

RESPONSE TO RULE 9 QUESTIONS
ON BEHALF OF THE TRAVELLER MOVEMENT

Background

1. The Inquiry has posed 7 initial questions to the Traveller Movement. Responses to those questions are set out below following the order proposed by the Inquiry.

1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.

2. The Traveller Movement (TM) is registered charitable organisation, Register Number: 1107113. The TM was founded in 1999, to advocate on behalf of those whose voices were not being heard by the wider society making decisions impacting on GRT people. Recognising the provision of public benefit, the TM was granted charitable status in 2003.
3. TM plays a unique and essential role, as the bridge between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ("GRT") people of the whole of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) and its service providers and policy makers.
4. TM is the largest organisation in the UK, which represents the interests of these three communities. It is important to note that, whilst accurate figures are unknown, GTR appear to account for between 0.5% - 0.8% of the population. Although it is a population that has been present in the UK for hundreds of years, it is notable that statistics around their size have only recently begun to be collected and remain partial.
5. According to the Office for National Statistics:

"...variations in the definitions used for this ethnic group has made comparisons between estimates difficult. For example, some previous estimates for Gypsy or Irish Travellers have included Roma or have been derived from counts of caravans rather than people's own self-identity. It noted that other sources of

data estimate the UK's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population to be in the region of 150,000 to 300,000, or as high as 500,000"

6. Members of TM serve the general interest through a democratic process, and play the role of mediator between public authorities and the GRT, which has been recognised by the GRT being given the status of a National Civil Society Organisation.
7. Without this organisation, the rights and views of GRT people would not be heard. They would not receive the representation that they deserve, and which is essential, to ensure that society takes into account the views and needs of those members of society that are, not fully visible within statistics and frequently ignored by the institutions within the UK.

2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.

8. As stated above, the group fall within Gypsy, Traveller and Roma ethnicities. All 3 groups, whilst culturally different are *'believed to face similar challenges'*. GTR are distinct ethnic groups, but are often reported together.
9. The key element of this definition, is the recognition of, GRT facing similar challenges. TM plays a vital role in representing people within society, who have been subject to historical discrimination and historic injustice, particularly including in health care, over several generations.

Discrimination

10. It is difficult to describe GTR without reference to discrimination. The discrimination experienced by GTR is aptly described in the letter from Mary Foy MP, the co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, to the Chair of the UK Covid 19 Inquiry, dated 2 November 2022, where she writes:

"Without doubt, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities suffer the most widespread and embedded discrimination of any of the UK's marginalised ethnic groups."

11. She goes on to say:

“There is a very real possibility that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities’ concerns will not be met in any future pandemic unless lessons are learned from recent events.”

12. TM maintain that given the size of the GTR communities in the UK, the systemic discrimination (including structural discrimination) that they are subjected to, there is a very compelling case for TM to participate in the Inquiry to ensure that the voices of the GRT community are heard in the Covid Inquiry.

3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.

13. TM has developed an expertise in jointly tackling local issues whilst also shaping national policies. The work includes policy proposals and lobbying, campaigning, providing access to justice through advocacy and casework, community development and economic inclusion.
14. The work undertaken by TM supporting and or representing GRT throughout the UK, between the period of January 2020 and Spring 2022, in relation to Covid 19 includes:
- a. Parliamentary and other lobbying work in relation to the failings of the UK Government in its duty to produce or disseminate any specific guidance relating to the pandemic and the GRT community, In the absence of a central government response, TTM had to fill the breach with other leading charitable and voluntary organisations to make or arrange emergency provision for GTR. In addition to lobbying of central Government and Parliamentarians, TM additionally engaged with local authorities on an ad-hoc basis, and non-departmental public bodies including OFQUAL, OFSTED, Public Health England, and the Prison and Probation Ombudsman in relating to GTR experiences of the pandemic.
 - b. TM researched, drafted and distributed specifically targeted essential information fact sheets. These recognised and met the unique needs of and the problems faced by the GRT community during the pandemic, which was not being met otherwise. Thematic briefings covered the Coronavirus Act 2020, Free school meals, regulations around funerals and prison visits, access to sick pay and other UK Government financial support, and generalised briefings on the impacts of schools and prisons.

