

Petr Torak  
Hi, Florentina Nice to see you again.

Florentina Chiriac  
Hello nice to see you too Peter, how are you?

Petr Torak  
I'm very good. Thank you. It's been a long time We haven't seen each other.

Florentina Chiriac  
I know it's been ages people been busy doing different things all over the place and we didn't have the time to catch up.

Petr Torak  
Absolutely, I'm sure that we will improve, you know, once the pandemic is over but thank you very much for your time that you give to this interview. It's very important. And the aim of this project is to inspire young people. So I'm really grateful for your time

Florentina Chiriac  
Thank you so much, I'm great to be here.

Petr Torak  
Thank you. And to start the interview, I would like to first ask about yourself, you know who you are, where you're from? What was your childhood like?

Florentina Chiriac  
So my name is Florentina Chiriac. I'm a Roma from Romania. I was born in Fetesti, which is a city in South Romania with a high Roma population. And I grew up there and I went to school there. And it was a bit difficult because I am 20 years old. So now days, things have changed a little bit with you know, Roma integration into schools, and you know, racism, and institutional racism. But when I grew up, things were different. And you were treated differently from coming from a Roman background or having Roma friends, you know, there was a different environment. Let me just put it this way.

Petr Torak  
Okay, thank you. And so, you lived in Romania until you're 20. And what made you do to move to the UK?

Florentina Chiriac  
So I was in Romania until I was 20. And then because my boyfriend a Roma as well, and came and lived here with his family, because he went school to England in England. So I came to follow Him and decided to move to UK. And things didn't work out. But I decided to stay. And I really liked England. For me, it was like a second home. Because especially the place where I was living, there were loads of Roma and there were some Romanian shops, and it was a bit like home, you know, having that close community together. And people would notice that people weren't like, identifying myself or my people as being Roma, because there was not such a, like, I was hearing travellers all over the place, but they were talking more about the English travellers. But like, especially like, the guy that I was seeing my, my ex-boyfriend, and he looked more like Asian, and there were there was that kind of thing. Like if there was speak to us on the street, they, they assume that he's Asian, but not that he's Roma or Romania, so there was the discrimination, and the racism wasn't there as much as being back home, so I feel more welcomed in England.

Petr Torak  
Yes, I completely understand this. And apart of, you know, liking the fact that you've been welcomed here. What else do you like about the UK?

Florentina Chiriac

I don't like the weather I must say. The weather is not a plus, but I like that I was actually offered a job in the police. And the senior leaders were quite happy for me to join coming from a Roma background, I was quite open with it. And there were more than happy to, you know, support me into going into the job. So there were the opportunities that I've, I've received in here. And they let me you know, get the training, they helped me with my application. And they were really supportive, you know, of my learning, and just like getting better. I like day to day stuff. And English, you know, because English obviously wasn't that isn't my first language. So that was quite good. But the situation slightly changed, because there's one having the senior leaders and, you know, supporting you, and the other one is being you know, open about who you are in front of, you know, your work colleagues and some, sometimes they might not, you know, see you in the same in the same way basically, as, you know, senior leaders do.

Petr Torak

Yes, no, I completely understand that. So, before we get to the work a bit, thinking back to your childhood, what was your dream job, what you imagined yourself to be when you grow up?

Florentina Chiriac

I grew up wanting to be a nurse. So I wanted to basically you know, is save, save, save lives, be a doctor or a nurse, like something to do with medical save lives, you know, do like give treatment to all the people and things like that. But then my, my grandpa was in the army, my uncle was in the military, my other uncle was the chief of the police back home. So I grew up into this sort of uniformed environment. So as I grew older, I wanted to join the police. I applied for Romania, but I wasn't accepted. And I got told it was due to medical reasons, but I had no issue. And I know I had no issues and nothing that stopped me to join, because I came here and I was perfectly fine. And I've been doing, I've been a police officer for six years, and I've got no issues whatsoever, nothing to stop me to do my job.

Petr Torak

So I guess you're not even far from your dream because you wanted to help people. And you are helping the people in a different kind of uniform. Absolutely brilliant that you can fulfil your dream this way. So okay, so you are a police officer now is that you are in the force for six years? How is it for you?

Florentina Chiriac

It started Rocky, I must say, you know, I had the rocky path where, you know, I've opened myself up and I came as being Roma. And when I joined some police forces, the police force that I was in, was unlike some colleagues, they still had their own unconscious biases. And I did feel that I was being treated differently due to my heritage due to where I'm coming from. And but that didn't stop me. And, you know, I realised that there is a need for a change. And if I don't step up, and if I don't get involved, and if I don't do anything, to change their perception, and to improve relationships between you know, Roma, and, and then you know, no one would, because it's hard, it's hard, like, you know, we can we can all moan about it, the whole, you know, our whole life. But if we don't actually step up and do something about it, it wouldn't make a difference. So, the, the Start was rocky and then, you know, I get to know you, I got to know Jim, I got to know other people in the same situation, and me and, you know, maybe alone when other strong, but together, you know, we'll make a team and we can do something, and we can let our voice be heard. So, now with is really good, you know, I'm going for promotion, I get supported, I've got a great team, and the force that that mean, you know, are really supportive of the work that I'm doing. And, you know, I get to do why what I enjoy, you know, and be closer to that dream job as being an A senior leader, and be able to make all the decisions that I want.

Petr Torak

Yes, no, thank you. That's very, I mean, it's amazing. And it's very powerful, what you say, and it's, you know, I like it when you talk about being together and managing, you know, and doing more together. It's actually the theme of this idea of this project is together we can, because the power is in unity, the power is in us working together, and helping each other So absolutely, you know I completely agree with you. Thank you. So, policing obviously I have seen you and we already met

when I was in the police office when I was a police officer, what was or what is for you within the police service, the most exciting thing to do?

