

the Traveller Movement



Our Truth. Our Voice Conference Report 2020

“We are all different, but we deserve equal treatment and we have equal value”

12th of November 2020 via Zoom

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity committed to the fulfillment of Human Rights for ethnic minority Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) people. The Traveller Movement’s mission is to develop a platform and voice for Travellers, working in solidarity with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities to achieve equality through self-determination and proactive participation in influencing and shaping policy.

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Acknowledgments

The Traveller Movement would like to thank:

- Pauline Anderson OBE for chairing the conference
- Senator Eileen Flynn for delivering the key note address
- Our panel speakers:
Daniel Cooper, Luke Smith and Zarah Sultana MP, and Dr Omar Khan,
Chrissie Browne, Jennifer Moses, and Keith Fraser
- The workshop speakers
- The conference delegates

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An Roinn Gnóthaí Fachtracha
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Introduction

The Traveller Movement annual conference took place at the end of a very challenging and disruptive year. Due to the national lockdown and COVID-19, the annual conference took place entirely online with delegates joining from the comfort of their own homes. The theme of the conference was *'Our Truth, Our Voice'* named in response to the Channel Four programme earlier in the year which painted Irish Travellers as criminal and violent.

The challenges faced by GRT were no less difficult in 2020 and the anti-Traveller rhetoric used by politicians and sections of the media has never been worse. From the Home Office consultation to criminalise trespass to the negative media towards Gypsies and Travellers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Channel 4 Dispatches programme depicting all Travellers as criminals, 2020 was a difficult year for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

To counter these narratives, the Traveller Movement conference provided a platform for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to reclaim and reshape the toxic narrative that permeated public discourse in the previous twelve months. The thematic foci were economic inclusion, political participation, accountability and advancement in politics. This year we encouraged people to think about the importance of reclaiming public platforms and reshaping the discourse: in the media, in politics, and on television. This included campaigning, registering to vote, political participation, outreach, advocacy, organisational and targeted media engagement.

This was the thirteenth annual conference, and we adapted the same format as previous years, with panel speakers and key note address in the morning, and thematic workshops in the afternoon.

The conference opened with introductions from Traveller Movement Chair, Pauline Anderson OBE.

Key Recommendations

Catch up and recovery planning for GRT pupils in education



- **Digital exclusion/literacy:** More support/funding is required to tackle issues of digital exclusion and poor digital literacy.
- **Elective Home Education:** Attendance fines should be suspended and schools should be encouraged to work with parents to find a solution. Open door policy for students to return to school once they are able to.
- **Brexit:** The Department for Education, the Home Office and schools need to work together to support families.

Changing the media narrative



- **Lobby IPSO** should change its code of practice to include claims made by groups of people.
- Encourage young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers **to become activists**. Provide training on how the media works and how to engage with and submit complaints and pursue realistic goals.
- Target and put pressure on social media platforms so they will better recognise and remove hate speech against GRT.
- Try to get more diverse narratives about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers into mainstream media

Political and democratic participation



- **Political literacy** is of critical importance and should be provided to all. This could be through mainstream education, through parliamentary outreach, or by civil society organisations.
- GRT activists and organisations should work together as **a strategic alliance**, and work on key issues and barriers that keep GRT out of politics.
- **Voter registration** for GRT needs to be ramped up. It's really important that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers vote and see politics is also "for us".
- We need to work with **non-mainstream media** to change the anti-Traveller narrative. There are many diverse media platforms that offer an alternative to mainstream media. They provide opportunities to reframe narratives.

Criminal Justice System



- Police must **improve engagement** with Gypsies and Travellers and enable effective communication that leads to positive outcomes.
- Promote greater understanding that **'GRT' are ethnic groups**, as many white minorities including GRT, and those from Eastern Europe are unsure if they are a protected minority and whether protections on the basis of race apply to them.
- **3rd party reporting** need to be explored and developed and there should be support from statutory mechanisms to assist the development of this.
- **Restorative Justice** needs to be explored. Youth offending team in Rotherham working with Roma communities referred to value of restorative justice in their work.

