



IASW

Irish Association of  
Social Workers

# IASW Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2027

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY:  
THE NEXT PHASE OF ANTI-RACISM  
INITIATIVES IN IRISH SOCIAL WORK.



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# IASW Chairperson's Foreword

I am delighted to present the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) second Anti-Racism Strategy – Continuing the Journey: The next phase of anti-racism initiatives in Irish social work. The first (2021-2023) Anti-Racism Strategy – A New Way Forward: Dismantling Racism in 21st Century Irish Social Work – was launched three years ago. In the intervening time, so much has changed and yet the problem that is racism persists. Among the many examples of how racism impacts in Ireland, the riot in Dublin on 23 November 2023 provided a stark reminder – if one were needed – of the insidious nature of racism and how it can be further amplified, manipulated and used to achieve hateful, destructive ends.

Racism is manifested in various ways and contexts that are less dramatic than rioting, but which must also be addressed, no less consistently and persistently, if we are to eliminate racism. The objectives set out in this new strategic plan, and the actions identified to achieve those objectives, are challenging, as they should be. It is clear from the plan that we in IASW need to start with ourselves, as an organisation, in terms of being the change we want to see. At the same time, we must work with our partner bodies to achieve positive changes, as set out here.

On all our behalf, I want to express our deep appreciation to IASW's Anti-Racism Advisory Group (ARAG) and to everyone who has contributed to the development of this new strategic plan. In particular, I commend the tireless work of IASW Board member Dr. Colletta Dalikeni, who recently stepped down as Chair of ARAG, and to Nisarg Nagwadia, who has taken up the role of ARAG Chair. While acknowledging the great work of Colletta, I want to assure Nisarg and colleagues in ARAG of our continuing support, particularly in implementing IASW's second anti-racism strategy.

This new Strategic Plan challenges all of us to do more and to do better, if we are to progress the goal we set in 2021: dismantling racism in 21st century social work. As social workers, we are always stronger together for social change. In that context, I look forward to continuing to work with ARAG, the IASW Board, Committees, Special Interest Groups, staff team and our wider network of partner bodies to achieve what is set out in the following pages of our Strategy.



Vivian Geiran

CORU Reg. No.: SW0319, Chairperson, IASW.

February 2024

# Context

The IASW Anti-Racism Advisory Group (ARAG) developed this Strategic Plan with its members, following an analysis of the effects of racism in Ireland. It hopes to work towards a more socially and racially just Ireland, helping to highlight and dismantle manifestations of institutional and structural racism<sup>[1]</sup> in social work, as well as support our members who are affected individually by it.

The makeup of Irish society has changed rapidly in the last few years, with the CSO recording a shift in the demographics of Ireland, better reflecting its diverse makeup, that includes Irish minority ethnic communities, migrant workers from the EU and the Global South, third generation migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We strive to work with those communities, particularly those social workers who qualified abroad and require support to join the sector.

Some very challenging events in recent times have highlighted worrying shifts in some public attitudes towards minority ethnic communities, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees. These have been aggravated by the proliferation of far-right misinformation and disinformation messages on social media. These have also led to a marked increase in the number of reports of racism, including those experienced by social workers and other staff.

The launch of the new State National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR)<sup>[2]</sup> in 2023, bringing Ireland into line with the recent European Union Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, is a welcome development reminding us of our duty to demonstrate equitable outcomes, especially in educating trainee social workers and in increasing minority ethnic community representation within the profession. ARAG has committed to showing solidarity on this issue, prioritising representation, and training as objectives.

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<sup>[1]</sup> As set out in the National Action Plan Against Racism (2023, P.7), this includes “...racism in all its forms in Ireland... [including] but is not limited to, racism that impacts on Travellers, as well as anti-Muslim prejudice and antisemitism... [and] including racism experienced by People of African Descent, Asians and Roma, as well as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.”

<sup>[2]</sup> National Action Plan Against Racism, 2023. Retrieved: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/250147/ff9dea67-ef0a-413e-9905-7246b5432737.pdf#page=null>

The community services sector continues to see fluctuating funding that results in some services being relatively adequately resourced, with others poorly provided for. The current cost of living crisis has resulted in a greater number of both service users and staff experiencing increases in costs relating to accommodation, food and energy. This, with the large differential in wages between the private and public sector, has also impacted on staffing across the sector. IASW members are concerned that this exacerbates shortfalls in staffing in the community sector, leading to inequitable access for those communities who are most in need.

Also welcome were the NAPAR's recommendations (Action 2.5, p.20) to "take steps to strengthen inclusion and anti-racism at all levels of the education system, including through addressing any bias embedded in the curriculum..." Such action, in addition for example to in-depth anti-racism and cultural competence training, within a racial and social justice module (NAPAR, Action 5.5, p.29) would help to increase representation in students attending professional social work courses. Specialist CPD training for social workers should include an analysis of social and racial justice approaches, sector specific anti-racism training, Equality legislation and the requirements of Public Sector Duty 2014, in order for them to adequately respond to people from diverse backgrounds.

