

CHAPTER TWO: WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FROM A MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on working with young people from a minority ethnic background. It presents a summary of most relevant and up to date demographics relating to minority ethnic communities, explains the varying needs and issues of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, looks at how racism or xenophobia impacts their everyday life, and offers practical advice on reaching out and working with culturally diverse young people in youth settings. It concludes with a list of contacts and resources that will help you in your work.

This resource has been developed to be used by youth workers on the island of Ireland. At times it is necessary to make distinctions between our two jurisdictions and we had to choose a terminology to reflect this. We have chosen for the most part to use Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (ROI). At times we also use North and South.



Working with minority ethnic young people sits in the legislation context:

In the Republic of Ireland, under the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their race (ethnicity, skin colour or national origin), or religious belief, or membership of the Traveller community, in the provision of goods and services, education, sports, access to public facilities and accommodation.

In Northern Ireland the **Race Relations (NI) order 1997**, (amended in 2012) makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of colour, nationality, ethnic origin, national origin, and membership of the Irish Traveller community

This section introduces key terminology to support shared understanding, critical reflection, and meaningful practice. It does not aim to provide a neutral or definitive glossary of terms. Instead, it reflects an intentional approach to language that is rooted in youth work values, a social justice framework, and NYCI's commitment to racial justice and anti-racist practice.

Ethnic Group

An Ethnic Group is a group that regards itself or is regarded by others as a distinct community based on shared characteristics such as language, culture, religion, nationality, or traditions. We are all members of an ethnic group.

Ethnicity has been described as residing in:

- the belief by members of a social group that they are culturally distinctive and different to outsiders.
- their willingness to find symbolic markers of that difference (food habits, religion, forms of dress, language) and to emphasise their significance; and
- their willingness to organise relationships with outsiders so that a kind of 'group boundary' is preserved and reproduced

This shows that ethnicity is not necessarily genetic. It also shows how someone might describe themselves by an ethnicity different to their birth identity if they reside for a considerable time in a different area and they decide to adopt the culture, symbols and relationships of their new community.

It is important to note that the Traveller Community is recognised in ROI as a distinct minority ethnic group since 2017.

Majority Ethnic refers to the predominant ethnic group in society e.g. White, Irish, Celtic, Christian, and settled (i.e. non-Traveller).

Minority Ethnic refers to a culture or ethnicity that is identifiably distinct from the ethnic majority. This includes the Traveller and Roma community, people who have been long established in Ireland, people who are 2nd, 3rd or more generation, people who are naturalised Irish citizens or Northern Irish/ British, or people who have recently arrived.



Travellers are recognised as a minority ethnic group in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and as such this chapter relates equally to Travellers as to other ethnic groups. *This Toolkit also has a separate chapter dedicated to working with Young Travellers – see Chapter 4.*

Culture is the way in which ethnicity is expressed. It includes the customs, values, behaviours and means of communication by which we belong to a community.

Assimilation is an approach entailing that ethnic minorities should be absorbed into the ethnic majority thereby losing their cultural identity; at the basis of this approach is the belief in the superiority of ethnic majority (ethnocentrism).

Interculturalism is an approach aimed at achieving social cohesion and harmony in a multi-ethnic society. It actively promotes dialogue, understanding, co-operation, collaboration, and respect between and within all cultural and religious groups in society. It stresses that all residents will develop their communities together.

Social Justice is a philosophical concept asserting that everyone should have equal access to wealth, privilege, and opportunity in society. It is measured by the distributions of wealth, opportunities for personal activity, and social privileges.

Race vs ethnicity

Ethnicity is the better term to describe the difference between humans rather than 'race'. This is because 'race' is a social construct originating in the violent history of colonialism. The term 'race' historically has divided people based on the alleged idea of white superiority which legitimised white western Europeans'

power over indigenous populations, over their land and their goods in the ‘newly’ discovered territories of 15th–18th centuries (Africa, America, Australia, Oceania); the ideology of white supremacy was born as part of this process, has been perpetuated over centuries and its legacy still shapes our societies, causing unequal outcomes. Race is a social construct used to group people based on physical features like skin colour, hair texture, or facial features. It has no scientific basis – all humans belong to the same species – but race has been used throughout history to create hierarchies, divide people, and justify unequal treatment. While race isn’t real in a biological sense, it has very real effects because of the way it has shaped societies, laws, and systems. It continues to affect access to education, healthcare, housing and employment.

Whiteness is a social and political system that centres and prioritises white people – their experiences, values, and ways of being – as the norm or standard. It’s not just about skin colour, but about who holds power, whose voices are heard, and who is seen as “belonging.” Whiteness often goes unnoticed by those who benefit from it, making it difficult to challenge. It shapes laws, institutions, media, and cultural norms – often in ways that exclude or disadvantage people from racialised groups¹.

Common terminology used to refer to groups from minority ethnic backgrounds

People of colour (POC) term is used for all people who do not identify as white; it is important to note that POC often experience racialisation, while there are other groups who are white and experience racialisation (Travellers) or xenophobia (Eastern Europeans, and other white communities perceived as ‘foreigners’)

Other terms used include people of migrant background, Black and minority ethnic (BME), people from overseas, international people, people from diverse cultures, first/second generation migrants etc. These terms might be acceptable in the right circumstances, but **they may not be liked by some individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds, so it is always appropriate to ask.**

‘New communities’ might be used in common speech, but as a descriptor it is unaccepted by many minority ethnic people. It is important to reflect whether we

¹ For deepening your understanding of key terms and concepts for strengthening your Anti-racist practice take our e-learning course: [Understanding Racism for Youth Workers - NYCI E-Learning](#)

use the descriptor to refer to anyone that is not part of the ethnic majority for example, when do communities or people from migrant background stop being 'new', and who gets to decide this?

'New-Irish' is also commonly used but it implies that minority ethnic people that reside in Ireland would all like to describe themselves as Irish. Many won't ever become naturalised as Irish citizens. From those who naturalise as Irish citizens, not all will use Irish as a descriptor of their identity, and not many that would do so will refer to themselves as 'new'. As stated previously, it is important not to assume someone's identity. We need to ask ourselves when do communities become established and who gets to decide the threshold between 'new' and 'established'? Moreover, if people who settle in Ireland prefer to describe themselves as Irish, when are they *'allowed'* to do so - should this choice not be self-determined because it speaks to a person's sense of belonging, attachment and loyalty?

'Mixed race' might be a phrase commonly used in everyday speech but that does not mean it is acceptable; **we shouldn't use it to describe anyone else without asking them first how they describe their ethnic background.**

Alternative terms people often use to describe themselves are "**mixed heritage**" or "**mixed racial background**". Some young people might prefer to be referred to as a person of colour or identify as Black. We should always ask minority ethnic young people how they would describe their ethnic identity.

No term should be used with 'non' in front of as it denies a person's own identity.

REMEMBER

Identity– and **ethnic identity in particular**– **is self-defined and open to change**. Therefore, **we should not assume someone else's ethnicity** based on limited information, **nor should we assign an ethnicity for someone without asking them how they like to be described**. People from minority ethnic backgrounds increasingly prefer to describe themselves in terms of their new identities, their mixed identities, or their national identity. So, terms such as African Irish, Polish–Northern Irish, Nigerian–British, Indian Irish, Black–Irish have become more commonly used. This should be encouraged and supported as it denotes a sense of belonging in a community as much as a personal identity. For this reason, we use the term **minority ethnic background** to acknowledge the changeable but still concrete nature of a person's ethnic identity.

International Protection Applicants/Asylum seekers, Refugees, Migrants: understanding the immigration system

Migrant (or Immigrant) refers to people who have themselves, or through their parents, chosen and planned to live abroad. If they are residents of the European Economic Area (EEA) they can live and work without a visa in Ireland. In Northern Ireland after 2020 and as result of Brexit, UK has introduced a points–based immigration system that applies to anyone (including migrants from EEA) who wants to study, live, work in the UK. Migrants from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) must have a visa/permit to work, live or study in Ireland or the UK. Various permits with differing entitlements are available depending on each person's circumstances.

