

RESULTS FROM  
ENGAGEMENT AND PRE-CONSULTATION  
HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN WALES

REPORT by the Romani Cultural and Arts Company  
Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

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## INTRODUCTION

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in the UK are commonly grouped together. They share some similarities due to their perceived lifestyles, often linked with their mobilities, housing/accommodation, ways of living, and as a result they are all united in the ways they experience spatial segregation, social discrimination, civil and political exclusion. Furthermore, they are commonly perceived, on the political and international levels, as one whole.

Irish Travellers have been a traditional nomadic ethnic minority in Ireland. They were recognised as an ethnic group by the Prime Minister of Ireland, Enda Kenny, in 2017. Before that, Ireland had avoided to recognise their distinct ethnicity while instead it has been trying to assimilate their Travellers and eradicate their differences. Policies began to change in the late 1980s and 1990s as Travellers' structural disadvantages and social stigmas made the Irish Government recognise them as a legally protected group. The Irish State gave Travellers more rights based on their identification as such, however, it continued to deny their ethnicity. After a long battle of continuous campaigning and lobbying by the Traveller community, the Travellers were ultimately recognised in 2017 as an ethnic group (Haynes et al. 2020). Taoiseach Enda Kenny described this new status as "[...] historic for our Travellers and a proud day for Ireland" (O'Halloran and O'Regan 2017). Recognising the uniqueness but also the inequalities and the discrimination that the Travellers face, the Taoiseach described the Traveller community as an "integral part of our society for over a millennium, with their own distinct identity – a people within our people." (ibid.). While their official recognition as a distinct ethnic group indigenous to Northern Ireland was a momentous step forward, especially for young members of the Travellers' community giving them a sense of pride for their culture, identity and their rightful place within the larger society, there are still several issues the community faces linked to social stigmas, stereotypes, inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion.

Even though Irish Travellers have their distinct identity, heritage, and culture, their experiences in the UK, due to their perceived mobile lifestyle, are similar to those of the Romany Gypsies of Great Britain and the Roma of Europe who became part of the broader British social and cultural mosaic on the back of the wave of migration linked to the expansion of the European Union and the accession of new states such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. It is noteworthy that even though the heritage of

Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers is nomadic, currently the majority of these groups live a sedentary lifestyle, (this does not exclude seasonal types of migration), in permanent locations, in houses or trailers as is the case of the British Gypsies and Travellers, and houses and apartments as has been the case of the Roma.

In the UK, it is common to group Romany Gypsies and Travellers together. This stems from their long history and presence in the country and society. Roma, on the other hand, are considerably 'new' within the British social fabric given their relatively recent waves of migration to the country. In general, Roma share similarities with the Romany Gypsies as they have a shared historical link to India, and from here, linguistically there are similar words, morale, social and family values, and also with their referral of non-Romani population as *Gadge* (in Romanes), *Gorgios* (British Romani) – i.e., those who are not one of *us, strangers, the rest, the Other*. There are however many inter-group differences. The Romani people are diverse, can have different socio-economic status, use different appellations, i.e., in the UK they prefer to identify themselves as Romany Gypsies, while the term *Gypsy*, a common translation of the term *Tsigan, Zigan, Cigan, Ziganeur*, etc., are racial slurs and can be perceived as offensive when used by *Gadge*. Additionally, the Romani people lead different life-styles, i.e., nomadic, semi-nomadic, fully sedentary; different Romani groups can be also identified by their professions, (i.e., basket-makers, cauldron-makers, brush-makers, spoon-makers, bear-leaders, etc.); some have different dialects, while others do not use the language on a daily-basis and they have only a certain amount of vocabulary that has been preserved to this day, as may be the case in the example of the Romani Gypsies of Britain and the *Gitanos* of Spain. Regardless of their particular differences, the Romani people are perceived as one homogeneous group by the larger society, and this is furthermore reflected in the relations between the Romani people and the state and thus the policy-making.

