



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Equalities and Human Rights Committee

**Thursday 4 June 2020**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**  
**9<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2020, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP)

\*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con)

\*Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Claire Frew (Homeless Network Scotland)

Michael Matovu (Radiant and Brighter)

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)

Suzanne Munday (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project)

Khaleda Noon (Intercultural Youth Scotland)

Trishna Singh (Sikh-Sanjog)

Lynne Tammi (Article 12 in Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Claire Menzies

**LOCATION**

Virtual Meeting



# Scottish Parliament

## Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Thursday 4 June 2020

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

### Covid-19: Impact on Equalities and Human Rights

**The Convener (Ruth Maguire):** Good morning and welcome to the 9th meeting in 2020 of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee.

I thank all members and witnesses for their attendance today in these difficult circumstances. I also thank parliamentary staff, particularly the broadcasting office, for all their hard work in setting up this remote formal meeting.

The committee recognises the challenging times in which we are living and we pay tribute to all the organisations in the equalities and human rights sector for their continued dedicated service and hard work.

We do not want to place undue pressure on anyone during this public health emergency, but it is important that parliamentary scrutiny and accountability continue. I am grateful to the witnesses and others for finding the time to answer our questions and for the way that they and other bodies have responded so quickly to our call for views. Responses to our on-going call for views are on our website.

Our main item of business is our second evidence session on how Covid-19 has impacted on equalities and human rights. We have two panels. The witnesses on the first panel are: Trishna Singh, OBE, who is the founder and director of Sikh-Sanjog; Khaleda Noon, who is the founder and executive director of Intercultural Youth Scotland; and Michael Matovu, who is the founder and director of Radiant and Brighter. You are all very welcome.

I refer members to paper 1, which is a private paper by the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Unusually, because of the challenges of managing a virtual meeting such as this, we will take questions in a pre-arranged order. I will invite members to ask questions, and then I will invite the witnesses to respond, which will also be in a pre-arranged order. If you have nothing to add in answering a question, simply say so—please do not feel the need to contribute. I will then go back to each member for any follow-up questions. Once

that has been completed, I will invite the next questioner to ask their questions and so on until the evidence session is concluded.

I expect the first session to last for no more than one hour. Please keep questions and answers succinct. Wait for me to announce you before you begin to ask your question or provide an answer. That will give the broadcasting staff a few seconds to operate your microphones.

I will ask the first question. How is the community that you provide services for being affected by the pandemic and by the measures that have been put in place to deal with it and keep people safe?

**Trishna Singh (Sikh-Sanjog):** We transitioned from being a face-to-face organisation to being an online organisation within 10 days of the lockdown being put in place. We provide services to more than 100 individuals in Edinburgh. Some 95 per cent are from the Sikh community; the rest are from other ethnic backgrounds.

We provide a package of support, which includes food parcels. We have been linking with the food banks. Previously, there was no provision of Asian food supplies. We have intervened and put that provision in place.

We have introduced a new befriending phone call service through which we are supporting women across Edinburgh. We are still running our youth groups, which keep in contact with around 20 to 25 young people weekly.

There has been a big increase in the number of women experiencing domestic violence and abuse. We support 15 women from our small community in Edinburgh by phone; we are also linking them up with other services that we consider would be helpful to them. We have created an in-house counselling service to support women by phone. That includes our staff, because there is a lot of stress for the women involved. Sikh-Sanjog has put all those measures into place.

There is no Sikh body in Scotland for the wider Sikh community. The Sikh Federation UK and the Sikh Network, which are based in England, have been asking questions of the Scottish Government about the data on Covid. Although there has been a Sikh community in Scotland for more than 80 years, there is no system to help with the vulnerabilities that have been reported by leading medical journals about people from the Sikh background and which the Scottish Government has not considered properly. That has now been brought into focus by the Covid outbreak. The Scottish health bodies and the Scottish Government have no idea of the number of Sikhs who have tested positive for Covid or the number of deaths of Sikhs from the disease in Scotland.

**The Convener:** Colleagues definitely wish to probe that area in more detail—[*Temporary loss of sound*]. We will come on to that specific issue. Would you like to add anything about how your organisation has adapted or how the community has been affected?

**Trishna Singh:** The closure of the Sikh temple in Edinburgh has affected the community immensely, as it is a place where people congregate every week. On Monday, I contacted the president of the gurdwara in Edinburgh. They have had no guidance or support from any authority with regard to closing the premises, or opening them. They are relying on information from the Sikh Federation and the Sikh Network in England, which are sending information about what they are doing in England. The gurdwara is using that as a guideline, but there has been no contact with Sikh gurdwaras from any authority in Scotland. That is quite concerning.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that.

I put the same questions to Khaleda Noon.

**Khaleda Noon (Intercultural Youth Scotland):** Thank you, convener. All Intercultural Youth Scotland services are available online, including on Instagram and Twitter, so that people can see what we are doing. I will not go into everything that we are doing, as this platform is a time for us to show which groups and individuals are impacted by Covid-19.

It is difficult for me to begin without mentioning what black people are experiencing in the world and the trauma that is being seen and felt by young black, Asian and minority ethnic Scots. Throughout our evidence on Covid-19, Intercultural Youth Scotland makes a plea for you to keep in your mind the devastating impact that those experiences are having on young black Scots.

Intercultural Youth Scotland has been working in consultation with our youth anti-racist ambassadors and their peers during the current Covid-19 crisis. They are commissioning a robust report on the impact of Covid-19, with a particular focus on education and young BAME school leavers aged 16-plus, in collaboration with the Anti-Racist Educator and the Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators. The report and recommendations will be available at the end of July.

We need to recognise and acknowledge inequality in the services that are provided. The number of young BAME Scots has increased in Scotland, but unfortunately schools and services have not been ready to serve them, which highlights the need for practitioners to be prepared.

Dedicated funding for anti-racist mental health services and education is limited, which has contributed to the lack of available resources that are devoted to young BAME Scots. One recent example is that, despite Intercultural Youth Scotland's youth anti-racist ambassadors campaigning hard over the past year, local authority grants for children and families have not funded adequate BAME youth provision for 14 to 19-year-olds in a city area. They have delivered four deputations and commissioned the "In sight" report, which is a robust collection of the experiences and perceptions of young BAME Scots in Scottish secondary schools.

As a result of the four deputations, councillors listened and highlighted a gap in BAME youth services for 14 to 19-year-olds. However, despite many meetings and deputations highlighting case studies of racist hate crime and attacks in Scottish schools and evidence of underreporting and of teachers not following procedures, the local authority has failed to dedicate any funding in that area for the next three years, particularly in relation to services that focus on black young people. They have only social media to depend on. More than ever, they are fearful of the police, and they are frustrated about their education and about not having basic rights and opportunities. There is a growing anger.

Apart from IYS, such services are non-existent in Edinburgh. The impact of Covid-19 and the murders of innocent black people will have devastating consequences.

**The Convener:** Thank you. There was a lot in that, and we will get into the specifics later.

I ask Michael Matovu the same question. How has the community that you provide services for been affected by the pandemic and the lockdown? Could you reflect briefly on any of the adaptations that you have had to make to your services during the pandemic?

