

# Travellers and Crime?

Reflections on the Channel 4  
Dispatches documentary and  
criminal stereotyping

A Report by The Traveller  
Movement 2021

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# Forewords by Colin Clark and Chris McDonagh

## Colin Clark

Professor of Sociology at the University of the West of Scotland  
Traveller Movement Advisory Board Member

**I**t has been more than a year now since Channel 4 first broadcast the Dispatches programme 'The Truth about Traveller Crime' (Hardcash Productions, 2020).

The reaction to this hour-long programme on social media, on the evening of April 16th, 2020, was one of disbelief and distress, not to mention anger and sorrow. The presenter, journalist Anja Popp, presented fictions as facts, rumours as evidence and hearsay as the gospel. Viewer prejudices were confirmed from the word go, via a mix of talking heads with an agenda, dodgy statistics and an editorial line that was biased in the extreme. The aftermath of the Dispatches programme was also deeply unpleasant to witness, akin to some of the abuse and harassment that was seen by Traveller families and kids after the first 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' series aired more than a decade ago now (Firecracker Films, 2011).

Indeed, 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' was another Channel 4 series – the channel have form on promoting an anti-Traveller agenda. After more than 12 months, and following several hundred complaints, Ofcom has still not reported its findings on 'The Truth about Traveller Crime'. This just isn't good enough and Ofcom need to be held to account for this inaction.

In the face of official apathy, the Traveller Movement decided to take its own form of DIY action in May/June 2020. Employing survey-based research methods, the Traveller Movement sought to investigate community reactions to the programme, the impact of





negative anti-Traveller stereotypes and how these can be challenged, as well as what happens when Travellers are the victims and survivors of hate crime.

This report features the headlines, the findings and the stories that UK broadcasters are not interested in. And the findings, as you will read, are both stark and horrifying. Suffice to say things have to change and change urgently. Also included in this report are a range of informed, practical and easily implemented recommendations that could help turn the situation around for the better.

*"Suffice to say things  
have to change and  
change urgently"*

However, is the political will there to take action to make the changes that are required?

Please read this report with an open mind and an open heart and be a part of the campaign to hold Ofcom to account and to challenge production teams and broadcasters when they encourage racism

and disseminate intolerance in the name of chasing viewer ratings. Enough is enough: in 2021, it is surely time to destroy the stereotypes and to present more accurate and factual reports on the realities of Traveller lives and livelihoods.

# Chris McDonagh

Founder of Travellers Against Racism  
Traveller Movement Advisory Board Member

**A**fter watching the disgraceful and false Channel 4 dispatches programme "The Truth About Traveller Crime" I set up the TravellersAgainstRacism Twitter account in order to challenge the stereotypes and racism Travellers and Gypsies face every day of our lives. As an Irish Traveller I am used to racism, I have grown a thick skin, but I was shocked at the sheer amount of racism I immediately came across. Since that first day I have been challenging anti-Traveller racism every day, with the offenders ranging from everyday members of the public, to police officers, business owners, politicians, councilors and mayors.



Anti-Traveller/Gypsy racism comes from every sector of modern society. This racism is seen as acceptable and is very rarely monitored or challenged, so the job of reporting and challenging these instances has been huge. I must add that since I have been challenging this behaviour, there have been people who I challenged, and they are now allies and help me challenge the stereotypes and hate. Education can make a real difference to help change people's perceptions of us and help them see us as people, not as a stereotype.

After "The Truth About Traveller Crime" aired I remember sitting there in shock and disgust. How had this blatant attack on our community been allowed to air? How were they allowed to stereotype and state their personal opinions as facts? Straight away my phone blew up with calls and texts from both friends and family, and the main topic we all spoke about was how anti-Traveller/Gypsy hate was so prevalent, that these people were allowed to stereotype and lie without challenge or fear of repercussions. The fact that a whole community, including innocent children were put on trial by press, and found guilty, was a truly disturbing and



worrying thing to witness.

The media are to blame for the current hate we are receiving. They broadcast only the negative stories about us and have no issue with sensationalising these stories. They choose to spread stereotypes, hate and anger in order to get viewers and clicks on their websites. They blacken the public opinion of us and accuse us of being a whole criminal enterprise. Of course there are criminals, as there are in every community, but there is a whole lot more to us than what the media shows. We are families and friends. We are people trying to get on with our lives away from hate and stereotypes. We are people who care for our elderly. We are people who give to charity and would help anyone. We are people who love and laugh. We are people who feed and clothe the homeless. We are people who are trying to live. But the media won't show this side to us because it doesn't fit their agenda. This is why we MUST challenge them. We have to show people the real us, and not the people the media portrays us as. We are more than the stereotype and we are more than the media portrays.

