

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An examination of the experiences
of people affected by racism and the
community services they engage with
as they seek support and to report

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Irish society in the present day is increasingly diverse. Historically a country of emigration, Ireland has seen significant demographic changes since the 1990s. In 2022 12% of the population were non-Irish nationals, while 20% were born abroad (CSO 2023). Among people residing in Fingal, 17.3% were non-Irish nationals and 26.7% were born outside of Ireland, both higher than the national average. In terms of ethnic diversity, 23% of the national population identified as from a minority ethnic background (not White Irish) in 2022 (CSO 2023a); in Fingal 35.4% of people did (CSO 2023b). The diversity at a national level and local Fingal level has not been welcomed by everyone.

Racism is part and parcel of many people's daily lives in Irish society (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2023). Numerous studies (e.g. Michael et al 2023; Machowska-Kosiack & Barry 2022; Centre for Youth Research and Development 2023) have identified the prevalence of racism, both in Ireland and in Fingal, and the impact of racism on those that experience it and the wider community.

This research was conducted as part of a broader project titled *Developing Anti-Racist Practice in Community and Higher Education* which was funded by the TU Dublin Access and Outreach through the PATH 3 Higher Education Access Fund. The project is a collaborative response to the prevalent issues of racism between the two project partners, the local development company Empower and TU Dublin (Blanchardstown). Its aim is to use action-based research to develop a suite of resources that inform and empower people and communities experiencing racism, the community services they engage with, as well as educators, support staff and students at TU Dublin. This report presents the findings from phase one of the project, a piece of action research, which examined the experiences of people affected by racism and the community services they engage with as they seek support and to report.

Using a qualitative approach, data was collected between March and June 2024 through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, involving twenty-five participants from community service providers (CSPs), local community groups, and key informants¹. Participants included those with both professional and lived experiences of racism, with a significant representation of participants from minority ethnic groups. The data was analysed thematically, and the main findings of the research were grouped under four main themes:

- Understanding, experiences and impact of racism
- Service providers' responses to racism
- Reporting of racism
- Recommendations in addressing racism

Understanding, experiences and impact of racism

Racism is understood by participants as a complex and prevalent issue that can manifest in both overt and subtle ways at the individual, structural, and institutional level. Participants described racism as occurring across a spectrum and provided numerous examples of different forms and types of racism, experienced in person and online. Black and Roma participants in particular described racism as a norm, experienced 'everywhere'. It operates at an individual level - verbal and physical abuse, criminal damage, attacks particularly on people seeking international protection - but also at a more institutional and structural level. Participants outlined how discriminatory treatment occurs in terms of the Gardaí, statutory bodies, in retail and education. Discriminatory behaviour was based on stereotypes linked to minority ethnic groups, and questions of identity and belonging and who is considered Irish or not. Roma and Black participants referred to the covert nature of racism which is more difficult to prove. Increasing levels of hate and hostility and anti-immigrant sentiment in Irish society were acknowledged - particularly towards people seeking international protection, but also those who are '*visibly different*' or those seen as not Irish such as people of colour or Roma women in traditional dress. The impact of racism on individuals and communities is '*huge*'. Participants spoke of the psychological impact on mental health and

¹ Key informants for this research are professionals working in interculturalism/anti-racism/advocacy within the community and voluntary sector in organisations with a regional or national remit.

self-esteem, and the emotional impact of fear as well as the impact on safety and a sense of belonging with younger Roma hiding their identity and Black youth questioning their '*place here*' in Irish society. The effect of racism is not just restricted to the individual but has a ripple effect, spreading to a community. Finally, racism impacts professionals with lived experiences when supporting people affected.

Service providers' responses to racism

Service providers' responses to racism were grouped under two headings: the responses of individual workers and organisational responses. Individual participants spoke of providing information, referring/signposting to other services as responses to people experiencing racism. CSP participants outlined providing informal emotional support and creating spaces to talk about experiences of racism. Other responses included advocacy and accompaniment to services/ to report and participants described people getting better treatment when accompanied by a professional. Finally, a few participants provide language support. The supports provided by CSP participants tended to be more informal in nature, as opposed to those provided by the key informants which were more formal, namely part of their professional role. Participants highlighted several shortcomings regarding support: it is ad hoc, dependent on the individual worker as opposed to standardised, there is a lack of awareness of organisations providing support even if these are not focused on racism and there is no structured support system for people/communities affected.