As mentioned already, the presence of the Roma in the UK is recent relative to the Gypsies and Irish Travellers who are native to the UK. The 'presence' of the GRT communities in the UK has not been recorded in some national statistics and there is no official data on their numbers prior to the 2011 Census. For the first time, in 2011's Census there has been a check box for the 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' ethnic group. For that year, the Census recorded 57,680 Gypsies and Travellers (making up 0.1 per cent of the total population) while there is no recorded data, or 'Roma' check box, to account for the number of Roma at the time. In the recent Census of 2021, however, the rubric for Roma has been introduced and recorded as 100,981 (or 0.2 per cent of the total population of England and Wales). The number of Gypsies and Travellers for 2021 are recorded as 67,768 (making up 0.1 per cent of the total population) (*Office for National Statistics 2022; Gov.Uk 2022*). We should note that many Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are weary of revealing their heritage and it is not uncommon to be distrusting of government surveys, representative/officials, and other people. These issues of mistrust and doubt could be understood as a side effect of their lived experiences, treatment, stigma, discrimination and perceptions by the larger society. Thus, officially published data coming from institutions such as the Office for National Statistics, Annual Population Survey, or the Department for Transport's National Survey should be considered as an indication. The Annual Population Survey (ASP) and the Department for Transport's

National Survey themselves also recorded a small number of responses by GRT in their surveys.

Their situation in the country, as a collective, is unique as evidenced from the House of Lords Public Services Committee which presented shocking evidence of discrimination (Eichler 2022). It has found that government and councils have failed to provide enough authorised, permanent, and negotiated stopping, sites for Gypsies and Travellers. Of them, in England, around 10,000 live at the roadside and many do not have access to basic amenities (ibid). The life-expectancy of GRT is also reported to be between 10 and 25 years less than the general population.

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study deals exclusively with the situation of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in Wales. It has been conducted by the Romani Cultural and Arts Company (RCAC) – a charity which is run by members of the GRT communities and solely dedicated to helping the members of the GRT through various means such as the use of arts, advocacy work, representation, symposiums, trainings. The RCAC has 13 years of successful engagement experiences and it has been representing the voices of the vulnerable and sometimes ‘invisible’ GRT communities. The research has received funding by the Welsh Government and is part of its Child Poverty Strategy for Wales which has been in place since 2015. Thinking about the future, the Welsh Government is committed to deliver a change for children and families and for Wales to become a highly desirable place to live. The recent economic crisis, rising cost of living, high level of inflation, and recovery from COVID-19, are all factors that are likely to have the most negative impact on the most disadvantaged in society. The RCAC has a special role in this study as it has an established level of trust, reach, and contact with members the GRT in Wales and thus can engage with them on their visions for the immediate and long-term needs of their communities and on issues like the prevention of child poverty, the needs of their children, and what would be the most desirable circumstances for the future generations.

## METHODOLOGY

To be able to fully engage with members of the GRT community, a total of five focus groups were conducted. Focus groups are quite suitable for the purpose of this study. They offer the special advantage of being able to understand the needs of the communities as they can offer GRT members the chance to voice out their issues but also to collectively brainstorm, discover and discuss ideas, many of which may not be originally conceived but may prove to be equally important for the questions discussed. Since participants have been identified and selected to share their views, experiences, and opinions about a given topic, this process could be appreciated by the some as empowering as they may have the feeling they are involved in the decision-making and that their opinion is important and valued (Race et al. 1994). Furthermore, focus groups are a particularly useful and suitable social research method as new hypotheses, ideas, and further questions could be generated. Focus groups offer an adequate way to gather respondents’ beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and experiences and focus group are useful for finding out about multiple points and of view and the shared

emotions by those who take part. This is a great benefit which may not be readily apparent if other research method has been used, such as a one-to-one interviews, observations, or questionnaires. Crucially, focus groups enable us to gather a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time. Another benefit of conducting focus groups is to find out the degree of consensus a given topic (Morgan and Kreuger 1993). Furthermore, in a focus group interaction between the participants, the language they use, as well as partaking could provide crucial clues of the participants' views of the world (Kitzinger 1994; Kitzinger 1995). The moderator of the activity would thus be able to get an adequate idea about the beliefs and values about a situation through the use of language and tone of the participants as well as their interaction.

