



House of Commons  
Northern Ireland Affairs  
Committee

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# The experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland

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**Second Report of Session 2021–22**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
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## Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

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### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3672; the Committee's email address is [northircom@parliament.uk](mailto:northircom@parliament.uk).

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# Contents

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<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 The politics of Green and Orange</b>	<b>5</b>
Political structures	5
Representation	5
Funding opportunities	6
<b>3 An absence of data</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 Hate Crime in Northern Ireland</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5 Experiences of Irish Travellers</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6 The Racial Equality Strategy</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7 Experiences of refugees and the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>8 Conclusion</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Formal minutes</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Witnesses</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>25</b>



## Summary

At the time of the 2011 Census, Northern Ireland was the least ethnically diverse region of the UK. Upcoming figures from the 2021 Census are widely expected, however, to show an increase in the ethnic diversity of the population. Many of the issues that affect minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland fall within the remit of the NI Executive, which is scrutinised by Assembly Committees. Nevertheless, the significance of the evidence we received, and the importance of the concerns we heard from a range of communities across the region, lead us to make a number of requests of, and suggestions to, the Executive, in the hope that it will respond constructively to the points we have made.

The public and political spheres have so far largely failed to reflect the growing diversity of Northern Ireland, with very few—and, in some cases, no—people from ethnic minorities represented in local government or by parties at the Assembly. Mainstream preoccupation with the traditional Green and Orange divide has left little political attention available for other important matters in Northern Ireland, with many minority ethnic communities feeling overlooked by politicians and policy makers as a result.

The Executive have published two racial equality strategies, in 2005 (running until 2010) and 2015 (which runs until 2025). Since their publication, some positive advances have been made (with the establishment of a Racial Equality Subgroup in 2016 and a review of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund), but we are concerned by the slow pace at which the Executive has sought to realise many of the aims and actions of those strategies. Ethnic monitoring, to help evaluate progress made on equality initiatives and identify the service needs of communities, has still not been introduced. Likewise, anti-discrimination and hate crime legislation, areas in which NI lags behind the rest of the UK, have still not been updated. With the number of racially motivated hate crimes now higher than those with a sectarian motivation, the statute books must be updated urgently. We urge The Executive Office to take these policies forward as a matter of priority once a new Executive has been formed following the Assembly elections in May.

Since 2015, many Syrian families have made their home in Northern Ireland under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). While we heard praise for the consortium model adopted in Northern Ireland, witnesses also reported mixed experiences regarding access to, and provision of, services for families once settled. Northern Ireland is also playing catch-up with the rest of the UK when it comes to a dedicated refugee integration strategy, although a draft strategy was recently out for consultation. We ask that these issues be addressed as part of the final Refugee Integration Strategy, and done so at pace. With families soon to start arriving as part of the Afghan resettlement scheme, and almost certainly from Ukraine, it is important to reflect on and learn the lessons of the VPRS.

Compared with the wider population, the Irish Traveller community encounter persistent inequalities and poorer outcomes in areas such as health, education and accommodation. The Executive Office should set out how it is tackling those challenges, and what achievements have been made by the groups it has set up to consult Travellers.

Given the significance of the issues raised in this report, we ask The Executive Office to reply setting out its response to our findings, as well as an update on recent progress made in this policy area which, along with the minority ethnic and migrant population in Northern Ireland, is of growing importance.

# 1 Introduction

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1. While the results of the latest Census are eagerly awaited, that of 2011 revealed Northern Ireland to be the least ethnically diverse nation of the United Kingdom. Only 1.8% (32,400) of its population (1,810,863) had a minority ethnic background.<sup>1</sup> The 2021 Census is widely expected to show an increase in the ethnic diversity of the population,<sup>2</sup> but with no obvious policy preparedness to deal with this demographic change. With that in mind, we launched an inquiry in April 2021 into *the experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland* alongside a call for written submissions from the public.<sup>3</sup> We held five oral evidence sessions with organisations and individuals representing or working directly with many minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland, published 25 written submissions,<sup>4</sup> and met informally with a range of groups during two visits to Belfast to enhance our understanding of the issues.<sup>5</sup> We are very grateful to all those who took the time to contribute their expertise and experiences to our inquiry. While not germane to our inquiry, it is worth noting that a number of witnesses and evidence submissions pointed to immigration complexities and the stresses they place on individuals and their resources. Minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland are diverse and not homogenous, so this report does not seek to represent the views of everyone, nor to identify a one-size-fits-all solution. Our findings are, however, based on key and frequent issues raised with us by those to whom we spoke, which in terms said that fluctuating degrees of interest and resource, and vagaries in understanding and appreciation of the issues effectively make the backdrop not a particularly attractive picture.

2. **We are mindful that many of the issues explored in this inquiry relate to matters devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive. However, with the policy-setting opportunities for all parties presented by an upcoming election, and with new Census figures due, our intention in this report is to highlight and offer reflections on some of the key issues raised in evidence to us. We believe these issues have been either hitherto largely overlooked or under-addressed, and the incoming Executive and Assembly should seek to address them without further delay.**

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1 [2011 Census - Key Statistics for Northern Ireland - Report \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/2011/key-statistics-for-northern-ireland-report)

2 For example, see [Q112](#)

3 For the inquiry's Terms of Reference, see: [Experience of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland inquiry launched - Committees - UK Parliament](#), Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

4 All published evidence can be read online [here](#).

5 On visits to Belfast in September and November 2021, we held a roundtable event with participants who shared some experiences of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland, met members of the Jewish community, members of the Belfast Islamic Centre, Chinese Welfare Association and the Consul General of the Republic of Poland.

