



MAKE **M**INORITY A PRIORITY

INSIGHTS FROM MINORITY ETHNIC
YOUNG PEOPLE GROWING UP IN
IRELAND AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR

SUMMARY REPORT



NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND

The National Youth Council of Ireland is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. It uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people.

www.youth.ie

THIS IS A SUMMARY REPORT

This document provides a summary of the NYCI report Make Minority a Priority, a qualitative study exploring the views, perspectives and experiences of young minority ethnic people aged 16 to 25 years who have grown up in Ireland. The complete research report is available at

youth.ie/minority

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METHODOLOGY

The research underpinning this report is the result of 6 Qualitative semi-structured focus group interviews in Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Dublin, with 50 young people from 20 different ethnic backgrounds.

More detail on methodology available in full report youth.ie/minority

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**IN THIS RESEARCH THE VOICES OF 50 MINORITY ETHNIC
YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENT POWERFUL INSIGHTS INTO THEIR
EXPERIENCES OF GROWING UP IN IRELAND**



The findings highlight issues and challenges around belonging, engagement and shifting notions of identity. This report will provide direction to the youth sector, and prompt us to reflect on whether our current approach to intercultural youth work needs to be adapted to include more diverse ways of including young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

What the young people have shown us in this research is that, given access to safe and supported spaces, sharing experiences with others from minority ethnic backgrounds helps in the negotiation of a sense of belonging.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This report documents the perspectives of minority ethnic young people and the current and potential role of youth work in their lives. It is based on an exploratory, qualitative research design whose principal aims were:

- to identify some of the issues facing young people from minority ethnic communities growing up in Ireland and to explore how youth work can support them;
- to identify a range of different youth work models which engage with minority ethnic youth groups across Ireland;
- to analyse the lessons that might be learnt from minority ethnic young people's experiences of youth projects across Ireland.

WHY DO WE NEED THIS RESEARCH?

Increased migration into Ireland in the early 2000s precipitated a range of responses by youth organisations. In 2008 NYCI set up an Intercultural Programme to support the youth sector to embed interculturalism in their youth work provision and practice. Although the widely-held view within the youth sector initially was that minority ethnic young people should participate alongside young people from the majority community within integrated youth groups, growing anecdotal evidence suggested that alternative ways of engaging may be required to meet the young people's needs.

To support evidence based debate about integration and interculturalism in youth work, NYCI set out to provide up-to-date, nationally-focused research on the specific needs of minority ethnic young people. This research explores the value of minority ethnic-only youth work spaces by hearing directly from the young people who have engaged with alternative models of youth work, as opposed to integrated mainstream youth groups.

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGE?

A number of recommendations at both practice and policy levels emerge from this research and are detailed on pages 9-11 of this document. They highlight that the current approach to intercultural youth work needs to be adapted to include more diverse ways of including young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

