



PPR's response to the Executive Office's draft Race Relations strategy

2 June 2026

This draft Race Relations strategy follows on from the 2015-2025 Racial Equality Strategy, the [independent review](#) of which was so politely damning that the Executive Office sat on it for nine months before [slipping it online](#) on Christmas Eve eve 2024. (The independent review wasn't alone: in a May 2025 open Call for Views to inform next steps, three fifths of respondents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that the 2015-2025 Strategy had been successful ([Analysis Report](#), p. 3.))

The new draft fails to adequately reckon with the failings of its predecessor. The independent review identified four main flaws of the 2015-2025 strategy, all of which remain present in the current version (see part 2 below). More broadly, PPR is deeply concerned at the Executive Office's proposed downshift to a 'race relations' approach in the face of increasing race-based hate.

1. The TEO pivot to an inadequate and inappropriate 'race relations' framework

The Executive Office's new draft strategy is no longer, as its predecessor was, a Racial Equality Strategy grounded in specific 75 duties around equality of opportunity. It is instead a **'race relations' strategy** under the secondary, weaker and more limited duty to regard the 'desirability of promoting good relations'. 'Elimination of racial inequality' is relegated to one of the strategy's four outcomes (alongside, amongst others, 'community cohesion').

The Executive Office oversees (and says it is currently reviewing) the Together: Building a United Community strategy under which most 'good relations' programming is delivered; its draft refers repeatedly to this approach. But it gives no rationale for shelving a rights-based 'equality of opportunity' approach for a 'good relations' one.

The precedents are not reassuring; nearly fifteen years ago PPR's founder [Inez McCormack](#) was scathing about the emerging use of the 'good relations' framework to paper over fundamental inequalities, saying

attempting to build 'good relations' on the basis of denying the needs, frustrating the rights, and silencing the voices of the poorest is wrong in itself as much as it is destructive to the goal of building a shared future.

In this instance she was talking about religious inequality in housing; but the same points apply to a 'good relations' approach in a context of race-based inequalities, racism and race hate directed against minority communities.

In addition to its duties to provide everyone – both majority and minority communities – access to housing, health care, education and more, the state has explicit obligations under international law, not just to refrain from racial discrimination but to prevent it. These duties include

not to sponsor, defend or support racial discrimination by any persons or organizations; ... to review governmental, national and local policies, and to amend, rescind or nullify any laws and regulations which have the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination wherever it exists; ... to prohibit and bring to an end, by all appropriate means, including legislation as required by circumstances, racial discrimination by any persons, group or organization (International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, paras. 2b-2d)

This treaty, to which the UK has been a party for over 50 years, places obligations on the state to **take action against racial discrimination in wider society**. By adopting a 'good relations' approach that places the onus on communities, the Executive Office defaults on the state's own obligations to act to prevent, respond to and combat discrimination.

Unprecedented levels of race-based and Islamophobic hate. During the remit of the weak 2015-2025 strategy, recorded race hate incidents increased by 49% (from 1,215 in 2015/16 to 1,807 in 2024/25) and race hate crimes increased by 40% (from 851 in 2015/16 to 1,188 in 2024/25) ([Independent Reporting Commission](#), p. 33).

PSNI [findings](#) show that the numbers of both race hate incidents and race hate crimes with a race motivation for the 2025/26 year was "the highest 12 month level since the recording of these motivations began in 2004/05" (p. 5).

Meanwhile we know that the level of hate crimes and incidents is significantly [underreported](#). Of those which are recorded, the Hate Crime Advocacy Service [noted](#) that in 2023/2024 (the last year for which this data appears to have been published), in only 3% of the over 1,000 referrals were the files forwarded to prosecutors by police.

PPR has called on the Department of Justice to take steps to make both the police and prosecutorial services more effective in responding to hate, for instance by issuing guidelines on how to make more effective use of Public Order (NI) Order 1987 [provisions](#) criminalising 'stirring up hatred'. Action in this area would help to build confidence amongst victims and potentially increase reporting rates.

This current draft strategy – despite naming ‘combatting racism and race hate crime’ as its Outcome 2 – fails to meaningfully address the spread of race hate or its pervasive impact on victims, witnesses and the wider ethnic minority community.

Local areas with comparatively high likelihood of hate crime. PPR’s [submission](#) to the ‘call for views’ included mapping of the District Electoral Areas (DEAs) with comparatively high likelihood of hate crime (this information is also presented [here](#)). The submission showed that hate crime does not occur either randomly or uniformly across the north. It noted,

this kind of analysis, which we have not seen produced and made public by those with the resources and the responsibilities to address these issues, is critical to informing the allocation of resources and responses to race hate crime. And we know there is other possible data available from e.g. restorative justice organisations which would provide further information on patterns of attacks, which could in turn assist both the policing and the community and political response.

In ignoring the geography of racist crime, this ‘race relations’ strategy limits its own effectiveness, failing NI’s ethnic minority residents and its wider society.