## 2 The politics of Green and Orange

### Political structures

3. The architecture of the political system set up under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement requires the two main communities, Unionist and Nationalist, to share power in government. Recent politics has therefore, understandably, been largely dominated by so-called Green and Orange issues and maintaining peace in line with the Agreement.<sup>6</sup> Many people we spoke to during our inquiry believed, however, that as a result, minority ethnic and migrant communities have been “overlooked”,<sup>7</sup> as the imperative to deliver a transparent Green-Orange balance dominates policy and funding decision making. At the same time, the number of people in Northern Ireland from a minority ethnic background has more than doubled since 2001.<sup>8</sup> We heard that the incessant challenge of balancing delicate “Green and Orange” issues can squeeze out political attention for other important matters in society<sup>9</sup> (such as those discussed in this report) and marginalise minority ethnic and migrant communities often seen as “other”.<sup>10</sup> Lilian Seenoi-Barr, Director of Programmes at the North West Migrants Forum, put this down to “the two communities narrative” which she said “does not truly reflect Northern Irish society”,<sup>11</sup> while Ronald Vellem, whom we note sadly died recently, of the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), said that it was often left to voluntary sector organisations to advocate for migrant and minority ethnic communities.<sup>12</sup>

### Representation

4. The lack of priority and time accorded to many issues affecting different minority ethnic communities correlates with a visible lack of representation of minority ethnic identities in public life. None of the 90 MLAs in the 2017–22 Assembly had a recorded minority ethnic background.<sup>13</sup> As this Report went to publication, not all candidates standing for the May 2022 Assembly election had been announced.<sup>14</sup> Previously, Hong Kong-born Anna Lo sat as an MLA for nine years as a member of the Alliance party, but stood down in 2016, citing continual online and racist abuse as influencing her decision to leave politics.<sup>15</sup> In 2019, only one councillor was of a recorded minority ethnic background out of a total of 462.<sup>16</sup>

5. The need for better representation is not confined to the political sphere. For example, figures from 2017/18 (the most recent published by The Executive Office) also show that 24 out of 942 public appointment applications were from minority ethnic people. Additionally, from a total of 183 appointments in that period, “less than five” were made to minority

6 [Q101](#)

7 [Q46](#)

8 1.8% of the population in 2011 were from minority ethnic backgrounds compared with 0.8% in 2001. [Census 2011: Key statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

9 [Q101](#)

10 [Q125](#)

11 [Q46](#)

12 [Q46](#)

13 [Ethnic diversity in politics and public life](#), House of Commons Library briefing paper, 15 November 2021

14 Candidates for the May 2022 Assembly election must submit their nomination by 8 April.

15 [Only Chinese-born parliamentarian in UK to quit politics over racist abuse](#), The Guardian, 29 May 2014

16 [Ethnic diversity in politics and public life](#), House of Commons Library briefing paper, 15 November 2021

ethnic applicants.<sup>17</sup> Andy George, President of the National Black Police Association, told us that minority ethnic officers “sit at 0.5% of the workforce” within the PSNI,<sup>18</sup> while officials from the Northern Ireland Civil Service also acknowledged that they have more to do to improve the ethnic diversity of their workforce.<sup>19</sup>

**6. The electorate can ask questions of candidates on issues affecting minority ethnic communities during the election campaign. The upcoming election provides more generally an opportunity for people from, or working with, minority ethnic communities to engage pro-actively to ensure their voices are heard by those seeking to represent them.**

## Funding opportunities

7. Funding is another area where minority ethnic and migrant communities may have been overlooked due to the predominance of initiatives to foster cohesion among the two main communities. In 2002, The Executive Office (TEO) established a Minority Ethnic Development Fund to provide support for voluntary and community organisations and projects working with minority ethnic communities. In December 2021 it was announced this would move to a three-year funding stream following a review.<sup>20</sup> However, we heard from organisations such as the Belfast Islamic Centre and Migrant Centre NI of instances where local funding opportunities such as good relations initiatives have been seen to prioritise the two main communities at the expense of other groups “who fall outside of this binary”.<sup>21</sup>

**8. Throughout our inquiry, we heard the perception that politics is often done “to” rather than “with” communities, and how the absence of representation of minority ethnic identities in political and public life has likely contributed to the lack of focus given to, and progress made on, racial equality in Northern Ireland. We urge organisations and political parties to take steps to encourage the representation of minority ethnic voices within their own institutions—so that politics and civil society become more diverse and better reflect Northern Ireland society today.**

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17 Page 5, [Racial Equality Indicator Report 2014–2019 \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

18 [Q74](#)

19 [Q168](#)

20 [Ministers launch new three-year Minority Ethnic Development Fund](#), 20 December 2021. A review of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund was promised as part of the 2015–25 Racial Equality Strategy. The review included 10 recommendations [which officials are now working on implementing](#).

