

# **Evidence Paper:**

## **Inquiry by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Concerning**

**The experience of minority ethnic and migrant  
people in Northern Ireland.**

**“Our Experience – Our voices”**

**A submission by North West Migrants Forum  
In partnership with**

**Belfast Islamic Centre, Belfast Multi-Cultural Association,  
Black and Minority Ethnic Women’s Network, Horn of Africa  
People’s Aid Northern Ireland,  
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## Introduction

The North West Migrants Forum (NWMF) welcomes this opportunity to submit written evidence to the Inquiry by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee concerning “the experience of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland.”

1. Established in 2012, and based in Derry/Londonderry, the NWMF was founded with the fundamental goal of supporting, advising and caring for members of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities living mainly, but not exclusively, in the north-west region of Northern Ireland. In addition to running a range of training courses and cultural activities, the NWMF assists people of minority ethnic and migrant communities in a myriad of ways. These include benefits advice and legal advocacy; plus the provision of food parcels and short-term crisis payments to vulnerable individuals, such as asylum seekers, and migrant workers experiencing hardship, but with no recourse to public funds; and the homeless.
2. The submission which follows is based on a series of four focus groups and 10 one-to-one interviews with minority ethnic individuals conducted over two days (29 April and 1 May 2021). The purpose of the engagement sessions was to listen carefully to the concerns and issues of members and service users and highlight any recommendations which emerged. Around 14 hours of recordings were made, involving migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and dual nationals of minority ethnic backgrounds from a range of countries and ages. These included Algeria, Hungary, Spain, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, South Africa, Kenya, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Ghana, Latvia, Russia, Mauritius, Jordan, Zimbabwe, and British Guyana. The focus groups were organised and conducted by a collective of grassroots organisations led by people of minority ethnic communities here in Northern Ireland. This was a deliberate decision to ensure the authenticity of evidence collected and a comprehensive outlook on BME peoples' life in Northern Ireland. But first, some background.

## **Background**

### **Demography**

3. Recent estimates (at June 2019) place the total population of Northern Ireland at around 1.894 million (NISRA, 2020a). Prior to the Millennium, Northern Ireland was the least ethnically diverse region of the United Kingdom (UK), with an overwhelmingly white population. However, the expansion of the EU in 2004, plus the advent of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, led to a surge in international migration. Between mid-2000 and mid-2019, an estimated 240,000 long-term international migrants arrived in Northern Ireland, and 195,000 left, leaving a net total of 45,000 new residents, accounting for 2.4% of the overall population (NISRA, 2020b). The scale of inward migration can be seen in the School Census figures. In 2002, there were 1,366 'newcomer' BAME pupils; by 2020, this figure had risen to 17,400 (Department of Education, 2021). The School Census for 2019 also lists over 65 languages spoken by primary school pupils as their first language here (NISRA, 2020c), another indication of the growth in diversity across Northern Ireland.

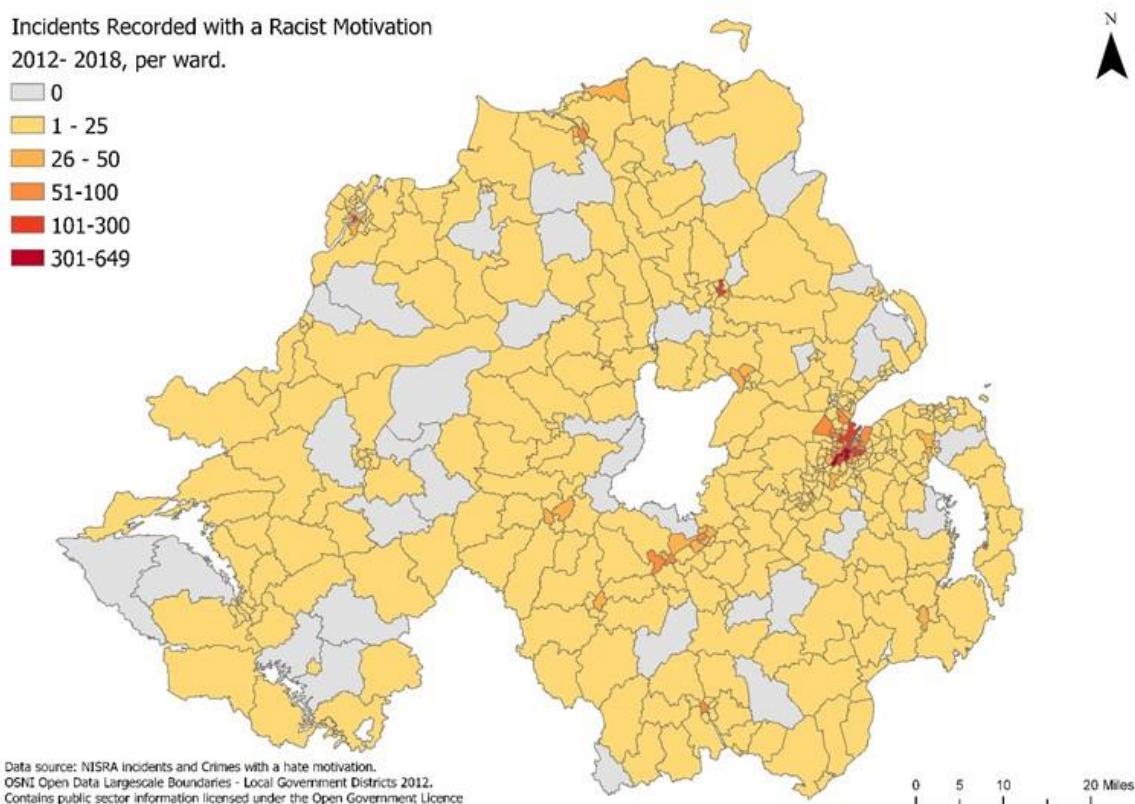
### **Legacy of conflict**

4. While the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (GFA) contributed to an increase in the ethnic diversity of Northern Ireland, the system of government it created is based upon parity of esteem between "two traditions". This has contributed to a lack of visibility for those who are neither Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) nor Catholic /Nationalist/Republican (CNR). Institutions established under the GFA to promote equality have historically been focused on the human rights of traditional communities, and the implementation of equal opportunities monitoring, such as in the fair employment legislation, is frequently limited to either CNR or PUL. The legacy of paramilitarism, and periodic flare-ups in particular neighbourhoods around certain events, is also part of the background that contributes to the marginalization and insecurity of minority groups.

## Racism and Hate Crime

5. The PSNI began recording hate-motivated incidents and crimes in 2004. The categories include sectarian, racist, homophobic, transphobic and disability-related criminality. Traditionally, Northern Ireland has been perceived as a society dominated by sectarianism, a view reflected in official police figures, which consistently showed sectarian incidents to be the most prevalent form of hate crime. That all changed in 2016.

