

# Racism in Northern Ireland: The Racial Equality Strategy from Policy to Practice\*

## Summary Report of Main Findings

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\* This Summary Report is based on findings from Doctoral Research of the same title published in 2010

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## Introduction: Background to study

“Racism is pervasive, permeating the fabric of everyday life and normalised in ways that render it invisible and neutral. The manifestations of it around the world make it one of the most powerful forms of structural violence”(Babacan et al 2009:1).

Completed in June 2010, this research was largely concerned with exploring racism in the context of Northern Ireland from a policy perspective, focusing on how racial equality policy was implemented at the local government level. More generally, the research aimed to investigate how local government addressed racism. In total thirty six in depth interviews were carried out. This included interviewing Good Relations Officers, councillors and minority ethnic representatives in six local government areas, in addition to interviewing MLAs, key actors in public bodies and representatives from minority ethnic organisations at the regional level.

At the outset, a critical review of the policy framework to tackle racism at the macro-political level was carried out. The fieldwork aimed to explore a number of key questions in the context of local government, given that this is a key site where anti-racist policy is delivered on the ground. More specifically, this examination at local government level aimed to assess the impact of the Racial Equality Strategy (2005–2010) and the overall effectiveness of government led anti-racist policy, given that no research thus far had attempted to do so. While the influence of the Racial Equality Strategy within local government was considered, the research also sought to investigate how local government tackled racism within their own localities. Moreover, in those local government areas that were starting to make progress towards addressing racism, it was essential to find out what drives action? In addition, it was also important to ask what factors have impeded progress towards addressing racism, as this could provide important insights which would have potential policy ramifications. Finally, given that policy had moved towards tackling racism and sectarianism in tandem, it was necessary to question the benefits of this policy shift.

It is important to note that during the course of the field research it became evident that there was an uncertainty around the future of the Racial Equality Strategy in its current form. Progress towards strategically addressing racism suffered a major setback as a result of A Shared Future being abandoned, resulting in the drawing up of a new strategy to tackle racism and sectarianism, which was beset by numerous delays due to political stalemate. Yet despite this looming policy vacuum, actions and initiatives to tackle racism on the ground were still taking place. Overall, it was found that the absence of strategic policy resulted in a lack of co-ordination in relation to how racism was tackled across local government. The upshot of this was the employment of weak measures to address racism in the majority of councils studied.

At its core, the research aimed to explore and question the effectiveness of government led anti-racist policy in light of a growing and deeply entrenched problem of racism in Northern Ireland, despite the existence of an anti-racist policy framework. All of this was framed within a discussion of how racism is defined and theorised and the implications this might have for anti-racist policy.

In the document that follows a comprehensive summary of the main findings of the research are presented in relation to how racism is tackled at a local level, the challenges around implementation, as well as critically examining the monitoring of racial equality policy.

### **How is Racism Being Tackled at the Local Government Level?**

This section will present and discuss the main findings in relation to the influence of the Racial Equality Strategy, how local government tackles racism and the factors that drive forward work on the ground. At the outset it is important to note that during the course of the fieldwork for this research it became apparent that measures to address racism within local government were taking place in a policy vacuum, largely because the policy framework designed to address sectarianism had been abandoned by central government. As a result of these developments the status of the Racial Equality Strategy was uncertain. Obviously this had dire consequences, in that there was no over-arching strategy to anchor the work that was taking place at the local level. Despite this realisation, it was clear that the Racial Equality Strategy still had some influence on actions to tackle racism in local government. This was particularly evident when looking at the language used in the objectives of good relations action plans within local government, as they were clearly influenced by the OFMDFM policy framework, in some cases actually mirroring A Shared Future and the Racial Equality Strategy. Therefore most councils did plan to operationalise the Racial Equality Strategy through their good relations plans. However this practice was not standard throughout councils, highlighting that this was optional rather than mandatory. Overall it was clear that the influence of the Racial Equality Strategy was weak, largely because it never really had a chance to become embedded within the structures of local government.

Obviously councils are also bound by S75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Article 67 of the Race Relations Order (1997), which dictates that local governments have to “make appropriate arrangements” in order to eradicate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations (OFMDFM 2005:56). This should dictate that councils will have a strong role to play in the eradication of racism at the local level. Yet this research has also found that these legislative and statutory duties are beset with numerous problems, largely relating to a lack of implementation and enforcement.

Despite this policy vacuum, this research found that work to address racism at the local level was ongoing and it is within this context that the researcher was able to make some assessment as to whether or not the promotion of good race relations has been given more prominence in local government.

All the councils in this study predominately tackled racism through their Good/Community Relations departments in two different ways. Firstly, Good Relations Officers would often take on the role of a facilitator bringing together the relevant sectors in order to build a multi-agency partnership. Secondly, a number of Good Relations Officers targeted minority ethnic community groups on the ground, providing small grants funding in order to strengthen their capacity to tackle racism on a local level. In relation to the measures put in place by local government to tackle racism, it was evident that there is some similarity across the local councils who participated in this study. Actions ranged from cultural awareness days, good relations training, welcome packs and the funding of minority ethnic groups to offer signposting and advice services.