- c. TM provided one to one help and support to the GTR community during the pandemic. TM provided advocacy and individual casework. These services were particularly important in light of the high of illiteracy (over 60%) within the community.

Work undertaken in Ireland – an important comparator

- d. Specifically, in relation to Ireland, TM worked collaboratively with Dr **NR** **NR** who headed the response of the Irish Health Service to pandemic issues for GTR in the west of Ireland (and who has previously worked with Public Health England), in relation to extensive provision that was made for GTR in Ireland, where Travellers were supported whilst in isolation or quarantine through the provision of food, phone helplines and mental health support. TM notes that the provision of the same in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was highly unsatisfactory.

4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.

15. There is a clear cross border element to this work, as the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is fluid and porous for both Travellers and the general population.
16. TM's publications and contributions to publication are numerous. TM has contributed to 132 publications on matters including:
- Criminal Justice
 - Education
 - Equality and Human Rights
 - Health and Wellbeing,
 - Women and Girls,
 - Political advocacy
 - Youth

17. With specific reference to publications during the pandemic, TM made a number of key sets of submissions to Parliamentary Committees and inquiries, Ministers, Government Departments and civil servants on the impact of COVID-19 on ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.

18. Examples of those submissions and evidence include as follows:

Women and Equalities Select Committee , April 2020 – Raising need for urgent assistance

19. **Firstly**, GTR made submissions to the Women and Equalities Select Committee of April 2020, at the outset of the Covid 19 pandemic. In those submissions TM highlighted that:

In 2019 the Women and Equalities select committee found that policymakers had comprehensively failed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in the UK. It also found there had been a persistent failure to tackle long standing inequalities facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in any sustained way. Given this starting point, it is unsurprising that GRT communities are deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers require a cross-government strategy to tackle the long entrenched inequalities experienced in their communities. This was announced on 6 th June 2019 by then communities Minister, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth² . Please find a template for that national strategy here³ , gathered in consultation with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members at the Traveller Movement’s annual national conference in November 2019.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Gypsies, Roma and Irish Traveller communities require urgent assistance in the following areas:

20. Furthermore, within those submissions. TM highlighted that, as a result of the recent pandemic, lock down and closure of schools GTR were placed in a perilous position. TM maintained in written submissions that:

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are left without educational support and resources during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the last few weeks, the Traveller Movement (TM) has been inundated with requests for support, including: requests for tuition; educational resources; access to tutors; access to laptops, data; advice about school exclusion....

...

.. that TM and other organisations wrote to the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, flagging a range of educational issues affecting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and suggested recommendations for change. These include digital exclusion, access to resources, and access to free school meal vouchers.

Schools must be made aware that the predicted grading system will be biased against GRT, and other nomadic groups such as New Travellers, Circus families, Showmen, Boaters etc. and BME pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is essential that guidance is established on how to overcome these biases so that historical injustices, such as cultural or unconscious bias, racism and low expectations in respect of GRT or BME pupils are not further entrenched in predicted grading.

21. In addition, TM highlighted the impact that Covid, the lock down and lack of Governmental response was having and would have on GTR in areas including

- Education,
- Access to financial support, when prevented from working,
- Health and Mental Health
- Access to public health information
- Discrimination,
- Accommodation and housing,
- Domestic abuse
- GTR in prisons

Education Committee, May 2020 – Raising substantial educational issues for GTR in pandemic

22. **Secondly**, TM made a Submission to the Education Committee of May 2020 “The Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Children’s Services”, in which TM highlighted that:

The Traveller Movement is concerned about the widening education gap for Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller (GRT) pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many GRT pupils have been left without educational support and resources, and in the last eight weeks, the Traveller Movement (TM) has been inundated with requests for support, including: requests for tuition; educational resources; access to tutors; access to laptops; mobile data, printers and ink; and advice about school exclusion.

There are concerns from some practitioners that children from GRT backgrounds will not return to school in September as they will have missed a significant amount of their education and, due to digital exclusion they will be well behind their peers.

23. TM also highlighted the fact that the impact of Covid 19 was further exacerbating the already exceptionally marginalised position of GTR children in education:

GRT school children already have the poorest attainment and educational outcomes of all ethnic minority groups. They are the ethnic groups most excluded from school and the least likely to leave school with any formal qualifications (Race Disparity audit, 2018).