This report is an important tool that can and will show how these types of programmes can affect people on a personal and mental level. People need to see and understand that we are people too. In this report, I hope people can see the importance of challenging and

*"They choose to spread stereotypes, hate and anger in order to get viewers and clicks on their websites"*

changing the narrative. If we don't challenge and move for change, then things will only get worse and these disgusting programmes will continue to air. Public perception of us won't change but only darken. The lies will continue to be accepted as facts, when the fact of the matter is:

**WE ARE MORE THAN THE STEREOTYPES.**

# 1. Executive Summary

After watching the Channel 4 Dispatches programme 'The Truth about Traveller Crime [1]' in April 2020, and witnessing the distress and anger it caused, we asked Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to tell their side of the story. This report summarises the results of our online 'Travellers and crime?' survey.

The report is based on 68 answers from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller respondents collected in May and June of 2020.

## 1.1 Key Findings

**96%** have heard negative stereotypes about Travellers and crime

**67%** had never seen a news article or programme that featured a Traveller as a victim of a crime

**56%** had reported a crime committed against them or their family

**55%** said that when they had reported the crime to the police no action had been taken

**90%** would challenge someone who held a prejudiced belief that most Travellers are 'criminals'

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/02/truth-about-traveller-crime-channel-4-dispatches-show-accused-dehumanising>

## 1.2 Recommendations

- ✓ Broadcasters and journalists should strive to reflect the many different experiences that GRT people have rather than engaging with them exclusively to focus on their ethnicity;
- ✓ Regulatory bodies, The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, and NGO's should target and put pressure on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and Youtube) so they better recognise and remove hate speech against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers;
- ✓ Third sector organisation should collaborate, campaign and lobby the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) for the print media to publish proportionate apologies when they have published false or misleading articles/information;
- ✓ Ofcom staff should be better informed about GRT people and should ensure it meets its regulatory obligations with regard to GRT people effectively and in a timely fashion;
- ✓ The IPSO Editors' Code of Practice clause 12 should be amended to permit complaints about discriminatory content relating to groups and categories of people;
- ✓ Funding bodies, trusts and statutory funders should support and make more funding available to GRT people to advocate and seek remedies for racist and discriminatory treatment;
- ✓ The Department for Education should make Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and history mandatory in school curricula across the UK;
- ✓ Police Services, as a whole, need to improve accountability and intolerance towards discrimination against GRT people by their staff and officers as per Standards of Professional Behaviour set out in the Police Code of Ethics; 2. Authority, Respect and Courtesy, 3. Equality and Diversity and 10. Challenging and Reporting Improper Behaviour. This is consistent with Police (Conduct) Regulations 2012 and the Police Staff Council Joint Circular 54.

## 2. Introduction and Background

'The Truth About Traveller Crime' aired on the 16 April 2020. The programme, which left many shocked and horrified, resulted in over 800 official complaints to Ofcom. After pressure from the public and help from [Stop Funding Hate UK](#), a number of companies and organisations also pulled their advertisements from the documentary's ad-breaks on the Channel 4 website.

The programme played into many harmful stereotypes that sadly, are all too familiar to many GRT people. In reality, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers experience high levels of racism, exclusion and victimisation, however this narrative is rarely showcased in the media. Programmes seldom celebrate the diversity and countless achievements of GRT people. Instead people who are of Gypsy, Roma or Traveller ethnicity are misrepresented and vilified as 'criminal.'

The Leveson Inquiry concluded that GRT people are targets of press hostility and xenophobia, and a recent Gate Herts study concluded that 82% of its respondents had experienced 'media incitement to racial hatred' [2]. Stereotyping and hostility towards GRT people are widely used by the press in a way that would not be tolerated against other minorities, and this exploitation of groups who are 'over-policed and under-protected' has serious consequences [3]. In the same Gate Herts study participants reported an uptick in incidents of hate crime following programmes such as the Channel 4 Dispatches programme and in 60% of cases where a family member had attempted suicide, family members reported the individual had spoken about experiences of hate speech and hate crime prior to the attempt [4].