However, while numerous actions to address racism are being taken by local government, these remain uncoordinated and weak, largely because the anti-racist policy framework is currently in a state of transition. It is also evident that the principles underpinning actions to tackle racism at a local level are open to criticism. Drawing on wider debates concerning the inadequacies of multicultural practices in England, which have reduced the problem of racism to an inter-personal dispute amongst individuals and communities (Gilroy 2002; Kundnani 2007; Sivanandan 2006), a number of conclusions can be drawn about how far measures at a local level can address racism.

Overall it is clear that actions to tackle racism at the local level in Northern Ireland amount to a weak form of multiculturalism that focuses predominately on improving race relations between minority groups and the white settled community through cultural diversity training and multicultural events. In addition, there is a tendency to divorce racism from the mainstream political and policy agenda. Instead, a focus is chiefly placed on the promotion of diversity and multiculturalism through the funding of minority ethnic groups, rather than an approach that seeks to understand how racism is part of the way that society operates. Therefore these findings appear to validate the criticisms made by McVeigh (2006) and Gilligan (2009) that anti-racism has been diluted by the adoption of a good relations model.

On a more positive note, the research found that there were exceptions to this overall finding whereby one council in this study defied this trend. Within this local authority there was more of an emphasis on an anti-racist approach, which most other local authorities did not have. But what sets these councils apart and what factors have contributed to, and driven, the work forward in order to enable them to make some progress in a relative policy vacuum?

Similar to previous research carried out by the Audit Commission (2004), which looked at local authorities' progress towards racial equality in England, it was found that a number of core factors needed to be present within the structure of the council itself in order for anti-racism to progress. This include the following:

- ✿ good political leadership and support from the councillors
- ✿ mainstreaming of good relations and equality throughout the council that is backed by the chief executive with a separate oversight committee
- ✿ The knowledge, experience and influence of the Good Relations Officer was paramount.

In addition, it was also found that a great deal of work was driven by people on the ground who were directly affected by racism, which led to setting up various minority ethnic community groups, who then pushed the work forward. The grass roots role in propelling forward anti-racist work forward at the meso level cannot be underestimated.

It is also clear that recognising and naming racism, even if it is a minimal definition, is a key factor in actually addressing racism at the local level. In councils that were perceived to be making good progress by OFMDFM, two of which were in this study, the majority had adopted an anti-racist approach to addressing racism which involved the acceptance that racism was a problem. Therefore, instead of offering cultural diversity, good relations and equality awareness training, there was an acknowledgement that training needed to be based around anti-racism.

Adopting an approach that is inherently focused on being proactively anti-racist is reminiscent of how some local authorities in England tackled racism in the 1980s, which has since become subsumed by a paradigm of integration and cohesion (Gilroy 2002). This may prove to be an important lesson for Northern Ireland because it represents how a strong anti-racist approach has been largely swept away by current central government politics and policy.

Therefore while there is some degree of optimism by central government around how these local authorities have progressed, this must be greeted with caution because it is by no means the norm within local government. Indeed, these councils only represent a small fraction of local councils across Northern Ireland. It is also evident that while there are factors driving the work forward, in the absence of a strong policy framework all of this is uncertain or tenuous, and is to some extent constrained by a number of barriers operating at the local government level. This lack of anti-racist policy is further exacerbated by the legacy of sectarianism and the minimisation of racism that will essentially stand in the way of racism being fully tackled, even if the barriers at the local authority level are removed.

## The Challenge of Implementing Racial Equality Policy

An examination of how local government addressed racism also revealed that councils are at different stages on 'the journey to racial equality' (Audit Commission 2004:17). Therefore, it became important to question why this variability exists. Obviously a lack of the drivers identified above go some way towards accounting for this. In addition, however, a number of councils and minority ethnic groups on the ground identified a number of challenges and problems around the implementation of anti-racist policy. Ultimately these barriers have impeded efforts to fully tackle racism. This section will outline the main obstacles that have hindered progress towards racial equality in Northern Ireland, specifically at the local government level, focusing predominately on the wider challenges that impede progress.

Overall, the barriers to tackling racism can be broken down into three categories. Firstly, it is evident that there are a number of barriers operating at the local government level, such as: a lack of capacity and confidence to tackle racism; political restrictions and bureaucracy within councils; and poor engagement with minority ethnic communities, particularly amongst councillors. Secondly, it was found that there are a number of issues emanating from central government which have effectively exacerbated efforts to address racism at the local level. The most predominant problem turned out to be stalling racial equality policy and halting mechanisms in place which were supposed to implement anti-racist policy. However, it was also clear that central government's disengagement with local government, a lack of support and advice, with little to no specialist training provision in relation to addressing racism, proved to be problematic for a number of councils on the ground. Thirdly, it was discovered that there are a number of wider barriers such as the minimisation of racism and the legacy of sectarianism that fundamentally impact upon overall progress towards racial equality and confronting racism.

