

# **Recent newspaper articles and letters related to the dissolution of NCCRI**

## **Dissolution of anti-racism body**

Madam, - I write on behalf of the diversity committee of the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street, Dublin to say how saddened we were by the Budget decision to dissolve the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI).

The NCCRI has been a great support to this hospital in our work on developing best practice in the area of cultural diversity in healthcare. Specifically, some of our staff have been fortunate to participate in the high quality training which the NCCRI has provided.

Also, the NCCRI has been a locus of expertise for us in our ongoing work in this highly complex area and we have valued this expertise and the generosity of the staff in NCCRI in sharing it.

Given our very positive experience of the NCCRI's work we were disappointed to read the article by Sarah Carey in which she describes the organisation as "not worth defending". Whilst we can only agree with Ms Carey's opinion that a grassroots approach to inclusiveness is effective, we would suggest that, from our experience, it is precisely this approach that the work of the NCCRI has always endeavoured to support.

We would like to thank the staff of the NCCRI for their contribution to our work in the hospital. We know this contribution will be missed not only by ourselves but by all the groups engaged in progressing an intercultural, anti-racist agenda in this country. - Yours, etc,

**MONA BAKER,**

**HR Manager and Diversity Committee Member,**

**Childrens University Hospital,**

**Temple Street,**

**Dublin 1.**

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# **End of racism committee**

Madam, - I would like to join Mona Baker of the Temple Street Children's Hospital (November 22nd) in strongly supporting the great work of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), dismissed so glibly by Sarah Carey as "not worth defending."

Three years ago the Centre for Cross- Border Studies was asked by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Belfast to carry out research into how public bodies in Northern Ireland could learn from the Republic of Ireland and Scotland about how best to deliver services like social and health services, housing and education to the new ethnic minority groups whose numbers were starting to grow in Northern Ireland in the same way they had done in the South and in Scotland over the past decade.

This work was led for us by Philip Watt and Fiona McGaughey of the NCCRI, and was quite simply the most thorough, professional and practical piece of research the centre has commissioned in its 10 years of existence.

The final report in October 2006 was welcomed with glowing tributes by a wide range of bodies in the North, including government departments like the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education, public agencies like the NI Housing Executive and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, charitable bodies like the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and advocacy bodies like the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities. It was also highly praised by the Scottish Executive.

All of us - and particularly people from ethnic minorities in Ireland - will be poorer for the untimely demise of the NCCRI. - Yours, etc,

**ANDY POLLAK,**

**Centre for Cross-Border Studies,**

**39 Abbey Street,**

**Armagh.**

# Abolition of anti-racism bodies

Madam, - Sarah Carey's apparent desire to promote a local charity run by a near neighbour may be understandable ("Grassroots approach to integration proves effective", Opinion, November 12th). But doing so by applauding the Government's decision to abolish the National Consultative Committee on Racism (NCCRI) and the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) because they did not measure up to her implied or potential standards of performance - set by a worthy but relatively untried initiative based in Summerhill, Co Meath - quite simply beggars belief.

Her column is an unfounded and outrageous attack on many very hard-working and dedicated people.

The State must spearhead the campaign against racism in Ireland. The Government is desperate to be seen to be cutting public expenditure. What more convenient bodies to abolish than those which are doing work that has the potential to both embarrass and challenge Ministers? This cutback is also likely to prove popular with those who are quite comfortable with attitudes and policies that if anything foment and encourage racism.

I admire and respect the staff of the NCCRI because I know of the considerable energy and commitment they have demonstrated in their work. Philip Watt, the organisation's chief executive, has visited us in TRUST on a number of occasions and taken testimonies from perhaps the most vulnerable victims of racism, with whom nobody else would talk.

It is appalling that anyone should seek to denigrate the very people who pressed the Government to keep racism on the national agenda - in a way that helps Ministers to cover up their shameful backtracking in the fight against racism in Ireland. - Yours, etc,

**ALICE LEAHY,**

**Director Co-Founder,**

**Trust (A social health service for people who are homeless),**

**Bride Road,**

**Dublin 8.**

Madam, - We are concerned about the impact of the cessation of government funding to the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI). We are led to believe by the Government that this body has been incorporated into the office of the Minister for Integration. But the reality is that all 12 staff of the NCCRI will lose their jobs. Their experience cannot be replaced by others and in any case the ministry is itself under-funded.

