Written evidence submitted by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Chair Neil Coyle MP. Vice- Chairs Baroness Whitaker, Baroness Angela Harris, Graham Evans MP, Andrew Slaughter MP.
August 2016

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers Roma welcomes the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into hate crime and its consequences. We also welcome the Government’s recently revised Hate Crime Action plan (Action against Hate) which we note includes specific references to Gypsies Travellers and Roma. Below is our submission to your Inquiry. For ease of comment we refer throughout to points in Action against Hate plan which include Gypsy Traveller Roma concerns. Our comments address relevant sections of the plan but also serve as responses to some of the Inquiry’s suggested points of evidence.

Gypsies and Irish Travellers are protected ethnic minorities whilst Roma categorise themselves as White Other or Other Ethnic Group.

We acknowledge the focus of the Inquiry is driven to a large extent by the significant increase in hate crime leading up to and after the EU referendum. Attacks against all communities whose experience will be addressed by the Inquiry have ranged from murders to vicious hounding on social media sites. Although in recent years racism has largely become covert and the public expression of racist remarks has become less acceptable we recognise that in the current climate that process may be regressing. However, we are keen to point out that attacks, prejudice and aggressively expressed remarks and actions directed at Gypsies Travellers and Roma has remained acceptable throughout. This has become known as the last acceptable form of racism. Hostile media reporting coupled with ignorant remarks from some politicians goes unchallenged.

There is a raft of equality and human rights legislation to protect against discrimination and further, many international and domestic bodies, from UN committees to the EHRC have condemned such media and political propaganda, apparently to little avail. We are encouraged that the Inquiry is keen to scrutinise the effectiveness of current legislation and law enforcement policies. Addressing how existing law can be more effectively and quickly employed is crucial if the Government is, as stated in the Action against Hate plan, serious about its commitment to successfully tackling all aspects of hate crime.

What the Action against Hate plan says specifically about Gypsy, Roma, Travellers?

It is clear that incidents “motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person’s race or perceived race” specifically includes hate crime directed at Gypsy and Travellers groups (Annex A: College of Policing definitions)
Gypsy Traveller Roma, (GTR) as communities likely to be victims of hate crime are mentioned within the Action against Hate plan. Particular mention is made that GTR people, families and communities might “under report” (#90). A commitment is given that the government will work with organisations within these communities to ensure people report hate crime.

The plan states that DCLG will work via the Gypsy/Traveller liaison group to make sure that the voices of GTR are heard (#53).

**APPG response and comments to the Select Committee:**

The Pew Research centre¹ (spring 2016) found that “unfavourable views” of “Roma and Gypsies” in the UK and France was substantially higher than unfavourable views of Muslims and Jews. For the UK and France, the survey found:

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<tr>
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<th>Roma (and Gypsy in UK)</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Jews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents reporting unfavourable</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ten countries in Europe (median)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
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Hate crime patterns will not be solely related to these trends (e.g. the persistence of anti-Semitic violence) but it is likely that victims of Roma Gypsy (and Traveller) communities will be widespread. This knowledge and understanding should be heavily employed to emphasis the specific character of anti-Gypsyism.

For many UK Gypsy Traveller Roma communities, hate crime is difficult to categorise as being any different from the sense of widespread exclusion, ignorance and hostility that is everyday experience. This all pervasive character of hate crime is not understood within these communities as a distinct and particular crime.

For UK Roma families with roots in countries of Central & Eastern Europe experiencing ‘hate crime’ is endemic, the legacy of the Roma genocide (the Porajmos) which is within living memory.

¹ “Many Europeans rate Roma, Muslims unfavourably”
DCLG and NGOs  GTR voluntary associations and organisations are currently at their most stretched and the government must seriously consider this lack of infrastructure when addressing the problem of “under reporting”. It cannot be assumed that the quarterly DCLG Gypsy Traveller Liaison group (#54), with its narrow number of invited agencies, sufficiently engages the increasing number of GTR communities. The swapping of information at this Forum is useful but the meeting is not designed for more than this and it appears somewhat naive to state that by “continuing to support the … Gypsy Traveller Liaison Group..” (the DCLG) will “ensure the voices of those communities are heard” ( #54). For this commitment to be effective a clear plan is required and NGOs working with all communities would value this support. This APPG is looking at the proposed strategy specifically from GTR perspective. It will take significant resources and we would welcome the Select Committee enquiring what form this will take.