**Michael Matovu (Radiant and Brighter):** One of the issues that has been significant for us and has affected our communities is value. For a very long time, we have highlighted the skills and qualifications brought by our communities, by which I mean the BAME communities.

People come here with skills and qualifications, but they are often not appreciated enough. The current Covid situation has highlighted more of the issues that we have been talking about for a very long time. The people we support work in low-income jobs or are on zero-hours contracts, either in factories or in jobs that involve manual labour. In the current situation, they are an easy group of people to lay off and leave without employment. Most of those people cannot work from home because they work in factories. Even if they were

given the opportunity to work from home, they do not have laptops or are not educated in using the technology.

We have found that Covid has hit our communities really hard. The approach that we have adopted is to provide online services to our communities—most of our services are now online. We also went the extra mile at the beginning of the pandemic. We realised that most of the food provision that was out there was not culturally sensitive. People were going to food banks, but the food banks were providing food that was not culturally sensitive. I will share the story of a single mum, whom we contacted to ask how she and her child were coping and getting on with life. She told me that she was going to a food bank and getting food but that they could not eat it. They had tins of food in the cupboard, but they could not eat it. Our organisation therefore decided to help, although we did not apply for funding. Normally, it is very difficult to get funding for such things for BAME communities, so we decided to use the few funds that our organisation had to reach out to communities. We went to African and Asian shops to buy food that suits the communities.

We also decided to provide laptops to some of the people we support. People are in isolation and might be failing to engage with what is going on. The money is not there, so we decided to loan our organisation's laptops to some of the people in the community, so that we could reach out to them and they could stay connected with what is happening.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That was very helpful.

**Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP):** Khaleda Noon was quite correct to make the point about the Black Lives Matter movement. We need to shine a light on race inequality at home, as well as inequalities overseas, and act to address it.

The Runnymede Trust has highlighted that Covid will increase the risk of and exacerbate race inequalities. I am particularly interested in the employment aspects. We must bear in mind that employment is a reserved area, but I would be interested to hear the views of the panel, starting with Michael Matovu, on what more the Scottish Government could do in that regard. Perhaps we could then hear from Khaleda Noon about the impacts on young people, whom we know are always hit doubly hard by recessions. The committee would like to hear about the experiences of women, too.

09:45

**Michael Matovu:** The Scottish Government needs to do more work on the education side of

things. Normally our focus would be on race equality but, obviously, right now people are talking about racism, too. There needs to be more education and more Scottish Government investment in tackling both areas.

Employers and training providers often say that they want to support people from ethnic minorities to get into employment, but they lack understanding of the cultural differences. We might succeed in supporting people into employment, but they then face challenges because of their employers' lack of education and awareness.

The Scottish Government therefore needs to create a lot of awareness and to provide employers with targeted support on racism. More important, though, it needs to invest in education on such matters. In supporting people to get into employment, the main issue that our organisation has faced has been a lack of funding. We often find that, regardless of whether they are in the public, private or third sector, employers say that they are keen to take on people from ethnic minority communities, but they do not want to go through the education aspects because they do not have the money to invest in doing so. There needs to be investment from the Scottish Government to support employers and other people who want to take on people from those communities.

**Khaleda Noon:** Education is key. There is evidence that young BAME Scots will face challenges in receiving estimated grades from teachers. Schools in less affluent areas will not have the previous performance privileges. As a result, there is a greater risk that pupils from lower socioeconomic or ethnic minority backgrounds will be disadvantaged. As has already been highlighted in the race equality action plan that was issued before the Covid outbreak and the recent murders of innocent black people, young BAME Scots are at more risk of leaving school with no positive destination and no support to assist them in making timely and positive decisions, as there is a lack of culturally appropriate street-style services to support them.

In November 2019, Intercultural Youth Scotland launched a first-of-its kind report on the perceptions and experiences of young BAME Scots in Scottish schools. It was based on an extensive survey, which was led by our anti-racist ambassadors and covered their peers in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The report highlighted a lack of trust in and engagement with teachers on race issues and a lack of sufficient anti-racist education, especially among women. The full report and recommendations can be accessed on our website.

Key statistics clearly show the existence of bias and that if someone is a person of colour they are

more likely to come out at the bottom. That inevitably leads to young people who are going through transitional periods making the wrong choices or experiencing mental health issues, and to many other costly and destructive outcomes. Again, those factors were highlighted before the outbreak of Covid-19 and the recent murders of innocent black people, furthering the inequality and damaging the human rights of young BAME Scots. They are in a dangerous situation that will cause structural disadvantage to deepen implicit bias, which could influence a teacher's decision to give a pupil a lower mark on assessments throughout the school year and influence their final estimated grades.

How many schools are preparing to support young BAME Scots who have experienced specific trauma due to Covid and the murders of innocent black people? Those pupils will carry an even heavier weight on their return to school, and they are more likely to be fined by the police and suffer discriminatory policing. We already have evidence that their human rights are overlooked and that, because of discrimination in access to employment, education and housing, they are less likely to access those rights.

All that young BAME Scots are seeing right now are police murders and brutality, and organisational leaders who have never spoken out for them before now following the #blacklivesmatter trend. This is not a trend; it is about black lives. High numbers of people in their communities are dying through Covid and poverty. On top of that, there is the thought of going back to school and having to stand up for themselves every day around anti-racism.

With that in mind, there is growing concern about London influences coming to Scotland through drill music, which promotes knife and drug crime. The minds of young BAME Scots are being influenced by that. Our young people have talents and gifts and bring innovation and deep cultural influences. Let us not let drill music be the only way that they express themselves. As we have seen in London, that has devastating consequences.

Intercultural Youth Scotland has a restless natives employability programme, which the Scottish Government currently supports as a pilot.

**The Convener:** I hate to interrupt you, Khaleda, because I know the work that your organisation does and how closely connected it is to young people. We want to hear from you, but I am also conscious that we are tight for time today. We will certainly look at your report and get in about it. There will be more work for the committee to do on it beyond this evidence session. However, I want to steer you towards telling us about a couple of things that the Scottish Government could do to

make a difference now during this crisis, acknowledging that the difficulties that are being experienced at the moment have not appeared because of the crisis but are being exacerbated by the crisis and are not new. I just want to bring you back to Angela Constance's question just now.

**Khaleda Noon:** We have a restless natives programme that involves training on cultural appropriateness and proficiency, and anti-racist education. The trouble for our young people in getting into jobs and adequate employment is lack of understanding and bias. It is therefore about the Scottish Government investing in young people and organisations to truly educate the young people and give them a chance. Not all young people are going to have brilliant CVs and get themselves across in a positive way. It is about giving them a chance and using positive action more and more, and ensuring that it actually works. It is about anti-racist education in every—[*Temporary Loss of Sound.*—]in society.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That is helpful. I now bring in bring in Trishna Singh. Angela Constance's question was about employment and what actions the Scottish Government needs to take to improve things for communities.

