



# The Stopping Place

**Advice & Information**

**Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Groups**

**[thestoppingplace.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://thestoppingplace.eastsussex.gov.uk)**

## What does 'GRT' mean?

'Travellers' or 'Gypsy, Roma and Travellers' are collective terms used for a wide variety of cultural and ethnic groups including:

Gypsy (including Romany Gypsy and English Gypsy)  
Roma  
Traveller of Irish Heritage  
Welsh Gypsy and Traveller  
Scottish Gypsy and Traveller  
Fairground and Travelling Showpeople (Showmen)  
Circus groups  
New Traveller  
Liveaboard Boater and Bargee



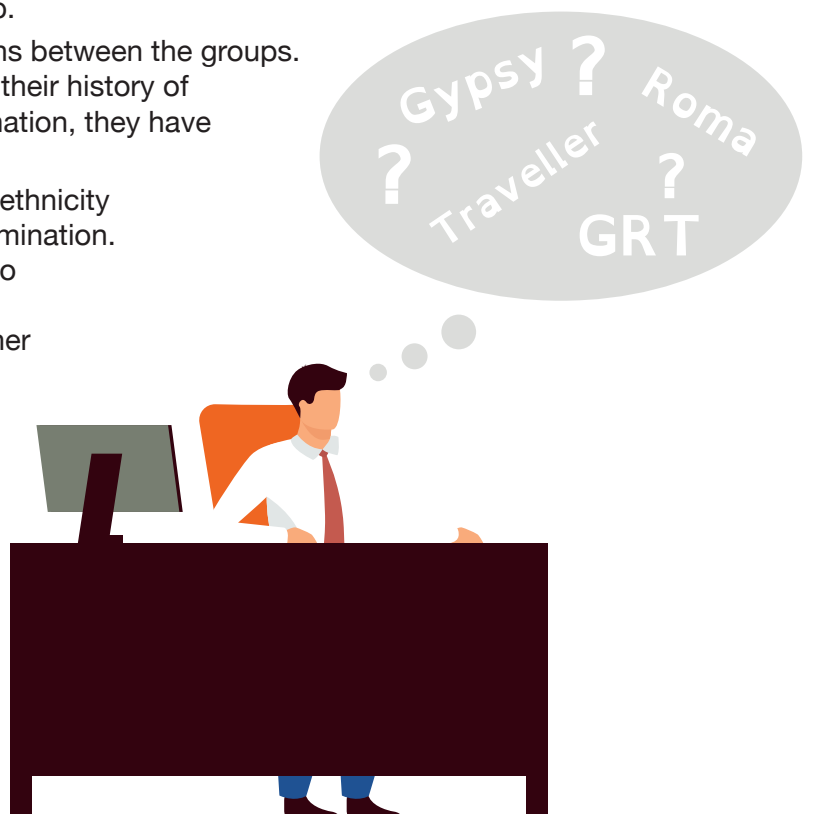
**It is important to recognise and acknowledge the differences between these groups, and that every family within each group is different. Travellers are vulnerable to prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping due to misinformation, media portrayal and racist assumptions. We can all make a difference by challenging negative views and assumptions.**

## How do you know which is the right term to use?

The term 'Traveller' is commonly acceptable as a generic term when necessary, as it does not refer to any one particular group.

It can be very offensive to make generalisations between the groups. While there are some similarities, for example their history of high mobility and being subjected to discrimination, they have distinct identities.

Many Travellers are reluctant to disclose their ethnicity unless they feel safe from judgement or discrimination. Give individuals open and safe opportunities to describe their cultural identity or ethnicity, by showing a genuine and respectful interest rather than making any assumptions or avoiding the subject completely. It is rare for any offence to be taken by well-intended and respectful interest. It would only be considered offensive if you make assumptions or generalisations, or if you use derogatory terms.



## Racism

Derogatory terms used about or towards Travellers must be treated as racism and must always be challenged. Depending on the circumstances, they may also be subject to criminal proceedings.

[\[Link to racism page on website\]](#)



## How big is the GRT population?

It is difficult to accurately estimate the size of the GRT population. Studies vary from 120,000 to 300,000 in the UK.