School Exclusion

Government figures show that, year on year, Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils have the highest rate of school exclusion, permanent and temporary, among all ethnic groups. In the 2017 to 2018 school year, the highest permanent exclusion rates were among Gypsy and Roma pupils (0.36%, or 36 exclusions per 10,000 pupils) and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils (0.29%, or 29 per 10,000 pupils).

Achievement

Pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds had the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years. At early years only 36% of Gypsy and Roma pupils achieved a good level of development, and 39% for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils – the lowest for any ethnic groups. At key stage 4 the disparity is greater; the Attainment 8 score which is the average points scored for attainment in 8 GCSEs including English and Maths, was only 18.2 points for Gypsy and Roma pupils and 21.9 for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils compared to the average of 46.5 points. These figures have been taken from the latest government data made available.

24. As a result of school closures many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) parents approached TM for assistance as they are unable to provide a suitable physical or digital environment to home school their children. Many lacked the basic equipment, such as laptops, tablets or printers. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of school's issue homework via digital platforms.

25. It is a matter of concern to TM that government institutions were seemingly unaware that many GRT parents are early school leavers, have low levels of literacy and were struggling to provide any level of educational support to their children.

Widening Participation Scheme

26. **Thirdly**, in response to this need key issue during the pandemic, TM established a tutoring project in partnership with Kings College London's Widening Participation team, where we linked tutors with GRT pupils who requested support. Further information can be found here <https://travellermovement.org.uk/Covid19>

Raising issues directly with Education Secretary

27. **Fourthly**, TM and other organisations wrote to the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson in April 2020 flagging a number of educational issues affecting GRT pupils and suggested recommendations for change. We attach a copy of TM's open letter with these submissions.

Raising issues in respect of GTR in women's prisons during pandemic

28. **Fifthly**, TM provided Written evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee, along with Zahid Mubarek Trust, Spark2Life and Project 507 (CVB0023), which complemented the evidence submitted to the Committee on the *Unequal Impact: coronavirus and the impact on people with protected characteristics*

29. In that written evidence, TM highlighted the disproportionate impact that Covid 19 was having on the prison population, in which GTR are exceptionally over represented. We raised the failure of Government to publish data, and called for the:

- *Publication of the ethnicity data of those affected by Coronavirus in prisons.*
- *Appropriate risk assessments for BAME staff and prisoners.*
- *Clear action plan of how the needs of these groups will be identified and met.*
- *Improved data collection for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ethnic groups.*

Raising specific issues to parliament as to lack of government guidance and engagement with GTR

30. **Sixthly**, TM provided written evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee in July 2020 in which TM highlighted the following:

Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers experience some of the worst social and economic outcomes of all ethnic minority groups in the UK. An inquiry by the Women and Equalities committee found¹ that GRT people had comprehensively been failed for decades by policymakers. This failure continues under the Covid-19 pandemic.

To date, no specific guidance or information have been disseminated to Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities. While the Communities minister

NR

***NR** wrote² to advise local authorities in April in relation to nomadic Travellers, there has been little to no coherent national policy pertaining to GRT during the pandemic, and no engagement or published communications from government. Any advice or support provided has been carried out by a handful of voluntary and charitable organisations across the UK.*

Given this lack of government engagement, it is unsurprising that GRT communities feel forgotten about during the pandemic³, are deeply affected by the Covid-19 and require urgent assistance in the following areas:

31. Within this evidence provided to the Women and Equalities Committee TM addressed the vital issues health and Accommodation and Housing, which were affecting GTR during the pandemic. TM made the following submissions:

Health

Currently the NHS does not record GRT ethnicity in its data dictionary, which means the health impact of Covid-19, including the mortality rate will not be fully known. Additionally, GRT were completely excluded from the recent Public Health England review of the impact of Covid on BAME communities.

Gypsies and Travellers experience some of the poorest health outcomes in the UK, including the lowest life expectancy of any group⁵. This makes these communities more vulnerable to Covid19. Having high rates of respiratory problems, diabetes, disabilities, maternal mortalities, and low child immunisation levels means that many Gypsies and Travellers have a high risk of getting seriously ill or even dying from Covid-19.

