

# Homelessness among young Gypsies and Travellers in Hackney

Findings from a London Gypsies and Travellers project providing support to young people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation

**LONDON  
GYPSIES &  
TRAVELLERS**



# Contents

This is a summary of key findings and recommendations from a report produced by WSA Community Consultants on the Hackney Young Travellers Homelessness Project, which can be found on LGT's website: [www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk](http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk)

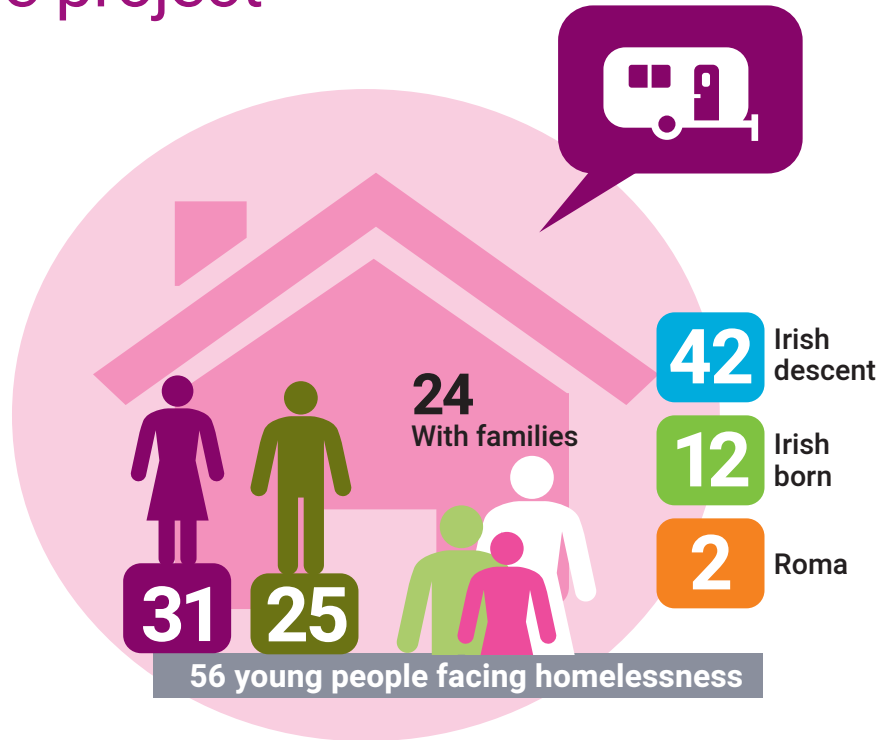
*London Gypsies and Travellers' extensive work in London has revealed housing approaches that could reduce negative impacts on Gypsy and Traveller young people and families.*

Background to the project	3
Main causes of homelessness	4
Recommendations for Hackney Council	5
Impacts on young people	6
Inaccessible services and unheard voices	8
The cycle of insecure housing	10
"The process was very, very slow" Joe's story	12
Learning from good practice	14

# Background to the project

Gypsy and Traveller people frequently struggle to navigate the housing system and are unable to access suitable housing. As a result, they seek support from organisations such as London Gypsies and Travellers (LGT), whose accommodation and advice service is consistently oversubscribed.