21 Migrant Centre NI ([MEM0019](#))

### 3 An absence of data

9. Minority ethnic communities may be largely invisible to policy makers for another reason, too: the lack of ethnic monitoring and data on the population. This concern was identified frequently by witnesses during our inquiry, and in this regard Northern Ireland trails behind the rest of the UK. Natalie Donnelly, a local organiser at UNISON NI, explained how such monitoring “is just not there” in Northern Ireland, adding that “we have the Catholic/Protestant/other split in the monitoring, and that is it”.<sup>22</sup> This issue was also raised during a roundtable event we hosted in Belfast with people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds in September 2021. Dolores Donnelly, Good Relations Officer at Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, said that her local authority “depend[s] on information coming from the likes of our Census” and other partners such as the PSNI for data on the make-up and needs of local minority ethnic and migrant communities.<sup>23</sup> Caroline Coleman from the Craigavon Travellers Support Committee, which works with around 150 Traveller families across the Craigavon and Banbridge areas, pointed out, however, that Census figures were now no longer an accurate reflection of her community:

10 years ago, we knew that 1% of Travellers lived to be 65; I do not know if that has changed. I do not know if that has improved or got worse because we do not collate the data or specifically look at those areas.<sup>24</sup>

This absence of monitoring and data has made it difficult to evaluate progress on equality initiatives and identify the service needs of communities,<sup>25</sup> notwithstanding the fact that the importance of ethnic monitoring was recognised over 15 years ago in TEO’s<sup>26</sup> own 2005 Racial Equality Strategy, which described how “a racial equality policy without ethnic monitoring has been likened to aiming for good financial management without keeping financial records”.<sup>27</sup>

10. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 introduced a statutory duty on public authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of a range of categories outlined in the Act including race.<sup>28</sup> In order to do this, however, Geraldine McGahey OBE, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland told us that public bodies are required “to have robust data in relation to that sector”. She stated that, as Northern Ireland does not currently have any form of ethnic monitoring, “I would say that all policy development to this date has been flawed, in that it has not been built on robust data”.<sup>29</sup> Liz Griffith, a policy officer at Law Centre NI, said that even immigration data for Northern Ireland was for a long time impossible to extract, as Scotland and Northern Ireland were considered a single immigration region.<sup>30</sup> When questioned on this issue, officials from TEO said that ethnic equality monitoring had been identified by the department as a key

22 [Q37](#). Sex is also required to be recorded as well as community background in employment monitoring.

23 [Q143](#)

24 [Q8](#)

25 For example, see Chapter 11 and Annex B, [2015–25 Racial Equality Strategy](#), The Executive Office

26 Then The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)

27 Para 4.22, Page 42, [Racial Equality Strategy 2005–2010](#), OFMDFM

28 [List of Public Authorities designated for the purposes of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#), Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, [Section 75](#), Northern Ireland Act 1998

29 [Q91](#)

30 [Q60](#)

priority for progress moving forward. They added that TEO would explore sectors such as workplaces where monitoring could be taken forward in the first instance—although they were unable to give us a definitive timeframe for implementing this initiative.<sup>31</sup>

**11. We note that the issue of ethnic monitoring was identified as a key policy for implementation by the Northern Ireland Executive itself over 15 years ago. Self-evidently, therefore, it is disappointing that the level of monitoring undertaken continues to be very low in Northern Ireland and the available data limited. We urge The Executive Office to implement wider monitoring as a matter of priority once a new Executive is formed.**

## 4 Hate Crime in Northern Ireland

12. A hate crime is generally recognised as any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone on the grounds of the victim’s ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or disability.<sup>32</sup> Recently released PSNI statistics show that racially motivated hate crimes increased in the year to September 2021 (although still remain lower than the peak of 2014/15) and that there were a higher number of racially motivated crimes reported than sectarian (41% vs 38% of all hate-motivated crimes)—a statistic more significant when considered in relation to the small proportion of the population from minority ethnic backgrounds.<sup>33</sup> The Belfast Jewish Community referred to rising reports of anti-Semitic acts and increased reporting of Jewish-related hate incidents and crimes in Belfast in written evidence to us.<sup>34</sup> During our visit to Belfast in November 2021, we heard claims of anti-Semitic sentiments by public figures. Fears were also expressed about the continuation of anti-Semitic acts and abuse. Unrelated to this, with a small and ageing population, the Jewish community noted there would be a worrying decline in their population within a generation. We also heard during that visit of an increase in incidents of verbal abuse in the street towards the Chinese community since the start of the covid-19 pandemic, as well as experiences of attacks on and abuse towards members of the Polish community, linked to the EU referendum. We also heard that some victims feel reluctant to speak out and draw further attention to themselves. Examples of incidents in recent months reported as being investigated by police include an arson attack on the Belfast Multi-Cultural Centre in January 2021 and an attack on refugees inside their house in south Belfast in June 2021.<sup>35</sup> The PSNI told us there is also strong evidence to suggest that many other incidents go unreported to the police, “meaning the true position of hate within society can be difficult to articulate”.<sup>36</sup> Despite views to the contrary, we do note that there is no evidence that the perpetrators of hate crime come from one community more than another,<sup>37</sup> meaning this is an issue that both traditions need to focus on. Instead, as Kendall Bousquet, Migration Justice Advocacy Officer at Migrant Centre NI told us, “the correlation is not based on community”;<sup>38</sup> it relates to areas “where there is available housing stock and where subsequently ethnic minority families, in particular new families, and refugee and asylum seeker families, tend to move into”.<sup>39</sup>

