

Race, Equality & Human Rights Network

Meeting Report

12 March 2026 – Stronger Communities Week
Merchants House, Glasgow



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Introduction

The Race, Equality and Human Rights (REHR) Network Meeting was convened on 12 March 2026 as part of Stronger Communities Week, bringing together key stakeholders, community organisations, public authorities, and human rights practitioners across Scotland.

The meeting provided a timely platform to reflect on emerging challenges to community cohesion, particularly in the lead-up to the Scottish May 2026 elections, and to collectively explore strategies for strengthening dignity, inclusion, and rights-based responses.

Executive Summary

The REHR Network Meeting (12 March 2026) brought together Scottish stakeholders to address rising racism, anti-immigration tensions, and threats to community cohesion ahead of the May elections. Evidence highlighted increasing hate crime, coordinated protests, and far-right activity, contributing to fear and division particularly affecting migrants and minority ethnic communities.

A Falkirk case study illustrated local escalation and wider national relevance. Participants emphasised early intervention, community–police collaboration, and stronger partnerships.

Interactive discussions identified education, communication, and solidarity as key pillars.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to rights-based, coordinated action to counter misinformation, strengthen trust, and promote inclusion.

Key Points

- Rising hate crime and organised protests increasing community tensions
- Disproportionate impact on migrants, refugees, and minority groups
- Need for early education and anti-bullying interventions

- Strengthening trust between communities and institutions
- Importance of real-time data and coordinated responses
- Focus on education, communication, and solidarity as core strategies
- Post-election, rapidly re-engage communities and rights holders in strategic anti-racism and hate crime interventions to address emerging issues and rebuild cohesion

Welcome and Scene Setting: National Context and Emerging Challenges

Danny Boyle (BEMIS Executive Director) opened the session by framing the discussion within both short-term (pre-election) and medium- to long-term (post-election) considerations.

He highlighted a number of pressing challenges currently facing Scotland, including:

- Rising racism and anti-immigration tensions
- Increased race-aggravated hate crime, supported by data presented during the session
- The organisation and mobilisation of protests via social media platforms, including coordinated activities across cities
- Evidence that individuals are travelling between locations to participate in protests
- The growing use of racially discriminatory language during demonstrations
- Reports indicating the presence and influence of far-right groups

Danny Boyle emphasised that these dynamics are contributing to:

- Heightened fear and insecurity within communities
- A growing sense of hostility and division
- Disproportionate impacts on migrants, refugees, and multigenerational minority ethnic communities

He further noted that these tensions are likely to escalate in the period leading up to the May elections, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, preventative, and rights-based interventions.

Case Study: Falkirk – Community Impact and Escalation of Tensions

Dr Eman Hani (Central Scotland Regional Equality Council) presented a case study from Falkirk, providing first-hand insights into the situation surrounding the Cladhan Hotel, where asylum seekers are currently accommodated.

Key highlights included:

- Ongoing daily protests organised by far-right groups outside the hotel
- Increasing levels of hostility and tension in the local area
- The use of anti-immigration rhetoric and divisive narratives
- The psychological and emotional impact on asylum seekers residing in the hotel
- Broader community-wide effects, including fear, polarisation, and disruption to social cohesion

Dr Hani emphasised that the situation is not isolated but reflective of wider national trends, illustrating how localised incidents can quickly escalate and affect both directly impacted individuals and the wider community fabric.

Organisational Reflections and Open Discussion

The session included reflections from key stakeholders, offering diverse perspectives on community cohesion, rights, and institutional responses.

Lorraine Glass (*respectme*)

Lorraine Glass highlighted the importance of children's rights, noting that:

- Bullying constitutes a violation of human rights
- It often begins at an early age and manifests both online and offline
- On average, one third of children report experiencing bullying, reflecting the widespread nature of the issue

She emphasised the need for early intervention, education, and awareness, linking childhood experiences of exclusion to broader societal patterns of discrimination.