Finally, all of the obstacles and challenges identified above were often aggravated by funding issues. Currently the minority ethnic sector is largely resourced through short-term funding schemes rather than any long-term overarching policy commitment. As a result, numerous minority ethnic groups on the ground cannot easily plan ahead or employ permanent staff. This has meant that a number of groups are struggling to build capacity and respond to the needs of minority ethnic people on a long-term basis.

More recently concerns have been voiced about the white settled community attracting funding to address racism under the banner of good relations, essentially diverting resources away from minority ethnic groups. The current method employed to resource minority ethnic groups actually prevents the minority ethnic sector from building capacity at a grass roots level.

Therefore, it is true to say that the capacity building aim of the Racial Equality Strategy was fundamentally neglected. This poor mismanagement of resources, coupled with a lack of policy commitment spoke volumes to those working in the minority ethnic sector, signalling that work in this area was not valued or taken seriously by central government, despite the promise of anti-racist policy.

## Defining Racism – From Denial to Minimisation

Until relatively recently there was still a level of popular denial that racism was a problem. The well publicised incidents of racist violence across Northern Ireland in recent years have largely ended this perception. This, in itself, does not highlight the range of other forms racism can take. There remains considerable discussion and varied perspectives on what the scope, form and manifestations racism takes...and crucially what should be done to tackle them (Parizzi 2008:2-3).

A fundamental problem to effectively tackling racism in Northern Ireland is the continued minimisation of racism that flows directly from a tendency to narrowly conceptualise racism. Throughout this study it became clear that the definition and understanding of racism within central and local government was severely limited, despite a move away from denial towards a recognition that racism is a problem in Northern Ireland. This has, and will continue to have significant consequences for how racism is addressed. As argued previously, many of the measures adopted by local governments in an effort to address racism through good relations are quite weak. This stems primarily from a tendency to narrowly define racism as an act of violence or overt racial prejudice at the inter-personal level. Of course, this has also meant that there is a limited understanding in relation to the factors that underlie racism.

As a direct result, a number of generic actions have been prescribed in order to tackle racism on an individual basis from one-off diversity training, to multicultural events, in the belief that racism is down to a lack of cultural understanding and poor race relations. Ultimately this approach ignores the structural roots of racism in Northern Ireland. Racism in Northern Ireland is multifaceted, existing at the individual, institutional and state levels of society. In addition, racism in Northern Ireland is deeply entrenched, subtle and often covert.

In 2009 100 Roma people living in South Belfast were forced to leave their homes under armed guard after a spate of racist attacks (Morvern 2009). It is important to return to this incident because the aftermath that followed clearly demonstrates how a narrow definition and understanding of racism enshrined within policy impinges upon efforts to fully address the problem. This examination will highlight how racism is often minimised and downplayed because of a tendency to associate racism with the extreme.



From the outset politicians were quick to condemn the racist attacks on Roma people living in Belfast; however they were also quick to point out that these attacks were carried out by an extreme minority of 'thugs' and that in actual fact the majority of Northern Ireland people were far from being racist (NIA 2009a; Belfast Telegraph 2009). The classification of racism in this way dictates that policy should be aimed at a small minority who are branded as being aberrant. However, if one looks behind the headlines it is clear that the racist attacks on the Roma people of South Belfast were symptomatic of a wider issue concerning institutional/state racism and deeply entrenched racist attitudes.

An analysis by Morvern (2009) revealed that the problems faced by the Roma people could also be attributed to structural factors, namely immigration policies that place restrictions on migrants, forcing people to live in overcrowded houses and a life of poverty and destitution. Critics have also highlighted that the incident laid bare the inadequacies within numerous agencies which were unable to manage the unfolding crisis (Flett 2009). In particular, the actions of the police facilitating the removal of people from their homes was heavily criticised as being "highly questionable" (Morvern 2009).

Added to this, if one digs a little deeper, it is clear that racism directed towards the Roma people is far from being confined to a handful of extremists. Indeed it is much more widespread, although manifested differently. For instance, an undercurrent of racial prejudice often surfaced in radio chat shows and in the comments sections of local online newspapers and blogs. Although there are condemnations of these attitudes as well, the point to make is that racism is much more widespread and not necessarily confined to a narrow band of extremists. Moreover, this undercurrent of racism remains largely unacknowledged and unchallenged by the media, politicians and policy makers. In November 2009 a Facebook page entitled "abusing Belfast rose sellers" was shut down because it contained violent racist comments made by a group of students about Roma people (BBC 2009), once again demonstrating the systemic problem of racism in Northern Ireland. Therefore it would seem that the relative anonymity of the Internet is being used as a vehicle for people to express views that are often hidden or unstated.

Ultimately, it can be concluded that a narrow understanding and minimisation of racism have led to a failure to recognise, let alone tackle, the root causes of racism in Northern Ireland. In sum, the examination above demonstrates how violent racism directed at Roma people is symptomatic of a much deeper problem in Northern Ireland, which is not recognised at the macro-political level. As a result, racism cannot be tackled in its entirety until the full extent of racism is acknowledged.

