

## 'SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS...'

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For many, Britain is fairer than it was three years ago. The recently-released "[Is Britain Fairer?](#)" report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission assessed 1840 pages of evidence and interviewed thousands of sources to come to this conclusion. There is a narrowing of the attainment gap between White pupils and their Pakistani/Bangladeshi and African/Caribbean/Black peers. The life expectancy gender gap has narrowed. And public acceptance of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across Britain has increased while stigma around mental health in England and Wales has decreased.

But for the Gypsies and Travellers of Britain, our situation remains depressingly unchanged— if it hasn't worsened. The educational attainment gaps among Gypsy and Traveller students has increased. We have lower life expectancies and self-reported health status is worse. And a negative bias and hostility against us has persevered.

Why are Gypsies still in the lowest demographics for good health and education after despite so many years of good intentions voiced by some Government departments? Why are Gypsies still victims of the most appalling and vitriolic discrimination?

The individual aspects of the dismal state of the Gypsy population of Britain are all interconnected. For example, unless the discrimination is addressed, Gypsies will continue to avoid interacting with healthcare providers and will continue to leave school at a young age. After all—who wishes to remain in a hostile environment?

But the safety and security of the Gypsies' home environment may soon be even more tenuous than it is now.

The Government recently revealed a bill which intends to remove the responsibility given to Local Authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers for the purposes of planning new sites.

The current accommodation situation for Gypsies and Travellers is already dire; this Housing and Planning Bill only threatens to exacerbate the situation. The population of Gypsies and Travellers is growing and if the Bill is passed there will be no onus on the Local Authorities to plan or build new sites. Thus, the Gypsy's way of life will become ever more difficult.

This is in direct insubordination to the European Court of Human Right's ruling in 2001, which states:

The applicant's occupation of her caravan is an integral part of her ethnic identity as a Gypsy, reflecting the long tradition of that minority of following a travelling lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of culturally appropriate accommodation is a contravention of Article 8 (1) of the European Convention of Human Rights. But sadly, despite the further exhortation of the ECtHR that states must facilitate the Gypsy way of life<sup>2</sup>, it would seem that nothing is to be done.

Discrimination in schools and healthcare settings must be addressed. It is unacceptable that Gypsies and Travellers have the lowest educational attainment rates of any ethnic minority, as well as lower life expectancy rates than the general population. The new report shows how much support the Gypsies and Travellers need, yet little has changed since 2012.

When is the Government going to honour their positive obligation towards Gypsies and Travellers to facilitate their way of life and improve their educational achievement and health? When will we be treated as equals in British society?

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<sup>1</sup> *Chapman* (2001) 399 EHRR at para 73

<sup>2</sup> *Chapman* (2001) 333 EHRR 399 at para 96.