The decision sends out a very negative message about Ireland's commitment to combat racism, both nationally and internationally. Anti-racism work is even more important at a time of economic downturn and ceasing to fund the main anti-racism body in the State is a very short-sighted move.

The decision also puts in direct jeopardy EU funding for anti-racism and integration work in Ireland to the value of €4 million and possibly more (the core funding to NCCRI is only €500,000).

Nasc is equally disturbed at the high cuts in agencies such as the Equality Authority, the Combat Poverty Agency and in English-language supports for schools. We ask the government to restore core funding to the NCCRI, which would at least allow it to continue its work, albeit on a reduced budget. - Yours, etc,

**GERTRUDE COTTER,**

**Director, Nasc, (Irish Immigrant Support Centre),**

**Mary Street,**

**Cork.**

## **Budget cutbacks weaken State's capacity to combat racism**

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There is no expert group on integration at a time when more investment is needed, suggests **Philip Watt**.

RECENT DECISIONS in the Budget will significantly weaken capacity in Ireland to address racism and to promote integration of migrant and minority communities. This is particularly worrying at a time of recession when more, not less investment in this area is needed. Due to recent Government decisions, the budget for the Office of the Minister for Integration was cut by 26 per cent of an overall budget that amounted to about €8 million. The Government's own advisory body on racism has had a 100 per cent cutback in funding. This cutback is disproportionate to the other cutbacks in integration and wider Government spending.

The anti-racism and integration drive needs continuing effective Government investment and support. The likely demise of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) resulting from the Budget also coincides with the end of the National Action Plan against Racism, which will be completed in 2008.

There is now a significant vacuum in Government policy arising from the fact that there is no longer an expert body to advise on anti-racism and integration and no longer a dedicated plan and funding line focused on dealing with these issues. The Government says the NCCRI's "functions" will be transferred to the Office for Integration. However, without staff or expertise being transferred, this commitment appears hollow.

In case anyone thinks racism is not a problem in Ireland, last year alone there were 180 incidents of racism reported to the Garda, up from a figure of 66 incidents in 2004. The main types of incidents reported included damage to property, assaults, harassment and incitement to hatred. Behind these statistics, the human impact of racism can be devastating. One incident can have a disproportionate impact as it can be perceived as not just being directed at individuals, but also at the communities that they belong to.

The NCCRI has consistently sought to highlight racism as an issue that needs an effective response, but also to build the voice of migrants and minorities themselves. Since the announcement that the NCCRI's funding would be cut, we have been inundated with e-mails and calls from minority and migrant communities concerned about the specific and wider implications arising from this decision.

We are being asked whether racism is not seen as a problem in Ireland any more. Is this the first sign of a significant shift in Government policy? How can the Office for Integration take on the functions of the NCCRI without its expertise and staff?

There have been massive changes in Irish society in recent years, largely as a consequence of inward migration. One in 10 people who reside here were born outside of Ireland. While inward migration may have stalled because of the recession, Ireland will remain a multicultural society. While most people view diversity as positive, a significant minority have also found the changes in their local neighbourhood to be challenging.

It is important that those who hold such views are not demonised and that there are active policies in place to educate and inform people, and to dissuade them from holding racist views. The NCCRI has been at the forefront of such work, including this year when the Government appointed it to co-ordinate the EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue in Ireland. As a result of the

participation of Government bodies and grassroots organisations, the Irish programme was recognised by the EU as one of the most effective in Europe.

The NCCRI has worked with grassroots groups over the past decade to ensure that integration and anti-racism are not just set out in worthy policy documents, but have a reality at national and local level. In this context, we worked closely with sporting bodies including the GAA and the Football Association of Ireland to maximise the role that sport can play in integrating minorities. We have also worked closely with community and voluntary groups. Most recently, this involved the problem of homelessness among migrants and minorities, and bringing the problem to the attention of the Government.

