

APPG launch event report: Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy (2026–2030)



All Party Parliamentary Group for
Gypsies, Travellers and Roma



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Introduction

On 2nd July 2026, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma (APPG) hosted an event in parliament, to launch the new Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy.

This report is intended to give a summary of the session. The event was chaired by APPG Chair Mary Foy MP and organised by APPG Secretariat Friends, Families and Travellers in partnership with the Council of Europe and the panel of speakers. The event welcomed community representatives (including some young people), parliamentarians, community and voluntary sector organisations, civil servants, local authorities and academics.

Mary K Foy MP's opening speech emphasised the urgent need to reaffirm equality and human rights amid rising social division, polarised political discourse and increasing hostility towards minority communities across Europe. Mary called for commitments to be matched by sustained action, stressing that lasting progress for Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities depends on political will, partnership and effective implementation.

An overview of the Strategy, from Council of Europe representatives

Eleni Tsetsekou, Head of the Roma and Travellers Division, and Georgios Stamatis, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe General Rapporteur on Roma and Travellers, introduced the Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy (2026–2030), which aims to strengthen equality, participation and inclusion by bringing together institutions, allies and communities.

Eleni and Georgios highlighted key priorities, including ensuring that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities can share their own histories and lived experiences, promoting these histories in education, and building stronger partnerships with parliamentarians, educators, academics and the media.

They also reflected on the Council of Europe's 50 years of work promoting Roma, Gypsy and Traveller rights,

emphasising the importance of meaningful community participation in shaping its work. They called for stronger engagement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK and concluded by expressing the Council of Europe's commitment to deepening cooperation with UK stakeholders, including the current Government, to support the implementation of the Strategy.

Speakers' contributions

Following the Council of Europe representatives, the panel of speakers included:

- **Allison Hulmes**, Senior Lecturer at Swansea University, Romani and Traveller representative at the International Federation of Social Workers
- **Esther Stubbs**, Associate Lecturer Buckinghamshire New University, GTRSB into Schools and Higher Education Pledges Lead
- **Mihai Bica**, Policy & Campaigns Coordinator, Roma Support Group
- **Josie O'Driscoll**, CEO, GATE Herts

Speakers welcomed the launch of the Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy and stressed the importance of using it as a catalyst for action across the UK. They asserted that the Inclusion Strategy provides a valuable framework for tackling the longstanding inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and renewed calls for a comprehensive, cross-government UK Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy, bringing together coordinated action across education, health, housing, employment, social services, participation and equality.

A central theme throughout the discussion was the need to address anti-Gypsyism and discrimination, which speakers described as one of the most persistent and socially accepted forms of racism. They highlighted how prejudice continues to affect the everyday lives of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, limiting access to public services, employment, housing and education, while also having significant impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

Josie O'Driscoll, CEO of GATE Herts, spoke about the devastating impact of discrimination on mental health, highlighting the tragic loss of nine members of the community to suicide in the space of a week, including an 18-year-old young man. Josie also highlighted evidence from GATE Herts' Report Racism GRT initiative, which supports victims of hate crime and discrimination, showing that 78% of respondents had experienced hate or discrimination during their lifetime. She called for greater recognition of the cumulative trauma experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Josie acknowledged the strong support of APPG allies but highlighted the challenge of engaging ministers and MPs who are not already involved in Gypsy and Traveller issues. Josie stressed the importance of broadening attendance at APPG events to reach decision-makers whose greater awareness and engagement could have the greatest impact.

Particular concern was raised about the disproportionate representation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in children's social care systems. **Allison Hulmes**, Senior Lecturer at Swansea University, Romani and Traveller representative at the International Federation of Social Workers, stressed that these outcomes reflect structural discrimination rather than inherent problems with parenting.

Allison highlighted ongoing research into the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in kinship care as an example of community-led research designed to influence future policy. The study has been co-produced with community peer researchers as equal partners in knowledge creation and is being closely followed by the Department for Education and the Kinship Care Ambassador.

