Beyond the tick box: the impact of institutional bias and discrimination on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Conference report 2018

“GRT ethnicity needs to stop being treated as a risk factor”
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Introduction

Every year, our annual, national conference brings together all types of stakeholders in the fight for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller equality. It is the biggest yearly event for the GRT sector.

The annual conference is an opportunity to spark ideas, promote collaboration and drive forward the agenda for justice in regards to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

This year, the theme of the conference cut to the centre of the inequalities experienced by Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities; the institutional bias that exists against GRT communities across many aspects of public life – from governmental departments to law enforcement institutions – is what perpetuates negative stereotypes and poor treatment of GRT people.

A thank you to all those who contributed to and participated in this year’s conference, and to Mary Humphreys for the photographs that are used in this report.
Key recommendations

Education

• Many GRT children report being bullied at school, with racist bullying against them not recognised as racist incidents. Schools must be sure to implement anti-bullying policies that are BME sensitive.
• Third sector organisations and other stakeholders must work to encourage GRT people to declare their ethnicity in schools in order to work towards removing associated stigma.
• Legal challenges must be mounted against schools that do not comply with their public sector equality duty to have due regard for the equality of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

Brexit

• The Home Office should ensure that successful applicants to the settlement scheme receive physical as well as digital confirmation of settled status, so that documents can be accessed easily for those who are digitally illiterate and can also be handed down to children.
• The Home Office must set out clear, legally-informed guidance on what will happen to those who are not successful in their application to the settled scheme.
• The Home Office must evaluate the reach and spread of Voluntary and Charity Sector Organisations (VCSOs), ensuring that there is assistance in applying for the settlement scheme available for Roma communities in areas not covered by frontline organisations.

Policing

• Mandatory 18+1 ethnic monitoring should be introduced to all police forces as a matter of urgency in order to ensure that interactions with Gypsies and Travellers can be captured and analysed for trends.
• A proactive approach to making sure police decisions are not based on Anti-Gypsyism needs to be adopted by police forces. For example, introducing a comparator ethnicity into the National Decision making model when the incident involved GRT would help focus the mind of the decision making officer as to whether their decisions could be negatively biased.
• From 2019, PEEL assessments should include a standardised measure to systematically assess individual police forces on their relationships with GRT communities.

Health

• Health projects targeted at Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers need sustainable funding from Clinical Commissioning Groups. At present, when the funding finishes, good work achieved by these projects finishes too. This is vital in order to challenge poor health outcomes.
• There needs to be a rethinking/reshaping of cultural awareness training into ‘access to services’ training instead, so that NHS agencies understand it is their statutory duty to provide access rather than a cultural barrier being used as a reason why they are unable to.
• The whole of the NHS must urgently adopt the 18+1 ethnic monitoring system in order to capture data on Gypsies and Irish Travellers.
Keynote speaker
Lord Young of Norwood Green

Enormous thanks to Lord Young, who is a recent and important advocate for the Gypsy Roma and Traveller cause.

Lord Young first attended a Traveller Movement event in parliament in February 2018, which was held to discuss educational disadvantage amongst Gypsy, Roma and Irish Travellers.

He revealed during the conference that since coming in to contact with the Traveller Movement he had been inspired to help fight for justice for Gypsies Roma and Travellers, drawing parallels between racism and the discrimination experienced by GRT communities and his own Jewish community.

Lord Young went on to take questions from the floor and assured delegates that he was looking forward to working in the future to advocate for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller equality.
Gypsy Roma and Traveller ethnicities

Gypsy Roma and Traveller identities and how they interact with statutory agencies

The first morning session focused on the identity of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers the guest speakers were:

- Brigid Quilligan, Kerry Travellers’ health and community development project
- Florintina Chiriac, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Police Association
- Phien O’Reactigain, National Gypsy and Traveller coalition
- Professor Colin Clark, University of the West of Scotland (UWS)

First to address the floor was Brigid Quilligan, an Irish Traveller, who spoke passionately about the marginalisation of Traveller communities in Ireland where she runs a Traveller Health project, and took the opportunity to highlight the severe cases of discrimination that she has had to help fellow community members to challenge.

Delegates then heard from Roma police officer Florintina Chiriac who, through her work, is attempting to dispel the notion that her Roma ethnicity and her role as a police officer are incompatible. She spoke at length about the idea that the identity of GRT communities is often formed and forced on community members by other members of society who claim to be able to ‘spot’ a Traveller – and pointed out that this ignorance is highly damaging to GRT people.

Phien O’Reactigain, a Pavee (Irish Traveller) community activist for over thirty years, took the opportunity to highlight that he perceived identity to be both a “wonderful and a dreadful thing”; wonderful because it had “buoyed up” Travellers for thousands of years, yet dreadful because of the way that the government and others use Traveller identity against the community, citing blanket injunctions taken out by councils as an example.