Among other criticisms, a recent NCCRI report on housing was singled out by a columnist in The Irish Times. This report, *Building Integrated Communities*, was launched by the Minister for Housing in September 2008, and well received at a conference involving all key housing practitioners in Ireland.

The report seeks to tackle problems such as segregated neighbourhoods and housing estates. Those working in the housing sector recognise the import of developing policy in this area, and investment in research is a vital prerequisite to avoiding the mistakes other countries have made.

We received criticism from the same columnist about our advice on the wearing of the hijab in Irish schools.

Our advice was that schools have, by and large, adopted a sensible and sensitive approach. Rather than dictating what boards of management should do, schools should be recognised as having the good sense to sort it out themselves, within broad guidance from Government. This approach was subsequently adopted by Government and welcomed by all the stakeholders in the education sector, including schools and the Muslim community. It leaves us somewhat bemused that such a successful outcome is then ridiculed.

In another areas of important work, the NCCRI has provided awareness training to many Government departments and agencies. Recently, all gardaí of inspector rank completed a course on the challenges of policing in an intercultural society. This is typical of much of our work which is "below the radar", but which is vital in helping key agencies to upskill in a changing society.

Over the past decade, the NCCRI has remained a compact organisation, but one that has sought to make a significant contribution, on limited resources. It has a staff of 12 and its core funding is €500,000 per annum. We receive research contracts at times from the EU, the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland and the Office for Integration.

Apart from the loss of expertise, it is likely that if such research and training was to be undertaken in future, it would cost the Government significantly more than it does at present. The potential loss of €4 million in an EU funding programme that was at an advanced stage is also jeopardised by this decision. In short, the decision does not make sense on policy or fiscal grounds.

The cut in the budget will mean the closure of the NCCRI offices and all staff being let go, the loss of expertise the NCCRI has built up over the past decade and the ability of the Government to identify and respond to incidents of racism before they escalate or become larger problems. This is the choice the Government has made.

We have been heartened by the hundreds of e-mails of support, including those from migrant, Traveller and minority groups, and indeed from the many excellent civil servants we have worked with over the past 10 years. All the NCCRI staff are committed to working to our full ability until December 30th, when we are likely to close, unless the Government changes its policy direction. Our legacy will be for others to judge, but we hope it would be done in a way that is considered.

We will continue to advocate for our funding to be retained, while accepting some form of cutback is inevitable, and we will continue to highlight the looming policy vacuum. The failure at this crucial stage to adequately invest and to reflect on what is needed to build a cohesive society in Ireland where diversity is valued is short-sighted, irrespective of the funding of individual organisations such as the NCCRI.

Philip Watt is director of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

## **Winding up of integration groups makes policy weaker**

GENEVIEVE CARBERY

GOVERNMENT integration policy has been "effectively emasculated" with the winding up of two bodies set up to tackle racism and promote interculturalism, the chairwoman of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) has said.

Speaking yesterday at the *Metro Éireann* Media and Multicultural Awards, Lucy Gaffney said the absence of these bodies will "leave a void at the heart of the Government's efforts in tackling racism" and undermines "our ability to respond to the needs of the new society".

It was announced in the Budget that State funding of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) is to cease and that some of its functions are to be absorbed by the office of Minister for Integration Conor Lenihan.

The NPAR's four-year term finishes at the end of this year. Ms Gaffney appealed to Mr Lenihan, who presented many of the awards at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin yesterday afternoon, to ensure the effort put into integrating those who helped to build the economy was also put in to protecting them when times were not as good.

Phillip Watt, chairman of the NCCRI, was presented with a special judges' award. He said both recession and integration were challenges that lay ahead.

"We need to redouble our efforts to tackle racism in Ireland," he said as he called on Mr Lenihan to develop a new action plan against racism.

Businessman Denis O'Brien, who is chairman of one of the award's sponsors, the Iris O'Brien Foundation, also appealed to Mr Lenihan. "We really need more action," Mr O'Brien said, adding that it would cost more to fix these problems than to ensure they were not created in the first place.

Mr Lenihan hoped that "with the downturn, people don't project anxieties about the economy towards vulnerable immigrants," as took place in other European countries during slowdowns.