The close-knit nature of Gypsy and Traveller families mean that Covid-19 can potentially spread fast within their communities, adding to their vulnerability in this crisis. Evidence suggests that men, BAME groups and disabled people

may be more adversely affected by Coronavirus in terms of health impacts, but opportunities to collect and make use of consistent data are currently being missed. Without this it is impossible to measure the extent of the problem or take appropriate action to address it.

And

Accommodation and housing Gypsies and Travellers who live on sites can be faced with overcrowding, having to share kitchens, bathrooms and toilets. Self-isolation and social distancing will be extremely hard in these conditions. If one person gets infected by Covid-19, it is highly likely that many other if not all people living on that site will get it too.

Gypsies and Travellers who are homeless, will face the constant threat of eviction, poor living conditions at the side of the road without access to clean water or electricity and are thus the most vulnerable community members.

Raising issues in relation to data monitoring

32. **Seventhly**, TM's submissions to the Women and Equalities select committee of 20 August 2020 (Written Evidence (LBC0187)), highlighted the disproportionate severity of the impact of Covid 19, and lack of government policy or provision was having on GTR in the areas of:

- Education,
- Access to financial support, when prevented from working,
- Health,
- Mental Health
- Access to public health information
- Discrimination and policing,
- Accommodation and housing,
- Domestic abuse
- GTR in prisons

33. TM also emphasised the profound lack of data monitoring that was being undertaken in relation to GTR, which undermined the ability of GTR to access services and obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty¹:

¹https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36007.htm#_idTextAnchor025

Data Monitoring

The Race Disparity Audit found that, among the 130 datasets that were audited in October 2017, only 27 included classifications for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people

Not recording Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity makes it difficult to ensure that agencies are providing needed services in a fair way and that they are fulfilling their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. There are considerable difficulties in commissioning services and planning budgets when there is insufficient information about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations in a local area.

- *All public statutory agencies should include 18+1 census categories with immediate effect*
- *This recommendation must be included in the national GRT strategy.*

34. TM referred to the Parliamentary Report “*Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*” of 5 April 2019 (a year before the pandemic), which found:

45.As outlined in Chapter 2, there is a lot we do not know about the lives and needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including something as simple as the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people who live in the UK. The need for good quality data was expressed by numerous witnesses, who spoke about the difficulties in commissioning services and planning budgets when there is insufficient information about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations in a local area. Shaynie Larwood-Smith of Cambridgeshire County Council gave us an example in healthcare:

On a big national level, even on a county council level or on an NHS level, you cannot commission for what you do not know. You cannot go and do cultural competency in a hospital that does not even recognise that it might have a Gypsy/Traveller community that it serves. You cannot make change until you can prove need, is my feeling.

35. It is TM’s position that GTR remain largely or wholly invisible to policy makers and providers, as they are simply not counted.

36. This issue, in and of itself, is a matter that should concern this Inquiry. As a population that is known to be highly vulnerable to a pandemic, and that is also statistically invisible, is a population at exceptional risk and a population that has been and will be overlooked by policy makers.

Raising discrete education issues relating to GTR within pandemic – inability to understand GTR issues and elective home education

37. **Eighthly**, TM made submissions on 5 November 2020 to the Education Committee Inquiry into Home Education, in which TM highlighted:

Introduction

In 2019, the Women and Equalities Committee found that policymakers had comprehensively failed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in the UK. It also found there had been a persistent failure to tackle long standing inequalities facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in any sustained way. Given this starting point, it is unsurprising that GRT communities are deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reason for submitting evidence

The Traveller Movement is responding to this call for evidence because high numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and families opt for elective home education and are overrepresented in local authority home education statistics. This has long been an area of concern for us, and we have submitted to previous consultations and have done research on this area. However, since September 2020, the Traveller Movement has received numerous calls from people inquiring about, and opting for, elective home education as a result of factors associated with COVID-19. This is a new and worrying development and one that requires significant attention.