Initiatives such as Report Racism GRT and the kinship care research are examples of effective community-led action. Speakers emphasised that these initiatives demonstrate the value of trust, co-production and meaningful participation, while also showing that lasting change requires sustained government commitment and partnership with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Speakers also highlighted a range of wider policy challenges, including poor health outcomes, educational inequalities, barriers to employment and suitable accommodation, and increasing levels of anti-Roma rhetoric and hate crime. They emphasised that these inequalities are structural rather than individual, requiring systemic responses that embed accountability, community participation and lived experience into policymaking.

Mihai Bica, Policy and Campaigns Coordinator at Roma Support Group, stressed the importance of improving awareness and understanding of the diversity of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities among policymakers and public services. For example, misconceptions such as assuming all Roma are Romanian or confusing the different housing needs of Roma and Gypsy and Traveller communities, can lead to ineffective policies and wasted resources. Mihai noted that a strategic, coordinated approach would enable services to respond more effectively to community needs rather than reacting only when crises arise.

Esther Stubbs, Associate Lecturer at Buckinghamshire New University and GTRSB into Schools and Higher Education Pledges Lead, reflected on the strong alignment between the Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy and work across education and public services. Esther emphasised the interconnected importance of raising awareness, advancing equal rights and access and strengthen participation for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Drawing on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Schools and Higher Education Pledge, she highlighted the importance of moving beyond awareness-raising to sustained, relational approaches to inclusion that are developed alongside communities.

Esther also stressed increasing the visibility of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories and experiences in education and ensuring community voices, particularly those of young people, shape policy and practice.

Esther concluded that lasting progress depends on creating environments where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are recognised, respected and able to participate fully in society.

Davide Bargna, representing the Scottish Government¹, outlined how the priorities of Scotland's Anti-Racism Delivery Plan align with the Council of Europe's Strategy. He highlighted a number of initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Scotland.

Speakers concluded by urging parliamentarians, UK government and civil servants to work in partnership with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to implement the Council of Europe's Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy in the UK. They called for stronger political leadership, cross-government coordination, meaningful community involvement and robust accountability to tackle inequalities and ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities can participate fully and equally in society.



Conclusion

The event marked an important opportunity to bring together the Council of Europe, parliamentarians, government representatives, community organisations and campaigners, legal and academic sectors, civil servants and other stakeholders to discuss how the Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy (2026–2030) can be translated into meaningful action in the UK.

Participant feedback indicated that the event increased awareness of the Strategy, strengthened understanding of the challenges faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and provided participants with opportunities to consider how they can contribute to its implementation.

Speakers emphasised that the Inclusion Strategy should be seen not as an end point, but as a framework for sustained collaboration, accountability and action. The event highlighted the importance of meaningful community participation, strong political leadership and partnership between institutions and communities to address structural inequalities and tackle discrimination and anti-Gypsyism.

The Council of Europe described the event as the beginning of renewed cooperation with UK stakeholders, expressing its commitment to strengthening engagement in the UK and working alongside communities, policymakers and allies to advance the aims of the Inclusion Strategy and support lasting change.

¹ Davide Bargna was unable to attend the event, but his prepared statement was delivered on his behalf by Mary K Foy MP.

Further reading

[Strategy for Roma and Traveller Inclusion \(2026–2030\)](#)

Council of Europe

[Hate: "As regular as rain"](#)

A pilot research project into the psychological effects of hate crime on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, Margaret Greenfields and Carol Rogers, commissioned by **GATE Herts**, 2020

[Ballymena 2025: One Year On](#)

Roma Support Group, 2026

[Kicking the can down the road: The planning and provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England 1960-2023](#)

Friends, Families and Travellers with **Dr Simon Ruston MRTPI**, 2023.

The Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boaters' Pledge: [for Schools](#) | [Higher Education Pledge](#)

Buckingham New University

[Romani and Traveller Rights, Social Work, and the Struggle Against Antigypsyism in Europe](#)

Dan Allen and **Allison Hulmes**, 2026

[Realities Checked Study](#)

An account of the crime and criminal justice experiences of Gypsies and Travellers in England since the 1960s.

University of Plymouth, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of East Anglia

Appendix 1: Participants' Feedback

Feedback from participants indicated a strong level of engagement with the Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy (2026–2030) and the themes discussed during the event. 21 responses were received. Before attending the event, respondents had varying levels of awareness of the Council of Europe Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy. Around one-third were familiar with the Strategy and its objectives, just over half were aware of it but not familiar with the details, and a smaller proportion had not been aware of the Strategy before receiving the event invitation.

