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Racism as a Cause of Poverty

A Submission to the Review of the National Anti Poverty Strategy

April 2001

The emergence of racism as a cause of poverty in the National Anti Poverty Strategy.

In the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness there is a commitment to expanding the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) analysis to include emerging causes of poverty including racism. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) welcomes the recognition of racism as a cause of poverty. The NCCRI has supported this development through a range of previous submissions to the NAPS Interdepartmental Policy Committee, including a rationale for building an anti racism dimension into NAPS and how such a dimension could be practically built in to poverty proofing mechanisms (see annex one).

The importance of addressing the interface between racism and poverty is also being increasingly recognised at a global level and is a key theme in the draft Programme of Action for the forthcoming UN World Conference on Racism, which states:

‘The World Conference urges States to adopt or strengthen, as appropriate, national programmes for eradicating poverty which take account of indigenous populations, people of minority descent, migrants and other ethnic, racial, cultural, religious and linguistic groups or minorities, and of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.’¹

This submission from the NCCRI to the review of the National Anti Poverty Strategy has the aim of drawing out some of the key issues in the complex interface between poverty and racism in the Irish context and concludes with a number of general and specific recommendations that might inform ‘next steps’.

The structure of this submission is as follows:

Section 1 provides contextual information on the growth of ethnic diversity in Ireland and the greater recognition of racism as a public policy issue.

Section 2 provides a review of the experience of poverty of groups among groups experiencing racism in Ireland, in particular refugees and asylum seekers, migrant workers and black and minority ethnic groups, including Travellers.

Section 3 seeks to consider the interface between racism and poverty in Ireland, through particular reference to the key NAPS themes of unemployment and income adequacy.

Section 4 makes a number of recommendations that may help to inform next steps.

1. Ethnic diversity and racism In Ireland

There are no accurate census figures on the populations of minority ethnic groups in the Republic of Ireland. The paucity of demographic data is also reflected in the availability of data related to socio-economic status, including baseline figures on issues such as health, accommodation, employment and education.

¹ UNHCHR Draft programme of Action for Equality and Non-discrimination. Measures at a national level.

These significant gaps in data are indicative of the low or uneven priority that has characterised policy responses to the needs of minority ethnic groups in Ireland, although there are now signs that this neglect is beginning to change. The factors influencing this change are first, the growing recognition of ethnic diversity in Ireland and second the increasing awareness of racism as a major public policy concern.

The largest minority ethnic group in Ireland is the Traveller community with an estimated 22,000 people. There is a long established Jewish community and growing Islamic and Asian communities. There are now refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland from over 100 countries, including Vietnam, Bosnia, Kosovo Romania, Nigeria, Algeria, Congo, Sudan, Somalia and Kurdistan, with approximately 10,000 asylum seekers applying for refugee status per annum at present.

In addition to refugee and asylum seekers, there are an increasing number of people from non-EEA² countries seeking employment and better opportunities as migrant workers in Ireland, including those that are being actively recruited by Irish employers. Government policy has been to encourage such migration, particularly to meet skill shortages in identified professions through employment interventions, such as the work visa programme. There are now more visible populations of ‘people of colour’, including Black Irish, another EU and non-EU citizens who are living in Ireland who have experienced racism on the basis of their skin colour.

The history of cultural diversity in Ireland has been quite distinct in the European context. Travellers, an indigenous Irish community are Ireland’s largest minority ethnic group with a distinct culture and history of nomadism. In contrast to other European countries, there was no large-scale immigration into Ireland following the Second World War. During the 1950’s 1970’s and 1980’s, Ireland experienced high levels of unemployment and emigration that peaked at different times during this period. These factors combined with restrictive immigration laws in the South and recurring political conflict Northern Ireland to ensure that emigration continued to far exceed inward migration during these periods³.