Key Note speaker

Senator Eileen Flynn

The key note speech was delivered by Senator Eileen Flynn, the first Irish Traveller to be nominated to the Irish Seanad (senate). Senator Flynn gave an inspiring speech which included anecdotes about her professional life as well as her journey into politics, her upbringing in Dublin, her educational experiences, and the barriers for the Traveller community in Ireland. It was an inspiring speech with a rallying call to action for Travellers to get involved in politics and have their voices heard.

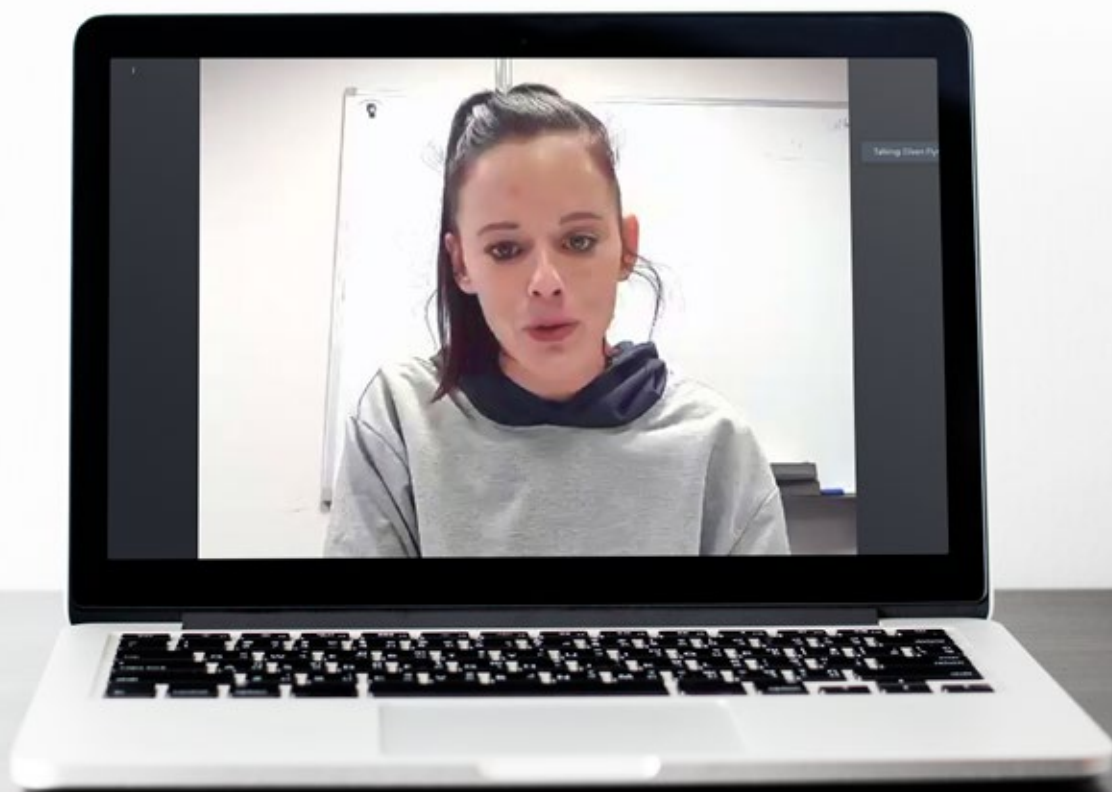
[Click here to see video](#)

Eileen described her role in the Oireachtas (Irish parliament), speaking truth to power, and standing in solidarity with all ethnic minority groups. She discussed diversity in the Traveller community and states that you are no less a Traveller if you are LGBT, if you are Trans, if you live in a trailer, if you don't live in a trailer etc. it doesn't make you any less of a Traveller.

Eileen spoke about empowering the Traveller community and the importance of working together and finding pathways to empowerment.

[Click here to see video](#)

She also discussed how she intends to see the enactment of hate crime legislation in Ireland and how she'll work for the inclusion for all minority ethnic groups, and those marginalised by mainstream society



Panel 1: Political representation and accountability

The first panel examined the toxic anti-Traveller rhetoric in politics and media, and how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are constantly othered. An expert and diverse panel allowed for rich discussion and open debate. Speakers highlighted their experiences and strategies in dealing with anti-Traveller prejudice, on their own, in their work, or through legal representations.

