



**Response to the Inquiry on
*Together: Building a United Community***

Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership
September 2014

About NISMP

1. Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP) aims to work across the spheres of government in Northern Ireland and with other key stakeholders to ensure that Northern Ireland is a welcoming place for new migrants. It seeks to support the retention and integration of people in a way that helps meet skills and labour needs to support future economic growth. It provides a regional advisory, developmental and consultative function, enabling our partners and stakeholders to develop an appropriate Northern Ireland migration policy structure. This will ensure that Northern Ireland's needs and concerns in respect of immigration are recognised within the constraints of UK wide strategy. This paper will speak to issues directly impacting Northern Ireland in the wider context of UK immigration policy. It has been approved by representatives on the Partnership. However this does not necessarily reflect the views of Partner Organisations, some of whom have not been canvassed.

General Comments

2. NISMP welcomes a community cohesion strategy for Northern Ireland in the form of Together: Building a United Community. In particular, we welcome the cross party, cross-departmental elements to the strategy, and the emphasis on local delivery on issues of good relations. The vision for the strategy is ambitious and comprehensive, and we welcome in particular the emphasis on diversity and the celebration of cultural expression without fear of hate and tolerance.

3. Unfortunately, while there are some references to diversity and racial equality in the document, it is still a strategy which is very much focused on the two 'traditional communities' in Northern Ireland. In spite of its vision, it feels at times like an exclusive document in practice. This is difficult for the strategy and its implementation, as well as its relationship to other strategies across government including Delivering Social Change and the Racial Equality Strategy. While these documents are in theory all linked together, even to the extent in some places that they are interdependent in terms of review and monitoring, there is little connectedness between them, and in some areas they are in direct contradiction.

4. This response will focus on the areas of work in which NISMP is directly involved – integration of migrant groups, and the incorporation of BME and migrant communities in the process of community planning at a local level. The response is divided into the following sections:

- A. Consistency in the TBUC vision of a diverse society;
- B. Relationship between TBUC and the Racial Equality Strategy;
- C. Links between TBUC, local government, good relations, and community planning;
and
- D. Measurement, process and indicators.

A. Moving beyond “Two Communities”: Making the strategy tie in with the vision of a diverse society

5. Northern Ireland has seen significant demographic changes in the past decade. In a region which had a BME population of less than 0.8% in 2011, ethnic minorities now make up 1.8% of Northern Ireland. Births to foreign born mothers have increased to 1 in 10, with that figure increasing to 1 in 5 in some parts of the region. Where previously people of Chinese ethnicity made up the largest number, now Polish and Lithuanian are the two most common first languages outside of English. Across Northern Ireland diversity is increasing, and has brought challenges as well as growth and opportunities. In its opening paragraph and stated vision, Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) acknowledges these changes in a summary of its vision:

6. A united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

7. The strategy highlights diversity and integration as underpinning principles, and cultural expression as a priority area. NISMP welcomes this approach to a dramatically changing society as it moves towards a more shared, safer and more cohesive community. However beyond the first few pages, the document appears to lose its focus on diversity and the definition of community seems to be limited to the two ‘traditional communities’ in NI.

8. As stated in our response to the good relations indicators review, NISMP would like to stress the importance of monitoring to take into account the wider definition of community and cultural identity so as not to limit good relations monitoring to relations between individuals identifying as Protestant or Catholic, British or Irish. While we recognise that the Racial Equality Strategy is a document focusing specifically on BME and migrant groups, we believe this is a separate but complementary issue to community relations/cohesion. The nature of community relations, community tensions and shared space is not limited to equality alone, and has much to do with recognition and acceptance of different identities. While certain elements of the document recognise this, it is not borne out in either the identified project priorities or review indicators. The Racial Equality Strategy does make reference to the full inclusion of BME groups in public life; however we believe it is essential for that to be reflected in the overall strategy for social cohesion in Northern Ireland – Together: Building a United Community. Additionally, the incorporation of other identities when looking at social cohesion and building a united community provides opportunities to have discussions about cultural, national, religious and ethnic identities in a more diverse, multi-faceted, and less threatening way than has previously been possible in the region given the historical tensions. The Building a United Community document does not go far enough in addressing these concerns, and as such it would be beneficial to be more clear about the diversity of the community, reflecting the rapidly changing demographics.

