



Conference Report 2025

Who's Left Behind? Rebuilding Trust, Fairness and Opportunity

“Exclusion by Design, Challenging a System that Fails Our Communities”

January 2026

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with to Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.



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Acknowledgments

The Traveller Movement would like to thank all our speakers, our workshop panellists and participants and would like to give special thanks to:

- Our Co-Chairs Pauline Melvin Anderson OBE and Shaun Mongan for expertly hosting the conference.
- Rt Revd Stephen Conway, Bishop of Lincoln for his keynote speech.
- Our panel speakers: Katharine Quarmby, Jabeer Butt, Danial Balaz, Simon Jones, Roxanne Lashley Allen, Michael Reilly, Charmaine Abdul Karim, Annalise Corcoran and Vigil Bitu.
- Our media and communications representatives: Declan O Driscoll, Anna-Marie Smith-Clark, Malcom McNally
- The community members who contributed to all our discussions throughout the day.



Introduction

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities experience some of the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a huge range of areas, including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime. Despite decades of inquiries, damning reports and policy papers our communities remain persistently left behind and underserved. This is an issue of systemic exclusion.

This conference is an opportunity for Government and policymakers to engage directly with the communities and organisations that work to tackle some of the most persistent inequalities in British society. Through the panel discussions and workshops we aimed to bring the priorities of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people to the forefront of our policy discussions. The outcomes from this Conference will inform much of the work of the Traveller Movement in the year ahead, in particular in our work in policy and public affairs, focusing on what remains our key goal: Change.



Keynote Speech: Rt Rvd Stephen Conway, Bishop of Lincoln

One of the themes The Bishop of Lincoln captured so powerfully at the conference was the idea that the concerns of our communities, and the inequalities they face, are so often overlooked by policymakers because they do not fit neatly into a box. These are not tidy problems, and for government, that can make the solutions appear complex or inconvenient. As he noted, there is a “*tyranny in such tidiness*”.

He urged those in the room, and policymakers across the country, to embrace rather than erase that nuance. By working together and truly listening to authentic voices, many of whom were in that room in Lambeth on a Thursday morning, we can create meaningful and lasting change. For those that were unable to attend the conference we are pleased to publish his speech in full below:

“

It is my privilege and pleasure to be invited to deliver a keynote speech to open The Traveller Movement's Annual Conference.

The theme of this year's conference is 'Who's Left Behind? Rebuilding Trust, Fairness and Opportunity'. As I reflect on this important question, I am struck by a deep sense of worrying déjà vu.

I have been a bishop for nearly 20 years. In that time, I have served communities across the south of England and Midlands – mostly in rural dioceses like Salisbury, Ely and now Lincoln.

I have gotten to know many extraordinary people who are members of Gypsy (Romany), Roma and Traveller communities. The inequalities, discrimination and deliberate invisibilisation these communities face is profound.

I have gotten to know many extraordinary people who are members of Gypsy (Romany), Roma and Traveller communities. The inequalities, discrimination and deliberate invisibilisation these communities face is profound. Everyone here is aware of this.

Policymakers have consistently failed and continue to fail Gypsy (Romany), Roma and Traveller communities. In 2019, the Women and Equalities Committee in Parliament published

a report highlighting systemic discrimination against GRT communities. The Committee's findings pointed to a lack of effort, a lack of leadership and a lack of motivation in government indeed ongoing resistance to develop meaningful strategies to address race equality for GRT communities. It has been 6 years since this publication, and the government's subsequent response. Yet the needle has not moved.

If policy is not reaching the most vulnerable, then it is simply not working. The Equality Act provides the mandate for uncovering and tackling societal and ethnic oppression in all policy areas.

Last month, I hosted the parliamentary launch event of The Traveller Movement's latest report "Tackling Institutionally Coercive Exclusions for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children." At the event, a number of representatives from the education sector based in multiple regions across the country were present, but hardly any parliamentarians. Where were they?

Coercive exclusion can take many forms. It is not just local authorities, or the police, or teachers, or government figures who bully and belittle children from Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities – their own peers do, too.

I find these testimonials chilling. There are children in our country who have left school because adults and authority figures who have a duty of care to protect them turned a blind eye to their mistreatment and abuse.

