

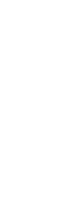
Introduction to Our Survey

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches, is a small group of passionate people from various backgrounds and denominations, with different experiences. We seek to challenge prejudice and work for harmony, understanding and co-operation between communities, churches and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

As Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches, we wanted to gain feedback from Gypsy, Roma and Travellers on their experiences of engaging with churches and their hopes and expectations of church. This information might give churches across denominations helpful insight into both existing barriers and how to create positive welcome.

Our survey aimed to gather feedback from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities on their experiences with churches. Developed by people from the communities and approved by the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Friendly Churches steering group, it was conducted online over the course of three months. We have endeavoured to accurately and sensitively reflect the views, experiences and beliefs of the respondents.

Overview



Community Feedback

The survey provides valuable insights into the experiences and expectations of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities when engaging with churches.



Identifying Barriers

Respondents highlighted existing barriers to church engagement, offering churches a chance to address these challenges.



Creating Welcome

Feedback emphasised the importance of creating a positive and welcoming environment for all community members.

Responses to questions

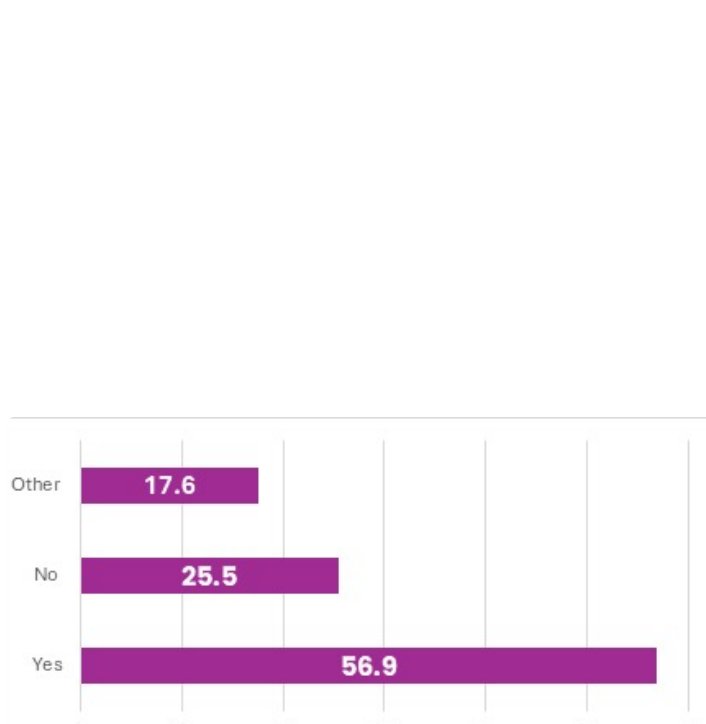
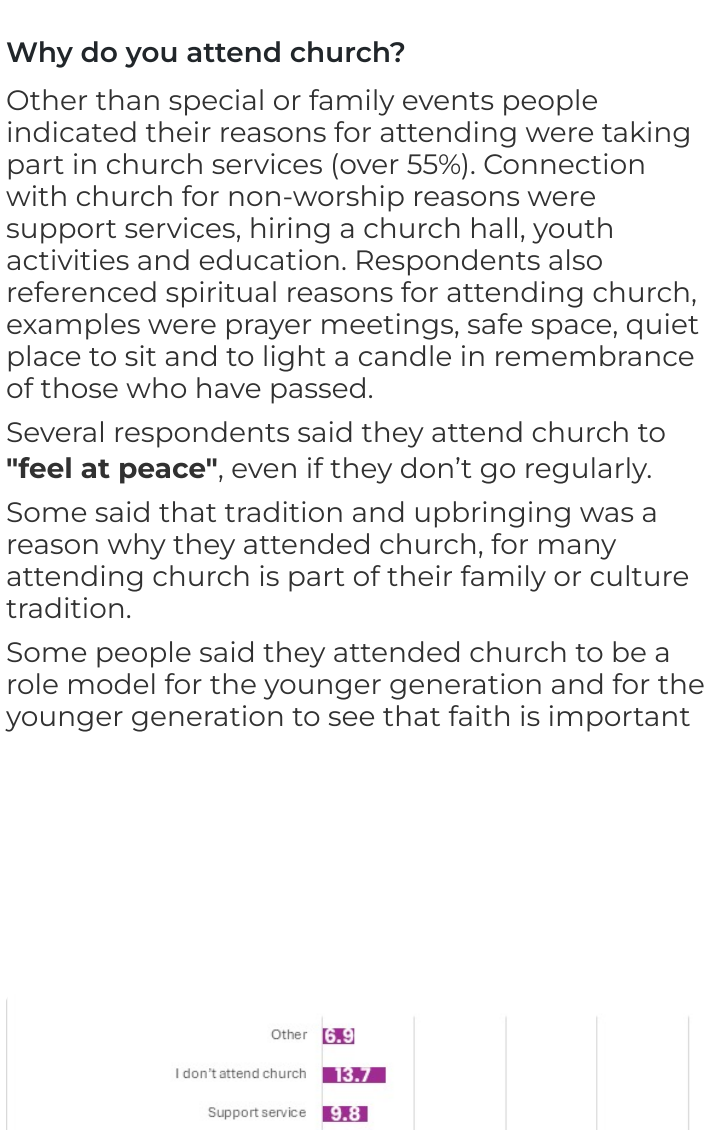
Do you identify as Christian

