



NCCRI

National Consultative
Committee on Racism
and Interculturalism

Submission to An Garda Síochána Policing Plan 2008

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Introduction

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was established in 1998 as an independent expert body on racism. It is a partnership body, which brings together government and non-government organisations to develop initiatives and to provide expertise in tackling racism and promoting Interculturalism.

The overall role of the NCCRI is:

- To act as an expert body to develop an integrated and strategic approach to racism, to focus on its prevention and to foster Interculturalism within Ireland
- To inform policy development and seek to build consensus through dialogue in relation to the issues of racism and Interculturalism
- To promote the understanding and celebration of cultural diversity within Ireland
- To establish links with other organisations or individuals involved in issues of racism and Interculturalism arising from developments at European Union and international levels.

The NCCRI welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to An Garda Síochána Policing Plan for 2008. We note that the mission of An Garda Síochána is to achieve the highest attainable level of personal protection, community commitment and state security in Ireland. The primary focus of our submission is the protection of minority ethnic groups including the Traveller community in Irish society. NCCRI would also like to take this opportunity to continue to acknowledge the positive strides that An Garda Síochána have made in recent years in adapting to the changing and increasingly diverse makeup of Ireland's population. We recognise that it is a slow and complicated process to adapt policies, procedures and to train staff. We look forward to continuing our relationship with An Garda Síochána and assisting them in their development.

The demographic context

In recent years, Ireland has experienced a rapid growth in ethnic and cultural diversity. This is mainly as a consequence of the most significant increase in inward migration in its history. The most recent Census (2006) shows that one in ten of Ireland's population is now non-Irish. This diversity builds on the diversity (albeit relatively small numbers) that always existed in Ireland and which includes the Traveller community, Jewish and Muslim communities, Asian and African communities.

Most of the inward migration into Ireland is closely linked to the very rapid economic growth rates experienced over the past decade and the concomitant skills and labour shortages. Several international bodies including the OECD have pointed to the importance of inward migration in helping to create and sustain Ireland's rapid economic grow-rates in recent years.

Between 2002 and 2006, non-Irish nationals increased from 224,000 to 420,000 (+87%). The fastest growing categories were EU nationals, particularly from Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, along with people from Africa and Asia. Polish nationals are the biggest minority in Ireland (63,000 people).¹

There has also been a significant increase in religious diversity in recent years. Between 2002 and 2006 the Orthodox Christian community in Ireland doubled from 10,400 to 20,800. The Muslim community grew by 70% over the same period from 19,100 to 32,500 people. 92% of Irish nationals in Ireland are Roman Catholic, compared with 51% of non-Irish nationals.²

In terms of ethnic and cultural diversity 95% of the Irish population is 'White', including the Irish Traveller community (0.5%) and 1% are 'Black' and 0.4% are 'Asian', with a further 1% describing themselves as having a 'mixed background'.³

These figures indicate the complexity of ethnic and cultural identity in Ireland, which can include some or all of the following: nationality, place of birth, language, regional affinity and religion.

The policy context

The National Action Plan Against Racism continues to be an important development in this regard. The potential for racism to be perpetuated through the systems or structures of institutions is an issue that is also beginning to receive attention in Ireland. A number of statutory bodies, including An Garda Síochána, are aware of this potential and are actively developing awareness raising programmes and training for staff and bringing in anti racism commitments as part of a broader approach to equality.

NCCRI notes the publication of a forthcoming report on racially motivated crime in Ireland commissioned by the National Action Plan Against Racism from the University of Limerick and calls on the Gardai to consider the implications from this report for the force.

Monitoring Racist Incidents

To date there has been a limited amount of disaggregated data from the Gardaí and an absence of regular national crime surveys on racial violence. The NCCRI acknowledges some improvement in this area in recent months but calls on further analysis on this issue to be carried out by the Gardai following the publication of statistics on racially motivated crime. The NCCRI calls for a more comprehensive report on racially motivated crime to be published each year that provides some analysis arising out of the statistics.

Since May 2001 the NCCRI established a complementary procedure for reporting racist incidents in Ireland. A victim of or a witness to a racist incident can report it to the NCCRI in confidence. The NCCRI is committed to dealing with each individual

¹ Central Statistics office, (2007). Census 2006. Principal Demographic Results, p25.

² Ibid, p31

³ Ibid, p27. (Note the Ethnic and Cultural Origin question was first asked in the 2006 Census)

complaint with appropriate referral to the relevant authority responsible for investigating and addressing the complaint. The NCCRI works in close collaboration with the Garda Racial and Intercultural Office on Harcourt square.

