

All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities

**Yearly Review
2014-2015**

Introduction:

This report details the work of the All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities (APG on Ethnic Minority Communities) for the 2014-2015 session. The purpose of the report is to highlight the key issues raised during meetings of the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities and to demonstrate the actions taken by the group in this period.

The All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities became an officially constituted group of the Assembly in June 2008. The group was established as a mechanism for representatives of ethnic minority communities to discuss and lobby with politicians on issues of specific concern.

There are four positions of office bearer in the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities: Chair, Deputy-chair, Treasurer and Secretary. These positions are held by the political representatives in the group and are rotated on a six-monthly basis. The following positions were held over the past year:

Office bearers:

September 2014-February 2015

Chair: Anna Lo (Alliance)¹

Vice Chair: Claire Sugden (Independent)

Secretary: David McIlveen (DUP)

Treasurer: Bronwyn McGahan (SF)

February 2015-June 2015

Chair: Claire Sugden (Independent)

Vice-Chair: David McIlveen (DUP)

Secretary: Bronwyn McGahan (SF)

Treasurer: Danny Kinahan (UUP)

1. Issues discussed by the All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities

Racial Equality Strategy Consultation and Draft Motion

The Racial Equality Strategy was discussed at every meeting between September and April. This increased attention to the issue was consequent from the release of a draft Strategy for consultation in June. In September, Paul Noonan from the Equality Commission delivered a presentation to the APG on the strengths and weaknesses of OFMDFM's proposals. At the same meeting, David Russell from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the rights compliance of the

¹ Due to the apology of Steven Agnew of the Green Party to be the Chair for the first half of the 2014-2015, he designated Anna Lo of Alliance Party to chairing on his behalf for the period.

consultation document. Patrick Yu of NICEM delivered a third presentation at this meeting on the document's drawbacks and NICEM's recommendations for change.

These presentations raised a number of issues regarding the consultation document, suggesting that it lacked a strong evidence base, key rights-based definitions, a timetabled commitment to legislative reform and an action plan, amongst other issues. In discussion, APG members expressed disappointment at the abandonment of racial equality champions as a form of departmental oversight and discussed the need for further accountability measures within the Strategy.

In December, the Common Platform presented to the APG to highlight its 12 common principles on the Racial Equality Strategy, particularly noting the need to establish baseline data on inequalities and develop a strong implementation plan for the Strategy.

Also in this September meeting, the APG agreed to draft a motion for debate before the Assembly on the Racial Equality Strategy. A proposed motion was discussed a number of times over this period – at the November, December, January, February and March meetings – but, as the DUP was unwilling to support the motion, the APG could not issue the motion for debate. It was suggested that Sinn Féin issue the motion through their party and confirmed in the February meeting that the motion had been passed to Sinn Féin's Business Committee for selection. However, the motion was not issued prior to recess.

In February, the APG agreed to write to OFMDFM to invite the Department to send representatives to a future meeting of the APG. Additionally, in March, the Secretariat forwarded a report on the proceedings of the Community Relations Council's Racial Equality Strategy Implementation Event to APG members.

Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 and Compulsory Registration of Charities in Northern Ireland from December 2013.

At the October meeting, Roisin McDaid from the Electoral Commission and Aoife Morrison from the Charity Commission delivered a presentation to the APG on lobbying restrictions in the run up to the 2015 Westminster Election. Roisin McDaid indicated that the Transparency of Lobbying Act expanded the range of activities to which restrictions applied, with a focus on capturing organisations that seek to influence the public vote. A distinction was drawn between this and organisations that lobby politicians directly. Ms McDaid noted that organisations falling within the scope of the Act must register with the Electoral Commission if spending more than £10,000 on campaigning.

The APG's discussion of this issue highlighted the need to exercise caution when campaigning, as encouraging public support for a policy particularly associated with one party could infringe the lobbying rules. The APG also discussed the

potential for a conflict of interest arising from an OFMDFM-funded campaign intended to raise the number of BME citizens voting, after two individuals involved in the campaign ran as candidates for council election. An AQW on this issue was submitted by Anna Lo MLA on the 12th of December 2014 and was subsequently answered by OFMDFM.

