

Equality, Rights and Identity Division  
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5<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: The Executive Office Racial Equality Call for Views**

The Commissioner for Victims of Crime's Office (CVOCO) is an independent body which represents the interests of victims of crime in Northern Ireland. The Commissioner Designate was appointed by the Minister of Justice in March 2022 to be an independent voice for victims of crime. The overarching purpose of the Commissioner Designate's role is to represent the needs and interests of all victims of crime and help drive systemic improvements across the criminal justice system.

This will include helping to identify any areas where victims are not consistently being provided with their entitlements set out within the Victim Charter and ensuring that their issues and experiences are raised in the public arena, with government department, criminal justice agencies and organisations that support and represent victims, in order to bring forward effective change.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds can be victims of any type of crime in Northern Ireland and are especially vulnerable to specific types of crime including domestic and sexual abuse and hate crime. They are also less likely to report crimes due to a range of individual and structural barriers to support-seeking. Recent PSNI statistics<sup>1</sup> have highlighted that in the twelve months from 1st January 2024 to 31st December 2024, crimes with a race hate motivation saw the largest increase with race crimes representing 1.3% of all police recorded crime.

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<sup>1</sup> [Incidents and Crimes with a Hate Motivation Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland Update to 31st December 2024](#)

The Commissioner Designate has met with many victims of crime from minority ethnic backgrounds and the issues they have discussed include:

- Experiencing hostility through verbal abuse, attacks in public and on homes, racist bullying of children in schools (with knock on effect on that child's right to an education), attacks on minority ethnic owned businesses impacting on their safety and right to economic stability;
- Not being taken seriously when reporting crime (hate based or otherwise) to police;
- Not having hate crime treated as 'motivated by hate' by the criminal justice system / lack of recognition of hate element upon conviction;
- Financial issues for asylum seeker victims who have been attacked and cannot afford to access treatment (e.g. dentistry for someone who needed teeth fixed after an assault);
- LGBT asylum seekers living in fear of attacks/being targeted in asylum accommodation because of hostility of other residents to their sexual orientation / gender identity;
- Ethnic minority women are more likely to suffer VAWG both within their own community but also from wider Northern Irish society, including but not limited to honour-based violence and attacks on hijab wearing women.

In the wake of the outbreak of racially motivated hate crimes Northern Ireland experienced last summer, the Commissioner Designate wrote to the First and deputy First Ministers and met with the Chair of the Executive Office Committee to call for a 'rapid review' to examine what happened within local communities, what the wider connections and implication across the UK and Ireland were, how the government responded and what lessons can be learned to prevent similar events in the future. Whilst this call was not responded to and the time for a 'rapid review' has passed, it is still vitally important to understand the events that led to such violence taking place in local communities and how this can be mitigated in the future.

The Commissioner Designate also has concerns regarding political messaging which tacitly excuses racist violence under the guise of 'legitimate community concerns' from some political parties. It is evident that the violence was driven by racist, white Christian supremacy ideology and attempts to rewrite this is unhelpful. Again, this does not move towards addressing the underlying societal issues that allowed this situation to occur in the first place.

It is widely accepted there is a social housing crisis in Northern Ireland, further evidenced by the recent Northern Ireland Housing Executive announcement to amend the Housing Selection Scheme. The Commissioner Designate calls for strong messaging from all relevant statutory agencies and political parties to combat narratives around 'illegal migrants' skipping the queue to access social housing. These narratives are not only demonstrably untrue but also fuels racist groups and sows discontent between communities.

The need for Hate Crime legislation cannot be ignored and whilst this is outside the remit of the Executive Office Racial Equality Strategy, the Commissioner Designate believes it is important to stress to all political parties and government departments the need to work cohesively to ensure any legislation that is brought forward adequately addresses how these types of crimes are punished and act as a deterrent to potential perpetrators. It is also vital there is stronger enforcement of current rules around Hate Crime reporting and that victims are believed when they express the view that the crime against them was motivated by hate.

We also know that certain groups are less likely to feel confident to report a crime to the police and that victims from minoritised backgrounds (including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities) can have a strong mistrust of the criminal justice system. Consideration should therefore be given to appropriate mechanisms for victims of racially motivated hate crimes to have the option of third party reporting, where they feel vulnerable reporting to police for fear of re-victimisation and/or retribution.

In order to build trust and confidence in our criminal justice system and wider institutions it is of course necessary that these systems reflect the people they serve. When considering the racial equality strategy links also need to be made to the diversity of work forces. Efforts must therefore be made to address the barriers faced by minority groups seeking to work within the police and wider justice system which should in time build confidence that police and the justice system will treat them fairly and with respect.

Whilst there is no doubt much more is needed to be done to strengthen the legislative protections for victims of racist hate crimes, the Commissioner Designate would note that not all victims seek a criminal justice response. For many victims a criminal justice response does not deliver the resolution or address the harm that has been caused. It is important therefore that we also consider the role of restorative practices and the potential role that it can play to improve outcomes for victims and prevent reoffending.

Research shows that tailored support services improves the recovery of victims of crime however we also know that for some groups access to such services is difficult. The provision of accessible support services with culturally appropriate counselling is also an important step for those people who have been victims of hate crime. This will be a significant step on the road to recovery for many people.

Finally, in order to ensure that the lived experience of minority ethnic communities and individuals is heard and incorporated into any new strategy, it is important they are engaged with directly. There are various voluntary and community sector organisations who work directly with people who have been impacted by hate crime and there is potential to work collaboratively to ensure their voices are heard and their experiences (whether positive or negative) are considered as part of any new strategy.

Developing these stronger links with these voluntary and community sector organisations could be developed through dedicated structures such as co-design forums as used in the development of the EAWG Action Plan.

These organisations provide invaluable support to people who have experienced racially motivated crimes and they are acutely aware of impact of racism, racial inequality and racist violence. Their input and value in being a key player within structures to promote racial equality and combat racism and racist violence cannot be understated.

If you would like to discuss any of the above points, please contact [policy@cvocni.org](mailto:policy@cvocni.org).