However this is not solely the preserve of Northern Ireland. This seems to be reflective of a wider issue within western European countries that have an overwhelmingly white settled population, whereby deeply entrenched racism remains to be acknowledged (Gillborn 2008). The reason for these patterns can be explained using Critical Race Theory. According to Critical Race Theory, racism is part and parcel of how society operates (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). In turn, it is argued that racism is a reflection of a social system that has historically bestowed privileges upon majority white settled communities all over Europe and America (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This has resulted in the normalisation of whiteness and a racial structure that functions to perpetuate and maintain 'white privilege' (Gillborn 2008). As a consequence, racism is often downplayed, denied or minimised, (Van Dijk 1997) allowing racism to persist and remain unchallenged by anti-racist policy. This type of racism is much more widespread and it is often subtle and covert, penetrating both the micro and macro levels of society (Delgado and Stefancic 2001).

### **The Continuing Legacy of Sectarianism**

The qualitative research for this thesis aimed to find out whether or not a history of sectarian conflict had aided or inhibited actions to tackle racism. Overall, it can be concluded that the continuing legacy of sectarianism is having a significant impact on anti-racist policy implementation. This is perceptible in three ways. Firstly, it is apparent that sectarian politics has held back the implementation of anti-racist policy, which has effectively derailed local government strategies to tackle racism. Secondly, it is evident that there is a sectarianisation of anti-racism at the macro level rather than a unified anti-racism policy. Finally, this research has also discovered that there are suggestions that actions to tackle racism on the ground are being negatively shaped by a legacy of sectarian conflict.

Political disagreements between the two main parties in Northern Ireland (DUP and Sinn Féin) have been ongoing since the Northern Ireland Assembly re-convened in May 2007, leading to deferred decisions and stalemate on important policy issues including; policing and justice; education; and local government reform (Knox 2010;BBC 2010a;BBC 2010b). The tendency to turn every issue into a sectarian contest has also had serious consequences for the implementation of racial equality policy. Not surprisingly, the deadlock around strategic policy to address racism is largely a result of disagreements between the two main parties over the best way forward to tackle sectarianism, and by extension racism, in the long-term.

This joint policy approach has meant that the language associated with anti-racism has become heavily politicised and contentious, largely because it is associated with anti-sectarian policy. This state of affairs has essentially meant that fundamental progress towards addressing racism was at a standstill.

The extent of this problem is also perceptible when Unionist and Nationalist parties speak out in opposition to racism, as their condemnations are often framed within a sectarian narrative. On one hand, Sinn Féin draws on Ireland's colonial past in order to draw a connection between the experience of sectarianism and racism (NIA 2009). On the other hand the UUP recounts World War Two, the Orange Order and sectarian violence in order to demonstrate the incompatibility between Unionism and racism (NIA 2009).

Therefore, while all the political parties in Northern Ireland have strongly condemned racist violence in Northern Ireland, the language used is often divisive and filtered through a sectarian perspective. This has meant that anti-racist language is becoming absorbed in a Catholic/Nationalist or Protestant/Unionist narrative. In sum there is a Unionist and a Nationalist anti-racism, instead of a unified anti-racism at the macro political level. It could be argued that this divisiveness weakens central government's ability to strategically address racism in Northern Ireland, given that political leadership is fragmented along sectarian lines.

Evidence also suggests that the legacy of sectarian conflict is having a direct impact upon measures to address racism. In an interview with a public sector representative, she talked about the unjust practice of responding to violent sectarianism whereby the police escorted victims away while the perpetrators stood by watching them go. She feared that this same approach is being used to tackle violent racism and that it could become a standard practice, largely because it has become a normalised response to sectarianism. An examination of how the police handled the 'Roma crisis', detailed earlier, highlights how this concern has been borne out.

This research has also highlighted that measures to challenge racism within local government have become influenced by a community relations approach that has previously been used to manage sectarian tensions.

**The key challenges to implementing anti-racist policy can be summarised as follows:**

- ✿ An absence of strategic policy direction and leadership from central government in relation to tackling racism.
- ✿ A lack of capacity and confidence within local government to address ongoing racism and put into action strategic policy to tackle the problem.
- ✿ Continued poor engagement between local government and minority ethnic people, especially via elected representatives.
- ✿ Under-funding and poor management of resources for minority ethnic groups, inhibiting the sector from building capacity – a central aim of the Racial Equality Strategy
- ✿ A narrow conceptualisation of racism limits how racism is tackled, in effect addressing racism on a superficial basis through good relations rather than a strong-anti-racist approach.
- ✿ The continuing legacy of sectarianism is also shaping how racism is dealt with, often having a detrimental affect on actions to tackle racism. Moreover, the main political parties have sectarianised the debate on racism as divisive, thereby stalling efforts to address racism.