9. There are BME groups which have been in Northern Ireland since the 1960s – people living here who experienced the Troubles and lived with the consequences of community tensions – and who have done their part to work towards good relations. There is significant learning to be gleaned from some of these community groups and the models they have employed. Artsekta is an example of this – taking cultural events as a means to feature BME

and migrant community culture, while simultaneously featuring 'local' art and culture. By using this format to showcase Irish and Highland alongside traditional Polish cultural expression for example, cultural practice from 'traditional communities' reaches audiences it might not have reached otherwise. It is examples like this which are missing from the document and which we would advocate for the incorporation into future planning around social cohesion. Cultural events are often taken as an end themselves. With this approach the opportunities and learning which could be achieved out of them are lost. Looking at the programmes funded by delivering social change, it is not clear how groups which use diverse communities to explore social issues – for example the model created by the Belfast Friendship Club, Challenge for Change in Newry and Mourne as well as the examples of world cafe events and employability training in the Belfast Integration and Participation Project - would be prioritised in accessing funds through Delivering Social Change. With the restructuring of the minority ethnic fund there have been significant difficulties in the maintenance of some projects which have consistently demonstrated positive results in creating community cohesion and integration. The Social Investment Fund would be well invested in some of these community projects, but without direction and prioritisation from TBUC, it is difficult to see how that would happen. This is one example of an issue raised in the NISMP response to the Good Relations Indicators review – where the measurement may fail to capture the positive outcomes, resulting in these projects being undervalued with regard to their contribution to social cohesion.

10. Additionally, while the migrant and BME groups in NI are normally entitled to access many of the programmes outlined in TBUC, there should be some acknowledgement about some of the practical and cultural barriers which may inhibit them from doing so. There are areas where it could be beneficial to make a targeted approach to some of the more marginalised communities, and ensure they have an awareness of and access to the programmes on offer through Delivering Social Change and TBUC. Taking a targeted approach in some areas is consistent with both positive duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, as well as the acknowledgement of the need for proactive work outlined in the Racial Equality Strategy consultation document.

Key Recommendations:|

- 1. In the development of programmes to tackle sectarianism, there are opportunities to examine issues of exclusion and discrimination across the board. While there is reference to some Section 75 groups in the executive summary of TBUC, the reference to social discord and discrimination outside of sectarianism is barely referenced. In order to elicit real social change for all members of the community of Northern Ireland, it is important that the entire document reflect the commitment to diversity outlined in the vision of the strategy. Without strong leadership at a policy level, it is difficult for the vision of integration across community groups to trickle down as the programmes will glean their objectives from the strategy which supports them.**
- 2. There should be some targeted approaches to the programmes delivered under TBUC, such as the United Youth programme, aimed at young people from migrant communities. This is an opportunity to promote integration, improve equality of opportunity, and demonstrate a commitment to diversity.**

B. Connections between the Racial Equality Strategy and Together: Building a United Community

11. As stated in the previous section, there is incongruence between the message of the importance of diversity laid out in the introduction to TBUC and the rest of the document which seems quite restricted to being a 'two community' one. This chasm is also evident in the diversion between the protection of cultural expression in TBUC, and the hesitance to commit to the right to cultural expression as one of the six shared aims of the Racial Equality Strategy. While TBUC holds cultural expression up as a key tenet which is to be protected, the Racial Equality Strategy identifies cultural expression as a potential barrier to integration, even referencing the practice of female genital mutilation as a risk factor. This is extremely contradictory and damaging to the relationship between the two strategies. More importantly, there is a risk that a message is sent that the only cultures and diversity which are to be protected are the two majority communities in Northern Ireland.

12. During informal focus studies with members of the Belfast Friendship Club, anecdotes of attempts to work with neighbours and communities were met by several migrants with further and escalated harassment – and these were the stories of people with proficiency in English, and the support of strong networks they had built through the BFC and other migrant communities. The dramatic increase in racially motivated attacks in the past year demonstrates the centrality of race, ethnicity and migration to issues of social cohesion. The First Minister himself pointed out after tensions arose when one migrant was offered a house in East Belfast, that there are tensions within neighbourhoods about 'locals' which led to the attacks, rather than it being associated with the tenant's race. This shows the interconnectedness of issues of social housing, deprivation, resource constricted environments, and social cohesion. While this is acknowledged in the TBUC document, it is less so in the Racial Equality Strategy. The acknowledged link between sectarianism and racism is also important to consider in the joining up of these two strategies.