There is a need to adequately fund the community services sector, in order to achieve the goals laid out in the National Action Plan Against Racism, particularly in improving minority community representation, and training of those staff. IASW will support members to seek an adequate, ring fenced, multi annual budget for this work.

International students studying for professional qualifications report disproportionately high fees, insufficient course supports and unequal treatment on courses. They also report unequal opportunities on graduating.<sup>[3]</sup> These barriers, alongside a visa renewal system, with attendant fees, and the non-recognition of qualifications, remain as serious obstacles to entry by minority ethnic community social workers from outside of Ireland and the EU, hampering recruitment and efforts to diversify the workforce.

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<sup>[3]</sup> Referenced from Shadow NAPAR by INAR (<https://inar.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/The-Shadow-NAPAR-A-High-Level-Overview.pdf>) and Olusa, Rom. (2021). Experiences of Black Social work Practitioners and Students: A Review of Literature. Winter 2018. 96.

The National Action Plan Against Racism includes key actions for all public sector bodies aimed at dismantling institutional racism and improving outcomes for minority ethnic communities. It lists overarching responsibilities that each Government Department must comply with under Equality legislation, including the adherence to the Public Sector Duty 2014, a duty that was introduced at the foundation of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Under this Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty,<sup>[4]</sup> all public bodies in Ireland have the responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. Some members have reported that they were unaware of the full extent of the Duty and this Strategy aims to inform them of the Duty's requirements.

ARAG values the NAPAR recommendation that all public sector bodies should comprehensively record data on ethnicity, to inform evidence-based policy making and to monitor equity of outcome in the provision of services. Since misuse of ethnicity data has the capacity to marginalise communities, NAPAR recommends appropriate training on how to collect and use such data. The IASW supports creating policy and actions that lead to the appropriate collection of members' ethnic data and will encourage the recording of instances of racism using shadow recording mechanisms, like INAR's iReport.ie system. Take up and use of technological innovation, including a move to end the use of paper case files, has been slow in many areas of social work practice. Use of such technology in case recording and management should improve the safety of service users and staff data, particularly when necessary steps (e.g. security firewalls) are put in place to limit the sharing of that data, to that which is legitimate, as recommended by NAPAR.

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<sup>[4]</sup> Further information on the Duty, including an e-learning module, can be found on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's website.

# Anti-Racism Advisory Group

## ARAG

### VISION

### MISSION

### VALUES

**Vision** The IASW vision is for the Association to be the strong, ethical, and independent voice of social work and social workers in Ireland; to strive to ensure that the full potential and positive impact of social work is delivered, helping to create a better society, through the promotion of excellence in practice, social justice, and human rights. In this context of IASW's vision of social justice and human rights, ARAG envisions an equal, socially just Ireland that is free of racism, through incorporating a commitment to racial justice and racial equity.

In addition, this strategy embodies a vision for change which will see the IASW developing further as an inclusive, diverse, and anti-racist association.

**Mission** The IASW mission, as the representative body of social work in Ireland, is to advance the interests of our members, the profession and service users, working with our members and partner bodies for enhanced wellbeing, human rights, social justice, and equality for all.

This requires that we work towards the removal of racism in all its forms in social work and more widely in Ireland, fostering a more inclusive and equitable profession and society.

**Values** In conjunction with IASW's broader expression of values in our organisational Strategic Plan, we identify the need to promote and implement,

- ◆ Social Justice and Human Rights.
- ◆ Equity - with an emphasis on racial equity, intersectionality, addressing poverty, and combating economic marginalisation.
- ◆ Working in coalition and solidarity with relevant organisations towards dismantling racism.
- ◆ Working in an inclusive way, representative of a diverse Ireland, both within the social work profession and with service users.

# Strategic Goals

ARAG identified four strategic goals on which to concentrate over the course of this plan:

1 Representation

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2 Education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

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3 Support and Report

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4 Influence Policy

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## Strategic Goal 1

# Representation

## Objective 1

The IASW will seek an increased representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities within IASW membership and in the social work profession, in line with the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) 2023, Objective, “Being Equal - addressing ethnic inequalities”, as a positive action measure, under the Public Sector Duty. This objective will be actioned as follows:

- ◆ The IASW to collate data regarding Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members of the Association in line with NAPAR recommendation on Ethnic Equality data collection (NAPAR 2023, p.28) guided by the EU’s guidance note on the collection and use of equality data based on racial or ethnic origin.
- ◆ The IASW will explore options for appointing a Diversity Inclusion Officer.
- ◆ The IASW to further engage with higher education institutions and employers to enhance the profile of the IASW and to promote representation of students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in social work education and employment.
- ◆ The IASW commits to achieving a board membership that includes at least two members from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
- ◆ The IASW will ensure greater representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic social workers within the IASW committees, groups, as well as in the Association’s broader membership.

