

This submission to the UK UPR is written in the face of a very short deadline and is therefore brief. The Executive Board of Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (Leeds GATE) wish to re-iterate to the authors of the UPR UK report the dire situation in respect of human rights of Gypsy and Irish Traveller people in the UK.

Behind recent high profile headlines and attention grabbing television programmes Gypsy and Irish Traveller people remain, according to Dept of Health, Dept for Education and EHRC among others, amongst the most disadvantaged communities in the UK. This disadvantage is underpinned by the failure of successive UK governments to recognise the right to specific land use by traditionally nomadic people.

On a weekly basis the UK courts are being used to remove the homes of Gypsy and Irish Traveller people from pieces of land. We identify three problems which are having a significant impact on the right to family life and other human rights.

UK law does not provide any statutory protection for the traditional land use needs of Gypsy and Irish Traveller people. The rights of Gypsy and Irish Traveller people to continue their traditional ways of life is not adequately protected and the actual area of land (in small parcels) available to Gypsy and Irish Traveller people for this purpose has been systematically eroded. Traditional 'stopping places' have been left unprotected and have disappeared.

The UK planning system does not sufficiently recognise or facilitate 'caravan dwelling' or other alternatives to bricks and mortar housing as a legitimate land use. This is of significant detriment to family life for anyone not wishing to live in a house but most particularly is of detriment to Gypsy and Irish Traveller people. And yet there are incidences of 'caravan dwelling' which are legitimated by the UK government, such as during highway maintenance contracts, or to deal with homelessness as a result of floods.

Successive local authorities, particularly elected members, do not recognise Gypsy and Irish Traveller people as being part of their 'constituency' and fail to represent or provide for their needs. There is virtually no significant evidence of Local Authorities engaging in dialogue or negotiation to facilitate traditional nomadism and/or to resolve homelessness amongst Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities.

We would draw attention to the plight of Mr James Connors as an exemplar. On 27th May 2004 the European Court of Human Rights judged that Leeds City Council had violated Mr Connors Article 8 'Right to respect for private and family life' when it chose to evict him from the local authorities own Gypsy and Traveller site at Cottingley Springs. This judgement led to significant changes in security of tenure on local authority sites and has benefit a vast number of Gypsy and Irish Traveller families living on LAS sites. However due to the failure of the city council in the intervening years to make any significant attempt to facilitate the provision of adequate site accommodation in Leeds, a significant number of

Leeds families, including Mr Connors, remain homeless. Rather than recognise Mr Connors right to live, according to his culture and tradition, in a caravan and facilitating that, the LA has spent over £2 million since 2003 evicting Mr Connors from various pieces of public land around Leeds. The detriment to Mr Connors health, privacy and family life are of huge significance. This situation is repeated across England. The courts are used punitively but no significant progress towards resolving the lack of appropriate stopping places is made, or even attempted.

UK citizens of Gypsy or Irish Traveller ethnicity, alongside many other groups not wishing to live a majority housed lifestyle, are being abused by the UK government every day.