Our Response

- *There are different reasons for GRT parents choosing to home educate their children, and often this is to do with unresolved school bullying , the threat of exclusion⁶ , poor school-parent relationships, unmet special educational needs (SEN), or avoidance of attendance fines. Parents should be supported to try and make improvements with the*

school, or move schools where necessary, instead of opting for elective home education. Parents need to be supported in order for this to happen.

- Those that do opt for elective home education should do through informed consent. Schools and local authorities (LA) should meet with parents to talk through their decision and fully inform them of the facts, including their responsibilities, associated costs, support available etc, so that they are able to make an informed decision.*
- The home education community is a vocal one and tends to be led by people from White and/or middle class backgrounds. Consequently, the voices of people with lower levels of literacy or education tend not to feature in public debates. This is an unfortunate omission which obfuscates the lived realities of people with less social, political, or educational capital. This in turn prevents a proper analysis of the structural issues and barriers that lead to more marginalised people opting for elective home education.*

COVID-19 and Elective Home Education

- We are seeing a rise in the number of parents inquiring about, and opting for, elective home education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- Most GRT parents are not aware of what home education actually entails.*
- In our experience, parents often believe they will be entitled to a tutor, to educational resources, and to financial support with state examinations. Upon hearing they are entitled to none of the above, and they must assume full responsibility for their children's education, they often prefer to keep their child in mainstream education.*
- In our experience, most schools do not maintain an open-door policy for returning pupils, and parents often have to go elsewhere to find a new school place.*
- A move to elective home education is often as a result of unaddressed issues and parents trying to protect their children.*

Raising further issues relating to GTR women prisoners during pandemic – high levels of self harm.

38. Ninthly, TM made submissions dated June 2021 “Written evidence from Traveller Movement Reducing the number of women in custody”

39. Those submissions addressed matters including the impact of Covid 19 on women prisoners including the increase in self-harm:

7. How are women supported to maintain family ties in prison? What progress has been made on improving family ties since the Farmer Review? What effect has Covid-19 had on maintaining family ties for women in custody?

Family contact is important for the well-being of prisoners. This is no different for Gypsy, Roma or Traveller prisoners. Like many people, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers often consider family to be of the highest importance. Therefore, separation is often a particularly difficult aspect of imprisonment. Both men and women will suffer with the pain of separation. However, we believe the negative consequences are accentuated when Traveller women go to prison. A recent study by Clinks found that far more women are primary carers for children, causing a disproportionately negative impact to women’s mental health and their responses to prison regimes, discipline and interventions. This is no different for Traveller women who are at the centre of family and community life.¹² As noted earlier, Traveller women form the pillar of their family and any community networks they may be linked in with. They are also likely to have caring responsibilities from a young age, meaning a support network may be removed when they are imprisoned. The pain of separation further impacts on the parent-child relationship. This is a concern, as statistically Travellers are more likely to be parents - the annual 2020 HMIP survey found that 66% of Travellers had children under the age 18, compared to 47% of Non-Travellers. Furthermore, it was held that 7% of Traveller persons were arranging care for dependents compared to 3% and 41% of Travellers were still contacting family, compared to 29% of Non-traveller respondents.

A point of concern for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals in prison is that they are more likely to need help contacted family. This was raised in the Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation report that stated that Gypsy/Traveller prisoners were more likely to report needing help to get in touch with family and friends while in custody than other prisoners. There was little strategic focus on this issue in prisons. This needs to be given attention, as with all groups, maintaining healthy family bonds is key to rehabilitation and this is no different for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women. However, the implications for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women who have families, and

played a key role within often large family structures are, anxiety, stress, disengagement, fear for loved ones, loss of identity and so on. This struggle for contact will have only worsened due to COVID-19. The changes to visitations and family contact is something of key concern for all Gypsy/Traveller and Roma women, as the restrictions to family visitations due to Covid-19 restrictions is likely to have a large impact due to the close family ties. The 2019/2020 HMIP report observed the concern surrounding the loss of visits for prisoners and that delays in the promised national roll-out of video-calling had added to their frustrations and anxieties. We highly recommend that this be rolled out as soon as possible to maintain personal relationships. However, many GRT families face issues of digital exclusion that may leave them excluded. It should also be noted, that Migrant Roma women may have immediate family abroad. Some Roma Women will come to the UK to work and send money to their family. This means their family structure and support network may not be in the UK. This should be accommodated for when supporting the implementation of successful remote visitations and maintaining family bonds.