Undocumented Migrant is a person without a current valid immigration status. Some people may be undocumented for a brief period while they have their immigration issues dealt with. For other this can be a longer–term issue. People can become undocumented for many reasons, for example people who have been trafficked or a worker whose employer did not renew their work permit or a student who has completed their studies and stayed on. Undocumented migrants are unable to return to Ireland if they travel home, afraid to report abuse or exploitation, progress in their lives such as attending third level

NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL!

education and are afraid to step out of the shadows. Undocumented people in Ireland receive no social welfare so they are working, often in precarious employment situations or being taken advantage of.

Sometimes undocumented migrants are incorrectly referred to as 'illegal immigrants.'

No person can be illegal. Sometimes people seeking international protection/asylum seekers are described as 'illegal' which is incorrect as well, they have a right to be in Ireland while their case is being decided; it is an internationally **recognised human right to seek asylum.**

Being a **migrant** is **not an identity**, but an experience with a complex story behind it. The impacts of migration are multi-faceted on every aspect of someone's life, including on shaping their identity. Essentialising someone's identity based on an experience (migration) robs them the ownership of a full spectrum identity; this is how stereotypes are created.

The term 'migrant' is commonly used in everyday speech sometimes without distinction, nor acknowledgement that many young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are born and raised in Ireland, and might self-identify as their dual/multiple ethnic identities. In the current context, anyone who is perceived as not part of the white settled Irish majority might be inaccurately and stereotypically named as 'migrant'. This could lead to the perception and framing of our multicultural and diverse society being an 'immigration issue'. For example, in a report published in 2024 focusing on 18-29yr olds needs and perspectives, when asked what is one of the issues facing Ireland today, this group of young people placed 'immigration' on third place (28%), after housing and cost of living (NYCI 2024).

International Protection Applicants or Asylum

seekers² are people in the process of being assessed for refugee status. This is a legal process that can take anything from 10 months up to several years. Refugee status may be granted depending on the merits of the case and the ability of the person to show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin. *Those who are refused refugee status may be offered leave to remain or subsidiary protection.* Those who are deemed to not have a case approved will receive a deportation order.

In ROI the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) are responsible for providing accommodation to asylum seekers. IPAS are also known as **Direct Provision** accommodation centres around the country, meaning International Protection applicants are provided with accommodation and food, but with little privacy or independence. It has become a practice in the recent years that asylum seekers are accommodated in emergency accommodation centres while waiting for a place in an IPAS centre; most recently – since January 2023, applicants for international protection who do not have children are not prioritised for accommodation, meaning many are left out (i.e. to sleep roughly) the main reason invoked being the lack of accommodation capacity.

International Protection applicants receive €38.80 per week per adult, and €29.80 per child to cover essential items such as toiletries, clothes, phone calls and local travel. Those who are six months in the country and still in the application process are permitted to work. International Protection applicants are entitled to a medical card and medical services. Adult asylum seekers cannot avail of free state third-level education courses by right, but some sponsored spaces are available. The system of Direct Provision has been in place in ROI since 1999; it was established as a temporary solution and has been consistently criticised by human rights organisations across the country for the unjust treatment of people fleeing war, conflict, and persecution.

Refugees have been compelled to leave their country of origin because of conflict/war and/or a well-founded fear of persecution on different grounds

² If you are working with young people in IPAS or with young refugees check our dedicated Youth Info Hub for more information: [Youth Information for Young People in International Protection NYC!](#)

(ethnicity, religion, membership of a particular social group or political opinion etc). Ireland is a signatory to the “1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees”, which obliges Ireland to provide protection to people fleeing their country for the reasons above. Refugees are entitled to apply for family reunification to bring their immediate family members (within certain criteria) to Ireland. They are granted rights like Irish and British residents i.e. the right to work, to social welfare, to claim citizenship etc. However, it is important to note that refugees have not had the opportunity to prepare for life financially and psychologically in a new country.

*The terms asylum-seeker and refugee are often confused: an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim for refugee status has not yet been evaluated by the authorities in the country in which they apply; a refugee is someone who has their refugee status approved; **a legally binding status granted by the United Nations Convention that entitles them rights like host countries residents.***

Temporary Protection Directive

The Temporary Protection Directive is a law introduced by the European Union in 2001, and adopted into Irish law in 2015, involving a special procedure to deal with ‘mass influx’ of people fleeing war, conflict, and persecution. While it is in place since 2001, **it was triggered for the first time in March 2022 in response to the war in Ukraine**, and it has been extended to March 2027. All people from Ukraine seeking asylum in Ireland and in Europe are protected by this law, which means granting immediate protection to people without the need for individual applications for International Protection. Currently in Ireland and EU countries, only Ukrainian residents are named under the Temporary Protection Directive. People under Temporary Protection receive a residence permit for the duration of the, and access to employment, accommodation, social welfare, healthcare, and education for children.

In the Republic of Ireland (but also in other European countries) there is currently **a two-tier rights system for people fleeing war and persecution**. Temporary Protection Directive (applying only to Ukrainians currently) and International Protection (applying to all other nationalities, mostly from outside EU countries). The **two-tier system** has been criticised due to its underlying institutional racism traceable in the **distinctions between people when it comes to rights and entitlements**; in the youth sector this two-tier system manifested in differential allocation of funding and provision of youth services.

More information about Temporary Protection [here](#).

DEMOGRAPHICS



In the **Republic of Ireland the last census from 2022** found out that:

- The total population of the Republic as of April 2022 consists of **5 149 139 people**
- 77% of total people residing in Ireland for Census 2022 identified as White Irish
- A citizenship question was asked for the first time on the Census 2022 form. Previously a question was asked on Nationality.
- The question on ethnic group or background was updated for Census 2022 with new response categories added including Roma, Indian/ Pakistani/ Bangladeshi and Arab.
- The demographic data for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds varies throughout the Republic of Ireland but cultural diversity is widespread and is the norm in most towns and villages.

The table below shows **the breakdown of ethnicities for young people aged 10-24** living in Republic of Ireland:

Ethnicity	Percentage of 10-24 yr olds
White Irish	76%
White Irish Traveller	1 %
Any Other White	8.30 %

Black or Black Irish African	2.40
Black or Black Irish- any other Black background	0.20 %
Asian or Asian Irish - Chinese	0.70 %
Asian or Asian Irish- Indian/ Pakistani/ Bangladeshi	1.66 %
Asian or Asian Irish - any other Asian background	1.10 %
Arab	0.60 %
Roma	0.40 %
Other including mixed background	1.70 %
Not stated	6 %

In **Northern Ireland the last census from 2021** found out that:

- The total population of Northern Ireland consists of **1,903,173 people**.
- 96.6% of the population identifies as part of a white ethnic group. It is important to mention that people with European background (both from and outside European Union) are included in this number, while Republic of Ireland has a separate category for them 'any other white'
- The total number of people identifying as minority ethnic stood at 65,600 people (3.4% of the population).
- 4.6% of people aged 3 or over had a main language other than English, with English not being the main language for 3.1% of the population.
- The most prevalent main languages were recorded as being Polish (20,100 people), Lithuanian (9,000), Irish (6,000), Romanian (5,600) and Portuguese (5,000).

The table below shows the breakdown of ethnic groups for the **total** population in **Northern Ireland**:

Ethnic group	Percentage /total population
White	96.55%
Irish Traveller	0.14%
Roma	0.08%
Indian	0.52%
Chinese	0.50%
Filipino	0.23%
Pakistani	0.08%

Arab	0.10%
Other Asian	0.28%
Black African	0.42%
Black Other	0.16%
Mixed	0.76%
Other ethnicities	0.19 %

In order to determine how inclusive your youth group **is it is appropriate to collect data on the ethnicity and languages spoken** of those that are attending. More guidance on how to do this is provided later in this chapter.