**Trishna Singh:** Most people know about the work of Sikh-Sanjog in delivering services for the past 30 years in Edinburgh. Our services have always focused on linking marginalised Sikh minority ethnic women to social, education and employment opportunities. Over the years, we have developed into a holistic, intersectional organisation. Focusing on the employment path, we have had funding from the Big Lottery and the Scottish Government to run projects. The biggest one that we ran was for four years with the Big Lottery Fund, which was linked to a social enterprise. It became a vehicle for women to come in to volunteer and gain skills, and then move into mainstream employment.

We did an external evaluation of that project after four years and presented it to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament in 2016. That evaluation and report had recommendations at the back of it as well. It was launched at the Parliament, but it has taken four years for the Scottish Government to take notice of it.

I have been around the Scottish Government and have met many ministers, mentioned the evaluation report and handed out copies of it, but it was never taken up. I was recently at a meeting of a parliamentary cross-party group where Close the Gap presented yet another report on the lack of employment for BAME women and other issues around them, but there was no mention of the Sikh community. I raised a point about our report at that meeting, and I passed a copy of it to the woman from Close the Gap. At the beginning of the year, I



received an email from Close the Gap to say that it would use the information in its next report.

Our report's findings are very stark. There is some miscommunication with regard to the Sikh community. There is an assumption that everyone in the Sikh community is a doctor, a nurse or a lawyer, or is working in some sort of high-end job. In reality, we have a whole community of people who are similar to the white working-class Scottish community.

There is other research out there, but it is very sparse. In the social workforce, more than 85 per cent of women are from BAME communities, and there are many women in the beauty, leisure, retail and hospitality sectors. They have all been affected by Covid. All of them have lost their jobs; none of the women working in those jobs, or very few that I know of, have been furloughed.

In March this year, we held the very first Scottish Sikh women's conference. Before the event took place, we conducted a survey of more than 100 women from across Scotland. The findings were very stark. The event took place on 4 March and, unfortunately, the following week everything went into lockdown. However, we have those findings; I went through them briefly earlier—I cannot present them just now, but they were very stark.

For me, the biggest thing was that the women who took part in the survey came from not the first, second, third or fourth generation but the fifth generation of women in the Sikh community who were born and brought up in Scotland, yet they still talked about discrimination in the workplace and the inequalities and barriers that they face. Some of those young women have degrees and they know that they are capable of doing the job, but then the barriers come into play.

That takes me back to Angela Constance's question about what the Scottish Government can do. There needs to be a recognition of the fact that funding specifically for charities that specialise in working with BAME communities should be prioritised in a meaningful way. By that, I mean that organisations should not have to continually go cap in hand to local authorities or Government.

I believe that every human being has the right, and is entitled, to a service that meets their specific cultural needs. People refer to mainstream services, but what does that mean? We are talking about employment, so I will focus on jobcentres, which are a mainstream service that people use. Over the past 30 years, we have done many projects and linked in with local jobcentres as well as jobcentres across Edinburgh. The same thing happens: women go there, and they are then referred back to us for long-term support. Some people call it hand holding, or they put a different

label on it. We work with those individual women long term, and we get them into employment. We are able to give them confidence.

A lot of the women from the Sikh community do not have a language problem, but they face other barriers. I was born and brought up in Scotland, and it is sad for me, at this age, to see discrimination happening on such a level that it is almost unbelievable.

One example is our local authority. We have worked with the City of Edinburgh Council on employment—we have held day events and seminars and worked to provide information on how people can access the council's website and submit applications. However, that goes only so far, and then it stops. It is very frustrating, and that is where I feel that the barriers have not moved. They are still there and—[*Temporary loss of sound.*]

**The Convener:** Thank you—that is helpful. Would you be able to share the report that you mentioned with the committee?

**Trishna Singh:** Yes, definitely.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

As I said at the beginning of the meeting, we are quite tight for time, unfortunately, so we will move on to the next question. This is such a big and important topic, but again I ask everyone to keep questions and answers fairly succinct. As I said earlier, this is not the only piece of work that the committee will do, and we will pick up on and probe issues further as we go along.

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** Good morning, panel. First, I identify myself at this very difficult time with the comments that Angela Constance made before she asked her questions.

I would like to ask the panel about financial support. Have your organisations been able to access the financial support that the Scottish Government is providing via the third sector resilience fund, or any other financial support?

10:00

**Trishna Singh:** Yes, we have. We have accessed the—[*Temporary loss of sound.*—]fund, the third sector fund and some other pots that have become available through Interfaith Scotland, as well as another one that I cannot remember the name of.

We have access to that funding, and the process for getting those funds was very straightforward and simple. The Scottish Government made us feel that it had trust in our organisations, because we did not have to go through a complicated process to get a small pot of money. That made a huge difference. The

Scottish Government at least acknowledges the fact that organisations that have been around and become steeped in the community after so many years are able to take a small amount of money and make it go far. For example, we had contacts with the food banks, but there were no Asian food supplies there.

Also, we are a very small community organisation and we were not digital—none of our staff had laptops at home—but the resilience fund enabled us to get laptops and have all our staff working from home within the space of 10 days. I think that that should be looked at in the future. This should not be a quick, sharp shock before we go back to the process of applying for three-year funding and having to go through hoops, when people know the kind of work that we do and have been doing.

I feel that we should be at the point of being in the main stream, and not always the third sector of it.

**Alison Harris:** I understand what you are saying.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Khaleda Noon on access to the third sector resilience fund and any other financial support.

**Khaleda Noon:** The Scottish Government has worked well during the pandemic; there are easy applications and funding is available. However, it must not ignore the seriousness of the future impact on young BAME Scots of Covid-19 and of what they are seeing on social media right now.

Although the funding absolutely did save our charity from closing, and we have been able to access small pots of funding, it is not sustainable. That funding is not big enough for us to truly give employment opportunities to our BAME youth workers, who at the moment are working around the clock for free and who are also impacted by what they are seeing. The funding that we have lasts for only 12 weeks.

The Scottish Government must know that young black Scots face additional and often unforeseen challenges on the basis of colour, nationality, ethnicity and cultural and national origin. Our youth workers, including the young people in our ambassador programme, are all on zero-hours contracts, which goes completely against our ethics. They are role models and future leaders. They will continue their journeys and efforts to dismantle racism.

**The Convener:** That is really helpful. Alison Harris, if you wait, I will bring you in soon. This wonderful format is not without its challenges; I know that it feels a bit clunky. I ask Michael Matovu to answer Alison's question.

**Michael Matovu:** For us, as an organisation, it has been tough and challenging. When we started up the organisation, we spent the first three years without any funding, despite the good work that we were doing and despite the community's recognition of the support that we were giving it. After those first three years and all that frustration, we managed to get some funding through the Scottish Government with a social innovation partnership with the Hunter Foundation. That was before Covid. However, when the pandemic started, it was very challenging to go through that process, because funding is provided in the short term. It is challenging for an organisation to have to apply for funding, support a community for a short period of time and then let go of that.

Normally, funding cycles—especially the funding that is related to coronavirus support—are short term, and we do not know what is going to happen afterwards. As no commitment was given to our organisation as to what would happen after, we could not commit ourselves to supporting the community. As a result, we have decided to use whatever little money we have to support the community. It is terrible. I think that there is a lack of trust in what grass-roots organisations can do when it comes to funding and, because of that, it becomes very challenging and tough for organisations such as ours to engage with and continue to support the community.