8. What factors contribute to the high levels of self-harm in the female estate?

The government's safety in custody statistics recently outlined some disturbing findings of the impact COVID-19 has had in prisons. In the most recent quarter May-September 2020 there were 14,167 self-harm incidents, up 9% on the previous quarter, comprising a 5% increase in male establishments and a 24% increase in female establishments.¹⁴ This is highly concerning for Traveller women as self-harm and suicide has been flagged as an issue disproportionately impacting Traveller people in prisons. Some studies have shown that Traveller women are 5 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population.

Shaming and 'scandalisation' of women is central to some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women's experiences of custody, divorce and domestic abuse. There is also a concerning trend Walker observed, that the shame and stigma which took place following an alleged criminal act or when awaiting trial for a criminal act, created a shamed suicide,¹⁶ Thus, showing the intersection between shaming practices and the severe impact it has on mental health. On entering and leaving prison, women may be facing extreme external pressures that will hinder rehabilitation both within prison and on release. Professionals need to be made aware of the power online and in-person shaming structures can have on Traveller women and offer trauma-informed assistance around these. Support may be needed to ensure safety on release. Capacity building

around addressing and overcoming feelings of shame and loss-of self would underpin a targeted approach to helping to support Traveller Women and enable them to have the tools to enhance Mental Health.

Further submissions on exclusion of GTR from education during pandemic

40. **Tenthly**, TM made submissions in January 2022 to the Education Committee on “The Future of Post-16 Qualifications”

41. In those submissions TM highlighted:

Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils are less likely to stay in education after the age of sixteen than pupils in any other ethnic group, with just 73% of Irish Traveller pupils and 66% of Gypsy and Roma pupils staying on in 2016/17 (The latest figures made available).¹ However, it is worth pointing out that this is for the pupils who manage to successfully remain in education until then and are likely to have a range of coping strategies. The higher numbers missing from education or moving to elective home education before the legal leaving age are not represented here which means that the real figure is likely to be much bleaker. It is also likely that many of the issues and challenges faced in schools by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils such as low teacher expectations, bullying and low prior attainment continue to be faced by these pupils.

Forthcoming Traveller Movement research indicates the extent to which young Romany Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people feel excluded from or unable to access academic or vocational qualifications. The introduction of T-Levels, as well as some other legislative proposals in the Skills & Post-16 Education Bill, are theoretically a welcome development but they do little to tackle the structural barriers facing GRT people in education, employment, and training; which are overwhelmingly experienced earlier in the educational system.

42. TM’s recommendations included:

- *A Levels – Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils need to be adequately supported at GCSE level to ensure that they are able to obtain the necessary grades to progress to A Level qualifications. Additional funding should be made available to provide tutoring or mentoring for pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller*

backgrounds. This is especially important when considering the impact that missed education due to the COVID-19 pandemic will have on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

Conclusion on publications and activities

43. As can be seen from the above examples of TM's submissions to Parliamentary Committees, from the very outset of the Covid 19 pandemic, TM sought to raise the extreme vulnerability of GTR in the context of the pandemic, their invisibility to national and local government and agencies, the lack of provision made for them by national and the disproportionate impact that Covid 19 and the lack of governmental response, policy and provision had on them.
44. TM are certain, that this context, in which GTR are routinely overlooked in policy and provision remains persists.

5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.

45. We refer the Inquiry to the detailed evidence referenced in the answers to Question 4 above. TM has clearly established through its activities and advocacy during the pandemic that GRT communities were effectively ignored in relation to decisions made by UK Government in response to COVID-19.
46. It might be asserted by various institutions within the Inquiry that the UK Government, at times, acknowledged particular vulnerabilities and exposure experienced by GTR communities. TM firmly aver that this did not translate into policy making, provision or implementation.

