Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers 2

Action Plan 2024-2026

COSLA

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers 2

Action Plan 2024-2026

The Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2024

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The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-83601-677-9

Published by The Scottish Government, September 2024

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1493298 (09/24)

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Foreword

Scottish Government and COSLA have a longstanding commitment to ensuring we support Gypsy/Travellers, one of the most marginalised groups of people in Scotland, to lead happy, productive and fulfilled lives. Improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller communities is a significant human rights commitment and tackling the deep-rooted inequalities will help us deliver the fairer Scotland we want.

The progress we have made through the 'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers' joint action plan published in 2019 is testimony to the collaborative work of national and local government, the dedication and tireless efforts of third sector organisations, and most of all, the determination of Gypsy/Travellers to ensure better futures for their communities.

During the last 12 months, we have been speaking with Gypsy/Travellers across Scotland to ensure their voices are, once again, at the centre of this second national joint action plan. This has been an important listening exercise incorporating more than 10 events in different locations, hearing from over 100 individual Gypsy/Traveller voices.

We have seen and heard evidence of the positive impact current initiatives are making on Gypsy/Traveller communities across Scotland. For example, the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund represents a significant collective investment in culturally appropriate accommodation needed to meet the needs of communities, and the success of the Community Health Worker programme supported Gypsy/Traveller communities overcome barriers to accessing health and other public services.

A stronger relationship and mutual trust has also developed between our institutions and communities in the last few years, and we want to continue working with communities to continue to build shared understanding, trust and cooperation.

However, we recognise that there is still work to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers. We will build on the successes we have had to date and will make further progress in many areas such as accommodation, health, education and combatting discrimination through measurable actions in this refreshed plan. With the Scottish Government's Ministerial Oversight Group for Gypsy/Travellers and COSLA's Community Wellbeing Board there is a strong commitment to ensure sector-wide responsibility for the actions and that progress is regularly reviewed, in conjunction with Gypsy/Traveller communities.

We would like to thank all the parties involved in the development of this second action plan – in particular stakeholders, partners, and community members for their invaluable contribution. We look forward to continuing to work together in delivering on our agreed actions and creating long-lasting positive change.



Kaukab Stewart MSP,
Minister for Equalities



Councillor Maureen Chalmers,
COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing

Summary

This action plan is divided into five sections. At the beginning of each section, we outline what we have heard from communities so that we can continue to be accountable. Each section has a number of objectives and commitments to address issues that communities have told us about, with targeted, specific and clear actions to tackle them.

The following outlines our high-level commitments for each section, and further detail on how we intend to work towards these commitments can be found in the Action Plan 2024–2026 section.



Accommodation and Planning

- We will gather information from demonstration projects in Aberdeen City, Clackmannanshire, Fife, Highland, Perth & Kinross and South Lanarkshire to share with future projects. We will take the necessary steps for funding for Gypsy/Traveller accommodation to be accessed alongside housing under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (or a successor housing programme) in the next Parliament.
- We will ensure good standards of accommodation and mechanisms for improvement, and act on the research findings and recommendations generated from the Negotiated Stopping Pilot.
- We will support preparation of a new guide to the planning system for the communities, sharing advice on contacting the communities and cultural awareness for planners.



Education

- We will develop a series of high-level actions to ensure a national, strategic, and sustainable response to community perspectives and their experiences of barriers to education. We will support staff to improve educational outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller children and young people. We will also identify and support community members and educators to work together to raise awareness of Gypsy/Traveller culture and build local relationships and trust.
- We will support schools to be proactive in communicating with Gypsy/Traveller parents to ensure that they have access to information and support at all stages of their children's education. We will also ensure that community members can access support for literacy and digital literacy development.



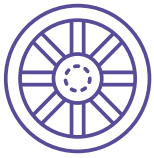
Health

- We will embed learning from the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP) Community Health Worker service in mainstream health services. We also want to increase knowledge and understanding about the health and social care needs and inequalities experienced by the Gypsy/Traveller communities to inform and influence future service planning and design.
- We want to ensure Gypsy/Traveller voices are included in our work to improve access to mental health supports and services, building understanding of Gypsy/Traveller culture in mental health community supports, and in Mental Health services. We also want to improve access to suicide prevention and self-harm training for staff working directly with Gypsy/Traveller communities.



Social Security, Work and Combatting Poverty

- We will develop approaches to tackle barriers to accessing social security experienced by seldom-heard groups, including Gypsy/Travellers. We will also develop case studies of positive partnership approaches with Gypsy/Traveller communities, building from the pilot project with Fife Council.
- We want to understand how the Tackling Fuel Poverty Strategy and our programmes may need to be adapted to reflect the particular needs of Gypsy/Travellers communities. We also want to improve the response to food insecurity for Gypsy/Traveller communities to reflect their needs and ensure they have an increased awareness of financial support available.
- We aim to increase understanding among employers of prejudice against Gypsy/Travellers and the barriers they face in trying to access jobs, and provide guidance for employers on how they can tackle these barriers. We also want to develop approaches to tackle barriers to accessing employability support including self-employment experienced by Gypsy/Travellers.



Empower Communities, Improve Representation, and Tackle Racism and Discrimination

- We will provide leadership to challenge racism and discrimination, promote Gypsy/Traveller's rights and recognise Gypsy/Traveller history and culture. We also want to strengthen community development and engagement and work with Gypsy/Travellers to improve their involvement in decision-making.
- We want to empower communities to better understand their human rights and how to exercise them, as well as increase opportunities for young Gypsy/Travellers to improve their skills and confidence to influence decision making processes; and challenge and change prejudice and discrimination.
- We want to ensure that views of Gypsy/Traveller stakeholders inform activity relating to our Hate Crime Strategy Delivery Plan. We want to improve digital inclusion within Gypsy/Traveller communities, and increase knowledge and understanding about the differential experiences of Gypsy/Traveller communities.