13. Contributors to our inquiry raised with us the contrast between hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Kendall Bousquet described Northern Ireland laws as “probably the worst on the books for the UK at the moment”, while Andy George, President of the National Black Police Association, said that, in addition, “officers from an ethnic minority have limited options” when they are racially abused.<sup>40</sup> A recent review of hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland was completed by Judge Desmond Marrinan

32 [What is a hate crime?](#), Information from the Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland

33 [Incidents and Crimes with a Hate Motivation Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland](#), Police Service of Northern Ireland/NISRA (October 2020 - September 2021)

34 Belfast Jewish Community ([MEM0003](#))

35 [Belfast Multi-Cultural Association fire ‘was deliberate hate crime’ - BBC News](#) ; [A year on and still no charges over Belfast Multi-Cultural Association arson attack - Belfast Live](#); [Holyland attack on asylum seekers leaves men fearing for their lives - Belfast Live](#)

36 Police Service of Northern Ireland ([MEM0030](#))

37 [Q102](#)

38 [Q4](#)

39 [Q3-5](#)

40 [Q69](#)

(commissioned by the Department of Justice) and published in December 2020. This recommended (among other things) amending the way in which, and at what stage, hate crime is dealt with under the law.<sup>41</sup> Officials from TEO described recent hate crime figures as “concerning” and told us of Executive plans to address the issue:

They [the Department of Justice] intend to introduce the hate crime Bill by autumn 2023, with the final stage of the Bill completed in spring 2024. They are planning a first phase of the public consultation for the end of January 2022 and a second consultation for later in the year, which will cover policies that require further consideration.<sup>42</sup>

The Northern Ireland Department of Justice launched the first phase of this public consultation in January this year.<sup>43</sup>

**14. There is no evidence of the perpetrators of hate crime being drawn disproportionately from one community over another; rather, hate crime is a problem that manifests across both traditional communities and is the responsibility of all to tackle. It is, however, very clear that legislation needs strengthening to ensure better protection is provided for victims of hate crime. We therefore welcome the launch by the Department of Justice in January 2022 of a public consultation ahead of a new Hate Crime Bill which is due to be introduced in the next Assembly mandate. But we would urge a speedier timetable for this given how far behind Northern Ireland is compared with the rest of the UK, and, in the worst-case scenario where the Executive does not function for a prolonged period, that Westminster delivers on this legislation.**

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41 [Hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland: Independent Review](#), Department of Justice, 1 December 2020

Northern Ireland currently uses an enhanced sentencing model in relation to hate crime, where the hate element of offences is dealt with at sentencing stage (a sentence can be increased where it is proven that the basic offence of which a person has been convicted was motivated by hostility against one of the protected groups or where the offender demonstrated hostility against one of those characteristics either at the time of committing the offence or immediately before/after it). The Marrinan review recommends moving to an aggravated offence model instead, where a hate crime aggravation can be added to an offence and then tried as such (similar to that used in Scotland).

42 [Q167](#)

43 [Long: Have your say on how we tackle hate crime | Department of Justice \(justice-ni.gov.uk\)](#), 27 January 2022

## 5 Experiences of Irish Travellers

15. While many minority ethnic communities have established themselves across Northern Ireland over the past 50 years or so, Travellers have been a distinct group in Northern Ireland and across the island of Ireland for centuries. Irish Travellers are defined in the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 as being

the community of people commonly so called who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.<sup>44</sup>

The 2011 Census recorded 1,300 Irish Travellers (or 0.1% of the population) living in Northern Ireland, although we heard that this was likely to be an underestimate as Travellers disproportionately fail to respond to the Census.<sup>45</sup> A more determined level of outreach may be necessary to improve Census data. Throughout our inquiry, we heard concerning evidence of a range of stark inequalities faced by Irish Traveller communities in Northern Ireland, and Caroline Coleman of the Craigavon Travellers Support Committee (CTSC) told us worryingly that “Traveller issues are not a priority for our own government”.<sup>46</sup>

16. Key concerns identified by witnesses included:

- **the educational outcomes and experiences of Traveller children**, which the Equality Commission described to us as “deplorable”.<sup>47</sup> They said there was a current concern “that things have not only not improved in many respects [compared to a decade ago] but have actually worsened as a result of the pandemic”.<sup>48</sup> The CTSC and Barnardo’s NI pointed to high reported school drop-out rates for Traveller children by the age of 13, with many children also experiencing bullying by their peers in schools,<sup>49</sup> issues which we were also told were experienced by Roma children.<sup>50</sup>
- **poor healthcare outcomes for Traveller communities** in Northern Ireland compared with the wider population, with reports of significantly lower life expectancies and higher rates of suicide.<sup>51</sup> Caroline Coleman also pointed to the lack of health services and interventions targeted at Travellers specifically to tackle these inequalities.<sup>52</sup>
- **examples of inadequate accommodation provision**, with a report by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in 2018 finding that “Travellers face the unpalatable choice of living in poor conditions to retain their culture or moving into standard social housing at the expense of their way of life”.<sup>53</sup>

44 The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997

45 Craigavon Travellers Support Committee ([MEM0004](#))

46 [Q9](#)

47 [Q110](#). See also [Q106](#) [Michele Janes]; [Audit of Inequalities 2018](#), Education Authority

48 [Q110](#)

49 Craigavon Travellers Support Committee ([MEM0004](#)); Barnardo’s NI ([MEM0013](#))

50 Forward South Partnership ([MEM0031](#))

51 Craigavon Travellers Support Committee ([MEM0004](#)); Migrant Centre NI ([MEM0019](#))

52 [Q12](#)

53 [NIHRC launches report: “Out of Sight, Out of Mind”: Travellers’ Accommodation in NI](#), March 2018. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive published an accommodation strategy for Irish Travellers in 2021.

