

**An Coiste Comhairleach Náisiúnta
ar Chiníochas agus Idirchultúrachas**

**National Consultative Committee
on Racism and Interculturalism**

20 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2.

☎: (+353 1) 4785777

Fax: (+353 1) 4785778

Email: nccri@eircom.net

Website: www.nccri.com



National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)

Submission to the Family Support Agency Strategic Plan

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Introduction

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism was established in July 1998 by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The overall role of the Committee is to act in a policy advisory role, to contribute to the overall development of public policy in relation to racism and interculturalism and to encourage integrated action towards acknowledging, understanding and celebrating cultural diversity in Ireland.

A key feature of the NCCRI strategy has been to work at national level in partnership with government departments, statutory agencies and the social partners, including the voluntary and community sector. This partnership approach is reflected in both the structure of the NCCRI, where there is broad representation on the Board, its sub committees and through the participation of people in the numerous roundtables, seminars, training programmes and conferences organised by the NCCRI since it was established in July 1998.

Background

The emerging cultural diversity in Ireland has presented challenges to all and in particular those responsible for developing public policy. Some of these challenges include:

- The challenge to ensure the inclusion and integration of new and existing minority ethnic families in Ireland, valuing the cultural diversity they bring.
- The challenge to ensure that minority ethnic families are protected from racism and other forms of social exclusion, including poverty.

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. In addition to refugee and asylum seekers, there are an increasing number of people from non-EEA¹ countries seeking employment and better opportunities as migrant workers in Ireland, including those that are being actively recruited by Irish employers. In the year 2002 the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment issued around 47,000 work permits. There are now more visible populations of 'people of colour', including Black Irish, other EU and non-EU citizens who are living in Ireland who have experienced racism on the basis of their skin colour.

Policy Context

There is a vast array of issues that are faced by minority ethnic families in Ireland. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy Review (2002) and the National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2003-2005) identify Travellers, migrants and minority ethnic groups as groups vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. These policies commit the Irish state to a range of objectives, which include accommodation, health and educational targets for Travellers; and in terms of migrants and other minority ethnic groups, broader targets to prevent racism, discrimination and social exclusion, to develop fair and effective immigration policies and to implement comprehensive policies for the integration of migrants. Irish equality legislation² prohibits discrimination in the provision of services and in access to employment on the grounds of race, religion or membership of the Traveller community (among other grounds). For service providers such as the Family Support Agency, ensuring their services comply with such legislation may target minority ethnic groups to access their services, providing anti-racism training to front-line staff, equality proofing service plans and delivering culturally appropriate services.

¹ European Economic Area comprising EU, Iceland and Norway

² The Equal Status Act (2000) and the Employment Equality Act (1998)

At the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban in 2001, participating states agreed to develop national action plans against racism. Ireland's National Action Plan Against Racism is expected to be published during 2004 and measures agreed by Government will be implemented. These measures are likely to cut across a very wide range of social policy and impact on all government departments.

Issues for Minority Ethnic Families

It is clear that minority ethnic groups, including Travellers, experience or are at risk of experiencing high levels of social exclusion. For Traveller families, statistics show that the health of Traveller families is far poorer than that of the settled population, educational deprivation is high and many Traveller families are living in totally inappropriate accommodation, with little progress being made on Traveller accommodation strategies in recent years.

For other minority ethnic groups, the picture is not quite as clear, due to the paucity of statistical and demographic data in relation to minority ethnic families. The need for disaggregated data collection and analysis is an important component in the delivery of culturally appropriate services.

Some of the emerging issues for minority ethnic families include:

- Difficulty accessing affordable, culturally appropriate and non-discriminative childcare
- The separation of migrant workers from their families
- The contravention of rights to family formation in Ireland by current immigration policies
- Difficulties experienced by asylum seeker families with accommodation provided under the Dispersal and Direct Provision policies, such as lack of privacy, lack of choice in food provision, sharing accommodation spaces with strangers and appropriate and adequate recreation space for children
- Experiences of racism and racial abuse
- Difficulty in accessing services such as health and education because of language barriers, lack of information etc
- Social isolation and loneliness

NCCRI Relationship with the Family Support Agency

The Community Development Support Unit (CDSU) of the NCCRI is co-funded by the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The overall aim of the CDSU is (working within the overall remit of the NCCRI) to create the conditions at both a national and local level, where community development with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants is recognised and resourced as a key strategy to addressing racism and social exclusion.