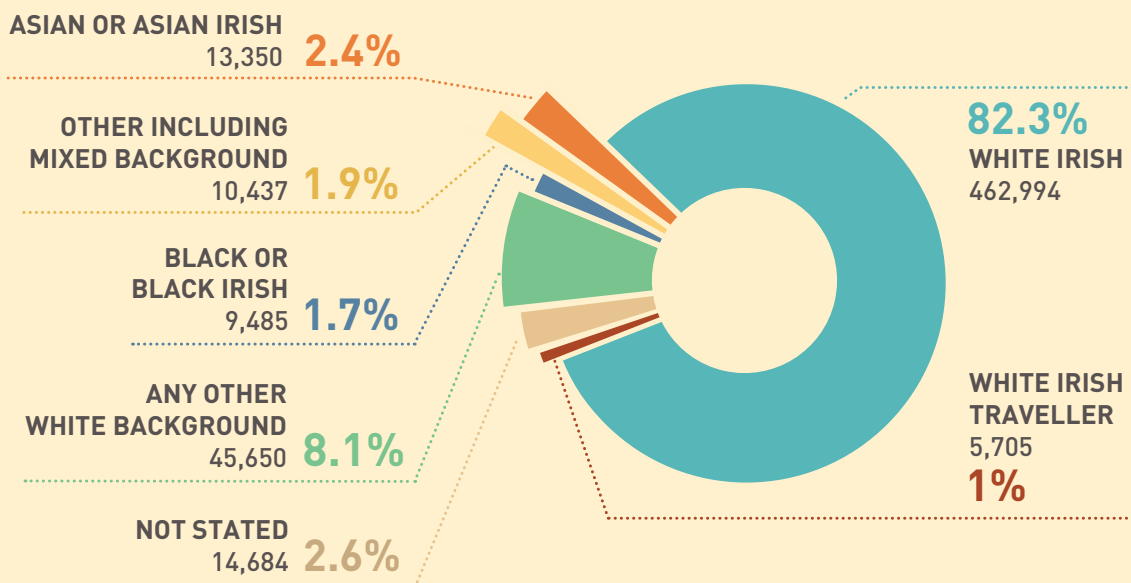
KEY NUMBERS

The figures shown here indicate the levels of ethnic diversity in Ireland of young people aged 15-24 and provide background and context for the qualitative research outlined in this report.

ALMOST **1 IN 7**
YOUNG PEOPLE (15%) AGED 15-24 LIVING
IN IRELAND ARE **MINORITY ETHNIC**



ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND AGED 15 – 24 YEARS



The largest minority nationality groups amongst the 15-24 age group are:
POLISH UK LITHUANIAN ROMANIAN IRISH-AMERICAN BRAZILIAN LATVIAN

IN THIS REPORT:

6

QUALITATIVE
SEMI-STRUCTURED
FOCUS GROUP
INTERVIEWS IN

ULSTER
MUNSTER
LEINSTER
& DUBLIN



Source: Central Statistics Office 2017a: EY029. For further data and complete bibliography see full report on youth.ie/minority

INTERVIEWS: THE MAIN FINDINGS

QUALITATIVE DATA FROM SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS EXPLORING MINORITY ETHNIC YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES GROWING UP IN IRELAND WERE GATHERED. THE FIVE KEY THEMES AND ISSUES EMERGING ARE HIGHLIGHTED HERE. FOR MORE ON THE INTERVIEWS AND FINDINGS SEE THE COMPLETE REPORT AT [YOUTH.IE/MINORITY](https://youth.ie/minority)

1 ON IDENTITY AND BELONGING:

In negotiating a sense of belonging in Ireland young minority ethnic people are significantly impacted by the attitude of people around them alongside navigating their own journeys of self-understanding and discovery. It was apparent that the journey toward belonging and of forging their personal identity was complex, and the young people's experiences differed considerably from each other. One of the key findings was that the young people felt the need to have safe and supported places in which they could discuss these issues, where they could share, deliberate and debate with others who had similar experiences.

ISSUES FOR YOUTH WORKERS TO BE AWARE OF ON IDENTITY AND BELONGING

- Be aware of the importance of dual-ethnicity as an option of identity.
- Young minority ethnic people feel they are being constantly judged based on their accent, language, appearance and cultural background.
- Young people are made to feel that they do not belong, that they are not Irish.

“You’re like scared to like show people who you are because you’re afraid that they’re going to like judge you from where you came from, and how you act. So you’re just like scared of really being yourself.”

[Asian female, under 18, Leinster]

2 ON PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS:

One of the key findings was the impact on children who are growing up in Ireland and adopting Irish cultural norms but whose parents promote and expect different behaviour in line with their cultural heritage. The findings demonstrate the importance of supporting family relationships which can sometimes come under significant pressure as the young people negotiate a home culture and outside culture which are significantly different. Equally important to note is that in migrant-only youth groups or spaces the young people are quick to support each other around intergenerational conflict through sharing their common experiences.

ISSUES FOR YOUTH WORKERS TO BE AWARE OF ON PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- Young people have to negotiate being accepted by both their minority ethnic peers and their majority ethnic peers who all make differing demands and judgements on them.
- Intergenerational issues include:
 - Managing complex and often competing expectations.
 - The nature of acculturation and the fear for parents of their children losing their cultural and religious traditions.
 - Understanding different child rearing practices.
 - Managing differing value systems.

“Your parents might be hanging on “but you’re African and this is the way you should be”.... [but] just because your background is African doesn’t mean that your culture can’t be both African and Irish.”