Speakers on the panel included:

Zarah Sultana MP - Labour MP for Coventry South

Luke Smith - Activist and campaigner with Labour GRT

Daniel Cooper – solicitor at Imran Khan & Partners

Zarah Sultana MP discussed her work calling out anti-Traveller racism in parliament during debates about unauthorised encampments. The media normalises anti-Traveller hatred and politicians perpetuate similar hateful messages which often goes unchallenged, particularly in the House of Commons. Both Muslims and Gypsies face normalised and socially accepted racism in the UK, and experience similar scapegoating. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people undoubtedly experience racism by elected representatives, but there is safety in solidarity. It is important for politicians to continue to call out racism in all forms wherever it occurs - in their constituencies, on social media, or in the houses of parliament.

[Watch Zarah deliver her speech here](#)

Activist Luke Smith discussed his work tackling anti-Traveller racism. He started the Labour GRT campaign to fight for representation within Trade Unions and within the wider Labour movement. It shouldn't have to be said in 2020, but Gypsies, Roma and Travellers deserve rights. They are constituents. They shouldn't be treated like a pest control issue. Also discussed were recent comments by a shadow labour MP who used anti-Traveller language, and we've witnessed the Home Secretary Priti Patel engage in public racism. Anti-Traveller racism, much like Islamophobia, passes the dinner table test. From MPs and civil servants to local authority representatives, anti-Traveller racism is so pervasive that no one blinks an eye. It is up to all of us to challenge this at every level.

Daniel Cooper discussed his work as a human rights solicitor at Imran Khan & Partners. Racism against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) people is about power and the state is a developer and driver of racism in public policy and discourse. GRT racism is more than just a few discriminatory comments made by individual racists, but instead it is a larger issue embedded in political, social and economic systems. Anti GRT discourses permeate all structures. Since the death of Stephen Lawrence, we've seen that police are institutionally racist and do not take sufficient action to address or solve racially motivated crimes. We see this in the mistreatment of GRT people by the police. The entire criminal justice system gives police the power to systematically harass and target groups with impunity, but this must be challenged. We should be more than just advocates on an individual level. We must challenge these systemic issues through our advocacy work, and by working in partnership with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and their supporters.

Panel 2: **Education & economic inclusion: breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils**

This second panel discussed the educational attainment and outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, and the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic. They also examined wider issues of access to Further and Higher Education, catch up tuition, unaddressed racist bullying, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Speakers on this panel included:

Keith Fraser – Chair of the Youth Justice Board

Christine Browne - Tutors for GRT project, King's College London Rom Belong project