He insisted the issue of integration would continue to be dealt with in a professional way and said he would announce a new body to incorporate the work of the NPAR before Christmas.

"The creation of a new ministry means it is my job rather than other groups' jobs to counter and fight racism and to pursue the valuable work of integrating minority communities into the mainstream," Mr Lenihan said in advance of the awards.

The Government cuts are "very short-sighted" and "may create social inequality in the future that will take a hell of a lot more money to fix than the Budget cut," Ms Gaffney said as she presented an award.

Mr O'Brien also criticised Mr Lenihan over an opinion piece in *The Irish Times* about the abolition of the NCCRI and NPAR.

"I was very disturbed to read an article in *The Irish Times* criticising the work of NPAR.

"Clearly there are background briefings going on from some forces within Government and obviously the journalist is, she is, being fed this and has to write the article.

"But at the end of the day it is an appalling way to treat people that are on the committee of NPAR of the work that they are doing is to be critical in a backhand sort of way and this has to stop and hopefully it will never happen again," Mr O'Brien said.

The NCCRI, which employs 13 people, has played a prominent role in advising governmental and other bodies, recording racist incidents and researching immigration and social integration.

Immigrant and voluntary groups have strongly criticised the Government's decision to withdraw funding from the NCCRI.

# Politicians urged to encourage Traveller involvement in Dáil



Ceann Comhairle John O'Donoghue with Ronnie Fay (right) director, Pavee Point and Bridgy Collins, a member of the Traveller community, at the launch of an information pack for politicians on Travellers at Leinster House yesterday.

Photograph: Moya Nolan

ALISON HEALY

A SEAT should be reserved in the Seanad for Travellers and politicians must do more to encourage Traveller representation in the Dáil, an Oireachtas committee was told yesterday.

Martin Collins of the Pavee Point Travellers' Centre said there had been positive action measures in other countries to encourage Roma representation in public life, but nothing had been done here.

Mr Collins said Pavee Point condemned criminal and anti-social behaviour and had addressed it. However, he had not heard any condemnation from politicians about remarks made by Fianna Fáil councillor Paddy Kiely in September.

The Bagenalstown councillor caused controversy when he said people should "buy a gun" to stop Travellers illegally camping.

Fianna Fáil deputies Seán Connick and Thomas Byrne said they had not heard the comments and would raise the issue within the party.

Mr Collins said that it was "totally unsatisfactory" that there were just two Traveller councillors in this State.

Martin Ward in Tuam and Tom Stokes in Longford are the State's only councillors from the Traveller community.

Mr Collins said Travellers were still one of the most marginalised and excluded groups in society, with a 78 per cent unemployment rate, low life expectancy and poor participation in education.

He said the official recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority would have symbolic and practical implications and would put an increased onus on the State to provide facilities and services for them.

Mr Collins highlighted public animosity towards Travellers and cited one survey which found that 80 per cent of people would not accept a Traveller as a friend.

Asked by committee chairman Brendan Kenneally if Travellers brought some of the antagonism upon themselves, Mr Collins said: "I would accept that there are elements within the community as within every community who behave in a way that is totally unacceptable."

Pavee Point director Ronnie Fay highlighted the exclusion of Travellers from the portfolio of the Minister for Integration Conor Lenihan and said the axing of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) meant that there was no mechanism to address common issues affecting Travellers and immigrants.

She also expressed concern at the media's handling of Traveller issues and the reluctance to highlight positive stories about Travellers.

Later yesterday, Ceann Comhairle John O'Donoghue launched a new information pack for politicians on Travellers.

He said it was a valuable resource for politicians and he believed it would improve dialogue between the Traveller community and their elected representatives.

Both events were held to mark Traveller Focus Week which began on Monday. Details of the week's events are on [www.tfw.ie](http://www.tfw.ie)

## **Grassroots approach to integration proves effective**

A rural elderly group's informal initiative is achieving greater results than the State's intercultural agencies, writes **Sarah Carey**

MORAL OUTRAGE being a necessary ingredient in a quality column, I had hoped to contrive some regarding the abolition of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism. Or, since a former colleague Lucy Gaffney is chairman of the National Action Plan Against Racism, perhaps work up the enthusiasm to lament its demise under the Government's war on quangos. So far, my irritation extends to the fact that my spellchecker rejects the term "interculturalism".