In most cases, we receive recognition for our services; people say, "Yes, you are doing very good work," but applying for funding—asking for money to support your community—is a totally different ball game. The process and the scrutiny that an organisation goes through when it comes to funding is normally not so good, and because of that, we decided not to apply for funding, because we did not want to start supporting a community and then have to let that go after Covid-19.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That is helpful.

Alison, are you content, or do you have any follow-up questions?

**Alison Harris:** No, I am content with the answers, thank you.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** How effectively have information and guidance about Covid-19 been communicated?

**Trishna Singh:** I have been looking at that issue and some communication has come out in different languages from local authorities.

However, there is a lot of confusion in the community at the moment. I have spoken to some of our service users, and the latest communication about the lockdown, where some things are opening and some things are not, has not been clearly communicated. The main sources of

information are radio stations, places of worship and other community hubs that are linked to the Sikh community. People have not been getting that information.

I have looked to see what information is available and in what languages and there is no information in Gurmukhi, which is the Sikh written language, about what is happening or what will be happening next. The communication is very sparse.

In Edinburgh, we have looked at how we can get as much information out to the community as we can. Again, we are restricted: we have a very small team and, like other members of the panel have said, we all work part time. Our resources are limited and we do not have the kind of resources or infrastructure to make sure that everyone is getting the correct message.

It is confusing and I am very concerned about some of the conversations that I have been having with people in the past week. Women have said, "Oh that's wonderful, that means the gurdwara is opening, and we can go," but that is not the case, and the disease is still out there. Lots of people are not getting that message. They seem to think that, because the Government has said that they can go out and meet people, that means that everything is okay.

A lot of work needs to be done in making sure that the message gets out to all the BAME communities. I am speaking for the Sikh community. There are four gurdwaras in Glasgow and there is one in Edinburgh and I do not think that there has been much communication with them. As I said before, I spoke to the president of Edinburgh's gurdwara on Monday and he said that he has had no contact or information on how they will proceed post-lockdown, what the exit strategy is and what they are meant to do, or not meant to do.

The Sikh Federation UK wrote to Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, with a query about what specific statistics are available for the Sikh community in Scotland. I will not read her whole reply, but I found this bit very interesting. She said:

"Ethnicity data is absent in relation to around 9% of Covid-19 related deaths, which means that this data cannot be used to draw reliable conclusions."

So—

**The Convener:** I am sorry to interrupt you, but my colleague Fulton MacGregor is going to explore that specific issue a little later.

Having had your feedback on communication, I want to ask Khaleda Noon specifically about communication with young people on what is happening with the lockdown and Covid.

**Khaleda Noon:** The information has been given out and it is everywhere that you look. It has been given out in leaflets, it is on the radio and it is on the television. However, the communities that we work with do not watch the TV, listen to the radio or read anything that comes through their door. Their only access to information is social media, so we have to provide that information to our young people. There are lots of good intentions out there, in the larger youth services and youth organisations, but the information stays at the top; it does not filter down.

There are no resources in place, and it is not on anyone's agenda or on anyone's mind that there needs to be that link, but that link needs to be resourced, because the young people in our communities are not accessing that information. We need partnership and collaboration to make sure that the information that is currently staying at the top actually has a positive impact. More resources are needed for the boots on the ground who are working with these communities. We do not want information that is not true or that reinforces a lot of embedded inequalities for young people.

**The Convener:** Michael Matovu, can you answer Maurice Golden's question about communication?

**Michael Matovu:** I think that the communication on our side has been okay. However, because we support people from different communities and backgrounds, we have to follow it up to provide clarity. As Trishna Singh highlighted, when you say that people can meet a group of eight people, that could be interpreted in different ways in different communities. Is it eight people within one family? We need to provide clarity around that, and that is the support that we have been providing to the communities. We have been giving input to the different communities to shed more light on such information. Generally, the information that has been provided has been good, but we are providing clarity on it.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Good morning, panel. You will probably be aware of the report that was published this week by Public Health England, which confirmed that black, Asian and minority ethnic people in the UK are more likely than others to die with Covid. How important is it to have information about Covid deaths and infection rates broken down by ethnicity? What can your organisations and the Government do with that information?

10:15

**Trishna Singh:** As an organisation, we do not deal with such statistics at the moment. It would be good for us to have that information, because,

in Scotland, there is currently no way to find that information. The gurdwaras came together in Glasgow, and there was a discussion on the matter. The UK Sikh Network conducted a survey after the Government published its Covid-19 recovery strategy, in May. The survey received 1,553 responses, of which 27 were from Scotland. It found that

“98 per cent of all respondents were extremely unhappy that the Government did not consult Sikh organisations working with gurdwaras before forcing them to close their doors to the public”

and that

“96 per cent of all respondents said that they were very concerned with the high proportion of Sikh deaths from Covid-19.”

The UK Sikh Network collected other data locally from gurdwaras and Sikh funeral directors. Those funeral directors are mainly in England—we do not have any in Scotland. The first Sikh deaths were reported in March 2020, and, according to the survey, their number was

“approximately twice the national average.”

That fact has been reported mainly in England; we have no way of gathering that kind of information in Scotland. The only way would be to go and see gurdwaras in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Fortunately, we have not heard of any deaths linked to Covid in the Sikh community in Edinburgh, as yet, and we hope that there are none.

In Glasgow, as recently as last week, a very close friend informed me that her sister, who was in a care home, had died from Covid. Glasgow has a larger Sikh community than Edinburgh, and its population is larger. There are Sikh people in care homes and we do not know how, or what, information is being gathered on their ethnicity or even whether people know that deaths among that group are happening.

The race equality framework for Scotland expressly states that public authorities in Scotland monitor and use ethnic data in formulating policies and developing practices, but it is reported that

“the Sikh Federation UK told MSPs that it had looked at data collected and used by individual NHS bodies in Scotland”

and that

“data on religion is consistently incomplete and of poor quality compared to ethnicity data.”

What is highlighted is that ethnicity data, as opposed to religious data, is more commonly used in NHS Scotland. Sikhs do not tick an ethnicity box here, as “Sikh” comes under the religious box, which makes the matter very difficult. The Sikh Council UK, the Sikh Federation UK and the UK Sikh Network are all based in England. They are

the ones who gather all that information and conduct and pull together all those surveys, and they can then contact us to let us know. The picture is quite stark.

As I said, there has been a Sikh community in Scotland for more than 80 years. However, we are at the stage that, when a pandemic has occurred, we do not know how many Sikh people have died or have been affected by it, and that is a big concern.

**The Convener:** Would you be willing to provide the committee with a copy of the cabinet secretary’s letter?

**Trishna Singh:** Yes.

**The Convener:** I would like to bring in Khaleda Noon on Fulton MacGregor’s question.

**Khaleda Noon:** I lost connection, so I did not hear the question.

**The Convener:** How important is it to have information on Covid-19 deaths broken down by ethnicity, and what would Intercultural Youth Scotland do with that information?