Jennifer Moses – Equalities lead with NASUWT Teachers Union

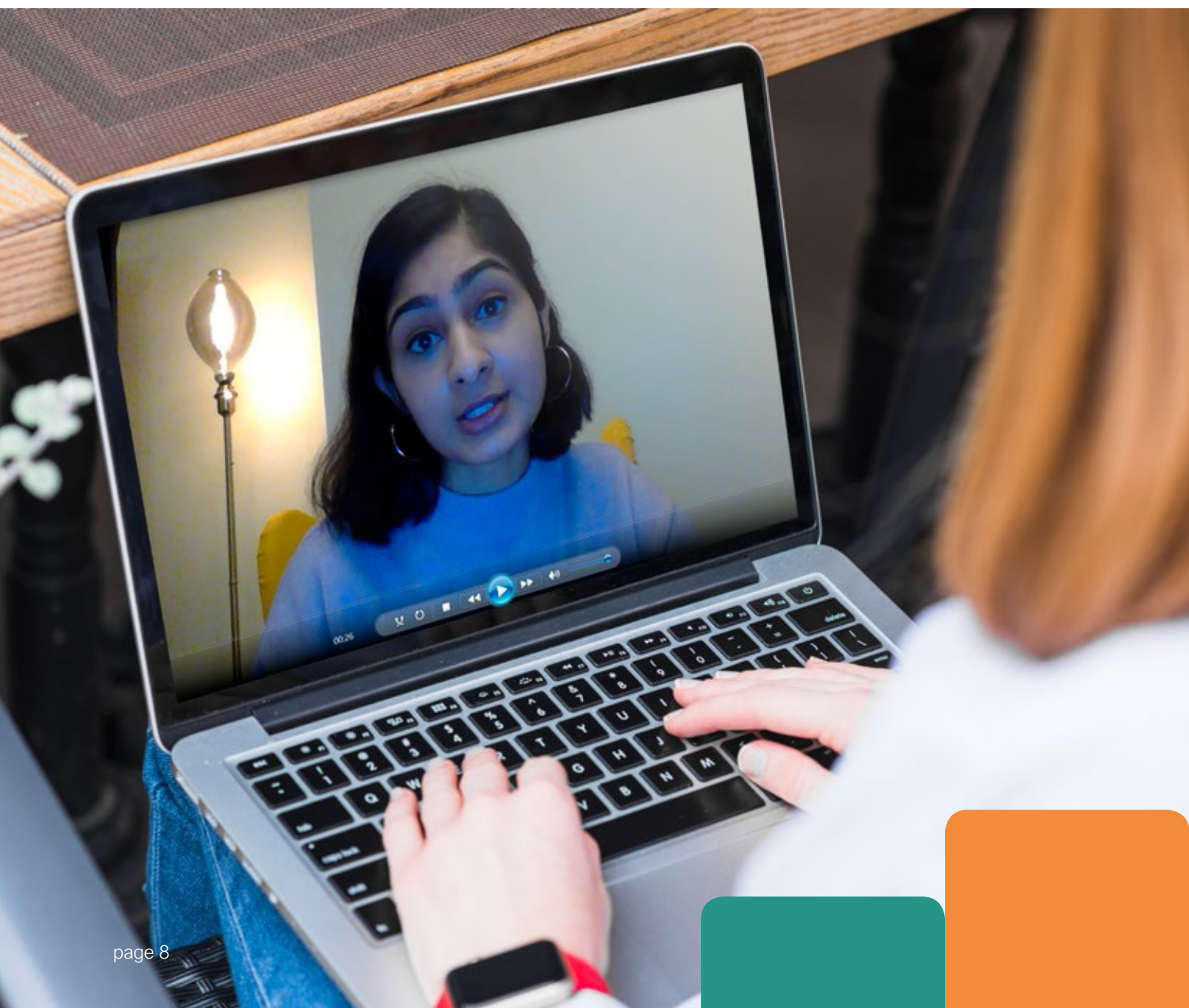
Dr Omar Khan – Director at TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education)

Keith Fraser discussed the importance of youth diversion programmes for at-risk youth, as the vast majority of children grow out of crime. This is especially important for GRT children as they are overrepresented in the youth justice system, and in school exclusion statistics. There are many benefits to diverting children away from the criminal justice system, and keeping them in school. Studies show that excluded students are four times more likely as other children to be sent to prison as adults. Criminalising children deepens their criminal careers. Research consistently shows that children are more likely to reoffend if processed through the formal justice system, which can often stigmatise them at a time when they may already be struggling and in need of support. Also discussed was the Pathfinder approach, a programme funded by the Youth Justice Board to drive and support youth diversion programmes

Chrissie Browne discussed the Traveller Movement and KCLs 'Tutors for GRT' project which showed there can be good practice approaches even in the middle of a pandemic. Top down policy is important, but bottom up community-led approaches are also really important. The pupils in the tutoring project are interested in a variety of subjects: zoology, science experiments and vlogging to name a few. Studies show GRT students are, on average, 34 months behind peers by graduation. It's necessary to address these gaps in education when they occur. By giving help to pupils and their parents over time the attainment gap closes. The Tutors for GRT project shows great engagement from pupils with 94% attendance. The project is open to 5-17 year olds and aims to provide help to pupils where it is needed.

Jennifer Moses discussed breaking the school-to-prison pipeline and ensuring pupils remain in school. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed systemic disadvantage and entrenched ideologies of racism. The Black Lives Matter movement has shown the need for educators to discuss racism and prejudice. High levels of school exclusion harms life chances of GRT pupils and is a direct result of entrenched systemic racism. Recent campaigns by the government highlights that education reform has taken a backward step, and there is a marked absence of strategies to enforce statutory duties and an absence of good practice guidance for schools from the government. NASUWT has called for action via campaigns for racial justice. There is also a role for Ofsted in dealing with racist bullying and stereotyping under the public sector equality duty.