The Ministerial Oversight Group on Gypsy/Travellers, co-chaired by the Minister for Equalities and COSLA's Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing, will oversee the work of this action plan and discuss how challenges to delivery can be tackled. This will also be a forum for members of Gypsy/Traveller communities and stakeholders to engage in the discussion.

Introduction

In the 2022 Census, 3,343 people in Scotland identified as belonging to the Gypsy/Traveller ethnic group, representing 0.06% of Scotland's population.[1] However, organisations working with these communities estimate that the true Gypsy/Traveller population size could be as high as 15,000 to 20,000. This indicates that Gypsy/Travellers can be more difficult to count in the census and other surveys, due to the fact that they move around, feel the need to hide their identities due to fear of discrimination, or feel a disconnect with any benefits from completing these surveys.[2]

Gypsy/Travellers have been part of the Scottish landscape for centuries. However, they are still one of the groups in Scotland most likely to experience social, educational, and labour market exclusion, poor health, and poverty in Scotland ("Is Scotland Fairer" report). Testimonies from Gypsy/Traveller communities shared with the Scottish Human Rights Commission in 2023 underlined experiences of racism and discrimination, challenges with accessing services and poor quality accommodation negatively impacting their physical and mental health. Findings of the Seldom Heard Voices 2022 research programme also revealed that when Gypsy/Travellers try to access social security services such as benefits, they face barriers, including discriminatory attitudes, complex applications, difficulty finding information about services, and long waiting times. Gypsy/Traveller children are also more likely to live below poverty lines (Tackling child poverty - progress report 2023-2024).

Our review of Scottish Government and COSLA's joint action plan 'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers' evidences that good progress has been made since 2019 in the areas of accommodation, health, representation and tackling discrimination (further details are provided in the next section). However, it is clear that this progress requires further time to become more embedded and reach communities more widely. 'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers 2' will continue the momentum achieved and act on recommendations received through further research and evaluations carried out until now.

'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers 2' is closely linked to our wider shared priorities in the National Performance Framework and our strong ambition to build a fairer Scotland. This means tackling poverty and inequality and, in particular, bringing an end to child poverty. Above all, this Plan is about protecting and promoting human rights, delivering equality and creating strong and cohesive communities.

1 The 2022 Census Gypsy/Traveller numbers are not fully comparable with the 2011 Census numbers. This is because the ethnic categories Roma and Showman/Showwoman were introduced into the census survey in 2022, and in 2011 some people in these categories may have ticked the Gypsy/Traveller category.

2 The census aims to count usual residents, those that have lived or intend to live in Scotland for 6 months or more, and populations who move around can be more difficult to count in the census. Considerable effort was made to enumerate Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller populations in the census and National Records of Scotland worked closely with these communities. Improvements were made to the question to include tick boxes for Roma and Showmen/Showwomen alongside the Gypsy/Traveller tick box.

Our work so far
– A review of 'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers - Action Plan 2019-2021'

We published Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers - Action Plan 2019-2021 in October 2019 setting out concrete steps for improving outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers. The Plan consisted of 33 actions across 5 areas:

- Provide more and better accommodation;
- Improve access to public services;
- Better incomes in and out of work;
- Tackle racism and discrimination;
- Improve Gypsy/Traveller representation.

Stakeholder organisations and community members were key in developing this Action Plan. We have continued to work closely together to ensure that the actions delivered meaningful change in the lives of Gypsy/Travellers across Scotland. Originally intended to run until 2021, the plan was extended to September 2023 following the Covid-19 pandemic, and refreshed to ensure it remained relevant to the needs of Gypsy/Traveller communities.

We gathered data on successes and challenges of the previous Plan with policy colleagues across Scottish Government, external stakeholders and community members to prepare this review for accountability purposes and to inform the new Action Plan for 2024-2026.

The findings highlight that good progress has been made in most areas, with some particularly successful stories. However, we recognise that we still have work to do in areas like accommodation, access to public services, education, and tackling stigma and discrimination. We have worked to address these throughout the new Plan.

Key Successes

Provide more and better accommodation

- Before the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund was established, a total of £2m was provided by the Scottish Government in 2020/21 to existing Local Authority sites to make immediate improvements with a focus on a better quality of life, including play and community facilities, adaptations to homes and digital connections.

- The Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund is providing up to £20m during 2021-26. With match funding from Local Authorities, this represents a significant collective investment in the culturally appropriate accommodation needed to meet the needs of communities. Nearly £15 million of the Fund has been spent or allocated (for 2021-25) to demonstration projects in six local authority areas.

- A number of demonstration projects have been established that will develop examples of model sites and develop an understanding of the accommodation needs and preferences of residents. This, alongside an independent evaluation, provides a strong evidence base to inform future policy and implementation.

- We have published an Interim Site Design Guide for Gypsy/Traveller sites, to drive a significant improvement in the quality of sites going forward. This was developed in conjunction with local authorities and with input from members of Gypsy/Traveller communities. This drew on the Gypsy/Travellers - accommodation needs: evidence review published in 2020.

- The National Planning Framework 4 (adopted in February 2023) includes a new positive policy framework for development to meet the housing needs of communities. It is clear that Councils' local development plans (LDPs) should allocate land to ensure provision of accommodation for Gypsy/Travellers where need is identified. It supports development proposals for public, private, permanent and temporary Gypsy/Traveller sites and family yards, including on land not specifically allocated for this use in the LDP.