As in any social research method, focus groups come with their peculiar limitations. Even though they offer a great way to generate and analyse people's opinions, feelings, sentiments, etc., on a given issue, focus groups are not to be considered as representative of the larger community due to the small number of participants. Also, the moderator of a focus group may try to contain and steer the conversation of the participants towards a certain topic, however, moderators cannot change the fact that they may talk to and interact with each which may result in producing results which may not be desired, i.e., results may end up in an unexpected fashion. Another limitation of the approach is that not all participants may contribute towards the conversation due to them being less talkative and/or confident in speaking and sharing their views and experiences as compared to others, and therefore, their opinion may be not heard and lost within the larger group. Therefore, focus groups may not be expressing participants' own points of view, and researchers may not be able to clearly identify individual messages. Additionally, participants may not be willing to share personal and sensitive information openly due to the open nature of the method and trust the other members of the group.

For this study, five focus groups were conducted in total with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Because Gypsies and Travellers share similar issues, spaces and have been long residents of the UK, their focus groups have been grouped together. Two of the focus groups were therefore exclusively with Gypsies and Travellers. Roma being relatively recent residents of the UK and Wales in particular and having different issues, a second set of focus group was conducted; thus, a total of three focus groups were with conducted with Roma.

The Gypsy/Traveller focus groups (1) was conducted on March 10, 2023 on Rover Way Caravan Site in Tremorfa, Cardiff. A total of eight participants took place in this focus group – five of them were parents/carers, and three were grandparents. Among the participants there were two young males, aged 18, while the rest were females. The Gypsy/Traveller focus group (2) was conducted on March 20, 2023 in Brynmawr Cwmcrachen, Blaenau Gwent. In this focus group, a total of nine participants took place, all of which were females. Two of them were carers, five were parents, and two were grandparents.

The ages of the Gypsy/Traveller focus groups (1&2) varied between 18 and 54. The moderator of both focus groups was Jamie James, a community member, and an affiliate of the Romani Cultural and Arts Company for many years.

The Roma focus groups (1, 2, 3) were conducted in Newport Gwent on the dates March 21, 24, and 25, 2023. The groups were mixed, composed of both males and females, originally from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with a fair representation of young people, parents/carers, and grandparents. Their ages vary between 11 and 60 and they have different educational and social-economic backgrounds. All of the Roma focus groups were conducted in a mix of languages – English, Romanes, Slovak and Czech. Roma focus groups (1) and (2) were moderated by Viera Matysakova, while Roma focus group (3) was moderated by Fabian Hovath – both are involved with the works of the Romani Cultural and Arts Company.

## RESULTS

Before we delve into presenting and analysing the results of the research, it should be highlighted that the responses of all focus groups (both Gypsy/Traveller and Roma) were not clear cut, many times they overlapped, and they tend to repeatedly come back and raise the same points. This could be perceived a shortfall of the focus group as social research method as discussions cannot be fully controlled by the moderator. At the same time, their answers to these points are to be appreciated as salient and they highlight areas of great concern to the participants. This analysis seeks to extract and present the raised and relevant points as an aggregate and separately when raised points are unique and differ from the points of the rest of the focus groups.

### *Gypsies and Travellers Focus Groups (1&2)*

Gypsy/Traveller focus group (1) was composed of residents of Rover Way Caravan Site in Tremorfa, Cardiff, on March 10, 2023. The site is located on a busy main road with no access to public transport or foot paths. When residents of the site encounter issues, many would turn to the Romani Cultural and Arts Company for advice, members of staff who work on the site, as well as the charity Gypsies and Travellers Wales. Gypsy/Traveller focus group (2) was conducted on March 20, 2023 and worked with residents of the Brynmawr Cwmcraehen site in Baenau Gwent. Residents of this site get support from a local school which provides advice to some parents and also circulates a reading letter; help is also sought from the site's warden who would assist with filling in forms, while another useful resource for the residents is the Romani Cultural and Arts Company. Apart from these main avenues, respondents could not identify any other forms of help and support.

1. Reducing costs and maximising the income of families so that children and young people have enough financial and material support for what they need.