## Monitoring Racial Equality

It is evident that the use of racial equality indicators as a way to track the success of racial equality policy, is beset with problems. Alongside the under-representation of racism, it is also clear that the methodology and measurements chosen by OFMDFM in order to monitor the health of race relations are open to more general criticisms. This could effectively call into question their usefulness for tracking trends in racism in the long-term. For example, past criticisms levelled at measurements to assess the effectiveness of community relations policy in Northern Ireland can equally be applied to the race relations indicators, given their similarities. Looking back at how community relations policy was assessed by the government in the early 90s, it is evident that the current indicators are based on this model, whereby effectiveness is measured through a range of indicators at the macro level, alongside an assessment of specific projects at the micro-level. In an article by Knox and Hughes (1993) it was highlighted that this procedure for measuring the success of Community Relations Policy was limited. This was because success was often based on outcomes that involved behavioral or attitudinal change, which could not be measured in the short-term (Knox and Hughes 1993). In conclusion Knox and Hughes (1993) argued that a more qualitative approach to measuring the success of community relations would be more suitable. As of yet, there has been no attempt by government to measure the impact of specific projects aimed at addressing racism on the micro level, never mind a more in-depth qualitative analysis.

On a broader level, it is clear that the methodology adopted to monitor the impact of racial equality policy must also be understood in the wider context of social policy, whereby there is a climate of evidence-based research which requires quantifiable outcomes in order to measure policy effectiveness. Already it is clear that the strategy used by OFMDFM to measure trends in racism draws on an outcome focused approach that has its origins in performance management, which shares similarities with evidence-based policy (Jennings and Hall 2006). However, research has shown that there are fundamental drawbacks to this approach. For a start, a focus on outcomes and evidence encourages a drive towards cutting costs and promoting greater efficiency, which may mean that corners are cut in order to achieve targets that are set by central government. As Keating (2005:170) argues: “centrally set targets may have perverse effects, as workers seek to meet the targets at the expense of the overall needs of the service”.

Research has shown that a shift towards evidence-based policy has had very specific ramifications for racial equality policy in England whereupon equality and diversity have merely become performance indicators (Ahmed 2007). This type of approach to measuring the success of racial equality policy is problematic on two levels. Firstly, there is danger that action plans, targets and indicators for addressing racism may come to represent the embodiment of race equality (Bhavnani et al 2005).

This may mean that addressing racial equality could end up being a tick box exercise, without fundamentally tackling the roots of racism, a problem that has arisen in the England (Bhavnani et al 2005). In a study by Bhavnani et al (2005:157) it was found that when trying to ascertain the effectiveness of race relations policy in England there were many instances when numerical targets were met, yet racism still remained a considerable problem (Bhavnani et al 2005). Secondly, those implementing diversity or race equality policies may feel overwhelmed by having to demonstrate accountability through “statistical outcomes, ticking boxes, and bureaucratic assessments” (Bhavnani et al (2005:1). In turn, this might actually harm minority ethnic communities as those responsible for implementing policy may feel swamped by targets, which “may increase the backlash against racialised minorities” (Bhavnani et al 2005:1).

In sum, a methodology that draws on an outcome-focused approach is flawed because it sets up high level goals that may end up becoming “an end in itself” reducing the delivery of racial equality to a “few arbitrary achievements” (Davies et al 2006:172). In effect, such targets narrowly set out how racism is defined and there is very little recognition that racism is a problem that is manifested at the individual, state and institutional levels of society. Therefore, the extent of racism may not be accurately reflected nor will the complexity of racism be understood.

## Discussion

In light of the findings discussed above, it is clear that there are significant problems with OFMDFMs handling of racism in Northern Ireland, especially at a time when violent racism has shown signs of increase. For a start, there has been a lack of policy implementation and political leadership at the macro level resulting in uncoordinated actions to tackle racism within local government. In addition, this research has also found that there are a number of problems (detailed above) operating at the local level which highlights that local government in Northern Ireland is not yet prepared to address racism in its entirety.

The research also concluded that anti-racist policy measures in place to address racism are having little or no effect on racism at the micro level, based on an examination of 'good relations indicators' chosen by government which illustrate that racism has predominately increased.

Therefore, it could be argued that these findings call into question the very effectiveness of anti-racist policy in Northern Ireland. However, this contention is not so clear-cut. Obviously at the time of this research the state of anti-racist policy across the board remained in a state of limbo. As a result, there was a lack of political leadership and will to address racism on a strategic basis which inevitably impeded fundamental progress towards racial equality. At the same time, this research found that actions to challenge racism on the ground were still ongoing in the face of this policy vacuum. Therefore, wider policy and theoretical debates were drawn upon to question the principles underlying local governments actions to address racism. It was argued that this strategy could tell us something about why government anti-racist policies have not readily addressed racism.

Overall, government led policy to address racism and promote racial equality in the context of Europe have been broadly characterised as multicultural style policies that aim to promote racial equality while striving to celebrate cultural diversity (Modood 2003). Racial equality policy in Northern Ireland draws heavily on this multicultural model, in that policy has tended to promote racial equality while celebrating cultural diversity. Drawing parallels with the UK, there is also a recognition, especially in community relations policy, (Knox 2011) that there is a need for a "cohesive force" in which people should interact and share common values (Bhattacharyya 1998: 253).

