

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD): Submission to 'List of Themes'.

May 2016

Policy Framework and Action Plan (Article 2):

While a Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland has recently been published, progress on racial equality has been slow (with publication of a new Strategy having come some 5 years after the expiration of the previous strategy). While we welcome the publication of the strategy, we remain concerned that it includes no baseline quantitative assessment, and a detailed action plan to accompany the Strategy is yet to be developed.

We recommend that the Committee asks the UK Government what action has been taken to develop a co-ordinated cross-departmental action plan in Northern Ireland to advance racial equality (incorporating clear targets, actions & timescales); and to provide evidence of how it is ensuring that the Northern Ireland Executive is giving effect to CERD obligations.

Legislative Reform (Article 2):

There are significant gaps between racial equality law in Northern Ireland as compared to other parts of the United Kingdom. While we welcome the NI Executive's recent commitment to have new legislation in place by the 2017-2018 Assembly Session, we remain concerned in that, despite previous similar commitments to reform race legislation, no substantive progress was made.

We recommend that the Committee asks Government to set out a detailed timetable for the review of, and public consultation on, the racial equality and fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland to achieve the NI Executive's stated goal of having new legislation in place by the 2017/18 Assembly.

Disaggregated data and ethnic monitoring (Article 2):

The lack of reliable and comprehensive and disaggregated statistical data on minority ethnic groups in relation to employment, health, education or housing outcomes presents a fundamental barrier to the monitoring and evaluation of public policy, strategies and programmes to address racial inequality in Northern Ireland. While the 2005 Racial Equality Strategy included a commitment to implement ethnic monitoring, the new (2015) Strategy, contains only a commitment to 'consult on proposals', with no corresponding timeframe for implementation.

We recommend that the Committee asks the UK Government what action has been taken by the NI Executive to collect, monitor and evaluate comprehensive and disaggregated data relating to minority ethnic groups across the full range of Government Departments / functions; and to outline specific timeframes for consultation on, and implementation of, comprehensive ethnic monitoring to improve public policy and service delivery in Northern Ireland.

Racist hate crime (Article 5):

Despite a recent focus on hate crime by criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland, the general trend since the Committee's last report is one of an increase in racist incidents and crimes. Research has highlighted an increasing trend in negative/prejudicial attitudes in Northern Ireland. Prosecution for racist hate crime also remains low and the lack of joined-up 'end to end' data to track the progress of hate crimes through the criminal-justice system remains an issue.

We recommend that the Committee asks the UK Government to provide evidence of the effectiveness of any specific actions to promote respect, and tackle racism and discrimination; and to provide specific detail on what action is being taken to reduce and eliminate racial violence in Northern Ireland (including to address issues of under reporting, the low number of prosecutions for racist hate crime, and to clarify if it will ensure the publication of comprehensive 'end to end' data to allow hate crimes to be tracked through the criminal-justice system);

Addressing inequality and promoting integration (Articles 1, 5, 7 and General Recommendation 25):

The Commission has identified a range of key inequalities and/or barriers to integration for minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland across a range of areas – employment, education, health, housing, public participation; and social protection. In Northern Ireland the policy response to addressing key racial inequalities has however been mixed. Despite some welcome developments (such as the decision to consult on a Refugee Integration Strategy), minority ethnic groups continue to face key inequalities across a range of social policy areas.

We recommend that the UK Government are asked to set out evidence of the actions being taken in Northern Ireland to address key inequalities experienced by minority ethnic communities (particularly marginalised groups such as Travellers and Roma); and to promote integration of minority ethnic communities by addressing barriers to education, health, housing, employment and social protection (including for asylum seekers and refugees).