Race, Equality & Human Rights Network

16 September 2025, Glasgow

Meeting Notes and Outcomes

BEMIS
Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities

Race, Equality & Human Rights Network

16 September 2025, Merchants House, Glasgow

Contents

https://youtu.be/y_KBtvO3huU

Executive Summary

Prepared by BEMIS Scotland

The Race, Equality & Human Rights Network Meeting, organised by group secretariat BEMIS Scotland took place on 16 September 2025 at the Merchants House in Glasgow. The keynote address was delivered by Prof Angela O'Hagan (Chair, Scottish Human Rights Commission) and chaired by Danny Boyle, (Executive Director, BEMIS Scotland).

The meeting examined Scotland's progress one year after the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) 2024 concluding observations.

In addition, the meeting provided an opportunity for members to consider present challenges in relation to racial discrimination and race equality in Scotland.

While some progress has been noted particularly in strategic planning by the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and community level dialogue significant gaps remain in government accountability, formal implementation of CERD recommendations, and trust between communities and institutions.

The SHRC's current Strategic Plan 2024-2028 prioritises protecting vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, and the Gypsy Traveller. Discussions highlighted persistent challenges: lack of structured government action, erosion of community trust, rising hate-motivated protests asylum seekers, and systemic failures in accountability, representation, and service provision.

Workshops reinforced these themes, focusing on:

1. Strengthening accountability, monitoring and reporting mechanisms for race equality.
2. Widening participation, representation and co-production across communities and sectors: Bridging the gap between policy and practice.
3. Fostering community cohesion by addressing hate crime and misinformation.

Across all sessions, a recurring demand emerged for urgent political leadership, proactive community engagement, and structural reform to move beyond rhetorical commitments and embed equality and human rights protections at all levels.

Key Findings & Issues

1. Gaps in Government Accountability

- Scottish Government has accepted CERD recommendations in principle but without formal acknowledgment or an implementation plan.
- Lack of urgency and structured mechanisms undermines Scotland's compliance with international human rights obligations.

2. Community Trust and Rights Awareness

- Minority communities report deep mistrust in institutions and limited knowledge of their rights.
- Legal status is increasingly being weaponised against migrants and asylum seekers, heightening marginalisation.
- This lived experience has been enhanced by the 2024 / 2025 exponential rise in anti-immigration protests across Britain and Scotland that have increased significant fear and alarm within ethnic minority communities.

3. Protests and Hate Narratives

- Protests outside asylum seeker accommodations in multiple cities are creating fear, insecurity, and social division.
- Government has obligations under CERD to condemn hate propaganda and incitement but has failed to act decisively to invest within the equalities and human rights 3rd sector to provide robust, independent opportunities led by communities to be the best of themselves and foster an 'Inclusive National Identity' via in person events.
- Misinformation and far-right rhetoric remain unchallenged in mainstream discourse, and this is characterised by a shift to the right across the political spectrum when discussing immigration and the impacts of ethnic minority communities in Britain and Scotland.

4. Weaknesses in Accountability & Data

- Current reporting frameworks focus on procedural outputs rather than outcomes.
- Race equality data is too aggregated, limiting its usefulness for service delivery and funding decisions. Race and ethnicity data must be disaggregated for it to be of any value
- Current reporting frameworks are inaccessible, data is often dense making it difficult for third sector organisations to interpret or apply.
- Lack of lived experience in data collection undermines relevance and effectiveness.

5. Representation and Inclusion Gaps

- Ethnic minority voices remain excluded from local and national decision making.
- Lived experience is used inconsistently and often tokenistically in policy and service design.
- 3rd sector national and grassroots organisations face severe underfunding that is materially affecting their ability to operate at full capacity. For example while facing budget cuts organisations have had to absorb national insurance, rent and cost of living increases.
- Funding opportunities for grassroots organisations is sporadic and application process and development are often excessively administrative with repetition of questions and use of corporate jargon.
- Simplifying funding applications to normal life circumstances and not corporate organisations is critical.

6. Community Cohesion Challenges

- Hate crime responses are challenging in an environment where everyday racism has become increasingly normalised, victims often feel re-victimised in reporting processes at work, school and in the community.
- Hostility currently seen towards asylum seekers is filtering into wider society, increasingly affecting multi-generational ethnic minority communities.
- Lack of safe, suitable housing for asylum seekers isolates them from communities.
- Cultural exchange and inclusion initiatives have been deprioritised, removing opportunities for cohesion.

Action Recommendations

Strengthening Accountability

- Formally acknowledge and implement CERD recommendations through a structured national action plan.
- Formally incorporate CERD into Scottish domestic law through the Scottish Human Rights Bill.
- Establish independent monitoring mechanisms with community participation.
- Ensure Public Sector Equality Duty translates into outcomes, not procedural compliance.