Witnesses also highlighted the impact of poor housing conditions on other areas of life such as health (including mental health) and education.<sup>54</sup>

We refer to these issues in relation to other, more recently arrived communities later in our Report.

17. We asked officials from TEO what steps they were taking to address the perceived lack of priority given to the needs of the Irish Traveller community. They referred to “a new strategic planning group on Travellers and Roma” as providing a forum where immediate concerns could be raised and issues escalated and addressed by Departments. They also cited the recent establishment of an independent thematic group on Travellers (a forum committed to as part of the 2015 Racial Equality Strategy<sup>55</sup>) as an example of where progress has been made.

**18. The Irish Traveller community continue to encounter many persistent inequalities in areas such as education, healthcare and housing, issues that are also experienced by other, more recently arrived, communities. We therefore look forward to the response of The Executive Office on these ongoing poor outcomes and experiences for Travellers in Northern Ireland and seek clarity on the output and outcomes of the strategic planning group on Travellers and Roma, and the independent thematic group on Travellers.**

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54 [Q19](#)

55 Page 53, [2015–25 Racial Equality Strategy](#)

## 6 The Racial Equality Strategy

19. The Executive Office has published two racial equalities strategies, one in 2005 (running until 2010) and the latest in 2015 (which runs until 2025). Another strategy, Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC), was also introduced in 2013 as part of the Executive's commitment to improve community relations and build an united and shared society. The strategy stated it is "not intended to replace or subsume our work on racial equality and good race relations" and would instead "complement and provide the coordinated framework for" aspects of the Racial Equality Strategy's delivery.<sup>56</sup> The purpose of the 2015 racial equality strategy, meanwhile, is to provide a framework for action by government departments and others to:

- (1) tackle racial inequalities and open up opportunity for all;
- (2) eradicate racism and hate crime; and
- (3) along with the Together: Building a United Community strategy, to promote good relations and social cohesion.<sup>57</sup>

The strategy also sets out a summary of proposed actions to be undertaken between 2015–25, some of which have been confirmed as completed and others which are still at various stages of progress. Examples include:

- review current Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 and other relevant legislation;
- work with the Department for Education to identify ways to tackle racist bullying in schools;
- work with the Department of Justice to develop approach to tackling race hate crime;
- examine where ethnic monitoring should be introduced and consult on proposals for implementation;
- establish a new Racial Equality Subgroup under the auspices of the Ministerial Panel on Together: Building a United Community; and
- identify Racial Equality Champions in all departments.<sup>58</sup>

20. However, a number of contributors expressed frustration at what they believed to be little tangible progress on the implementation of the aims and actions of this strategy.<sup>59</sup> Michele Janes, Head of Barnardo's NI, argued that many of the recommendations from the initial strategy (2005–10) had still not been implemented, a view that was supported by the Equality Commission, which described the strategy as too "process-orientated".<sup>60</sup> We also heard from former head of the Racial Equality Unit Ken Fraser who understood that many of the key actions from 2005 have still not been completed.<sup>61</sup> TEO officials said

56 Page 18, [Together Building a United Community \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](http://executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)

57 Para 1.1, Chapter 1, [2015–25 Racial Equality Strategy](#), The Executive Office

58 Page 5, [2015–25 Racial Equality Strategy](#), The Executive Office

59 For example, see National Black Police Association ([MEM0018](#)); Migrant Centre NI ([MEM0019](#)); North West Migrants Forum ([MEM0028](#))

60 [Q92](#)

61 [Q187](#)

during oral evidence on 1 December 2021, however, that significant steps had been taken on the strategy and cited key areas of progress:

The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order has been reviewed. There will be legislative proposals that will be consulted on early next year. Just yesterday, we published for consultation a draft Refugee Integration Strategy [...] We have more than doubled our minority ethnic development fund in size. We have increased our crisis fund for migrants. We have established a thematic group on Travellers and a strategic planning group on Travellers and Roma. There is the racial equality subgroup that I have just mentioned, and racial equality champions in each of our departments.<sup>62</sup>

21. In total, the budget for the Minority Ethnic Development Fund was £1,220,000 in 2021/22 compared with £585,000 in 2005/6.<sup>63</sup> The role of the Racial Equality Champions is to increase and ensure staff awareness of the Racial Equality Strategy, the importance of racial equality and issues related to their department's policy areas.<sup>64</sup> Profiles of each department's Racial Equality Champion are listed online. The composition of the Racial Equality Sub-Group has also been published and includes representatives from organisations such as ASCONI (the African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland), the South Belfast Round Table (a partnership of more than 100 groups tackling racism), the Belfast Islamic Centre and the Wah Hep Chinese community association.<sup>65</sup>