**Map 1: Racist Incidents, Geographical Distribution, 2012 – 2018**



6. In 2016/17 the number of racist incidents exceeded the number of sectarian incidents for the first time, and this has remained the case since then (PSNI, 2021). In 2020/21, for example, **993 racist incidents** were recorded by the police, compared with **934**

**sectarian incidents**<sup>1</sup>. Map 1 (above) shows just how widespread these incidents are across Northern Ireland, with very few electoral wards incident-free (shown in grey).

7. The figures on hate crime become even more striking when a simple calculation is made. Firstly, it should be noted that the 993 racist incidents recorded in 2020-21 directly impact on less than 3 per cent of the population, while the 934 sectarian incidents relate to the other 97 per cent (Protestant and Catholic communities). Table 1 (above) shows the number of racist/sectarian incidents; the affected population in both cases; and the rate per 100,000 population. Assuming that around 45,000 BAME individuals are potentially affected by racist criminality, the table reveals that the likelihood of a BAME individual experiencing a racist incident is **44 times higher** than the likelihood of a member of the majority (Protestant/Catholic community) experiencing a sectarian incident. Even when the total estimated Non-UK/ROI population (around 112,000 in 2019) is used as a comparator, instead of the newcomer population (45,000), the likelihood only falls from **44 to 17 times** – still a remarkable differential. In brief, racist hate crime is more prevalent in Northern Ireland than generally assumed, particularly when the relatively small size of the BAME community is taken into account.

**Table 1: Likelihood of experiencing racist –v- sectarian incident, 2020/21**

Type of Incident	No. of Incidents	Affected Population	Rate per 100,000	Likelihood
Racist	993	45,000	2,207	44
Sectarian	934	1,848,700	51	1

Source: PSNI (2021) and NISRA (2020a)

8. Having provided some background and context for our submission, it is now time to present the Submission itself.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the PSNI (2021), “Not all hate motivated incidents will result in the recording of a crime, as what has occurred in the incident may not be of the level of severity that would result in a crime being recorded.” (p. 2)

## THE SUBMISSION

### 1 The Experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people living in Northern Ireland, and the challenges they face.

9. Before proceeding to the other questions posed by the Committee, the submission, will initially examine the experiences and challenges facing minoritized individuals under the following six themes:

- Asylum and immigration
- Security and justice
- Systemic/Institutional Racism
- Employment, education and Housing
- Inclusion and belonging
- Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategies, 2005 and 2015

#### Asylum and immigration

10. While Northern Ireland has a long history of providing asylum to people in danger, recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of desperate people seeking sanctuary. War and conflict in countries such as Syria, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Congo, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan have fuelled this increase. The precise number of asylum seekers and refugees currently living in Northern Ireland is not known, mainly because, while the Home Office collects national data, they do not release statistics for Northern Ireland (Law Centre NI, 2015). However, the true figure is believed to be in the low thousands.

11. As part of the evidence-gathering process, a focus group and set of one-on-one interviews were held with asylum seekers from Algeria, Syria, Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria and Sudan. All accounts have been anonymised to protect confidentiality. Five key issues emerged from these engagements, namely: (i) **denial of the right to work**; (ii) **derisory benefit payments**; (ii) **long delays in processing asylum applications**; (iv) **mental health concerns**; and (v) **the Home Secretary's 'New Plan' for Immigration**.

12. **Denial of the right to work** is built into the very fabric of Immigration Rules, with the policy intention to discourage ‘economic migrants’ from entering the UK (Home Office, 2021). However, as the focus group revealed, desperate people are not dissuaded from fleeing terror by administrative rules. Instead, our asylum seekers spoke of the poverty and sense of shame at being unable to work, often for years. MH (from Eritrea) spoke for many when he said:

*“I’m still an Asylum Seeker after five years, and I live in Belfast. Our problems are more than just getting the right papers. We need permission to work and support ourselves. I haven’t worked since I came here; it feels like five years of being in lockdown. We just want to work like normal people. I know of around 20 asylum seekers of my age that can’t go to work, and it’s a stressful and hard life.”*

13. Asylum seekers are given a cash allowance of £39.63 per week for each person in the household. According to the Government, “This will help you pay for things you need like food, clothing and toiletries.” (Gov.UK, 2021). A payment of this size, however, bears no relation to the actual cost of living in 2021, and anyone forced to exist on this meagre amount is likely to have an inadequate diet. MH continued:

*“For going to college, you would like to look nice, perhaps buy a pair of shoes, but with this money you can’t do it at all. £35 is for everything, even the internet data on your phone and bus fare to college. I’ve been living this life for 5 years. I’ve been homeless twice. I’ve been kicked out of two houses, and I’m in my third address. I got kicked out from my previous house because if you get an immigration refusal or court refusal, they (Home Office) stop supporting you. I’ve been homeless for almost two years, sleeping on my friend’s sofa. It’s sad. If they (Home Office) just let us get a national insurance number and work, we would be able to pay for our accommodation and support ourselves.”*

14. Another participant, an asylum seeker from Eritrea, remarked that the small amount of money he was living on (£5 per day) meant that he was “eating the same thing every day, just rice and pasta”. In order to survive, many asylum seekers are forced to use local food banks. A Syrian asylum seeker commented:

*"Yeah, the food banks are very helpful, and without them we couldn't support ourselves because, as previously mentioned, it is only five pounds per day. So, imagine with this five pounds, you'll have the cheapest food at breakfast. So what you are going to do for lunch and dinner? It is not Ramadan every day!"*

15. Most participants felt a sense of embarrassment or shame at having to seek free food, and preferred to work, if they would only be allowed to do so. A former asylum-seeker from Zimbabwe explained:

*"I must say, when I was seeking asylum, the food bank was helpful, but I hated going there because I felt it took away my dignity. I didn't like taking those plastic bags from the food bank, as I used to think people were looking at me every time. And sometimes they'd give you things you don't want, and things that you don't eat, and you just have to say, thank you. I hated it!"*

16. **Long delays by the Home Office** in processing asylum claims, or a failure to properly understand the political situation in certain countries, are a common complaint. In one of the focus groups, a Nigerian woman (married with three children) spoke about how she is still an asylum seeker **after seven years**.

*"I have lived here for seven years and I am still an asylum seeker. The Home Office is basically refusing to give me asylum, and they don't really pay attention to the issues in my country, to know that I am in danger, and it is not safe to return. Apart from the kids, we have no hopes. The only plan that you have is what will you eat for breakfast and dinner; that is what we have been reduced to."*

17. Even opening a **basic bank account** can be difficult for many asylum seekers, particularly if they are women and the required proof of address is associated with her husband:

*"Yesterday, I made an application for a bank account and they couldn't even open one for me. They asked me for proof of address, but because my husband is the case holder everything is in his name, and we don't really have any address with my name on it. When I left the bank, I just wanted to shout, I'm a human being just like you!"*

18. **Mental health** concerns are a significant problem among asylum seekers, and this was reflected in some of the comments made by the focus group participants. The increased vulnerability to mental health problems that refugees, and asylum seekers face is linked to **pre-migration** experiences (such as PTSD and war trauma) and **post-migration** conditions, including separation from family, prolonged asylum procedures, poverty, and poor housing (Mental Health Foundation, 2017).