The failure to acknowledge GRT people

[2] <https://gateherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rain-Report-201211.pdf>

[3] <https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/userupload/Briefings/Hate-crime.pdf>

[4] <https://gateherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rain-Report-201211.pdf>



are victimised, is reflected in the fact that, even though hate speech and hate crime against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is widespread, 81% of police forces across the UK do not include Gypsies and Travellers in their ethnic monitoring systems and none record the Roma ethnicity - despite keeping records for other ethnic groups [5]. This is just one example of the many ways in which GRT victims and survivors are erased. As the aforementioned Gate Herts report aptly states, 'There is a complex and often toxic interplay between mainstream media, social media and the attitudes of, and behaviours by, staff within statutory authorities and services' [6]

or established authorities such as the police, entrenches the inequalities that GRT people face.

This report aims to centre the voices of those directly impacted by the Channel 4 programme and by stereotyping more widely. The Traveller Movement believes this report will provide further evidence of the pervasive discrimination Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face and the ways in which this discrimination is created and perpetuated by the media. This report demonstrates how this experience of discrimination, coupled with the feeling that there is no recourse to challenge discrimination, especially when it comes from powerful national media corporations



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[5] <https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/Ethnic-recognition-of-Gypsies-and-Travellers-in-Police-Forces-in-the-UK.pdf>

[6] <https://gateherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rain-Report-201211.pdf>



## 3. Methodology

The Traveller Movement conducted an online survey of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people from across the UK to hear their side of the story. In total, 68 people completed the survey between 11th May and 22nd June 2020. We received responses from people ranging in age from under 18 to over 65.

The questions were informed by the numerous complaints received by the Traveller Movement and observed on social media, as well as the Traveller Movement's 17 year experience working with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

The survey was circulated via social media (Facebook and Twitter) to reach as many GRT individuals as possible. All responses were analysed and answers from non-GRT people removed. None of the survey questions required a compulsory answer, however all questions except one were answered by all participants. The only question which did not receive a full response, still received 47 responses.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Reactions to the programme

“*They crucified us*”

Of the 74% of respondents who watched the programme, many expressed disbelief, feelings of unfairness, and fear.

"Quite worrying that a mainstream TV channel can get away with ***awful stereotyping of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities*** in the country. Total sensationalism and racist."

Many were left feeling frightened and worried:

"It was straight up biased and written in a narrative that painted GRT communities as a threat to society. The interviewer came across as if she was really on to something; ***as if she was getting to the bottom of who Travellers really are*** and I got a sense that she was proud of the work she was creating and about to share with the nation. ***It left me with a***

***knot in my stomach*** knowing that the Traveller community was now even more so going to be a target of racism both online and off.'

As well as the fear felt by some, more than one respondent described witnessing an increase in hate speech and hate crimes after the programme.

"Since the filming ***my neighbours have started giving me abuse again***, and my windows have been smashed in."

The methodology that the programme used was criticised as biased and unreliable. The motives of those creating, presenting and interviewed in the programme were questioned.



"Disgraceful unbalanced account. The argument and the statistics didn't tally. The figures actually showed **crime was lower around majority of sites**. It was incitement to racial hatred and online abuse has increased as a result. **The police who took part had no evidence** only anecdote and should be prosecuted for taking part."

Some criticised the accusations made by police officers in the documentary that they could not take action against Travellers 'for fear of being labelled racist.'

"This type of policing also has a **direct negative affect on the Travelling community** because police are failing to protect the community of Gypsy/ Travellers from acts of crime also with these types of tactics and that was not highlighted... Gypsy/Travellers have access to little justice in the system as a direct result of the 'leave them to it' mentality..."

*"Since the filming **my my neighbours have started giving me abuse again, and my windows have been smashed in.**"*

## 4.2 Criminal and other negative stereotypes

“  
*They live off crime. They are bad for the area. Avoid at all costs*  
”

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people experience widespread stereotyping and prejudice and when asked what negative criminal stereotypes they had heard personally, many discussed the way they feel all Travellers are ‘tarred with the same brush.’ Many felt these generalisations centre around the idea that all people from GRT backgrounds are criminal in a number of ways.

*“[They call us] dirty, thieves, do as they likeys, uneducated, neglect children and animals, antisocial, take from society and don’t contribute, pay no taxes, are incredibly wealthy, marry their cousins (inbred).”*

‘Tax dodging’ and stealing in particular were common responses from participants.

“There isn’t one Traveller in this country, from as young as primary school age that hasn’t been associated with stealing. I know that for a fact. *I’ve been told several times by friends they were wary of me at the start of our friendship.* It hurts but it doesn’t shock me.”

96% of respondents had heard negative stereotypes about Travellers and crime

## 4.3 Why are Travellers stereotyped?

“

*They hear bad stories in local press and spread rumors. Folks love a bogey man!*

”

When discussing the criminal stereotypes forced upon Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people most respondents discussed scapegoating and the negative portrayal of Travellers in the media. Some felt that such stereotypes have come from persisting prejudice and racism, ignorance and myths that are not challenged enough by wider society, as well as being perpetuated and upheld by institutions such as the government and police.