22. The 2015 Racial Equality Strategy acknowledged that, since the enactment of the Equality Act 2010 which applies in Great Britain, "a significant gap" had opened up between protections offered to people in GB and NI.<sup>66</sup> The relevant legislation in Northern Ireland is the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which prohibits discrimination on racial grounds in employment and vocational training and when accessing goods, facilities and services, in addition to other areas.<sup>67</sup> We also heard evidence that the Northern Ireland Protocol has jeopardised longstanding unfettered access to kosher meat from Great Britain for the local Jewish community. On the issue of equality legislation, the Equality Commissioner Geraldine McGahey described Northern Ireland to us, memorably and starkly, as being "in the dark ages".<sup>68</sup> The Equality Commission has previously stated the rights offered under current legislation "are not comprehensive and gaps in protection still exist".<sup>69</sup> TEO officials said a public consultation will be held this year (2022) on proposals to enhance legislation "and bring us to at least on par with legislation elsewhere".<sup>70</sup>

23. Officials were also asked about opportunities available for civil service secondment and information sharing from other areas of the UK with larger and longer-established minority ethnic and migrant populations. Gareth Johnston, Acting Deputy Secretary of the Good Relations and Inclusion Directorate said they were open to looking at any

62 [Q158](#)

63 [AQW 24178/17-22](#), answered on 05/11/21.

64 Page 38, [2015-25 Racial Equality Strategy](#), The Executive Office

65 [Profiles of departmental Racial Equality Champions](#), The Executive Office [accessed February 2022]

[The Racial Equality Subgroup \(published minutes of meetings\)](#) [accessed February 2022]

66 Page 25, [2015-25 Racial Equality Strategy](#), The Executive Office

67 [ECNI - Race Law Reform - Context of proposals \(equalityni.org\)](#)

68 [Q101](#)

69 [ECNI - Race Law Reform - Context of proposals \(equalityni.org\)](#)

70 [Q161](#)

avenues to bring in additional useful experience and guidance to the department.<sup>71</sup>

**24. We heard many concerns about the lack of progress made on the aims and actions of the Executive's original and current Racial Equality Strategies. The Executive Office should seek to address these by implementing without delay the outstanding actions of the current strategy, for example on ethnic monitoring, the refugee integration strategy and tackling hate crime. Furthermore, TEO should consider the merits of formal secondment and closer information sharing with organisations in Great Britain with experience of tackling issues of racial equality. We are pleased to learn that the Executive Office will consult on proposals to update NI equality legislation this year but urge them to expedite this process, to address the significant and ongoing disruption posed to the Jewish community in Northern Ireland and to afford the people of Northern Ireland the same rights and protections as their fellow citizens throughout the rest of the UK.**

## 7 Experiences of refugees and the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

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25. Elsewhere in this report, we have recorded how Northern Ireland has struggled to make policy and deliver services to minority ethnic and migrant communities. We also heard, however, of recent more successful schemes, in the form specifically of refugee resettlement. Since 2015, Northern Ireland has welcomed over 1,800 people who have been resettled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS).<sup>72</sup> Last year the then First and deputy First Ministers also confirmed their commitment to resettling Afghan citizens in Northern Ireland as part of UK-wide plans.<sup>73</sup> Immigration, including policy on asylum, is an excepted matter and the responsibility of the UK Home Office. However, several Executive departments are responsible for providing services and support to refugees and people seeking asylum.

26. We spoke to organisations such as Barnardo’s NI and Women’s Centre Derry who have worked directly with many refugee families who have settled in Northern Ireland.<sup>74</sup> There was praise for the consortium model adopted by the Executive in response to the Syrian scheme, which enabled joint working between the public and voluntary sectors.<sup>75</sup> That said, some witnesses reported mixed experiences regarding access to, and provision of, services for families once they had settled, indicating that the level of care provided after people have settled has been sometimes patchy.<sup>76</sup> Also, not all people coming to Northern Ireland arrive through managed schemes such as the VPRS, and one key concern we heard was that many services for refugees are often “Belfast-centric” and inaccessible to those living in rural settings. Michele Janes of Barnardo’s NI explained:

It is not just about getting the physical house. It is also about what is in the local community. We had families that were being placed, for example, in one area where there were no mosques. There was nowhere where they could go and pray. There were no halal shops. There was nowhere they could access food. Getting an interpreter there was the cost of somebody driving from Belfast, for example, to Newry or up to Derry/Londonderry.<sup>77</sup>

27. Other issues raised by witnesses relating to the experiences of refugees included housing provision, access to healthcare services and children’s needs.<sup>78</sup> On health specifically, some witnesses described how language barriers can make it more difficult for people to access medical care and communicate with health professionals.<sup>79</sup> Kendall Bousquet said there was also a “feeling that care is not culturally sensitive to the needs of the respective communities”<sup>80</sup> and noted that for example some women prefer to speak

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72 [AIMS Portal \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](https://niassembly.gov.uk)

73 [We are ready to help Afghan refugees - Givan and O’Neill | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#), 18 August 2021

74 Women’s Centre Derry ([MEM0001](#)); Barnardo’s NI ([MEM0013](#))

75 For example, see [Q152](#) [Dolores Donnelly]; [Q103](#) [Michele Janes]

76 For example, see [Q7](#) [Breidge McPherson]

77 [Q122](#)

78 For example, see [Q6](#) [Breidge McPherson]; Barnardo’s NI ([MEM0013](#))

79 For example, see [Q6](#)

80 [Q19](#)

to women GPs and interpreters rather than male.<sup>81</sup> On the preparedness of schools for welcoming new pupils from the VPRS, Michele Janes told us “schools have actually done quite a good job” and that children had mostly settled very well. When asked about the relationship of refugee communities with the PSNI locally, Breidge McPherson of Women’s Centre Derry provided an example of importance of positive engagement women at the Centre had with their local community police officer:

