

# Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups call for higher standards of public discourse after Conservative leader tars their communities with the same "criminal" brush

June 2026

On 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2026 the leader of Conservative Party, Kemi Badenoch delivered a speech during which she made the following statement:

*"Confidence in our institutions is now collapsing.*

*And how could it not?*

*When people can see, as in my own constituency, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities breaking laws that no one else would get away with."*

Anti-Gypsyism is recognised internationally by the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and numerous human rights bodies as a specific form of racism. And in 2020 the Conservative Government helped draft and gave its positive vote towards the adoption of IHRA's working definition on Anti Gypsism/anti-Roma discrimination.

One of its most persistent manifestations is the portrayal of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities as inherently criminal, lawless or unwilling to contribute to society. Such stereotypes have historically been used to justify exclusion, segregation, discrimination and unequal treatment.

**We, the undersigned, write to express our profound concern regarding Ms Badenoch's statement.**

Romany Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic groups protected under the Equality Act 2010.

Criminal responsibility belongs to individuals. It should never be attributed to entire ethnic groups.

**We are particularly concerned that these comments were made during Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month**, a time dedicated to recognising and celebrating the rich cultures, histories, languages, resilience and contributions of our communities to British society, while challenging the prejudice and discrimination that continue to affect many families across the United Kingdom.

**The impact of such statements extends far beyond political debate.**

Such statements undermine decades of work by councils, schools, charities, health services, police forces, universities and organisations to build trust between institutions and communities, improve educational outcomes, increase access to healthcare, strengthen safeguarding practices, support employment opportunities, encourage civic participation and create stronger, safer and more cohesive communities.

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## **We are particularly concerned about the impact on children and young people.**

Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils continue to experience some of the highest levels of bullying, racism, exclusion and educational disadvantage in the United Kingdom. When senior political figures publicly associate their communities with criminality, it reinforces stigma, legitimises discriminatory attitudes and can profoundly affect children's confidence, wellbeing, educational aspirations, school experiences and sense of belonging.

## **The consequences extend beyond schools.**

Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women and men, continue to face significant barriers in accessing employment, education, training, housing, healthcare and public services. Research and lived experience consistently confirms that many individuals conceal their ethnic identity due to fear of discrimination. Negative public narratives can further entrench prejudice, making it more difficult for people to secure employment, progress in education, access opportunities, participate in public life and feel accepted within wider society. In this context, the Public Sector Equality Duty is a backbone principle of the modern state. "Abolishing" this duty means leaving policy and practice to discriminatory arbitrariness.

## **More broadly, misrepresenting the meaning of equality by generalising on the basis of instances of supposed manipulation, lowers the standards of political discourse for everyone.**

We are also concerned that in the same speech, Ms Badenoch singled out people with other protected characteristics, such as sex and gender. We ask that all politicians abide by the guidance for respectful civic discourse as recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

## **We are concerned of the impact on Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women**

As often the primary carers, cultural educators, language transmitters and bridge-builders between families and institutions, such rhetoric can deepen mistrust and discourage engagement with schools, healthcare providers, employment services and safeguarding systems. It also undermines the efforts of thousands of women who work tirelessly to support their families, preserve culture and contribute positively to their communities and wider society.

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## **As organisations and individuals working daily with Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families**

We witness first-hand the impact that public narratives have on people's lives. We support children facing bullying in schools, men and women seeking access to employment and training, families engaging with health and safeguarding services, and young people striving to overcome barriers created by prejudice and exclusion.

### **We therefore call upon:**

1. Kemi Badenoch MP to publicly clarify and withdraw remarks that appear to associate entire Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities with law-breaking.
2. The Conservative Party to publicly reaffirm its commitment to equality, non-discrimination and respect towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and clarify the implications of "abolishing" the Public Sector Equality Duty.
3. The conservative Party should adopt a Anti Gypsyism/ Anti-Roma discrimination policy using the IHRA working definition on Anti Gypsyism/ Anti-Roma discrimination
4. Members of Parliament from all political parties to publicly challenge and condemn rhetoric that collectively attributes criminality to protected groups.
5. Political parties and parliamentary bodies to consider whether these remarks are compatible with the standards expected of public office holders and to take any appropriate action.
6. The Government and Parliament to engage directly with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller representative organisations regarding the impact of such statements.
7. Public discourse concerning our communities to be grounded in evidence, equality, dignity and individual responsibility rather than generalisations about entire ethnic groups.
8. All elected representatives to actively challenge anti-Gypsyism and support efforts to improve inclusion, equality and social cohesion.

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The United Kingdom is strongest when people are judged on their individual actions, character and contributions—not on assumptions attached to their ethnicity, culture or background. We remain committed to constructive dialogue, mutual respect and the shared goal of building a society in which every child, woman and man can live free from prejudice, discrimination and collective blame.

## Signed,

Sylvia Ingmire, CEO of Roma Support Group  
Terezia Rostas, Founder of Welcoming Cultures UK  
Debby Kennett, CEO of London Gypsies and Travellers  
Sarah Mann, CEO of Friends, Families and Travellers  
Helen Littlewood, CEO Clifton Learning Partnership  
Crina Morteau, Manager of Luton Roma Trust  
Jabeer Butt, CEO Race Equality Foundation  
Marek Balog, Neighborhood Manager at Community Renewal Rom Romeha  
Yvonne MacNamara, CEO of The Traveller Movement  
Laura Janova, Independent Roma Consultant  
Daniel Balaz, Head of Services, Connecting Roma C.I.C.  
Marius Taba, Sociologist  
Revd. Canon Dr. Nichola Chater, Chairperson of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Friendly Churches  
Nicu Ion, CEO of Roma ACCess Newcastle  
Alexandra Bahor, Roma Activist  
Juice Vamosi, CEO of KaskoSan Roma Charity  
Katarina Dome, CEO of European Drom CIC  
Petr Torak, CEO of Compass Charity  
Alison Blackwood, Manager of Southwark Travellers Action Group  
Josie O'Driscoll, CEO of Gate Herts  
Dr Rosa Cisneros  
RosaSenCis Films Productions  
Trudy Aspinwall, Team Manager at Travelling Ahead TGP Cymru  
János Lang, Creative Director of Ando Glaso  
Violet Cannon, CEO of York Travellers Trust  
Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC  
Romano Lav  
Dr Ian F Hancock OBE FRSA  
Simona Lazar, CEO, Union Romani Voice (UK)  
Elizabeth Billington BEM CEO of Kushti Bok