Over 70% firmly identified as being a Christian. Whilst this may be influenced by the survey having come from Gypsy Roma and Traveller friendly churches, it does reflect the lived experience and expectation of the community members. The Census data from 2021 comments

"In the 2021 census, Nearly two-thirds of those who identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller also identified as "Christian" (63.2%). This was higher than the percentage for the England and Wales population (46.2%).

Those who identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller also had a younger age profile compared with those who had a "Christian" religious affiliation. The average (median) age for those who identified as "Christian" was 51 years whereas the average (median) age for those who identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller was 28 years."

Responses to this survey ranged from young people to elders



Some respondents described themselves as **"prayerful but not always churchgoers"**, often due to fear of judgment. Whilst some said they **"believed in God but felt no need to attend church"**.

Some individuals decide not to attend church due to concerns about acceptance and safety related to their sexual identity.

Other respondents indicate a preference for more traditional interpretations of scripture. They point to shifts in church doctrine as reasons for their decision to withdraw from their congregation.

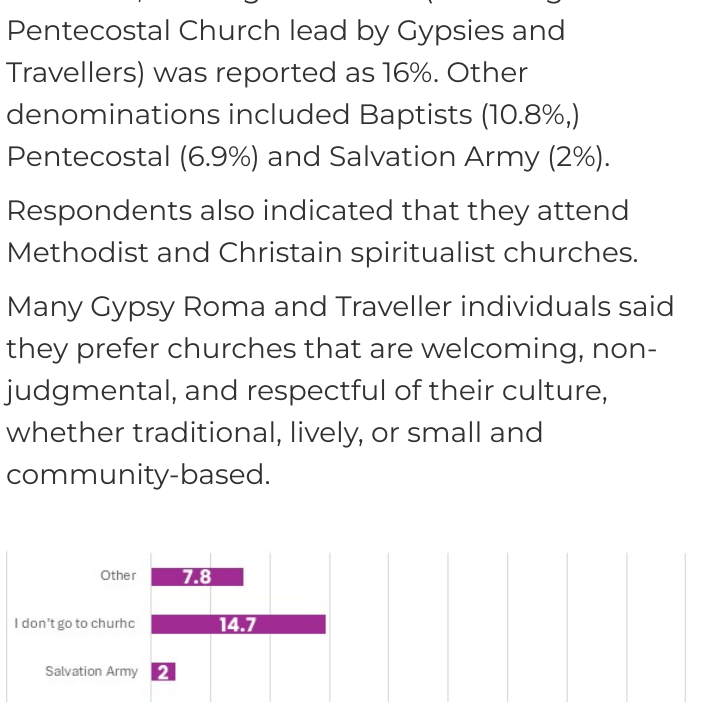
However some do continue to participate in services but report challenges in engaging with teachings or perspectives from some churches on topics around gender that they perceive as differing from traditional biblical interpretations.

Why do you attend church?

Other than special or family events people indicated their reasons for attending were taking part in church services (over 55%). Connection with church for non-worship reasons were support services, hiring a church hall, youth activities and education. Respondents also referenced spiritual reasons for attending church, examples were prayer meetings, safe space, quiet place to sit and to light a candle in remembrance of those who have passed.

Several respondents said they attend church to **"feel at peace"**, even if they don't go regularly. Some said that tradition and upbringing was a reason why they attended church, for many attending church is part of their family or culture tradition.