NEEDS AND ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

When working with young people from minority ethnic backgrounds it is important to remember that **they are young people first**, while they do have needs and barriers that should be addressed for them **to be able participate in their own terms** and to feel a sense of belonging in the youth setting. At the same time - and more importantly- is to acknowledge that **minority ethnic young people are not a monolithic group but a diverse and effervescent one**. Each have complex identities and sets of experiences in navigating life with the white settled Irish majority. This includes coping with the increasing assimilationist pressures from the ethnic majority and narrow notions of what it means to be Irish.

This requires constantly learning and adapting your youth work practice, looking both at the needs of the minority ethnic young people you are working with, and at the wider social context impacting them.

This section provides key information about the needs and issues arising for minority ethnic young people that we have compiled from our programme's evidence-based research throughout time.

EXPERIENCING RACISM AND/OR XENOPHOBIA

Through our engagement, youth consultations and research over time we have heard from minority ethnic young people about their experiences of racism and/or xenophobia in Ireland. When working with ethnic minority young people it is important to acknowledge and address the systemic barriers they face in Irish society and to consciously work towards creating more inclusive youth spaces. We cannot talk about the needs and issues of minority ethnic young people without talking about the harmful impact discrimination and racism is having on many of them, which subsequently influences their engagement and/or supports needed in youth settings.

The youth work sector can play a significant role in tackling racism and supporting minority ethnic young people experiencing racism and standing in solidarity with communities affected by it. It is therefore critical to establish a shared and clear understanding of racism³. NYCI supports and uses the definition of racism formulated by the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR):

“Any action, practice, law, speech or incident which has the effect (whether intentional or not) of undermining anyone’s enjoyment of their human rights, based on their actual or perceived ethnic or national origin or background, where that background is that of a marginalised or historically subordinated group. Racism carries connotations of violence because the dehumanisation of ethnic groups has been historically enforced through violence”

We understand racism to be structural, institutional, and historical, and **not just an individualised experience**. It is structurally **embedded within our culture** as a phenomenon of domination and power, which is reflected through, and reproduced by, institutions, practices, policies, and cultural norms, and through them has the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals or groups, based on their ‘race’ or ethnicity (including nationality and membership of the Traveller community). Instances of racism are experienced by young people, families and youth leaders who are:

- Black (experiencing Afrophobia),

³ For comprehensive and structured learning, see our dedicated e-learning course: [Understanding Racism for Youth Workers – NYCI E-Learning](#)

- Other people of colour (POC) groups, (Anti-migrant racism),
- Muslim or other minority religion (Islamophobia or Anti-Muslim racism, Antisemitism etc.),
- Travellers or Roma (Antigypsyism or Anti-Traveller racism),

Xenophobia is a fear/prejudice/dislike/hatred towards those who are from other countries. It is connected to Nationalism where a person/group hold the ideology that their nation is superior to others.

The importance of addressing racism is most keenly felt by young people who are more likely than other age groups to see racial discrimination as an important issue:

- For instance a RED C poll carried by NYCI found out that 80% of those aged 18 – 24 recognised that racism is having a negative impact on Irish society (compared with 63% on average)
- The same research shows that only 21% in the general population stated that racism is an issue in the area they live; this may be due to **lack of awareness** on manifestations of racism at structural and institutional level (*from unconscious bias and microaggressions to policies that exclude and silence minority ethnic people*)
- **people tend to not see racism that is not overt**, blatant or experienced at an individual level.
- Many young people we heard from in our youth consultations state that **when they report racism** (in schools, for example) **their experience is dismissed as being 'not racist'**; this invalidates their experience, causing more hurt and impedes young people to report instances of racism in the future.⁴



⁴ For more on the importance of tackling racism in youth settings, and on reporting see the next dedicated sections of this chapter

In the following sections we will refer to the particular needs of some groups acknowledging that this categorisation involves considerable limitations.

Please note we have a dedicated chapter (Chapter 4 of Access all Areas) focusing on working with Traveller young people.

NEWLY ARRIVED COMMUNITIES

For newly arrived communities settling in a new country can be a difficult process. It may take years, even a generation or two to develop a real sense of belonging in a new country; there is a question whether in a context of hostility to anyone perceived as 'different' this can ever happen. Your organisation can help young people who have experienced migration to make this transition. This includes the opportunity to connect with other peers, make friends and have fun, to increase their proficiency in English (in the cases where English is not their first language), to be acknowledged for themselves and not stereotyped by their status or their ethnicity (migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, undocumented, Nigerian, Polish, Muslim etc.) and to have time for themselves. Moving to another country involves facing many life changes and adaptations for young people and their parents including finding employment, securing accommodation, registering for education, learning a new language, forming social connections and adjusting to life in a new culture.

Many people struggle to find the help and relevant information they need to settle in their new country. Often there is so much information, or conflicting information, making it difficult to filter out what is important and what is factual. There are various and many stakeholders involved in what is called currently 'integration work', which can sometimes overwhelm people in their process of adjustment and in navigating all the information disseminated to them. More often the informal networks used by the majority culture to convey information are not available to

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SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED
MIGRATION TO NAVIGATE
THE TRANSITION.**

newcomers, since they lack connections and social capital in their new area of residence.

Family life, language, and cultural heritage

Younger people will usually pick up a new language much quicker than their parents and some parents may always struggle to learn English. Because of this, young people might be expected to interpret and translate for their parents when accessing services such as housing, health, employment, education, youth organisations etc. This can result in more pressures on young people as parents become dependent on their children. In the context of youth work, low English proficiency can create barriers, especially where youth workers want to inform parents about youth work activities and subsequently need to seek permission from parents for children to attend activities etc.

Inter-generational differences can be an additional challenge and involve negotiation within immigrant families. Parents may expect or hope that their children will adopt the traditional values and roles of their country of origin. Meanwhile at school, local clubs and any other social contexts young people will face pressures to adopt the values and roles of Irish society. Parents may be inclined to limit their children's involvement in youth organisations not only because they might be concerned that their children will adopt social and cultural practices which could be in tension with their own, but moreover because they wish their children to be safe, and their cultural identity recognised, respected and celebrated in the youth groups.

Parental concerns

Just like other families, parents of migrant background are concerned for the safety of their children. This can be intensified amongst families who have migrated because they may not have had sufficient circumstances to develop trusting relationships with established local people. In the current context, where hateful narratives towards migrants are gaining more traction, we should expect parents to be more protective, as their distrust and fear could justifiably increase. Parents are unlikely to trust organisations – including youth groups – that have not been personally recommended. These recommendations will be absent if trusting relationships and social networks have not proactively and purposefully

been developed by local groups from host community and organisations. These relationships will be harder to establish for people who do not have proficient English or are not confident speaking English, and if not enough resources have been put in place by the relevant services to overcome language barriers.

Other parental concerns include:

- Not enough information and visibility in the local area on the local youth projects and youth clubs and what they do
- Unfamiliarity with the Irish/UK way of practicing youth work. Youth work might be named and practiced differently across the world
- Not having the information on the practical aspects of joining a youth project or youth club
- Fear for the safety of their children getting to and from youth groups (such as facing racism, bullying, harassment)
- Fear for the well-being of their children in social groups (such as facing exclusion or isolation)
- Concerns over financial issues and the cost of activities, membership fees or uniforms
- Concern that youth group activities will impact on study time and consequently on future opportunities
- Concern that youth group activities will clash with family and care responsibilities

Young people's concerns

Young people themselves may also have concerns or fears. Some may not feel very comfortable in social situations. Social codes of behaviour may differ from

the ones they have become used to in school therefore **they are constantly adapting and require time and support** in navigating the various spaces they are part of. This can be more difficult if young people have low English language proficiency or lack of confidence speaking English. For many it **can be very difficult to join a new group without having a friend or trusted person** present. Young people may fear being perceived as different as more often they will have experienced discrimination or racism. Most will not be familiar with the geographical limitations that some youth organisations work within, which is important to be communicated. This can be especially difficult where their established social networks cross geographical boundaries – for example they may travel some distance from their residence to attend school, place of worship, any other social activities. Other rules may also be confusing, for example, many young people might not understand the system of being put on a waiting list to get a place in a group and may see it instead as a way of rejecting them.

SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM /UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Some young people arrive in Ireland without family members to seek asylum.

In the **Republic of Ireland** if they are under 18, they are placed under the care of Tusla. If they are seeking asylum (known as **separated children seeking asylum**), they will stay in care until their 18th birthday when they must enter the adult Direct Provision accommodation system if they haven't yet received a positive decision on their refugee status. Then referred to as aged-out minors; they are entitled to continue in education beyond the Leaving Certificate, but they face economical barriers as they are required to pay international fees so access to third-level courses is dependent on receiving a scholarship.

⁵Meanwhile, the institutional conditions of International Protection accommodation system can have a devastating effect on their potential and aspirations.

In **Northern Ireland** separated children seeking asylum are particularly vulnerable. If their asylum application fails, the Government will seek to identify

⁵ For more on this check our dedicated Youth Info Hub: [Youth Information-under 18 – National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

YOUR ORGANISATION CAN OFFER A VALUABLE DIVERSION FROM THESE STRESSES AND A CHANCE TO BE TREATED AS A PERSON IN THEIR OWN RIGHT RATHER THAN AS SOMEONE WITH A PARTICULAR STATUS.

appropriate facilities in the country where they came from so that they can be returned.

YOUNG INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION APPLICANTS AND REFUGEES

For all International protection applicants, the stresses of living in a new country will also be compounded by the **memory of past traumas** that made them flee their countries of origin in the first place. These experiences will have a profound **impact on young people's sense of safety and identity**, and their **ability to trust and develop relationships**. Young people may experience anxiety, difficulties in establishing friendships, low self-esteem, survivor guilt, aggressive outbursts or emotional numbness, sadness, withdrawal, sleeping problems, intrusive thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder etc. These experiences will severely limit the young person's ability to concentrate, to retain information and to attend activities on a regular basis. **Your organisation** offers a valuable diversion from these stressors and a **safer space** where they can be **treated as a person in their own right and human complexity rather than as someone with a particular status**. Young refugees and asylum seekers may require extra assistance in educational support because their previous education might have been disrupted. Some might have missed out on education because they might have spent a significant part of their childhood in refugee camps, on dangerous and long journeys seeking safety, and/or in politically unstable societies.

DUAL AND/OR MULTIPLE ETHNIC IDENTITY YOUNG PEOPLE

Mixed relationships and culturally diverse families are becoming widespread in contemporary Ireland so working with children and young people of dual or multiple heritage is also more prevalent. Some of



these children and young people will describe themselves as Irish and may not mention their dual or multiple ethnicities. For many, **straddling two or more cultures and adopting dual or multiple cultural identities is challenging** particularly due to majority ethnic **judgements** and perceptions of difference.

Our research⁶ (2017) found that **young people often felt an affinity with more than one national or cultural identity**. This was particularly the case for those who were born in Ireland or who arrived here as children and for those that had become naturalized Irish citizens. For this reason, it is considered good practice to ask what the ethnic identity of young people's parents are, as well as what languages are spoken at home, because the parents' culture or migrant status may play a significant part in the identity construction of the young person you are working with.

Some young people will strongly connect with and maintain the culture(s), language(s) and values of their parents while others will choose to adopt aspects of Irish culture at the loss of much of the culture(s), language (s) and values of their parents. Other young people will **display aspects of both/all heritage cultures and adopt a double or multiple cultural identity**. Research shows that this last option contributes to a greater sense of recognition and belonging for young people, and it is this model that intercultural and inclusive youth work seek to embed.

Your organisation can do a lot to support young people in their journeys of self-identity and belonging, **by doing activities that value both the cultural heritages** present within your group (including the languages spoken at home) alongside understanding and valuing 'Irish' or 'Northern Irish' cultural values, norms and traditions. This is also **very important for the white settled Irish/Northern Irish young people** in your group who equally need to integrate in what is becoming a more culturally diverse society.

Parental expectations

Like most parents, first generation **migrant parents want their children to be safe**, to do well in school and have good prospects. For most of them, the experience of migration involved many adaptations and sacrifices, while overcoming many obstacles to secure better opportunities for their children than

⁶ [Make Minority A Priority - Complete Research Report - National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

they had. It is important to acknowledge that **the experience of migration involves loss** as well: of support systems, of connections and relationships—extended families and communities—, of feeling respected and being valued for what they bring at the table. For many of them the experience of migration meant underemployment and compromise, as often they might haven't had access to the jobs they were qualified for due to their migration status (e.g. qualifications from country of origin not being recognised in Ireland/Northern Ireland) and/or structural barriers (e.g. negative perceptions of their ethnicity, lack of support networks). Many might have navigated discriminatory workplaces, lower pay and humiliation, stigmatisation and exclusion in accessing accommodation and/or services, or even overt workplace exploitation. The **pressures to provide for their children** to have better prospects than themselves can sometimes translate in them being inclined to place many expectations on their children to do well in school and succeed.

Other parental concerns:

- Fear of their children losing their connection to their own culture and language: parents face pressures on bridging and mediating between their own cultural heritage where there might be more emphasis on communal values, collective care and expected contribution from each member of the family, respect and reverence for authority figures (*depending on culture of origin, there are various degrees and nuances*), and Irish/Northern Irish values where more emphasis is placed on the individual freedom and autonomy.
- Concern for their children's safety and wellbeing, in that their children will need to face similar prejudice and/or discrimination that they might have faced in various settings while settling in host country
- Fear for their children's safety in the context of more overt public hostility and/or street harassment towards anyone perceived as different from white Irish
- Concern that youth and social activities will impact on study time, family and communal responsibilities, which may affect their overall school performance and prospects

ETHNIC IDENTITY IS DEFINED AND UNDERSTOOD IN IRISH POLICY AS GROUNDED IN SHARED CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS AND A SENSE OF BELONGING AND IS NOT FIXED ONLY TO GENETIC HERITAGE (NCCRI 2007: 6).

Young people's concerns

Young people are concerned about **being accepted for who they** are no matter what descriptors they use at a particular time in their self-identity journey. While descriptors such as Black-Irish and Asian-Irish are firmly established in the Republic's census this does not appear to be filtering into everyday acceptance; young people we heard from spoke **about dual (or multiple) Irish identity being seen as less authentic than a White -Irish only identity**. These fixed perceptions of people, especially placed on those young people with mixed backgrounds, can impact heavily over a sustained period. It denies them their individual identity which makes them doubt themselves. It is important to ensure that any sense of alienation is tackled by **recognising the multiple ways and places where the young people might belong**.


Young people may be concerned about youth leaders and youth workers not being able to tune in the **complexity and diversity of experiences of migration, belonging and negotiating expectations from family and society**. In the journey of self-identity and belonging they may go through different stages, and they need to be supported, allowed to oscillate and to be always accepted by whatever identity descriptor they use at a particular stage.

Young people from dual/multiple ethnicities can feel a greater disconnect from culture(s) of their parents; many can grow up without an in-depth



knowledge of their heritage culture(s) and feel that absence in their life. A key issue for these young people is **negotiating differing and sometimes conflicting expectations from parents and society**. Significant areas of conflict include expectations around respect and adherence to cultural and religious practices; heightened levels of fear among parents for their children; as well as different attitudes to discipline, and personal autonomy, especially in relation to career choice. A common expectation is in relation to maintaining their heritage language which parents see as the direct link their children have to their culture of origin. Another key expectation is in relation to the **young people achieving and doing well**, and in this the migration experience of parents plays a big part in connection to the sacrifices that have been made by them to give their children new opportunities.