Clear evidence of inadequate consideration by Government of the position of GTR within the pandemic – delegation of GTR issues to local authorities

It is important that the Inquiry is aware that during the first wave of the pandemic, the Minister for Communities issued a letter dated 30 April 2020 to Local Authority Chief Officers stating:

“During this unprecedented time Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure all communities are supported to stop the spread of COVID-19 by following the advice given by Public Health England. This includes members of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Some Gypsies and Travellers are particularly vulnerable and have the potential to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and some will already have been asked to shield for 12 weeks due to high risk underlying health conditions. Social-distancing or self-isolation may be particularly challenging for members of these communities due to often confined and communal households, and restricted living conditions on many sites. In addition, we know that some families lack basic amenities including running water, adequate sanitation, and refuse disposal facilities, all of which are essential to limit the spread of the virus and keep people safe. Many will no longer have access to places they may have relied on for water and cleaning purposes, due to closures of leisure centres, churches and petrol station toilets. The closure of many recycling centres has also had an impact on the disposal of refuse. [Our emphasis]

It is for Local Authorities to determine how best to support vulnerable groups during this unprecedented period in line with their public health responsibilities. To enable compliance with COVID-19 public health guidance on hygiene requirements, access to basic facilities is essential. This might involve the provision of additional temporary water, sanitation and waste disposal facilities to those currently lacking access to these, or making alternative stopping places available, such as transit sites, suitable local authority land, and holiday campsites which may have closed and have established facilities.” (Our Bold)

47. Extraordinarily, in TM’s view, the position of central Government that although it was known that “...Gypsies and Travellers are particularly vulnerable and have the potential to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19,..” however the Minister considered that “...It is for Local Authorities to determine how best to support vulnerable groups during this unprecedented period” .

48. The point arises in in further correspondence. The Minister wrote to Local Authority Chief Officers² on 10 November 2020 acknowledging that:

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/935042/Lord_Greenhalgh_Letter_to_LA_CEOs_November_2020.pdf

“We know that some Gypsies and Travellers, especially those living in caravans, in vehicles and canal boats, are likely to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and that social distancing or self-isolation can be particularly challenging for members of the communities. That is why the government has also published public health guidance to help those leading a nomadic way of life.”

49. This evidence demonstrates that it was the response of the UK Government that when preparing for, and responding to, the impact of Covid-19 for a group which was identified as a *“particularly vulnerable group”*, which had *“the potential to be disproportionately impacted”*, it decided to pass over responsibility for this vulnerable minority to Local Authorities.

50. In contrast, the National Audit Office report of 10 February 2021³ detailed the response for Central Government (in particular the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and the Department of Health & Social Care) in respect of vulnerable groups in the general population. The report noted:

“1.5 Faced with an immediate need to ensure reliable access to food, medicines and care for an anticipated 1.5 million people, in March, ministers quickly commissioned shielding as a centrally directed programme with an offer of local support to all people considered CEV. Government chose a centrally directed system of support for CEV people led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). Government chose a centrally directed rather than local approach for speed and confidence in delivery. It did so because of concerns about capacity in local food supplies and supermarket shortages and after briefly consulting a small number of local authorities. Government did not attempt to systematically assess the capacity or willingness of local authorities to provide a more local model of support as a thorough assessment would have been difficult in the time available.

Objective of the Programme

1.6 The objective of the Programme was to minimise mortality and severe illness among those who are CEV by providing them with public health guidance and support to stay at home and avoid all non-essential contact. Through the Programme, CEV people could get support accessing food, medicine and basic care.”

³ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Protecting-and-supporting-the-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-during-lockdown.pdf>

51. Thus, it appears that whereas Central Government “..chose a centrally directed rather than local approach for speed and confidence in delivery..” in respect of the vulnerable general population, in respect of GTR a different approach was taken and responsibility for GTR was left with Local Authorities.
52. This is clear evidence of inadequate consideration and response by Government of the position of, and provision for GTR within the pandemic.
53. Simply put, it is anticipated that, should the Inquiry investigate the preparedness and responses of Central and Local Government in respect of GTR, it will be found that little if anything was done to prepare, protect and respond to the threats to and needs of GTR people, who had been identified by Central Government as “*particularly vulnerable and have the potential to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19*”.
54. As can be seen TTM did raise concerns with UK Government through a variety of committees and other engagements, and was able to do so as a result of the many years TTM has been engaged with these committees and other bodies.
55. However, despite submissions by TTM and the recognition of parliamentary committees, it remained the case that the UK government failed to make policy or provision for GTR and treated GTR differently and less favourably than other vulnerable groups.
56. It is the view of TTM that UK national and local government, agencies and providers treated GTR less favourably during and after the Covid 19 pandemic for reasons of race, including structural racism.
57. In this regard (structural racism) we would draw the Inquiry’s attention again to the data desert that exists, up to and including the ONS and NHS, in relation to GTR and the official governmental response that was issued in relation to GTR by the Minister for Communities at the beginning of the pandemic.

