

Date:

Dear Member of Parliament,

As a supporter of René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, I am calling on the government to place humanity at the forefront of its response to the current Coronavirus crisis. I am writing to ask you to consider the devastation the Coronavirus pandemic is causing the most at-risk in our country.

The UK's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, who share a history of persecution with the Jewish people, are some of the most vulnerable to the threat of Coronavirus. They are known to face some of the most severe health inequalities, even in comparison to other ethnic groups,¹ and have an increased risk of underlying health issues and respiratory problems, meaning their communities are disproportionately under threat from the coronavirus.

We are all affected by this crisis, but we are not all affected equally. In 2019, the Women and Equalities Committee published its inquiry into inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, which exposed the local authorities' and government's failure to recognise and address the differential needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.² These failures have impeded these communities' access to basic services, and of those who do access services, such as an appointment with a GP, their experiences are disproportionately negative.³

Health inequalities are coupled by the constant threat of eviction for those living in unauthorised encampments, and the discrimination Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience has been shown to have a causal link to the deteriorating health of their members.⁴ Individually these inequalities place Gypsy, Roman and Travellers under unnecessary risk, together they can have devastating effects to the health and wellbeing of these communities during the pandemic.

A history of neglect and marginalisation has left Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in desperate need of support. The UK Government has stated that "Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged people in this country and have poor outcomes in key areas such as health and education."⁵ However, this recognition did not, and does not, undo the "persistent failure" of national and local governments to care for our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.⁶ Such failures cannot persist in this current crisis, which has the potential to cause even greater harm to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

¹ Women and Equalities Committee, 'Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' (5 April 2019) [<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html#heading-6>]

² Ibid.

³ Sarah Sweeney and Rosie Stanbury, 'Experiences of Gypsies and Travellers in primary care: GP services' (July 2019)

⁴ Women and Equalities Committee, 'Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' (5 April 2019) [<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html#heading-6>]

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Women and Equalities Committee, 'Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities – Report Summary' (5 April 2019) [<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-summary.html>]

I support René Cassin's call for the government to respect and protect the welfare of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This should include: access to public services, sanitation, water and provisions; guidance for individuals, families and communities self-isolating in unauthorised encampments or traveller sites; and banning of evictions and enforced removals of people living on unauthorised encampments or traveller sites, during the coronavirus crisis.

Whilst the Coronavirus crisis threatens us all, and the health and safety of those we hold dear, we must not forget our duty to provide for and protect the most vulnerable in our society. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and nomadic ways of life, make up part of the fabric of the country we are currently fighting to protect. Let us make sure that we fight for their safety, too.

Sincerely

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[René Cassin](#), the Jewish voice for human rights, draws upon Jewish values and experience to promote and protect universal human rights.