**Khaleda Noon:** A lot of young people are seeing the information that is already out there, but it would be good to get the statistics that really affect their communities. That would be a good resource for us to take to our young people.

We have to consider mental health. In many BAME communities, mental health problems are barely spoken about and are considered negatively. Anxiety is high among families in low-paid jobs, and the statistics just add to the pressure—as does the fact that people are not hearing about them and so are asking, “Where are the statistics? Why are we not hearing about what’s happening?” That, taken together with the murders of innocent black people, means that we are really at a crisis and a critical point with our young people and their ability to be socially included and active in their communities.

**Michael Matovu:** The data is very important, and the report that was released down south was very good. The challenge is that, when such information is released, it is usually focused down south or on London. The Scottish Government needs to produce its own report, based on what is happening in Scotland. When the reports are produced down south, it is left to the people down south to deal with the issues. That is how Scotland gets away with some of the issues. Now is a good time for Scotland to address some of those issues. When it comes to outreach and applying the recommendations, we must think about what we can do in Scotland, rather than leave it to what is happening down south.

I am sorry to go back to employability, but in March we carried out some research on employability, which we sent to the Scottish Government. All that we got in response was a generic email saying, “Yes, we are committed to a, b, c, d.” The Scottish Government says that it is committed, but there are still some gaps. It is important for Scotland to concentrate on what is happening in Scotland and to respond to that rather than to what is happening in London and the rest of Britain.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That is a very helpful comment. For accountability, we need to know exactly what is happening here.

We are entering the last eight minutes of the evidence from this panel of witnesses.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab) (Committee Substitute):** I want to go back to what Khaleda Noon said about teachers not following the procedure and how young black people are fearful of the police. Do you have any figures that you can share with the committee on that?

You also talked about police murder and the fact that young black people are seeing that. Could you clarify for us whether you are talking about the scenes in the United States or events UK-wide or specific to Scotland? I am keen to know the answer to that question, because we are having to refresh our approach, given the response to the Black Lives Matter campaign. If you cannot share that information with us today, it would be great if you could share it with the committee in writing. I know that we are short of time.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Khaleda Noon on that issue in a moment. I feel as though I am preventing people from speaking, which is not something that I would ever want to do, but today it would be helpful for us to focus on the Covid inquiry. However, the committee would also like to hear from your organisations about the other issues in a follow-up response.

I apologise for the sound—they have begun drilling in the street outside—which is adding to the relaxing ambience of the meeting.

**Khaleda Noon:** Young people from those communities already do not go to the police for anything. Even if there is violence in their home or among their peers, they never reach out to the police—they just deal with it themselves. There is no trust there. Even before all this, what they saw was police brutality and murders.

With regard to Covid-19 and the police, there is evidence that a young BAME person is more likely to be stopped and fined. The statistics on how young people in Scotland are feeling will be in the Covid-19 report that we are doing right now.

I am not sure whether I heard you right—was your question about teachers not dealing with racism?

**The Convener:** Pauline McNeill, will you refresh our memories?

**Pauline McNeill:** You spoke for quite a while about teachers not following procedures, and I just wondered what procedures you were talking about.

**Khaleda Noon:** Our “In sight” report goes into some depth about teachers not having the right training or skills and, sometimes, being biased and not understanding that something is not racist bullying but a racist attack. There are plenty of examples of young people informing teachers about racist attacks and the teachers not responding effectively. There is a gaslighting effect and, sometimes, the young person who reports the racist incident is the one who gets suspended. We have two case studies on that, one of which is on our website for you to see.

Teachers are not adequately trained, or they do not have the desire, to truly support such young people, follow the right procedures, be kind or see the young person as a victim. Many teachers do not see those young people as victims and, time and time again, incidents get brushed under the carpet.

We have been campaigning on this for years, including with Trishna Singh and Sikh-Sanjog, but it is not until the murder of a black person that everybody now wants to work in partnership with you. It has to be followed through. Being able to understand the correct procedures for dealing with racism in schools does not take much effort, but it has a huge, life-changing impact on the young person who is a victim of racism.

Sorry—I got a bit passionate.

**The Convener:** You are right to be. We welcome your passion, knowledge and expertise.

Committee members have had sight of many of the reports that you have spoken about, and I looked on social media yesterday for news on your organisation and saw a wonderful article from your anti-racist ambassadors. I apologise for asking again, but if you could share all that with the committee, even if it is not for this bit of work, we will pick it up in the future.

We are coming to the end of the session, but I will bring in Khaleda Noon for a couple of seconds.

**Khaleda Noon:** On the question of what young black people are seeing, it is not just in the US—Scotland is not innocent. There is a lot of video footage of young black people being treated differently from their white counterparts. There are currently scenes of police brutality in the US, but

there are also many examples in the UK and Scotland of young people of colour being targeted and not having the same positive experience with the police.

**The Convener:** That completes our questions for our first panel of witnesses.

Today, more than ever, we have been acutely aware of time constraints. I therefore invite Trishna, Khaleda and Michael to email us if there is anything that we did not ask about or anything that they did not get the chance to say. We will pick it up, because, as I said, this is not a one-off event. I thank them for their time and expertise.

10:30

*Meeting suspended.*

10:36

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our second panel of the day. I repeat my thanks to the witnesses for being with us this morning. I am grateful to you for finding the time to answer questions from the committee.

For the benefit of the witnesses and members, I will repeat how the session will work. Given the challenges of managing a virtual meeting, we will take questions in a pre-arranged order. I will invite a member to ask questions, and then I will invite the witnesses to respond also in a pre-arranged order. I will then go back to the member for any follow-up questions. Once that is completed, I will invite the next questioner and so on until the evidence session is concluded.

We have one hour for the evidence session. Questions and answers should be succinct, please, and broadcasting staff should be given a few seconds to operate your microphone before you begin to ask your question or provide an answer. Please wait for me to say your name before you come in on your question or answer.

I welcome the witnesses on our second panel: Lynne Tammi, interim national co-ordinator for Article 12 in Scotland; Suzanne Munday, Gypsy Traveller programme manager at the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project; and Claire Frew, policy and impact manager at Homeless Network Scotland. Thank you for being with us; you are all very welcome.

I start by asking for some feedback on how the communities to which you provide services have been affected by the pandemic and the lockdown measures that have been put in place.

**Lynne Tammi (Article 12 in Scotland):** Thank you for inviting me to speak to the committee.

I will give a quick introduction to what Article 12 in Scotland does. We work with young people, in the main, to empower them to promote and enjoy their human rights. A focus of that work is on enabling young Gypsy Travellers to build their capacity and social capital. A necessary part of that involves access to learning and developing.

As was the case with the previous witnesses—I am sure that it is also the case with the other witnesses who will speak in this session—Covid-19 has impacted on the work that we do. Our main focus has been on the need to shift our learning and development online. That has been a steep learning curve for us as workers as well as for the young people. Trying to connect with people and encouraging learning and development through online platforms is a completely different game.

I am sure that everyone is already aware of this—it is not just an issue for young Gypsy Travellers—but the biggest issue that has come up is a lack of access to resources that enable online learning. We have provided a core group of young people, with whom we were already working, with access to Chromebooks, stationery packs and, just as important, data SIM cards.