Racism in Ireland

Despite documented evidence of the racism experienced by existing black and minority ethnic groups in Ireland, including Travellers, it is only in recent years that racism has emerged as an important public policy concern. Such concern has been reflected in a number of policy initiatives including the enactment of equality legislation and the establishment of equality infrastructure in Ireland, the development of the NCCRI as an advisory partnership of government and non-government agencies and the forthcoming national public awareness programme to address racism.

There are a number of different types of racism evident in the Irish context:

- The racism experienced by the Traveller community based on their distinct culture and nomadic identity.

² European Economic Area comprising EU, Iceland and Norway

³ While recent migration to Ireland has been a key factor in highlighting ethnic and cultural diversity in Ireland, it is important that immigration and diversity are not used interchangeably as this denies the presence of minority ethnic groups Ireland prior to the mid 1990’s, which will have consequences for which groups are included in social inclusion measures.

- Minority ethnic groups experience racism on the basis of skin colour and their ethnicity, whatever their legal status or citizenship.
- Racism experienced by refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers related to their legal status and ethnicity.

2. Poverty and Minority Ethnic Groups.

There is strong evidence from research undertaken in North America and Western Europe that minority ethnic groups experience disproportionate levels of poverty. According to the United States Census (1995), African Americans and Hispanic Americans are three times more likely than whites to fall below the officially defined poverty line.⁴

The higher level of poverty among minority ethnic groups in Britain has been well documented through various data sources. To take unemployment as one indicator of poverty, labour force surveys undertaken in Britain showed that in the 1980's, unemployment rates among the minority ethnic groups peaked at over 20%, nearly double the rate for the majority ethnic population in Britain at that time.⁵

Evidence from Britain also points to poverty levels being disproportionate between different minority ethnic groups. According to research carried out in 1997, the closest groups, in socio economic terms, to white households in Britain were the Chinese. Next came African Asians, Caribbean's and Indians very close together, but significantly worse off than whites or Chinese. People from Pakistan and Bangladesh were far and away the poorest ethnic groups, with more than four out of five below the low-income threshold.⁶

Poverty and Minority Ethnic Groups in Ireland.

Unlike Britain, it is very rare for official data sources in Ireland to disaggregate data for demographic or ethnic equality purposes. There is therefore virtually no official quantitative data, with the exception of limited data in relation to Travellers and asylum seekers. It is very disappointing that despite representations from the NCCRI, the forthcoming 2001 Census will not have an ethnicity question that covers the different ethnic groups in Ireland and questions related to country of birth and nationality will only provide partial information.

Similarly it has been acknowledged that a key data source used under the NAPS, the 'Living in Ireland Survey' which is used to determine and benchmark poverty levels fails to provide disaggregated data on minority ethnic groups, as the survey does not include people who live in private households such as Travellers and many refugees and asylum seekers.⁷

Nevertheless there are small-scale surveys and qualitative research beginning to emerge, particularly from NGO's but also from statutory sources that provides a growing body of evidence that as with other countries poverty levels among minority ethnic groups in Ireland are disproportionate.

⁴ National Coordinating Committee for European Year Against Racism. (1997) Towards an Anti Racism Dimension in the NAPS.

⁵ Racism and Anti Racism (1999). Ed Braham; Rattansi; Skellington. P59.

⁶ Quoted in National Coordinating Committee for European Year Against Racism. (1997)

⁷ Poverty Today. July/August 1999. Strengthening the NAPS. Frazer H.

It is difficult to capture all the socio-economic and political issues related to poverty and minority ethnic groups in a short submission. As a consequence this paper will focus on two of the key themes identified under NAPS, the overlapping themes of unemployment and income adequacy. These themes are now briefly considered in relation to the different forms of racism in Ireland identified in section one of this submission. In doing so this submission fully acknowledges the definition of poverty contained in the NAPS which defines poverty as being more than lack of income and can result in the exclusion from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in Irish society. Access to decision making is also an important issue that impacts on poverty and exclusion of groups experiencing poverty.