Key Recommendations

- 1. More should be done to ensure the interconnectedness between the Racial Equality Strategy and Together: Building a United Community. This should include improved representativeness of the Racial Equality Panel in Delivering Social Change and monitoring mechanisms of TBUC.**
- 2. Action should be directed from TBUC to ensure that the Racial Equality Strategy does not contradict the key priorities of TBUC, in particular the priority of cultural expression. By failing to acknowledge cultural expression as a priority in the RES, but making it a key priority in TBUC, it both confuses and lends the impression that the cultural expression of the traditional communities in Northern Ireland are the only ones protected.**
- 3. At the time of writing this strategy, racist attacks were on a downward trend. Since 2013, the number of racist attacks has increased by more than 100% in spite of immigration figures levelling out. It is important that any review of TBUC takes these changes into consideration, and incorporates anti-racism strategies across its initiatives with sufficient investment and resource.**

C. Links between local government, good relations and community planning

13. Many of the recent attacks against migrants and BME groups have been justified by saying they are not racially motivated, but rather motivated by keeping local areas local. This mentality is reinforced by the segregation within neighbourhoods and is an excellent example of the overlap between racism and sectarianism, and the need to look closely at working with communities to identify solutions to local issues which help people feel less threatened by diversifying communities. This is an issue which has been recognised by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and there is a lot of positive learning from the racial equality, good relations and migrant support work undertaken by NIHE.

14. There is a considerable body of anecdotal, academic and commissioned research which indicates the best practice of integration and social cohesion happening at a local level. NISMP welcomes the acknowledgement of this in the Building a United Community document, as well as the commitment to implementation of community relations strategies through the District Councils Good Relations Programme. Community planning provides a key opportunity through which the creation of more diverse and inclusive neighbourhoods might take place with the support of those individuals living and working locally. While housing remains outside of the remit of councils, the proposed strategies around shared housing proposed in TBUC would be well supported through direct working with the community planning process. This would provide the opportunity to incorporate shared learning from the Housing Executive, residents' associations, and local community groups into the implementation of the key commitments in TBUC such as shared housing and the removal of 'peace walls'.

Key Recommendations

- 1. As the process of community planning develops, Delivering Social Change and the commitments of TBUC should be channelled through these mechanisms. This should include resource and capacity building for individuals from BME and migrant backgrounds.***
- 2. There should be more coordinated actions using existing partnerships and joint working to roll out examples of best practice on a regional basis and support councils with less experience working with diverse populations.***
- 3. In considering the commitment to work with community groups and neighbourhoods to reduce 'chill factors' which lead to exclusion and intimidation in communities, it is important that the impact of this interpretation of localism has on BME and migrant groups. Without considering the needs of these groups in the development of shared and cohesive housing, tensions are likely to continue and racist attacks may continue to increase.***

D. Measurement, process and indicators

15. NISMP submitted a response to the review of good relations indicators. We would like to take the opportunity to reinforce the comments put forward in that document here. We acknowledge the statement within the consultation document that good relations indicators relating to the forthcoming Racial Equality Strategy have been developed separately. While we welcome this, we believe that in the context of our changing demographics, consideration to the full interpretation of good relations duties should be given to each good relations indicator within this current review. It is therefore important that there are clear links between the aims and commitments outlined in the strategy and the indicators which are being used to monitor these. While we support the focus on outcome indicators, it is stated in the consultation document that the revised indicators will be used to monitor progress within TBUC at every level of implementation. We would therefore recommend that in order that these indicators may be used to both monitor implementation as well as to assess the contribution of TBUC activities in meeting the stated outcomes, a further set of input indicators is required. We would recommend that within each of the proposed indicators, data is disaggregated according to the ethnic background of respondents in order to more robustly assess the differential impact of interventions on various communities and thus better inform future related planning.

For further information, please contact:

Bethany Waterhouse Bradley

Partnership Development and Policy Officer
Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership
Unit 5B Castlereagh Business Park
478 Castlereagh Road
Belfast
BT5 6BQ
028 90 798 972
079 898 50704