He came up and he spoke. He had no interpreter or anything, but we managed between us to get to know what he was saying. It was a revelation to the women to be able to speak to somebody from a police force because, where they come from, you are often frightened of the police force, and you might have to pay them backhanders and stuff like that. It was a great model to bring the community police officer to the women’s centre and the women appreciated that.<sup>82</sup>

Since the conclusion of our evidence-gathering process TEO has published a draft refugee integration strategy, on which public consultation has now ended.<sup>83</sup> Witnesses had previously pointed out that Northern Ireland was the only part of the UK without such a strategy.<sup>84</sup>

**28. With new families soon to start arriving in Northern Ireland as part of the Afghan resettlement scheme, and the potential for refugees from Ukraine, it is important for the Executive to reflect on and learn the lessons of the previous Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. We are pleased to hear that Northern Ireland will soon join other parts of the UK in having a refugee integration strategy. We ask that the issues we have cited, including care for refugees once they have been settled, appropriate healthcare and addressing the Belfast-centred provision of services, be addressed as part of the final strategy, and done so at pace.**

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81 [Q17](#)

82 [Q27](#)

83 [Givan and O’Neill seek public views on draft Refugee Integration Strategy | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#). The Committee for the Executive Office [took evidence](#) from stakeholder organisations and officials from The Executive Office on the draft strategy in December 2021.

84 For example, see: [Q10](#) [Breidge McPherson]; [Q51](#) [Liz Griffith]; [Q90](#) [Michele Janes]

## 8 Conclusion

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29. We acknowledge that our direct responsibility is to scrutinise the work of the Northern Ireland Office of the UK Government rather than The Executive Office of the Northern Ireland Executive, but many of the findings of our report bear upon the role and responsibilities of that department. These are important issues which affect those living in Northern Ireland and the dignity and respect that should be common to all. For that reason, we would be very grateful if The Executive Office could seek to respond to this report in three months' time, setting out:

- its general response to the findings and the evidence received during our inquiry, and particularly as they relate to the absence of important data on minority ethnic and migrant people and the relative weakness of the legislative framework in Northern Ireland in respect of hate crime and anti-discrimination legislation; and
- an update on recent progress made by the department in this area, specifically on the implementation of the actions contained within the 2015 Racial Equality Strategy.

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Introduction

1. We are mindful that many of the issues explored in this inquiry relate to matters devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive. However, with the policy-setting opportunities for all parties presented by an upcoming election, and with new Census figures due, our intention in this report is to highlight and offer reflections on some of the key issues raised in evidence to us. We believe these issues have been either hitherto largely overlooked or under-addressed, and the incoming Executive and Assembly should seek to address them without further delay. (Paragraph 2)

## The politics of Green and Orange

2. The electorate can ask questions of candidates on issues affecting minority ethnic communities during the election campaign. The upcoming election provides more generally an opportunity for people from, or working with, minority ethnic communities to engage pro-actively to ensure their voices are heard by those seeking to represent them. (Paragraph 6)
3. Throughout our inquiry, we heard the perception that politics is often done “to” rather than “with” communities, and how the absence of representation of minority ethnic identities in political and public life has likely contributed to the lack of focus given to, and progress made on, racial equality in Northern Ireland. We urge organisations and political parties to take steps to encourage the representation of minority ethnic voices within their own institutions—so that politics and civil society become more diverse and better reflect Northern Ireland society today. (Paragraph 8)

## An absence of data

4. We note that the issue of ethnic monitoring was identified as a key policy for implementation by the Northern Ireland Executive itself over 15 years ago. Self-evidently, therefore, it is disappointing that the level of monitoring undertaken continues to be very low in Northern Ireland and the available data limited. We urge The Executive Office to implement wider monitoring as a matter of priority once a new Executive is formed. (Paragraph 11)

## Hate crime in Northern Ireland

5. There is no evidence of the perpetrators of hate crime being drawn disproportionately from one community over another; rather, hate crime is a problem that manifests across both traditional communities and is the responsibility of all to tackle. It is, however, very clear that legislation needs strengthening to ensure better protection is provided for victims of hate crime. We therefore welcome the launch by the Department of Justice in January 2022 of a public consultation ahead of a new Hate Crime Bill which is due to be introduced in the next Assembly mandate. But we would urge a speedier timetable for this given how far behind Northern Ireland

is compared with the rest of the UK, and, in the worst-case scenario where the Executive does not function for a prolonged period, that Westminster delivers on this legislation. (Paragraph 14)

### Experiences of Irish Travellers

6. The Irish Traveller community continue to encounter many persistent inequalities in areas such as education, healthcare and housing, issues that are also experienced by other, more recently arrived, communities. We therefore look forward to the response of The Executive Office on these ongoing poor outcomes and experiences for Travellers in Northern Ireland and seek clarity on the output and outcomes of the strategic planning group on Travellers and Roma, and the independent thematic group on Travellers. (Paragraph 18)

### The racial equality strategy

7. We heard many concerns about the lack of progress made on the aims and actions of the Executive's original and current Racial Equality Strategies. The Executive Office should seek to address these by implementing without delay the outstanding actions of the current strategy, for example on ethnic monitoring, the refugee integration strategy and tackling hate crime. Furthermore, TEO should consider the merits of formal secondment and closer information sharing with organisations in Great Britain with experience of tackling issues of racial equality. We are pleased to learn that the Executive Office will consult on proposals to update NI equality legislation this year but urge them to expedite this process, to address the significant and ongoing disruption posed to the Jewish community in Northern Ireland and to afford the people of Northern Ireland the same rights and protections as their fellow citizens throughout the rest of the UK. (Paragraph 24)

