



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

United Kingdom Country Report: April 2021

In the United Kingdom (UK) since 2010, the government has created a “[hostile environment](#)” for illegal immigration. The “Gypsy,” Roma and Traveller community, a traditionally nomadic minority, has endured persecution in Europe since the [Middle Ages](#). The Nazis killed [300,000 to 500,000](#) Roma in the Holocaust, while Sweden subjected Roma to [forced sterilization](#) until 1976. Even now, their way of life is under threat in the UK.

Since World War II, the UK has passed [laws](#) harming Roma and Travellers. Roma and Travellers often face [evictions](#), and their land use applications are [often rejected](#). Following the government’s revision of the [definition](#) of “Gypsies” and “Travellers” in 2015, it has been more difficult for those who temporarily stop travelling to retain their eligibility for land use applications.

A 2016 law watered down authorities’ obligations to provide encampment sites. An Equality and Human Rights Commission survey showed [44% of people](#) in the UK expressed negative feelings towards Roma and Travellers. A survey in the Traveller Movement’s [2017 report](#) found that 91% of participants from the community faced discrimination in education, healthcare, and employment; 77% experienced hate speech or crime; and 76% hid their identity. Their life expectancy is [10 years below](#) the UK average, and their lifestyle makes them more vulnerable to [COVID-19](#).

The *Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill* contains [anti-protest measures](#), and it also harms Roma and Travellers by [criminalizing](#) trespass and unauthorized encampments. Police have already used [violent tactics](#) at protests against the bill. The [vaguely-defined](#) bill could result in land bans, fines, jail terms, or vehicle seizures for residing or “intending” to reside on land with a vehicle without consent or causing significant “disruption” or “distress.” Such measures could increase homelessness and trigger [family separations](#) and even [forced adoptions](#). Given the itinerant lifestyle of Gypsies and Travellers, which was upheld as an “enshrined freedom not to stay in one place” by the [Court of Appeal](#) in 2020, the bill appears to be a direct attack on the community’s [identity](#). [Only 3%](#) of encampments were unauthorized in 2020, but families that use such camps often have [no option](#), and the number of families concerned may change over time. [84% of police oppose](#) criminalizing unauthorized encampments. 93% propose more site provision instead.

The [mainstreaming of dehumanization](#) by politicians has fed into policymaking. A Conservative politician was suspended in 2014 for saying Travellers should be [“executed”](#). Others still in office have called them [“parasites” and a “disease”](#). The 2019 Conservative manifesto said criminalizing trespass would [“protect our communities.”](#) While there is [no evidence](#) of disproportionately high crime rates around Traveller sites, Home Secretary Priti Patel has said nearby communities [“should not be living in fear”](#) and referred broadly to [“criminality”](#) among Travellers.

The 2018 Windrush Scandal [collectively traumatized](#) Black people in the UK. The Home Office deported or detained [at least 164 residents](#) from the Windrush Generation, which the UK invited from the Caribbean to settle from 1948 to 1971. It never offered them citizenship and then [destroyed their landing cards](#) in 2010. At least [11 deportees died](#), 50,000 people risked deportation, and [5,000](#) were impacted in some way. Victims faced [discrimination or homelessness](#), including people [born in the UK](#). The Windrush Compensation Scheme has been [slow and insufficient](#). Some survivors have still been [denied citizenship](#).

Refugees have also been targeted with harsh policies. Discriminatory migration policies have forced refugees to take dangerous sea-crossings, causing almost [300 deaths](#) since 1999. The UK has dropped a refugee family reunification scheme led by Lord Alf Dubs, who fled Nazi genocide in the [Kindertransport mission](#). This form of family separation is harming [children’s welfare](#). The UK has crammed refugees into [military barracks](#) despite their increased risk of contracting COVID-19. The government plans to [deny asylum rights](#) to refugees who arrive illegally and send asylum seekers to be [processed offshore](#). In Australia, a similar policy has been held to amount to [crimes against humanity](#).

The government-ordered Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has [denied](#) the UK is institutionally racist. However, Genocide Watch considers the UK is at **Stage 3: Discrimination**, **Stage 4: Dehumanization**, and **Stage 6: Polarization** of the [Ten Stages of Genocide](#). The police bill threatens to elevate the UK to **Stage 8: Persecution**. Genocide Watch recommends:

- Members of Parliament should remove parts of the bill criminalizing the rights of Gypsies and Travellers.
- If the bill passes without these changes, it should be [challenged in the UK courts](#) for violating Travellers’ rights.
- The government should provide more encampment sites and form a strategy to tackle anti-Traveller discrimination.
- The government should compensate and grant citizenship to all Windrush survivors and protect refugee rights.