Submission from the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) Anti-Racism Advisory Group (ARAG) to the Anti-Racism Committee on the Consultation of the proposed National Action Plan against Racism in Ireland

14th July 2021

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Introduction and Overview

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) is the national professional body for social workers in the Republic of Ireland. It was founded in 1971 and has a membership of more than 1,500 social workers from different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and nationalities. This submission draws on the experiences of social workers from the Antiracism Advisory Group (ARAG) within the IASW which was set up in July 2020 following George Floyd 's murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. Following this disaster came the Black Lives Matter Movement which culminated in a global outcry for justice and a catalyst for a refocus on racism at the time. Since its establishment, the anti-racism advisory group, a member of the Irish Network against Racism (INAR) has engaged with various campaigns against racism including the recent Love not Hate Campaign. This submission also draws from the IASW Anti-Racism Strategy 2021-2023 – launched by Senator Eileen Flynn in early February 2021 – and from our own experiences of working with Black and Ethnic minority service users who experience racism. We are concerned about the devastating impact of racism on those with whom we work, and, in that respect, we put forward our recommendations for consideration.

While we welcome and support the National Action Plan against Racism, and the Government's efforts to introduce hate crime legislation along with the Government's social inclusion agenda, we believe that a move towards the implementation of the Government's good intentions needs to take place to address the root causes of racism in our society and to close the gaps which incubate the different types of Racisms – including Institutional Racism within state organisations. We concur with the many organisations that are expressing concerns about Racism in Irish Society and call upon the Government to include the recommendations listed below from the IASW in its National Action Plan Against Racism. As an organisation, we are willing to engage with the Anti-Racism Committee in how these recommendations could be both developed and implemented.

EDUCATION:

Prevalence of Racism in Irish Schools

The prevalence of racism in Irish Schools has come to the fore in recent time and has been highlighted both in research and in the print media during the resurgence of the *Black Lives Matter* movement globally – and in Ireland – in 2020. Young people experiencing racism spoke out and are continuing to highlight the problem of racism in Irish schools: Emma O Kelly (2020,[1] [2]Kenny,2020, [3]Pollak,2020, [4]Adekoya 2021).

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[1] 'It's happening in so many places' - concerns over alleged racism in Irish schools: https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0608/1146246-racism/

[2] 'I make myself small and stay quiet': Experiences of racism in Ireland: https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/i-make-myself-small-and-stay-quiet-experiences-of-racism-in-ireland-1.4277637

[3] 'White Irish people have never had to think about this':https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/white-irish-people-have-never-had-to-think-about-this-1.4271935?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fsocial-affairs%2Fwhite-irish-people-have-never-had-to-think-about-this-1.4271935

[4] My experience of racism in Ireland: https://spunout.ie/voices/experiences/my-experience-of-racism-in-ireland

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Anti-Racist teacher training of all educators in the education sector i.e., in Primary, Secondary and Third Level Education.
2. Explicit Anti-Racist Education Policies.
3. Decolonise the curriculum at all levels of education to represent today's multicultural Ireland of today. This could be achieved through the Curriculum Development Unit (CDETB).
4. Representation: Race Diversity in the recruitment of teachers and lecturers in schools, in colleges and in universities: This could be achieved through expanding the role of the Athena SWAN National Committee.

Anti-Racist Teacher Training

Anti-Racism needs to be included in the training of teachers in Ireland today. There is currently a growing body of research highlighting how students experience racism not only from their peers in schools but also from their teachers. For example, the Ombudsman for Children's report (2020, p.65)[5] highlighted how the young people who were interviewed recommended anti-racism training for their teachers, along with training in human rights and in different religions. In our role as social workers we work with families, whose children experience racism – some of it from their teachers. We are we are gravely concerned about the trauma which such children and families endure, given that some of the children i.e., those from the travelling community and children living in Direct Provision, already endure extreme disadvantage and discrimination. See also Holland, (2020)[6]. We call on the Irish Government to include racism in teacher training education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) so that teachers can address their own unconscious biases regarding racism and become ambassadors for dismantling racism in the classroom.