Despite the objections of Microsoft Word, one is all for interculturalism especially since 2008 is European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. I wonder though if throughout their existence, the NCCRI or the NPAR persuaded any racists to like foreigners? They have achieved much in the

way of reports, research and the recognition of people who aren't racist, but I suspect that someone like Mary Nally does far more for "intercultural dialogue" than either agency has or ever could. And she doesn't cost much.

The three full-time employees and one part-time employee of the National Action Plan on Racism are civil servants who will be absorbed into the Department of Integration. Conversely, the NCCRI was set up as a private company and its employees will be made redundant. I am sorry for the staff, but two recent examples of its work show why the NCCRI is not worth defending.

When some schools found themselves under pressure to adopt a position on the wearing of hijabs they turned to the agency for advice. Guidelines were duly issued that were thankfully brief but of precisely no use to school principals. I could quote but the gist was "for the love of all monotheistic religions, don't expect us to say anything controversial. Hijabs are your problem."

Another piece of pointless work was promoted by a press release headlined *New Report Shows Housing and Neighbourhood Planning Crucial to the Integration of Migrants in Ireland*. As an exercise in stating the obvious, I doubt this report came cheap. The issue however, is not just money.

Effectiveness is the real test of any agency's existence. A "consultative committee" that recommends that school principals consult someone else on what Islamic schoolgirls should or shouldn't wear is not effective. If you want to know about effectively integrating a newly multiracial society, talk to Mary Nally instead.

Nally looks like anyone's respectable Auntie Mary and lives a few miles from me in the village of Summerhill, Co Meath. Two years ago, she was doing her shopping and observed a young south American woman and her young son at the same task. Nally was dismayed to see that the little boy was in charge of the job as he translated the labels for his mother. Without English, the woman couldn't even shop and like many immigrants, found herself dependent on her child for help.

Nally is well-known for her voluntary work with Summerhill's active retirement group Third Age and discussed the issue with her friends there. Shopping wasn't the only problem. Local medics revealed that immigrant children translated their parents' medical problems for them, which sometimes could be inappropriate. It's easy to say, "take English lessons", but outside a major urban centre, that's not straightforward.

The Third Agers also realised that lack of English was part of a bigger problem. Summerhill had lots of foreign residents, but no one really knew who they were. The language barrier made life hard for individuals but it also divided the community.

The woman was Maria Roman-Noriega, and women like her, stuck at home while their husbands work, have much in common with the elderly. Both groups are frequently isolated and casually assumed to have little use in a society that values paid work above all other activities. Elderly people might be suspected of possessing conservative views, but are often less judgmental than

the young and, like most Irish people, tend to be racist only in the abstract. Perhaps having had to endure emigration in their youth, the Third Aged, when faced with a nice young woman with a big problem, were moved to help Maria and others in her predicament.

Before you could say "National Consultative Committee", Summerhill's community centre became the regular Tuesday night venue for free English lessons from pensioners to struggling migrants. Elderly people with time on their hands soon got the hang of helping confused foreigners fill out forms, translate documents or walk through lesson plans with titles such as "visiting the doctor". The immigrants were learning English while the pensioners, supposedly a drain on the economy, were making a huge contribution to local life. Noriega was only one of dozens of people transformed by the experience. She learnt the language and soon was serving traditional Argentinian food in her home for her new Third Age friends. That's integration and interculturalism served up on one plate.

The project is called Fáilte Isteach and with the help of a few quid from Denis O'Brien is being rolled out across the country through other voluntary groups. As Garret FitzGerald supposedly said: "That's all very well in practice, but does it work in theory?" Yes: it's called "mainstreaming".

There are some things the Government should do but can't. The Department of Integration, which supports Fáilte Isteach, admits it cannot ordain integration. Instead, it has decided to work with organisations such as county councils, the HSE and even the GAA to help them achieve what quangos cannot: results. This looks remarkably like common sense and no one, even Microsoft, should have a problem with that.