Data, Evidence & Reporting

- Collect and publish disaggregated race equality data (health, education, employment, housing).

- Co-produce data collection with communities to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance.
- Share findings in accessible, user-friendly formats beyond statistical reports.

Representation & Participation

- Embed lived experience systematically into policy design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Invest properly in the race equality "expert 3rd sector" who are presently significantly underfunded and struggling with inflation and the cost-of-living crisis having faced real terms budget cuts for over 15 years. Funding that provides stability and sustainability for third sector organisations is essential.
- Streamline funding processes by simplifying application requirements, removing unnecessary administrative burdens, and designing criteria that reflect the realities of grassroots organisations rather than corporate structures.
- Ensure ethnic minority representation at all levels of governance and service delivery.
- Provide multi-year, accessible funding streams for grassroots organisations, with equitable distribution.

Building Community Trust & Cohesion

- Condemn and regulate protests outside asylum seeker accommodations, balancing rights with protections.
- Counter misinformation with accurate, inclusive public messaging and media engagement.
- Invest in cultural exchange, community development, and cross-cultural engagement initiatives.
- Provide safe, suitable housing and integration pathways for asylum seekers.

Political Leadership

- Demonstrate visible, consistent leadership in condemning hate-driven narratives and practices, while affirming a strong commitment to human rights.
- Acknowledge Scotland's colonial legacy and link it to present-day challenges in migration and race equality. This must be aligned with all communities racialised in Scotland via colonialism and imperialism based on CERD Article 1 of provisions colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin. The present approach that solely focuses anti racism on colour is inadequate and incongruent with Scotland's migration and social history
- Commit to a rights-based approach that moves beyond symbolic gestures toward structural reform.

Meeting Narrative

Keynote Address

Delivered by Prof Angela O'Hagan, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, One year on from CERD Concluding Observations 2024.

In her address, Prof O'Hagan mentioned the work of the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC), its strategic priorities, and the current context for human rights and racial equality in Scotland. She highlighted the progress made one year on from the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) concluding observations, while also critically examining persisting gaps in accountability, community trust, and implementation of rights protections.

Angela emphasised that the SHRC's current "Strategic Plan 2024-2028" is centred on protecting the rights of groups most at risk, including ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, and other protected populations. The strategy reflects a commitment to proactive interventions to safeguard human rights across Scotland, acknowledging both systemic challenges and the lived realities of affected communities.

SHRC will soon release a Spotlight Report on the Scottish Gypsy Traveller community. This report is anticipated to shed light on entrenched inequalities, barriers to accessing services, and ongoing discrimination experienced by this historically marginalised group. Angela noted that these reports are a crucial tool in both documenting systemic challenges and informing policy responses.

Angela reflected on developments in the year following the CERD concluding observations, noting a mixture of progress and persistent challenges. While there have been some strategic conversations within government, the Commission remains concerned about the absence of concrete, actionable plans.

During a 2024 Race Equality and Human Rights Network Meeting, the Minister for Equalities stated in person that the Scottish Government had accepted the CERD recommendations. However, Angela clarified that these recommendations have never been formally acknowledged, and no structured action plans have been presented by the Scottish Government to implement them. The lack of urgency and formal mechanisms to address Treaty obligations remains a significant gap in Scotland's human rights structure.

A central theme of the address was that human rights work must start from the ground up, grounded in the recognition of the humanity of every individual. she stressed that effective human rights advocacy requires seeing and valuing people as they are, not merely as statistics or policy abstractions.

The SHRC's anti-racist strategy aims to take a proactive approach in identifying and addressing systemic barriers that perpetuate discrimination. Angela emphasised that addressing inequality requires both structural change and community-level engagement, including policies that actively dismantle discriminatory practices rather than reacting only when issues arise.

Participants were reminded that communities continue to experience a profound loss of trust in institutions, compounded by limited knowledge of their rights. The Commission identifies that trust is a critical barrier to achieving meaningful equality and human rights protections.

Angela highlighted the concerning trend of weaponising the legal status of minority communities, particularly migrants and asylum seekers, as a means of exclusion or marginalisation. This approach not only infringes on basic rights but also undermines community cohesion and social trust.

The Commission aims to hold the Scottish Government accountable for its obligations under CERD. Despite the acceptance of recommendations in principle, she noted that there has been no visible implementation plan. Moreover, current practices within the Scottish Government do not sufficiently recognise the importance or urgency of addressing Treaty recommendations, leaving communities without clear protections or recourse.

The Chair of the Commission drew attention to recent protests outside accommodation housing asylum seekers. She emphasised that under CERD, the Government has an obligation to condemn hate propaganda and acts of incitement at such protests. The failure to act not only exposes vulnerable populations to harm but also undermines the credibility of human rights commitments in Scotland.