Unemployment and income adequacy⁸

Unemployment and income adequacy have been identified in the NAPS as key themes with specific targets. The overall objective under the unemployment theme is as follows:

‘Paid employment should be available to all men and women currently in poverty who are seeking employment. This should be capable of providing adequate income, either on its own or when combined with other forms of support, sufficient to lift them out of poverty and should be available without barriers of discrimination’.

In relation to income adequacy the overall objective identified in NAPS is as follows:

‘Policies in relation to income support, whether these policies relate to employment, tax, social welfare occupational pensions or otherwise should aim to provide sufficient income for all those concerned to move out of poverty and live in a manner compatible with human dignity’⁹.

The theme of unemployment and income adequacy are now discussed in the context of the types of racism identified in section one of this submission, related to refugees and asylum seekers, migrants and black and minority ethnic groups, including Travellers.

Refugees

Access to employment and income adequacy for refugees and asylum seekers, Travellers and Migrant workers is a complex issue which is in part determined by government policy, and part related to refugees and asylum seekers overcoming a range of barriers to obtaining employment and adequate income, including the barrier of racism.

Those with refugee status (Convention refugees and Programme Refugees¹⁰) have virtually the same rights as Irish citizens to employment, social welfare benefits and to education, training and labour market schemes. However there are indications that people with refugee status experience a number of barriers to obtaining employment. A small-scale study published by IBEC in 2000¹¹ provides indications of the range of

⁸ The choice of the adopting the themes of unemployment and income adequacy in this submission does not deny or undervalue the other causes of poverty or themes identified under the NAPS.

⁹ Interdepartmental Policy Committee (2001). Annual Report 1999/2000 p10, 15.

¹⁰ See glossary

¹¹ IBEC (2000). Employment of Non-EU Nationals/Refugees in Ireland. Interact Ireland

such barriers and their importance. The two most important barriers identified by those surveyed were racism and lack of skills.

Ranking of Barriers to Employment identified by Refugees

1 is most important 10 least important

Barriers to Obtaining Employment	Rank
Racism	1
Lack of skills	2
Lack of information	3
Cultural difficulties	4
Verification of qualifications	5
Transferability of qualifications	6
Lack of childcare facilities	7
Loss of health board housing subsidy	8
Lack of English	9
Other	10

A study of the Vietnamese and Bosnian refugee community¹² (who came to Ireland as Programme Refugees) in 1999 concluded that the unemployment levels among both communities was much greater than the general Irish population, with a greater proportion of Bosnians unemployed than Vietnamese.¹³ Many participants were pessimistic about their short-term chances of obtaining employment.

Barriers identified by the two communities included language; non-recognition of qualifications; the need to attain new qualifications; and the need for more targeted labour force programmes. While racism was not investigated in respect of identified barriers to employment in the survey, some 32% of Vietnamese and 9.5% of Bosnians surveyed had experienced some form of racial abuse.

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers do not have the right to work or to unemployment assistance, except those asylum seekers who applied for refugee status before July 1999 and who have been resident in Ireland for one year. In general asylum seekers are only entitled to supplementary welfare allowance or comfort money of £15 per week that is provided to adult asylum seekers who are provided with full board and lodgings under the direct provision policy.

Successive reports produced by NGO's¹⁴ have highlighted with concern that one of the outcomes of the direct provision scheme, combined with the lack of access to employment is the creation of enforced dependency on the State and the effective denial of the opportunity to earn an adequate income. The consensus between many NGO's is that asylum seekers should have the right to seek work if their claim for asylum has not been processed within the government target of six months.

¹² Refugee Agency (1999) Report of a Survey of the Vietnamese and Bosnian Refugee Communities in Ireland.

¹³ This may be because the Vietnamese have been in Ireland longer and they tend to be self-employed.

¹⁴ Including a forthcoming report from the Irish Refugee Council.