Explicit Anti-Racist Policies in the Education Sector

Racist policies that are not conflated with anti-bullying policies need to be introduced in schools, colleges and universities because of the distinct features that differentiate racist attack and bullying (Hildago 2019). We call upon the Government to affirm a requirement for schools and third-level academic institutions to adopt specific anti-racism policies to enable a satisfactory redress of racist incidences when they occur. In addition to all academic institutions, it is important that all people of influence – public servants, Gardaí, and solicitors – are educated on the necessity of developing an awareness that all human beings are of equal value, irrespective of their skin colour, background, or ethnicity. Existing research evidence on racism in Irish schools/universities and colleges highlights the devastating impact that Racism

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[5] Direct Discrimination Children's views and experiences of living in Direct Provision
A report by the Ombudsman for Children's Office 2020: file:///E:/Ombudsman-for-Children-Direct-Division-Report-2020%20(5)%20(1).pdf

[6] Holland (2020) Racism and bullying experienced by many child asylum seekers https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/racism-and-bullying-experienced-by-many-child-asylum-seekers-1.4297710

has on students from Black and Ethnic minority backgrounds including Roma and Travellers (O'Brien 2020, O'Kelly 2020, Ombudsman for Children 2020, Carl and Curtain 2020, Maguire 2020, Teacher's Union of Ireland 2010, Devine et al. 2008).

Decolonise the Curriculum:

We call upon the Government through the Ministries in all education departments to introduce a decolonisation of the curriculum at all levels of education in Ireland. "Decolonising education is often understood as the process in which we rethink, reframe and reconstruct the curricula and research that preserve the Europe-centred, colonial lens"[7].

A decolonised education curriculum will also ensure representation of all knowledge systems in the context of current diversity in Irish society and, in so doing, will aid social inclusion of students from Black and Ethnic minority Communities and other marginalised groups – including those from the Roma and Travelling community. We recommend inclusive education which considers Black history and other diverse world views. The trend of 'decolonising learning' and its importance is summed up as follows: when breaking down one structure we are building up another structure.

'A curriculum provides a way of identifying the knowledge we value. It structures the ways in which we are taught to think and talk about the world. As education has become increasingly global, communities have challenged the widespread assumption that the most valuable knowledge and the most valuable ways of teaching and learning come from a single European tradition. Decolonising learning prompts us to consider everything we study from new perspectives. It draws attention to how often the only world view presented to learners is male, white, and European. This is not simply about removing some content from the curriculum and replacing it with new content – it's about considering multiple perspectives and making space to think carefully about what we value. Decolonising learning helps us to recognise, understand, and challenge the ways in which our world is shaped by colonialism. It also prompts us to examine our professional practices. It is an approach that includes indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, enabling students to explore themselves and their values and to define success on their own terms.' Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2021).'

The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), the National Teacher's Forum and other relevant educational stakeholders can be instrumental in the designing a decolonised curriculum.

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[7] Sofia Akel, specialist in race equality in higher education.14th Aug 2020

Representation: Through Recruitment of Racially Diverse Educators

We call on the Government to consider expanding the role of the Athena SWAN National Committee to facilitate recruitment of ethnically diverse educators by inclusion of e.g., the Race Charter and the Disability Confident Award.

RACISM IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Summary of Recommendations

Given current available race discrimination research evidence, we call on the Government through the National Action Plan against Racism to address in the following ways the race disparities which currently exist in the Irish labour market:

1. State funded organisations to set an example of hiring diverse workforces to demonstrate equality and integration policy and legislation compliance.
2. Ensuring both statutory and non-statutory organisations and institutions adopt robust non-tokenist Equality& diversity recruitment policies to ensure representation of ethnic minorities in the labour market and to improve employment outcomes for Black and Ethnic minorities and other marginalised groups
3. Ensuring that statutory and non-statutory organisations adopt explicit anti-racism policies – which are not blended into Dignity at work policies in the workplace – with clear reporting and resolution mechanisms for addressing incidences of Racism. Such policies, aimed at specifically addressing racism, would adequately address race issues which dignity at work policies are not equipped to challenge.
4. Supporting employers to have on-going diversity and anti-racism training for all employees led by experts by experience. In other words, such training must be led by those with lived experience of Racism.
5. In line with the envisaged forthcoming Hate Crime Legislation, we call on the Government to ensure that all public sector organisations should have mandatory policies in place for reporting incidents of racial discrimination at the workplace.
6. Each public sector organisation should appoint or employ an officer who will undertake the task of recording and reporting the incidents of racism.
7. These organisations should offer mandatory training to all their staff on unconscious racial bias, culturally appropriate behaviour in the workplace, the inclusion of diversity, and the reporting of incidents of racial discrimination and violence.
8. We would like to advocate for ongoing consultations with the organisations which are working with people from ethnic minorities prior to forming any policies or changing policies concerning people from ethnic minorities.