There is a general misunderstanding that all families have access to the internet, whether that be via mobile data on smartphones or through tablets or laptops. That is certainly not the case for young Gypsy Travellers. Reports from across the UK say that at least 50 per cent of Gypsy Traveller families do not have internet access.

The figure is much higher when it comes to access to devices, which is a huge problem in itself. We work with young people who have never had sight of a laptop or a personal computer, so they do not understand how a keyboard works or even, for example, what the @ symbol is. A huge amount of time and effort has therefore gone into getting young people ready to re-engage with their learning. Fortunately, the majority of our workforce at Article 12 in Scotland are tech savvy, and we have been able to spend a lot of time with young people, but that process has been extremely intensive. For example, one worker had to spend six hours explaining to a young person how a keyboard operates and how to access the internet before they were able to become familiar with that platform and feel confident and safe in using it.

The availability of funding has been a huge factor. We have been able to access additional emergency funding from the Scottish Government—

**The Convener:** I will have to ask you to pause there, Lynne, because one of my colleagues will go on to probe that aspect later.

I ask Suzanne Munday to tell us about the impacts of Covid-19 and the lockdown measures on the folk whom she works with.

**Suzanne Munday (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project):** During the Covid-19 outbreak, we have had to balance targeting our resources and efforts on supporting the community with continuing with our usual work. We support carers and cared-for people in the community, and the issues have not gone away during the pandemic. We know that carers have also had particular concerns about their current situations.

I echo what Lynne Tammi said and add that the primary issues that we have come across in the community are the impacts on people's household incomes. A lot of Gypsy Traveller men are sole traders who are unable to work if they cannot travel, so the pandemic has had a huge impact on their household incomes.

We have also seen mental health issues coming to the fore at this time of year, which is traditionally the shifting season when people are able to travel. The fact that people have had to stay put has had a significant impact on their mental health. We know that, in general, there are already considerable levels of depression, stress and anxiety in Gypsy Traveller communities. The impact from the pandemic has come on top of those.

I also echo what Lynne Tammi said about the reliance that has been placed on digital literacy as a main form of access to information. Ensuring such access has presented a challenge, because not everyone in such communities is connected to the internet or has access to information technology equipment.

The long-standing issue of deficient site accommodation for Gypsy Traveller communities is a further on-going challenge.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That is helpful. I ask Claire Frew to respond to the same question.

10:45

**Claire Frew (Homeless Network Scotland):** Thank you, convener. I, too, thank all the other panel members, whom we have learned a lot from by listening in this morning. I will make a few introductory comments; I am sure that we will pick up on specifics as we go along.

As a homelessness organisation, we have always been clear about the importance of a safe and secure home for everyone, and the current pandemic has simply reinforced that. Many people who are experiencing homelessness in Scotland either had no accommodation at all when the pandemic hit or the accommodation was congregate in nature—by that, we mean hostels

and various types of shared accommodation. A lot of people were sleeping in night shelters, which would mean a mattress on the floor and sharing the space with 20, 30 or 40 other people. That immediately begs the question how somebody shields, self-isolates or maintains social distance. That became our immediate priority and the challenge for local authorities across Scotland. Things were put in place in response to that, which we can talk more about later. They have been really effective in the short term in reducing some of the impacts on homelessness people, which is important.

The link between homelessness and poverty is very well evidenced. We know for a fact that the single biggest risk factor for homelessness in Scotland is poverty. The economic impact of coronavirus today and in the future is very important for us to consider. In that context, we have paused evictions. We can also talk about that later.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the homelessness population is not just one single mass. For example, we need to take account of the issues that affect women who are experiencing domestic abuse and people with no recourse to public funds, and of tensions at home for young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Clearly, there are people in our population who will have found the lockdown particularly difficult.

The pandemic has forced big actions to be taken and, as a sector, we are already trying to look to the future to ensure that we do not lose any of the progress that we have made. I am happy to share information about that work.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That is really helpful. I will now bring in committee colleagues, starting with Angela Constance.

**Angela Constance:** Hello, panel. I have a question for Lynn Tammi and Suzanne Munday about the impact of Covid specifically on the Gypsy Traveller community. Alison Harris will follow up with questions on funding and other matters.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government published a framework for decision making to help inform anybody who works with the Gypsy Traveller community, whether that be the police, site managers, health services or local authority services. How do you think that is going? Is the framework working well operationally? In particular, are social care services working well, given that the Gypsy Traveller community has higher rates of ill health?

**Lynne Tammi:** I will leave the discussion about social care to Suzanne Munday, as she is much more experienced in that regard than I am.

Suzanne and I took part in building the new framework, and we have been working closely with COSLA, the Scottish Government and other organisations. To be fair, there have been great efforts by all, including some local authorities, to ensure that Gypsy Travellers have basic, fundamental services around sanitation, access to clean water and access to a place to call home. We all need those in these times.

However, there have been areas in which the work has not been as efficient as it could have been. My thinking on that is that it goes back to historical methods of operating in local authorities. The authorities that have Gypsy Traveller liaison officers—GTLOs—and a commitment from elected representatives seem to have been quicker off the mark than other local authorities. However, to be fair, all local authorities have shown interest, keenness and commitment to ensure that the Gypsy Traveller community's needs are met on a basis of equity with the settled community's needs.

**Suzanne Munday:** Specifically on social health, the Gypsy Traveller community has historically been distanced from a lot of mainstream services, including social work and social care. A vast amount of informal care, as a key component of social care, continues to be delivered by family members and wider community networks. A lot of our focus has been on supporting the informal carers whom we are in touch with. We have done that through regular telephone welfare calls by my team—currently, we are supporting in excess of 100 people. Through those telephone calls, we can provide support and give information and reassurance, for example.

Where Gypsy Travellers are linked into formal social care services—I am thinking about funded services and self-directed support in particular—there has been a preference for people to have direct payments to employ a personal assistant. Obviously, the lockdown and the restrictions on people coming into homes have had an impact on the continuity of that service. We have found specific examples of carers having to take on even more care than they were previously, because of the withdrawal or reduction of services. That is one issue that is coming to prominence.

As a result, as I have said, we are seeing a real impact on people's mental health. People cannot access counselling services that they were previously in touch with, perhaps because of delays in referrals or because they are waiting for appointments with community psychiatric nurses or psychiatrists, for example. We are finding that people are having to struggle on their own for longer.

**Alison Harris:** Have your organisations been able to access the financial support that has been provided by the Scottish Government?

**Lynne Tammi:** I touched on that issue earlier. We already receive a pot of funding from the Scottish Government's equality unit. We have been able to access emergency funding from the unit to increase the hours in which our workforce is engaging young people in learning and development programmes. We were approached by some funders to apply for additional funding for resources. Those involved a quick turnaround—some were within a couple of days—so we opted to go for them rather than apply to the larger funding pots.

**Suzanne Munday:** I echo what Lynne Tammi said. I commend the Scottish Government for making the process simple and quick. We accessed additional resources to set up a financial resilience service for Gypsy Traveller communities in Scotland and a telephone support line, in recognition of the additional mental health pressures. We were also given flexibility to use our existing funding and target that in a more concentrated way to support the community through the pandemic. We have been able to access that support and, more widely, we were lucky to receive a donation from a previous charitable funder for our work. So, the answer is yes.