Angela's keynote addressed both the progress and continuing challenges in Scotland's human rights landscape. While the Scottish Human Rights Commission has advanced a strategic plan focused on protecting rights at risk, documenting inequalities, and implementing anti-racist strategies, gaps remain in government accountability, formal acceptance of CERD recommendations, and meaningful engagement with affected communities.

Key issues identified include the erosion of community trust, the weaponisation of legal status, and a lack of urgency in government action to implement international obligations. The upcoming Spotlight Reports, including the one focusing on the Scottish Gypsy Traveller community, are expected to provide further evidence to inform policy, advocacy, and structural reforms. The address underscores the need for Scotland to move beyond symbolic commitments, embedding human rights protections at both the policy and practice level, while ensuring that vulnerable communities are seen, heard, and empowered.

Questions, reflections and discussion on current Human Rights challenges

The session explored the growing challenges surrounding protests outside accommodation facilities for asylum seekers in Falkirk, Stirling, Perth and Aberdeen Scotland, and the wider implications for human rights, community cohesion, and public trust in institutions. The discussion reflected on systemic failures in governance, the responsibilities of duty bearers, and the urgent need to counter misinformation and racist narratives.

Moderated by Danny Boyle (BEMIS), the dialogue reflected diverse perspectives and offered key insights into challenges, institutional shortcomings, and potential pathways forward.

Key Discussion Points

1. Protests and Human Rights Obligations

Participants highlighted growing concerns around protests staged outside hotels and other accommodation facilities housing asylum seekers. These protests were described as deeply disruptive, targeting individuals in their homes, creating fear, and undermining their safety and dignity. It was stressed that while the right to freedom of assembly and expression is fundamental, these rights are not absolute and may be lawfully restricted in order to protect public safety and safeguard the rights of others. Protest against government policies or societal challenges is legitimate, but such demonstrations should be held in public spaces rather than outside the homes of vulnerable individuals.

2. First-Hand Impacts on Communities

The discussion included accounts of incidents where protests directly affected asylum seekers and hotel staffs. These events created a hostile environment, illustrating the urgent need for more effective protections. Participants stressed that these experiences demonstrate a wider lack of community engagement and support from public authorities, which undermines efforts to build cohesion and foster trust.

3. The Role of Media and Public Narratives

Participants expressed concern about the role of misinformation in fuelling hostility by the far-rights groups towards migrants. The spread of untruths and negative narratives was seen as a key factor driving division and racism. It was agreed that countering these narratives requires proactive engagement with media, clear public messaging, and collaborative efforts to challenge harmful rhetoric.

4. Structural and Policy Failures

A recurring theme was the disconnect between political rhetoric and practical action. While Scotland is often portrayed as a nation that welcomes refugees, the reality on the ground reflects inconsistent support, limited community engagement, and a lack of effective policy implementation. Participants also identified gaps in the civil service's knowledge of human rights obligations, where mainstreaming approaches often serve as a surface-level exercise rather than a substantive integration of rights into planning and governance.

5. Community Engagement and Cohesion

The erosion of community development initiatives was identified as a major factor contributing to current tensions. Without meaningful opportunities for communities to engage with authorities, policies risk being developed in isolation from the people most affected. Participants agreed that genuine engagement must form the foundation for building resilience and fostering cohesion, particularly at a time of rising division.

6. Historical Parallels and Political Responsibility

The discussion acknowledged the need to situate present challenges within a wider historical context. Participants pointed out that Scotland has previously experienced hostility directed at other minority groups, and current events reflect a worrying repetition of those cycles. It was stressed that political leaders have a duty to show courage by condemning hate-driven protests, addressing systemic inequalities, and acknowledging the nation's colonial history and its lasting impact on migration and integration.

7. Cultural Exchange and Inclusion

It was also noted that cultural initiatives, which once provided opportunities for communities to share traditions and foster mutual understanding, have been deprioritised. The loss of these platforms for cultural exchange was seen as a missed opportunity to strengthen inclusion and challenge divisive narratives.

The discussion underscored the urgent need for stronger political leadership, clearer public messaging, and a more genuine commitment to human rights at every level of governance. Participants emphasised that protesting against asylum seekers and minority ethnic communities not only undermines social cohesion but also breaches fundamental human rights obligations.

Moving forward, a rights-based approach must be embedded across all policy areas, ensuring that vulnerable communities are protected, misinformation is challenged, and Scotland lives up to its stated commitment to equality and inclusion.