Organisational responses to racism identified by participants included awareness raising and outreach activities: the CSP participants outlined engagement in more community building activities such as organising events, the key informants described reaching out to support other organisations to develop anti-racist practice and deliver structured programmes. While some CSP participants organise training in-house, others spoke of the dearth of education and training and a need for more '*ongoing training*'. Examples of interagency activities that emerged from the data included engaging with the Gardaí and the local authority. The limitations of organisational responses identified by participants included a lack of coherent organisational response, lack of education and training, lack of spaces for people to talk about their experiences of racism, and the overall lack of a clear strategy at a national level to support people affected by racism which hinders the response at an organisational level.

Reporting of racism

Another main theme that emerged from the data was reporting racism. Participants offer support, signposting people experiencing racism to the iReport, the Gardaí (depending on the severity of the incident), and those working in IPAS centres directed people to management there. Participants shared negative past experiences of the Gardaí and highlighted the limited action that they take. Participants working with people seeking international protection identified a lack of specific category for racism in their complaints/incidents reports system. Numerous barriers to reporting were recognised by participants. People's reluctance to report was linked to the length and bureaucracy of the process, lack of awareness of where/how to report, fear of reprisal and concern depending on immigration status. Once again, in terms of the Gardaí, participants described a lack of standardised response. The evidence required when reporting to the Gardaí is a challenge as is the difficulty of proving more covert racism. Additional barriers to reporting include the lack of hate crime legislation in Ireland (the Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024 was not signed into law until October 2024), the lack of trust in a 'White' system, and the lack of response after reporting as nothing is done about it.

Recommendations in addressing racism

Finally, participants made recommendations around addressing racism. First and foremost, there is a need for education in the broadest sense, education to counter misinformation and disinformation circulating. Community education talks and workshops are also necessary to raise awareness about racism, about affected people's rights and anti-racist action people can take. Second, at a workplace/organisational level racism needs to be given a focus, training is required to develop anti-racist practice, leadership is needed, underpinned by the professional values (of community development and youth work). There is a need for networking and collaboration with external organisations, representation from minority ethnic groups and finally an organisational anti-racism policy is required. Third, there is a need for hate crime legislation in Ireland and for anti-racism policies (e.g. *National Action Plan Against Racism*) to be implemented. Government action is required to address structural issues e.g. housing, provide clear information around migration and ensure politicians use inclusive language. The Gardaí require anti-racism training and the state focus on integration should include a focus on addressing racism and the continued organisation of intercultural

events where people can meet. Fourth, there is a need for a reporting mechanism, a particular office or person to guide people through the process, a protocol and awareness of it, and an interagency approach. Furthermore, a response is needed that goes beyond the Gardaí and information on reporting available in different languages is also required. Fifth, there is a need for a support system for people who experience racism, someone to talk people through the process, language support if required, make people aware of the support available from community providers with connections to community groups. The two final recommendations related to the others outlined above: the need to gather data to evidence racism occurring and monitor initiatives to address it and what is at the core of anti-racism, the need to take action from this and other research.

The findings of this report demonstrate not only the prevalence and impact of racism but also the real and complex challenges that exist for people that experience racism and community service providers as they seek supports and to report these incidents. However, the findings also demonstrate a set of concrete actions, which if adopted and implemented, have the potential to develop anti-racist practice within community and voluntary service providers. The actions can also contribute to ensuring that people who experience racism are supported using a structured and consistent approach.

The partners have reviewed the findings of this report, and the suggested actions are:

- Develop a roadmap for what the process would look like to develop antiracism at an organisational level.
- Develop a training component for staff on developing anti-racist practice.
- Develop a digital information hub which will map services that are currently available to those seeking support to report.

This work is not limited to one organisation and the resources developed can be shared across the wider community and voluntary sector and higher education.

