



Working collectively to support and promote community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and advancing human rights

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National Action Plan against Racism

CWI Submission

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Introduction

Established in 1981,¹ Community Work Ireland is the national organisation that promotes and supports community work/community development as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, and promoting human rights. CWI is a membership organisation comprising over 700 individuals and organisations that support community work/community development and work in the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. For nearly 40 years, Community Work Ireland has played an important role in working to advance policy and programmes that meet the real and pressing needs of marginalised communities seeking to ensure the meaningful participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

CWI is a member of the Irish Network against Racism, the Far Right Observatory and Le Chéile and were members of the Department of Justice Advisory Committee on the Community Sponsorship Programme. CWI was also a member of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

At the outset Community Work Ireland recognises that racism can be on purpose or in effect and that at a structural, systemic and individual level racism is endemic in Irish society and must be challenged and addressed as a matter of urgency.

Community Work Ireland welcomes the development of the new National Action Plan against Racism (NAPAR), the commitment in the Programme for Government in this regard and the opportunity to engage with the development of the Plan, which we do having consulted with CWI members. We recognise the community sector as both rights holders and duty bearers and that the community sector has a key role to play in ensuring that an anti-racist and would welcome the opportunity for ongoing engagement in the process.

¹ As the Community Worker's Co-operative

Community Development, Representation and Participation

Engagement of communities and their representative organisations who are affected by, and suffer the brunt of, racism in developing and monitoring the solutions to these issues will be critical for the successful implementation of the Action Plan.

The Plan needs to advance mechanisms that ensure that Black and Minority Ethnic communities in all their diversity are represented on a broad and diverse range of decision-making bodies at local and national levels. Where there are gaps, the Plan needs to be proactive in addressing them. Strong representation requires strong community development. The role of community development in building inclusion integration and voice needs to be recognised and resourced. Effective engagement requires a robust process of community development supported by the necessary community infrastructure, including by professional community work.

We call for a commitment in the Plan to investing in the extension of the Pilot Community Development Programme currently being operated by the Department of Rural and Community Development projects, with a specific focus on addressing racism and promoting interculturalism and inclusion supported by the DCEDIY. This will lead to the creation of a sustainable community infrastructure that will contribute to ensuring social cohesion, and the development of strong communities, which have inclusion, anti-racism and solidarity at their core.

Diversity

The Plan needs to recognise the diversity that exists within and between Black and minority ethnic communities, the often differential type and impact of racism depending on age, gender, sexual orientation, disability and religion, the intersectionality of racism and discrimination on other grounds, the multiplier effect this can have, and the different responses that are needed.

We call for an action Plan which sets out key issues and responses for specific groups within Black and Minority Ethnic communities including women, children and young people.

The Influence of the Far-Right

Increasingly, there has been a growth of far-right elements who have deliberately and cynically infiltrated and manipulated concerns at proposals to locate direct provision centres in rural villages and small towns across Ireland. In the context of COVID, such protests have diminished but this has not stopped the spread of hatred, racist rhetoric, hate speech and division online. Communities need to be supported and equipped to recognise and stand against such mobilisation.

We call for clear actions to be set out in the Plan to challenge far right mobilisation, messaging and action including supports for communities.

Addressing Systemic Racism

Addressing systemic and structural racism must be a priority for this Plan. The Plan needs to acknowledge first and foremost that institutional racism exists and that the way to address it is by

working with BME communities to strengthen their voice and work towards the development of services that are truly intercultural and inclusive.

We call for the focus of this Plan to be firmly placed on public institutions with a strong emphasis on the Public Sector Duty as a key tool in ensuring that all public sector bodies place human rights including anti-racism and equality at the core of all that they do. In addition, the Plan should reaffirm and endorse the UN CERDs definition of racism and the understanding of racism as articulated in the Interim Report of the Anti-Racism Committee which notes that ‘Racism occurs in many areas of society and affects many aspects of people’s lives. Racism is embedded in structures; reflected and reproduced in institutions; practices, policies and cultural norms, and through them has the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals or groups, based on their race or ethnicity (including nationality and membership of the Traveller community)...This systemic racism is manifest in the ways that it prevents people from enjoying their rights across many domains, including their economic, social and cultural rights, as well as their civil and political rights’.²

Hate Crime Legislation

Whilst policy, practice and legislation such as the Equal Status Acts, the Employment Equality Acts and the Equality and Human Rights Act all have an important role to play in addressing racism and promoting equality and human rights, the absence of coherent and robust hate crime legislation in Ireland makes us an outlier in Europe and fails to offer adequate protection to those who experience such crimes.

We call for the urgent finalisation of the hate crime legislation currently before the Oireachtas, ensuring that it’s understanding of racism is that outlined in the NAPAR interim report and that it adequately addresses all forms of racism. Implementation must be prioritised and integrated where appropriate with implementation of the National Action Plan.