19. Studies have shown that asylum seekers and refugees are more likely to experience poor mental health than the local population, including higher rates of depression, PTSD and other anxiety disorders. For example, they are **five times more likely** to have mental health needs than the general population <sup>2</sup>, and more than 61% will experience serious mental distress (Medical Health Foundation, 2017). An asylum seeker from Eritrea noted:

*“Belfast is a good city, and the people are very kind to me, but the immigration process is long, you live in overcrowded accommodation, and you don't have a permit to work and to study, so it's very stressful”*

20. The Home Secretary's **'New Plan' for Immigration** (24 March 2021) came in for particular criticism, both during the interviews and the focus groups. The Plan will establish a two-tier asylum system, with someone's means of arrival in the UK determining how they will be treated:

- Asylum seekers arriving through anything other than 'resettlement' (legal route) will receive a lesser form of protection, including **temporary status, no access to financial support, and limited rights to family reunion**. Even those who are recognised as refugees will live in constant fear of being returned to persecution in their country of origin.

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<sup>2</sup> The ever-present fear of being returned to the country where they were persecuted can trigger extreme distress in asylum seekers, with tragic consequences. A torture survivor in England recently committed suicide because he believed, when contacted by the Home Office, that he was going to be removed from the country. It turned out, the man was due to be informed that his asylum claim had been successful. But it was too late, the fear of return to persecution had been too much to bear. Last year (2020), 29 asylum seekers died in Home Office custody (see Freedom from Torture, 2021).

21. In essence, the ‘New Plan’, will criminalise people who attempt to reach the UK irregularly. But some participants in the focus group made the point that people fleeing terror or persecution often have to **travel without permission**, as there is no visa to enable them to do so legally.
22. The government is proposing to use **destitution** as a weapon to encourage people to leave once their claim has been refused, as they will no longer be eligible for any financial support. All who attended the focus groups and interviews were uniformly opposed to the New Plan. Their views were succinctly summarised by the charity *Freedom from Torture*, who wrote:

*“Refused asylum seekers living on £5 a day already live far beyond the poverty line and have no right to work. Stripping people of that minimal financial support and pushing them into destitution and street homelessness will have seriously damaging effects on the safety, stability and physical and mental health of this already extremely vulnerable population.”* (Freedom from Torture, 2021).

23. It is also worth noting that not a single European country has decided to support the UK government’s controversial asylum plans (for deporting migrants who enter the UK illegally). The United Nations have also criticised the proposals (8 May 2021) as so damaging they risked Britain’s “global credibility” (The Guardian, 9 May 2021).
24. It is important that the Committee understands how these plans will impact Northern Irish society as a whole, not just asylum seekers. One focus group participant, a former asylum seeker from Somalia, spoke for many when he noted:

*“Implementation of the Home Secretary’s ‘New Plan’ will almost certainly lead to a fall in the number of asylum seekers who reach Northern Ireland. This, in turn, will result in a loss of diversity here, and all the cultural riches which flow from absorbing new traditions, food, life-styles, and dress. Basically the new proposals criminalise irregular status, and makes anything other than irregular status **almost impossible** for most who will arrive and seek protection.”*

25. To summarise, this section has specifically focused on the lived experiences and concerns of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland. Five main issues emerged from these engagements, namely: **(i) denial of the right to work; (ii) inadequate benefit payments; (ii) long delays in processing asylum applications; (iv) mental health concerns; and (v) the Home Secretary's 'New Plan' for Immigration.**

## **Security and Justice**

26. Before discussing the findings on security and justice which emerged from the engagement sessions, it may be helpful to point out there are three main types of race-related violence directed against BAME residents in Northern Ireland. These are **(i) overt physical violence; (ii) racist micro-aggressions; and (iii) systemic/ institutionalised racism.**

27. The recent attack (14 January 2021) on the building which houses the **Belfast Multi-Cultural Association** (BMCA) is an example of overt violence. The fire, which was started deliberately, took 50 firefighters to bring under control, and resulted in the building being extensively damaged. The blaze was the culmination of 18 months of harassment, during which a number of cars belonging to staff and volunteers were damaged (BBC, 2021). One focus group participant who was a volunteer in the Centre takes up the story:

*"During the pandemic last year we were very active in the food bank attached to the BMCA; really going out of our way to feed and help the needy. Unfortunately, some members of the local community didn't like what we were doing. Didn't like our volunteers, who came dressed in their cultural (Islamic) clothing. That led to cars being attacked, leading on to graffiti daubed on the main door. The intimidation continued for months, and ultimately led to the virtual destruction of the Centre by fire in January 2021."*

28. While extreme violence of this nature is comparatively rare, most focus group participants and interviewees were able to cite some examples of physical attacks and individual property damage, such as stone-throwing, daubing of slogans on walls; kicking

of doors, plus motorbikes and bicycles set on fire; windows broken, and physical attacks on young people. Another focus group participant, a teacher from Spain, declared:

*"The hate and racism in this country is unreal. One day a neighbour came to our house and brought us a cake to welcome us to the street. We thought this was amazing and very kind of her to do that. She asked us a lot of questions, as to where we come from, and why we came to live there. We told her we are from Spain. The next day there was a pile of rubbish on our doorstep. This went on for weeks until we had to move out of the area. Our neighbour from Greece got it worse; he woke up and found his motorbike was set on fire, and on his door was written: "Go back to your own country, you are not welcome here." Who would do that? We did nothing wrong. We never showed anyone any animosity; we thought the place was very good and the people were kind; but when we spoke to neighbours about it, they told us it was best if we moved out, because we will never be safe there. And that is what we were told by the police too, which is very sad"*

29. The second form of violence – **racial micro-aggressions** – was found to be far more common by all participants in our engagement sessions. Racial micro-aggressions, a term first used by a U.S. psychiatrist in 1970 (Pierce, 1985), are described as “subtle insults” (verbal, non-verbal, and/or visual) directed towards minority individuals, often unconsciously (Wong *et al.*, 2013). In and of itself, a micro-aggression can seem harmless, but research confirms that being subjected to these so-called ‘low-level’ incidents on a daily basis can have a cumulative effect. This may result in long-term health problems, including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, suicidal ideation, and low self-esteem. While the bio-mechanisms are not fully understood, it is thought that the presence of high levels of stress hormones (e.g. cortisol) in the bloodstream for long periods of time can lead to wear-and-tear on the body (Torino, 2017).
30. As noted above, all focus group participants and interviewees reported having experienced some form of micro-aggressions on a regular basis. These incidents ranged from, “being asked when am I going back home”, to abusive name-calling in the street, throwing banana skins at the feet of a person from a minority community, being ignored in shops, and long stares, to signify, “I am in the wrong place, and shouldn’t be here”.