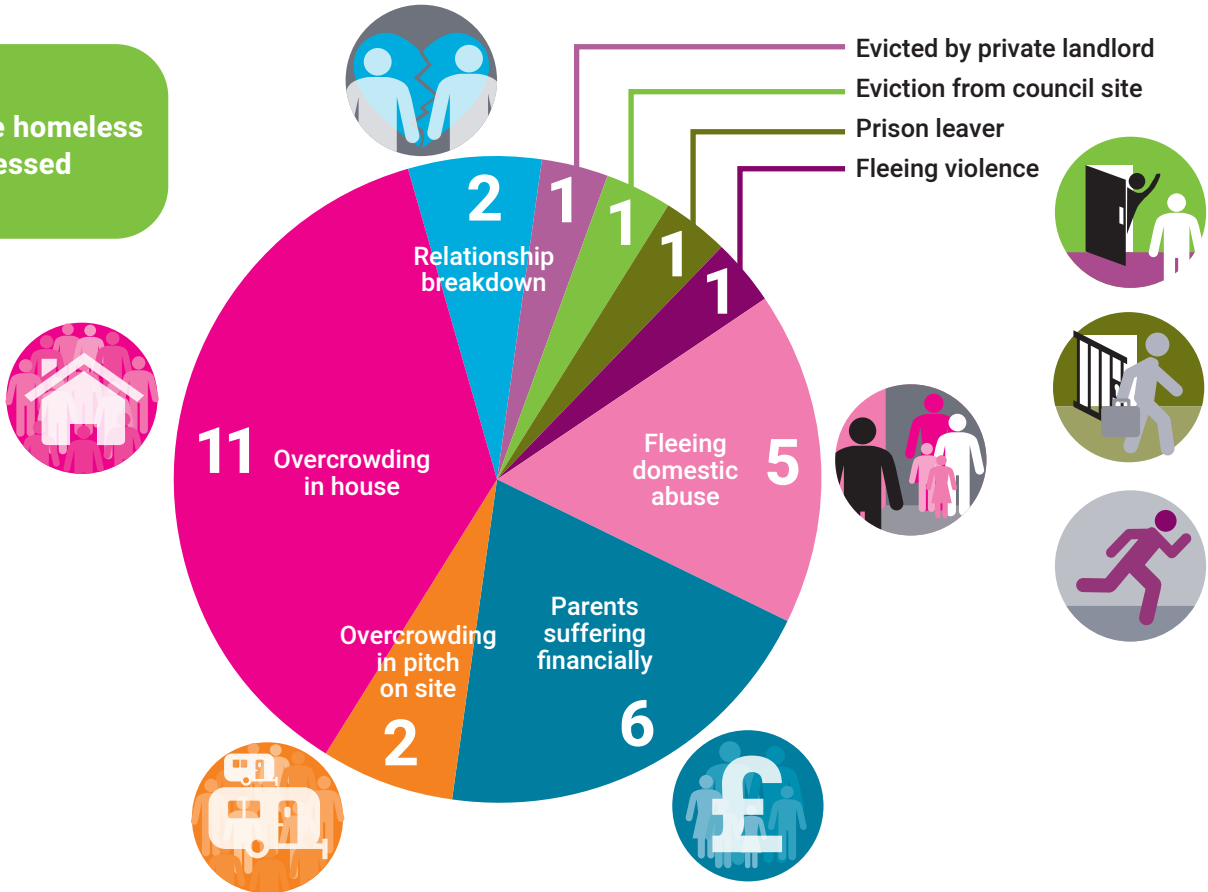
In June 2022, the organisation began a one-year project working with young people in Hackney aged 18 to 30, many with families. The LGT Hackney Young Travellers Homelessness Project provided advice, advocacy and signposting. The project also provided information about who is seeking help and why.



In total, the project benefits extended to 67 adults and 63 children

# Main causes of homelessness

Out of the 56, 30 people were homeless when they accessed the service.



# Recommendations for Hackney Council

## 1. Provide more culturally suitable accommodation

Build more council housing and Traveller sites and explore the use of negotiated stopping as an alternative to unsuitable emergency and temporary accommodation.



## 2. Make homelessness services accessible and inclusive

- Provide clear visual guidance throughout application and allocation, signposting to support
- Ensure that online application platforms and websites are mobile-friendly and accessible
- Provide a council officer to contact about updates and to report issues
- Organise face-to-face housing and homelessness surgeries
- Provide translation and interpretation support.



## 3. Support forums and partnership working

Resource and convene regular meetings between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller residents, council officers and other relevant stakeholders to address housing concerns, gather feedback and develop solutions.



## 4. Train council and housing officers

Provide comprehensive training on risks and challenges faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller residents to foster a deeper understanding of the unique circumstances these groups encounter when seeking housing.