- The Planning (Scotland) 2019 Act strengthened engagement requirements within the planning system and specifically includes requirements for planning authorities to engage with Gypsy/Travellers as they prepare their LDPs. The definition of Gypsy and Traveller, defined in planning legislation for the purposes of local development plan engagement was the result of collaborative working with the community.

- Our LDP Guidance (May 2023) gives advice to planning authorities when engaging with Gypsies and Travellers, highlighting different engagement methods and signposting to representative organisations.

- A Priority (previously known as Vulnerable) Energy Consumers working group, chaired by the former Minister for Energy and the Environment, met on three occasions to consider, and seek potential solutions to, the impact of high energy costs on consumers living within vulnerable circumstances. Issues affecting Gypsy/Traveller communities, and raised by stakeholders at the working groups, will be included in Scottish Government asks of the new UK Government, prior to the Autumn Statement.

- COSLA has been working with Local Authorities to pilot the delivery of a Negotiated Stopping Approach to improve the support that is available to people who are camping roadside. This includes negotiating the provision of culturally appropriate and safe stopping places as well as access to sanitation and essential services. The pilot learned from experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown when the Scottish Government and COSLA worked together to produce a framework (Coronavirus COVID-19 supporting Gypsy/Travellers: framework for local authorities) to guide Local Authority support for affected families. The pilot is now in the evaluation stage and recommendations will be embedded in the new Action Plan.

Improve access to public services

- The Community Health Workers (CHWs) programme led by MECOPP helped Gypsy/Traveller communities to overcome barriers to accessing health and other statutory services and provided information to help wider Gypsy/Traveller communities to improve their health and to access services.

- The programme, which became operational in December 2021 whereby CHWs – who are members of Gypsy/Traveller communities – were recruited and trained to provide support in a number of Health Boards areas including Tayside, Lothian, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Highland.

- The 'Mums Matter' pilot project improved maternity, health visiting and income maximisation services for Gypsy/Traveller women.

- Networks of experts have been created to identify potential partnerships and opportunities for joint working, assisting in the sharing of learning and good practice and influencing NHS and Health and Social Care Partnership policy and service responses.

- A series of learning sacks containing materials, resources and learning activities to explore as a family, have been produced by the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP), one of our strategic partners, to improve uptake of early learning and childcare with the Gypsy/Traveller community. STEP has now distributed 457 Starter Sacks reaching families in 19 Local Authorities, resulting in increased family participation and enrolments in nurseries and schools.

- STEP has also introduced the School Pledge Scheme, an incentivising tool which places responsibility on schools and local authorities to support best practice in ensuring monitoring of data, inclusive practice and the development of widening participation practice to support Gypsy/Traveller pupils and their families.
- The STEP Digital Teacher provided an educational lifeline for many children and their families before and during Covid-19. It held training programmes for local authority staff, produced and shared online resources and delivered one-to-one and group teaching for pupils. The app can be used when families are travelling or living in places without internet connection. The app allows school work to be stored offline and then shared with teachers at any point when Wi-Fi is available.
- Schools can also record specific details of pupils' attainment 'Levels' as well as National Qualifications in the app, enabling pupils to share their progress in a wider range of awards and qualifications with a wider range of education settings.
- The Digital Rapid Assessment Guide allows any education setting to assess reading, writing and maths levels when Gypsy/Travellers children enrol mid-term, enabling them to begin a learning programme at the appropriate level.
- STEP also produced a series of cards with QR codes which families can give to school staff, directing them to the relevant section of the STEP website for professionals. This bypasses challenging conversations and has mitigated against many families removing children from schools.

Better incomes in and out of work

- The 'Seldom Heard Voices' research programme was set up to bring the voices of those with lived experience into the design and delivery of the Scottish social security system, with Gypsy/Travellers being identified as one key group.
- At a local level, Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery Team have initiated and developed good working relationships with stakeholders supporting Gypsy/Traveller communities.
- We also improved the response to food insecurity for Gypsy/Traveller communities through funding for MECOPP who promoted access to cash-first support by increasing knowledge and uptake of complementary provision, e.g. Free School Meals provision and Best Start Foods. They also supported communities to access or develop their own community-led initiatives that celebrate the social value of food, encouraging integration and social connections.

Tackle racism and discrimination

- The Scottish Government supported key partners to provide training materials and resources to public services to help address needs in a culturally sensitive way.
- Progress in Dialogue's 'Long Shadow of Hate Crime' project, supported by Scottish Government funding, has contributed to increased engagement and awareness raising on hate crime within Gypsy/Traveller communities.
- COSLA developed a 'Local Leaders Network', a cross-party network of local elected members with the shared aim to 'champion' the rights of Gypsy/Travellers, challenge discrimination and promote Gypsy/Traveller representation on relevant public forums. The Network is an essential transformative bridge between Gypsy/Travellers statutory services and wider settled communities. The Network has welcomed Gypsy/Travellers and stakeholders to inform them of issues faced by the community such as the impact of health provision and accommodation.
- In the last two years, the Scottish Government led on national Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month events to bring together MSPs, Councillors, stakeholders, community members, public service providers and the wider public to recognise the positive work of stakeholders and communities in tackling inequalities and discrimination. It was also a platform for those with influence to champion the needs of communities and challenge discrimination and inequalities.
- Scottish Government has published also guidance on the collection of data on ethnic group, updated in March 2022, which includes separate response options for 'Gypsy/Traveller' and 'Roma' to improve evidence and data gathering.