From these reasons **working with families** in the context of intercultural youth work is key. In supporting the young people, it **is critical to support their family relationships** which can sometimes come under pressure as the young people **negotiate home culture and social culture**. Our programme's research and consultations show that ethnic minority-only youth groups or spaces where young people share their common experiences are important in supporting them to navigate intergenerational tensions and their self-identity journeys.



**IN SUPPORTING THE YOUNG PEOPLE, IT IS CRITICAL TO
SUPPORT THEIR FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS WHICH CAN
SOMETIMES COME UNDER PRESSURE AS THE YOUNG PEOPLE
NEGOTIATE HOME CULTURE AND SOCIAL CULTURE**

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

PLANNING, PROMOTING AND DELIVERING PROGRAMMES TO MINORITY ETHNIC YOUNG PEOPLE

When planning and delivering youth activities to minority ethnic young people the approach we promote is **inclusive youth work practice**, in which key is the **deep listening** alongside with making **adaptations** based on what you hear from this group and the issues and needs coming up for them. Inclusive practice will fit within the key components of the youth work delivery – from planning to practice, to monitoring and reflection, and involves making adaptations and **constantly improving**.

We all have to start from somewhere to develop inclusive practice, therefore in the following sections you can find **useful guidance to support you** in getting more confident in your practice: from how to reach out to minority ethnic young people, to assessing and responding to their needs, organisational communications and delivery of programmes, and so much more.





PLANNING AN EFFECTIVE SERVICE

To **plan an effective service** that is intentionally inclusive of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds it is helpful to **start with the following steps:**

- Determine demographics in your area- how many people in your local area identify themselves as being from a minority ethnicity or nationality and identify the main heritage cultures and languages spoken in your area
- Be proactive in learning more about the minority ethnic communities in your area such as their religious and cultural backgrounds
- Identify the needs, issues and barriers to youth work that might face people from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Find out about services in your area that work with minority ethnic groups
- Attend local and regionally based forums where you can meet minority ethnic-led groups and/or organisations
- Network with local schools and places of worship
- Prepare your staff, volunteers and the young people you currently work with by doing cultural awareness and cultural competency trainings, and anti-racism programmes
- Have in mind how you will ensure opportunities for long-term engagement as one-off projects with no opportunities for continued contact can damage the trust you have built up

The following section expands on some of the practical advice outlined above.

Are you reaching the young people from a minority ethnic background in your community?

To discover if you are reaching the minority ethnic young people in your community you must **first know the ethnic identity of the young people already attending your organisation**. One way of doing this is by including an **ethnic identifier** question on your registration form, if you use one.

A suggested wording is **highlighted here**.

Alternatively you can collate this information through a conversation:



What is your ethnic/national identity?

[Give your answer as you do to your friends. Examples others have given to this question include Irish, Northern Irish, Irish-Traveller, Polish, Nigerian, Nigerian Irish, Lithuanian-Northern Irish, Kurdish etc.]

What is the ethnic/national identity of your: Parents/guardians?

1) ----- 2)

(This question is asked to record what other cultural influences play a significant part in your life)

What languages do you speak at home? 1)

----- 2) ----- 3)

If you practise a religion, please state?

It is important to tell young people and their parents that the information is collected to help plan inclusive and appropriate youth activities, and stress that it is both confidential (shared only within the organisation) and optional. Best practice models indicate that it is appropriate for all young people over the age of 11 to identify their ethnicity for themselves and for parents to choose the ethnicity for younger children. It is important to be present to answer any questions young people or parents may have about filling out this form.

Questions on religious practice are also appropriate so that you can plan effectively, as are questions on the language/s spoken at home. An example of a **full registration form that includes all the questions a youth group might need** is included in **Chapter 1** of Access All Areas.

NB: Asking someone personal questions, especially around their migration or asylum-seeking experience, status or circumstances, could be seen as prying and insensitive. It could bring up painful memories or it could make someone feel ashamed. Only ask questions that you would answer about your own life, that you would easily share with others.

*We also want to bring attention to what we heard from our youth consultations particularly from young people from mixed background: young people report being asked quite often in different settings and daily conversations **'where are you from?'** sometimes followed by **'where are you really from?'** when they identify themselves with the Irish/Northern Irish town or county they were born and/or grew up; the question of origin and particularly the reiteration of it as **'where are you really from?'** assumes that dual (or multiple) Irish identity is less authentic than a settled White-Irish only identity; this impacts negatively and **makes them doubt themselves and feel they don't belong**. While the question **'where are you from?'** might be acceptable in certain circumstances and curiosity can be indeed invoked, if is one of the first questions coming into your mind when starting a conversation with someone from a minority ethnic background that you just met, you might want to bring your awareness to it: ask yourself – does continuing the conversation depend on their response?*

Determining the demographics of minority ethnic young people in your community

Having collected data on the group of young people you are working with you should then compare the information with the demographics from your own catchment area and determine if the young people from a minority ethnic background in your area are represented proportionately in your youth group.

One of the ways to determine if the young people you are working with reflect the ethnic makeup of your community is to compare your data with the statistics from local schools.

In the **Republic of Ireland** this data is collected for all schools, and you can request it from the statistics section of the Department of Education if you cannot source it directly from your local schools.

In **Northern Ireland** this information is available from the Department of Education statistics and research section or directly from your local school. Data is collected for primary and post-primary schools.

See [Chapter 1 of 'Access All Areas' resource](#) for a more detailed explanation on collating and comparing data on ethnicity and religion.



SEE [CHAPTER 1 OF 'ACCESS ALL AREAS'](#) FOR A MORE DETAILED EXPLANATION ON COLLATING AND COMPARING DATA ON ETHNICITY AND RELIGION.

OFFERING AN EFFECTIVE SERVICE

Here are some guidelines and support for you in **offering** an **effective service** to young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in your community:

- Allow more recruitment time for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds to become involved in your organisation. Developing interagency partnerships is a positive way to reach the target group. Advertise in minority ethnic papers and use the internet to advertise your programme. Translate your basic information and be very specific – explain exactly where and when the group meets
- You might be concerned about using new terminology – use the guidance at the beginning of this chapter to support you in that. Be open to change and remember it is better to act, rather than not, for fear of not knowing all the right the words. Mistakes might happen, see them as a valuable learning opportunity
- Seek input from available expertise wherever possible. Share your experiences and learning with others. Network with other support services
- Consider that young people from minority ethnic backgrounds may not have adequate financial resources to take part in many activities. Transport to and from activities may also be a problem, particularly in rural and isolated area, and particularly for young people living in International Protection
- Do not expect young people to be the representative for their culture, and do not expect them to educate you and the other young people in the group about their culture. They may not want to be differentiated from others while in a youth group setting
- Be aware of gender dynamics and gender sensitivities of the ethnic diversity within your group to better plan and implement your activities

The following sections expands on some of the practical advice outlined above

Working with other services or groups

Many organisations that work with minority ethnic adults, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers do not have the expertise or capacity to work with young people. As a result young people from minority ethnic backgrounds often miss out on valuable youth work opportunities.



One way to meet these young people's needs is to develop collaborations with specialist migrant and minority ethnic support organisations that will be able to provide advice and links to the young people. Other ways would be to connect and develop good relationships with grass-roots local minority ethnic groups, local community leaders, churches and mosques.