When asked to present the three main factors which would ensure families have more money to support their children and young people, Gypsies and Travellers raised the question of the currently unbearably high living expenses on the sites. Financial issues seem to be of the highest importance and both groups were of the opinion that government should help and intervene more. Issues here gravitate around the fact that 1) cost of living has become unbearably high, 2) government should intervene and help more, and 3), living on Gypsy/Traveller sites is expensive and hard. Specifically, respondents spoke of the need to

make applying for benefits easier. Also, the authorities should keep in mind some of the residents are illiterate and do not have access to computers. It is not uncommon, respondents explained, that families would run out of pocket. Financial troubles are further complicated by the fact that the residents do not have direct energy suppliers for both gas and electricity. Also, some use propane bottles to meet their needs such as cooking and heating. As a result of the industrial rates residents of the sites would have to pay, they would run out of money and this would affect their available budgets which is mostly used to meet their most basic needs such as food as well as their ability to provide a warm meal and a having a warm home. As a result, the Gypsies and Travellers wish the government intervenes and helps more with these circumstances.

2. Creating pathways to help children and young people move out of poverty and reach their potential.

Trying to have a discussion about the prospects of moving Gypsy and Traveller children and young people out of poverty, respondents seem to have a sober and realistic view. Their outlook did not appear to be overly optimistic about their present and future circumstances. Their suggestions were simple and the identified points again overlapped. Emphasis was put on the much-needed issue of 1) more government support and intervention. Here some of the respondents spoke about their lack of knowledge and information of what public funding is available and not being aware of how to potentially apply for it. Others suggested that low-income families should have access to vouchers that could be used towards food and clothes. In the same theme of more government support, participants wanted to witness more intervention and make the benefit system more intelligible and available to Gypsies and Travellers as there are people that are illiterate. 2) as already raised and discussed earlier, the participants spoke of the need to reduce the cost of living on their sites and make it more bearable/affordable. Parents and children in both focus groups spoke about the need to create a more acceptable living environment, particularly warm homes/warm and more suitable utility blocks. Since they live in caravans, and some do not have immediate access to toilets and showers in their homes, children complained they are cold, uncomfortable, and bothered because they need to go in and out in the winter months to wash and use the toilets which are very cold.

The raised points relate to meeting the most basic needs– access to food, clothing, and enjoying comfortable, warm homes. Research has found that the GRT communities' health status is much poorer than the rest of the population, Gypsy/Traveller mothers also are more likely to experience the loss of a child, while the life-expectancy Gypsies/Travellers is reported to be 10-12 years less than that of the rest of the population (*What we know about inequalities facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities* 2019).

3. Supporting family well-being and ensuring what we do delivers for children in poverty so that they can enjoy their rights and better lives.

Thinking about children's rights and equality, the Gypsy and Traveller respondents spoke about the need to upgrade their standards so that they could enjoy at least basic standards of living. Besides the yet again raised issue of more government support/intervention,

participants spoke about the lack of foot paths, green areas and play areas for the children, space must be made safe and enjoyable for the children; there are issues with mould and damp on the site, access to public transport, as well as help with transportation of their children to and from school. Relevant here is also their suggestion about their need and support to have access to white goods..

Gypsies and Travellers shared they feel like they are a forgotten community which is left to fend for themselves. There is a feeling that they do not “get anything for free” and that they have been living in poverty far too long. Families work, however, they are unable to meet their needs and that is why they suggested emergency funds should be made available for families. They would like to be noticed by the government and authorities which should come and enquire in person about the critical needs of the residents of Gypsy/Traveller sites.

#### 4. Making sure children and families are treated with dignity and respect.

With regards to treating Gypsies and Travellers with dignity and respect, respondents spoke about their wish to be recognised and respected as who they are. They do not wish to be assimilated and they do not want their lives to be stolen by policies of assimilation. Instead, they want their existence to be recognised, to be understood as people, and to be respected along with their culture, traditions, heritage, and morals. Due to their heritage, Gypsies and Travellers are aware they are singled out by the society. According to the respondents, children are not treated equally in schools. Thus, they want to see more cultural awareness initiatives which would make the education and the society at large more inclusive and tolerant toward Gypsies and Travellers. Respondents also wanted to get more advice and information in the form of regular and suitably accessible advice groups where they would get proper advice about the issues they face and how to properly address them.

#### 5. Is there anything else people wanted us to know?

Respondents from Rover Way insisted again their wish for more assistance in the form of advice (greater awareness and clarity of what help/assistance/funding is available for them), safer roads, access to public transport, direct supply of gas and electric (residents use smart meters that need to be topped up to use electricity; residents also rely on gas cylinders for cooking/heating), and also they need higher living standards. The service charges residents from Rover Way pay to the council should be cancelled as residents are not able to see any benefits and they complain of poor service from the staff who are in charge of their site.