Far too often, policymakers and civil servants have dismissed the concerns of GRT communities because they don't fit neatly in a box or because engagement with them on their terms to build trust and mutual understanding is perceived to be 'too difficult'. The 'solution', from the

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government's perspective, is to 'tidy'. I would suggest that there is tyranny in such tidiness.

We need a culture of policymaking that embraces – rather than erases – this nuance. GRT communities are distinct from one another, yet even these unique and defining characteristics are misunderstood and misrepresented. Gypsy (Romany), Roma and Irish Travellers are now the only indigenous nomadic communities left.

It is imperative that we work harder to appreciate their histories and cultures – not least through the handing down of oral traditions in story and song.

Individuals from all walks of life across GRT communities have already participated in multiple research projects and evidence-gathering exercises to inform more compassionate and insightful policymaking.

Gypsy (Romany), Roma and Traveller communities have not been silent. They are being ignored.

As a member of the House of Lords, my role is to scrutinise legislation, to hold elected officials to account and to ensure that our system of government is transparent, accessible and fair.

It is not my place to speak for you or on your behalf. Instead, it is my privilege to amplify – to 'pass the mic', as it were – and to work with you to raise your platform even higher so that you can stand to speak into your own lived experience and be heard. You have the knowledge, the insights and the agency – and I honour that.

I am so pleased to be here, and I look forward to learning from each of you during the panel sessions and policy workshops planned today. I am delighted to see so many organisations represented in this room. Knowledge is power, and there is tremendous power in your collective wisdom.

I ask only that each of us reflect on what one or two action points you will bring back to your colleagues, your networks, your MPs, your fellow government officials, your family – indeed, your communities – from today's sessions.

We must hold ourselves mutually accountable so that we can in turn hold policymakers and all those in positions of power to account. This is not only a campaign of anti-racism and awareness: it is nothing less than a campaign of long-overdue justice."

Panel 1: Policy Gaps and Invisible Communities: Who Gets Left Behind?

Katharine Quarmby (Investigative Journalist)

Jabeer Butt (Race Equality Foundation)

Daniel Balaz (Connecting Roma CIC)

Simon Jones (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government)

Roxanne Lasley (Impetus)



Much of the panel discussion focused on the poor quality of data and the need to collect and use it better. Katharine Quarmby emphasised that data is important and the Romani (Gypsy) Roma and Irish Traveller communities get lumped together in one dataset when different communities face different challenges. She spoke about her work in mapping data which showed that Traveller sites tended to be located in difficult and dangerous places and it seems to be a pattern across the country, potentially amounting to environmental racism. Jabeer Butt commented that the 1991 Census did not include Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities although the 2021 census now did.

Simons Jones explained how his responsibility at the Department of Housing Communities and Local Government was for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller community cohesion. He gave some examples (Bradford, Harehills in Leeds and Luton) of where he believed that Local Authorities were working well with the community. However, Jabeer Butt cited the example of the Timpson Review into School Exclusions as an area where policy was still failing. The report attempted to explain away the disparity that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children were more likely to be excluded by suggesting that the cause lay with lifestyle.

The panellists contributions brought a lively discussion in the Q&A section. Residents from the Redbourn Site in Hertfordshire joined us for this discussion and spoke passionately about the



The message for the Traveller Movement was clear: we must do more to highlight and champion examples of good practice. Across the country, effective and compassionate policymaking is happening driven by dedicated organisations, local authorities, and individuals. Shining a light on this positive work is essential if we are to push for change across the rest of the country.



difficulties they are facing following the devastating fire which left multiple families traumatised, displaced, and without homes.

Their contributions underscored the central message of the panel: our communities urgently need a coordinated, cross-government response to the crises they face, especially for those living on sites or seeking to sustain a traditional way of life through site accommodation.

Simon Jones said that he understood the perception cited during the discussion that institutional racism is the experience of many in the community, and that the data seems to support that. However turning to the positive he said that the Affordable Homes programme and new planning policy do provide the architecture to support the Romani (Gypsy) Roma and Irish Traveller communities. It is just a question of how that is being translated on the ground by Local Authorities. He emphasised that we must have some hope, look at where it is working and bring this to life in other places. The message for the Traveller Movement was clear: we must do more to highlight and champion examples of good practice. Across the country, effective and compassionate policymaking is happening driven by dedicated organisations, local authorities, and individuals. Shining a light on this positive work is essential if we are to push for change across the rest of the country.