## 5. Learn from good practice

End the use of hostels as temporary accommodation, as Southwark Council has pledged to do. And look to the work of councils such as Enfield, which has set up a company that can rent properties directly to tenants, allowing them to remain on the housing register and bid for properties despite being in the private rental sector.







*"It's really cold in the caravan in the winter. I can't get the money for the gas bottles as I don't have a licence. It's probably affecting my asthma and mental health and I don't even realise." \**

\* From a young person who lives unauthorised on a site without amenities

## Impacts on young people

*Homelessness and living in poor quality, unsafe and inappropriate accommodation has many impacts on young Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers.*

# Impacts on young people

## Lower health outcomes and life expectancy

Gypsy and Traveller men are 12.4 times as likely to suffer from two or more physical health conditions as white British counterparts.

## Increased anxiety and mental health problems

65% of Gypsy and Traveller young people are affected by suicide in their families. Living in unsuitable accommodation, with no space to take time away from other people, can exacerbate already poor mental health.



## Interrupted education

The disruption caused by temporary accommodation and frequent changes in housing can force children to change school or have their schooling interrupted. This can lead to instability and affect educational progress.



At GCSE level, children from Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller backgrounds have the lowest attainment scores of all comparable ethnic groups.

## Reduced trust and engagement with authorities

Experiences of discrimination, including forced evictions, exclusion from public services and unequal treatment, have contributed to a sense of scepticism and reluctance to engage with authorities.

## Greater exposure to racism and prejudice

A national survey revealed that Gypsies and Travellers experienced the highest levels of racially motivated abuse among all minority ethnic groups surveyed. 62% had reported such incidents.



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*"My partner has anxiety and wakes up a lot throughout the night. In the hostel, he has panic attacks and cries at night. It stops my kids sleeping."*

# Inaccessible services and unheard voices

There are significant barriers facing homeless young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people who are trying to access housing services.

*"With everything being digital and over the phone I don't know how to do this... Nowadays it's very hard to get into the contact centre. Before you went in and sat with someone. Now everything is over the phone..."*

*"I feel like I kept having the same conversation I was having with everybody else... I don't feel like they care enough to sort it out."*



- Not feeling heard or safe
- Digital exclusion
- Language barriers
- Discrimination
- Barriers in the housing system
- Lack of action
- Communication gaps

*"...I don't have the best English for a Polish Roma... I struggle to communicate with them and it makes this situation stressful."*





*"London Gypsies and Travellers has helped me to speak with the council and with Greenhouse [the single homeless unit within Hackney Council]"*

*"Mostly, when the council isn't doing much, either LGT or the Hackney Traveller Manager get in touch with them and they do something for a bit, but not for long."*

## Unheard voices

*"The housing officer was discriminating against us. One time, she tried to make me calculate the rent we could pay, but I found it hard and she made me feel stupid. If it wasn't for London Gypsies and Travellers getting into the case I don't know what would've happened."*