Residents from Brynmawr Cwmcrachen wished for regular updates with relevant information relating to their site. They also raised a point related to the upbringing and the education of their children, i.e., fathers should be paid to train and pass on to their sons their trades; they need help from the state in finding jobs and wished that the state ensures they all are employed as typically employers would not offer Gypsy/Travellers jobs because of their addresses. Participants also did not want traveller *education* anymore but equality in the schools where their children would be treated equally – that way they would feel respected, independent and empowered to take their own destinies in their hands and to pursue their interests.

## 6. How would you like to hear back from us?

Respondents from both focus groups wished to stay informed regarding the outcomes of this research. One way was to come and speak to them, since many of them cannot read or write, or they said they would enquire by getting in touch with the Romani Cultural and Arts Company. Respondents from the Rover Way are also aware they could get advice from the charity Gypsies and Travellers Wales, however, they said they are not sure what the charity actually does.

### *Roma Focus Groups (3, 4 & 5)*

Roma focus group (3) was composed entirely by 6 young persons. When appropriate, we will present their views separately. Focus group (4) was entirely composed of parents/carers, and Roma focus group (5) was a mixed group, composed of children, parents, and grandparents.

1. Reducing costs and maximising the income of families so that children and young people have enough financial and material support for what they need.

The young respondents from focus group (3) were aware of their social standing and admitted they are poor. Therefore, to reduce costs and maximise income, they suggested that society should provide jobs for everyone and that it is not the Roma's faults that they are not working. Another raised point was that money and food should be made available to those who live in poverty, while their third point was that they should have access to advice where they can seek out help when needed. Thus, as a sum the main three points raised by the young respondents revolve around more government involvement with providing jobs, food, money, and advice.

The answers of the conducted Roma focus groups (4&5) converge when they were asked about the most critical things which would make the biggest difference to reduce costs and maximise their incomes. Roma wanted to have access to information which should be available in different languages, including their mother tongues Romanes, Slovak, and Czech, ideally available in the same place. Knowing where and who to ask for help, information, and advice seems to be key needs of Roma to navigate what is available for them and when they encounter issues. As a suggestion also came that information should be also more intuitive and have visual clues so that those who do not know the language, or are illiterate, would be able to understand and access the much-needed advice. In that same token, Roma think an Advice Community Centre should be set up which would deal, preferably in their mother tongues, with providing support from both government and non-government organisations. A practical suggestion was that members of the community could be employed by councils to collaborate with all sectors and share information in their home languages.

2. Creating pathways to help children and young people move out of poverty and reach their potential.



The Roma respondents seem to have a couple of converging points when asked to discuss the ways they could move out of poverty. One was about being offered a wider range of practical, hands-on, work opportunities. This also applies to hands-on learning so that adults could upgrade and upskill their previous work experiences. Another common point was their wish for transport to and from school to be free, suitable, and safe. Participants from Roma focus group (5) explained that children had to take two public transport buses or walk for 20 minutes to reach a bus stop. They explained also that buses tend not to arrive on time, sometimes they would not turn up at all, and when they did manage to get it, drivers would refuse to take them due to limited space. In that regard, the young respondents suggested that parents should be taught how to look after their children. What is meant is that some parents are not aware of what is acceptable in the country in terms of issues relating to health, diet, and rights. Also raised was the issue of more support in school for Roma pupils so that they could grasp the learning material and be successful in getting a qualification as well as access to English lesson classes for all Roma.

3. Supporting family well-being and ensuring what we do delivers for children in poverty so that they can enjoy their rights and better lives.

Identified as key issues that would make a difference in the lives and well-being of Roma were the need for more opportunities to enjoy various side activities such as family trips, nature outings, extra curricular activities such as ballet, dancing, as well as playing and recording music. Another point that was raised by two of the groups was the need for a safe community space where children and young people could nurture their interests and grow, rather than wander the streets and potentially get into trouble. The Roma focus group that was composed of parents and grandparents wanted to see greater presence of Roma in the form of teaching assistants in schools, midwives, health visitors, childcare workers, as well as representatives to serve in the council and other public buildings. In schools, Roma assistants could act as advocates and help to eliminate bias and cultural differences when dealing with Roma pupils. Another point, which was already raised was their wish for a more simplified and accessible way to understand the Welsh system relating to issues of education, healthcare and dealing with the council.