East Sussex has about 400 pupils ascribed as GRT. We know there are significantly higher numbers as not all pupils are ascribed as GRT for various reasons. [\[Link to ascription page on website\]](#)

The largest of the GRT groups in East Sussex is Romany Gypsy, and the majority live in permanent housing.

Due to the shared hereditary line with Roma, the category for Romany Gypsy on ethnicity forms tends to be labelled 'Gypsy/Roma'. Not all Romany Gypsies identify with this category as their community is very distinct from the European Roma community. They may need to be reassured that the distinction is noted.

## Can you be a Traveller if you live in a house and you don't travel?

A mobile lifestyle, or living arrangements, are not what defines all Travellers. Travellers have a rich and distinct cultural heritage. Being settled or housed doesn't take that away.

Equally, someone is not a Traveller just because they live in a caravan.

The words Roma, Gypsy and Traveller are spelt with capital letters, as they describe ethnicities. 'Traveller' as an ethnicity is different to the word 'traveller' which can be used to describe anyone who travels.

Most Travellers live in houses. A minority are still highly mobile. Others spend some of their time travelling but most of it settled in one place. Their settled place may be a Traveller site, a caravan site, private land or permanent housing.

Previous generations had a greater need and opportunity to sustain a mobile lifestyle.

Many Travellers would prefer to live in the traditional way on a Traveller site, but they don't have that choice.

Families may move into permanent housing for lots of reasons. For example, it can be due to shortage of Traveller sites and legal stopping places, or for access to healthcare and education. They may still travel during the summer, and to culturally important events and gatherings throughout the year.

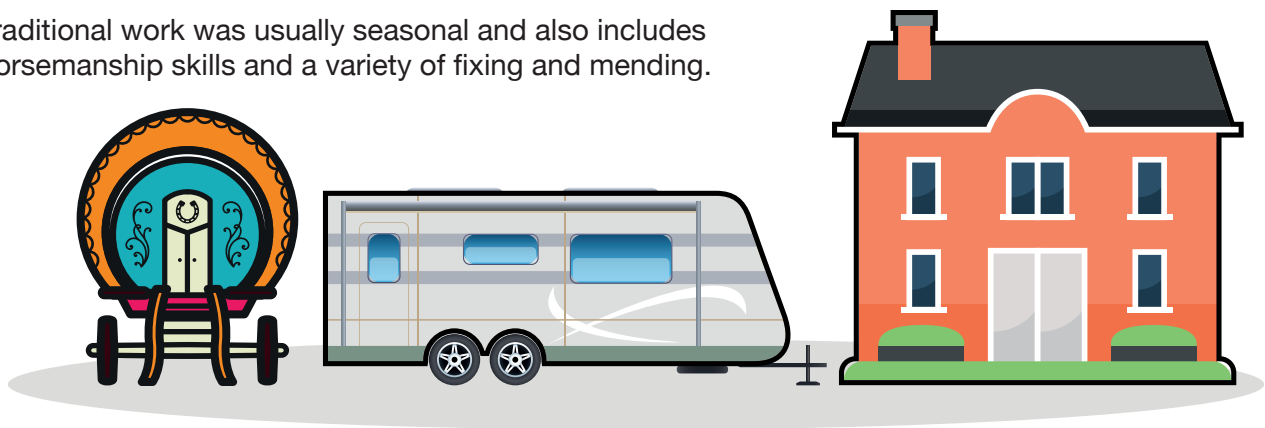
[\[Link to cultural reasons for absence web page\]](#)

It is common for housed Travellers to feel isolated from their support network, making any opportunities to come together even more important.



## Gypsy

- Legally recognised as a minority ethnic group, protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 2010 Equality Act.
- Gypsy ethnicity includes those identifying as English Gypsy or Romany Gypsy.
- They have a common shared history, language, customs and practices.
- Records show that people of Romany Gypsy ethnicity have been in the UK since the 16th century, originating from North West India (sharing the same hereditary line as European Roma groups).
- Their language is Romani, or Romany, which is sometimes considered to be private. English has become the main language and some use pogardi-jib which is a mix of English and Romani words. [\[link to language page\]](#).
- They have close bonds across extended family groups.
- Traditional work was usually seasonal and also includes horsemanship skills and a variety of fixing and mending.