Employment

Addressing racism in the labour market must be a focus of the Plan. ‘Although there is little mention of whiteness in the public discourse on labour market outcomes, inequalities and discrimination, continues to be a silent but key factor in recruitment, promotion and labour market experiences’³. Travellers too, experience significant levels of unemployment attributed to systemic racism and exclusion in the education and employment sectors.

We call for positive action measures including targets for the employment of people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities in all public bodies. In addition, the Plan should set out a strategy for engagement with the private sector to address these issues.

² <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/132151/ed3f39e2-4aa1-4991-aa06-52beae8310db.pdf#page=null>

³ <https://inar.ie/the-centrality-of-race-and-whiteness-in-the-irish-labour-market/>

Education

The Education system plays a key role in challenging or reinforcing negative or positive attitudes to diversity. A core aspect of ensuring that this role is a positive one must include a focus not just on diversity within education settings but on the curriculum itself.

Educational institutions must ensure diversity exists on every level by ensuring diverse enrolment, integrating classrooms, and crucially, implementing curricula which reflects the history and culture of students of all backgrounds⁴.

Whilst many students from BME communities experience educational disadvantage there are others who do not. Ensuring equality of access, participation and outcomes from the education system requires special measures for those who are most marginalised and experience the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion within BME communities.

We call for: A refocus on the curriculum at all levels to ensure a clear reflection of the history, literature and experiences of BME communities in Ireland. In addition, we call for special measures to be included in the Plan which prioritise and ensure equality of access, participation and outcome for students from BME communities who experience the highest levels of poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

Implementation of The White Paper on Ending Direct Provision

Whilst welcoming the commitment by this Government to end direct provision, there will be challenges associated with this move in ensuring that this process is managed in a way that promotes inclusion, integration and social cohesion as opposed to hardening attitudes against asylum seekers. The NAP needs to take cognisance of this and set out clear direction in this regard.

We call for co-ordination and cohesion between this Plan and the implementation plan/process for the White Paper on Direct Provision ensuring a strong prioritisation and anti-racist and social inclusion actions in the implementation of the White Paper.

Racist Reporting Mechanisms

Whilst acknowledging the importance of the role that the Irish Network against Racism's ireport plays in monitoring and tracking racist incidents, this role should not be left to NGOs and the Gardaí. Other state bodies too have a role to play in this regard and should be supported and resourced to fulfil this function.

⁴ <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?agreed=1>

We call for measures in the Plan which create a role for public bodies including for example local authorities, schools, universities and hospitals in tracking and monitoring racist incidents through the development of simple, clear and accessible racist reporting systems to be implemented by public bodies.

Training and Awareness Raising

Mandatory anti-racism training at pre – service and in-service levels for key personnel in public bodies is essential to address both the conscious and unconscious bias which has a hugely negative impact on the lives of members of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities.

In addition, members of BME communities and in particular those in direct provision require rights awareness training to ensure that they can self-advocate and gain the supports that they need in exercising their rights.

We call for action in the Plan to develop QQI accredited anti-racism training as well as Awareness of Rights training for BME communities in particular those in direct provision.

Data

Community Work Ireland welcomes the recognition in the consultation document that ‘Ethnic equality monitoring is a key tool in uncovering the prevalence of racial discrimination and its impact on lives’, and the commitment therein to ‘adopt a consistent approach to the collection of ethnically disaggregated data by public service providers and others’⁵. Capturing ethnicity data is important in establishing baseline across a range of social and economic indicators, measuring progress and providing strong evidence for policy making.

We call for a clear framework to be set out in the Plan for the collection and collation of ethnic data in all public bodies within a strong human rights framework.

Institutional Mechanisms

Robust Institutional mechanisms and supports are required to ensure meaningful and effective action can be taken to challenge racism and build an inclusive and antiracist society in Ireland.

The closing down of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism in 2008, which for 10 years was the government advisory body on racism, was a retrograde step at a time when Irish society was becoming ever more diverse and when racist incidents were on the increase and attitudes were hardening. Its role was to report and monitor racist incidents (a role now undertaken by INAR) work at policy level with agencies, conduct extensive research and analysis, support antiracism action at community level through the provision of grants and other supports, promote interculturalism and Traveller awareness and design and deliver anti-racism training for

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/132788/85f75bfc-0154-46f7-b947-f25513e9070a.pdf#page=null>

state agencies. Despite claims at the time that this work would be mainstreamed into Government there is little evidence to show that this has been the case.

Ireland's record in Europe as a leader in developing ways to promote inclusion and equality needs at this difficult time to be reinforced not dismantled. For this to happen strong institutional mechanisms with adequate resourcing will be imperative.

We call for the establishment of an independent oversight and monitoring body with the authority, resources and capacity to oversee implementation of the NAPAR including indicators and timelines and with a key role in supporting research and information, anti-racism training and policy.

We call for assurances in the Plan that the provisions contained therein apply to all residents in Ireland including asylum seekers and Refugees.