## Strategic Goal 1

# Representation

## Objective 2

The IASW will explore the implementation of Positive Action measures, under Public Sector Duty 2014 with higher education institutions and social work employers. This objective will be actioned as follows:

- ◆ Engage with higher education institutions with a view to increasing minority ethnic community participation and outcomes on courses, in line with the principles in HEA Anti-Racism Principles.<sup>[5]</sup>
- ◆ Build collaboration/partnerships with social work employers, to:
  - ◆ Promote an anti-racism environment and best practice in relation to anti-racism and racial justice.
  - ◆ Promote strategies towards increasing employment of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic social workers in Ireland.
  - ◆ Advocate that employers avail of opportunities such as World Anti-Racism Day and World Social Work Day to host events promoting representation and anti-racism.

<sup>[5]</sup> <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2022/03/Anti-Racism-Principles-for-Irish-Higher-Education-Institutions.pdf>

## Strategic Goal 2

# Education & Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

## Objective 1

The IASW will provide and promote training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to enhance the IASW members' understanding of and responses to racism in social work. This objective will be actioned as follows:

- ◆ Work with the IASW CPD Committee and CPD coordinator to identify areas of need in relation to upskilling and informing members on best practices regarding anti-racism
- ◆ Connect and collaborate with relevant groups (e.g. African Social Workers Ireland) regarding provision of education and CPD.
- ◆ Provide CPD on legislation and policies relevant to anti-racism and Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (e.g. Public Sector Duty).
- ◆ Further develop online anti-racism CPD options that are short and accessible.
- ◆ Develop an IASW anti-racism education and CPD training pack.

## Strategic Goal 2

# Education & Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

## Objective 2

To support and promote actions that address issues of racism in the context of professional education and to advocate for and support the provision of anti-racist social work education. This objective will be supported through the following actions:

- ✦ Work with social work education providers on developing and delivering anti-racism modules.
- ✦ Promote effective responses for international social workers attempting to obtain CORU accreditation in Ireland informed by the NAPAR recommendation to “introduce timely, accessible and transparent mechanisms by which qualifications earned outside Ireland can be recognised for use within Ireland”, (NAPAR 2023, Action 2.2, p.19).
- ✦ Develop workshops on anti-racism and cultural competency for social workers in partnership with education providers and other bodies.

## Strategic Goal 3

# Support & Report

## Objective 1

To support social work students and social workers who have experienced racism in practice, to be actioned as follows:

- ◆ Promote ARAG as an IASW group that social workers and social work students can identify with for support and representation.
- ◆ Develop a response within the IASW to support social work students and social workers who experience racism.
- ◆ Liaise with other organisations and to explore the feasibility of developing support for social workers experiencing racism in the workplace.
- ◆ Liaise with other organisations (e.g. BASW) regarding setting up support groups and to learn from their experience.

## Strategic Goal 3

# Support & Report

## Objective 2

To encourage and promote reporting of racism by members of IASW. This objective will be actioned as follows:

- ◆ Promote awareness amongst members regarding best practice in reporting racism in employment and working to achieve sectoral change.
- ◆ Provide information to social workers and social work students who experience racism on how to make a report, in line with NAPAR recommendation, Action 1.1, p.17, “to facilitate third-party and online reporting of racist incidents.”
- ◆ Provide information about the iReport.ie System (INAR) on the IASW website.
- ◆ Create awareness of Dignity at Work policies and the role of the Workplace Relations Commission in vindicating employment rights.
- ◆ Enhance the IASW’s capacity to respond to incidents of racism, online and on social media platforms.
- ◆ Collaborate with other organisations in responding to incidents of racism and related issues.

## Strategic Goal 4

# Influence Policy

## Objective

To build knowledge and capacity within the IASW to respond to relevant policies and to collaborate on actions outlined in the National Action Plan Against Racism 2023 and Public Sector Duty 2014. This objective will be actioned as follows:

- ◆ Build partnerships with other bodies in relation to policy priorities and represent the IASW at Anti-Racism forums.
- ◆ Collaborate with the IASW CPD Officer to provide policy-related learning opportunities.
- ◆ Draw from and contribute to IASW Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to respond to and influence policy in line with the Vision and Mission of ARAG and the IASW.
- ◆ Investigate opportunities for partnering with other bodies in exploring ways of utilising and /or conducting research with a view to influencing policy.

In progressing the above objectives and actions, the ARAG will continue to engage with the IASW Board, Special Interest Groups, Committees and wider membership of the IASW to increase and deepen our analysis in further developing an organisation-wide approach to addressing racism in any way we can.

# Strategic Plan compiled by:

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