Workshop 1 - Strengthening Accountability, Monitoring, and Reporting Mechanisms for Race Equality

The workshop on strengthening accountability, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms for race equality provided a platform for statutory bodies, community organisations, and sectoral networks to discuss challenges, share experiences, and propose improvements. The session focused on evaluating the effectiveness of current public sector frameworks, the utility and accessibility of race equality data, and ways to enhance accountability, transparency, and meaningful engagement with minority communities. Insights from participants informed the discussion, highlighting both operational and systemic barriers that impede progress toward genuine race equality.

Do you think enough is being done by the Scottish Government to improve accountability, reporting and monitoring mechanisms for race equality (e.g. promoting a new race equality action plan, publishing disaggregated data)?

The discussion reflected a consensus that existing measures by the Scottish Government to improve accountability, reporting, and monitoring for race equality remain insufficient. Mechanisms such as the Public Sector Equality Duty provide a statutory framework that encourages awareness and engagement, yet these do not consistently translate into measurable outcomes or practical improvements for minority communities. Reports and action plans generated under these frameworks often focus on outputs-plans, statistics, or narrative summaries rather than actionable steps, leaving third sector organisations to navigate complex reporting requirements while simultaneously delivering direct services.

Operational challenges were highlighted, including practices such as “race dumping,” where non-white families are referred to separate services, limiting access to primary support structures. Referral processes were also noted as inconsistent, frequently lacking sufficient context or information, which constrains the ability of receiving organisations to respond effectively. Participants emphasised that these structural gaps contribute to the perception that accountability measures are largely procedural rather than transformative. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful engagement between public bodies and communities often results in data being collected and analysed by individuals who do not have a lived understanding of the cultural and linguistic contexts of the communities they serve, undermining the reliability and utility of the data.

Is race equality data (on things like health, education, or employment) shared in ways that are clear and useful for your organisation and the communities you support?

Participants identified significant limitations in how race equality data is collected, disaggregated, and shared. Data is often aggregated under broad categories, such as “Asian”, which obscures the nuanced realities and specific needs of diverse

communities. This limits the ability of organisations to identify disparities in areas such as health, education, and employment and hinders informed decision-making. Community organisations reported that accessing meaningful disaggregated data for funding applications or service planning remains challenging, as government datasets often lack the level of granularity required for effective interventions.

The accessibility of reports was also criticised. Existing documentation tends to be dense, heavily numerical making it difficult for third sector organisations to interpret findings or translate them into practical strategies. Data collection was described as frequently compliance-driven rather than purposeful, with forms and reporting systems imposing administrative burdens that detract from service delivery. Furthermore, current systems often fail to capture the lived experiences and barriers faced by community members, including issues such as language, cultural differences, or socio-economic factors.

Nonetheless, participants highlighted examples of effective use of data in supporting community initiatives. Programmes that connect volunteers from minority backgrounds with schools and local services to mentor children or facilitate professional development demonstrate the potential of targeted, community-informed data collection and reporting to produce tangible benefits.

What changes would you like to see in how public bodies are held accountable for race equality commitments?

The workshop participants emphasised the need for public bodies to move beyond compliance-oriented reporting toward mechanisms that result in measurable outcomes and genuine improvements. Accountability should be strengthened by embedding community participation in the design, collection, and analysis of data to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance. Transparent dissemination of findings in accessible formats including case studies, stories, and multimedia outputs was recommended to facilitate knowledge sharing and highlight effective practices.

Third sector organisations, including BEMIS, were identified as critical convenors and facilitators in this process, capable of bridging gaps between communities and public institutions while promoting good practice. Participants recommended that public bodies should provide adequate support to these organisations to allow them to focus on service delivery while contributing meaningfully to accountability and reporting processes.

Further structural improvements proposed included stronger oversight of referral processes to prevent inequitable service distribution, embedding racial literacy and anti-racist training into public sector staff development, and ensuring that obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty are translated into actionable strategies. Integrating race equality considerations across all aspects of policy and planning

including health, education, and social services was emphasised as essential for systemic change. Participants also stressed the importance of tracking outcomes over time to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and promote continuous improvement.

The workshop concluded that while statutory frameworks exist to support race equality accountability, significant gaps remain in practice. Aggregated data, procedural reporting, and insufficient community engagement limit the effectiveness of current measures. Organisations such as BEMIS play a pivotal role in facilitating engagement, sharing good practice, and supporting communities to navigate these gaps.

The discussions highlighted the urgent need to make accountability mechanisms actionable, improve access to disaggregated and meaningful data, enhance representation within public bodies, and integrate racial equality considerations across all sectors. Strengthening these areas is critical to translating commitments into tangible outcomes for minority communities in Scotland, ensuring that public bodies are both responsible and responsive to the communities they serve.