[Black male, 18+, Munster]

3 ON RACISM AND EXCLUSION:

A key issue to emerge was the degree to which racism had become a 'normal' feature of young people's lives. Remarkably, the young people presented stories which spoke of considerable resilience. In deflecting the impact of racism they diminished it largely by shrugging it off. Nevertheless, the young people also expressed eagerness to find ways to challenge the endemic societal nature and tolerance of racism.

ISSUES FOR YOUTH WORKERS TO BE AWARE OF ON RACISM AND EXCLUSION

- Young people need their experiences of racism to be acknowledged and they need the tools to process, understand and challenge it safely.
- The impact of racism and comments on young people can result in them excluding themselves from opportunities due to lack of confidence in whether they are welcome to attend events or groups.

"Just be realistic here, because this actually does happen, I'm seen as a nigger, [...] seen as a monkey. [...] we get called these names. That even if it's not on a daily basis, at least once a week. I'm just saying this actually does go on and you're not taking it seriously."

[Black female, 18+, Ulster]

4 ON LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

Attaining and using leadership skills were key motivators for the young people's ongoing engagement in their youth groups. In two organisations, the young people applied their leadership skills within the community as part of the youth organisation's outreach work. This provided the organisations they were linked to a valid reason for supporting an age group that they might otherwise have discontinued engaging with. This is critically important as many of the young people we interviewed were only beginning to articulate the journeys of identity that they had been on. Up until the age of 18 they had been too caught up with trying to fit in than with exploring and understanding their own sense of self.

ISSUES FOR YOUTH WORKERS TO BE AWARE OF ON LEADERSHIP SKILLS

- Minority ethnic young people want to make a difference, to be leaders, but often miss out on opportunities to learn leadership skills, especially those that are self-organising youth groups.

"Young [minority ethnic] people....definitely [need] to stand up more and be leaders and be facilitators because it does help motivate others."

[Black male, 18+, Ulster]

5 ON INTEGRATION:

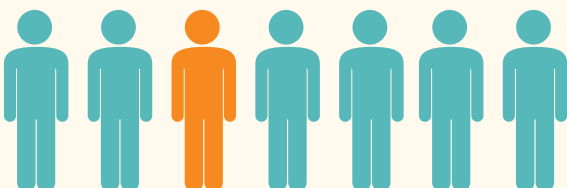
A key theme on integration was the need to build cultural awareness and understanding within the wider Irish community. Critical was the call for an environment in which young people could be themselves and not be expected to assimilate. The value of trusted and culturally competent adults, who support the young people as they negotiate and balance different aspects of their identity and where they belong was also clear.

ISSUES FOR YOUTH WORKERS TO BE AWARE OF ON INTEGRATION

- Understand how the concept of acting or being black, or white, manifests for young people.
- Understand the loss, pain, isolation and confusion that minority ethnic young people can face.
- Young people may feel uncomfortable being singled out on the basis of their migrant/ minority ethnic status or which require them to be 'representative' of a particular country or culture while at the same time they need their cultural identity to be valued – it's a balance that must be negotiated with the young person and managed. A young person's visa/migration status impacts significantly on their employment and education options.

“Sometimes people are surprised [by cultural practices]... even though you try and explain they don't understand....We should be taught more about other cultures so that you understand why people act differently and what you might think is weird is completely normal to another person. If you're not taught that then you don't really know that.”

[Asian female, under 18, Dublin]





RECOMMENDATIONS

THIS REPORT RECOMMENDS THAT THE CURRENT APPROACH TO INTERCULTURAL YOUTH WORK NEEDS TO BE ADAPTED TO INCLUDE MORE DIVERSE WAYS OF INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS. A SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IS OUTLINED BELOW. THE COMPLETE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AVAILABLE AT [YOUTH.IE/MINORITY](https://youth.ie/minority)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR

In light of the findings of this report, we recommend the following for the youth work sector:

ENSURE APPROPRIATE SUPPORTS AND SPACES ARE AVAILABLE

- 1** Ensure that the specific needs and contributions of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are taken into account in the development of **organisational strategies, work plans and actions**.
- 2** **Safe and supported spaces** where young minority ethnic people can share their experiences with others from minority ethnic backgrounds to help them to explore and negotiate their sense of identity should be provided. Examples in the research included groups supported by youth workers and a self-organised group that is supported by a youth organisation to meet in their premises.
- 3** Youth work provision based on strict geographical limitations and age restrictions impacts on minority ethnic young people's opportunities to engage. More flexible or **alternate approaches** are required to take account of the numerous demands that young people aged 18+ face. Spaces may need to serve as drop-in or fluid spaces where project work can evolve based on the young people's interests. They will need to promote exploration and dialogue, where youth work methodologies and training are grounding principles.