In the **Republic of Ireland** contact details for local organisations – including minority ethnic led organisations are available from your county ETB Youth Officer, your Local Authority Integration Team (established in city/county councils), local community/county forum, your local city, and from organisations such as New Communities Partnership⁷. Attending an interagency forum or network can be a useful way to network with many groups, including minority ethnic led groups. In **Northern Ireland** minority ethnic led organisations can be found through the Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality⁸ and a number of locally based forums.

⁷ New Communities Partnership membership list www.newcommunities.ie/

⁸ More details here: www.facebook.com/nicre.org/

Specialised organisations – working with young people who have experienced torture or trauma

Young people who have experienced torture or trauma should be engaging with **specialist support services**. Make sure they are aware of the specialist support services they can access. At the same time it is important that the young people **continue to engage with your youth organisation**.

Experiences of torture and trauma can seriously reduce a person's ability to concentrate. It can also affect a person's ability to make clear judgements and set safe boundaries for themselves. Specialised psychosocial support may be needed depending on the young person's personal history – develop relationships with service providers that can offer the appropriate support where necessary

To support someone who has experienced trauma or post-traumatic stress the following guidelines are important:

- Do not ask the young person about their past experiences.
- If a young person starts to talk about a past traumatic event bring them gently back into the present moment, to the activity they are doing now. Explain that this space is not a helpful place for them to talk about a past event – that should be done with a qualified person in a safe space
- Some young people who experience trauma may see your engagement with them and your concern as a friendship whereas you will see it as a professional service. Explain your role and commitment clearly so that the young person's trust is not broken, and the professional relationship can be maintained

DELIVERING AN EFFECTIVE SERVICE

To **deliver an effective service** to young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in your community consider the following:

- Create a welcoming and safe environment for minority ethnic people –this can be expressed through your organisation ethos that is displayed visibly
- Acknowledge, respect and celebrate difference – have visual imagery in your centres that show you are open to diversity e.g. images of people from different parts of the world, welcome signs in several languages etc.
- Listen to what the young person wants to tell you, especially about their culture or country of origin
- Attending social events can be daunting for minority ethnic young people; it might be because there are learning new social codes (in the cases of young people recently moved in the country), or they might have been made to feel different and excluded
- Be flexible in your programming – explore what activities are the most relevant, translate materials when language barriers are identified and be patient
- Developing new skills is often a key motivator for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds and their parents in getting involved in youth work opportunities– consider programmes that develop new skills in consultation with young people and their parents
- Art, drama, photography, video, music, sports and games work well especially if you notice language barriers
- Culture proof your activities (ask yourself will it work cross culturally?)
- Talking to young people and parents directly is the key to understanding and meeting their specific needs and allaying their concerns or issues

The following sections expands on some of the practical advice outlined above

Involving parents and families

Historically youth organisations across the island, have focused on the young person as an individual in their own right and close contact with parents has often been limited. However, to engage with young people from a minority ethnic background it is important to **involve parents from the outset to allay any of their concerns**. Youth work as we practice it in Ireland/Northern Ireland might be unfamiliar to parents and they can be suspicious of it. Some families from minority ethnic backgrounds may not allow or may limit their children's involvement in youth organisations due to the concerns we mentioned in the previous sections of the chapter.

It is important to always **provide clear information to families** about the programmes you offer and communicate transparently the meaning, values of youth work and what outcomes for young people you are expecting to achieve.

If you are running programs that discuss relationships, sexual health or STDs/STIs, make sure that you speak to parents or elders in the community. **Adapt your programme** to the needs and sensitivities of the ethnic diversity within your group, **in consultation with parents**.



**INVOLVE PARENTS FROM THE OUTSET TO
ALLAY ANY OF THEIR CONCERNS**

When you work with families from minority ethnic backgrounds you will need to **gain and maintain the trust of families** through continuous communication and engagement. **Best practice strategies include:**

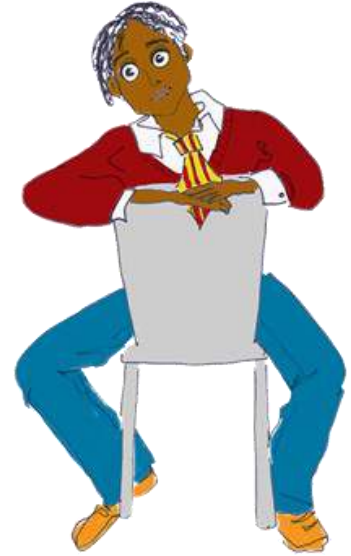
- Reassure parents of the ethos of your organisation, the safety guidelines you follow and the benefits of youth work
- Have clear information (where possible translated) about your organisation, what activities you run, how they will be run, at what times and where they will be run
- Work closely with local services that already have contact with parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. You may be able to attend a group that parents attend and explain your programme
- Have open days at your organisation for parents where they can meet the youth workers face to face
- Always make a point of introducing yourself and having a chat with parents who visit the centre or drop their children off
- If a young person has not been given permission to attend your programme or to take part in a particular activity offer to meet with their parents in person
- Consider holding parent events (such as mother & daughter evenings or father & son events)
- Be aware that in some cultural groups the father or male relative or elder in the faith community may have the final decision-making role
- Be careful to allay parents' concerns about privacy; they may not want to share information about their personal background, and they may be wary of 'Irish' curiosity
- Invite parents/older siblings to get involved as volunteers

Communications- written, verbal and translations

Language barriers might exist in your groups, for young people and/or their families. At the same time **do not to assume language issues just because you are engaging with minority ethnic groups** – there are different needs among individuals and communities. After identifying the needs of the ethnic minority young people you are planning to or already working with, and you notice that language (verbal and/or written) could be an obstacle in fully engaging with your programmes, try to adapt your communication. For instance:

- Introduce written communication gently at first to determine skill levels before relying on it as a key communication tool or in activities
- It is always good to give information on meeting times, places and dates in written form as well as verbally
- Repeat instructions if it is not clear that someone has understood
- Don't be afraid to ask someone to repeat themselves if you have not understood what they have said – give your conversations time; ask questions to clarify things but make sure you have understood enough to move the communication forward
- Telephone conversations might be more difficult for people from minority ethnic backgrounds who don't have English proficiency so they can be hesitant to ring up for information, registration etc. A drop-in service should be provided so that the person can get information and familiarise themselves with your premises
- Translated permission notes/forms for activities would be useful in cases of language barriers. Consider asking someone relevant in your community to help you translate your current forms into the main languages spoken by residents in your local area

When providing information about your organisation make sure that you avoid jargon wherever possible and provide an explanation for terms that people from minority ethnic backgrounds may not be familiar with such as youth work, participation, volunteering etc. Do not use acronyms without explanations of what it stands for. Proof all your information for its use of 'plain English'⁹. Try to use short sentences and paragraphs. In promotional material, where possible, include photos of your staff next to their name. Use words such as 'we' and 'you' so that your documents explain things from the reader's point of view.



Interpreting (verbal communication)

You may work with young people or parents who are not proficient English speakers. **If you are communicating through an interpreter, it is important to remember:**

- Everyone has a **right to confidentiality and professionalism**, so do not use children, relatives, friends or unqualified bilingual staff members as interpreters in any conversations that might be personal or sensitive
- Use short statements and **avoid use of jargon or the vernacular in conversations**. If necessary, repeat what you are trying to say using different and simpler terms
- Interpreting can take place face to face or alternatively over the phone.
- Look at and engage with the service user and not with the interpreter

⁹ A useful guide for 'plain English' writing is available at www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/howto.pdf

Games and activities

Many youth organisations use fun games as a way of engaging young people and developing teamwork in a group. Many of these activities may not be culturally appropriate for some young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

If you are working with **young people that have fled war or conflict** (young refugees, young people living in IPAS accommodation) you need to adapt your games or activities, so they **do not**:

- Contain war-like themes e.g. laser games, paint ball
- Contain high challenge activities where young people are asked to take sudden or unexpected risks
- Make people reveal details about their migration story
- Lead to a feeling of loss of control e.g. blindfolding
- Contain surprises that could trigger traumatic memories e.g. loud noises, activities involving boats (ask first)
- Involve camping or hostelling as it could be too close to unpleasant life experiences from present or the past

Many of your activities can be easily adapted to ensure the involvement of young people from a minority ethnic background. For example, if you are running a physical contact game then split the group into separate groups for males and females.