9. Develop policies to encourage organisations to document and keep records of ethnic diversity statistics of their employees, as is the case in Canada as a form of best practice.
10. Develop mechanisms for employers to evaluate and report effectiveness of their anti-racism policies.

Research Evidence on Racism in the Workplace:

Research evidence by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) highlights the growing concern about racial discrimination against Black and Ethnic Minority communities in the labour market, signalling how the existing Employment Equality Status Act legislation does not go far enough to protect those experiencing racial discrimination in the workplace. The [8]Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) 2019's annual report recently noted that under the nine grounds stipulated in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018, under which a person can suffer discrimination, race is still the most frequent complaint submitted. Labour market racial discrimination also had the most adverse effect on mental, social, and psychological health. These findings are echoed in more recent studies (Joseph, 2020) which highlight race stratification in the Irish labour market. Overall research about inequalities in the labour market show that disadvantages experienced by BEM are influenced by some policy-led factors.

Anti-Racist Practices through Professional Regulatory Bodies

Professional regulatory bodies have an important role in designing codes of practice and codes of conduct for professions.

1. Professional Regulatory bodies such as CORU and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) specifically embed Anti-Racism consciousness in professional guidelines code of ethics and standards of proficiency for professionals and should reflect that, under the Equal Status Act (2000), discrimination can be based on race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.
2. Inclusion of anti-racism training in the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all professionals working in the public sector. Such training should be delivered by those with lived experience of Racism. Current Equality and Diversity Training is not always ethnic minority led.

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[8] Workplace Relations Commission 2020:
https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/publications_forms/corporate_matters/annual_reports_reviews/annual-report-2020.pdf

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF ANTI-RACIST AND NON-DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES IN SERVICE PROVISION

Health

As social workers working with minority groups across various settings, we are aware from our practice and from research on Black and Ethnic communities, including Roma and those from the Traveller community, that these groups experience persistent race discrimination and inequalities in service provision. Research has shown that 'Everyday' incidences of covert/ overt racism continue to negatively impact Black Africans and other ethnic minority groups psychologically and emotionally. This research was highlighted in research by Cairde (2015) and by the Mental Health Commission (2013). Despite having intercultural health strategies such as the [9]National Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy and the 2017-2021 and the[10] 2nd Intercultural Health Strategy 2018-2023, Roma and Traveller people are still experiencing racism. This indicates that while strategies are in place, their implementation has not always resulted in the ameliorative outcomes of the identified problems.

1.   We therefore call on the Government to review and address any weaknesses in the implementation of these strategies to mitigate the impact of racism on the health and wellbeing of minorities.
2.   In all professional areas of work with ethnic minorities, we call for the adoption of culturally sensitive diagnostic and assessment tools e.g., culturagrams to provide a framework for assessing information about cultural features of an individuals as it relates to a social and cultural context and history.
3.   In order to provide meaningful response to those who experience racism the government should fund ethnic minority led organisations to develop support systems for victims of racism.

Housing and Racism in Homelessness

As social workers working in housing, we are aware that people from Black and Ethnic minority communities, non-EU migrants and those from Roma and the Travelling community, continue to be at risk of homelessness, poor housing quality and discrimination. With little policy focus on this issue, the recently published Migrant Integration strategy makes no mention of housing.[11] A study by Ní Chonaill and Buczkowska (2017) for the Immigrant Council of Ireland

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[9] http://justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf

[10] https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/30767/1/intercultural-health-strategy.pdf