Respondents reported improved understanding across all areas covered by the Strategy. The strongest improvements related to examples of good practice, approaches that support inclusion, and the contribution different organisations can make to delivering the Strategy's objectives, with 13 of the 21 respondents giving the highest rating (5) for improved understanding.

Participants also reported greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities, and the importance of tackling anti-Gypsyism, discrimination and prejudice. All three priority areas of the Strategy were identified as relevant to participants' work or interests, with each selected by around one-third of respondents.

Many respondents identified opportunities to apply the Strategy in their own work. Planned actions included raising awareness among colleagues, aligning policy discussions with the Strategy's priorities, promoting greater awareness and action among social workers, strengthening partnership working, supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller representation at local and national levels, and applying the Strategy to work on health needs assessments, anti-racism policy, housing, cultural recognition and wider health partnerships.

One participant also noted that the event had encouraged them to engage more with local MPs to strengthen support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations.

Main takeaways from feedback respondents

Participants emphasised the importance of continued collaboration and collective action to tackle anti-Gypsyism, discrimination and inequalities, and to ensure that the Inclusion Strategy is translated into practical action at both national and local levels. They also valued gaining a clearer understanding of the Council of Europe's Strategy and hearing examples of implementation, particularly from Wales and Scotland, while stressing the importance of meaningful involvement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in policy development and decision-making.

Networking opportunities and hearing directly from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities were highlighted as particularly valuable. Some participants also expressed a desire for a longer session to allow more time for discussion, networking and exploration of the Strategy's implementation. Respondents also called for greater support for implementation, especially in health, housing and local government.

One respondent noted that although there are examples of strong local practice, progress often depends on a small number of committed individuals and organisations and argued for stronger UK Government leadership and coordination. The contrast between approaches in England and Northern Ireland compared with Wales and Scotland was also highlighted.

Appendix 2: Event agenda

	13.00-13.20	Tea and coffee available
Mary Foy MP , APPG Chair	13.20-13.30	Welcome from event chair
Eleni Tsetsekou , Head of the Roma and Travellers Division and Secretary to the ADI-ROM, the Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues. Georgios Stamatis , PACE General Rapporteur on Roma and Travellers	13.30-13.45	An overview of the Strategy and the requirements of Council of Europe members
Davide Bargna Policy Manager, Strategic Team for Anti-Racism (Directorate for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights), Scottish Government	13.45-13.50	Scottish Government commitments to improving outcomes for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities in Scotland and how these align with the Strategy objectives
Allison Hulmes , Senior Lecturer at Swansea University, Romani and Traveller representative at the International Federation of Social Workers	13.50-13.55	The importance of the themes across the Strategy and need for action, and a reflection of progress in Wales to tackle racism and discrimination and improve outcomes
Esther Stubbs , Associate Lecturer Buckinghamshire New University, GTRSB into Schools and Higher Education Pledges Lead	13.55-14.00	An example of civil society action to support delivery of the Strategy: 'The Pledge', an initiative for schools and higher education to create inclusive environments for Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showman and Boater learners
Mihai Bica , Policy & Campaigns Coordinator, Roma Support Group	14.00-14.05	The importance of Strategy Priority 1: Increasing and promoting knowledge and awareness about Roma and Traveller communities to combat anti-Gypsyism and prejudice, while fostering a sense of pride in Roma and Traveller identities
Josie O'Driscoll , CEO, GATE Herts	14.05-14.10	Experiences of racism and prejudice and the need for meaningful change to tackle this
	14.10-14.30	Q&A
	14.30-14.35	Concluding thoughts from event chair
	14.35-14.55	Networking



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The Council of Europe is an international Strasbourg-based organisation, set up to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It includes 46 European countries and is home to the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights – among many other things. www.coe.int



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The APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma provides a forum for parliamentarians concerned about issues facing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities and seeks to address these issues and challenge inequalities. As Secretariat, Friends, Families and Travellers supports this work, ensuring members of the APPG are briefed on these issues.

www.gypsy-traveller.org/our-flagship-projects/appg/



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Friends, Families and Travellers

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is a leading national charity working to end discrimination against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life.

www.gypsy-traveller.org