## Roma

- Legally recognised as a minority ethnic group, protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 2010 Equality Act.
- Roma is a collective name for the different European Gypsy groups including Rom, Sinti and Manouche.
- The terms 'Roma' and 'Romany' are unrelated to the country of Romania. Roma and Romany Gypsies originated in North West India. 'Rom' is derived from the ancient Sanskrit language of India, literally meaning 'man'.
- European Roma arrived in the UK before WW1, as Coppersmiths in 1930s and as Hungarian refugees in 1956. More recently they may arrive in the UK from Romania, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.
- Many have fled racist persecution and segregation.
- During the Second World War, many Roma populations were wiped out in the concentration camps.
- Mostly housed and often living in three-generation family groups.
- Their first language is Romani, and children may need support with English as an Additional Language. [\[link to language page\]](#).



## Travellers of Irish Heritage

- Legally recognised as a minority ethnic group, protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 2010 Equality Act.
- There is a small and mainly mobile population of Travellers of Irish Heritage in East Sussex, though some are settled on permanent Traveller sites or in housing.
- Their language is Shelta (Gammon and Cant) [[link to language page](#)].
- They have strong kinship ties and families generally travel together in related groups.
- They have a separate hereditary line to Gypsy and Roma – they may be descendants of people during Cromwell's oppression and those who lost land during the Irish potato famine in 1847. The population has migrated to UK for work since the 1960s.
- They are descendants of travelling craftsmen, metalworkers, wandering musicians and storytellers.
- The majority are practising Catholics.



## Welsh Gypsies and Travellers

- Legally recognised as a minority ethnic group, protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 2010 Equality Act.
- Many identify as descendants of Abram Wood and others.
- They migrated from South West England in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Mostly housed, they traditionally lead a nomadic life, specialising in wood carving, wagon building, horse dealing and fishing.
- They are traditionally skilled harpists and excellent musicians, introducing the fiddle to Wales.



## Scottish Gypsies and Travellers

- Legally recognised as a minority ethnic group, protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 2010 Equality Act.
- First recorded in the 12th century as travelling metalworkers.
- Nomadic in 18th and 19th century due to war and land clearances.



## Fairground Families / Travelling Showpeople / Showmen

- Fairs go back to pagan times and were popular in Roman times.
  - There are strong family ties.
  - There are generally regular patterns of migration which involve the whole family as a working unit.
  - They tend to be well organised, and their rights are protected by membership of the Showman's Guild of Great Britain.
  - Families tend to own or rent winter quarters returning to these after the travelling season.
  - Children usually have a base school with distance learning while they are travelling.
- [Link to Attendance: T Code]**
- Fairground or Showmen families have a strong and distinct culture and may not necessarily identify themselves as Travellers in the same way as Gypsy, Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage. Travellers from these groups may also be part of the Fairground or Showmen community, but it is important to understand the distinction.



## Circus Groups

- They have lived and travelled in Britain since 1770.
- Usually British-administered but with a multicultural community. Each circus is owned by a single family, but performers may have international backgrounds and are hired for the yearly circuit.
- Frequently associated with family names going back over generations.
- There is a long travelling season, so children may only attend their winter 'base' school for a short period. [\[Link to Attendance: T Code\]](#)
- Many children will not speak English as their first language.
- As well as attending school, children may be involved in learning circus skills.



## New Travellers

- Their origin is relatively recent, and often a personal lifestyle choice rather than cultural heritage, but some are now third generation New Travellers with no experience of house dwelling in their immediate family history.
- Numbers grew dramatically in the 80s and early 90s but have since declined as legislation made roadside encampment increasingly difficult.
- Group ties are usually strong.
- Many children are electively home educated [\[Link to Elective Home Education\]](#).



## Liveaboard Boaters and Bargees

- This term relates to people living and working on the waterways. It is not defined as an ethnic group, but some families have lived this lifestyle for generations and have a shared heritage, culture and traditions.
- Bargees, living and working on canals, were established in the 18th century but are very few now. There are no canals in East Sussex but there are still some traditional Bargees in places such as Somerset, Norfolk and Birmingham.
- Liveaboard Boaters is a wider term, including individuals from any ethnic group. Some may also identify as being from another Traveller community as well as Liveaboard Boater.



**For further information, please visit:**  
**[thestoppingplace.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://thestoppingplace.eastsussex.gov.uk)**