

FACT OR FICTION



GYPSIES,
ROMA
AND TRAVELLERS
AN AMNESTY MYTHBUSTER

MYTH 1

**THEY
ARE
CRIMINAL**

REALITY

As in any other community, some Gypsies are involved in crime. But there is no evidence that criminality is higher among Gypsies, Roma and Travellers than other groups. The proportion of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK mainstream prison population is smaller than their proportion of the general population.

MYTH 2

**THEY ARE
NOMADIC
AND THEY
ALL LIVE IN
CARAVANS**

REALITY

As an ethnic group, Gypsies and Roma have a nomadic heritage but today, 90 per cent of Gypsies and Roma across the world live in houses. In Eastern Europe and Italy, the vast majority of Roma are settled, although their housing conditions are often much worse than those of the non-Roma population. However, many Gypsies and Travellers in Western Europe, particularly in France (about 15 per cent), Ireland and the UK (50 per cent) lead nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles.

MYTH 3

**THEY
ARE
WORKSHY**

REALITY

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers often start work younger, with traditional skills being passed down to the next generation. There is a strong work ethic, based on the need to survive. Because of discrimination and a lack of formal qualifications, many prefer (or are forced into) self-employment. Under UK immigration rules, Roma from Bulgaria and Romania (like other citizens of those countries) are restricted to self-employment unless they have a work permit as highly skilled workers or seasonal agricultural workers.

MYTH 4

**THEY DON'T
CONTRIBUTE
TO SOCIETY
AND DON'T
PAY THEIR
TAXES**

REALITY

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have been part of European society for centuries, practising a range of occupations including metal-work, small-scale trading and agricultural labour. Their music, storytelling and art have long been part of European culture. Those who are employed or self-employed pay taxes like anyone else. In the UK, Gypsies and Travellers living on privately owned or Council sites pay Council Tax, rent and other charges.

MYTH 5

**THEY
ARE
DIRTY**

REALITY

Gypsy culture is built on strict codes of cleanliness, including strict guidelines on what objects can be washed in what bowls. Most Gypsies, Roma and Travellers take great pride in their homes.

MYTH 6

**THEY DON'T
WANT TO
SEND THEIR
CHILDREN TO
SCHOOL**

REALITY

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers want a better future for their children and value the literacy that comes with formal education. However, many also fear that schools will weaken their children's identity and values. In a UK survey, three-quarters of Gypsy Travellers said they had been picked on by other pupils because of their background. In Central and Eastern Europe, Roma children are often segregated from others in special schools and classes, and receive an inferior education.

FACTS

CHILD MORTALITY

In the UK, Gypsy and Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely than the rest of the population to have experienced the **death of a child**.

2/3 REFUSED EMPLOYMENT

In a survey covering Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, almost two-thirds of respondents said they were refused employment because they were Roma.

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*Sources: Amnesty International, Equality and Human Rights
Commission Scotland, Ormiston Children and Families Trust,
Travellers Times*