Panel 2: Around the Campfire: Reclaiming Identity, Belonging and Pride

Michael Reilly (Outdoor Sports and Diversity Inclusion Officer)

Pauline Melvin Anderson OBE (Traveller Movement)

Charmaine Abdul Karim (Pride of Romany)

Annalise Corcoran (Traveller Movement)

Virgil Bitu (Roma Organisation for Training and Advocacy)



Our around the campfire panel is always one of our most important and insightful moments on the day, and this year was no exception. We asked our panellists some difficult questions about identity, authenticity, and belonging. Too often, those who speak out, pursue education, take up leadership, or challenge injustice face not only external discrimination but also internal criticism. Many are told they are “not Traveller enough” or ridiculed for daring to raise their voice. Putting your head above the parapet is never easy and for our communities, it can come at a real personal cost.

Michael Reilly opened the discussion asking the panellists to explore what it means being told to keep your head down about your identity and that we needed to encourage the next generation to be proud of their identity. Pauline Melvin Anderson stated that the French don’t stop being French if they live in England. Charmaine Abdul Karim said that all the time she was always told never deny what you were, but that she had been accused on Tik Tok of not being Romany enough.

The panel discussed how the Romani, (gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities are lumped together in one dataset (GRT) by Government and the important need to separate cultures and celebrate individual communities.

Michael Reilly asked the panel about whether they felt there was a perception that being educated or successful means that you have lost your roots? Annalise Corcoran responded



One of our panellists reflected powerfully about her journey charting her own path, choosing faith, education, work and the difficulties she found breaking the mould. She reminded us that being an Irish Traveller is just one part of her identity: her life, like the lives of so many in our communities, is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a single label.



that it was dependant on how confident you were as an individual. She believed that the younger generation were taking a step forward in education and the suggestion that if you work or are in education you are not a traveller was rubbish.

One of our panellists reflected powerfully about her journey charting her own path, choosing faith, education, work and the difficulties she found breaking the mould. She reminded us that being an Irish Traveller is just one part of her identity: her life, like the lives of so many in our communities, is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a single label.

Michael asked Virgil on the panel about his views on the Roma genocide in World War Two that no one talks about? Virgil said that the Imperial War Museum previously opened a Holocaust exhibition and they had set up an advisory group for the exhibition. Unfortunately due to the lack of Roma representation out of 15,000 articles exhibited only 5 mentioned Roma. The Roma community was still not fairly represented in decision making.

Charmaine Abdul Karim emphasised the importance of making spaces for young people who are game changers, stating that “education is power”.

Michael Reilly concluded that everyone on the panel here had faced challenges, but overcoming these will make it easier for the next generation. We want to thank all the community members who spoke, listened, and engaged with this panel. We look forward to gathering around the campfire with you all again next year.

Workshop 1: Opportunity Gaps – Education, Employment and Exclusion

Workshop One focused on education, employment, and exclusion, particularly for Romani, Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller communities. Olivia Hammond introduced the panel, including Lib Peck from the Mayor of London's violence reduction unit, Amy Price from Coram Children's Legal Centre, and Polly, an education consultant.

Key points included the need for legal frameworks to shift from punishment to inclusive support in school exclusions, the importance of early intervention, and the role of community engagement.





The discussion emphasized the need for better funding and targeted action to keep these communities in mainstream education. The workshop discussed the use of part-time timetables, or “flexi schooling,” in education. The panel agreed on the importance of inclusive education and the need for professionals to support children effectively. The session concluded with a positive note on the potential for positive outcomes when flexi schooling is used appropriately.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Review school policies and practices to ensure they are not inadvertently discriminating against or excluding Romani, Gypsy Roma, and Irish Traveller students, and implement more holistic, trauma-informed approaches.**
- **Advocate for increased funding and resources for dedicated community outreach workers and liaisons, similar to the role of “Eileen” described in the meeting.**
- **Collaborate with Romani, Gypsy Roma, and Irish Traveller community organizations to develop inclusive educational and employment strategies that centre the voices and experiences of these communities.**
- **Reach out to local colleges to explore introducing pre-apprenticeship and traineeship programs for Romani, Gypsy Roma, and Irish Traveller youth.**
- **Develop cultural competency training for professionals working with Romani, Gypsy Roma, and Irish Traveller communities, ensuring it is co-created with community members.**



“It was an inspiring event, thank you.” Director of Education,
Pickwick Academy Trust

Workshop 2: **Poverty by Design – When Policy Fails Marginalised Communities**

Workshop Two looked at the big picture context of child poverty in the UK. Panellists included David Enright who worked with a law firm (Howe & Co) who had previously worked with the Travellers Movement on taking a legal case against Wetherspoons to Court for refusing entry to Travellers, Joe Howells from Buttle UK, which made crisis grants to those in need and Tom a representative from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).