Other adaptations for your games and activities when working with a culturally diverse group that are **important to consider**:

- Refrain from games referencing spirits, witches, devils etc; in some cultures there is a strong belief in these, with significant fears attached
- Be careful in planning activities that can invade personal space or involve physical touching e.g. asking people to hold hands or carry each other. It is always appropriate to ask young people if they feel comfortable
- Be aware of gender dynamics and sensitivities of the cultures within your youth group
- Refrain from games or activities that might make people feel ashamed or uncomfortable (losing face is experienced differently across different cultures)

If you are planning to run any activities that involve some of the things mentioned in the lists above **take the time to explain the activity in advance** and **allow young people a choice as to whether to participate**.

Sports and outdoor activities

Barriers to participation in structured sport include lack of knowledge about sporting associations especially Irish sports such as hurling, gaelic football, rounders etc. Another issue for some is the lack of access to a car so transport to activities can be difficult. Similarly, the cost of participating in structured sport and outdoor activities, such as registration fees, uniform, kit and equipment costs can be too high- cost and transport issues are significant barriers, particularly to young people and families currently in the International Protection system.

Gender issues can also arise. Some cultural groups may associate certain sports as gender specific. It is also important to consider that other sports outside of the traditionally Irish ones are hard to access or very expensive, and many times they are not offered as an option. Concerns about the dress codes in sporting and outdoor activities may arise but solutions are usually available.

To increase participation in sport, you can provide practical support to the young people in the following ways:



- Where language barriers are observed, translate information about sports and outdoor activities
- Subsidise registration fees and uniforms
- Arrange transport to events
- Introduce a simplified registration process i.e. not too many forms
- Network with schools or youth organisations
- Introduce them to role models from diverse cultures who play sport such as the female soccer group Hijabs and Hat tricks¹⁰

¹⁰ Learn more about the group here: www.sari.ie

Gender sensitivity

Young women from minority ethnic families often miss out on youth work opportunities because activities provided are not segregated by gender. Some families may not allow their daughters to attend activities where young men are present. This may apply to all activities or just particular activities e.g. swimming. This varies depending on the religious or cultural values of the parents and on how they interpret and practice their religion.

If you speak to parents about their concerns, you may be able to work out a way to adapt your activity. For example, if a young woman is not allowed to attend an overnight camp alone you may allow their parent to attend as a volunteer support worker.

Other strategies **to promote the access of young women** include:



- Using female tutors and coaches
- If your organisation runs activities which require a uniform such as netball or soccer, allow modifications to suit specific cultural customs
- If you run swimming activities consult on the need for gender specific sessions and whether all-in-one swimsuits should be the accepted rule for females

TAKE ACTIVE STEPS TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS RACISM AT YOUR ORGANISATION INCLUDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLEAR AND VISIBLE RULES, POLICIES AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES.

PREVENTING AND TACKLING RACISM

Racism is a serious concern for many people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Evidence shows that incidents of racism increasing in Ireland.¹¹

In our consultations with young people and throughout our research we found out about the many places and instances in which this takes place; more worryingly we heard about the prevalence of racism in schools¹². Youth settings can act as supportive and safer spaces for those minority ethnic young people experiencing racism. That can happen only if the youth workers and youth organisations are committed and intentional about tackling this issue and support the young people impacted by it. Racism has a major impact on the mental health, sense of identity, sense of self and well-being. Moreover, if these young people are not taken seriously when they report it to youth workers and trusted adults, or their experience dismissed—it creates more hurt and they will lose trust.

How we prevent and respond to racism is shaped by how deeply we understand it¹³. Therefore, organisations must actively and continually build this understanding while taking sustained action to prevent and address racism through clear, visible rules, policies, and procedures that promote accountability and safety for all

Best practice shows that actively promoting the values of interculturalism, of inclusion and solidarity, and increasing the knowledge about different cultural groups at your organisation are protective factors in the face of racist views and attitudes.

Here are some **practical steps** you can take:

¹¹ Annual reports from Garda Ethnic Liaison Division and INAR Ireland [iReport Reports of Racism](#)

¹² NYCI published a dedicated report in 2024: [The-Silenced-Struggles-report-final.pdf](#), and in 2026 Irish Secondary School- Level's Union published research on this: [ISSU-Racism-in-Schools-Report-2026.pdf](#)

¹³ For deepening your understanding on racism enrol in our e-learning course: [Understanding Racism for Youth Workers - NYCI E-Learning](#)

- Develop and implement an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy for your organisation that names racism, and that includes accountability mechanisms. Similarly, make sure you have A Dignity at Work policy that names racism
- Take part in special events such as intercultural festivals
- Acknowledge and celebrate special cultural days (Eid, Divali, Chinese New Year etc.)
- Promote positive images of people from a range of different cultural backgrounds
- Representation is important: hire more minority ethnic staff, promote and support minority ethnic youth leaders and volunteers in your organisation
- Talk to young people about their culture – including with those from ethnic majority as part of normal conversation
- Organise activities for young people that increase their awareness and respect of other cultures. Exchange visits to other groups in your area can be helpful
- Take stereotyping, prejudice and abusive comments seriously and challenge negative attitudes – create group charters that highlight respect and be clear about consequences when that respect is broken
- Young people might be influenced by disinformation and misinformation¹⁴ circulating in the community about certain groups– or sometimes are just curious about what they hear– take time to unpack what’s coming up and plan programmes that can equip them with critical thinking and empathy (if you have a mixed group, including minority ethnic young people ensure safety for them in these conversations¹⁵).

¹⁴ More on equipping yourself to challenge disinformation and misinformation in the next section of this chapter

¹⁵ Check our **Beyond Hate** activity resource to support you in this: [NYCI- Beyond Hate Activity Resource](#)

N.B: ONGOING RACIST ISSUES WILL NEED MORE TARGETED RESPONSES THAT MAY INCLUDE TRAINING AND/OR DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY-WIDE INTERAGENCY APPROACH.

REPORTING RACISM

Creating an organisational culture that promotes accountability and addresses racism is key, and youth workers can play an important role in that.

It is within your power as a youth worker to build trustful relationships with the minority ethnic young people so they can feel safe and supported in reporting instances of racism. Link in with Reporting Racism mechanisms such as <https://www.ireport.ie/> and link with your local Diversity Gardaí or your local Minority Liaison Officer PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) to report racism.

Reporting mechanisms are important not only for facilitating more accountability and justice across the board, but also because through the collection and analysis of data we will understand racism's prevalence and expressions in our societies and furthermore can support the advancement of policies and mechanisms to tackle it and repair the harm.

The role of the Gardaí and the PSNI in reporting racism and community policing
In some cultures authority figures such as police are treated with fear and reluctance for various reasons (specific to country-of-origin context). In addition, evidence shows that in Ireland racial/ethnic profiling by Garda is a reality for many people from minority ethnic background¹⁶. Therefore young people and their families may be fearful of authority figures such as police, security officers and transport inspectors.



¹⁶ See here: [ICCL and INAR launch 'Policing and Racial Discrimination in Ireland: A Community and Rights Perspective' Report – Irish Council for Civil Liberties](#)

There are several community policing projects in **Republic of Ireland** which work with people from minority ethnic backgrounds to allay these fears and increase their awareness of their rights and responsibilities about services provided by the Gardaí. There are Garda Diversity Officers in many Garda stations who will respond to issues raised by people from minority ethnic backgrounds including racist incidents.¹⁷ The Hate Crime Bill was signed into law in ROI at the end of 2024.