Since the initiation of the Family Support Agency, the CDSU has met with FSA staff, along with Specialist Support Agencies, to discuss work plans, budgets and the strategic planning process of the FSA.

The NCCRI communicates information on anti-racism and interculturalism directly to the Agency and to the Family Resource Centres through:

- Its quarterly newsletter, *Spectrum*. This newsletter provides comprehensive updates on international, EU and national policy development, reports on racist incidents, analysis of policy developments and progress in anti-racism and interculturalism.
- Its monthly e-bulletin, *NCCRI News*. The e-bulletin provides short and snappy updates such as upcoming events, funding deadlines for community and voluntary organisations and policy updates.

From time to time the NCCRI holds seminars targeted at community development projects, refugee and asylum seeker support groups and family resource centres, such as *Responding to the Community Development Needs of 'new communities'* and *Towards Interculturalism – working with Minority Ethnic Groups*. It also invites the participation of the FSA and family resource centres at various roundtable discussions it hosts on various EU and international policy developments.

The NCCRI would wish to have a relationship with the FSA that is mutually informative on issues facing minority ethnic families and the policy responses being devised. As an advisory body, NCCRI is in a position to advise the FSA on issues of anti-racism and interculturalism, particularly in terms of:

- providing up to date information on international, EU and national policy and legislative developments and analysing their implications for the provision of family services;
- providing anti-racism training and training for trainers;
- supporting family resource centres in using community development approaches in their work with minority ethnic families through written information and tools, issue based seminars and workshops and direct support where requested.

Role of the Family Support Agency

The 'Background' paragraph in this submission details some demographic changes in Ireland that have recently taken place in terms of inward migration. Other major environmental changes in Irish society include an increasingly ageing population, the decline of family size and the significant changes to family structure, formation and lifestyle that exist. Much attention has been drawn to growing inequalities in Irish society, many of which have particular impact on the quality of life of women, children, lone parents, Travellers and other minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, the unemployed, gay and lesbian people, and older people.

It is clear that the potential of the Family Resource Agency, as the single statutory agency dealing with family issues and providing support services to families, has a major role in ensuring that the needs of **all** families at risk of social exclusion are met by their services. This implies that the principles that inform the FSA should be based on notions of equality, inclusiveness and understanding of the rich diversity that makes up the reality of the family life in Ireland.

Function (f) of the extract from the Family Support Agency Act 2001: '*to undertake or commission research...*' would enable the FSA to gather information about diverse families formations, structures and situations, and explore the varying support needs of families experiencing social exclusion. This could inform the delivery of service, in particular through the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme (FCSRCP), whose priority areas are those where "*communities are contending with multiple disadvantage and where families are facing significant challenges in trying to rear their children and securing positive futures for them*"³.

The fact that the Family Support Agency also has an advisory role to the Minister of Social and Family Affairs is of key importance. The NCCRI hopes that this role will be embraced by the FSA to ensure that future family policy, and other policies that impact on the quality of life of all families will be informed by the realities they experience. Continuing to involve families and the organisations that represent them, particularly those that experience social exclusion, will be an important contribution to the development of meaningful social policy. For example, consultation with minority ethnic families on their specific needs can ensure that they are not excluded from the quality family services provided by the FSA and FCSRCP and that they are appropriately targeted for the particular supports they require.

³ Department of Social and Family Affairs Website

The NCCRI also welcomes the FSA's commitment to using community development principles in its work and acknowledges the important contributions that family resource centres have made in communities through working from such an approach. The NCCRI looks forward to ongoing collaboration with the FSA, to promote intercultural approaches to community development, through its Community Development Support Unit.

Summary

The NCCRI is committed to working in partnership with statutory and non-statutory organisations to develop inclusive and strategic approaches to combat racism and to promote an intercultural Irish society. It recognises and welcomes the important contribution that the FSA can make to ensuring the integration and inclusion of minority ethnic families – in particular through its Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. The NCCRI welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the FSA strategic planning process, it looks forward to the publication of a comprehensive, inclusive and equality-based strategic plan to be implemented over the coming three years and commits to working in partnership with the Family Support Agency to ensure the continued development of quality family services for minority ethnic families.