According to one participant, it is the micro-aggression, rather than overt violence, which is ultimately more destructive, and “does the real harm.”

31. The recollections of one interviewee, a 30-year-old Lisburn woman from a PUL background who converted to Islam, are particularly instructive, as they illustrate how one’s whole life can change simply by deciding to wear an Islamic headscarf (known as a *khimar* or *hijab*). Whilst, before she decided to wear a headscarf she felt anonymous and perfectly safe walking around Belfast, since wearing the *hijab* she has felt distinctly unsafe:

*“I grew up here as a white person who didn’t wear a hijab, and about 16 years ago I started wearing it. It was like I became a different person: suddenly, anyone could ask you where you’re from, or where’s your family from. And even if you have a broad local accent, they don’t see that – they just see the scarf. So, I have been told to go home; I’ve been told to speak English. When out with my kids, I’ve been insulted and called racist names, because there’s just that assumption that you’re foreign. So it’s been a really weird experience, and has opened my eyes to what minority ethnic people go through here on a daily basis.”*

32. While micro-aggressions tend to be associated with uneducated people, our contributors reported receiving insults from a range of middle-class professionals, confirming that prejudice is not confined to working people. A nurse from Guyana declared:

*“If you go to any hospital in Northern Ireland, and talk to any ethnic minority doctor, nurse or pharmacist, and ask if they’ve ever been subjected to any racial stress or abuse from colleagues or service users, all of them would say “yes, on a daily basis.” These are traumatizing things, and so demoralizing. When you wake up in the morning, and put on your uniform to go and help, and the very same people that you help disrespect and abuse you. And then you get it from your colleagues as well, it’s heart-breaking!”*

33. A number of our contributors stated that fear of being abused or insulted, either at work or in the street, has a corrosive effect, and will often lead to changes in behaviour. This may mean changing their route home, deciding not to go to a particular venue, or even deciding against going out at all.

34. While many participants gave examples of micro-aggressions, relatively few of them reported these incidents to the PSNI. There are two main reasons for this under-reporting: firstly, there is the perception among many that it is a waste of time, either because (i) the police will not take any action or (ii) if they do, that no arrests or prosecutions will follow. Secondly, many minority individuals decide not to draw attention to themselves, for fear of further victimisation and persecution.

35. One focus group participant said:

*"I reported several racial insults and intimidation directed towards me to the police until I stopped reporting. You'll find a lot of case reference numbers on my name, but you know what happened, the police basically said I brought all that on myself for wearing a costume that identified me as a Muslim. One day I called the police when my house was surrounded by 12 youths. They looked as young as ten. I have two children myself, and we were all inside the house. They threw eggs at my windows and told me to go back to Pakistan. Although I came here from Somalia, my children were born here, and we are now British citizens.*

*I have lived in the Waterside area for 10 years now, but I am told by young children to go back to my country. I called the police telling them if you come now, you'll find them here; they are still throwing eggs at my house, shouting go back to Pakistan. The police took two hours to come. We were so scared, my children were crying, my wife was so distressed, and all the police did was issue me a crime number, then ask me to tell them what kind of help I needed after that. I called them when they could have arrested those young people, but they took their time to come and help me; why should I report to them again? I don't have any faith that they will help me"*

36. A serving mixed-race police officer, who was interviewed for an earlier project, cast some light on the difficulties experienced by the PSNI when tackling racially motivated crime in Northern Ireland:

*"Northern Ireland is legislatively weak in terms of hate crime. I could be walking down the street in Belfast as a police officer, and someone could racially abuse me. I have no redress to the law. As long as they are not committing some other offence, I cannot arrest them purely for uttering racist remarks. In England, if someone racially abuses me, I can arrest them on*

*the spot. And that's why I think racist crimes are under-reported here – it looks like nothing is being done about it. That's because the police can't act, unless the abuse is attached to some other offence, such as assault or disorderly behaviour, that aggravates that offence."*

37. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK which does not have specific hate crime legislation. However, an **Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation** (Department for Justice (2020) recently concluded with 34 recommendations for change. It urged the adoption of an “aggravated offence model”, whereby a hate crime aggravation could potentially be added to **any** offence. This would encourage the police to collect evidence of hate in all cases at an early stage and could conceivably lead to more successful prosecutions in the future.

### **Systemic/Institutional Racism.**

38. In 1999, Sir William MacPherson, author of a report on the murder of Stephen Lawrence, defined **institutional racism** as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people" (Macpherson 1999, para 6.34)

39. MacPherson noted that institutional racism can often be unwitting, and even well-intentioned or colour-blind, and may arise from ignorance rather than malice. However, as McGill and Oliver (ECNI, 2002) pointed out:

*"It is not enough, in reply to an allegation of institutional racism, to say that services are offered equally to all. By treating everyone equally we may be discriminating. Many groups have special needs for health, education, housing, employment, policing and other services, and an organisation is at fault if it does not ensure it offers them to black and minority ethnic groups in a way that meets their needs, as they express them." (ECNI, 2002, p. 31)*

40. Institutional racism has been described as the third type of violence directed against BAME individuals in Northern Ireland. An ethnic minority leader who was interviewed for this Paper cast some light on systemic racism which she believes is “denied, excused or dismissed” in Northern Ireland.

*“We need to recognise the ways in which racism is woven into the fabric of our institutions. It is in institutional racism that we find why people of colour are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Systemic racism also led to the differential treatment of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters, and organisers of the 6th of June 2020 BLM protests here in Northern Ireland.”*

*“The Police Ombudsman report on the policing of a BLM protest in Belfast and Derry confirmed that the ‘complaints of discrimination and unfairness in respect of the policing of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations are justified, substantive and cogent.’ However, she went on to say that this was unintentional. When dealing with racism, what matters is our feelings, and the way we are treated, not if it was intentional or unintentional. I think if you read between the lines, the Police Ombudsman and the Policing Board Human Right Advisor were very clear this was institutional racism at its best, but as usual, classic denial and defensiveness played its part here.”*

*“When you speak about systemic racism in Northern Ireland, people think you are making it up, because the PSNI do not kill black people. But our reality is the PSNI are very good at after-service, and not when you desperately need them to protect you. What we really want is rapid response when called upon, and prevention of these incidents. If they take racist hate crimes seriously, and hold racists to account, this will deter people from attacking us. But they don’t, and you have to ask yourself why this is happening. Could the PSNI be institutionally racist?”*

41. The Covid 19 pandemic has further revealed both the existence and impact of structural racism, as outlined in the “An Avoidable Crisis” report, Lawrence (2020) notes:

*“Covid-19 has thrived on structural inequalities that have long scarred the United Kingdom. Black and minority ethnic people are more likely to work in frontline or shutdown sectors, more likely to live in poor quality or overcrowded housing, and more likely to face barriers.” (Lawrence, p. 24).*