Improve Gypsy/Traveller representation

- Scottish Government and COSLA hosted regular community conversations as a space to raise live concerns affecting communities and to provide updates on the progress of the plan. The conversations enabled direct engagement with Scottish Government's Minister for Equalities and COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing.
- Scottish Government continued to ensure that Gypsy/Traveller needs were represented within a diverse range of areas, including those where they are often not heard or included.

Challenges

Despite the majority of the actions being successfully delivered, some priorities changed as as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, community members highlighted the need for more clear and concrete actions to ensure accountability and measure progress. Other points that were raised during the review include:

- The need for further disaggregated data and evidence to fully understand the experiences of Gypsy/Traveller communities.
- While local authorities have come forward with projects to improve existing sites with some additional pitches, the fund has not produced new sites. Robust evidence of accommodation needs continues to be a challenge for Local Authorities.
- A continuing need for stronger leadership and strategic commitment by Health Boards to tackle Gypsy/Traveller inequalities, with Health Boards to have a strategic, long-term plan for continuing to improve Gypsy/Traveller access to and experience of healthcare, recognising this cannot be done without continued investment in building trust and the cultural competence of staff.
- A general understanding that poor mental health and suicide is a significant issue for Gypsy/Traveller communities (particularly young males). Initial discussion has happened in relevant policy areas but further actions need to be taken to address these issues in a meaningful way.
- The need for more strategic planning in terms of education, to be supported by professional organisations such as the Association of Directors of Education (ADES), Education Scotland and General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).
- Staff and family surveys have shown that discrimination by education service providers, bullying and discrimination in playgrounds and culturally irrelevant curriculum are the key factors that prevent Gypsy/Traveller children transitioning from primary to secondary schools.
- Adult literacy as an area of necessary development over the coming years, being a barrier for parents who want to support their children.
- More work to tackle negative narrative on Gypsy/Travellers, to increase reports from Gypsy/Travellers on discrimination and stereotyping, and address poor service delivery in many councils areas.
- The need to ensure better networking between policy teams and stakeholders.

We have worked to address these in the new plan for 2024-2026, alongside many other points raised by both stakeholders and community members during our listening exercise. Further details are provided in the next section.

Action Plan 2024–2026

Accommodation and Planning

Education

Health

Social Security, Work and Combatting Poverty

Empower Communities, Improve Representation, and Tackle Racism and Discrimination

Accommodation and Planning



What we have heard and what issues were raised by communities:

- Need for more accommodation – More sites and increased pitch numbers, including transit pitches where needed. While the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund has delivered additional pitches on some sites and larger pitches, due to pitch closures to meet fire safety distancing the overall amount of accommodation has not increased. Over the long term, there has been a reduction in site numbers. Sites can be under-occupied because of conditions or a cultural preference for living within extended family groups. Councils do not have an accurate picture of the need for more culturally appropriate accommodation.
- Need for better accommodation and an improvement in standards – Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund projects are improving some sites, and setting an expectation for improvement and highlighting contrasting conditions of some underdeveloped/older sites. Sites should not fall below the Minimum Standards for Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and, at the same time, residents are keen to see improved standards in line with the Interim Site Design Guide.
- Need for more choice – Recognise there are different accommodation needs and preferences throughout communities, e.g., council/housing association run sites, houses, private yards, transit sites and stopping places. Recognition of cultural importance given to multigenerational family living and flexibility for family growth. Better communication and understanding of tenants' rights to ensure greater consistency of a rights-based approach.
- Need for better communication/understanding around planning and the issues communities wish to address through planning – Make the local planning system more accessible to communities. Better accessibility, understanding, advice and support to enable effective navigation of the planning process. More community representatives need to be involved in the development of guides. Increase awareness of benefits of early engagement. Locations with better engagement in the early stages of the planning process are more likely to have a successful planning application. Increase planners' understanding of different types of accommodation options. For example, better understanding of the concept of Private Yards which can offer stability and future security for extended family units to live in according to tradition.

Objective 1 - Continue to fund the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund demonstration projects in Aberdeen City, Clackmannanshire, Fife, Highland, Perth and Kinross, and South Lanarkshire and gather information from them to share with future projects.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will complete the independent evaluation of the Fund and publish the report.	Interim Report Winter 2024/25	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy
We will update the Interim Site Design Guide with additional information e.g. on decanting residents during the build and community engagement.	Winter 2024/25	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy
We will hold an event to share the lessons learned from the projects with Local Authorities.	Winter 2024/25	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy

Objective 2 - Work together with COSLA to gather the evidence and look at options for a follow up fund from 2026 onwards.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will analyse the information from the demonstration projects to make a case for funding for future projects.	Winter 2025/26	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy
We will work with Local Authorities to identify investment needs on sites and consider the best way to improve site standards in the future.	Winter 2025/26	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy
We will take the necessary steps for funding for Gypsy/Traveller accommodation to be accessed alongside housing under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (or a successor housing programme) in the next Parliament.	Winter 2025/26	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy

Objective 3 - Ensure good standards of accommodation and mechanisms for improvement.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will continue with ongoing monitoring of standards on public sites under the Scottish Social Housing Charter: Each year local authorities need to tell the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) if they meet regulatory requirements including the Regulatory Standards. They do this by submitting an Annual Assurance Statement (the Statement). Where a local authority with Gypsy/Traveller sites no longer complies with minimum site standards, it should set out in the Statement the nature of the issue, and how and when it will make the necessary improvements to ensure compliance as quickly as possible. Social landlords, including local authorities, should make it easy for tenants and other service users to talk to them and get the information they need about the services they provide and decisions they make. Sometimes a resident on a Gypsy/Traveller site might have a problem with the standard of their home or site. SHR's factsheet (Complaints and serious concerns - information for tenants and service users of social landlords) explains what residents can do if they have a complaint or serious concern.	October 2024 – Annually	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy Scottish Housing Regulator
We will publish an independent analytical report relating to our recent consultation on a new Social Housing Net Zero Standard, which included proposals related to public sector Gypsy/Traveller sites. These analyses will inform the development of the finalised standard, which will help to ensure that Gypsy/Traveller communities will benefit from warmer, better-quality accommodation.	March 2025	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy Net Zero Housing Standard

Objective 4 - Commission research to create an Accommodation Needs Toolkit.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will commission research to help Local Authorities identify Gypsy/Traveller accommodation needs and include them in their Housing Needs and Demand Assessments (HNDA), Local Housing Strategies (LHS) and Development Plans.	Winter 2025/26	Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation and Residential Mobile Home Policy

Objective 5 - Act on the research findings and recommendations generated from the Negotiated Stopping Pilot.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will disseminate the findings from the Negotiated Stopping Pilot evaluation research.	Autumn 2024	COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity
We will develop a resource for local authorities, community partners and third sector organisations re: rights and entitlements to services and support for roadside camps.	Spring 2025	COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity
We will share best practice and support partners to take forward recommendations from the Negotiated Stopping Pilot in their area.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity

Objective 6 - Support preparation of a new guide to the planning system for communities.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will work with North and South Lanarkshire Councils (plus representatives from the communities) to co-develop a guide to planning, aimed at communities to make planning more accessible to them.	Spring 2025	Planning, Architecture & Regeneration Division North Lanarkshire Council South Lanarkshire Council HOPS
We will share and promote the guide more widely as an example of good practice through the Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) network and the Improvement Service.	Ongoing once guide published	Planning, Architecture & Regeneration Division North Lanarkshire Council South Lanarkshire Council MECOPP HOPS Improvement Service

Objective 7 - Share advice on contacting communities and cultural awareness for planners.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will help planning authorities/Councils across Scotland establish ways of contacting communities when seeking to carry out required engagement to inform local development plans (LDPs).	Spring 2025	Planning, Architecture & Regeneration Division HOPS MECOPP Improvement Service
We will hold training session between MECOPP and Heads of Planning Scotland- Development Plan Sub-Committee to share advice around cultural appropriateness and best practice when carrying out engagement with communities to inform the early stages of plan making around LDP Evidence Reports.	Spring 2025	Planning, Architecture & Regeneration Division HOPS MECOPP Improvement Service

Education



What we have heard and what issues were raised by communities:

- More Gypsy/Traveller cultural awareness in our schools – Introduce children and young people to the Gypsy/Traveller way of life in a positive manner. Communities feel that current policy does not recognise nor celebrate traditionally nomadic communities.
- Need for action on bias and discrimination in schools – Discrimination and prejudice in schools is one of the main reasons for high levels of non-attendance. Experiencing racist and offensive language and physical violence from other pupils was common and many participants felt that staff did not deal with it effectively. Children described education staff as making assumptions about their lifestyle, their expected behaviour, and their educational potential. Few teachers were thought to be knowledgeable about the culture.
- More flexible education and training opportunities – Provide more flexible education and more opportunities for secondary age young people. Secondary school was not seen to be an option for many parents. Reasons included: a lack of knowledge about schools and staff; no tradition of attending within families; not seeing the relevance of the curriculum to the culture; aspects of the Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) curriculum being unacceptable; family traditions not being respected; concerns over children mixing with other children and genders leading to health worries relating to sex, alcohol and drugs.

Objective 8 - Develop a series of high-level actions to ensure a national, strategic, and sustainable response to the community perspectives and their experiences of barriers to education.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will publish research ("community research") carried out by the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) to demonstrate community experiences and perspectives on education, enhancing the current evidence base and understanding.	October 2024	Additional Support for Learners Health and Wellbeing STEP
We will set up a short life working group to respond to the community research findings with membership from key stakeholders – Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Education Scotland, General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), Gypsy/Traveller communities, Local Authority (LA) Additional Support Needs (ASN) staff, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The group will scope out the issues (local/ systemic) affecting Gypsy/Traveller participation in education and agree priority actions to achieve improvement. The group will align with work being taken forward on relationships and behaviour in schools, including updates to the national anti-bullying guidance, and development of guidance to addressing Racism and Racist Incidents in schools.	November 2025	Additional Support for Learners Health and Wellbeing STEP
We will host a seminar with key stakeholders, providing an opportunity to engage with the community research and to expand knowledge and understanding in the profession/sector. To further this work, we will then disseminate the community research findings to a range of Community Learning and Development (CLD) and third sector partners and to discuss achievable local solutions.	September 2024-June 2025	Additional Support for Learners Health and Wellbeing STEP

Objective 9 - Support staff to Improve educational outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller children and young people.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will develop a toolkit for Local Authority staff and other educators based on the findings from the community research linking into the Improving educational outcomes for children and young people from travelling cultures: guidance. The toolkit will also align with national policies: for example, Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1, and Realising the Ambition. We will review the content of the toolkit with the short life working group, identify gaps and establish clear timescales, deliverables and key stakeholder engagement phases to implement the toolkit and embed it into practice	November 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP
We will consult with local authority staff to develop a resource to support transitions between primary and secondary schools or alternative education settings. This work will be underpinned by The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 which provides the legal framework to support transition planning for children and young people who face a barrier, or barriers to learning. This will include a rights-based approach ensuring that Gypsy/Traveller children and young people have a meaningful role in the development.	March 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP

