below.

1) *Complaint against content*

- a) Follow these steps if you see a piece of **content** that you take issue with – e.g. a wall post, message, status update or picture:
- b) Hold your mouse over the piece of content in question.
- c) This symbol should pop up: 
- d) Click on the image and select 'report abuse'
- e) You can choose why you're reporting the abuse – 'hate speech' is probably the most relevant option for most discrimination against groups of individuals.
- f) You can also write a brief note explaining why you find the material offensive.

- 2) *Complaint against a Page*
 - a) Go to the Page you want to report
 - b) Click ... on the Page's Cover Photo
 - c) Select 'Report Page'
 - d) Choose the reason you're reporting the page and select 'Continue'

- 3) *Report a person*
 - a) Click ... on the top right side of the individual's Timeline
 - b) Choose 'Report'

If you don't have a Facebook account but know of something on Facebook that angers you, Facebook has a separate complaints process available for you to use. To access this and to find out what to do for other categories of complaint, check Facebook's reporting policies [here](#).

Twitter

Twitter is a simpler social media tool and has only one way of reporting violations. Simply navigate your way to the complaints form using the links under '[Abusive behaviour and violent threats](#)'.

Make sure you include the following information in your complaint:

- 1) Description of problem, including length of time the abusive behaviour has been happening
- 2) Tweet URLs (they explain how to do this [here](#))
- 3) Tweet text
- 4) Your email address

There is growing jurisprudence that shows that racist and offensive tweets will be acted upon by the police and can result in people serving prison sentences.¹⁹

Other social media

Most forms of social media have their own customer service and complaints procedures. A quick Google search should find you the relevant information. Alternatively, get in touch with us and we can help you find the appropriate authority.

Your complaints to mainstream or social media organisations may not be acted upon immediately. Sometimes, your complaint may be rejected – this could be for any number of reasons. Social media sites get several complaints, and some are wary about interfering with issues that are seen to require a particular sensitivity or something that is outside their understanding.²⁰

You may wish to take further action. Social Media, as well as being a potential vehicle for negative messages can also be used to spread a positive message and bring awareness to an issue. Again, feel free to get in touch with us to see what we can do for you.

¹⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/27/student-jailed-fabrice-muamba-tweets>

²⁰ <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2012/08/17/racism-laws-fail-world-wild-web>

4) Conclusions

This toolkit serves as a guide for any member of the public and aims to provide guidelines and information on appropriate responses to programmes, articles and comments that proliferate negative stereotypes about the Roma, Gypsy, or Traveller (GRT) communities. We hope that you now have a clearer understanding of when, where and to whom you can make a complaint, and which rules and procedures to follow.

It is important to identify discrimination as well as combat the inappropriate material being published or broadcast because they essentialise entire communities and perpetuate racist stereotypes. There is a direct correlation between these negative stereotypes and active discrimination and we need to challenge them in our everyday encounters.

Get in touch with us if you are not comfortable filing a complaint on your own and we can talk it over and find a way to help you.

Contact us at:

E: info@renecassin.org

T: 020 7443 5130

A: René Cassin, JHub, Haskell House, 152 West End Lane, London, NW6 1SD

Twitter: [@Rene_Cassin](https://twitter.com/Rene_Cassin)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/renecassin>