Links between race hate and paramilitarism. In its [8th report](#) the Independent Reporting Commission refers to “compelling evidence of a paramilitary dimension to race and hate crime” (para. 3.11). In September 2024 by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination wrote,

the Committee recommends that the State party, in particular the government of Northern Ireland, adopt robust measures to prevent and combat paramilitary racist violence and intimidation against ethnic minorities and migrants in Northern Ireland, systematically collect information on these acts of violence and intimidation and ensure that cases of paramilitary racist violence and intimidation are promptly and effectively investigated, prosecuted and punished with appropriate sanctions and that victims have access to effective protection and redress. ([CERD/C/GBR/CO/24-26](#), para. 22).

Similarly, in March 2025 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called on the UK and the devolved NI governments to:

strengthen measures to prevent and combat intimidation by paramilitary groups against ethnic minorities and migrants in Northern Ireland to ensure their access to adequate housing and to prevent de facto segregation, collect data on such acts and ensure that they are promptly and effectively investigated. ([E/C.12/GBR/CO/7](#), para 47 (h))

While the Independent Reporting Commission and UN Committees are open about the link between paramilitarism and race hate, the Executive Office draft neither acknowledges nor addresses it. Ignoring it and treating race hate as a simple issue of 'relations' between different communities is a dereliction of duty to victims, to their families and social networks (who are also impacted) and to wider NI society.

2/ The four flaws identified in the independent review of the 2015-2025 strategy

Lack of budget and action plan. The [independent review](#) found that while the old strategy had 11 proposed actions, 7 shared aims, 4 outcomes and 3 purposes, there had never been either an action plan with concrete tasks, or a budget to pay for them. This has not changed. The draft 'race relations' strategy does come with a two-year 'delivery plan', but this literally reproduces verbatim the 25 'interventions' named in the draft strategy, then repeats nine of them again on a separate page. There is no further development or detail, not to mention any concrete actions, tasks or budget.

Involvement of people with lived experience. The independent review found that

there is a strong feeling that minority ethnic communities have been ignored for too long, and that this strategy does present an opportunity to rectify this situation. And if there is one immediate learning from this review [it] is that this must change now. (p. 14)

The new draft does reference some outreach efforts that the TEO has made, for instance through 'thematic group workshops', one with Roma and one with Travellers (p. 14). Yet the independent review made plain that

there has to be better involvement of people with lived experience (LE), which is both properly funded and supported, and not just to be content to work through third party organisations. The voice of people with lived experience must be heard in a meaningful and sustainable way including co-production and co-design of delivery plans.

In contrast, as mentioned TEO's 'delivery plan' is copied and pasted from the draft strategy, with zero sign of any co-production or -design by people with lived experience.

Ethnic monitoring and data. The independent review highlighted how ethnic monitoring is vital to setting a baseline for assessing the impact of any strategy. It found, worryingly, that "there has been no coherent research approach on the challenges presented in racial equality across Northern Ireland" (p. 16) and concluded,

the lack of an agreed action plan to establish effective ethnic monitoring does appear to have been one of the most fundamental challenges in preventing the implementation of this strategy (p. 16).

It is not at all clear that the new draft strategy addresses this gap. Its outcome 3 is “equality of service provision” and one of the ‘key interventions’ named is “build upon the work already being progressed in the field of Ethnic Equality Monitoring” (p. 23) – but there is explanation of what that work actually is. The text refers elsewhere to a “piece commissioned by TEO on minority ethnic outcomes using 2021 Census Microdata” (p. 15) and sets a task of “develop[ing] interventions for the groups with the poorest outcomes, informed by [its] results” (p. 23) – but this hardly constitutes a new system of effective ethnic monitoring. Nor does the Executive Office appear to have followed up on the independent review’s suggestions to involve academic and local authority data and resources to help identify and tackle ethnic inequalities (p. 16).

The independent review was clear about the social impact of ongoing failure:

we also need to be clear about the responsibilities of TEO. They have a duty of care for all communities, and having no data could lead to major issues and potential community tensions. You cannot resolve a societal issue such as racial equality without the data or having the bigger picture. Monitoring is the stepping stone to racial equality. It is not a luxury but a necessity (p. 16).

Yet there is nothing in the draft strategy to indicate meaningful progress in this area.

Governance. The independent review of the 2015-2025 strategy identified the Racial Equality Subgroup as a “key means to drive progress on the strategy” (p. 17). It identified weaknesses: a lack of funding for member development; the risk of silos given its structure; barriers to participation; and lack of transparency and representativeness in its membership, with some members believed to have been ‘handpicked’. The new draft strategy gives no indication that these have been addressed.

Alongside the Racial Equality Subgroup, the Executive Office names the Strategic Planning Group (SPG) for Race Relations and Integration; the Tactical Delivery Group; and thematic groups (currently, just Roma and Travellers) as key governance mechanisms. Given the description of their prominent role in governance, it would be helpful for the Executive Office to set out in the strategy who is involved in these groups; their mandate; and the mechanisms for public input to and scrutiny of them.

Similarly, quarterly updates, annual reports, 5 year ‘temperature reports’ and SPG performance reports only work as governance mechanisms if these are widely known about and scrutinised. (The same can be said for ‘strategic linkages’ with T:BUC and Refugee Integration Strategy structures, themselves already quite opaque to anyone who isn’t in the Executive Office.) Including information about and, crucially, public access to the various reporting and cross-reporting mechanisms mentioned would be essential for them to have any meaning or utility in terms of governance.