42. All Focus group participants and interviewees agreed with the above sentiments, with one noting: *“There may also be a disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities here, but it would be difficult to prove because of the absence of ethnic monitoring data for Northern Ireland.”* It was agreed that institutional racism is an issue which has gone largely unrecognised in Northern Ireland, and needs to be acknowledged and tackled, particularly by public authorities delivering front-line services.
43. To recap, this section of the Paper has outlined some of the experiences and concerns of minoritized people in relation to **security and justice**. It drew attention to the three forms of violence against minority groups, namely **overt violence, racist micro-aggression and institutional racism**. It was found that micro-aggressions directed against minoritized individuals are much more widespread across all sections of society than is generally assumed. There is also a clear growth in mistrust of the PSNI. This has emerged out of a view that they do not protect the BAME community; do not take racist hate crime seriously; do not engage well; and, do not focus upon prevention and investigation. Focus group participants agreed that '**reassurance will not deliver safety**'. In order to deliver the required level of safety and security, the present legislation on hate crime requires strengthening, in line with the recommendations of the Independent Review of Hate Crime legislation. Finally, more work is required, particularly by front-line service providers, such as the PSNI and government departments, to identify and deal with institutional racism, wherever it exists.

## **Employment, Education and Housing**

44. The focus group sessions relating to employment, education and housing yielded a number of issues. In relation to employment and education, these included a failure to recognise qualifications from other jurisdictions and the need for more integrated education.
45. One of the most common problems facing migrants coming to live and work in Northern Ireland from countries outside the UK and Ireland, is the **failure to recognise academic and professional qualifications** obtained from these countries. It is often forgotten that

a considerable proportion of migrants (if not the majority) are highly educated individuals, most with primary degrees or higher, and often with a range of professional qualifications. And yet, they struggle to gain employment here, often ending up in menial occupations, far below their level of competence. A typical comment on this situation was made in the focus group, by a young man from Somalia:

*"I have an M.Sc. in Communication and Mass Media, plus a second masters. When I applied to the third (community) sector for work, they told me I was unable to step my foot inside the community development sector because I didn't have an NVQ 2 in something, or an NVQ 3 in something else. They were unable, or unwilling, to grasp that a primary degree and two masters' degrees trumps these lower-level qualifications every time. I found it very hard to gain employment here, because I wasn't coming from an English-speaking country, and there was a big barrier. I found it both in employment and education. They wouldn't go with someone who doesn't have a qualification from here."*

46. The failure to use **equivalence**, which would ensure that qualifications obtained in other jurisdictions are recognised in Northern Ireland, also creates difficulties for BAME individuals applying for further and higher education courses here, as they fail to meet the criteria because their previous qualifications go unrecognised. Even when focus group participants did have their qualifications recognized, and succeeded in finding jobs, there was a feeling that they had to do so much more than their white Irish and British colleagues to be recognized and to succeed.
47. **Racial bullying** was also a concern for the parents, children and young people. Several participants told stories of their children being targeted and singled out, including one mother who said:

*"(My son) was beaten up by a gang. They stopped him outside school and threw bottles at him. ... And then he had a teacher ask him if he had brought a curry to school for lunch that day! And whenever I reported this remark to the school, they apparently conducted an investigation, which came back that they didn't feel that the teacher had acted inappropriately. Nothing happened. After that, my son didn't really tell me anything about school, because he felt that I was drawing attention to him, and I was making a big deal out of everything. He just wanted to go and study and come back and not say anything."*

48. A secondary school pupil interviewed revealed additional issues relating to education as follows.

- Absence of specific school policies relating to racial bullying.
- Inadequate training for teachers on matters relating to race in Northern Ireland.
- Inappropriate dress codes and uniform policies; and
- an educational workforce which is overwhelmingly white.

Another young person said "*I think the main problem is in school we are not taught black history or racism. We only get to hear about racism when we attend youth clubs or sometimes when organisations like NWMF visit our schools to talk about it. Last year was the first time I heard people talk about black history. Even as a black person who was born in N. Ireland, I don't know much about my own history, but I am told by my peers that I am African, and Africa is my home. I think black history should be taught in schools for others to understand the relationships between this country and Africa*".

49. A staff member at North West Migrants Forum agreed with the young person confirming that she regularly receives calls from different schools in the North-west, seeking advice and support in dealing with racial bullying in school. According to the staff member: "*These teachers are ill-prepared to deal with racism and have no clear guidance on how to respond to it.*"

50. Uniform policies in many schools have come in for particular criticism, due to their lack of cultural sensitivity. One focused group participant said:

*"Uniform policies have directly discriminated against our children. Many of our young people from the black community have been sent home from school; or told they will have to change their hair or be excluded from school. My daughter was told she cannot wear a long skirt in school. We are Muslims and that's our religion, but my daughter is discriminated against because of her code. School policies do not respect our religious values; for example, my daughter is forced to wear a short skirt in class."*

51. While precise figures are not available, it is evident that the teaching workforce in Northern Ireland is overwhelmingly white. This means the vast majority of BAME pupils will never experience being mentored by a Black teacher or have one to look up to as a role model. As one young pupil exclaimed: "*I would love to go into school and see a teacher the same colour as me.*"
52. The structuring of the education system along mostly sectarian lines exacerbates feelings of exclusion, making it harder to integrate. Several participants suggested that a more inclusive approach to education would increase tolerance and understanding, with one participant suggesting that, "*the education system in Northern Ireland needs to adapt in a way that teaches school kids that the world is bigger than your street, and the other side of the street.*"
53. In order to improve the situation in schools, it is recommended that **(i) racial 'literacy' training should be compulsory for all staff and teachers; (ii) racial bullying policies, which would provide guidance on how to respond to interpersonal student racism, should become mandatory in all schools; (iii) school uniform policies and dress codes should be reviewed, and amended, if necessary, to accommodate the cultural and religious values of all students and;**(iv)**Black history should be included in the school curriculum.**
54. Overall, when asked how the education and employment situation could be improved, there was a general acceptance that things were unlikely to change substantially until there were more people '**who looked like me**' in positions of authority. Hence, the importance of recruiting more teachers from a BAME background.
55. In terms of **housing**, a number of focus group participants spoke about the difficulty of obtaining a tenancy in the private rental sector, even when the BAME applicant was in full employment. Discrimination in housing can often be covert, and hard to prove, as one focus group participant, a professional from East Africa, remarked:

*“If you’re a foreigner, and you’re getting a rental directly from a private landlord, it’s going to be crap, and twice as expensive as a house you would get from an estate agency. We started looking with agencies, but they would rarely invite us to a viewing. And the very few times we were invited, usually when it was an Open Viewing, we were left in a corner, and you could see the agency staff member speaking to the other couples (local people), and we knew that we wouldn’t get that house.”*

## **Inclusion and Belonging**

56. Underlying each of the issue areas outlined above is the fundamental concern of how BAME people are included in all areas of social, economic and political life and the degree to which they are enabled to “belong” in Northern Ireland. Across all focus groups the lack of **inclusion and belonging** emerged as an important aspect of ethnic minorities experience. One major area of concern was political participation and representation. Participants in the focus groups felt that participation in the political process is a fundamental human right, and a crucial requirement for integration. However, BAME groups across Northern Ireland often feel excluded from political participation by formal as well as informal barriers. It was suggested that ethnic and religious minorities are unable to exercise their political and civil rights due to the binary nature of the two dominant communities in Northern Ireland politics – *“They only talk about issues that affect the two tribes here, and we do not fit into the narrative of the two tribes.”*, remarked one participant.