ENSURE APPROPRIATE TRAINING AND EDUCATION IS DELIVERED

- 4** Anti-racism and intercultural **training** should be included as core competencies of youth workers in order to ensure that organisations are better equipped to support minority ethnic young people.
 - a. Youth organisations must foster critical conversations on the theme of racism to help address racist attitudes.
- 5** Religious literacy **training**
 - a. Find opportunities to build understanding of minority faiths and beliefs with young people with the aim of reducing Islamophobia and other religious intolerances.
 - b. Support honest and open debate, and room for disagreement while grounding the work in the often difficult balance where everyone's rights are respected.
- 6** **Cultural competency** should form part of the education of all young people:
 - a. To promote acceptance and embracing of cultural diversity as the norm.
 - b. To deal with difficult or unfamiliar situations and differing values and beliefs.

SUPPORT ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP WITH AND FOR MINORITY ETHNIC YOUNG PEOPLE

- 7** Create a minority–ethnic led youth work forum as a **special interest group**.
- 8** Young people and adults from a minority ethnic backgrounds need opportunities and mentoring to move into **leadership roles** within mainstream youth work.
- 9** Youth work centres and community **facilities** need to be made available to self-organising minority-ethnic youth groups for free or minimum cost.
- 10** Youth work **leadership** training for minority ethnic peer leaders (aged 18+) needs to be provided that is religiously and culturally appropriate but based on current resources such as Starting Out.
- 11** Where minority ethnic people have significant **advocacy and support** needs in relation to visas/migration status, access to college, and isolation from family members, it is important that youth workers engage in advocacy to address these issues.

CARRY OUT RESEARCH AND MAPPING TO ADDRESS GAPS IN EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

- 12** Further **research** should be undertaken to explore the **gaps within current youth work provision** in addressing any of the key issues raised by young people in this report:
 - a. Is integrated youth work provision sufficiently supporting young people to explore aspects of their identity and belonging?
 - b. Are minority ethnic young people attending mainstream youth work supported to address issues such as racism, intergenerational conflict, etc. in their lives?
- 13** A **mapping** exercise is necessary to determine the level and range of intercultural and minority ethnic-only youth work provision across Ireland, to include an audit of cultural diversity amongst staff and volunteers.
- 14** Norms and cultural practices within youth work organisations need to be examined and evaluated to **assess** whether these may present difficulties for young people from minority ethnic communities to find out about them, to join then and/or to participate fully.
- 15** NYCI should establish a forum to facilitate a debate on a strategic direction for intercultural youth work in Ireland that **moves beyond an exclusive focus on integrated universal youth work** provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS OF THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR

In the period 2008-2014, funding for youth work declined significantly. This led to 'fire-fighting' and reduced the capacity for inclusive practice. In the last two years investment in youth work has been partially restored and that is welcome. However, given the increased number of young people from a minority ethnic background and the needs and supports identified in this report, we recommend the following:

- 1** Allocate resources at national, regional and local levels to strategically fund **dedicated youth workers** to support intercultural youth work.
- 2** Explore ways of **replicating or adapting the models** spearheaded by existing intercultural youth projects on a regional basis and in a manner which suits local needs.
- 3** The current review of the Youth Service Grant Scheme and the Value for Money and Policy Review of the Youth Funding Programmes should facilitate the provision and delivery of additional and enhanced youth work supports to young people from a minority ethnic background.
- 4** Any review of funding arrangements should facilitate minority ethnic-led organisations to apply for resources to deliver youth work services in their own right or in partnership with others.
- 5** Open up youth work funding opportunities to minority ethnic-led youth work organisations that aligns them with current youth work services.





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