"Racism and ignorance primarily. Fed by a media and government prejudiced so deep it seems impossible we'll ever be viewed any differently. Also the fact many of our communities don't like gadjo [non Gypsy/Traveller] interfering in our business. ***They fill in the bits they don't understand like people spinning a fairytale.***"

Respondents felt that a minority of GRT people who commit crime tend to receive all of the media attention and just over 67% (46 of 68) respondents had never seen a news article or programme where Travellers were the victims or survivors of a crime.

"Criminals in our culture are somehow poster characters for our culture as a whole and our private way of living is viewed with suspicion but it is because ***historically in the most atrocious ways we have tolerated hatred*** and so have little confidence in the solution being "let them in."

Many discussed the biased nature of the media more generally and the lack of positive stories involving people who are Gypsy, Roma or Traveller.

"... I knew from the start that it would destroy the reputation of the many Travellers/Gypsies that do good for their communities like doing food runs for the NHS, buying children's toys at Christmas for hundreds of children in hospital."

*"Our private way of living is viewed with suspicion but it is because historically in the most atrocious ways we have tolerated hatred"*

Some respondents raised the issue of 'othering' that GRT people face and the need that wider society has to blame 'outsiders,' especially as times become harder and socio-economic conditions worsen.

"Because we are 'other'. We keep to ourselves (due to prejudice), and speak our own languages. People both fantasise about our way of life and fear it. People seek out scapegoats to blame when times are tough, because ***it's easier to point to someone else and say 'it's all their fault' than recognise corruption and greed in their own houses.***"

Respondents also pointed to the problems caused by many years of pressure to assimilate, racism within the justice system and the criminalisation of GRT cultures.

"Years and years of prejudice. It's a stereotype that's been around for generations. Some Travellers do commit crime, we can't ignore that however it would be nice to see what the ratio is per population. Also, ***some policing is targeted, so a disproportionate number of Travellers will be convicted.***"

"Some Travellers lifestyles have been criminalised, cold calling, hare coursing and ***even travelling for social and economic reasons are either illegal or looked upon with suspicion.***"

## 4.4 Travellers as victims and survivors of crime

*“The views of most are you deserve it so why bother?”*

Over half of respondents had reported crimes that had been perpetrated towards them or their families (100% of respondents who identified as women, 50% as men and 1% as a gender identity not listed). Many however described the racism and discrimination they faced when doing so. Respondents felt they were treated with suspicion rather than as victims or survivors of crimes and that many crimes were not even recognised as such by the police and were blamed on other GRT people.

"I used to [report crime]. It stopped mattering. **When we were the victims we were approached as suspicious** and the whole situation tended to be approached as though other Travellers were to blame."

When asked if authorities had taken

any action when they had reported crimes, 55% responded that no action had been taken as a result of their report and a number of others reported mixed results. In some cases people described being treated with distrust and described officers as blaming Travellers or Traveller 'culture' for crimes with no evidence. Others identified wider issues with policing for other groups in society.

"I live in a house and my shed was broken into. **I was visited by a police officer who told me it was probably Travellers that did it.** I said really? They don't normally rob their relations!"

"...From my experience, when a police officer is called out to the location of a well-known Traveller site, they

genuinely have a different approach altogether. ***They can't seem to fathom the fact that a Traveller can be a victim of a crime*** in the same way a settled person can be convicted of a crime."

"None but I don't think being a Traveller was the problem. The police don't do a great deal for most cultures."

*"They can't seem to fathom the fact that a Traveller can be a victim of a crime in the same way a settled person can be convicted of a crime."*



## 4.5 Challenging stereotypes

“

*I feel like I'm trying to defend the actions of a whole section of society. I shouldn't have to do that*

”

### Would you challenge someone who thinks most Travellers are criminals?

**90%** of those surveyed said they would challenge someone who thinks most Travellers are criminals.

"They assume all Travellers are criminals yet they've never actually known a Traveller and by the end of the conversation they say something along the lines of "you are nothing like I imagined a Traveller to be like" I have these conversations with friends and people at my university and I try to educate them the basic point that ***you cannot paint an entire ethnic minority with the same brush. It seems such a basic right but for some reason Travellers aren't included in that right.*** And it's exhausting. I feel like I'm trying to defend the actions of a whole section of society. I shouldn't have to do that."