### **There were two significant contributors to problems accessing services during the study period:**

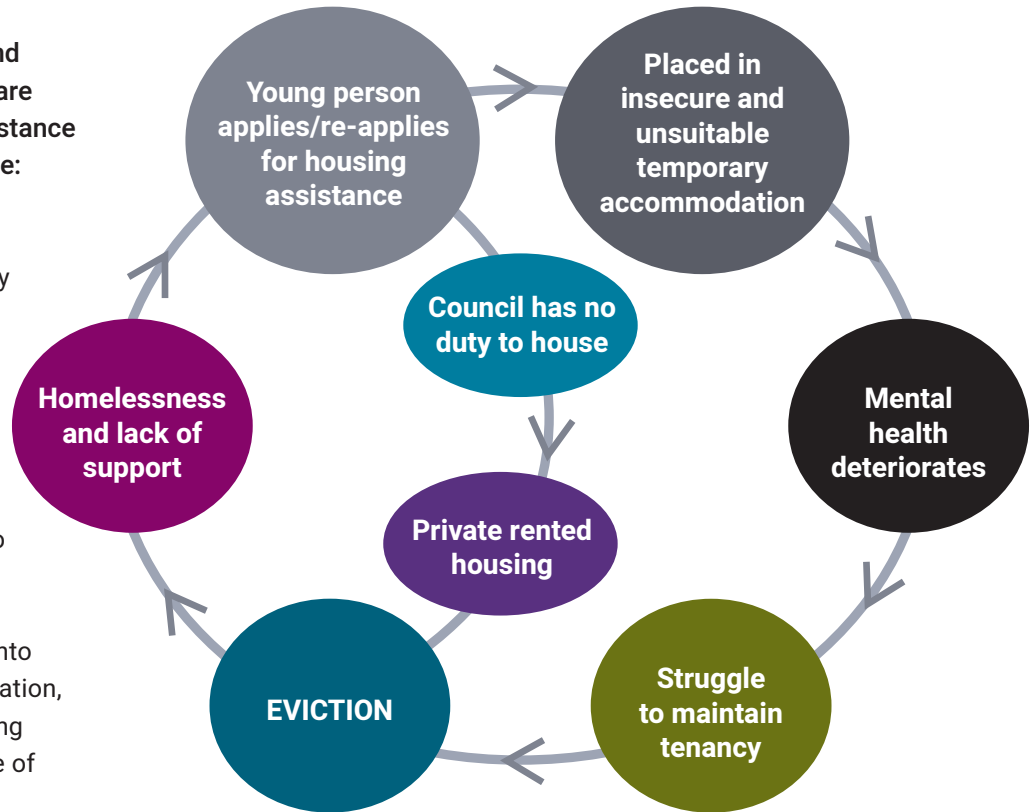
- A ransomware attack on Hackney's IT services, which resulted in the loss and disruption of records and support systems
- The suspension of face-to-face services during the COVID-19 pandemic, which have not fully resumed.

# The cycle of insecure housing – issues

Young people from the Gypsy and Traveller community in London are forced to apply for housing assistance with their local authority because:

- there is a shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites and culturally suitable alternatives
- private rented housing in London is unaffordable and presents an increased risk of eviction
- a lack of social rented homes limits the options for those who can't afford private rental.

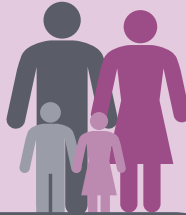
They are then often then placed into unsuitable temporary accommodation, which leads to a cyclical worsening of their situation. This is the cycle of insecure housing.



# The cycle of insecure housing – challenges

## The cycle of insecure housing typically involves challenges such as:

- Evictions and loss of housing
- Limited income
- Services being inaccessible because they are digital/online
- Language barriers
- Placement in unsuitable temporary accommodation far away from families and support networks
- Long stays in temporary accommodation
- Discrimination against Gypsy and Traveller people within the planning system.



*“If the council can give you the property you are suitable for at the beginning, then you wouldn’t need to go through all this effort. They don’t care, they are just buying time constantly.”*

*“My landlord now wants the property back and told me they will evict me. I have three children. I don’t want to go to a hotel or hostel or live with other people I don’t know. I’m scared. I don’t need anything nice, just somewhere I can look after my children.”*

*“We were in a hostel for three years. Then went into temporary accommodation flat for another three years, but they didn’t give it from the kindness of their heart. We got a lawyer and had to fight our way out.”*

# “The process was very, very slow” Joe’s story

Joe’s story highlights the length of time people must wait to access temporary accommodation and the challenges of navigating the system when circumstances change. For Joe (not his real name), this took a toll on his mental health.

He lived in his two-bedroom family home in Hackney with his parents and two brothers. But the house was overcrowded and his parents asked him to leave.

So Joe contacted London Gypsies and Travellers for help. LGT’s accommodation and advice service supported him to make a homeless application through Greenhouse, Hackney Council’s service for single homeless people.

Joe moved into a hostel but when he started a relationship he had

to move out again. With nowhere else to go, he had to return to the family home – and because he brought his partner with him, the overcrowding problem was now even worse.