Dr Omar Khan discussed addressing the inequality gaps for GRT students in higher education. TASO is a new organisation that acts as an independent hub for Higher Education professionals to access research, toolkits, evaluation techniques and more, to help widen participation and improve equality within the sector. There are few targeted interventions, with the exception of the Rom Belong programme at KCL, but we must look across the student lifecycle and recognise the many barriers facing GRT pupils. We can learn at other targeted interventions with BME groups. We do need better data to fully understand the inequalities and to design solutions but data alone won't solve these inequalities. We need external buy-in and accountability at a political level, and recognition that discrimination is a key driver in pushing GRT out of school before they ever consider access to Higher Education.



Conference workshops

The conference workshops addressed four thematic areas: education and catch up tuition; media narratives; political and democratic participation; and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Each workshop was chaired and speakers were given five minutes to discuss their areas of work. This was followed by a Q&A and an agreed set of policy recommendations.

Workshop 1: Catch up and recovery planning for GRT pupils in Education

Speakers:

Chair: **Brian Foster** (ACERT, TM Trustee);

Christine Browne (Tutors for GRT project; KCL RomBelong project);

Poornima Karunacadacharan (Education Consultant).

This workshop considered catch up and recovery planning for GRT pupils following school closures. The main issues discussed were high levels of digital exclusion and illiteracy in GRT families which meant many were prevented from helping children with homework due to lack of devices, internet connection, or low levels of literacy. Elective Home Education (EHE) was also considered a major issue as more families had opted for EHE since the reopening of schools after the first lockdown and the reinstating of attendance fines. A major issue for Roma parents is the lack of knowledge of the EU settled status scheme, of which many remain unaware. If people fail to apply for settled status by June 30 2021 they may lose access to education and other services, ultimately this could lead to deportation. Schools need to be proactive in offering support and not becoming a front line for the Home Office as this could lead to disengagement from education.

Workshop 2: Changing the Media Narrative

Speakers:

Chair: **Martin Howe** (Howe & Co Solicitors, TM Trustee);

Josie O'Driscoll (ReportRacismGRT/ GATE Herts);

Nathan Sparkes (Hacked Off);

Mike Doherty (Travellers' Times).

This workshop considered the media narrative surrounding Gypsies and Travellers over the last twenty years and what meaningful action can be taken to stop the media negatively targeting GRT. The delegates discussed the Ofcom complaints system, challenging toxic media narratives, reframing and providing alternative narratives to the mainstream debate, and the limitations of the press regulator IPSO in tackling discrimination. While it was felt mainstream media largely reported negatively on GRT, the new generation of activists were challenging these debates, on social media and other non-traditional media outlets.

Workshop 3: Political and Democratic Participation

Speakers:

Chair: **Lisa Smith** (Travellers' Times);
Hannah Swirsky (Centenary Action Group);
Luke Smith (Activist);
Jessye Berkowitz-Werner (Rene Cassin).