Joe Howells stated that providing crisis grants was part of the solution, but also part of the problem as they were often no more than a “sticking plaster”. The Government provided crisis grants of about £850 million a year but this was only a drop in the ocean compared to the need. The question was always asked if the money is being spent in the right way. Organisations really want to deliver grants but don't want to be sticking plasters when the system is actively working against young people. We need to look at a future system that works for those most in need.





Tom from the CPAG emphasised that there is not just a moral case for addressing child poverty but an economic one as well. Child poverty costs £40billion to the Government in providing additional services such as increased demand on healthcare services. The Government ends up spending more, not less revenue. Pushing parents into work does not solve the problems. Since the foundation of the welfare state people have always needed support to get the best start in life and what works is investment in state support. However, since 2010 and austerity he estimated that £50 billion has been stripped out. He believed that scrapping the 2 child benefit cap and benefit cap would both be policies that would positively impact Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children and was hopeful to see changes announced at the Budget the following week.

The workshop broke into groups of two to discuss the question *“What is the biggest lever for change that could impact child poverty?”*

After discussion and feedback the workshop agreed the following:

KEY TAKEAWAY

- **To continue to lobby the Chancellor on behalf of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller communities for the abolition of the 2 child benefit cap and benefit cap as the most effective and immediate policy lever to lift children out of poverty.**



“Thank you very much for an insightful, informative and thought-provoking day.” Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Education Officer, Buckinghamshire Council

Workshop 3: Criminalised Communities – Building Fairer Justice Systems

Workshop Three focused on the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities and how they are overrepresented at every stage of the system. Grace Preston, Senior Policy Officer at the Traveller Movement chaired the workshop and she was joined by panellists Caroline Hunter of the University of York and Chief Superintendent Anna Maxwell of the National Police Chiefs Council.

The workshop discussed the blanket, pre-emptive and disproportionate injunctions facing Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities, to build on the existing court order that they have to be a “last resort”. Currently London Gypsy and Travellers are challenging each injunction that comes to their attention individually – this is costly.

The group discussed how often MPs and Councillors actually heighten tensions and fuel discrimination against the community, for instance during community events. It was felt that there was clear evidence of their role in heightening tension visible on social media and there should be more robust procedures for holding individuals to account.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Borough wide injunctions should be used as a last resort.**
- **More accountability and responsibility for MPs and Councillors.**
- **Cultural diversity and better representation in the workforce.**
- **Better training for police staff.**
- **Scale the independent advisory group model that was in place in Leicester.**

The group noted that it can be challenging for community members to be open about their ethnicity when they join policing. Concerns were raised about facing a hostile work environment and that it places individuals in the difficult position of policing their own communities. Any retention and recruitment efforts need to focus on increasing the Romani (Gypsy) Roma and Irish Travellers trust in the police and tackling discrimination in the workforce are the top two priorities.

It was also felt that there needed to be better cultural competence and humility training for police staff, including moving away from the catch all “GRT” term, like they have moved away from using the “BAME” term.



“Today’s event was a complete success. I have been attending Traveller Movement Conferences for about 15 years. This was definitely the best.” Partner, Howe & Co

Workshop 4: Empowering Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller Youth through Advocacy

This workshop aimed to explore the importance of advocacy and discussed how young people can become confident advocates for themselves and their communities. The workshop was chaired by Lourdes O'Brian of the Traveller Movement with panellists Yasmina, Alina and Geraldine.

