



## Economic and Social Council

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**High-level segment: annual ministerial review**

### **Statement submitted by Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* E/2012/100.



## Statement

The present statement will address the issue of poverty faced by Gypsies and Travellers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. By looking at how these minority groups are received by the mainstream British population, it will become evident that factors such as social exclusion and the inaccessibility of employment are the primary causes of poverty within the Gypsy and Traveller community.

The expression “Gypsies and Travellers” serves as an umbrella term that comprises a number of subgroups. In the United Kingdom, the Roma (Gypsies), an ethnic group comprising a combination of commercial and nomadic groups who came from India in the tenth century and later mixed with European and other groups, and the Irish Travellers, whose culture is defined by self-employment, occupational fluidity and a nomadic lifestyle, make up a significant part of the population.

It is important to begin by noting that Gypsies and Travellers are one of the groups who suffer the most racial discrimination in the United Kingdom. In the absence of specific Gypsy and Traveller communities, this discrimination presents itself in national and local anti-poverty agendas and strategies. This, in turn, means that there is a lack of quantitative data about employment and poverty within the community. There has, however, been a decline in traditional work opportunities, which has forced Gypsies and Travellers into mainstream employment.

A shared history of discrimination and racism has meant that, as a Jewish human rights organization, we can easily identify with the current plight of Gypsies and Travellers and we are actively interested in eradicating poverty, reducing unemployment and ending social exclusion among this community.

There are two primary factors that affect poverty within the Gypsy and Traveller community: education and social exclusion. Evidence indicates that the academic performance of children hailing from Gypsy and Traveller communities continues to decline, with at least half of all Gypsy and Traveller children in England refusing to participate in secondary education. This is largely a result of social exclusion, discrimination and lack of appropriate educational provision. The most serious consequence of this is that literacy rates remain very low, which drastically reduces the ability of Gypsies and Travellers to learn new trades and hinders them in obtaining employment.

In addition to poor education, social exclusion directly affects the poverty rate of Gypsies and Travellers. Gypsies and Travellers are often excluded geographically, through their struggle to obtain secure accommodation owing to objections by local authorities and members of the mainstream population, and culturally, through racist public attitudes and behaviour. Many find that, by virtue of being a Gypsy or Traveller, they are prevented from accessing mainstream wage-labour employment or training, which serves to increase the poverty rate within the community.