In **Northern Ireland** legislation came into effect in 2004, enabling the courts to impose tougher sentences for offences defined as 'hate crimes'. It is deemed to be such an offence where a crime is 'aggravated by hostility if, either at the time of the offence, immediately before or after its commission, the offender demonstrates hostility to the victim based on the victim's racial, religious or sexual orientation group, or his/her disability'.

Minority Liaison Officers (MLO's) provide a service across all District Command Units (DCU) in Northern Ireland. These police officers are specifically trained to offer support to victims of racial incidents and to any other victims of 'hate crime'.¹⁸

¹⁷ Check here contact details of your local Diversity Officer: [garda-diversity-officers-november-2023.pdf](#)

¹⁸ Policing, Accountability and the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in NI (2004). Radford, K. Betts, J. Ostermeyer, M. ICR

COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

Currently there are many hostile and hateful narratives towards different groups of people, but – relevant to this chapter– particularly towards people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants; these narratives are based on disinformation spread by bad faith actors seeking division for personal or political gains. As a youth worker it is important to have the knowledge about the groups being targeted, whether you are working or not with them in your youth settings. It is also key to be prepared in your conversations with young people to **clarify without judgement** some issues they might bring in the group.



Please note that it is beneficial to equip yourself with the facts to be able to respond to young people's questions and have meaningful conversations with them, but a **myth-busting approach is limited in its efficiency**. Relying entirely on myth busting as a strategy to counteract disinformation and misinformation doesn't help people to feel heard when expressing concerns, they hear rather that they are wrong and their emotions are not valid. As a youth worker **you can help young people influenced by disinformation to interpret things they are seeing, reading or witnessing** and support them in developing critical thinking skills. **It is important to empathise with their feelings** about the social situation but **not with their conclusions**.

In the following section you will find some additional information to support you in this; we strongly encourage you to continue furnishing yourself with information from trusted sources, and to resource yourself with strategies to respond to growing hostile attitudes that can turn up within your youth setting¹⁹.

¹⁹ Check our resources on this topic: [Transforming Hate Manual & Activity Resource – National Youth Council of Ireland](#);

At the very end of this chapter you can find further reading and resources helpful in your work.

Disinformation and misinformation- what's the difference?²⁰

Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created and spread with the express purpose to cause harm.

Misinformation is information that is false but not intended to cause harm; it can spread when people targeted by disinformation become concerned or funnelled into it and share it with others that might have similar fears or concerns.

A **key difference** between misinformation and disinformation is **the motivation** behind it or simply put whether the false information is *intended* to mislead.

Additional information about International Protection Applicants and refugees

Some groups are more discussed than others: people seeking asylum (International Protection Applicants) receive a lot of political and media attention even if they account for a very small proportion of immigration in the Republic of Ireland²¹.

Everyone deserves to feel safe and protected from violence, conflict and persecution, and seeking asylum is a human right granted through international law.

In the Republic of Ireland, International Protection Applicants are placed in the International Protection Accommodation system (known as Direct Provision), that has been criticized since its inception in 1999 by human rights activist groups and international bodies for its inhumane conditions and infringement of human rights.

- People seeking asylum have the right to work only since mid-2018, under strict conditions. Since 2021 new rules on the right to work provisions came into force: International Protection Applicants are eligible to apply for a

²⁰ Check our dedicated toolkit for more information and practical activities with young people on this topic: [Navigating the Noise – National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

²¹ More here: [Refugee countries and asylum data](#)

Labour Market Access Permission (LMAP) 6 months after they arrive in the country. Many have accessed work since this right was granted and are active on the labour market.

- They have the right to apply to a drivers licence from 2021
- Until recently people seeking asylum were not allowed to open a bank account in Ireland, and it still remains a challenge
- Many asylum seekers become active volunteers and bring valuable contributions to their local communities while waiting for decisions on their case; in some cases people wait for many years for a decision, which keeps them in limbo and ultimately attacks their human dignity. This has negative impacts on their mental health²²
- International Protection applicants face many systemic barriers: the remote locations of direct provision centres and the resultant scarcity of jobs and/or underemployment, access to 3rd level education, childcare, discrimination.
- Homelessness and accommodation issues are the key issues, particularly for young males: for example from the start of 2024 hundreds of male international applicants were denied accommodation; accommodation can be an issue also for the families housed by Government- an increasing number have been told to leave, often at short notice and sometimes being moved around the country.
- When this system was created it was supposed to be temporary, and yet it is still place in 2026

²² More here: [Message-To-Government-End-Direct-Provision-Tackle-The-International-Protection-Process-Afri-MASI_compressed.pdf](#)

Checklist 2 – How accessible is your organisation to young people from a minority ethnic background?

This checklist can help you to identify how you can improve your service for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds

Programme planning and delivery

We make sure our programmes are designed and delivered to consciously include the diverse needs and identities of all young people in the community

Our youth group reflects the diversity of the wider community

- | | | | |
|--|-----|--------|----|
| • Our service/group/club has up to date information about the numbers of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in our community | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We know which minority ethnic communities are most highly represented in our area | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We collect statistics on the cultural and ethnic background of the young people who use our service | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We assess whether all ethnic groups in the community are fairly represented (e.g. if a significant number of the local community are Asian we strive to have Asians represented in our membership) | YES | PARTLY | NO |

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- | | | | |
|---|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We identify the young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in our community who do not use our service | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a list of the organisations in our area that represent minority ethnic groups | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Our programme responds to the ethnic diversity of the community

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our programming is relevant to the diversity of ethnicities and cultures in our area | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our programme is responsive to the specific needs, issues and experiences of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our programme is considerate of different religious needs | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We provide anti-racism, equality, inclusion and intercultural programmes for all young people | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our group celebrates cultural days of significance to our members | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Public image

How we present our service to our community

We know and actively communicate with:

- | | | | |
|--|-----|--------|----|
| ➤ Organisations that work with people from minority ethnic backgrounds | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| ➤ Organisations that have a good understanding of the needs and issues of minority ethnic groups | YES | PARTLY | NO |

We provide information about our youth group to:

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--------|----|
| ➤ Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| ➤ Parents from minority ethnic backgrounds | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| ➤ Organisations that work with people from minority ethnic backgrounds (schools, specialist services etc) | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We work closely with parents to ensure their concerns for their children are met | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Information about our youth group is translated | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Our organisation uses an interpreter | YES | PARTLY | NO |

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our organisation has visual imagery in its premises and publications that reflects the ethnic diversity of the community and proactively invites all ethnic groups in the area to join | YES | PARTLY | NO |
|--|-----|--------|----|

Participation

We make sure we include the voices of young people at all levels of our youth service

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consult with young people, parents and organisations about the specific needs and issues for minority ethnic young people in relation to accessing and participating in youth work – including those who do not use our service | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We promote a message of safety and respect and invite the active participation of all young people, including those from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people from different ethnicities are involved in decision making in our organisation | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Policies and procedures

We have a written commitment to deliver an equal and inclusive service

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanisms are in place that protect participants from racism and discrimination | YES | PARTLY | NO |
|--|-----|--------|----|

- | | | | |
|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our organisation has a written commitment to anti-racism, equality, inclusion and interculturalism | YES | PARTLY | NO |
|--|-----|--------|----|

Professional development

Our staff and volunteers are trained and supported to deliver an inclusive youth service

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and volunteers receive training on interculturalism, cultural awareness, tackling racism and the issues young people from minority ethnic backgrounds face | YES | PARTLY | NO |
|--|-----|--------|----|

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our staff, volunteers (and young people) address racist comments or behaviour and model inclusive language | YES | PARTLY | NO |
|--|-----|--------|----|

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|--|-----|--------|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have staff members or volunteers who come from a minority ethnic background | YES | PARTLY | NO |
|--|-----|--------|----|