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[Blog article](#) by Darren McKinstry, Director of Public Policy & Strategic Engagement

Race Equality: a need for ongoing action

Recent weeks have seen the publication of the UK-wide Commission of Race and Ethnic Disparities report (the Sewell Report) and the Executive Office's Northern Ireland Racial Equality Indicators Report: 2014-2019.

While the Commission will consider the findings in more detail, the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Indicators Report suggests improvements with regards to mixing and integration. The summary indicators also points to an improvement in rates of educational attainment for both white, and minority ethnic pupils as a whole, although the latter continue to do less well than white pupils. In contrast however, almost one in three people reported that they were prejudiced against people from minority ethnic communities, an increase on previous surveys. 45% of young people also report having witnessed racist bullying or harassment in their school. It is essential that the [Addressing Bullying in Schools Act 2016](#) delivers improvements in this regard when it finally [comes into effect for schools on 1 September](#) of this year.

The TEO publication also includes data on public perceptions. While this can be of value, it is important that such data is also disaggregated to communicate the views of ethnic minority people on the issues that affect them.

While it is important to acknowledge progress, there also remains a need for ongoing action. Our long standing recommendations to advance racial equality call for:

- Reform of the law, to address key shortfalls in legal protections
- Tackling prejudicial attitudes, racism and hate crime
- Ensuring equality of opportunity in education, employment, accommodation, healthcare and access to social welfare
- Ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation, supported by robust data collection

We continue to recommend that the NI Executive, Departments and other key stakeholders take action, including via the Racial Equality Strategy, to advance these areas.

Equality Data, Analysis & Monitoring

We have [long identified the need for robust equality data in Northern Ireland](#), both to enable good evidence-based policy making and to ensure effective compliance with the equality and good relations duties established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The absence of key equality data means that it is difficult to assess the extent of key inequalities, and to track progress in achieving outcomes.

Over the past year, the COVID -19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of up to date and detailed equality data in Northern Ireland, as a vital component in shaping emergency and longer term public policy responses. A number of equality-based analyses have emanated from Britain and elsewhere - demonstrating different equality impacts of the virus, the wider pandemic and responses to it, across a range of grounds.

We continue to call for the Programme for Government to include actions, particularly by Departments and other public bodies, to collect comprehensive equality data, to address key gaps in equality data (including on the grounds of race) and to rectify a lack of data disaggregation (including on ethnicity).

The recent [Sewell Report](#) recommends that *"government move away from the use of the term 'BAME', to better focus on understanding disparities and outcomes for specific ethnic groups"*. While we welcome a focus on ensuring a better understanding of disparities and outcomes, we also see value in discussions or analyses at a range of levels.

Overall, to identify relevant trends, the level of data (dis)aggregation in both collection and analysis should be appropriate to the issues being examined. It is for this reason that the Commission recommends that all Programme for Government measures are not only tracked in aggregate but also for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 equality grounds.

Human Rights Obligations

It is important that the Executive also takes action to ensure compliance with international obligations and to give effect to [Concluding Observations](#) of key bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the European Committee against Racism and Injustice and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Included in those recommendations are calls for prompt action on law reform, racist hate crime and hate speech, the collection of disaggregated data and actions to advance equality for Travellers and Roma, and asylum seekers and refugees.

Working in Partnership

Representatives of minority ethnic communities must be involved in developing policy responses to inequalities. The establishment of the Racial Equality Sub-Group under the Race Equality Strategy was an important step, as is the recent

establishment of the Executive Office's Racial Equality Strategy Travellers Thematic Group. It is important that engagement with ethnic minority people is meaningful and that the end results – improvements to legislation, public policy and service delivery – meet identified needs.

It is important that we see full implementation of the Executive's Racial Equality Strategy via a clear set of time-bound and funded outcome focused actions, with regular monitoring and review.

Maintaining Focus to Secure Progress

We must of course continue to tackle acts of racism and discrimination, by calling them out and challenging them. At a fundamental level, we must examine the systems in which we all live and work and challenge them where they serve to maintain or exacerbate disadvantage or discrimination.

The law in Northern Ireland needs to be reformed so as to strengthen the rights of people here against racial discrimination and harassment and to ensure that, at the very least, the law here keeps pace with legislative developments in Great Britain. Key actions to advance and monitor racial equality should be mainstreamed across the Programme for Government and the key work plans of Departments and other Public Authorities.

In the last year, the Black Lives Matter movement has given a renewed focus to racial inequalities. This full involvement of BAME people and communities must form a core part of delivering changes to equality laws and to the development, delivery and monitoring of public policy and service delivery.