Workshop 2 - Widening Participation, Representation and Co-Production Across Communities and Sectors: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice

This report provides an assessment of the extent to which ethnic minority communities in Scotland are being meaningfully engaged in decision-making processes, represented in governance structures, and supported in their contributions to race equality. It draws on the lived experiences and perspectives of participants and examines three critical areas: engagement in decision-making, the integration of lived experience into policy and service design, and the adequacy of support and funding for minority ethnic organisations. The findings highlight both positive developments and persisting systemic challenges that continue to undermine genuine inclusion and equality.

Since the concluding observations, have you seen more opportunities for meaningful engagement of ethnic minority communities in decision making at the local and national level?

Participants observed that, since the concluding observations, there has been no real progress in creating opportunities for meaningful engagement of ethnic minority communities in decision-making at either the local or national level. While some local councils, such as Aberdeen City Council, have attempted to engage ethnic communities, these efforts have not led to tangible or lasting impacts. Instead, there remains a sense of exclusion and invisibility, particularly outside of the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, where most of the recognition and engagement efforts are concentrated.

Communities in Aberdeen and other areas noted that they are often left unsupported and unacknowledged, despite facing unique challenges that require tailored responses. Many participants highlighted that while there are numerous committees, strategies, and initiatives that reference equality, diversity, and inclusion, these commitments are largely rhetorical and fail to produce meaningful outcomes on the ground. The absence of ethnic minority voices in decision-making spaces results in policies that do not reflect the realities or priorities of these communities.

Historically, there were moments in previous administrations when selective minority communities were consulted and occasionally involved in influencing policies. However, this engagement was neither consistent nor inclusive. Communities were often treated as isolated and separate groups, which created division, fragmentation, and disjointed representation. This practice undermined community cohesion and weakened collective advocacy for systemic change. At present, there is an even greater sense of exclusion, as communities report being completely sidelined from local and national decision-making processes.

Do you think lived experience is being used to shape policies and services in a meaningful way? What more can be done?

The incorporation of lived experience into policy and service design remains sporadic and inconsistent. For most communities, their day-to-day realities are not reflected in the development or delivery of policies that affect their lives. Participants noted that, with some exceptions, lived experience has not been systematically embedded in shaping public services or influencing policy frameworks.

One example of good practice is the approach taken by NHS Scotland, which has shown a degree of responsiveness to the needs of ethnic minorities. Through the use of community input, the NHS has introduced practical measures such as translation services for non-English speakers, enabling better access to healthcare services. However, the lived experiences of the Ukrainian community have not been taken into account in some policy responses, particularly in relation to language support and service provision.

Despite these isolated examples, participants stressed that such practices are not widespread and cannot be regarded as the norm across public institutions. Too often, the voices of minority groups are either overlooked or used in tokenistic ways, without being meaningfully integrated into the structures of decision-making or service delivery. This lack of systematic engagement undermines trust and perpetuates a disconnect between communities and the institutions that are meant to serve them. The lived experiences of the Esau classes of over 60 students were mentioned where they received no support from the local council.

There is a clear need for lived experience to be embedded as a guiding principle in policymaking, rather than being considered on an ad hoc basis. Mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, co-production, and monitoring should be established to ensure that lived experience is consistently applied not only in the design of policies but also in their implementation and evaluation.

Do you feel that minority ethnic organisations have been given adequate support and funding to do effective work on race equality? What more is needed?

Participants unanimously expressed that minority ethnic organisations have not been provided with adequate support and funding to enable them to carry out effective work on race equality. Grassroots organisations, particularly newer and smaller groups, face significant barriers to accessing funding, with many receiving little to no financial assistance. In contrast, larger and more established organisations continue to secure the majority of available funds, perpetuating an inequitable system that marginalises smaller community-based groups.

Several participants reported that councils are not supportive in practice and often fail to engage directly with ethnic minority groups. In some cases, when support has been provided, it has been symbolic or inadequate, such as the allocation of dilapidated buildings for the African community use. Ukrainian communities were cited as an example of groups that require urgent support, particularly in addressing language barriers, yet even their needs are not fully met. Councils were described as selective in their approach, choosing to work with larger, more visible communities while others encounter significant resistance or exclusion.

Funding processes were also identified as a major barrier. Multi-year funding streams, while valuable in theory, are often highly competitive and inaccessible to grassroots organisations that lack the administrative capacity to meet complex criteria. This structural inequity leaves smaller organisations trapped in cycles of underfunding and underrepresentation. Participants recommended that funding cycles should have a minimum duration of three years and a maximum of five years to provide stability and sustainability for community initiatives. Additionally, funders should adopt approaches that recognise the diversity of migrant statuses within ethnic minority groups and address equality as a unifying principle rather than an exclusionary one.

Participants also emphasised the need for third sector organisations and community groups to build resilience, strengthen their advocacy, and leverage their wealth of knowledge and lived experience in order to hold councils and other duty bearers accountable. Duty bearers must, in turn, acknowledge their obligations to right-holders and ensure that resource allocation and support are equitable, transparent, and responsive to the needs of all communities.