Michael Fletcher (Police Scotland)

Michael Fletcher emphasised the importance of collaboration between law enforcement and communities, noting that:

- Police Scotland is actively seeking greater support and engagement from community organisations

- The introduction of Independent Advisory Groups and community advisers has strengthened institutional understanding
- There has been an increase in community advisers, particularly in areas where there is limited cultural or contextual knowledge

He highlighted that these measures are essential for:

- Bridging the trust gap between police and communities
- Enhancing culturally informed responses
- Supporting more effective and inclusive policing practices

Abhainn Macleod (Grampian Regional Equality Council)

Abhainn Macleod provided reflections on:

- The growing community cohesion challenges across different regions in Scotland
- The need for stronger partnerships and localised responses
- The importance of sustained engagement with communities to address emerging tensions

Interactive Scenario and Collaborative Discussion

A key highlight of the meeting was the interactive scenario session led by Dr Justina Obaoye-Ajala (BEMIS).

This session:

- Encouraged participants to engage in practical, solution-oriented thinking
- Created space for collaborative dialogue and shared learning
- Focused on real-life challenges relating to misinformation, racism, and community tensions

Participants explored:

- How to respond to rising misinformation and harmful narratives
- The role of institutions and community actors in maintaining trust
- Practical strategies to strengthen community cohesion.

The discussion identified three critical pillars:

Education

- Promoting awareness of rights and responsibilities
- Addressing misinformation through informed, community-led approaches

Communication

- Strengthening transparent and inclusive communication between institutions and communities
- Amplifying trusted voices within communities

Solidarity

- Building alliances across communities
- Encouraging collective responsibility in addressing racism and division

Key Outcomes and Reflections

The meeting underscored several key insights:

- Community cohesion in Scotland is under increasing strain, particularly in the context of political and social developments
- Racism and anti-immigration narratives are becoming more visible and organised, requiring urgent and coordinated responses
- The impact on affected communities is significant, including fear, isolation, and reduced participation
- Trust between communities and institutions remains a critical issue, necessitating sustained engagement and accountability
- Collaborative, rights-based approaches are essential to addressing both immediate and long-term challenges

Conclusion and Next Steps

The REHR Network Meeting highlighted the urgent need for collective action to address rising tensions and strengthen community cohesion across Scotland.

As the country approaches the May 2026 elections, stakeholders emphasised the importance of:

- Proactive engagement with communities
- Using real time hate incident / crime data to inform front line allocation of policing resources where required
- Strengthening partnerships between public bodies and civil society to articulate robust anti racism and discrimination messaging
- Promoting accurate information and countering harmful narratives. This includes all political parties' fact checking claims that Scotland is "overrun"
- Embedding human rights principles of dignity, equality, and inclusion into all responses

- Ensuring that post-election we move swiftly to integrate rights holders and communities into anti racism strategy and hate crime interventions.

The session concluded with a shared commitment to continue working collaboratively to ensure that Scotland remains a society where everyone feels safe, valued, and that they truly belong.



Agenda

- 11:00** **Welcome & Scene Setting on Current National Challenges**
Danny Boyle (BEMIS)
- 11:15** **Case Study Example – Falkirk**
Dr Eman Hani (Central Scotland Regional Equality Council)
- 11:25** **Organisational Reflections & Open Discussion - Open to all attendees**
Moderated by Charlotte Thomas (BEMIS)
Key Reflections From:
- Lorraine Glass (respectme)
 - Micheal Fletcher (Police Scotland)
 - Abhainn Macleod (Grampian Regional Equality Council)
- 12:10** **Short Comfort Break**
- 12:15** **Interactive Scenario – Open Discussion**
Moderated by Justina Obaoye-Ajala (BEMIS)
- 12:35** **Summary and Next Steps**
BEMIS
- 12:50** **Session Close – Lunch & Informal Networking**
Light lunch & informal networking
Sharing of Break-Fast Boxes for those currently fasting

BEMIS Discussion Scenario: “When Belonging is Questioned”

It is April 2026, just weeks before the local elections in Scotland. In the town of Glenross, a culturally diverse community that has historically been peaceful and collaborative, tensions have begun to rise.