However, some acknowledged the feelings of exhaustion and frustration experienced when constantly challenging and correcting stereotypes, prejudice and misinformation. One respondent who said they wouldn't challenge someone gave the reason that:

"If I did I would be constantly arguing with someone."

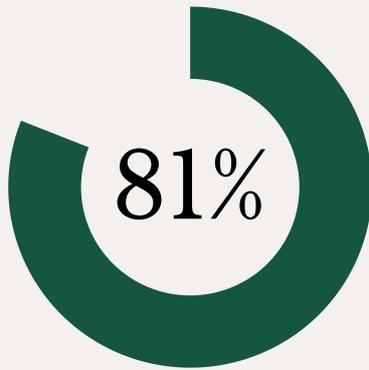


## 5. Recommendations

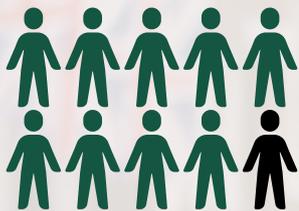
- 1 Broadcasters and journalists should strive to reflect the many different experiences that GRT people have rather than engaging with them exclusively to focus on their ethnicity;
- 2 Regulatory bodies, The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, and NGO's should target and put pressure on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and Youtube) so they better recognise and remove hate speech against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers;
- 3 Third sector organisation should collaborate, campaign and lobby the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) for the print media to publish proportionate apologies when they have published false or misleading articles/information;
- 4 Ofcom staff should be better informed about GRT people and should ensure it meets its regulatory obligations with regard to GRT people effectively and in timely fashion;
- 5 The IPSO Editors' Code of Practice clause 12 should be amended to permit complaints about discriminatory content relating to groups and categories of people;
- 6 Funding bodies, trusts and statutory funders should support and make more funding available to GRT people to advocate and seek remedies for racist and discriminatory treatment;
- 7 The Department for Education should make Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and history mandatory in school curricula across the UK;
- 8 Police Services, as a whole, need to improve accountability and intolerance towards discrimination against GRT people by their staff and officers as per Standards of Professional Behaviour set out in the Police Code of Ethics; 2. Authority, Respect and Courtesy, 3. Equality and Diversity and 10. Challenging and Reporting Improper Behaviour. This is consistent with Police (Conduct) Regulations 2012 and the Police Staff Council Joint Circular 54.

# Gypsy, Roma and Traveller People's Experience with the Media and the Police

This is based on 68 answers from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller respondents collected in May and June of 2020



of police forces across the UK do not include Gypsies and Travellers in their ethnic monitoring systems and none record the Roma ethnicity - despite keeping records for other ethnic groups



96%

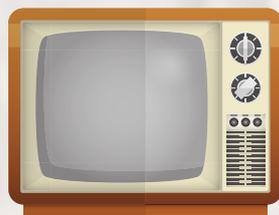
had heard negative stereotypes about Travellers and crime



56%

had reported a crime committed against them or their family

67%



had never seen a news article or programme that featured a Traveller as a victim of a crime

55%



said that when they had reported the crime to the police no action had been taken



## 7. Appendix 1: Survey

### Travellers and Crime?

We want to find out more about some of the claims that the Channel 4 Dispatches programme 'The Truth about Traveller Crime' made regarding Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies. We also want to find out more about other experiences of crime that need to be mentioned that Channel 4 did not talk about, such as Travellers being victims of crime.

All your answers will be anonymous, no one will know what you answer.

We will use the answers to raise awareness about 'Travellers and crime'

Thank you!

Traveller Movement team

#### 1. What is your ethnicity?

- Minceir/Pavee (Irish Traveller)
- Scottish Traveller / Nawken
- English Romany Gypsy
- Welsh Gypsy Traveller
- Mixed Romany / Pavee
- Roma
- Other

If other, write here

## 2. How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

## 3. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- I don't want to say
- Not listed

If not listed please write here

## \* 4. Did you watch Channel 4 Dispatches programme 'Truth About Traveller Crime'?

- Yes
- No



If you watched it, what did you think of it?

\* 5. Why do you think some people associate Travellers with crime? (For example, prejudice)

6. Have you heard any negative stereotypes about Travellers and crime?

Yes

No



If yes, what were they?

**\* 7. Would you challenge someone who thinks most Travellers are criminals?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If yes, how would you challenge them?



\* 8. Have you seen news articles or programmes about Travellers as victims of crime?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

\* 9. Have you reported crimes committed against you or your family?

- Yes
- No

If no, can you tell us why?

10. If you have reported crimes committed against you or your family, what actions, if any, were taken by the authorities?



# The Traveller Movement

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