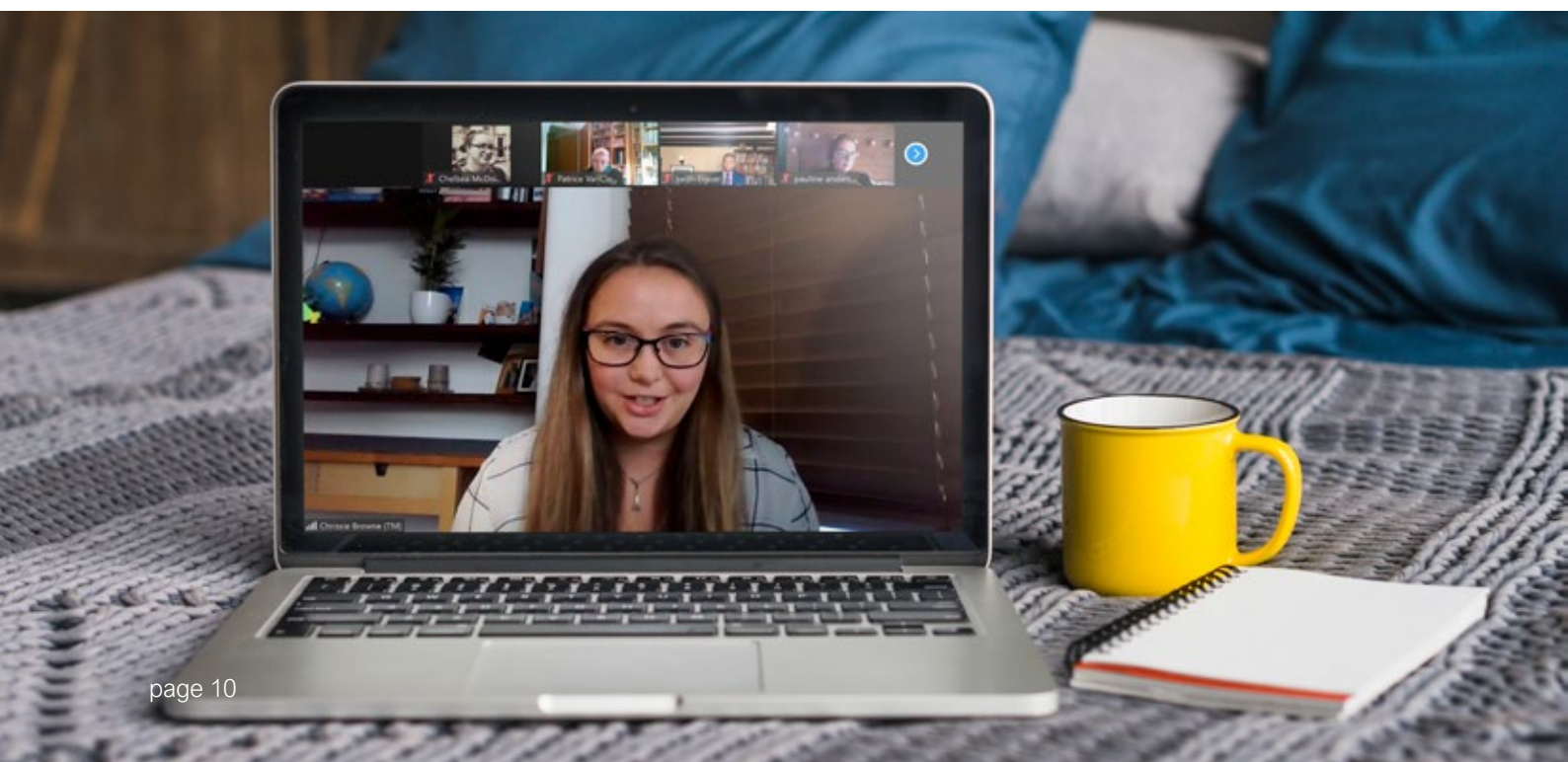
This workshop discussed the issue of anti-Traveller rhetoric in politics and the barriers to reporting anti-Traveller hate speech. Apart from one or two examples, there is no representation of GRT people in parliament/councils, and that it is important to increase the number of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers who run for elected positions. Also discussed was the lack of political education among GRT people and the power of 'strength in numbers' and working collaboratively to tackle anti-Traveller hate speech in politics. Political education was deemed crucial in order to understand how politics 'works'. Solutions to tackle anti-Traveller hate included reframing narratives, focusing on counter-arguments rather than wasting energy fire-fighting mainstream media narratives, and working on a case-by-case basis and getting the "small wins".