In the first part of the workshop speakers discussed the importance of youth advocacy. Geraldine highlighted that community advocacy is too often led by people outside the community. She stressed the need for more authentic representation, allowing young advocates freedom without restrictive “boundaries.” and acknowledging that empowerment is a continuous journey. Alina shared that her experience of bullying motivated her to become a voice for younger generations and Yasmina encouraged young people: “*Don't be afraid, love it, be proud of who you are.*”

The panel reflected on their experiences of education with Lourdes sharing her personal experience of pursuing college despite family resistance and being expected to leave school at Year 9. Geraldine asked a group of schoolgirls about their understanding of youth advocacy; they said they did not know, highlighting a knowledge gap. Lourdes provided examples of Traveller women advocates such as Chantelle Fury, who openly challenges discrimination. A schoolteacher emphasised: the importance of long-term goals for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller students and the need for persistence, support, and stronger partnerships with organisations like the Traveller Movement. Charmaine noted that while many cultures are celebrated in schools, Romani (Gypsy) and Traveller children often are not. She called for more recognition and inclusive environments.



The discussion then turned to overcoming barriers and suggestions from the audience included; more graduate schemes and shadowing programmes to motivate young people, allowing youth the freedom to make mistakes and learn independently, providing practical tools and support aligned with young people's interests (e.g., beauty, trades, arts) acknowledging and celebrating ongoing youth work, which is often overlooked and encouraging young people to identify their inner motivations and goals to build confidence. Lourdes discussed the positive impact of the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) and its strong community representation.

A question was asked what motivated the speakers to become advocates? Alina stated she received no encouragement but pursued advocacy because she knew its value. Yasmina shared her dislike for school but found purpose in college, eventually becoming an advocate to help others avoid her struggles. When asked if it was difficult, Alina confirmed that it was but she persevered.

Finally the workshop discussed what support is needed. The school teacher recommended that schools should assign a specific staff member responsible for working with Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities to build trust with parents and deepen cultural understanding.

Schools should create dedicated spaces and displays within schools that celebrate these cultures proudly and ensure equal effort in representing these communities as is given to others.

When asked what non-community members should understand if such school displays were created Charmaine emphasised the need for greater public education on Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller history and that this history is deeply tied to British history. Schools should incorporate it into the curriculum, as children from these communities often learn this at home but others do not.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Trust must be strengthened between schools and parents.**
- **Schools need to take proactive steps to create safe, welcoming spaces that honour Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller identity and history.**
- **Youth advocacy must be expanded so young people can reach their goals and fulfil their potential.**



“Just wanted to say thank you for a fabulous conference. Another success. Well done to you all for the hard work and inspiration. See you at the next one!” Student, University of East Anglia

Conclusion

Who's Left Behind underscored again that the issues facing Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities are often labelled as “*too difficult*” or “*Too niche*” by many policymakers – leaving the communities chronically left behind by legislation and interventions which are supposed to serve the most vulnerable in society. Placing the most disadvantaged communities at the heart of future government action on equality is the only way to ensure no one is left behind.

Ethnic data collection and disaggregation remained a common theme running throughout the conference.

It is important to remember that there was a message of hope seen through the examples of good practice highlighted at the Conference. Across the country, effective and compassionate policymaking is happening driven by dedicated organisations, local authorities, and individuals. The 2025 Conference focused on identifying the root causes of the problems but also identified and highlighted the examples of good practice that if we can replicate elsewhere can ensure that no one is left behind in the future.





CPD Certified

The 2025 Conference marked a major milestone for The Traveller Movement as, for the first time, it was CPD certified. This achievement reflects the high quality, professionalism and impact of the work, and the strong commitment to learning and development across our sector. The conference was a huge success, bringing together practitioners, partners and community members to share knowledge, celebrate achievements and strengthen collective action. It provided an excellent opportunity to recognise and celebrate the vital work we do at The Traveller Movement, while reinforcing our role as leaders in advancing rights, inclusion and best practice.



Conference Evaluation in Numbers



135
Attendees



Venue facilities
67.24%

said excellent and the rest
said good and average



Whole Event
84.48%
said excellent and
15.52% said good



**Meeting
expectations**
81.03%

said excellent and 17.24
said good



**Quality of
workshops**
70.69%
said excellent and
29.31% said good



Booking process
79.31

said excellent and 18.97
said good



**Subjects
presented**
78.18%
said excellent and only
1.82% said average



**Organisation
on the day**
84.48%

said excellent and
15.52% said good

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SAVE THE DATE

Our next Annual Conference
will be on Thursday 26th
November 2026



For more information about the Traveller
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