A study of asylum seekers undertaken by the Applied Social Science Research programme in UCD¹⁵ in 2001 concluded:

- Many of those participating in the study have high levels of education and considerable vocational skills.
- The vast majority were in the economically active age groups.
- 28% said that they had very little spoken English, or none at all.
- Less than one in ten had no qualifications, but women were disproportionately represented in this figure.
- The restriction on working was a considerable frustration for many asylum seekers with only 16% surveyed with this right.

The study also reflected on the main barriers to employment of those asylum seekers with the right to work, including:

- Non-recognition of qualifications resulting in underemployment.
- Abrupt removal of ancillary benefits.
- Lack of basis English.
- The need for adequate training, support and assessment.

The conclusions from the UCD would indicate that skills issues, including command of the English language are of less importance than the limitations placed by government policy on employment entitlement. The issue of racism was only briefly considered in the UCD report and did not form a specific question in the survey. However the report highlights spontaneous responses on this issue in relation to accessing accommodation, which is an important consideration for securing employment for those with work entitlement:

‘Respondents ...spoke of the prejudice and discrimination they encountered in seeking accommodation – this was accentuated greatly in the case of black asylum seekers.’¹⁶

Migrant Workers

There is growing anecdotal evidence of migrant workers experiencing a range of problems related to employment and income adequacy caused by a range of interrelated factors, including exploitation by a minority of Irish employers and recruitment agencies, the inadequacy of statutory rights for migrant workers, lack of flexibility provided under the work permit scheme and weaknesses in the State’s provision of adequate enforcement of existing labour protection legislation and racism.

In a submission to the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment in 2001, the NCCRI highlighted the inadequacy of rights and protection afforded to migrant workers in Ireland. The main labour force mechanism for non EEA migrant workers, the work permit scheme is open to abuse by employers as the permits are held by the employer rather than the employee and the employee is not entitled to seek alternative employment with a different employer or to seek support from social welfare.

¹⁵ Faughnan and Woods (2001) Lives on Hold. Seeking Asylum in Ireland

¹⁶Faughnan and Woods. Ibid. p 78.

Some bogus agencies are posing as employers and sub contracting work permits to companies desperately short of staff or who are seeking cheaper and more flexible employment. Some employment agencies are charging a high percentage of an annual wage to support migrants to come to Ireland. Some migrant workers, particularly those employed in the meat processing, horticulture and agricultural industries are only being employed for two or three days per week because of changing demands and the requirement by employers for flexibility from the labour force. These factors combined with low wages combine to make such jobs increasingly unattractive to Irish workers.

However, under the terms of the work permit scheme employees are prevented in seeking employment from other employers for the remaining days of the week or to seek social welfare benefits. As a consequence some workers are only earning £70 or £80 a week, which is further reduced by problems of accessing adequate and affordable accommodation, including discrimination by landlords¹⁷

The poor treatment of migrant workers is not confined to those on the work permit scheme. A visa scheme aimed at attracting professionals such as nurses and construction workers into Ireland is a distinct improvement on the work permit scheme as it allows for rights such as family reunification and the employee rather than the employer holds the visa, allowing for less dependency on the policies of one employer. However, there has also been some recent adverse media reports of the conditions provided to some employees brought to Ireland under this scheme vis a vis the accommodation conditions of some Philippino nurses.

The treatment of migrant workers as economic commodities without reference to their other economic social and cultural rights is extremely discriminatory. The denial of basic freedoms such as the right to change employer or family reunification for spouses and children of migrant workers, has the potential of creating an underclass of 'guest workers' who will never be fully integrated into local communities and will leave such groups open to further exploitation and racism.

Travellers

Social exclusion, racism and poverty experienced by the Traveller community have been documented in the reports of NGO's and government initiatives. This is evidenced by indicators such as high morbidity and mortality rates, the appalling conditions on some sites, in particular temporary and unofficial sites, and the low participation rates in secondary education.