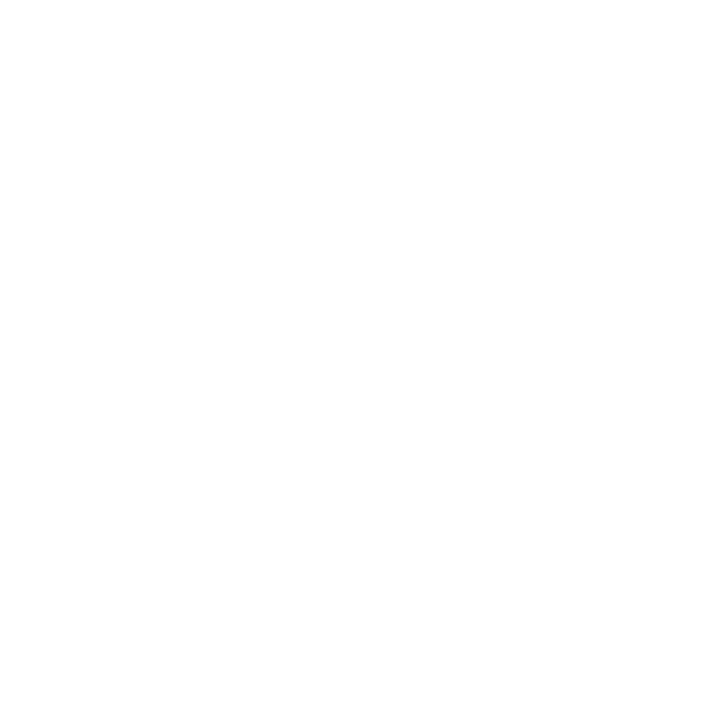
Some people said they attended church to be a role model for the younger generation and for the younger generation to see that faith is important



What sort of churches do you like going to

The highest denomination at just over 39% were Roman Catholic, with Church of England more then 34%, and 'Light and Life' (an Evangelical Pentecostal Church led by Gypsies and Travellers) was reported as 16%. Other denominations included Baptists (10.8%), Pentecostal (6.9%) and Salvation Army (2%). Respondents also indicated that they attend Methodist and Christain spiritualist churches.

Many Gypsy Roma and Traveller individuals said they prefer churches that are welcoming, non-judgmental, and respectful of their culture, whether traditional, lively, or small and community-based.



Have you ever experienced discrimination from a church or a church leader?

In our survey 44.1% reported they had experienced discrimination from a church or a church leader. We note that this is a similar figure (44.6%) to the proportion who negatively viewed Gypsies and Irish Travellers in "The Dinner Table Prejudice study" carried out by Birmingham University in recent years.

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/ptr/90172-univ73-islamophobia-in-the-uk-report-final.pdf>

In an open question 48 respondents, out of 102, gave details of prejudice or negative stereotyping they had experienced.

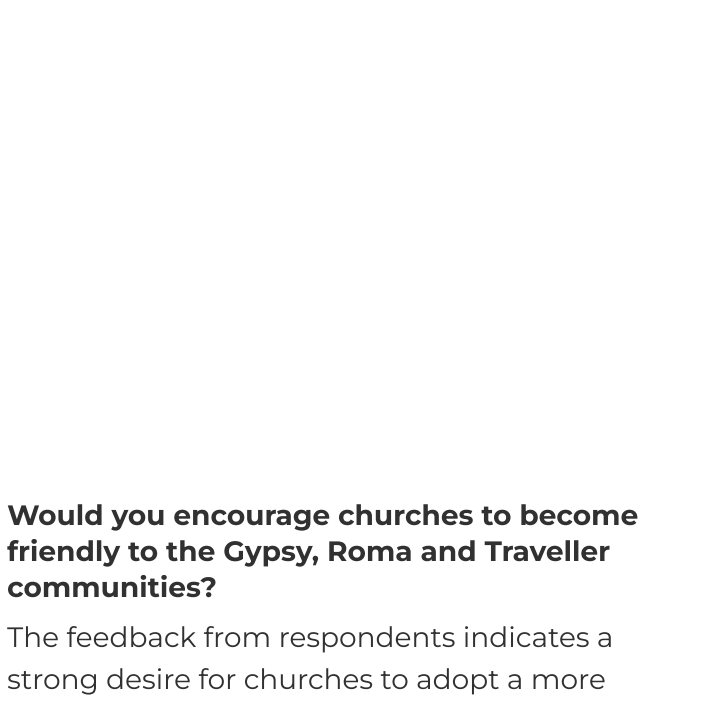
Respondents articulated the significant challenges of perceived or blatant discrimination they have experienced from certain churches and their leaders. The breadth and nature of this discrimination is deeply troubling, from some respondents reporting that small gifts were refused because fears they were stolen, to certain clergy implying that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are involved in child abuse because some marry at a younger age.

There were assumptions of theft and criminality and that they were troublemakers. It has been insinuated that the presence of Gypsies would discourage other people from attending the church. Because of such assumptions some respondents had been denied baptisms, weddings and funerals, this has even extended to being refused opportunity to take part in any church activities.

A small number of respondents experienced additional discrimination in regard to being gay or lesbian.

Several respondents indicated that these experiences have led them to discontinue their attendance at church services. Some expressed being made to feel stupid.

Trust is very important, and our respondents indicated that trust is at an all-time low with churches.