A video circulating on social media falsely claims that a newly arrived refugee family received “priority housing over local residents.” The post quickly gains traction, attracting hundreds of comments, some expressing concern, but many spreading harmful stereotypes and misinformation.

Within days, the refugee family experiences verbal harassment in public spaces. Their children report feeling unsafe at school. Community members from minority ethnic backgrounds begin to withdraw from local activities, fearing hostility.

Local authorities issue a brief public statement denying the claim but do not engage directly with affected communities. Police record the incident but describe it as an “isolated misunderstanding.” Meanwhile, community organisations feel overwhelmed and unsupported in addressing both the misinformation and the emotional harm caused.

A previously planned community cultural event sees a sharp drop in attendance from minority communities, while some long-standing residents express frustration, claiming their concerns are “not being heard either.”

Trust begins to erode between communities and institutions.

A local network of community leaders, public officials, and civil society actors convenes an urgent meeting to address the situation and rebuild trust, dignity, and belonging.

The question now is not only how to respond to this incident but how to prevent future harm and strengthen the community for the long term.

Guided Discussion Questions

1. Belonging and Human Impact

When misinformation or harmful narratives emerge, what happens to a person’s sense of belonging, safety, and dignity and why does this matter for the strength of the entire community?

2. Trust and Institutional Responsibility

In moments of community tension, what actions or inaction from institutions can either build trust or deepen mistrust, and what does a truly rights-respecting response look like?

3. Challenging Harmful Narratives

What responsibility do we each hold as individuals, community members, and leaders to challenge misinformation and harmful narratives when we encounter them?

4. Shared Accountability and Partnership

What does genuine shared accountability between communities, duty bearers and third sector organisations look like not just in words, but in everyday practice and decision-making?

5. Moving From Dialogue to Action

If we are truly committed to building communities rooted in dignity, respect, and belonging, what is one concrete action each of us and our organisations must be willing to take?

Attendees

NAME	ORGANISATION
Abhainn MacLeod	Grampian Regional Equality Council
Adriana Budzisz Orłowska	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Ahmad Mourad	SIA, Scottish Inter-cultural Association
Angie Mwafulirwa	Sharpen Her: The African Women's Network
Anna Russell	The Women's Integration Network
Asiatou Kora	International Women's Group
Callum Smith	Progress in Dialogue
Cecily May	Voluntary Health Scotland
Danny Boyle	BEMIS Scotland
Donna Cameron	Police Scotland
Dr Harriette Campbell	ACES /ACWA
Dr Narayan Shrestha	AHTT
Eloise Wilson	CVS Falkirk & District
Else Kek	Interfaith Scotland
Eman Hani	CSREC
Emma Cresswell	Aberdeen City Council
Erin Docherty	Scottish Government
Esraa Husain	Human Rights Consortium Scotland
Ghzala Khan	WSREC
Hongmei Nalci	Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association
Jamilah Mahmud Hassan	African & Caribbean Women's Association
Jane Simpson	Sharpen Her
Kateryna Nenko	Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association
Kubra bibi	Hstar
Kyle O'Brien	CSREC
Lorraine Glass	<i>respectme</i> , Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service
Lynda Irving	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Maria Papachristos	Citizens' Rights Project
Maryam	Women's integration network
Meriem Timizar	International Women's Group
Michael Fletcher	Police Scotland
Nadia Aslam	Capital City Partnership
Nara Morrison	Grampian Regional Equality Council
Rachel Maurice	Aberdeen Climate Action + GREC/ In-Trans
Ratko	Risteski
Rosie McIntosh	Scottish Human Rights Commission
Sarah Robinson Galloway	Youthlink Scotland
Sean Hewitt	Scottish Government
Steven Marwick	Inspiring Scotland
Tafadzwa Maisva	School for CEOs
Unyimeobong Matthew	Inspiring Families Development Network Scotland- INFADENS.
Usman Lamin-Sidique	ACES