The Government Task force on the Traveller Community (1995) identified many of the reasons for the low participation of Travellers in employment:

'Traveller participation in the mainstream labour force is very low for many reasons, including low pay and poor work conditions, need for training, cultural factors, lack of acceptance by 'settled' counterparts'.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment have recently announced some measures to address some of these issues through for example strengthening the employment inspectorate and the greater policing of employment agencies. The placing of work permits and visas on a statutory basis has also been indicated by the Department.

¹⁸ Government Publications. (1995) Task Force on the Travelling Community. Executive Summary p19.

The report emphasised the need in the immediate term to develop strategies to increase development of Traveller community enterprise within the social economy and on the employment of Travellers in the public service, particularly within those areas providing services to or contact with the Traveller community.

The Task Force Report emphasises that despite some popular prejudices there is a significant and distinct work ethic within the Traveller community and Traveller culture and way of life values enterprise and financial independence. A number of features stand out as central to the Traveller economy, including nomadism, focussing on generating income, the family as the basis economic unit, flexibility and the importance of the home base for economic activities.

The progress made since the publication of the Task Force report on issues such as income adequacy and employment have been recognised as being very disappointing by NGO's and the governments own monitoring committee to oversee the implementation of its recommendations. The Monitoring Committee's First Report (2001) noted:

'The Committee points out that in terms of access to the mainstream labour market the participation of Travellers continues to be very low. The difficulties stem from the discrimination Travellers experience in school, in training courses, accessing and/or in the work environment; nomadism and the desire for self employment; a logical choice given the levels of discrimination; early school leaving; and a shortage of skills to enable access to the mainstream labour market, in particular employment and prospects'.¹⁹

Discrimination is clearly identified as a factor impacting on unemployment and income adequacy and the forms that such discrimination is usefully defined within the Task Force Report in a way that can be applied to other groups experiencing racism.

'Travellers experience direct and indirect discrimination at the individual or interpersonal level and at the institutional level. Discrimination at the individual level is most common when a Traveller seeks access to a range of goods, services and facilities, to which access was denied purely on the basis of their identity as a Traveller. There are many examples of public houses refusing to serve Travellers, hotels refusing to book Traveller weddings, leisure facilities barring access to Travellers and insurance companies refusing to provide motor insurance cover.

The Task Force found that at the institutional level discrimination could occur where procedures and practices reflect the lack of acceptance of Traveller's culture and identity and can involve controls placed on Travellers in excess of those placed on the settled community in similar circumstances. While Travellers are segregated in the provision of various services it can be seen as an imposed setting apart of a group. Legislation, policy making and provision can develop in a manner that only reflects the settled communities culture and identity and ignores the impact it may have in the Travellers as a minority ethnic group. The Task Force concluded that while

¹⁹ Department for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. First progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Coordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community.

legislation alone would not put an end to such discrimination, it would make an essential contribution.²⁰

Black and minority ethnic groups in Ireland

There has been very little research carried out into the poverty experienced by Black and minority ethnic groups in Ireland except when their legal status is one of a refugee and asylum seeker or a migrant worker. Indeed it is often overlooked that there are Black Irish and other EU citizens living in Ireland who are not migrants or asylum seekers.

There is even less research available related to the NAPS themes of unemployment and income adequacy in relation to this group, which is not surprising giving the absence of disaggregated data on which to measure and benchmark their socio economic status and their progress or lack of progress towards equality with other ethnic groups, including the majority population.

There is however, a considerable amount of evidence related to the socio economic experience of Black people in Britain. Issues that emerge from such research in relation to unemployment and income are summarised as follows:

- Black people and minority ethnic groups in Britain have experienced institutional racism in issues such as recruitment, access to promotion and the experience of higher levels of unemployment.²¹
- The institutional racism they experience is often subtle and can be both intentional and unintentional. Patterns can only be proved through adequate data and research.
- Women from black and minority ethnic groups are even more disadvantaged and have been concentrated into low paid and low skilled jobs, particularly low paid jobs in the public services such as health services.

