

An Coiste Comhairleach Náisiúnta  
ar Chiníochas agus Idirchultúrachas

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## **National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism**

**Submission to the Draft Public Service  
Broadcasting Charter for RTE**

**August 2003**

## **Introduction**

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was established in 1998 as an independent expert body focusing on racism and interculturalism. The NCCRI is a partnership body which brings together government and non-government organisations to:

- Develop an inclusive and strategic approach to combat racism by focusing on its prevention and promoting an intercultural society
- Contribute to policy and legislative developments and seek to encourage dialogue and progress in all areas relating to racism and interculturalism
- Encourage integrated actions towards acknowledging, celebrating and accommodating cultural diversity
- Establish and maintain links with organisations or individuals involved in addressing racism and promoting interculturalism at national, European and international level
- Provide a national framework for responding to and consulting with key European and international bodies on issues related to racism and interculturalism.

The NCCRI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Public Service Broadcasting Charter for RTE. We note that under the Broadcasting Authority Acts (1960-2001) RTE is required to provide a comprehensive range of programmes, in Irish and English, which reflect the cultural diversity of the whole island of Ireland.

We further note that in fulfilling their statutory mandate, RTE is required to cater for the expectations of the community as a whole as well as the expectations of the community with special or minority interests and in every case to respect human dignity.

The NCCRI's main concern focuses on the needs and expectations of minority ethnic groups living in Ireland. The Public Service Broadcasting Charter for RTE is a unique opportunity to reflect the diversity of the public broadcaster's audience and to look at ways to address their needs and expectation and to facilitate their participation in society, thereby contributing to a more intercultural Ireland.

## **Context**

The minority ethnic population has risen significantly in recent years. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2002 Census of Population Principal Demographic Results indicates for the first time that Irish non-nationals make up 5.8% of the population, of which almost half were UK nationals (2.7%). Other EU nationals and the nationals of other European countries were the next numerous, followed by Asian, African and US nationals. This was the first time a nationality question was asked in the Census and it gives an indication of the extent of such diversity in Ireland.

The 2002 Census does not however, provide a complete picture of ethnic diversity in Ireland because the ethnicity question, which is a separate question to nationality in the 2002 Census, was limited to a question on the Traveller Community. A separate question on ethnicity is required because there are many people from minority ethnic

groups in Ireland who are Irish nationals and who would not be covered by the 'nationality' question.

One of the key factors that have resulted in greater nationality and ethnic diversity in Ireland is inward migration. Contrary to widespread perceptions, most of the recent immigration into Ireland is as a consequence of returning Irish emigrants and migrant workers rather than asylum seekers. In 2002, for example there were over 43,000 work permits and visas issued to non European Economic Area nationals to work in Ireland as opposed to 11,634 applications by asylum seekers for refugee status.

The 2002 Census also gives a far more accurate reflection of the size of the Irish Traveller population in Ireland. Close to 24,000 Irish Travellers, representing 0.65% of the total population was enumerated in the 2002 Census. This is more than double the figure in the previous Census when coverage was only partial.

The religious profile of Ireland has also changed significantly over the last 10 years, which is also an indicator that we are now a more multicultural society. The number of Muslim people in Ireland has quadrupled to 19,000 from the 1991 Census, when the religion question was last asked. The number of Orthodox Christians has increased from 400 in 1991 to over 10,000 in 2002, representing migrants mainly from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The new figures reveal that public broadcasting now need to ensure that there is an overall range of programmes in place to account for the extent of ethnic diversity in Ireland.

### **National Action Plan Against Racism**

The United Nations World Conference Against Racism was held in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. One of the key outcomes of the Conference was the commitment by participating countries to develop National Action Plans Against Racism. The development of a National Action Plan Against Racism in Ireland represents a significant opportunity to both build upon and enhance existing policies and strategies to address racism in Ireland and to identify new priorities, aspirations and arenas of work that can be drawn together into an overall cohesive plan.

The National Action Plan will reflect the outcomes of the consultative process undertaken by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform between March and December 2002 which was overseen by a broad based Steering Group representing government and non-government organisations with support from the NCCRI. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform have recently published the summary of outcomes of the consultative process entitled "Diverse Voices".<sup>1</sup>

In Diverse Voices the role of the media was identified in the consultative process as crucial to the further strengthening of an anti-racist society in Ireland, where cultural diversity is valued and respected. It was emphasised that the role of the media in Ireland has been both positive and negative in this respect. The media has both promoted understanding, awareness and analysis of key issues but there continues to

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<sup>1</sup> National Action Plan Against Racism Steering Group: **Diverse Voices: Summary of the Consultation Process and a Proposed Framework for the National Action Plan Against Racism**. Stationery Office. Available on [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)

be examples of irresponsible media reporting that contribute to stigmatising and labelling of minority ethnic groups including the Traveller community.

The most Vulnerable groups identified during the consultation to such labelling/stigmatisation were Travellers and recent migrants to Ireland, in particular refugee and asylum seekers. Key issues that emerged from the consultative process included:

- Support for programming that highlights cultural diversity and anti-racism in Ireland
- Enhanced participation of journalists from minority ethnic groups in all parts of the media industry, including reporting and production
- The development of a code of conduct for those working in the media industry
- Enhanced and consistent complaints and redress procedures within media organisations

### **Draft Public Service Broadcasting Charter**

It is important that RTE, as the national public service broadcaster, reflects the democratic, social and cultural values of an increasingly diverse society. It is equally important that RTE programming is responsible and promotes the positive aspects of minority ethnic groups living in Ireland including Travellers. With regard to the Charter, we note that one of the guiding principles of the Charter is that there will be no editorial or programming bias to be shown in terms of gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religion or membership of a minority community. The NCCRI welcomes the inclusion of this clause.

However we consider that an inclusion of an explicit reference to the outlawing of any reporting or programming which depicts or reinforces negative images or assumptions of minority ethnic groups would be useful. The reference could be modelled on a similar one contained in the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Conduct which requires journalists not to sensationalise race issues and only to mention a person's age, race, colour, creed, disability, mental status, gender or sexual orientation if this information is strictly relevant.

The guidelines on reporting of issues affecting minority ethnic groups actually encourage members of the NUJ to be proactive in seeking to “expose the myths and lies of racist organizations and their antisocial behaviour”. There are also specific guidelines on the coverage of stories involving Travellers which say that journalists could ensure that nothing they write could lead people to the view that Travellers are less than full citizens of the State. These types of guidelines should also be included in the guiding principles of the Charter.

The NCCRI welcome the fact that RTE programming shall be socially inclusive and shall reflect the lives and concerns of all social strata in Ireland. It is equally important that the programming strives to reflect the lives and concerns of the different ethnic groups in Ireland and that the membership of the Board that determines the programming reflect this diversity also.

Regarding accountability the NCCRI welcomes the idea to establish an Audience Council as a means of effectively addressing complaints of the public. It is crucial that

the availability of this mechanism to all members of the public is promoted and highlighted on RTE.

The NCCRI would be happy to elaborate on any of the points raised in this submission and should you require further information please do not hesitate to contact Kensika Monshengwo, Acting Director or Jacqueline Healy, Information & Communications Officer at the address below.

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