6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on

which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.

58. As detailed above, TM have been making detailed submissions to Government since the outset of the Covid 19 pandemic highlighting concerns regarding the lack of policy or provision for GTR.

TM's work stakeholder groups

59. Additionally, TM co-convened stakeholder groups with civil servants in the Ministry of Justice which predated the Covid-19 pandemic. These meetings were held to discuss GTR experiences of the criminal justice system in general, but through the pandemic were used by TM to specifically escalate concerns and issues reported by GTR community members as they related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholder meetings with the MoJ were held on 22/06/2020, 24/09/2020, 07/01/2021, 01/07/2021, 29/10/2021
60. Between August and October 2020, TM met and liaised with Public Health England representatives regarding the organisation's messaging and communications that were distributed to local Directors of Public Health.
61. On 6th August 2020, TM representatives met with Lord Bethell to discuss concerns and challenges GRT communities faced with regards to the Government's Test and Trace programme. We attach herewith the agenda in relation to that meeting.
62. Furthermore, on 29th June 2021, TM's policy manager gave a presentation to 60 civil servants within the Cabinet Office's COVID-19 taskforce team.

7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.

63. TM believes that the lessons which can be learned from the consideration (or lack thereof) of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities is primarily a matter for the Inquiry to establish.
64. It is fundamentally for this reasons that TM is committed to ensuring adequate representation of these communities in the course of the inquiry's business. However, there are wider issues which TM believes the Inquiry should address:

Defects in discrimination legislation

65. **Firstly** - That the omission of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller - as distinct ethnicities protected by the Equality Act 2010 – from the NHS Data Model and Dictionary significantly impeded the UK Government's ability to effectively assess the extent to which GRT communities were affected by both COVID-19 and subsequent policy interventions. TM maintains that if GTR were afforded greater protection as a separate recognised group under equalities legislation, they might not be overlooked in the same way (or at all) in any future pandemic.
66. TM will be in a position to develop these points further if afforded access to disclosed reports and other material within the Inquiry process.

Government action on GTR reactive and not proactive

67. **Secondly** That the consideration given to GTR groups by the UK Government was primarily attributable to the advocacy, lobbying, and campaigning of charitable and voluntary organisations; as opposed to through structures put into place by UK Government for this express purpose.
68. Again, we submit that TM would be in a position to develop detailed submissions lessons to be learned from the approach of government to GTR issues raised in the pandemic upon consideration of relevant documents disclosed to the Inquiry.

Government concerns did not translate into policy

69. **Thirdly** That considerations given to GTR groups by UK Government, and that concerns raised with UK Government by voluntary and charitable organisations representing GTR groups, did not sufficiently translate into policy implementation.

70. We submit that the extent to which GTR issues were considered, discarded or rejected at policy forming stages will be set out in documents that the relevant institutions will disclose to the Inquiry. It is nevertheless clear that the experiences of GTR in the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be repeated through the same policy failures in any future pandemic.

Continuing exclusion of GTR groups within Covid Inquiry

71. **And Finally** That the Inquiry's decision to refuse TM core participant status is a clear continuation of the singular marginalisation experienced by GTR. TM believes that the continued refusal to allow GTR to play any meaningful part in the Covid Inquiry as Core Participants is a matter of serious concern, which negatively impacts the integrity of the Inquiry process and will potentially impact on the treatment of between 0.5% and 0.8% of the population, who are known to be more vulnerable than the general population, in any future pandemic.

72. The Chair is respectfully urged to reconsider the Inquiry's position in relation to TM and the interests of GTR within the Inquiry.

73. This statement is true

Signed

Personal Data

Yvonne MacNamara (CEO of Traveller Movement)

Dated – 15 March 2023