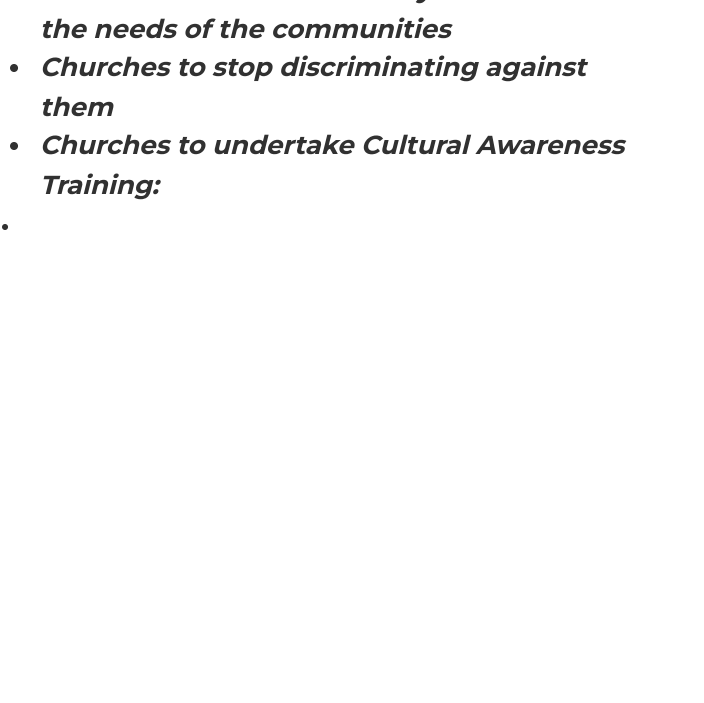
Do you travel? If so, would you stay on land owned by the church? (Not just the graveyard!)

The statistics we encountered were not unexpected, given the limited culturally appropriate accommodation options available for Gypsy and Traveller communities. These communities have a rich history with churches and expressed great enthusiasm when the synod voted to allocate land for their use. This land could serve as a temporary stopping point or potentially facilitate more permanent accommodations. The Church of England has a valuable opportunity to collaborate with developers to create sites that aligns with their social housing initiatives.

In 2019 the general synod of the Church of England voted on a motion put forward by the churches network for Gypsies Travellers and Roma. The motion was to request the Mission and Public Affairs Council, in its forthcoming work on housing, to evaluate the importance of provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers in wider housing policy and recommend Church bodies to play their part in lobbying for and enabling land to be made available for such sites.

In light of the synod motion, there have been numerous discussions with a variety of church members across all levels regarding the implementation of this motion. Unfortunately, these discussions have yet to yield tangible outcomes. Whilst we recognise the complexities of church and charity law, we respectfully encourage the church to take appropriate action in addressing the ongoing accommodation challenges faced by Gypsies and Travellers.

Just half of all respondents would happily stay on church land if available, and approximately 20% are undecided



Would you encourage churches to become friendly to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

The feedback from respondents indicates a strong desire for churches to adopt a more inclusive and welcoming approach. Several respondents recommended the introduction of services that resonate with their diverse lifestyles, such as additional church services scheduled at varying times to accommodate mobile families.

There is a clear request for churches to extend support to individuals and families in times of need.

Respondents have expressed a wish for churches to foster an environment of inclusivity, where they are welcomed as equals, and for efforts to be made to learn and understand the various cultures represented within their communities. To facilitate this, respondents suggested the implementation of informed practice and cultural awareness training throughout the church.



Results



What respondents are seeking:

- Churches to become friendly
- Churches to reflect the communities in services
- Churches to call out racism and discrimination in all forms
- To express their faith within church
- For churches to be Culturally sensitive with the needs of the communities
- Churches to stop discrimination against them
- Churches to undertake Cultural Awareness Training:



Going forward

- Visit and talk with the communities
- Churches to be an advocate
- Give access to water/toilets/rubbish disposal for those who are roadside
- Welcome Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people into worship
- Think how to make specific services culturally relevant (Baptisms, funerals, weddings etc)
- Celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month (June)
- Offer sanctuary stopping (Sanctuaryplaces.co.uk)



Community Engagement

Churches need to actively engage with their local Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities to foster inclusivity.



Barrier Reduction

Addressing barriers is crucial for creating a welcoming environment.

Positive Environment

Creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere is essential for community integration.

Influencing

Churches have a vital role to play in influencing other church congregations, schools, local authorities etc, to become friendly to the communities

Diverse community voices bring:

- Constructive feedback on church experiences.
- Lived experience
- Identified barriers to church engagement.
- Positive solutions
- Mending bridges

In conclusion

We asked respondents a series of questions about their experiences with churches and church leaders. Their responses provide valuable insights into the experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities with churches, highlighting barriers and opportunities for positive engagement. Our prayer is that churches graciously consider these findings and suggested steps, when reaching out to their local communities and developing their ministries.

Main Insights

- Community Engagement
- Barrier Reduction
- Positive Environment
- Influencing

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