In conclusion, the findings from this report reveal that, despite longstanding commitments to equality and diversity, ethnic minority communities in Scotland continue to experience exclusion from meaningful participation and representation. While isolated examples of good practice exist, such as in the health sector, these are the exception rather than the rule. Across most policy areas and levels of governance, lived experiences are not adequately embedded, and decision-making processes remain inaccessible to minority groups.

Furthermore, minority ethnic organisations remain underfunded and under-supported, with smaller community groups facing disproportionate challenges in securing resources. The current funding landscape reinforces inequality and undermines the capacity of grassroots organisations to contribute meaningfully to race equality efforts.

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, Scotland must move beyond rhetorical commitments and adopt a more inclusive, systematic, and equitable approach. This requires ensuring that ethnic minority communities are recognised not as fragmented or selective groups but as integral partners in shaping policies, delivering services, and building cohesive communities. A shift towards embedding lived experience, restructuring funding frameworks, and holding duty bearers accountable is essential if Scotland is to realise its aspirations of genuine equality and inclusive representation.

Workshop 3 - Fostering Community Cohesion by Addressing Hate Crime and Misinformation

The workshop on fostering community cohesion in Scotland explored the urgent challenges posed by hate crime, misinformation, and social division, particularly in the context of recent protests and public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. Participants highlighted the increasing difficulties faced in building solidarity and resilience within communities. The discussion considered both the systemic barriers to cohesion and practical steps for promoting understanding and integration in a time of heightened societal tension.

Do you feel that hate crime and misinformation are being effectively addressed? What is working well/ what is not?

Participants highlighted that hate crime continues to present a significant challenge across Scotland. Despite longstanding campaigning and policy development, progress in tackling hate crime has been limited, with little visible change over decades. Participants emphasised that hate crimes are rarely isolated incidents, noting that political rhetoric and media narratives often exacerbate tensions and contribute to hostile environments. Concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of the current reporting framework, which can lead to re-victimisation and a lack of accountability for law enforcement. Reports of racist behaviour by officers being inadequately addressed

illustrate a broader failure to take meaningful action, leaving communities feeling unsupported and unsafe.

Generational patterns of hostility toward minority communities were identified, with targets shifting over time while discriminatory behaviour persists. Participants noted that while Scotland has articulated hate crime policies consistent with the principles of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), these remain disconnected from the lived realities of affected communities. Organisations stressed the need for stronger leadership and demonstrable political will to implement and enforce measures that meaningfully protect minority populations.

What do you feel are the key barriers to community cohesion for ethnic minority communities in Scotland today?

The session highlighted the pervasive role of misinformation in undermining community cohesion. Participants observed that false narratives, particularly those circulated by far-right actors, contribute to the dehumanisation of minority communities and exacerbate societal divisions. While some isolated counter-narratives have emerged, there is little evidence of sustained government-led initiatives to address misinformation at scale.

It was noted that Scotland's approach to public accountability often involves deflecting responsibility, with historical injustices and colonial legacies inadequately acknowledged. Participants argued that addressing misinformation effectively requires a holistic approach, including truth-telling, reconciliation, and community development initiatives that reflect the lived experiences of affected populations. The normalisation of false narratives in media and public discourse was described as a significant barrier to cohesion, particularly when coverage focuses on majority populations while marginalising the perspectives and experiences of asylum seekers and minority communities.

A range of structural, social, and cultural barriers were identified as impeding community cohesion. The use of unsuitable accommodation for asylum seekers, such as hotels, hospitals, or proposed abandoned barracks, was criticised for creating isolated and unsafe environments that prevent meaningful interaction with local communities. Participants emphasised that such arrangements not only hinder integration but may reinforce negative stereotypes and fear.

Media coverage was highlighted as a key factor shaping public perceptions, often amplifying fear, resentment, and misinformation. The deliberate targeting of vulnerable populations with misleading narratives was described as a tactic that exploits mistrust in government institutions and exacerbates existing social divisions. Additionally, the recent rise in hostility toward migrant communities, including multi-generational

minorities, has created new tensions within previously integrated communities, further undermining cohesion.

Participants also emphasised the importance of unwritten cultural norms, shared history, and everyday social practices in fostering integration. Without spaces and opportunities for cross-cultural engagement, initiatives remain fragmented and ineffective. Integration networks that fail to involve wider Scottish society, beyond refugee or minority-specific networks, were seen as insufficient to promote lasting understanding and solidarity.

How might we best encourage and facilitate community cohesion and cultural understanding across communities in Scotland?