Incidents are compiled into six-monthly reports, which aim to identify key issues arising from incidents logged and to make recommendations to the Government.⁴ These reports do not aim to provide a comprehensive list of every racist incident in Ireland. Indeed evidence from other countries tends to reveal that with all such reporting systems, whether statutory or voluntary, there is likely to be significant under-reporting of incidents. We look forward to continuing to develop this relationship.

Dress Codes

The NCCRI is concerned with the approach adopted by the Gardaí in respect of the Sikh community in Ireland and the wearing of the turban. NCCRI has always advocated an approach that is consistent with the National Action Plan Against Racism, which calls for the ‘reasonable accommodation of diversity’. In this context the dress code policy should be reviewed to allow for some compromise from the present inflexible position. We do not think that such an approach would ‘open the floodgates’ for further significant diversity within the design of the uniform, as this has not been the experience in Britain. The NCCRI has put forward suggestions to the Garda Commissioner on finding a compromise on this issue. We believe that if the issue is not resolved with some compromise, it will lead to further damage in the relationship between the Gardaí and the Sikh community in Ireland.

Key Recommendations for the Policing Plan 2008

- The policing initiatives that were commenced/enhanced as part of the National Action Plan Against Racism, such as the intercultural policing forums at district level and the better collection of data, need to be further embedded
- The Garda response against assaults, incitement, abuse and dissemination of material motivated by racism needs to be comprehensively reviewed and enhanced on a periodic basis (at least once every two years). NCCRI notes the publication of a forthcoming report on racially motivated crime in Ireland commissioned by the National Action Plan Against Racism from the University of Limerick and calls on the Gardaí to consider the implications from this report for the force.
- The positive action programme to recruit more Gardaí from minority ethnic backgrounds has been a welcome initiative but has yielded disappointing results. The NCCRI calls on the recruitment policy to be further reviewed and changed to encourage equality of opportunity

⁴ Reporting forms and six monthly reports are available from our office or on our website: www.nccri.com

- The recent policy in relation to the wearing turbans by Sikh police officers should be reviewed. The NCCRI calls on the Gardaí and the Sikh community to engage in discussions and find a compromise on this issue.
- The resources of the Garda Racial and Intercultural Unit need to be increased. Staff levels in the unit are lower than they were two years ago.
- Close communication with minority ethnic groups, which are more vulnerable as a result of events at an international level (including the Muslim and Jewish community in Ireland), needs to be undertaken on a proactive basis. Appropriate support strategies and responses need to be co-ordinated across the Policing Divisions.
- The importance of monitoring, analysing and publishing reports of racist incidents made to the Gardaí on an annual basis in order to inform appropriate policing and related responses cannot be overemphasized.
- There should be mechanisms in place to ensure that there is a holistic, effective and consistent response to racist incidents at national and local level. A partnership approach should be encouraged and developed at all times. The NCCRI welcomes the regular meetings that have taken place on this issue with the Intercultural unit.
- There is a need for greater consistency in front line policing responses through in service training, quality customer service, as well as effective monitoring and complaints processes.
- The enhanced role and responsibility of the Garda Ethnic Liaison Officers needs appropriate support and resources.
- There is a need for proactive local community relations and partnership strategies.
- Review of operational strategies or aspects of operational strategies that have sometimes caused concern such as large scale immigration operations and frontline immigration services should be carried out on a regular basis.
- All policies related to protection issues should be gender proofed as women can experience particular forms of racism. Protection against assaults and abuse, including domestic violence, should be monitored and proofed to ensure that they are fully inclusive of the experience of minority ethnic women. Gardaí should be trained to understand the added difficulties faced by many women from minority ethnic groups when they report domestic violence.
- Ensure that the protection of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum is a particular issue for service providers.

- There is a need for disaggregated data on the protections provided against racism, including incitement, assaults and related abuse. The availability of data is an important means of tailoring more effective and targeted actions and benchmarking progress in tackling these forms of racism. A key focus for data and research includes:
 - The design of national crime and victim surveys to include disaggregated data on the experience of minority ethnic groups
 - The outlawing of 'racial profiling' by law enforcement bodies
 - The role of the Garda annual report in providing clear data and analysis on trends in all crime and their motivation, including crime motivated by racism under headline and non-headline offences
 - The inclusion of a specific focus on racist crime in the remit and work of the National Crime Council
 - The design and analysis of comparative data on crime with other EU countries.

The NCCRI would welcome an opportunity to elaborate on the issues and recommendations presented in this submission.