Discrimination can occur in all professions. For instance speakers at the recent Irish Medical Organisations AGM referred to the fact that only 2% of consultants are from black and minority ethnic groups despite the fact that they make up nearly one third of junior doctors. Further issues identified included insecurity of tenure and poorer working conditions.

3. The Interface between Racism and Poverty

From this review of poverty and minority ethnic groups in Ireland it is clear that the causes of poverty and the relationship between poverty and racism are both complex and multidimensional. Racism can impact on poverty in different ways, for example a person may not get employment or accommodation that enables them to take up employment, because of direct discrimination by a employer or landlord, contributing directly to poverty.

Other ways in which racism can impact on poverty may be more difficult to identify without adequate research and consultation with the groups experiencing racism. For example, a minority ethnic group may in theory be able to access a particular state

²⁰ Ibid. P 32.

²¹ Braham, Rattansi, Skellington. Ibid particularly chapters 3,4,7,8

service, but in practice may not because the service does not recognise the specific and additional barriers faced by minority ethnic groups in accessing such a service. These barriers can include lack of accessible information or knowledge of rights, lack of resources to avail of such services or their geographical remoteness or lack of cultural sensitivity by the service provider concerning the services provided.

The historical legacy of racism also needs to be considered in relation to poverty. A group that has experienced racism over many years will likely show of multiple disadvantage because of discrimination in key areas of concern such as education, employment, training, accommodation and health services. In short a whole series of mechanisms serve in combination to disadvantage minority ethnic groups.

The key issues arising out of this brief review of poverty and minority ethnic groups in section two are as follows:

- There is increasing evidence that Black and minority ethnic groups in Ireland, including Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers and migrants experience disproportionate levels of poverty
- Racism is a major factor in contributing to the disproportionate poverty experienced by minority ethnic groups at both an individual and institutional level.
- Government policy can have both a direct and indirect effect on the levels of poverty experienced by specific minority ethnic groups.
- Women from minority ethnic groups experience specific and additional forms of racism and often experience or bear the main brunt higher levels of poverty among majority and minority ethnic groups.
- The complex and multi dimensional nature of the interface between racism and poverty is highlighted by the example of theme of unemployment and income inadequacy and can include:
 - Discrimination in recruitment and promotion policies
 - Discrimination in retention in times of economic downturn in mainstream employment.
 - Non recognition or transferability of qualifications
 - Skill gaps. Many people from minority ethnic groups will have good qualifications and vocational and language skills. Others will require on going support.
 - The inadequate access or provision of quality education training and employment services is a significant barrier to people from minority ethnic groups who need ongoing support.
 - Inadequate support of the development of the potential of the social economy and penetration into mainstream employment (see discussion on Travellers and Refugees in section 2)
 - Inadequate protection afforded to and the potential exploitation of migrant workers. (See discussion on migrant workers in section 2)

The extent of such poverty and basic data on the demographic profile of minority ethnic groups are largely absent. The historical absence of data is further compounded by failure to seize forthcoming opportunities, such as the failure to include an adequate ethnicity question in the 2001 census. The failure to provide such data means, first, there is no accurate way of estimating the full extent of need of minority ethnic groups in Ireland or to inform future planning and resource implications.

Second, there is no comprehensive system of benchmarking at regular intervals indicators of poverty such as issues such as incomes, employment status, dependency ratios within a family and particular community, tenure of accommodation and location.

4. Recommendations

This submission seeks to endorse general recommendations in relations to NAPS and to identify new actions that have the potential to specifically impact on the racism/poverty interface. These include:

General recommendations

- The development of a more integrated equality and poverty proofing mechanism arising out of the report commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform presented in January 2000.
- The urgent need for data collection systems to collect ethnic equality data that should reflect the needs of different ethnic groups and in particular the different forms of racism identified in this submission.
- The need for the NAPS to be strengthened and enhanced as identified in the evaluation undertaken by the Combat Poverty Agency²² including:
 - The development of institutional structures to underpin the NAPS process.
 - The adoption of specific poverty reduction targets.
 - Introducing and increased transparency in respect of poverty proofing.
 - Strengthening the participation of the community and voluntary sector in NAPS.
 - The extension of NAPS to a local level.