57. Another participant declared:

*“In an ideal world, the political establishment would accurately reflect the composition of the society it represents, and the issues facing all communities would be adequately reflected in the mainstream political debate. However, in Northern Ireland political parties shy away from engaging with minority ethnic people because I think they believe they will lose support from their core supporters if they were to demonstrate their support and solidarity with ethnic minority people, this was blatant during the Black Lives Matter protests, there was only one political party that publicly supported the BLM protests in Northern Ireland, the rest only joined in when there was wide condemnation of how protesters were treated and others politicized the issue to suit their own political agendas”.*

58. A more visible example of the challenges faced by BAME communities, in terms of **inclusion and belonging**, relate to the Common Travel Area (CTA). It is not generally understood, except by Immigration specialists, that Non-CTA nationals born outside the EU and living in Northern Ireland, do not have freedom of movement across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In effect, this means that most non-EU nationals living in Northern Ireland, or the Republic, must apply for a visa before crossing the border. Non-CTA nationals who wish to visit the Republic of Ireland for tourism purposes must apply for a short stay 'C' visa for a single entry or multiple entries. This means that Non-CTA nationals settled in Northern Ireland must also comply with the same rules, even though they may permanently live and work a short distance away from the land border. There are numerous examples of the challenges and difficulties these rules create for BAME individuals and families in Northern Ireland, but one will serve to illustrate the point:

59. Aahana (female, Indian, aged 65) migrated to Derry-Londonderry with her husband and sister in 1972. She is an excellent cook, dressmaker, and beautician. She had four children and decided to stay at home to look after them. Meanwhile, Aahana's sister, who also migrated to Derry-Londonderry at the same time, started a business after she successfully applied for her British passport. Within a few years, her sister's business was thriving, so she decided to extend her operations to Carndonagh and Letterkenny in the Republic of Ireland. For Aahana to visit or help her sister in either Letterkenny or Carndonagh would require her to apply for a working/visiting visa.

60. Despite being a family business, she cannot visit and support her sister in managing their operations without applying for a relevant visa. Even though she has lived legally in Derry-Londonderry for more than 35 years, and her husband owns businesses in Dublin, none of this is considered sufficient to extend the privileges of the CTA to her, as she is still considered a 'non-national'."

61. It is worth noting that a lack of awareness of this issue has resulted in BAME people unknowingly committing an immigration offence and, in some cases, this unintentional

breach of current regulations has resulted in detention and/or deportation. A focus group participant from Iran told us:

*"We came here because of my husband's PhD. and were passionate about starting a life here; Despite paying lots of money, and going through a long process to be able to enter this place, we were ready to exchange all we have to live here and develop our new home. But then we faced a hard, invisible border that made us realize we can't be part of this society because we cannot even move freely in it like our friends. This beautiful island should to be more welcoming and see all new people the same."*

62. **Racial profiling** was also raised as an issue. One participant from Zimbabwe, a permanent resident living in Belfast, recalled his experience of travelling back home from Scotland by air:

*"The entire check-in process was a little shocking. The sheer number of questions I was asked: how long am I going to stay in Northern Ireland? They wanted my address. How long have I lived there; do I live with anyone else, etc. They wanted everything. I was literally traveling within the UK and have been living in Belfast for years. Here is my job. I'm like, what? But the number of questions, not the way they were asked, was disturbing. I don't see the necessity of asking a person who is a permanent resident somewhere, and has a job, these types of questions? I found the whole experience intimidating, hostile and threatening."*

### **Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategies, 2005 and 2015**

63. The Executive Office (TEO) – which has race as part of its remit – has published two Racial Equality Strategies, in 2005 and 2015 respectively. Both Strategies had broadly the same aims, namely:

- to tackle racial inequalities.
- to eradicate racism and hate crime; and
- along with *Together: Building a United Community*, to promote good race relations and social cohesion.

These aims – and the measures proposed – remain relevant today, not least because so little has been accomplished towards achieving them. The first Strategy was enthusiastically received by people from minority ethnic backgrounds. There was broad

agreement that the measures proposed – including legislation, ethnic monitoring and training – were what was needed. The second Strategy contained many of the same measures (because they had not yet been implemented).

64. The Northern Ireland Assembly, in a debate on 14 September 2020, noted the continuing relevance of the second Strategy (2015 – 2025), but some Members who spoke expressed regret about how long implementation was taking. One example cited was **ethnic monitoring**; first recommended in the 2005 Strategy but still outstanding sixteen years later.
65. According to one focus group respondent, the civil service in general, and TEO in particular, have failed to devote the necessary resources to implement the Racial Equality Strategy, and suggested that systemic racism may be worth considering as an underlying factor. In this regard, the current Strategy (2015 – 2025) **recognises the need for all public bodies and others to ensure they take urgent steps to identify institutional racism and to tackle it as a matter of urgency where it exists** (para 3.18). The Race Equality Unit of TEO, is seriously under-resourced in terms of staff and funding and requires a major increase in numbers if government is serious about tackling the myriad issues facing BAME communities in Northern Ireland.
66. Another participant argued that the **TEO should invest in staff training** and focus on eliminating the potential of incidents of “unwitting”, “unconscious” or “unintentional” racism, as well as deliberate and intentional racism, as per para 3.20 of the Racial Equality Strategy.
67. The next section will review the **health and economic outcomes** of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland, and the steps the UK Government can take to help improve them.