Finally, delegates heard from Professor Colin Clark, who pointed out an unfortunate shared characteristic for GRT communities – experiences of racism. However, he also championed the power of individual testimony and a sense of place and family as being at the heart of Gypsy identity. Professor Colin Clark outlined his beliefs that cultural competency training can be a great thing, as long as outcomes are monitored and evaluated isn’t carried out simply to ‘tick the box’.
GRT ethnicity and the criminal justice system

The second session of the morning focused on the ways in which GRT ethnicity is treated as a risk factor by the criminal justice system, which perpetuates a damaging criminal stereotype of GRT people. Guest speakers in this session were:

- Martin Campbell, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Police Association
- Anne Fox, Clinks
- Mairead Healy, Youth Justice Board
- Derrick Campbell, Independent Office for Police Complaints

Martin Campbell outlined his experiences of being a Traveller and a police officer, recommending that police be required to spend time on a Traveller site in order to truly break down mutual distrust between the two groups. He outlined different types of bias that can occur against GRT, including unconscious bias – a problem across many aspects of society.

Anne Fox spoke specifically about prisons and probations, highlighting that a lack of data for GRT offenders within the penal system is problematic and the ways in which the system appears to operate in such a way as to disadvantage GRT offenders. She also highlighted that the ‘explain or change’ principle introduced by the Lammy review is a real opportunity to address these imbalances.

Mairead Healy also emphasised the problematic gaps in data around GRT people and that exclusions from school are a fast track to ending up in the criminal justice system. The youth justice board’s new approach is to recognise the importance of good mental health and putting the “child first, offender second” – ensuring young offenders get a good education to help them in the future.

Derrick Campbell spoke passionately of his commitment to furthering equal treatment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, particularly within his remit as an Independent Office for Police complaints commissioner, sharing anecdotes of various complaints about the police from GRT people that he’s taken on personally in order to promote trust and equitable access to the police complaints system.
Workshop 1

**Education: ‘Addressing institutional bias towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller school children’**

Jennifer Moses (National Official for Equality & Training at NASUWT Teachers’ Union), Liffy McDonnell-Bond (Development Officer, Anti-Bullying Alliance), Tyler Hatwell, (youth outreach worker, LGT), Brian Foster (TM Trustee and ACERT)

There was a broad consensus within the education workshop that the most effective way to push GRT equality within education forward is to insist upon schools meeting their legal public sector equality duty. An emphasis was placed on legal challenges as a way to achieve change for GRT children.

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Workshop 2

**Brexit: ‘Securing the rights of Irish Travellers and Roma in a post-Brexit UK’**

Sarah Zawacki (Roma Support Group), Chris Desira (Seraphus Solicitors), Bernard Ryan (Professor of Migration Law)

The workshop on Brexit provoked a lively discussion between both panellists and community members in the audience. It focused mainly on barriers faced by Roma communities in accessing the settlement scheme and a Q&A on the rights of Irish citizens in the UK post-Brexit.
Workshop 3

Policing Policing: ‘Taking the “risk” out of ethnicity’

Traveller Police Association, Mike Young (Equality and Human Rights Commission), Mark Watson (TM Trustee and Cheshire Crimebeat Co-ordinator)

The policing workshop discussed the national decision making model employed within the police to aid individual officers in making on duty decisions. Discussions focused on the ‘risk assessment’ stage of this model and on why police officers appear to perceive Gypsy/Traveller ethnic identity as a risk factor.

Workshop 4

Health: ‘Barriers to accessing healthcare for Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers’

Chair: Prof. Margaret Greenfields (Buckinghamshire New University), Barbara Czyznikowska (Project Officer, Centre for Black Minority Ethnic Health Leicester), Sabrina Stewart (GRT Women’s Empowerment Network Member), Catherine Kerrigan (Traveller healthcare worker at St Catherine’s Community Centre in Carlow Ireland)

Delegates at the health workshop discussed how to ensure that the NHS met its Public Sector Equality Duty to improve health outcomes for GRT communities, talking in detail about preventative measures and the importance of diversity and inclusion across the NHS.
Evaluation

From the evaluation forms received, over 75% of the delegates felt the whole event was excellent, with the remaining delegates scoring the whole event as good.

Attendees

This year we had one of the all-time high number of attendees at the Conference, reaching 160 delegates.

Christmas card competition

The yearly Christmas card competition had a record breaking 72 entries! Of all of those the conference delegates voted Alexis Loveridge, aged 10, as the winner.
Quotes

“Each conference gets better than the last. This one is a hard act to follow but I’m sure next year will be ever better!”

“Brilliant level of genuine participation by Traveller and Gypsy community members. All speakers were outstanding.”

“Very useful day of learning, thank you!”

“Thanks for the ever more detailed information with which I can challenge stereotypes and bigotry.”

“I really enjoyed the conference. The speakers were wonderful and the subjects were all great.”

Save the date!

Save the date! Our next conference will be on Thursday 21st November 2019.

Need to get in contact?
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