4. Making sure children and families are treated with dignity and respect.

With regards to the question of how we could make sure children and families are treated with respect and dignity a response that was shared with two of the focus groups with Roma was that they wish to be “listened to”. This response also resonates with the responses from the focus groups conducted with Gypsies and Travellers in the sense that they wish their needs, concerns and particular issues are recognised and genuinely taken into consideration. That also is reinforced by Romani respondents who stated a desire to be understood i.e. their traditions, culture, and religion to be understood and recognised by services, teachers to be more understanding and tolerant, and for their children not to face discrimination at school. In that regard, one of the focus groups wished that poverty should not prevent their children from going to universities, studying, and developing, hoping that education would break a vicious circle of low income living. Adults also wished that regardless of their limited

skills, they would be offered the opportunity to learn and develop and ultimately increase their employability.

5. Is there anything else people wanted us to know? and 6. How would you like to hear back from us?

The participants of the Roma focus groups wished to be informed about the ways their views have impacted the renewed Welsh child poverty strategy but were not specific in how exactly but instead simply stated, “tell us” and “talk to us” or through “meetings.” However, the other issue they raised could help us with an understanding of their needs and potentially how they could get informed about this and future projects. Namely, they wished things to be explained in a simple fashion as they often find it hard to understand/inaccessible. Relevant is also their suggestion for the creation of a Roma community/advice centre which would be run by Romani people and would work in collaboration with local services, such as health services, police, street patrols, education, care, social services, etc.

## DISCUSSION

There are several factors that need to be outlined and presented here while we try to understand the main results from the conducted focus groups with Gypsies/Travellers and Roma. The Gypsy and Traveller focus groups were made up predominantly of female respondents with the exception of two 18-year-old males. The reason for that imbalance is due to the fact that Gypsy/Traveller males must work and earn in order to provide for their families and children. Being able to practice their trades, therefore, must be appreciated as being synonymous with them being able to pay for food, clothes, and services. Retirement for Gypsies and Travellers is not perceived as an option and males ought to continue working well past the retirement age. Thus, unless disabled, Gypsy/Traveller males must carry on working and earning. It should not be surprising that the one of the male Romany Gypsy respondents, who is a father, wished that there should be more available access to tools so that fathers could pass their trades to their sons. In that vein, it was suggested that Gypsies/Travellers should be given money so that they could buy the necessary tools or alternatively to be able to rent these tools. Furthermore, since passing on their trades to their children is a form of education, it was agreed by one of the focus groups that these trainings should be paid by the government.

Prevalent issues of discrimination due to their heritage seems to be well-recognised and to be a norm recognised by the Gypsies and Travellers. It is quite common that couriers refuse to deliver packages to the addresses of Gypsy/Traveller sites. One of the Romani Gypsy respondents shared that she had to drive for 20 miles to get her package on Christmas as the driver would refuse to deliver to their address. Additionally, due to their address, they have experienced that they are closed off from services such as online shopping, car insurance and services from lending companies.

Provided that they practice their trades and earn, the hard-earned money of Gypsy and Travellers are very often not enough. As the results above have shown, the unbearably high living costs on their sites, coupled with the recent rise of the cost of living, the lack of

presence of services on the sites such as direct access to electricity, gas, or transport, as well as discrimination by the society at large, on the grounds of their ethnicity, makes the lives of Gypsies and Travellers extremely hard. Based on the conversations with the Gypsies and Travellers, it seems they are well-aware of their social position, and their hopes for a better future for their children mainly seem to revolve around a few key issues.

The changes that would make a difference, in the opinions of Gypsies and Travellers are linked to a perceived need for increased attention from and recognition by the government, council, and its officials. Gypsy/Traveller residents invited state representatives to come, speak to the residents, to learn about their needs and issues, and to witness the dire situation they live in. The Rover Way site was described as a “complete dump” by one of the participants of the focus groups with lots of rubbish on the site and thus making it an unhealthy and unsuitable place raise children. The children are in need of green and recreational spaces, warm homes and utility blocks, as well as access to wite goods – factors which were all raised in the Gypsy/Traveller focus groups. Lastly, they wished for a more tolerant and inclusive society which would not force them to obliterate who they are as people. Since GRT do not live in a bubble, they wish for their culture, traditions, morals, value systems, and contribution to society to be recognised and respected. This also includes a suitable reflection in the national school curricula along with working with the wider society, state institutions and officials through their engagement in cultural awareness programmes.

