



## Racial Equality – Policy Priorities and Recommendations (Key Point Briefing)

May 2014

This key point briefing<sup>1</sup> provides an overview of the Commission's policy priorities and recommendations to advance racial equality in Northern Ireland. In particular we highlight the importance of law reform, tackling prejudicial attitudes and effective monitoring and evaluation, supported by robust data collection. We recommend that the Executive, Departments and other key stakeholders take action in the following areas, including via the proposed Racial Equality Strategy (RES).

- **Law Reform** - Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals in Northern Ireland currently have less protection against racial discrimination, harassment and victimisation, than people in other parts of the UK. **The Commission recommends** specific changes to give greater protections to BME individuals in Northern Ireland – including increased protection from racial harassment and victimisation; the removal of unjustified exceptions; along with enhanced scope for employers to take positive action and tribunal powers etc.
- **Tackling Prejudicial Attitudes and Racism** – Research has highlighted the persistence of negative attitudes towards BME groups and migrant workers; lack of participation in public life; and under-reporting of hate crime. **We recommend** actions to tackle prejudicial attitudes; to tackle racial violence and improve reporting; to promote values of acceptance and respect so as to improve good relations; and to increase representation in public life.
- **Education** - The Commission has long been concerned about bullying, non-attendance, drop-out rates and poor educational outcomes experienced by Irish Travellers. The Commission is also aware that Newcomer, Roma or refugee learners can also encounter similar difficulties. **We recommend** that the cultures and language of learners are reflected in the curriculum; that barriers to participation and progression are identified and addressed; that targeted strategies and training are used to progress key issues such as bullying; and that relevant data is collected, and evaluation of progress undertaken.
- **Employment** - In addition to harassment at work, research suggests that key issues include lack of recognition of culture; concentration in low grade, low paid employment;

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, download our full policy position (40 pp) or specific recommendations on race equality law reform from <http://www.equalityni.org/Delivering-Equality/Equality-Themes/Racial-equality.aspx> Our recommendations take account of the Commission's remit, relevant policy developments and extended engagement with stakeholders over the past year.

low expectations; recognition of qualifications, lack of English language skills, problems in accessing childcare, gaps in legal protection, exploitation and forced labour. **We recommend** ratification of the Migrant Workers Convention and the extension of the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004; targeted initiatives to maximise participation in employment and training; to ensure access to appropriate employment support (including childcare and ESOL); to tackle exploitation, and to address gaps in employment rights.

- **Accommodation and Housing** - An undersupply of appropriate accommodation for Travellers, insecurity of tenure and overcrowding for migrants remain key issues. Issues for refugees also include a lack of time to find suitable alternative housing and difficulties in providing deposits or a suitable guarantor. **We recommend** the establishment of a multi-agency Taskforce on Traveller accommodation; specific measures to address the housing needs of migrants; accessible information and training for relevant front-line staff on the entitlements of EU Migrants; and a coordinated strategic policy response to the needs of all asylum seekers and refugees
- **Health** – poor life expectancy and high levels of suicide persist for the Irish Traveller community. Maternal and infant mortality is also an issue for some BME groups. There are also concerns about poor health outcomes for the Roma community. **We recommend** co-ordinated actions to monitor (including collection of relevant data) and address the key health inequalities amongst BME, newcomer and Traveller populations, to ensure measurable improvements in health outcomes; that barriers to access are addressed and that relevant training is provided to service providers; targeted actions to address the needs of BME groups, including asylum seekers and refugees.
- **Social Welfare** – Migrant Workers experience restrictions to benefits because of residence rules and may have more limited access to advice. Asylum Seekers and Refugees have similar issues with regards to accessing advice and support. **We recommend** that the Executive ensures that welfare reform changes are compatible with EU and Human Rights law; action to address key barriers to accessing benefits so as to ensure appropriate support; clear guidance and support; and that OFMDFM takes appropriate steps to ensure the long term sustainability of the Emergency fund for destitute migrants.
- **Multiple Identities** – **We recommend** particular attention be paid to addressing multiple identities within the delivery of public services and associated strategies.
- **Ethnic Monitoring** - Research has noted the current absence of robust, reliable statistical or administrative analysis and significant gaps in the knowledge base. **We recommend** that public authorities ensure effective monitoring systems are in place to ensure effective policy development and service delivery.
- **A Racial Equality Strategy** - We highlight the importance of the development and implementation of a Racial Equality Strategy. The strategy should take account of relevant international obligations and revised guidance on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and ensure targeted, resourced and measurable actions with clear responsibilities for delivery and review.