The discussion highlighted the importance of proactive measures to foster community cohesion. Examples were shared where direct interaction between local communities and asylum seekers led to greater understanding and empathy, demonstrating that personal relationships are critical for breaking down fear and prejudice. Participants argued that the third sector plays a central role in creating these opportunities, including the organisation of community cohesion events and programmes that facilitate cross-cultural engagement.

There was consensus that the Scottish Government, in partnership with the civil service and community organisations, must take responsibility for promoting integration and addressing the root causes of division. This includes addressing broader social issues such as homelessness, public health crises, and economic disparities, which, if neglected, can be exploited to scapegoat minority communities. Political leadership and institutional accountability were repeatedly emphasised as essential to prevent the normalisation of hate and to reinforce inclusive social norms.

The workshop concluded that fostering community cohesion in Scotland requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses hate crime, counters misinformation, and actively promotes cross-cultural engagement. Participants highlighted the need for strengthened government leadership, improved accountability mechanisms, and meaningful partnerships between public institutions and community networks.

Key recommendations include the creation of safe and suitable housing for asylum seekers, the promotion of accurate and inclusive media narratives, investment in community cohesion programmes, and increased political and institutional accountability. By addressing both structural barriers and social attitudes, Scotland can move toward more cohesive, resilient communities capable of fostering solidarity across diverse populations.

Post-Event Key Evaluation Points

(for internal network use)

What was most useful part?

- Listening to the situation across the country.
- Being updated by BEMIS and SHRC. Hearing from the wider sector.
- The workshops
- Scotland's journey toward racial equality requires moving from recognising both overt and systemic discrimination, as defined by CERD, to taking deliberate, accountable action that eliminates persistent inequalities and harnesses the strength of its diversity.
- Insights and frankness from Angela / SHRC, good discussions about the current situation and about solutions, networking.
- It really showed there are some people behind the scenes working for the minority and it gave me the confidence that all sojourners have hope.
- Participants able to ask questions and interact with each other.
- The breakout discussions and well-noted recaps from other groups
- Learning about work that others are currently engaged in, thinking about next steps together.
- Hearing from BEMIS, who articulated current concerns and ideas for pushing back against collective negativity, superbly. Similarly, Angela (SHRC) spoke brilliantly, and it was good to hear her commitment to speaking on behalf of BAME communities, especially when engaging with key stakeholders - notably, Scottish Government and Police Scotland.

What can we improve?

- More time probably - a full day would be useful with more than enough to discuss.
- Future meetings could be improved by emphasising follow-up on implemented actions, evaluating their effectiveness, and ensuring accountability for measurable outcomes.
- Have individuals from the Government / Council invited that can help us answer the questions we were discussing at our workshops- Accountability.
- Focussing breakout discussions on a narrower scope; not everything could be covered in the time allotted. Having the conference run 12.00-16.00 instead of 10.00-14.00 would also make travel from outwith Glasgow easier.
- Maybe choosing which breakout group you join? But really was a great event, so informative and great networking

"In breakout spaces, it might be worth considering allocating time to everyone to make respective points so that everyone is heard. Not everyone feels comfortable in jumping in and out of conversation and, as is the case, with open discussion, some are more vocal than others if there isn't someone on hand to ensure that there is relative equity in discussion. Overall, a great event and a much-needed tonic for the past few weeks. Although draining speaking about these issues, it is fundamental to our work, and I think there was a sense of reinvigoration in the room after being able to share and learn from likeminded individuals who, generally, feel much the same about current events. For events, in the near future, I think it will help to have a real focus on what is affecting us as communities, particularly around the influence of the far-right, as unfortunately they don't look like they are going anywhere fast".

Agenda

10:00–10:30	**Registration & Refreshments** Arrival, tea, and coffee served
10:30–10:35	**Welcome & Setting the Scene** Danny Boyle, Executive Director, BEMIS
10:35–10:50	**Keynote Address** Professor Angela O'Hagan Chair of The Scottish Human Rights Commission 'One Year on from CERD Concluding Observations 2024'
10:50–11:00	**Questions**
11:00–11:30	**Reflection and Discussion on Current Human rights Challenges**
11:30–11:40	**Comfort Break**
11:40–12:30	**Workshop Session** Aligning UNCERD recommendations with the Race Equality Framework 2016–2030
12:30–12:45	**Workshop Feedback & Findings**
12:45–13:00	**Next Steps & Thank You** Closing remarks, led by Danny Boyle, BEMIS
13:00–13:45	**Networking Lunch**
14:00	**Event Close**

Workshops

Theme	Host	Note taker
1. Strengthening accountability, monitoring and reporting mechanisms for race equality.	Eilidh Dickson (SHRC)	Neil Foster (BEMIS)
2. Widening participation, representation and co-production across communities and sectors: Bridging the gap between policy and practice.	Eman Hani (CSREC)	Justina Obaoye (BEMIS)
3. Fostering community cohesion by addressing hate crime and misinformation.	Charlotte Thomas (BEMIS)	Kyle O'Brian (CSREC)

Roundtable Discussion

Progress One Year On from CERD Concluding Observations

In these workshops we have linked the CERD concluding observations to some key themes in the Race Equality Framework 2026-30.