Aoife Morrison presented on the requirement for charities to register with the Charity Commission. Ms Morrison highlighted that organisations established for a political purpose could not be registered and therefore would not be recognised as charities. In discussion, the APG queried whether this would impact on charities' policy work and Ms Morrison distinguished between a charity taking political action and being established for political purposes. It was also noted that political representatives involved in charitable organisations, or who are sitting on management boards et cetera, must be careful to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Children in Need Funding Programme

In its November meeting, the APG received a presentation from BBC Children in Need on funding opportunities. The presentation noted that funding was available for three-year periods, with domestic violence being a particularly big issue. BME groups would fall under the category of 'marginalised groups' for the purposes of funding, although would also receive funding indirectly, through initiatives addressing key issues, such as domestic violence.

Discussion highlighted the need for funding to cater for childcare, so that BME individuals could participate in events; however, the representative noted that BBC Children in Need funding did not normally cover childcare. The APG agreed to disseminate information about the fund, in order to identify BME groups that that fell within the scope of the funding programme.

BME Women's Network and Issues Facing BME Women

The APG's November meeting also saw a presentation on the newly established Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Network. The Network is a BME women-led group, which seeks to establish a system of information-sharing, training and leadership. The Network organises social and information events, delivers training, conducts policy work and builds the capacity of other groups in order to empower BME women in Northern Ireland.

The Network again presented to the APG in March, on the issue of domestic violence and women with no recourse to public funds. It was highlighted that BME women whose immigration status depends on their relationship with their spouse are particularly vulnerable. It was noted that EU migrants who cannot satisfy the habitual residence test and failed asylum seekers are also particularly vulnerable, due to their inability to access public resources. Women who do not

have access to public resources find themselves unable to access refuges if they experience domestic violence.

Discussion highlighted the existence of the domestic violence rule under immigration law, which permits some women who have experienced domestic violence to claim leave to remain. However, it was noted that it can be difficult for individuals to prove that they have been the victim of domestic violence in order to satisfy this rule.

To follow up on this issue, the APG decided to invite a representative from the PSNI to present before the APG, in order to provide further information on the law surrounding domestic violence. Consequently, Inspector Pauline Mooney of the PSNI delivered a presentation to the APG in April on the policy surrounding domestic violence. Following this presentation, the APG agreed to organise a separate seminar whereby the PSNI, the DoJ and the DHSSPSNI could come together and provide information to community members on this issue.

Issues Facing Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland

In its December meeting, the APG received a presentation from the Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) on the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland. The presentation noted the services that NICRAS provides, such as advice, English classes and measures to tackle poverty. Destitution was highlighted as the main issue facing asylum seekers, as they do not have the right to work and NASS support leaves them living below the poverty line. The fact that asylum seekers have no recourse to public funds leaves them reliant on charities and food banks.

It was highlighted that this situation can intensify when an individual is granted refugee status, due to administrative delays in obtaining a National Insurance number leaving refugees completely destitute for long periods after their eligibility for NASS support expires.

Discussion highlighted the low level of support available to asylum seekers in comparison to standard welfare provision and the APG agreed to write to OFMDFM about the provision of a crisis fund for individuals with no recourse to public funds. The APG also stated that it would circulate any information that NICRAS wished to disseminate.

Assisted Voluntary Return

In January, representatives from the Home Office delivered a presentation to the APG on the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) scheme, which is delivered by the charity Choices. This scheme provides up to £1,500 to refused asylum seekers who wish to cooperate with the Home Office in returning to their state of origin and have not been subjected to immigration detention.

Discussion indicated that this could be an attractive option in some cases, although it was also highlighted that money is not an incentive for asylum seekers to return to their state of origin, as they left due to the danger of remaining and not for financial reasons.

The APG requested information from the Home Office representatives on the number of forced removals of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland, but they were unable to provide this. The representatives stated that they could not commit to whether or not this information would be made available.

Minority Ethnic Development Fund

In January, the APG discussed the future of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF), which ended its most recent cycle in March 2015. Community representatives expressed that many organisations were reliant on this funding and needed to know what the future of the fund would be. It was noted that organisations had been forced to hand out redundancy notices to employees due to the delay in announcing the new cycle.