[11]Taking Racism Seriously: Experiences of Racism and Racially Motivated Anti-Social Behaviour in Social Housing https://emn.ie/files/p_201803151140062016_Taking%20Racism%20Seriously%20-%20social%20housing.pdf

found that non-Irish nationals are substantially over-represented among the homeless and found that non-Irish nationals are substantially over-represented among the homeless and that Racist harassment in housing was much more prevalent and serious than previously documented. Similarly, another study by Grotti et al. (2018, p.62) found that "the most at-risk ethnic and cultural groups are Irish Travellers and Black people, composing 9 per cent and 11 per cent of the homeless, respectively." As social workers, it is difficult to work with families in our services and expect them to adequately raise their children amidst housing discrimination and the risk of homelessness. While we commend the Government for the Action Plan for housing and homelessness (2016) we call on the Government to address systemic racism in the housing market in the following ways:

1. Develop specific policies that address systemic inequalities in housing affecting BEM communities and those from Roma and Traveller backgrounds.
2. Evaluate and monitor effectiveness of current housing policies to ensure the inclusion of BEM communities, including those from Roma and Traveller backgrounds
3. Ensure that local authority staff receive ongoing training in understanding racism and the impact on victims of racially motivated anti-social behaviour.

RACISM EXPERIENCED BY ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN DIRECT PROVISION AND WITHIN THE STATE

We welcome the publication of the White Paper by the Minister for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration early this year and the Government's commitment to end Direct Provision by 2024. As members of one of the professions working with families undergoing the international protection application process, we are aware of the negative impact of racism on this group of people who come to seek sanctuary in our country. Relatedly, their experiences of Racism have been extensively documented over the twenty years of the existence of Direct Provision (Holland 2020, Lentin,2016, Mc Ginnity 2006).

For the human rights' approach envisioned in the White Paper to be a reality for those seeking international protection, we recommend the following preventative measures against racism:

Summary of Recommendations

1. Given the discrimination faced by people in the international protection system, we call on the Government to have a clear implementation and monitoring plan of the White Paper.
2. Ensure that the aspirations of the White Paper are placed on a legal footing to provide a framework to challenge any unfair decisions, should they arise.
3. All organisations working with international protection applicants should receive anti-racism training and culturally sensitive training to enable them to appropriately engage with those undergoing the international application process.

4. Provide a clear system of regularising the immigration status of children of international protection applicants who are in State care. Such a system needs to be set up so that such children obtain citizenship before they turn 18.
5. Implement existing Research Findings which highlight the prevalence of Racism on children and families in the International Protection System.
6. Provide funding for ethnic minority led organisations to establish appropriate responses to support victims of racism.

We call on the Government to make available funding to organisations like the IASW and migrant organisations to implement recommendations from existing research which highlight racism and discrimination, for example, Carol Coulter's 2013 Report which highlighted the disproportionate number of African Children involved in childcare proceedings. According to this report, African families are twenty times more likely to find themselves in the childcare courts than are other members of Irish society (Coulter, 2013: 19-20) Relatedly, a 2019 report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) highlighted persistent racism and discrimination experienced by Irish Travellers and Roma in Ireland.

Conclusion

Racism is a barrier against respect for diversity, equality, social inclusion and interculturalism. It is an infringement of human rights and a key barrier to integration. In this respect any attempt to achieve equality in the areas indicated in this submission is hampered unless racism is addressed. We welcome the Government's recommendation to 'take steps to put in place ethnic equality monitoring across all public services' as outlined in the National Action Against Racism interim report. However, we believe that to address the burning issue of racism in the communities with whom we work, there is a need to look beyond simply the monitoring of public services for ethnic equality. We propose that each public service should work under the principle of anti-racism and zero tolerance towards racial biases and discrimination. Social inclusion can be achieved through the participation of minority communities and the organisations which are working with these communities in policy development. We strongly believe that without putting mandatory anti-racism policies and training in place for public sector organisations, the issue of racism cannot be addressed. On a micro level anti-racism policy will educate and inform public sector staff and, on a macro level, these policies will have a positive influence on public sector staff's interactions with people from the ethnic minority. Government could leverage its funding for state and quasi-state bodies to ensure compliance with its equality and inclusion policies.

Respectfully, we call upon the Government to meaningfully address Racism in the areas highlighted in our submission and to fund ethnic minority led organisations to support victims of racism.

Dr. Colletta Dalikeni
(IASW) Anti-Racism Advisory Group
officeadministrator@iasw.ie

Vivian Geiran
IASW Chairperson
086-0241055

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