Greenhouse sent an email to the case worker about Joe’s new circumstances but the case worker didn’t respond. Joe visited Greenhouse every day to try and progress things.

*“It was a worse situation than before, it was more crowded. And I won’t lie, the process was very, very, very slow.”*

*“I went up to Greenhouse a couple of times but it wasn’t really any help... it was mostly about the time limit, and it took them a long, long time to get people a place.”*



*“The health issues I have, sometimes depression and things like that, I have bad days and good days. But when I was coming up against the Greenhouse, it was making my life worse. With the stresses of trying to get back into the hostel, it didn't really help. It's just not nice for people who are both homeless and have mental health issues. Some days, it was mentally draining.”*

It took a month and a half for his partner to be added to his housing application.

Joe, who already lived with depression, found the process of trying to get back into a hostel stressful and draining. The only support he felt he received was from his family and London Gypsies and Travellers.

After 11 months in a hostel, Joe and his partner were offered permanent accommodation in a flat in Hackney. Joe was placed in a priority category meaning he only had

to bid on the housing register for 11 months (compared to a London average of seven years). Once he was able to bid, his needs could be properly taken account of.

When the door needed repairs, Joe didn't know how the procedure for getting it fixed – no one had given him the information. He is now in touch with the Housing Officer, who has helped manage the repair.

Overall Joe feels that Greenhouse and the council should help homeless people like him a lot more.

*“I feel they didn't care enough to sort it out. But London Gypsies and Travellers made everything a lot easier, even providing advice about rent and universal credit when I moved into my permanent home.”*





# Learning from good practice



London Gypsies and Travellers' extensive work in London has revealed housing approaches that could reduce negative impacts on Gypsy and Traveller young people and families.

## A dedicated role in Hackney

Hackney has a dedicated staff member to liaise with Gypsy and Traveller communities about managing sites and enforcing regulations, and to provide support for Gypsy and Traveller families. This support is essential, as those interviewed noted how difficult it can be to access services.

However, it is also vital that all council officers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and cultural sensitivity to effectively engage with Gypsy and Traveller people.

## Ending temporary hostels in Southwark

In February 2021, Southwark Council announced it would end the use of hostels as temporary accommodation. This is significant because short periods in hostels can be very disruptive, making it difficult to settle into a routine and



build relationships. Sharing facilities with other people may also create privacy, wellbeing and security concerns.

The new policy means that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are now offered a tenancy in the council's name. This will be a self-contained property with its own bathroom and kitchen.

## Enfield Council's housing company

Enfield Council has created its own company, Enfield Let, which can rent properties directly to tenants. It provides assured shorthold tenancies that allow tenants to be in a private rented sector property and bid, even get extra points, on the housing register.

In 2022, Enfield moved 240 families out of temporary accommodation into properties with three- to five-year leases. This initiative has enabled a significant number of individuals to break free from the cycle of insecure housing, since people are able to bid for housing while transitioning between private rented properties.

**London Gypsies and Travellers** is an organisation dedicated to advocating for the rights and wellbeing of Gypsy and Traveller people in London. The organisation works to promote social inclusion, combat discrimination, and ensure access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and secure accommodation.

**WSA Community** is an organisation specialising in community development, meaningful participation and social inclusion. It runs training courses, evaluates projects and encourages user involvement to inform services, policies and strategies.

The report was supported by funding through the **Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners programme**, an initiative by **Trust for London** and the **Oak Foundation**.



**London Gypsies and Travellers**

Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners

Traveller RIGHTS Human RIGHTS

The image shows the cover of a report. The background is a blue gradient. On the right side, there is a photograph of a young woman with a blue headband and a fur-lined coat, holding a white sign that reads "Traveller RIGHTS Human RIGHTS". The sign also has small photos of people on it. The title "London Gypsies and Travellers" is in large, bold, black font. Below it, a white box contains the subtitle "Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners". At the bottom left, there are three logos: the Oak Foundation logo, the Trust for London logo, and the London Gypsies & Travellers logo.

Produced by London Gypsies and Travellers,  
based on a project report by WSA Community.

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Charity No. 1072111  
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