**The Convener:** Has Homeless Network Scotland been able to access the financial support that has been made available?

**Claire Frew:** We have been lucky to be working with a lot of very supportive funders through this time, which has been fantastic.

On money that the Scottish Government has made available, we were not seeking funds for any of our work, but we have accessed the third sector resilience fund that SCVO administers. We got quick access to that and we set up a staying-in fund for people who are homeless. It was recognised that, although a lot of effort was going into picking up prescriptions for people, getting them food packages and all that, people lacked immediate access to money. Through the fund, we were able to offer £100 to people, and the applications came in thick and fast. We accessed £100,000 to offer people immediate access to cash or vouchers, to get them through the current period. That has been a really positive experience for us.

**The Convener:** Do you have a follow-up question, Alison?

**Alison Harris:** I have a different question for Suzanne Munday. Are you aware of any Gypsy Travellers who have been unfairly accused of ignoring social distancing measures?

**Suzanne Munday:** That is an interesting question. We have noticed that, as a result of a Channel 4 programme that focused on the Gypsy



Traveller community in England, there has been a heightened, more general awareness that has impacted negatively on the community.

Recently, we have become aware of small numbers of Gypsy Travellers starting to move. We have been picking up reports that social distancing has perhaps not been adhered to as much as we would like.

I do not know whether Lynne would like to say anything about that.

**Lynne Tammi:** There are different perceptions of and misunderstandings about how people in the community live when they are moving around or, indeed, when they are on permanent sites. Generally, when we talk about a household of Gypsy Travellers, we are talking about a substantial number of people who form an extended family. If you were to see three or four trailers being towed, you would perhaps think that that was people travelling together who were not from the same household and therefore were not practising appropriate social distancing. When members of the settled community see that, they should be aware that they can be 99 per cent sure that that will be one household moving around.

No one has reported to us that people in the community have not been practising good social distancing.

**Maurice Golden:** My question is mainly for Claire Frew. Earlier, you mentioned issues with shielding groups in night shelters. Has there been appropriate action on providing accommodation? Has there been any geographical disparity in that?

11:00

**Claire Frew:** That is an important question. As I said, the immediate challenge that we faced was how to put those things in place.

Between national Government and local government, significant funding was put in straight away to make use of empty hotel rooms across the country. Initially, Scottish Government funding was focused largely in Glasgow and Edinburgh, because that is where there are higher numbers of rough sleepers. However, local authorities across the country were taking advantage of the fact that nobody was staying in any hotels, in order to get people off the streets and to disperse people who were using some of our bigger accommodation projects, in order to reduce the pressure on them. That intervention has meant that rough sleeping is almost non-existent on the streets of Scotland.

What has been put in place is temporary but we have taken a massive step forward. We can never put numbers on these things, because the situation changes day by day, but one of the latest estimates that we heard is that fewer than 30

people are sleeping rough across the country. In Glasgow, the amount could be down to single figures. That shows what can be done through a massive intervention with a sense of urgency behind it.

We have managed to take a lot of the pressure off for now. However, the big question is, what comes next? We have made massive progress in a short time and the focus now must be on not losing what we have achieved.

If you walk the streets of cities now, you will see almost nobody sleeping on the streets. That is quite an achievement. Local government, national Government, third sector organisations, housing associations and all who made that happen deserve massive credit.

**Maurice Golden:** That is heartening to hear. The Scottish Parliament passed legislation to extend the notice for evictions. Is anyone presenting to you as being in danger of losing their home as a result of what would be, effectively, an illegal eviction?

**Claire Frew:** That is another excellent question. The pause in evictions—for six months in a lot of cases and three months in others—has been welcome. We have seen a little bit of confusion around some of the eviction proceedings that were in the works prior to the new legislation—in the early days, people were unclear about whether the legislation covered evictions that had already been started. Other than that, based on the feedback that we are getting, we are not seeing anyone coming into the homelessness system as a result of any evictions being carried out. That is not to say that people are not being impacted by evictions, but, as far as we are aware, that situation will hold for the next few months. Again, that is heartening.

**Fulton MacGregor:** I have a general question for each of the panel members. What are your main concerns for the individuals and communities you work with, both in phase 1, which we are in just now, and as we move through the phases, which each have different considerations around infection rates?

**Lynne Tammi:** As Suzanne Munday said earlier, there have been issues around family income. People have been locked down for several weeks—[*Temporary loss of sound.*—]or are using benefits. Families have raised concerns with us about the fact that they are feeling a genuine need to be out working.

As we all know, working is acceptable in certain areas, provided that people wash their hands, all the necessary facilities are there and social distancing is in place. A positive aspect for members of the community is the fact that many of them are lone workers, which makes things a bit

easier. It is a case of getting out to the community information about what the various stages are, what can and cannot be done, and what is and is not appropriate. However, I will stop there, because I have a feeling that there might be a question about information coming up.

**The Convener:** I invite Suzanne Munday to respond to Fulton MacGregor's question.

**Suzanne Munday:** Going back to the issue of social distancing, I would like to clarify that the overwhelming majority of the community are maintaining social distancing and have been very strict about that.

With regard to what our main concerns are, I echo what has been said about the need for a focus on household income and clarity on what is and is not possible in terms of movement, particularly when it comes to men being able to engage in work.

In the medium to longer term, we are keen that we do not lose the progress that has been made. There has been a significant amount of joint working—lots of agencies have pulled together to support the community. We need to think about how we consolidate, build and maintain that as we move into phases 2, 3 and 4 and out of lockdown.

**Claire Frew:** I would like to come at the question by focusing on the lifting of some of the restrictions for staff. Obviously, we have all been affected, but we are thinking about the delivery of services for people who are homeless and how we can continue to work alongside people.

I described the incredible temporary and emergency solutions that we have found, but a big issue that we continue to face is the restrictions on staff that mean that they have to work remotely. The fact that staff have been working from home has meant that we have not been able to have housing allocations as we normally would. That process pretty much ground to a halt, partly because of staffing issues in local authorities and housing associations. There have also been issues to do with repairs, utilities and other people not working.

It is important to note that, although what we have put in place might be better than what was in place previously, many people who are still locked down might be in unsuitable accommodation. As the lockdown lifts, it is important for us that we can quickly get back to letting permanent homes to people. A backlog has been created of people who are in a temporary situation. Almost nobody is getting out of that because of the lockdown restrictions. Our big concern is that we can get back to a position in which people can move into their own homes, because, having solved one problem, we are potentially storing up another.

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

**Fulton MacGregor:** I have a follow-up question about the messaging as we move through the phases. It strikes me that various organisations would want to message in different ways. I saw a good graphic that was done by North Lanarkshire Council communications friendly graphics, which showed what people could do in phase 1. Do you have any suggestions or ideas about how the Scottish Government could deliver the messaging for each of the groups and communities that you work with as we move through the various phases?