Objective 10 - Identify and support community members and educators to work together to raise awareness of Gypsy/Traveller culture and build local relationships and trust.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will identify community members in four Local Authorities to liaise with education providers.	September 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP
We will identify educators in Local Authorities to liaise with local community members.	September 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP
We will provide information and resources to increase community member knowledge.	September 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP
We will support staff by providing targeted training and information.	December 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP
We will create a web resource to make information and contacts available.	December 2025	Additional Support for Learners STEP

Objective 11 - Support schools to be proactive in communicating with Gypsy/Traveller parents to ensure that they have access to information and support at all stages of their children's education.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will extend and develop the 'STEP Starter Packs' programme so every child is able to learn through play, offering the best start for going to school and improving opportunities throughout life.	March 2026	Additional Support for Learners Health and Wellbeing STEP
We will recruit 4 further schools to the 'School Pledge' programme and support delivery of this. Pledge Schools will commit to: • establish a named contact point for Gypsy/ Traveller pupils • clearly identify and publicise the support for Gypsy/Traveller pupils already in place • monitor the progress of pupils through data routinely collected within school • build a supportive and welcoming culture • inclusion, celebration and commemoration of Gypsy/Traveller cultures and communities. • develop processes to identify Gypsy/ Traveller pupils and monitor their progress • commit to ensuring that staff development exists raising awareness of the barriers Gypsy/Traveller pupils face accessing education, and broadly in society.	March 2025	Additional Support for Learners Health and Wellbeing STEP
We will update our national anti-bullying guidance, Respect for All, to provide further guidance on prejudice-based bullying, including against Gypsy/Traveller children, and publish new guidance for schools on preventing and responding to racism and racist incidents.	November 2024-Summer 2025	Additional Support for Learners Health and Wellbeing STEP

Objective 12 - Ensure that community members can access support for literacy and digital literacy development.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will signpost community members to access local or national support with literacy and digital development.	March 2026	Additional Support for Learners STEP

Health



What we have heard and what issues were raised by communities:

- More culturally sensitive health services – The importance of positive and culturally informed relationships with services providers. More cultural competency training for front-line health service providers, e.g., GPs, nurses, paramedics and administration.
- Better access to mental health services – Gypsy/Traveller communities are at higher risk of experiencing mental health crisis, which for some people can lead to self-harm and suicide. This is due to being disproportionately affected by poverty, poorer educational and employment opportunities and discrimination, as well as stigma. At the same time, they can also face greater barriers to support and services.
- Embed and further develop the role of MECOPP Community Health Workers (CHWs) – CHWs are playing a crucial role in representing and supporting community members to access health services and wider services. More development of CHW positions across health service areas.
- More information and support accessing health services – There are still barriers to registering for a GP and accessing health services, e.g. dealing with bureaucracy/forms, literacy issues, people with no fixed address, and discrimination. The need for more promotion of services that are already in place (e.g. blue card).

Objective 13 - Embed learning from the MECOPP Community Health Worker (CHW) service in mainstream health services, to inform future service planning and design.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will continue to work with MECOPP, Health Boards and Community Health Workers (with a strong focus on NHS Ayrshire & Arran; NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde; NHS Highland; NHS Lanarkshire; NHS Lothian and NHS Tayside) to deliver on agreed priorities for mainstreaming, consistent with the needs of local Gypsy/ Traveller communities. Agreed priorities include vaccinations and immunisation, screening, women's health and menopause, mental health including men's mental health and perinatal mental health, Primary Care and community health services, and long-term conditions including Diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2)	March 2025	Racialised Health Inequality and Health Equity
We will work with MECOPP and all Health Boards to embed learning from the Community Health Worker service and strengthen leadership and action to improve Gypsy/Traveller community access to, experience of, and outcomes of, healthcare across Scotland.	March 2025	Racialised Health Inequality and Health Equity
We will report on the learning from the next phase of implementation including what worked, challenges and recommendations for future service.	December 2025	Public Health Scotland

Objective 14 - Increase knowledge and understanding about the health and social care needs and inequalities experienced by Gypsy/Traveller communities to inform and influence future service planning and design.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will assess strategic needs of current and potentially future health needs of Gypsy/Traveller communities from a local and national perspective and engage with health boards to understand support needed for services to meet these health needs.	August 2025	Public Health Scotland
We will organise five co-design sessions with MECOPP (Gypsy/Traveller communities) to support with the design and delivery of the National Care Service through the grant-funded Seldom Heard Voices programme of co-design work	March 2025	Office of the Chief Designer/National Care Service Development and Delivery

Objective 15 - Ensure Gypsy/Traveller voices are included in our work to improve access to mental health supports and services.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will invite MECOPP to join and participate as full members in a) the Mental Health Equality and Human Rights Forum b) Suicide Prevention Scotland and c) Self-Harm Network Scotland to explore how we can better meet the needs of Gypsy/Travellers who may be experiencing or at risk of mental health distress or crisis, which may include self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviour. We will report on actions that have been taken as a result of their participation in each of these groups.	March 2025	Distress Interventions and Suicide Prevention