## 2 Health and Economic outcomes of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in Northern Ireland

68. The Cabinet Office, Race Disparity Unit, in GB routinely publishes data from a variety of sources, which clearly shows the disparity in **health and economic outcomes** in England and Wales experienced by some BAME groups, such as the Bangladeshi and Roma communities. The authority or mandate for collecting, compiling and publishing this data is drawn from the *Equality Act 2010* and the *Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011*. The importance of the 2011 Regulations lies in their power to impose a duty on listed public authorities to collect and publish monitoring information on (i) employees of the authority; and (ii) the services provided by the authority. When collated, this monitoring data can then provide a comprehensive picture of racial disparities in terms of government services, such as health, education, and the criminal justice system.
69. The problem for Northern Ireland is that the Equality Act 2010, and the associated 2011 Regulations which enable the collection of monitoring data, have never been extended to the province. Thus, there is no legal authority to compel public authorities here to collect such data.
70. Put simply, **there is no reliable statistical evidence on health and the economy**, or indeed any other public service with the exception of education, which could demonstrate where racial disparities exist. Anecdotal evidence does indeed suggest that BAME residents in Northern Ireland are disadvantaged in relation to health, the jobs market, and the criminal justice system, but the statistical evidence to support these claims does not exist, as no one is collecting it. For example, unlike England, Scotland and Wales, we currently have no way of knowing whether the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected BAME groups here.
71. The key, initial step the government can do to improve the health and economic outcomes of BAME groups in Northern Ireland is to extend coverage of the Equality Act 2010 to include Northern Ireland. This would enable the collection of monitoring data on all sectors, not just health and the economy. Monitoring is the fundamental building

block of equality: without explicit statistical evidence to bring to bear on allegations of unfair treatment, or inequalities in employment, health, education, and the criminal justice system, such issues will continue to be either hidden or ignored. A proper system of ethnic monitoring will allow public authorities to highlight possible inequalities, investigate their underlying causes, and develop plans to remove any unfairness or disadvantage<sup>3</sup>.

### **3 The steps the UK Government can take to help ensure effective racial equality legislation in Northern Ireland**

72. Previous sections of this Evidence Paper have drawn attention to two actions the UK Government could take to ensure effective race equality legislation in Northern Ireland, namely:
  1. bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK, and require public authorities here to introduce **mandatory ethnic monitoring**; and
  2. ensure that the Northern Ireland Executive implements the findings of the **Independent Review of Hate Crime legislation**.
73. A third step Government could take would be the introduction of positive or '**affirmative action**' measures for racial minorities in Northern Ireland, similar to what is already in place for the two dominant communities here (under the Fair Employment legislation). Where BAME people are under-represented in a particular company, examples of affirmative action might include:
  - Inserting statements into job advertisements '**welcoming**' applications from under-represented groups;
  - Examining existing recruitment and selection procedures to ensure they are **culturally sensitive**; and

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<sup>3</sup> A recent report commissioned by The Executive Office (TEO) in Northern Ireland recommended the introduction of mandatory ethnic monitoring, along the lines of GB, by 2024. The report is currently being considered by TEO.

- If few members of BAME communities are represented in senior positions, then devise a **training or development programme** which would improve the promotion prospects of BAME employees but would not exclude members of any other group.

74. As noted above, the framework already exists for affirmative action on behalf of the Protestant and Catholic communities via the fair employment legislation.

#### **4 Successful initiatives and Programmes to encourage cultural exchange and diversity among people in Northern Ireland**

75. Successful programmes to encourage diversity and cultural exchange would be ones where minoritized people are NOT there as a form of entertainment or exoticised by the programme. Rather, one where their expertise, knowledge and experience is valued and centred.

76. One good example would be the recent North West Migrants Forum *Choose to Challenge* events. This programme highlighted BAME women - not just as participants brought as a 'showcase' or curiosity, but as the organisers and experts. It is important that the two dominant communities learn from minoritized people, and centre their voices, as the community model in Northern Ireland constantly centres the voices of the two dominant communities, rendering others almost 'invisible' or inconsequential. This contributes to 'othering' in society.

#### **5 People's experiences of applying for the EU Settlement Scheme**

77. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (EU) on 31 December 2019 has meant that citizens of the EU, EEA and Switzerland are now required to apply for permission to remain in the UK. By December 2020, the Scheme, known as the **EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)**, had attracted a total of 79,110 applicants from Northern Ireland.

78. If successful, the applicant is offered either **settled or pre-settled status**. Both categories provide important rights, including the right to:

- work in the UK
- use the NHS for free
- enrol in education or study
- access public funds, such as benefits or pensions, and
- travel in and out of the UK.

79. The North West Migrants Forum is part of the *Stronger Together* consortium in Northern Ireland which has been assisting migrant workers with their applications. One of the applicants assisted expressed concern about the decision by Government not to create a physical card or document confirming their new settled status. In the absence of such a card, it is likely to create difficulties in the future with, for example, prospective employers or landlords, who may well require proof of status:

*"We were able to apply in the brief window where NI born individuals could apply for their spouse via the scheme. Unfortunately, friends holding British or Irish passports and living in NI since childhood were not able to avail of this scheme. The process was a little confusing and slow. But we were able to successfully navigate it. **There is concern that the lack of a card/physical visa confirming status will create issues long term.**"*

## Conclusion

80. The North West Migrants Forum thanks the Committee for this opportunity to present evidence in respect of their inquiry into the experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland. As noted above, the evidence presented in this Paper is largely based upon a series of focus groups and one-to-one interviews conducted with minoritized individuals, supplemented by desk research. The Paper concludes with a number of recommendations (see below).

81. Before presenting the recommendations, it is important to record that, while the evidence presented in this paper is somewhat grim, it was widely agreed by almost all participants that Northern Ireland is a beautiful place to live, and that the majority of people here are welcoming and kind. Our new migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have generally chosen to live here, and wish to make a permanent home for themselves and their families. This desire, to enrich the local culture and make a valuable contribution to building the country, is being hampered by the actions of a small, but dangerous minority and the severe lack of investment in racial equality.

## Recommendations

### Security and Justice

82. Depending upon the figures used, the likelihood of a minority ethnic person in Northern Ireland experiencing a racist incident is between **17** and **44 times higher** than the likelihood of a member of the dominant (Protestant/Catholic community) experiencing a sectarian incident. Moreover, Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK without proper hate crime legislation. Focus group participants agreed that '*reassurance will not deliver safety*'. For this reason, there is a clear need for proactive and effective investigation and prevention by the PSNI, in order to deliver the required safety and security for BAME communities in Northern Ireland.

- For this to happen, the **present legislation on hate crime requires strengthening, in line with the recommendations of the Independent Review of Hate Crime legislation (2020)**.

83. **Institutional racism** was cited by some focus group respondents as a factor in the PSNI's treatment of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters in Belfast and Derry-Londonderry in June 2020. A growing mistrust of the PSNI has emerged among some sections of the minority community, out of a view that they do not protect the BAME community; do not take racist hate crime seriously; do not engage well; and, do not focus upon the prevention and investigation of crimes

### **Asylum Seekers**

84. Asylum seekers are doubly disadvantaged: not only do they face the same issues as other migrant groups, but they have also usually fled from war and conflict in their home countries and live under the constant threat of deportation. It is recommended that:

- **asylum seekers are given the right to work while their case is pending;**
- **the current payment of £39.63 per week is increased to the same level as Universal Credit;**
- the long delays in processing asylum applications should be sharply reduced, with a **target of processing applications within six months of arrival**. It is inhumane and cruel to delay the final resolution of claims, in some cases, for up to seven years.
- Asylum seekers often live under exceptional stress, due to their pre-migration trauma (war and conflict) and post-migration experiences in the UK. For this reason, **special attention should be paid to their mental health during the application process**.
- The Government's 'New Plan' for immigration breaches the 1951 Refugee Convention. This protects people seeking asylum from persecution on the grounds of their method of entry, and guarantees them access to claim asylum, for the very reason that there is no viable, legal way of entering a country in order to apply for asylum. **This nefarious plan will only damage the UK's reputation – it should be scrapped completely.**

### **Education, Employment and Housing**

85. One of the most common problems facing migrants coming to live and work in Northern Ireland from countries outside the UK and Ireland, is the failure to recognise academic and professional qualifications obtained from these countries.