The APG continued to discuss the issue of the MEDF in its meetings from February to May, highlighted the crucial effect of delays in announcing the new funding cycle. It was noted in the APG's March meeting that APG member Anna Lo MLA had met with OFMDFM's Junior Ministers, who stated that they were considering extending the fund for 2 months prior to receiving new applications. A Race Unit official repeated this commitment before the Committee for OFMDFM on the 18th of March. However, at the APG's April meeting it was announced that this decision had been reversed and new applications would be expected for the fund at short notice. Discussion during this meeting focused on the effect that this would have on the capacity of organisations that were dependent on this funding stream.

The APG agreed, in its April meeting, that organisations represented at the APG should submit a collective complaint to the Ombudsman's office to request compensation for the effects of this decision. Furthermore, the APG agreed to draft a letter to OFMDFM requesting an urgent meeting on this issue. As of May, there was no reply to this letter.

In its May meeting, it was noted that contact had been made with OFMDFM to request information on the successful applicants under the new cycle of funding, however this request was refused prior to the finalisation of internal administrative processes.

Voices for Change Research – Issues Affecting the Integration of Third Country Nationals in Northern Ireland

In February, the APG received a presentation from Geraldine Scullion, a co-author of the Voices for Change research report, which illustrates the issues

facing third country nationals attempting to integrate into Northern Ireland. The presentation highlighted employment as the main barrier noted by respondents, with underemployment, lack of English language provision, lack of recognition of qualifications and work experience, and lack of flexible childcare provision all contributing to this obstacle.

Discussion raised the Racial Equality Strategy as a vital foundation for driving change in this area, although it was noted that it would likely be delayed and these issues must be addressed via other means in the interim. It was noted that pending legislation on Bullying could be a vehicle for tackling racist bullying.

Members agreed to raise relevant issues through Statutory Committee on which they sat, including the Education Committee and the Committee of Employment and Learning. The APG also agreed to write to OFMDFM to invite them to appear before the APG to discuss the timescale for producing the Racial Equality Strategy. It was also agreed that the Committee for Employment and Learning would be contacted to suggest that Geraldine Scullion deliver a presentation on the findings of Voices for Change before the Committee.

Proposed Merger of Three Primary Schools in South Belfast

In May, David Gault of the Board of Governors of Fane Street Primary School delivered a presentation on the intended merger, by the Education Authority, of three primary schools in South Belfast (Fane Street, Blythefield and Donegall Road). Mr Gault noted that Fane Street Primary had a high BME pupil population and a number of special arrangements in place to cater for newcomer pupils, which could be lost during a merger.

During discussion, it was noted that the arrangements for merging the schools onto a single site were insecure, as there was no certainty of funding for such a build and no agreed site for a new school. Mr. Gault also stated that some BME pupils had deliberately moved to Fane Street Primary following incidents of racist bullying at other schools in the area and raised the fact that racist incidents had statistically increased in the South Belfast area.

Discussion also highlighted the fact that the Education Authority was attempting to seek agreement on a merger via a pre-consultation, which is not subject to the same Section 75 strictures as a full consultation. The APG agreed to write to the Minister of Education on this issue and develop a response to the Education Authority's pre-consultation. It was also noted that there was no BME representation on any of the schools' Boards of Governors and the APG determined to ask Department of Education officials about the criteria for selection for these boards.

2. Actions taken

Letters written:

- To OFMDFM about the delays in renewing the MEDF
- To the Northern Ireland Ombudsman on administration of the MEDF
- To OFMDFM requesting a meeting with the First and Deputy First Ministers to discuss the administration of the MEDF
- To the Minister for Education on the South Belfast primary school merger

Consultation submissions

- To the Education Authority on proposals to merge three primary schools in South Belfast

Statements

- A statement on the failure of OFMDFM to respond to six AQWs presented by an APG political representative

AQWs

- Crisis Fund: To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in establishing a crisis fund for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Vote! You are at Home Campaign: To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures are in place to ensure that no individuals or organisations use funds for ethnic minority engagement for their own electoral purpose and that any conflicts of interests of people involved in campaigns such as “Vote! You are at Home” are declared.
- MEDF: To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the next round of the Ethnic Minority Development Fund will be available.
- MEDF: To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) how; and (ii) when they will implement the new round of the Ethnic Minority Development Fund in 2015/16.
- MEDF: To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the new round of funding for the Minority Ethnic Development Fund is currently being assessed, whether funding for organisations will be extended until the new fund has been processed.
- Racial Equality Strategy: To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the Racial Equality Strategy.