The results of the Roma focus groups showed slightly different factors than the ones of the Gypsies and Travellers. These relate mainly to the fact that the elder respondents are not fluent in English even though all of them have been living in Wales for more than eight years. In that regard, all of the Roma participants are literate but one. The young participants, however, are multilingual – speaking their mother tongues (Romanes), their home languages (Slovak/Czech), as well as English. It must be highlighted that the Roma participants are all happy and satisfied with Wales, they consider it to be their new home, and, as of this moment, they do not wish/plan to return to their countries of origin. They do travel, however, regularly to visit their extended family in their countries of origin. Among the Romani respondents, some work part time, get carer’s allowance, disability allowance and all get universal credit. Similar to the case of Gypsies/Travellers, none of the Roma females were employed at the if the research. With regards to the accommodation of the Roma participants, they live in various areas of Newport in rented accommodation via private landlords while only one family lives in a council housing.

Living as part of their community is important for the Roma. They try to support each other, sharing knowledge and experience. However, often they would lack a proper understanding of how the Welsh system actually works, and the proper ways to navigate it. Thus, even though Roma community members try to help and support each other, there is a lot of misunderstanding, and the shared information is often times inaccurate which would cause issues and tensions. It should be of no surprise, therefore, one of the main concerns for the Roma participants was access to a credible and accessible institution which would offer help and advice. Regarding the knowledge of the Roma on their rights, including those of the child, they showed little awareness. They are not aware who to contact and what to do

when they are mistreated and discriminated against, and as a result there is a sense of helplessness in such cases. Furthermore, when they deal with advice services, they often encounter issues getting an appointment, especially if a timeframe is given to reply to benefit services, appointments many times get cancelled, support workers would not turn up and thus, missing their deadlines, they deal with delays of the processing of their benefits. It was also shared by the Romani respondents that the information they would provide would not match that one on the official forms and that is another instance when they do not know what to do and who to contact for advice.

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to find out the most pressing needs and suggestions of members of the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in helping the Welsh government to create a child poverty strategy. The results of the conducted five focus groups showed slightly different outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers on the one hand and Roma, on the other. This is unsurprising, as the communities have different experiences with the country, live different lives, and have different needs. Their most immediate needs surfaced in the focus groups and these relate to elevating their living standards, more financial support, information, and equality and understanding in the society (for Gypsies/Travellers). Along with access to relevant clear information, Roma, on the other hand, wished for the creation/existence of a more specialised organisation where they could access accurate advice and information, for example, in situations where they experience discrimination and unfair treatment in the society and in schools.

Both Gypsies/Travellers and Roma groups are aware of their identities and the stigma these can bring. Nevertheless, they are happy and proud of who they are and prefer to retain their traditions and identities rather than lose them by trying to fit and conform in the larger society. The theme of education was slightly touched upon in of the focus groups and this includes issues of discrimination in schools and unfair treatment by teachers (i.e., Roma replied teachers shouting at them for not wearing appropriate uniforms) and also, the wish for the education to be more inclusive. The creation of safe and pleasant spaces, as well as access to extra curricula activities, sports, and apprenticeships for GRT was also an important point which would be deemed essential for the better and proper upbringing of GRT children and young persons. Finally, it should be noted there is a great deal of mistrust and doubt by GRT when dealing with government officials. On the one hand, Gypsies and Travellers would find it hard to open up and speak frankly if the researcher has been not a member of their communities who approached them with similar research. Roma, on the other hand, did not want to take part in this research due to the quickly spread rumour that the information they would share would be used against them and strip them from receiving their current benefits. Furthermore, there is a great deal of cynicism among the Roma that such forms of outreach and policies would actually result in tangible outcomes in their lives. Greater presence and representation of Roma in key state institutions and their lobbying for the rights of the Roma was another vision which respondents saw as an appropriate and genuine way forward.

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