However, critical race sociologists, particularly in England, have argued that multicultural style policies are fundamentally flawed because they tend to represent racism as being rooted in a lack of cultural understanding (Gilroy 2002). As a result, the measures that flow from this policy framework are often targeted at the inter-personal level, and the structural roots of racism remain unchallenged (Bhavnani et al 2005). Although a shift towards multiculturalism in England was born out of the struggles faced by minority ethnic people at the grass roots level, especially in the late 70s and 80s, it has been argued that this ended up becoming a top-down approach (Gilroy 2002). Overall, anti-racist critics are not at odds with multiculturalism as a policy or idea, but were more concerned that multiculturalism was not going far enough to tackle long-standing racism.

More recently, there has been a shift in this policy approach on European-wide level, prompting critics to question such moves. Instead, governments across Europe are now adopting an approach that focuses more on the promotion of integration and cohesion, rather than fostering cultural diversity. Critics have argued that such shifts have been predicated upon the false belief that there is an 'excess of cultural diversity' which has created tensions and ghettoised communities (Kundnani 2007). With this prognosis of the problem, government policies in England became more focused on promoting community cohesion and integration. However, anti-racist critics have argued that this interpretation is flawed and that the problem is not too much cultural diversity, but a failure to address the continuing racism and discrimination faced by minority ethnic people. Some critics have also seen this policy shift as a return to assimilation whereby the issues facing minority ethnic people are being equated with too much cultural diversity (Kundnani 2007)

Already it is clear that this so-called 'crisis of multiculturalism' is starting to inform how politicians speak about race and racism in Northern Ireland. Drawing on this wider policy analysis, it is evident that racial equality policy in Northern Ireland is to some extent reminiscent of "official" multicultural policy adopted in 1980s Britain (Bhattacharyya 1998: 253). However, this research has also shown that political dialogue in Northern Ireland is becoming informed by the polemic of multiculturalism Vs cohesion. This highlights that the theory underpinning anti-racist policy in Northern Ireland has been shaped by the ongoing debate around how racism should be tackled. As a result, anti-racist policy in Northern Ireland and the actions that flow from such an approach are subject to much wider criticisms which call into question the usefulness of government led strategies to address racism (Lentin and Titley 2008; Bhavnani et al 2005; Lentin 2008; Gilroy 2002).



It is also evident from these wider policy debates that there is a drive towards reframing what is meant by race and racism (Gilroy 2002). This is something that this research has also aimed to do in an effort to simultaneously highlight the flaws in the current policy approach and contribute to the policy debate at the same time. In the context of Northern Ireland this research has shown that there is a distinct lack of recognition amongst policymakers and those responsible for implementing policy as to the pervasive nature of racism and its structural roots. If this minimisation of racism continues, anti-racist policy in Northern Ireland will not be fully equipped to address racism in its entirety.

### Policy Implications

While this research has been a relatively small-scale project, nonetheless it has made a number of important insights into how racism is tackled at the local government level, the drivers for action and the barriers that impede progress, as well as offering a wider policy and theoretical analysis of racism in Northern Ireland. In turn, all of these insights have the potential to contribute to the anti-racist policy debate on how racism is defined, understood and responded to. Based on these findings it is possible to argue that a number of key areas require prompt attention in order for policy to become more effective. Overall, the following section will aim to discuss and reflect upon a number of these policy implications based on the empirical analysis carried out for this research, as well as a reflection on the theoretical literature.

Broadly speaking, the policy implications of this research can be broken down into three main categories which involve action at the micro, meso and macro levels of Northern Ireland society. Firstly, it is evident that a number of problems at the local level, identified earlier in the report, could be resolved by more strategic direction and political leadership from central government, which could essentially facilitate progress towards racial equality. However at the moment there is distinct lack of unified political leadership in Northern Ireland as issues in Stormont routinely turn into a sectarian contest between the two main parties (Sinn Féin and the DUP).

More specifically, within local government a number of issues were raised by Good/Community Relations Officers in relation to the difficulties they faced when aiming to address racism in their area, which could have potential policy implications for local governments across Northern Ireland. For example, most Good/Community Relations Officers stated that they lacked the confidence and knowledge to tackle emerging issues of racism. Therefore future policy implementation should involve building the capacity of Good/Community Relations Officers through training and the provision of specialist sources of advice. As an alternative, issues around capacity could also be remedied through the employment of a dedicated Anti-Racist Officer, as this has proved to be an effective measure in challenging racism over a small number of councils in Northern Ireland.