- Consideration should be given to developing a proper **equivalence structure**. This would make it easier for migrants to enter employment.
- **Racial bullying** is an issue in some schools in Northern Ireland. Schools should develop policies which tackle this type of bullying, which can have destructive and long-lasting impacts on children.
- The educational workforce in Northern Ireland is overwhelmingly white, and measures should be taken to address the severe **under-representation of teachers from a BAME background**.
- In terms of overall employment opportunities, Government should introduce positive **or affirmative action' measures** in respect of BAME communities in Northern Ireland, similar to what is already in place for the two dominant communities (Protestant and Catholic) under the Fair Employment legislation.

### **Inclusion and belonging.**

86. In an increasingly diverse society, we need to focus on the political inclusion of ethnic minority groups as a means to their wider integration into society. Active participation in democracy and decision-making is indeed a paramount, necessary condition for the integration of minority groups. This requires active measures to empower people, such as providing information on how they can exercise their voting rights. If Northern Ireland is to be truly representative, public bodies including government should reflect the make-up and cultural diversity of society as a whole. **Funded programmes on political and civic engagement should be offered to minority ethnic groups to build capacity and confidence in public engagement.**

87. To fully integrate society in Northern Ireland, and to afford minority ethnic people equal rights, **the privileges conferred by the CTA on British and Irish citizens living on the Island of Ireland should be extended to include non-EU nationals living and working here.** This would mean the right to freely travel, study and work across the island of Ireland.

## **Northern Ireland Race Equality Strategy, 2015 - 2025**

88. Many of the recommendations and actions arising from the first Racial Equality Strategy (2005) have still not been implemented, never mind the second strategy (2015). This may, in part, be due to a lack of staff and other resources.

- The Race Equality Unit of TEO, is seriously under-resourced in terms of staff and funding and **requires a major increase in numbers if** government is serious about tackling the myriad issues facing BAME communities in Northern Ireland.
- Whilst stressing the importance of the current Racial Equality Strategy being implemented, considering contexts of BLM, Covid 19 and Brexit and the fact that we are at mid-point of the current Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025, a review should be undertaken to refresh and update the strategy. it is also recommended that The Executive Office undertake a Racial Disparity Audit
- The appointment of an independent race equality advisor to support TEO and NICS and the introduction of racial literacy as a competency requirement for staff working on race relations policies should be favourably considered.

## **Ethnic Monitoring**

89. Ethnic monitoring has been part of the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategy since 2005, but sixteen years later it has still to be implemented. Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK which does not monitor race and ethnicity. This makes it impossible to quantify any racial disparities which may exist in employment, criminal justice, and the provision of goods, facilities and services.

- **Public authorities should be required to monitor the composition of their workforce, and the provision of their services.** This could be accomplished through Sections 149 and 153 (or their equivalents) of the Equality Act 2010, to be included in a new race relations statute.

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## Annex 1

The North West Migrants Forum teamed up with a collective of grassroots organisations led by people of minority ethnic communities here in Northern Ireland to help gather comprehensive, representative and rigorous evidence to submit to the Northern Ireland Affairs Parliamentary Committee Inquiry on; Experiences of Minority Ethnic people living in Northern Ireland. This was a deliberate decision, to ensure the authenticity of evidence collected. The collective grassroots organisations involved in this process were as follows;

### Belfast Islamic Centre

Belfast Islamic Centre supports all Muslims irrespective of their ethnic background, gender, country of origin or age. It is the largest institution of the Muslim community in Northern Ireland and acts as both a place of worship and a community centre. Despite a comparatively small facility with modest staffing and financial resources we try to address a wide range of needs.

**Contact details:** 028 9066 4465

38 Wellington Park, Belfast BT9 6DN

**Website:** <https://belfastislamiccentre.org.uk/>

**Facebook:** @belfastislamiccentre

### The BME Women's Network

The BME Women's Network aim is to promote gender and racial equality for ethnic minority [and minority faith] women in NI. The objectives are to develop our capacity in sustainable community-based leadership and decision-making and empower us through education, development, research and networking to fully access our human rights.

**Contact details:** 028 9031 9888 (c/o TWN)

**Email:** [bmewomensnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:bmewomensnetwork@gmail.com)

**Facebook:** @bmewomensnetwork or BMEWN

### MSCNI

Multi-ethnic sports & cultures NI (MSCNI) is a registered charity organisation, Central body of the BAME sports and cultural platform established under the relevant laws of Northern Ireland since 2016. One of our purpose is to use sporting and socio-cultural activities as an effective way of uniting people irrespective of their race, colour, sex, or origin. And to

integrate and socialise, promote cross-community relations, good relation & healthy lifestyle, and well-being.

**Contact details:** 07788319061

BT12 4LP, Belfast

**Website:** [mscni.org](http://mscni.org)

**Facebook:** MSCNI

### **Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI)**

It is a non-governmental organisation was formed in 2011 which supports individuals in NI from the Horn of Africa (HoA): Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan regardless of ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender or social origin.

Its core objectives are: Developing independent initiatives that foster autonomy and participation among Horn of Africa individuals; Raising awareness within public services; challenging intolerance towards individuals from African communities in NI; Developing mutual support between Horn of Africa individuals, refugees, asylum seekers and their dependants, and members of the "host" community; Raising funds and resources for education, agriculture, and health-related projects in the HoA countries.

**Contact details:** +442890315778

1-5 Botanic Avenue, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT7 1JG

**Website:** <https://hapani.org>

**Facebook:** @Hapani

### **Belfast Multi-Cultural Association (BMCA)**

BMCA is managed by a board of trustees who has given vesting powers to the Management Committee; the trustees are silent within the operating of the association but shall intervene if any matters are unresolved by the management committee, in breach of this constitution and/or the law. The aims of the Association are: Support individuals living in poverty; Promote independence; Promote inclusion; Provide mentoring support to beneficiaries; Work in partnership with statutory and charitable organisations to achieve set aims; Promote integration and Reduce isolation; Raise cultural awareness.

Since Starting Covid 19 pandemic, BMCA has helped vulnerable people isolating or shielding and who find themselves unemployed.

**Contact details:** +447958284302

**Facebook:** @theBMCA