Objective 16 - Build understanding of Gypsy/Traveller culture in mental health community supports, and in Mental Health services.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will work in partnership with MECOPP to offer training on Gypsy/Traveller culture to services that support people who self-harm or who may have suicidal thoughts or feelings (for example Samaritans Scotland, and Self-Harm Network Scotland), so that they are better equipped to meet the needs of Gypsy/Traveller communities. We will evaluate the impact of this training with a view to exploring how the offer can be extended to other services over time. We will also encourage Scottish Government staff working in key areas of Mental Health policy to take up this training. At the same time we will work with MECOPP to understand what else we can do to encourage Gypsy/Traveller communities to make use of these services.	March 2025	Distress Interventions and Suicide Prevention
We will work with Gypsy/Traveller organisations, initially through a focussed discussion with key staff, to explore whether and how mental health resources/materials can be tailored to better reflect, reach and meet the needs of Gypsy/Traveller communities.	March 2025	Distress Interventions and Suicide Prevention
We will actively support MECOPP's Community Health Workers to connect with organisations and networks that are delivering suicide prevention work in local areas, and will gather information on how this has been taken forward, sharing examples of positive practice, through relevant networks.	March 2025	Distress Interventions and Suicide Prevention

Objective 17 - Improve access to suicide prevention and self-harm training for staff working directly with Gypsy/Traveller communities.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will work with organisations that work directly to support Gypsy/Traveller communities to help them to access a) self-harm prevention training and b) suicide prevention training for key staff.	March 2025	Distress Interventions and Suicide Prevention

Objective 18 - Build our understanding of the risk of suicide in Gypsy/Traveller communities.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will ensure that Gypsy/Travellers are included as a distinct group in our work to review deaths by suicide to improve our understanding of the factors which contribute to suicide deaths in Scotland and utilise this to support the development of action plans to address suicide risk.	March 2026	Distress Interventions and Suicide Prevention

Social Security, Work and Combatting Poverty



What we have heard and what issues were raised by communities:

- Need more information to understand social security entitlements – Communities lack awareness of the financial support they are eligible for, and entitled to. Communities need more support in understanding the social security system and more work is required to tackle the key barriers which prevent benefit take-up, e.g. stigma.
- More support when applying for benefits – There are challenges navigating the social security system, including the emotional and financial impacts this presents. The social security system is complex, and difficulties completing application forms and navigating online systems can be increased for some Gypsy/Travellers who experience low literacy levels. Community members noted a strong preference face-to-face support, rather than online approaches.
- More information and support with establishing businesses – Self-employment is the primary occupation status within communities. The development of opportunities to build knowledge and expertise in running a small business or being self-employed would benefit individuals and remove negative stereotyping of cultural traditional trades.
- More cultural awareness for employers – Gypsy/Travellers experience unconscious bias and stereotyping during the recruitment process. Also, need to promote and encourage the recognition of skills within communities to employers.
- Need for more access to skills and trades for young people – Better pathways to apprenticeships that address challenges faced by Gypsy/Traveller communities are needed, e.g. gaps in education. Pathways for mentoring/training within communities/ family business to be developed and recognised.

Objective 19 - Develop approaches to tackle barriers to accessing social security experienced by seldom-heard groups, including Gypsy/Travellers.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will publish a Seldom-Heard Groups Benefit Take-Up Action Plan setting out the steps we will take to support these groups to access their entitlements.	March 2025	Supporting Access to Social Security
We will continue to share the findings from a recent Seldom-Heard Groups Evidence Review with key internal and external stakeholders. This will allow us to identify opportunities for actions to be included in the published plan.	September 2024	Supporting Access to Social Security
We will continue engaging with stakeholders who represent Gypsy/Traveller interests through the Benefit Take-Up Stakeholder Reference Group.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity: meets quarterly)	Supporting Access to Social Security
We will carry out research to further develop our understanding of how to reach and engage Gypsy/Traveller communities with communication around devolved benefits.	September 2024	Social Security External Communications

Objective 20 - Link with Lead Officers for Gypsy/Traveller sites in Local Authority areas to develop case studies of positive partnership approaches with Gypsy/Traveller communities, building from the pilot project with Fife Council.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will continue to engage with Lead Officers in the areas where these roles are in place to build relationships and to develop trust and engagement with these client groups.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	Social Security Scotland – Local Delivery
We will continue to use existing Relationship Lead presence at local strategic partnerships to ensure awareness of Social Security benefits.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	Social Security Scotland – Local Delivery
We will consider available insight and evidence, including the effectiveness of previous presentations on Social Security payments and Social Security Scotland's service to Gypsy/ Traveller families, to identify the most effective approach to ensure this group has access to appropriate information to support take-up.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	Social Security Scotland – Briefing and Engagement

Objective 21 - Understand how the Tackling Fuel Poverty Strategy and our programmes may need to be adapted to reflect the particular needs of Gypsy/Travellers communities.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will consult with representatives of Gypsy/ Travellers communities when consulting on the first fuel poverty periodic report, as referenced in the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019	March 2025	Fuel Poverty

Objective 22 - Improve the response to food insecurity for Gypsy/Traveller communities to reflect their needs and ensure they have an increased awareness of financial support available.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will develop service and activities in Fife, 'Argyll and Bute' to support communities right to food (including healthy foods) and income maximisation via MECOPPs Food Insecurity Service.	March 2025	Food Insecurity MECOPP

Objective 23 - As part of delivering our Anti-Racist Employment Strategy, increase understanding among employers of prejudice against Gypsy/Travellers and the barriers they face in trying to access jobs, and provide guidance for employers on how they can tackle these barriers.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will explain the specific issues relevant to Gypsy/Travellers as we build anti-racism capability and understanding among senior leaders in both the public and private sectors.	March 2026	Anti-Racism in Employment
We will include information on Gypsy/Travellers in our refreshed Minority Ethnic Recruitment Toolkit.	March 2026	Anti-Racism in Employment
We will remind employers of the need to provide training and other learning opportunities on Gypsy/Traveller communities in the framework we are developing to help employers identify their training needs on anti-racism.	March 2026	Anti-Racism in Employment
We will provide support for public sector employers on the use of Positive Action to increase recruitment, promotion and retention of Gypsy/Travellers in their workforces.	March 2026	Anti-Racism in Employment
We will include links to information, networks and stakeholders on Gypsy/Travellers in the Fair Work Resource Hub that we are creating for employers.	March 2026	Anti-Racism in Employment