Previous research suggests that in order for local authorities to progress in terms of racial equality, they also need to know where they are in order to set goals and progress further; therefore, monitoring progress more substantially is absolutely necessary in this regard (Audit Commission 2004). However, most councils in this study specified that they are unsure of their progress, largely because they had no feedback from central government about whether or not the measures they had employed were making an impact on racism in their area. More generally, Good/Community Relations Officers often argued that the monitoring of good relations policy had fallen below their expectations. It could be argued that these problems could be rectified through more in-depth qualitative analysis of specific projects at the local level. In turn, this could be supplemented with more robust and locally relevant quantitative measures.

Drawing on the views of minority ethnic representatives in each of the council areas studied, it is abundantly clear that much more needs to be done by both central and local government in terms of engaging with minority ethnic communities in a more meaningful way. A vital element of this would have to involve gaining the trust of minority ethnic people on the ground. At present, the engagement that councils have with minority ethnic people is often sporadic and usually carried out through representative groups rather than people at the grass roots level. In particular, it has been found that a number of councillors in this study had very little contact with minority ethnic people which meant that they often displayed a very poor awareness of the issues that affected minority ethnic people and the policies in place to address racism. This meagre level of knowledge suggested that racism was not a priority in these local government areas.

It is also clear that there needs to be more focus on empowering and building up the capacity of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, signalling that the funding for the minority ethnic sector needs to become a strategic part of the mainstream policy agenda. As explored earlier in the report the prevalence of short-term funding schemes have prevented minority ethnic groups from responding to the needs of minority ethnic people in the long-term, ultimately hindering efforts to build up the capacity of the minority ethnic sector. Related to this to this, a number of minority ethnic representatives feared that funding streams may end up diverting money away from communities facing racism who have built up years of experience working on these issues. In effect, it was argued that local government might set up duplicate services for minority communities, rather than with them, in order to attract funding under the banner of good relations, which does nothing to empower minority ethnic communities.

More generally, it is clear that much more needs to be done in all facets of policy development, from the initial stages of policymaking, right through to consultation and implementation. Throughout the research a number of minority ethnic representatives argued that the problems faced by minority communities have been highlighted in numerous consultations with local and central government and that no action had been taken to move forward on these issues. In particular, one minority ethnic representative argued how this acts as a real disincentive for people on the ground to get involved in this process of policy consultation. Such findings indicate that over-consultation, which has gone hand-in-hand with failures in policy implementation, is perceived to be a core problem across Northern Ireland.

However this problem is not confined to Northern Ireland. In the context of racial equality policy in England, Ahmed (2007) draws very pertinent conclusions that resonate with the findings of this research. Ahmed (2007) argues that there is a real danger that policymaking has become a substitute for taking action, in which there is an endless cycle of policies that have been halfheartedly implemented. Already anti-racist policy on a macro level in Northern Ireland is suffering from this same fate.

One minority ethnic representative in this study who had been working in this field for over ten years suggested that the issues faced by minority ethnic people, although varied, similar problems kept being raised in each round of consultation which were never fully addressed. In order to resolve this issue, it was argued that government consultations, research reports and the years of experience amassed by minority ethnic organisations could be better utilised by government and agencies (Interview 13th September 2009). In turn, a review of this rich source of data could help to inform future policymaking and provide insight into the issues faced by minority ethnic people.

Ultimately this cycle of consultations has led to disappointment and lack of trust in the political will to tackle these issues. It could be argued that this is reflective of a much wider problem in society. Research has shown that there is a growing disillusionment and lack of trust in the political process and its ability to actually tackle the social problems in society (Hay and Stoker 2009). As a solution, one minority ethnic representative proposed that more opportunities should be given to citizens on the ground in order to meaningfully participate in the policymaking process.

Apart from the suggestions and issues raised by respondents in this research, a reflection on the extent and the root causes of racism in Northern Ireland dictates that anti-racist policy should be multifaceted given that racism in Northern Ireland is shaped by a number of factors. This would involve addressing the interplay between racism and sectarianism, the wider structural roots that underpin racism, and the role of white privilege in perpetuating and sustaining racism.

On the ground, empirical research evidence highlights that racism in Northern Ireland is not being tackled on all these fronts because there has been a failure to recognise the true extent of racism. As a result, actions to tackle racism are guided more by the principles of good relations rather than an anti-racist approach. If policy continues to ignore the full extent and roots of racism in this way, then the actions to address racism that flow from central government policy framework will be less effective. This suggests that there needs to be a more fundamental shift at the macro-political level in relation to reframing the conceptual and policy debate around racism. This will have ramifications in relation to how racism is responded to at the grass-roots level, dictating an approach which is more anti-racist, while being localised and multi-faceted at the same time.

Drawing on wider policy analysis concerning the ‘crisis of multiculturalism’ and moves towards cohesion style policies, it can also be concluded that problems with associated with anti-racist policy in Northern Ireland are a reflection of flaws endemic to government anti-racist policy on a European wide level (Lentin and Titley 2008). Such criticisms, suggests that the debate on multiculturalism and how to address racism needs to be redrawn at both the local, national, and international levels of society.

## Conclusion

This summary report has aimed to draw together the main findings of this research project and advance a number of policy suggestions that could potentially contribute to the anti-racist policy debate in Northern Ireland.