**Lynne Tammi:** It might be a good idea if I give a quick introduction to what we have been doing with the Gypsy Traveller community. We have been working with Suzanne Munday and MECOPP, the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the national health service and the Scottish Traveller Education Programme to produce online and social media messages.

The main thing that we have produced is a Facebook page, which Article 12 is facilitating and monitoring. It took a lot of work to get the page up and running, and it needs to be monitored and kept up to date. We set it up in March, and since then it has reached more than 80,000 people, so it is clearly getting our messages out to the community. We recently did an evaluation of the page with some community members, and we had a lot of positive feedback. We also engaged a graphic artist, who produced infographics to enable us to get our messages out clearly, accessibly and quickly.

Just as importantly, we have been making videos to address literacy issues, and community members have made videos to address key points. Again, that has proved to be successful—in fact, when a video goes up, it will get upwards of 6,000 hits within a couple of hours, so the evidence is there.

We know that not all members of the community are literate or have access to the internet. A lot of information is spread by word of mouth, especially among older members of the community, so the younger ones and those who are on the internet are sharing the information. Social media is not the only way for us to get our messages out, but it is certainly working for us.

**The Convener:** That is helpful, and you have given us some good concrete examples of inclusive communication.

**Suzanne Munday:** I will highlight two additional elements of the way in which we get information out to the community. The first involves our workers, who are in regular contact with a large number of individuals. I ensure that members of

my team have access to accurate, up-to-date and timely information that they are then able to share with the community, which has proved to be an effective approach.

Secondly, we cascade information down through specific people in the community whom we have identified. I am in contact with community members who are more linked in with various things that are going on at a policy level and with the Government. If I share information with them, they are able to take it into the community—as Lynne Tammi said—by word of mouth.

Facebook has been fantastic and the videos have been amazing—the page is produced very much by the community for the community—but there are also the two additional routes that I have described.

**The Convener:** That is helpful. Does Claire Frew wish to reflect on anything to do with communication and messaging?

**Claire Frew:** I will not add too much. I will just echo what both my colleagues have said, in particular Suzanne Munday's point about the fact that volunteers and front-line staff are often the messengers. If we take time to ensure that the information is clear to them and that they know what they need to know, that will help.

**Pauline McNeill:** I have a couple of questions for Claire Frew. First, you said that there are currently no housing allocations. Can you confirm that that is the case across the board?

Secondly, through the current arrangements, as you said, we have managed to resolve the issue of rough sleeping, which is positive. Have you any information on how that has protected the homeless community from Covid? I, along with a lot of MSPs, have had letters that raise concerns about people not being able to social distance in hotels, but I have no further information on whether that has caused problems. Any information on those two points would be helpful.

**Claire Frew:** I will do my best to pick up on them both. First, there has been a small number of housing allocations. Some local authorities have maintained allocations, largely for homeless households, to try to reduce the backlog. However, not every council has been able to do that, partly because they cannot get staff to go out and deal with issues to do with utilities and repairs. A lot of housing associations have paused their allocation processes for the same reasons. There have been some allocations, but nowhere near as many as we would normally see. The process has largely ground to a halt. There has been guidance from the Scottish Government, and work from the social housing resilience group to look at how we can get allocations back up and running safely. That is a massive priority for everyone.

11:15

On the second question, from our perspective—certainly from what we have heard—there will be individual cases in which things have been difficult for people either in existing accommodation or in the hotels. We definitely hear some individual stories, but we know that the organisations on site have been working hard to try to make the accommodation as safe for people as possible. If any concerns have been raised to them, they have worked hard to resolve them on an individual basis. We have certainly not heard of any issues en masse, because the organisations have been trying hard to keep people as far apart from each other as they can and provide them with what they need. I am sure that there will have been such cases, as members will have heard through their constituency offices, but I would hope that they would be a minority.

**The Convener:** This morning, we have heard about new and different ways of working; the urgency of getting things fixed and whether or not things have been fixed; and a reduction in the number of rough sleepers. I am interested in comments, which came from the first panel as well as this one, that the funding application process currently seems to place more trust in organisations and is a bit more straightforward to complete and easier to access. What do we need to do to ensure that we hold on to those gains and retain better ways of working and directing resource?

**Suzanne Munday:** In some ways, MECOPP is in a relatively privileged position, because we have a long-standing and very effective working relationship with the Scottish Government. What has been different at this time is the number of organisations that have come together through what I think is now called the Gypsy Traveller impact group. We have been able to bring individual resources to a collective way of working in order to maximise the impact, which has been very effective.

In the past, organisations may not have worked with each other closely, for various reasons, but those networks are now established and I think that they will continue in the future. However, that does not take away from the fact that additional resources will be needed. Once the immediate crisis is over, medium-term and longer-term issues will still need to be addressed through resourcing.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Does Lynne Tammi have any reflections on my points about the changes that we have managed to make under crisis conditions and how we sustain that good work?

**Lynne Tammi:** I echo what Suzanne Munday said. We have found it especially useful to work in

collaboration with our colleagues in other non-governmental and civil society organisations. In general, we come together now and again at certain points anyway; it is important to point out that it is currently Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, and we always come together on that. However, the crisis has consolidated our ability and willingness to collaborate, because we are all working towards the same aim of improving life for the Gypsy Traveller community.

Nonetheless, the provision of additional and on-going resources will be critical to our work. We have had to increase the hours for our workforce, and even then we are pushing it, because there is a limit to how many days and hours we can work. We need to be able to increase our workforce, and we need to know that that is sustainable. Any offer of funding needs to cover three, four or five years.

**The Convener:** That is helpful. Claire Frew said that we have substantially reduced rough sleeping. If we can do that during the crisis, what do we need to do to ensure that, in the future, everyone has a home?

**Claire Frew:** That is the focus of our work for now, and it is very important; I alluded to that in my initial comments. A collective of 19 organisations is looking at what happens in the future. We are seeking a triple lock, and one of the elements is that there should be no return to rough sleeping. We can achieve that by prioritising more homes for everyone.

It is about ensuring that we are committed to the next steps to help people. For the people whom we have housed in hotels during this period, the next step must be a step forward into their own tenancies. It cannot be a step backwards to where they were and, ideally, it would not be a step sideways into another form of temporary accommodation.

We know what ends homelessness, and that is a home. We knew that and were committed to it already, and now we have to ensure that the resources that we put in as we move forward are absolutely geared towards permanent rather than more temporary solutions.

That includes considering everything from macro issues such as more house building to bringing back allocations and lets. We should not forget what we have learned through this process. First, it is absolutely possible to resolve the issues. We need only look at what we have just achieved as a sector and as a country, which has been significant. We need to take that work forward and never forget what the solution is. We need to make sure that good resources are aligned towards providing the solution of a home, because the solution is always a home.

**The Convener:** Thank you—that was very helpful.

That completes our questions and concludes our evidence session this morning. The next meeting of the committee is scheduled for next week, when we will consider the Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill at stage 2, as notified in the *Business Bulletin* and via the committee's social media. In the meantime, any follow-up issues for scrutiny will be dealt with in correspondence, which will be published on our website. I thank all the witnesses very much for their expertise and time. As previously agreed, we now move into private session.

11:22

*Meeting continued in private until 12:11.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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