3. Presentations made by APG member groups

Date of meeting	Group presentation
9 December 2014	NICRAS
16 June 2015	Indian Community Centre

4. Presentations made to the APG

Organisation/Department	Topic	Date of meeting
Equality Commission NI	Racial Equality Strategy Consultation	16 September 2014
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Racial Equality Strategy Consultation	16 September 2014
Electoral Commission	Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014	21 October 2014
Charity Commission	Compulsory Registration of Charities in Northern Ireland from December 2013	21 October 2014
BBC Children in Need	Funding opportunities for BME groups	18 November 2014
BME Women's Network	The role and work of the Network	18 November 2014
Common Platform	The Common Platform on the Racial Equality Strategy	9 December 2014
Home Office	Assisted Voluntary Return	20 January 2015
Geraldine Scullion (Researcher)	Voices for Change Research and barriers to integration for third country nationals in NI	17 February 2015
BME Women's Network	Domestic Violence and No Recourse to Public Funds	24 March 2015
PSNI	Policing and domestic and sexual violence	21 st April 2015
Board of Governors for Fane Street Primary School	Proposed merger of three primary schools in South Belfast	19 May 2015

5. Dates of Meetings

Tuesday 16 September 2014
 Tuesday 21 October 2014
 Tuesday 18 November 2014
 Tuesday 9 December 2014
 Tuesday 20 January 2015
 Tuesday 17 February 2015
 Tuesday 24 March 2015
 Tuesday 21 April 2015
 Tuesday 19 May 2015
 Tuesday 16 June 2015

6. Participation in the APG from 2014-15

Oragnisation	Attended	Apology
ACSONI	8	1
Al-Nisa Association NI	nil	nil
Alliance of Filipino Communities in Northern Ireland	nil	
An Munia Tober	nil	nil
Armagh Traveller's Support Group	1	
Baha'i Council for NI	4	6
Bangladeshi Welfare Association	nil	nil
Ballymena Inter Ethnic Forum	nil	nil
Balmoral Filipino Community	nil	nil
Barnardo's Tuar Ceatha	nil	nil
Belfast Chinese Christian Church	nil	nil
Belfast Islamic Centre	4	
Belfast Jewish Community	1	1
Belfast Migrant Centre	nil	nil
Bryson Intercultural	nil	nil
Chinese Chamber of Commerce	nil	nil
Chinese Welfare Association	1	2
Craigavon Traveller Support Committee	nil	nil
Derry Travellers Support Group	Dissolved	
Egyptian Society NI	nil	nil
Ethnic Minority Empowerment Association	Dissolved	
Guru Nanak Devi Ji Sikh Community Association	nil	nil
Hare Krishna Community	nil	nil
Hungarian Community Association	nil	nil
Indonesian Association NI	1	
Indian Community Centre	2	3
Kenyan Association of NI	1	1
Latino America Unida	nil	nil

Mandarin Speakers Association	nil	2
Mid-Ulster International Cultural Group	nil	nil
Multi-cultural Group, Windsor Women's Centre	nil	nil
Nigerian Association Northern Ireland	2	
NICEM	10	2
NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers	8	
NI Filipino Association	nil	nil
NI Filipino Community in Action	nil	nil
NI Multicultural Association	nil	nil
NI Muslim Family Association	1	nil
NI Pakistani Cultural Association	nil	nil
NI Sikh Association	nil	nil
Newry and Mourne Traveller Support Group	nil	nil
Oi Kwan Chinese Women's Group	nil	nil
Oi Wah Chinese Women's Group	nil	nil
Oi Yin Chinese Women's Group	8	7
Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group	6	2
Pakistani Community Association	nil	nil
Polish Abroad	nil	1
Polish Educational and Cultural Association	nil	nil
Sikh Women and Children's Association	nil	nil
Sikh Cultural Centre (Derry)	nil	nil
Strabane Ethnic Community Association	1	2
Sudanese Community Association NI	6	1
Thai Northern Ireland Community Group	nil	nil
Traveller and Gypsy Network	nil	nil
Wah Hep Chinese Community Association	2	
Women of the World	nil	nil
World Wide Women @ North Down	3	1
Alliance	10	1
DUP	1	4
Green Party	2	2
Independent	2	2
SDLP	1	nil
Sinn Féin	5	nil
UUP	4	4
UKIP	nil	2