Please see below the key themes and roundtable questions:

1. Strengthening Accountability, Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms for Race Equality

- Do you think enough is being done by the Scottish Government to improve accountability, reporting and monitoring mechanisms for race equality (e.g. promoting a new race equality action plan, publishing disaggregated data)?
- Is race equality data (on things like health, education, or employment) shared in ways that are clear and useful for your organisation and the communities you support?
- What changes would you like to see in how public bodies are held accountable for race equality commitments?

2. Widening Participation, Representation and Co-Production Across Communities and Sectors: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice

- Since the concluding observations, have you seen more opportunities for meaningful engagement of ethnic minority communities in decision making at the local and national level?
- Do you think lived experience is being used to shape policies and services in a meaningful way? What more can be done?
- Do you feel that minority ethnic organisations have been given adequate support and funding to do effective work on race equality? What more is needed?

3. Fostering Community Cohesion by Addressing Hate Crime and Misinformation.

- Do you feel that hate crime and misinformation are being effectively addressed? What is working well/ what is not?
- What do you feel are the key barriers to community cohesion for ethnic minority communities in Scotland today?
- How might we best encourage and facilitate community cohesion and cultural understanding across communities in Scotland?

CERD Recommendations

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Concluding Observations for Scotland

In September 2024 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) delivered its concluding observations on the UK's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. These observations include specific recommendations for Scotland.

The following bullet points summarise UNCERD's recommended key areas of focus for the Scottish Government.

1. Incorporate CERD Principles into Domestic Law: Ensure that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is fully enforceable in Scotland's legal system.
2. Adopt a New Race Equality Action Plan: Expedite the process of adopting a new Race Equality Action Plan. Ensure meaningful consultations and engagement with civil society in the development, implementation and monitoring of this.
3. Engage with the Irish Community: Actively collaborate with the Irish community and relevant stakeholders to develop and implement measures that address ethnic and religious prejudice.
4. Combat Ethnic Minority Poverty: Develop and implement targeted strategies to reduce poverty which disproportionally affects ethnic minorities, with a focus on children.
5. Ensure Access to Affordable Housing: Take immediate steps to improve access to affordable and adequate housing for ethnic minority households, including increasing the availability of social housing.
6. Revise the NRPF Rule: Work towards revising the "no recourse to public funds" rule that exposes ethnic minority families to a higher risk of poverty.
7. Support Gypsy and Traveller Communities: Address the causes and legacy of forced assimilation of Gypsy and Traveller communities, ensuring their full participation in relevant initiatives.
8. Improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people from minority ethnic communities across Scotland is being measured.
9. Collect and publish comparable statistics on the enjoyment of rights by members of ethnic minority communities in all fields of life.
10. Hate Crime and Hate Speech: Take all measures necessary to combat hate crime and hate speech.
11. National Human Rights Institutions: Increase human, technical, and financial support for National Human Rights Institutions such as the Scottish Human Rights Commission so they can fulfil their mandates effectively.

12. Access to Justice: Ensure all ethnic minorities have fair and effective access to legal aid to seek justice.
13. Representation and Participation in Political Life: Continue to take effective measures to improve representation of ethnic minorities, especially women in political and public affairs.

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Abhainn MacLeod	GREC
Ahmad Mourad	SIA - Scottish Inter-cultural Association
Aneel Singh Bhopal	WSREC
Angie Mwafulirwa	Sharpen Her: The African Women's Network
Aymen Alkhawlani	Maryhill Integration Network
Charlie McMillan	HRCS
Charlotte Thomas	BEMIS
Danny Boyle	BEMIS
Davids	Inspiring Families Development Network Scotland- INFADENS
Dr. Harriette Campbell	ACWA/ACES
Eilidh Dickson	SHRC
Eman Hani	CSREC
Ethelinda Lashley-Scott	Multi-Cultural Family Base
Francesca Malila	CEMVO
Jamie Spurway	Interfaith Scotland
Justina Obaoye	BEMIS
Kyle O'Brien	CSREC
Magda Czarnecka	Feniks
Maree Aldam	Amma Birth Companions
Meriem Timizar	International Women’s group
Myshele Haywood	GREC
Neil Foster	BEMIS
Professor Angela O’Hagan	SHRC Commissioner
Ratko	Seventh-day Adventist Church/ WECC
Steven Marwick	Inspiring Scotland
Susan Siegel	Garnethill Hebrew Congregation
Tommy Brannigan	Call it Out