Barriers to reporting As part of their Inquiry we would ask the Home Affairs Select Committee to recognise the barriers to reporting hate crime that these communities have experienced for many generations, such as mistrust of the Police and Authorities. The APPG is aware that many local groups and organizations have worked with local police forces, local authorities, schools and other statutory agencies to understand and eradicate hate crime as it affects Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. The Home Office, DCLG and MoJ might usefully support the collation of this knowledge and previous actions and campaigns as an example of how learning across the spectrum of hate crime (#114-119; key theme 2) can strengthen collective and national efforts to combat hate crime.

Social Media Data from 2014 suggests terms that that denigrate Gypsy and Traveller Communities are the commonest insults posted routinely on Twitter. We support the Government’s initiative to “convene a ministerial seminar on hate on the internet that brings together victims’ groups, stakeholders and industry representatives” (#71). We will be approaching the Home Office to ensure that GTR are represented, particularly as significant numbers of these communities regularly experience acute forms of Social Media abuse including comments posted in connection with mainstream online press/other media articles. We would appreciate the support of Home Affairs committee in making this request.

Reporting tools: The True Vision website (#72). This website has been a welcome addition but it is hard to navigate. We would welcome a commitment to regular monitoring and evaluation to assess its reach.

Third Party reporting We acknowledge that the Action against Hate Plan comments that Third Party reporting can be more effective. (#84) We support the initiatives in Sections #82 - #93 "Improving awareness of hate crime and third party reporting " and with particular reference to (#90) mentioning Gypsies Travellers and Roma “We will work with organisations already present in those communities to ensure that everyone has the opportunity and information needed to report hate crime. This will include helping to establish third party reporting centres where they do not exist and helping to promote them where they do.” It would be useful to ascertain how the Home Office and DCLG intend to implement this. We refer the Select committee to a new

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2 http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2014-06/18/hatebrain-stats-uk
National website dedicated to Third party reporting “ReportracismGRT”. Only just launched, it comes from a Herts. based Gypsy and Traveller Group with input from TELL MAMA, and GALOP and supported by Friends Families Travellers and crucially the Hate Crime Independent Advisory Group whose backing is much valued. Article here http://travellerstimes.org.uk/News/New-report-racism-website-launched-by-Gypsy-charit.aspx. It is this kind of initiative, coupled with the targeted use of Social Media which we believe will start to turn the tide on GTR reporting and we would urge the Home Office, DCLG and True Vision team to offer all support they can.

Monitoring With reference to Action against Hate (#94), the APPG has for some time been striving to support the Gypsy Traveller Roma Police Association (GRTPA) and others in their quest to introduce Gypsy Traveller Roma ethnic monitoring into all aspects of Police work in whatever aspect they become involved. Mistrust on both sides, over many years has led to a breakdown of effective working and this clearly needs addressing before hate crime against these communities can be effectively reported. Some forces, notably Cheshire Constabulary have made strides (and have instigated ethnic monitoring) and the Inquiry may wish to follow this up. The APPG would ask the Committee to look at the value of disaggregating relevant data across the board, including hate crime.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Report August 2016. This recent report expressed concerns at the negative portrayal of immigrants in the UK and a rise of racist online abuse, post Brexit. The report also stated that the Committee remained concerned at the "negative portrayal" of ethnic minority communities, immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK, including coverage by the media.

Equalities and Human Rights Commission David Isaac Chair of the EHRC stated recently that "Political parties need to come together and show leadership, working with the relevant crime prevention agencies."

The APPG applauds this sentiment and would remind the Select Committee again that for generations, the hate crime experienced by Gypsies Travellers and Roma have for too long been long ignored and it is clearly within the public interest to include and promote their experience in the wider remit of the current hate crime agenda.

Proposed Witnesses. The APPG would like to commend

Sherrie Smith an English Romany Gypsy. Sherrie has first hand experience of Hate Crime and has worked for many years with members of her community on this issue. She and an Irish Traveller colleague recently started Hertsgate an advice and policy organisation in Hertfordshire. Secured funding has resulted in a new, National website (referred to earlier) “Report Racism Gypsy Roma Traveller” along the lines of TELL MAMA, CST and GALOP.

The lead officer on the Gypsies Travellers and Roma group, of the National Police Chiefs Council who has much experience of both speaking about and dealing with Hate Crime in this area of Police work.

Marc Willers QC His excellent 2015 Blog on Hate Crime is here http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/HateSpeechBlogMWQC5.3.2015.pdf Marc has represented Gypsies and Travellers over many years. We suggest he would contribute much to the area of evidence on which the committee is keen to hear concerning the effectiveness of current legislation.