Specific Recommendations

- The consideration of building in an immediate anti racism dimension into NAPS as envisaged under the NCCRI as a component of and prelude to a fully integrated anti poverty/equality proofing mechanism.
- The development of mechanisms to ensure that all key policy developments which have the potential to impact on minority ethnic groups should be poverty proofed. This should include policies towards refugees and asylum seekers, migrants and Black and minority ethnic groups including Travellers and the development of mechanisms to address cross cutting themes such as gender and disability.
- The consideration of a statutory duty on statutory agencies to promote equality *and* tackle poverty based on similar duties introduced into legislation in Northern Ireland and Britain.
- The resourcing of NGO's representing minority ethnic groups to enable them to participate in programmes to address poverty and racism and to provide greater participation in the decision making that effects their lives.
- The development of further research on the poverty/racism interface.

²² Combat Poverty Agency (2000) Planning for a more inclusive society: An initial assessment of the NAPS

- Priority given to measures to ensure the visibility of meeting the needs of groups experiencing racism within the NAPS.
- The specific inclusion of ethnic equality questions in all national surveys, including the census and the surveys used by the NAPS.
- The inclusion of the needs of groups experiencing racism in all major social inclusion programmes, including the Local Development and Community Development (CDP) Programme and the RAPID initiative and Employment Action Plan, to give a few examples.

The NCCRI proposes the establishment of a small working group to consider the development of an anti racism dimension into the NAPS. This working group could seek to identify how the NAPS could give visibility to the racism/poverty interface and would ensure that minority ethnic groups in Ireland are fully included under the NAPS. The working group would also consider the merging European social exclusion programme.

Annex 1

Summary of NCCRI research

The identification of the intersection between poverty and racism commenced in 1997 when the predecessor of the NCCRI, the National Coordinating Committee for European Year Against Racism submitted a report to the Interdepartmental Committee 'Towards an Anti Racism Dimension in the National Anti Poverty Strategy.' This Paper concluded that not only do disproportionate levels of poverty persist among most minority ethnic groups, but there is also a causal link between racism and poverty.

The report contended that theories that seek to explain the poverty experienced by minority ethnic groups in terms of some perceived quality of the minority ethnic groups themselves have now been discredited. These theories sought to advance the belief that the consequences of poverty such as drug abuse and social welfare dependency were somehow part of the culture of minority ethnic groups, and therefore minority ethnic groups were responsible for their own poverty. The report concluded that the key factors in determining the poverty experienced by minority ethnic groups are not internal characteristics, but structural inequalities experienced by such groups over many years and the impact of racism in both direct and indirect ways.

Poverty proofing from an anti racism perspective

In October 1999 the NCCRI published the report 'Poverty proofing from an anti racism perspective' with the purpose of providing a practical demonstration of how an anti racism dimension could be built into the National Anti Poverty Strategy.

Poverty proofing is the process by which Government Departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction.²³

The guidelines state that poverty proofing should be undertaken in the following circumstances:

- In the preparation of SMI Statements of Strategy.
- In designing policies and preparing memoranda to Government on significant policy proposals.
- In the preparation of spending estimates.
- In the preparation of the National Development Plan and other relevant EU Plans and Programmes.
- In the preparation of legislation.

The publication used the examples of aspects of housing and education that have the potential to impact on minority ethnic groups, to illustrate how such proofing might be undertaken.

²³ NAPS (1998). Guidelines for Poverty/Equality Proofing. Dublin: Department of Social Community and Family Affairs.