Anti-Roma prejudice and persecution is growing across Europe, but much research and policy focuses more on the impact of discrimination rather than the causes. Dr McGarry’s work is being recognised for his insistence that governments and decision-makers address these causes. He has not only spoken in high level meetings, including for the Council of Europe, but has written two influential books with two more in the pipeline and has been involved in changing local policy on the treatment of Travellers.

Dr McGarry’s first book, Who speaks for Roma? Political representation of a transnational minority community, is a monograph on Roma politics based on his PhD. It was the subject of a three-book review in the leading academic journal Citizenship Studies covering the most important books on Roma issues in recent years. The book deals with the key barriers to effective political participation by Roma. Dr McGarry, a senior lecturer in politics in the School of Applied Social Science, co-authored a second book on migration and the rise of the far right in Europe. A third forthcoming book will deal with identity and social movements, and a fourth on Romaphobia, due out in 2016, will cover the issues of identity and territoriality that are at the heart of rights abuses against Roma people.

Dr McGarry has just received funding to support further research on Roma and territoriality. He said: “Most research focuses on the impact of prejudice, such as higher unemployment rates. Virtually no-one is working on the causes, the idea of the Roma being a nation without territory, of not belonging. It is this that is behind the idea that they can be treated differently, that they have no rights.”

For this research Dr McGarry will travel to countries in Eastern Europe with a high territorial concentration of Roma. One place he will visit is Prague, where a Roma pride parade is being held. Dr McGarry says the Roma pride movement has been building in recent years, modelled on gay pride events, and is part of an attempt to assert a positive Roma identity.

The idea for the Romaphobia book came out of an article Dr McGarry wrote on the acceptability of racism against the Roma in Europe for the website Open Democracy, following the supposed abduction of a blonde child by Roma in Greece last year. Dr McGarry’s research on the Roma also led to his appointment as the independent chair of the Brighton and Hove Traveller Scrutiny Panel whose aim was to scrutinise and inform the creation of the city’s new Traveller Strategy.

The panel won an award for the way in which it carried out the scrutiny process and influenced council policy. Brighton & Hove City Council’s housing unit attended all its meetings and has taken up the recommendation for a permanent Traveller site in the area. Dr McGarry says this is key to improving the health, education and job prospects of Travellers as well as their integration in local communities. He presented the panel’s recommendations to the council in 2012. The findings included the negative representation of Travellers in local media. One local editor was interviewed by the panel about his newspaper’s sensationalist coverage of Travellers. Stories about Travellers have since changed and are less negative. Dr McGarry said: “I found the experience to be incredibly rewarding, allowing me to apply my expertise as a researcher to a real-world issue. It was refreshing to come down from the ivory tower and put my knowledge to good use.”

Social Sciences

Dr Aidan McGarry’s research on the Roma has shone a spotlight on one of the last acceptable forms of racism in Europe and led to initiatives in Brighton to confront the marginalisation of Travellers.

Being able to take evidence from various voices around the city and within the Traveller community was really helpful in shaping an effective strategy with buy-in from different sectors.

Councillor Pete West, Brighton & Hove City Council