Objective 24 - Develop approaches to tackle barriers to accessing employability support including self-employment experienced by Gypsy/Travellers.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will work together with partners, including Local Authorities, to develop signposting from existing services used by Gypsy/Travellers to local employability services.	March 2025	Employability Policy

Empower Communities, Improve Representation, and Tackle Racism and Discrimination

What we have heard and what issues were raised by communities:

- Need for more work to fight racism and discrimination – Gypsy/Travellers experience high levels of racism and discrimination and are often stigmatised because of their identity. There is a need to counter misrepresentation and encourage more positive cultural awareness in public services (including teachers, social work, health), media (national and local press and wider social media forums), service sectors (e.g. shops and restaurants), and general public. Furthermore, we need to ensure that Gypsy/Travellers can confidently and safely report hate crime, and that actions are taken to investigate such reports.
- Need for better representation – Gypsy/Travellers and their needs should be represented in decision-making forums throughout public service delivery, Scottish Parliament and Council chambers. Disaggregated data on Gypsy/Travellers is also essential to better understand issues.
- Need more advocates for Gypsy/Traveller communities – More elected members and officials working alongside, and supporting, Gypsy/Traveller communities.

Objective 25 - Provide leadership to challenge racism and discrimination, promote Gypsy/Traveller's rights and recognise Gypsy/Traveller history and culture.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will ensure Gypsy/Travellers needs are reflected in work within the Scottish Government's Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights Directorate, and we will promote Gypsy/Travellers needs across the organisation, putting in contact policy makers with stakeholders and community representatives when necessary.	March 2026	Strategic Anti-Racism
We will commemorate Gypsy, Roma, Travellers History Month (June) to raise awareness on Gypsy/Travellers and Roma culture.	June 2025	Strategic Anti-Racism
We will develop the Local Leaders Network, a cross-party network of local elected members with the shared aim to 'champion' work to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity
We will facilitate Local Authority Lead Officer Group meetings. This group will support the delivery of the Action Plan and provide a forum for sharing information and best practice across Local Authorities.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity

Objective 26 - Strengthen community development and engagement and work with Gypsy/ Travellers to improve their involvement in decision-making.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will organise regular community conversations between Gypsy/Travellers communities, the Equalities Minister and COSLA's Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing to give a platform to raise concerns directly with leaders.	March 2026	Strategic Anti-Racism COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity
We will set up a Ministerial Oversight Group to provide a scrutiny function to this action plan and to ensure sound delivery and improvements across all relevant portfolio areas.	October 2024 (Ongoing activity)	Strategic Anti-Racism
We will invite those with lived experience to share their knowledge with the Local Leaders Network and Lead Officer Groups.	March 2026 (Ongoing activity)	COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity

Objective 27 - Empower communities to better understand their human rights and how to exercise these.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will deliver a tailored human rights training programme for communities. This will be piloted in Highlands and in Great Glasgow and Clyde areas to provide rural and urban opportunities and delivered by MECOPP.	March 2025	Strategic Anti-Racism MECOPP

Objective 28 - Improve opportunities for children and young Gypsy/Travellers to have their views heard.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will raise awareness and increase knowledge of human rights and the UNCRC through our programmes, reaching up to 50 young Gypsy/ Travellers across Scotland.	March 2025	Empowered Children and Young People Article 12
We will consult with up to 20 young Gypsy/ Travellers on their rights as part of the UNCRC reporting process.	March 2025	Empowered Children and Young People Article 12

Objective 29 - Increase opportunities for young Gypsy/Travellers to improve their skills and confidence to influence decision making processes; and challenge and change prejudice and discrimination.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will train up to five young Gypsy/Travellers as human rights defenders, providing Learning and Development which will enable them to advocate for their communities to decision makers at the local and national level.	March 2025	Empowered Children and Young People Article 12

Objective 30 - Ensure the views of Gypsy/Traveller stakeholders inform activity relating to our Hate Crime Strategy Delivery Plan.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will consult with Gypsy/Traveller stakeholders and reflect the views of Gypsy/Traveller communities in the development of a national resource for local authorities to help address hate crime and strengthen community cohesion at a local level.	March 2026	Hate Crime

Objective 31 - Improve digital inclusion within Gypsy/Traveller communities.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will deliver a nationally co-developed IT digital training to upskill families in communities.	March 2025	Digital Ethics and Inclusion MECOPP

Objective 32 - Increase knowledge and understanding about the differential experiences of Gypsy/Traveller communities.

Actions	Deadline	Responsible Team
We will analyse the Scotland Census 2022 dataset, to draw out understanding of differential experiences of Gypsy/Traveller communities. Where possible, this will be supplemented by additional official statistics.	June 2025	Equality Analysis
We will promote ethnicity data collection by continuing to disseminate guidance and showcase best practice in collecting, analysing and presenting ethnicity data across policy areas. This would include, for example, through seminars and workshops.	March 2026	Equality Analysis

COSLA

Scottish Government
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ISBN: 978-1-83601-677-9

This document is also available on The Scottish Government website:
www.gov.scot

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1493298 (09/24)