Workshop 4: After the Lammy Review - Outcomes for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

Speakers:

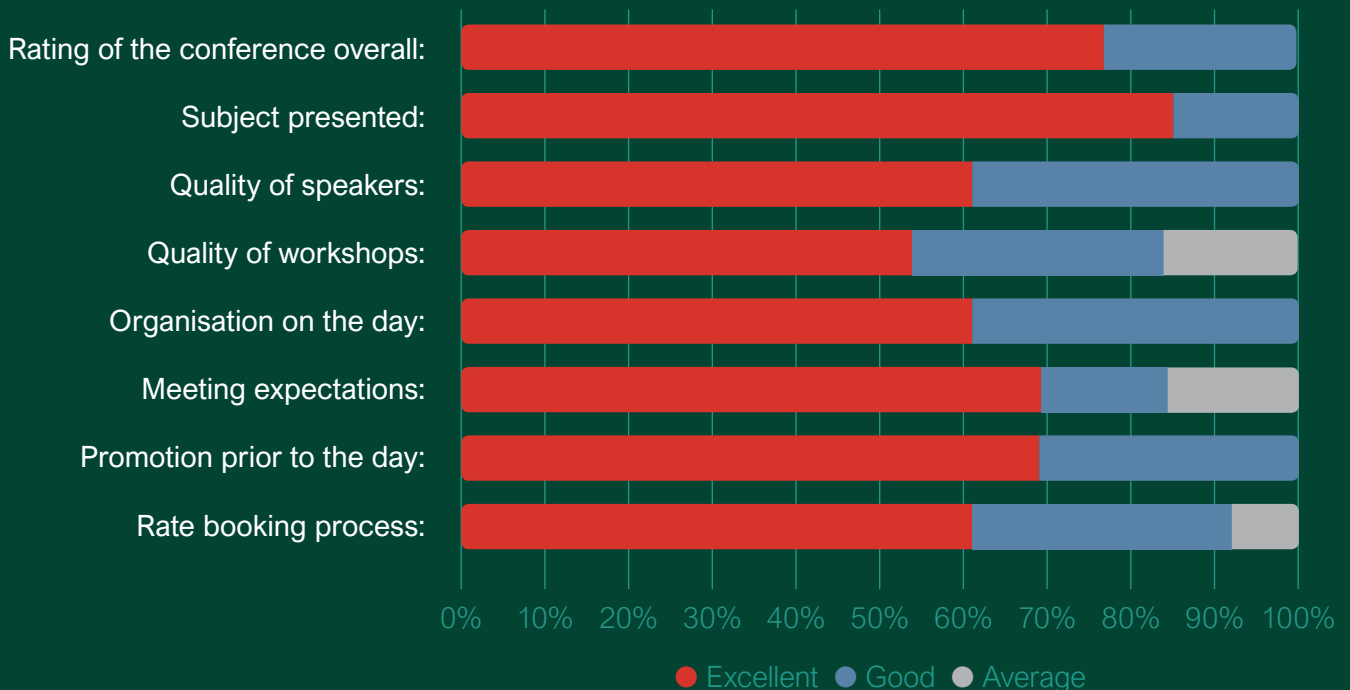
Chair: **George Barrow** (Ministry of Justice);
Joe Browne (TM Trustee);
Khatuna Tsintsadze (Zahid Mubarek Trust);
Chris Baughurst (Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association).

This workshop provided the opportunity to explore some of the issues faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in the criminal justice system. It examined data gaps in the adult estate and how much progress has been made since the Lammy Review was published in 2017, and how far is yet to go. In the workshop delegates highlighted the need for greater education for victims as well as offenders as many don't understand the justice system and struggle to grasp what the different sentences mean. A discussion came up around the problem that the probation service is ripe for development as it struggles to support GRT people. The delegates also explored how education can be given to probation staff and advocating for funding for independent case workers were outlined as things to look at in the future.



Evaluation

133 people attended the conference which is excellent, as it was our first ever digital conference. 77% of delegates felt the whole event was excellent. 85% felt the subjects presented were excellent, and 66% felt the quality of speakers was excellent.



Quotes



“Really enjoyed hearing from Eileen Flynn, what an inspiration. Luke Smith and Chrissie Brown too. Was great to see so many younger members of the GRT community speaking out and taking action”

“As ever great to hear from colleagues pick up on current policy preoccupations etc and attend what is always the ‘go to’ conference in the field”

“I think, given this was a virtual conference, it all went really smoothly but I hope we’re back face to face next year”

“I thought the day ran brilliantly, the IT was easy and well managed”

Christmas card competition

The winner of the Christmas card competition was Bobby age 11.



Save the date

Our next Annual Conference will be on Thursday the 18th of November 2021, location to be confirmed.

Need to get in contact?

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