Overall this research discovered that moves towards tackling racism in Northern Ireland were largely impeded by a lack of policy and legislative implementation. Ultimately this contributed to a lack of co-ordination in relation to how racism is tackled across local government, resulting in the employment of weak measures to address racism which are often founded on a good relations style approach. More generally a number of obstacles operating at the local level have also stymied efforts to successfully challenge racism. These have included: a lack of capacity and confidence to address racism within local government; poor engagement with minority ethnic communities; and a under resourcing of the minority ethnic sector, which has contributed to a lack of capacity building at the grass roots (Haughey 2014). These findings suggest that councils are not fully equipped to address racism and that more needs to be done in order to meaningfully engage with minority ethnic communities. It is also clear that anti-racist policy needs to work more on building the capacity of the minority ethnic sector, which is not happening at this current juncture. On a wider scale it is evident that a narrow conceptualisation of racism and the continuing legacy of sectarianism have played a role in delaying progress towards addressing racism. If these obstacles are not fully resolved they could prevent the successful implementation of anti-racist policy in the future and render anti-racist policy ineffective.

Drawing on wider debates about the effectiveness of state-led anti-racist policy, this research also suggested that the principles underlying government policies across Europe are often fundamentally flawed. This was mirrored at the macro political level in Northern Ireland, whereby there is a tendency to define and understand racism in the extreme. As a result, actions to tackle racism have become constrained within a paradigm that focuses on promoting good race relations between minority ethnic people and the white settled community. However, this research has demonstrated that racism in Northern Ireland is much more expansive and multi-faceted and that the roots of racism are both context specific (i.e. sectarianism) and subject to wider national (i.e. the demonisation of migration in politics and the media) and global currents (i.e. economic recession).

It is clear that the dimensions, roots, and associated policy debates surrounding racism in the 21st century are undoubtedly global (Babacan et al 2009). In addition, there are similarities in relation to how racism is manifested across the world, in that it is ultimately a reflection of a “global hierarchy”, yet it is also recognised that it can be manifested in a localised way (Babacan et al 2009:4). Therefore in order to address racism through policy, it becomes necessary to widen the debate in regard to how racism is understood so that one does not fall into the trap of completely localising the issue of racism to the terrain of Northern Ireland. In effect, the nature of racism in Northern Ireland must be subject to a much more complex analysis. Overall this research argues that there needs to be a break away from understanding racism as one-dimensional. Often, simplistic caricatures that equate racism with the extreme lead to superficial strategies of redress. It is clear that racism in Northern Ireland is much more multifaceted. Research has uncovered institutional and state racism, alongside more subtle forms of racism that occur on a daily basis. Therefore racism in Northern Ireland comes in many different guises, effectively having a huge impact on the everyday lives of minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland. A model for understanding racism in Northern Ireland, therefore, should be multifaceted and critical. In sum, the conceptualisation of racism must be subject to much deeper scrutiny in order for racism to be fully addressed through policy

On completion of this research in 2010 the policy landscape was uncertain and it seemed that efforts to tackle racism were moving towards a joint policy approach, whereby racism and sectarianism were to be tackled in one strategy. Huge concerns were raised about this shift. Indeed, a number of minority ethnic representatives who took part in the research expressed concerns about this joint policy, arguing that the magnitude of sectarianism might end up consuming efforts to tackle racism. Furthermore, any policy framework that aims to tackle racism and sectarianism in tandem may end up recycling community relations style policy dictating a one-size-fits-all approach.

An ongoing policy vacuum since the completion of this research in relation to tackling racism at a local and strategic level has inevitably allowed racism to flourish and increase. This year racist incidents and racist hate crimes have gone up considerably in comparison to previous years (PSNI 2014). In response to this escalation, minority ethnic organisations have put pressure on central government to push forward with strategic policy to tackle racism that has remained in a state of paralysis for several years. In June 2014 The Racial Equality Strategy was exhumed from its decaying state. This is to be welcomed, yet as NICEM states “this is only the first step”, (NICEM 2014) it still has to be finalised and implemented. It would seem that drawing up policies and carrying out consultations have become a substitute for taking action on a very real problem of growing racism. The document itself has not altered drastically, except for a chapter on immigration. This chapter should have been in the 2005 version which was somewhat out of date given that it was delayed by five years after being first proposed in 2000 (OFMDFM 2014).

Once again, the Racial Equality Strategy is still a work in progress and issues and questions still remain in regard to how it will be resourced, implemented and monitored. OFMDFM need to be cognisant of wider policy debates in regard to how racism is tackled on a local, national and international level.

Overall it is evident that anti-racist policy in Northern Ireland has become part of the policy agenda in Northern Ireland in just over ten years; however strategies to address racism are still very much in their infancy and have not yet had a significant impact on levels of racism.

As racism continues to manifest itself in a multitude of ways, the upcoming policy framework could offer the opportunity to re-define how racism is challenged, drawing on lessons from other countries, the past, and what is known about race and racism in Northern Ireland.

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