Florentina Chiriac

Most exciting thing you know, a lot people see police differently. If you once you join, once you come in, you know, you see a different world out there is, you know, it's good. driving fast cars is good. Having the uniform Don't get me wrong is great. You know, the first I remember the first day I actually saw myself in the windows of a shop and I couldn't believe it was me. And the way I looked and I just feel that you know cry, that, you know, look it's me and I just couldn't believe it. But when you when you have someone there isn't really need of your help a victim of domestic abuse or someone you know, that had a car accident, and you know, just the small things and you can see, you know, making their lives better. And having an impact in the life and actually helping them and see how they are afterwards is just, there's no there's no words to describe that feeling is just, you know, you've had such a positive impact in someone's life. That is just you know, is priceless, is actually priceless.

Petr Torak

So thinking about your future. Where do you see yourself In 5 or 10 years time?

Florentina Chiriac

I see myself as an inspector or as chief inspector, I want to get involved more in, you know, making the decisions more into implementing new ways of policing, and more into, you know, how we do things training recruitments, you know, increase the VME into the police, you know, make sure that we get more Romas and more minorities on board, because at the end of the day, we are the community that we police, you know, and we do police by consent. So we should, you know, get more minorities on board so they can help us understand, you know, where you know, what we're doing and what we're doing wrong, and understand that, you know, different communities are different and they might have different needs. Because everyone is the same. Everyone is different at the end of the day. So I see myself on a senior on a senior level.

Petr Torak

So the next questions are about your background, you've mentioned that you're from Roma background, what does it mean to to be a Roma?

Florentina Chiriac

For me Roma, makes me feel nostalgic. You know, whenever I say to someone that I'm Roma, you know, I said it with pride, because I think everyone should say, you know, we should, we shouldn't feel that, you know, we shouldn't feel ashamed about it. We shouldn't feel scared of saying hey you know, we should, we should scream louder, we should be louder to saying here because it's something to be proud of, because there's so so many Roma, that they have been successful through these years, and there's so many that we don't even know that they're Roma because, you know, we still have that fear into like, you know, saying, you know, being open about our heritage and being open about who we actually are. And I think this needs to change. For me Roma, it means tradition from the Romans family and it means loud music, it means being alive, it means dancing, it means a lot of things, but it means also strong, because it means you need strong people like Roma to be strong, you know, and they are strong, because they've, they've been through so so much. And they gone so so far, that they couldn't do it without having, you know, that strong feeling there as well. So yeah, so for me, Roma means, you know, putting twice the effort, but getting all the stuff back means like not giving up means being together, it means being family.

Petr Torak

Wow, you've said it so beautifully. And, because obviously, one of our aims is also to show Roma girls, young Roma women, too, that they can achieve as well, you know, because quite often there are conceptions that Roma women can't do as much as boys. And we want obviously to change this, because it's it's rubbish. But, you know, your opinion on this is do you see the role of Roma women changing in the society in these days?

Florentina Chiriac

Definitely, things have evolved you know, things have, you know, we grow so much from the past. And I think, you know, female, female in general, you know, the role of a female in society has changed, you know, regardless if he's Roma and non Roma. But yeah, you definitely see more Roma girls out there, you know, making themselves heard, you know, like, look at me, and I can tell you so many example but obviously I wouldn't want to speak in their names, without them, you know, being being open about it. But there's so so many Roma girls out there that that they have seen something, they wanted it and they fight for them, they've got it because they've got the you know, they've got the power is nothing stopping them. And you know, that it doesn't mean that being a woman, you know, it doesn't mean that you can't, you know, get some way you can, like, you know, achieve something, my Nan used to say to me, if you want to go somewhere, or get to someplace, you need to pick the moon. Because even if you don't succeed, you read through the stars. So pick as high as you want, you know, and then even if you don't get as high, you know, you get somewhere really, really close. So you can do it. I have all the faith in the Roma girls out there.

Petr Torak

It's amazing to figure out it's such a strong, powerful message. And I've been a witness how you make such a huge difference to all those young lives. You know, we've been together to do some speeches, not only in the UK, but in other countries as well. And I've seen when the girls see when they see a boy, yeah, it's nice. That is Roma. But when they see you, it's like, wow, you know, their eyes are more full of spark and the smile was over all over the face. You know, they suddenly saw Yeah, I can do it because she could do it. So this is so powerful, and it's amazing work. Thank you. Last question is, and you've already said it, but now including the boys. What would be your final message To all the young people listening to this interview, what would be your recommendation or tips for them?

Florentina Chiriac

You need to fight for your dreams, If you don't do it, no one else will. You know, you need to make the best out of you. Get there, get out there, be a be loud, be proud about who you are. Yeah, don't be scared. Don't be scared and you know frightened about anything. If someone treats you bad, you know, you come to us you got all support, you know, we're a community, we're a family. And we're together and we can all make this, okay, we can make it you know, we can make it happen, but fight for your dreams. You know, you've got all your life in front of you. Be who you want to be, be the person that you know your best version of yourself. You know, and don't let anyone stop you. And don't let anyone tell you that you can't. You can.

Petr Torak

It's so beautiful. Thank you very much Florentina, really thank you very much for your time. But obviously, for all those very powerful words because they will make change, they will make a huge change into people's perceptions of themselves of the world around them as well. So it's amazing work that you are doing. I'm very proud to know you and to call myself your friends. So thank you, and I hope to see you again in the future in person.

Florentina Chiriac

Thank you so much, I hope to see you soon and all the best of luck. And I salute all the Roma on this way and I hope to meet as many as many of you and hope there you know as many of you know, achieve what you wanted to achieve.