### Experiences of refugees and the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

8. With new families soon to start arriving in Northern Ireland as part of the Afghan resettlement scheme, and the potential for refugees from Ukraine, it is important for the Executive to reflect on and learn the lessons of the previous Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. We are pleased to hear that Northern Ireland will soon join other parts of the UK in having a refugee integration strategy. We ask that the issues we have cited, including care for refugees once they have been settled, appropriate healthcare and addressing the Belfast-centred provision of services be addressed as part of the final strategy, and done so at pace. (Paragraph 28)

### Conclusion

9. We acknowledge that our direct responsibility is to scrutinise the work of the Northern Ireland Office of the UK Government rather than The Executive Office of the Northern Ireland Executive, but many of the findings of our report bear upon the role and responsibilities of that department. These are important issues which affect those living in Northern Ireland and the dignity and respect that should be

common to all. For that reason, we would be very grateful if The Executive Office could seek to respond to this report in three months' time, setting out:

- its general response to the findings and the evidence received during our inquiry, and particularly as they relate to the absence of important data on minority ethnic and migrant people and the relative weakness of the legislative framework in Northern Ireland in respect of hate crime and anti-discrimination legislation; and
- an update on recent progress made by the department in this area, specifically on the implementation of the actions contained within the 2015 Racial Equality Strategy. (Paragraph 29)

# Formal minutes

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**Wednesday 2 March 2022**

## **Members present**

Simon Hoare, in the Chair

Scott Benton

Mr Gregory Campbell

Sir Robert Goodwill

Stephen Farry

Claire Hanna

Ian Paisley

Stephanie Peacock

Draft Report (*The experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 29 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Wednesday 16 March at 9am

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Wednesday 8 September 2021

**Ms Kendall Bousquet**, Migration Justice Advocacy Officer, Migrant Centre NI; **Caroline Coleman**, Manager, Craigavon Travellers Support Committee; **Breidge McPherson**, Regional Outreach Worker, Women's Centre Derry [Q1–35](#)

**John Patrick Clayton**, Policy Officer, UNISON Northern Ireland; **Natalie Donnelly**, Local Organiser, UNISON Northern Ireland; **Patrick Yu**, Black and Migrant Workers' Group, UNISON Northern Ireland [Q36–44](#)

### Wednesday 15 September 2021

**Liz Griffith**, Policy Officer, Law Centre NI; **Lilian Seenoi-Barr**, Director Of Operations, North West Migrants Forum (NWMF); **Ronnie Vellem**, Secretary, Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) [Q45–68](#)

**Sgt Richard Williams**, Chair, Ethnic Minority Police Association (NI); **Mr Andy George**, President, National Black Police Association [Q69–88](#)

### Wednesday 20 October 2021

**Michele Janes**, Head of Barnardo's NI, Barnardo's Northern Ireland; **Geraldine McGahey OBE**, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; **Mr Paul Noonan**, Senior Policy Officer, Public Policy and Strategic Engagement Team, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland [Q89–124](#)

### Wednesday 1 December 2021

**Cllr Martin Reilly**, Councillor, Derry and Strabane District Council; **Godfrey McCartney**, Community Development Manager, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; **Dolores Donnelly**, Good Relations Officer, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; **Cllr Shaun Harkin**, Councillor, Derry and Strabane District Council [Q125–156](#)

**Gareth Johnston**, Acting Deputy Secretary, Good Relations and Inclusion Directorate, Northern Ireland Executive; **Orla McStravick**, Acting Head of Infrastructure and Racial Equality Division, Northern Ireland Executive [Q157–180](#)

### Tuesday 1 February 2022

**Kenneth Fraser**, Head, Racial Equality Unit, The Executive Office, Northern Ireland [Q181–223](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

MEM numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Barnardo's Northern Ireland ([MEM0013](#))
- 2 Belfast Jewish Community ([MEM0003](#))
- 3 Clayton, John Patrick (Policy Officer, UNISON Northern Ireland) ([MEM0025](#))
- 4 Committee on the Administration of Justice ([MEM0023](#))
- 5 Craigavon Travellers Support Committee ([MEM0004](#))
- 6 Employers for Childcare ([MEM0010](#))
- 7 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ([MEM0017](#))
- 8 Fraser, Kenneth ([MEM0033](#))
- 9 Law Centre NI ([MEM0015](#))
- 10 Logan, Kerry (Policy Co-ordinator, Housing Rights Service) ([MEM0032](#))
- 11 Long, Stephen (Advanced Practitioner Community Development, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust) ([MEM0029](#))
- 12 McClarey, Mrs Marie-Louise (Manager, Building Communities Resource Centre (BCRC)) ([MEM0027](#))
- 13 McGrath, Gerry (T/Chief Superintendent, Police Service of Northern Ireland) ([MEM0030](#))
- 14 Migrant Centre NI ([MEM0019](#))
- 15 Monahan, Jacqueline (Roma Hub Coordinator, Forward South Partnership) ([MEM0031](#))
- 16 National Black Police Association ([MEM0018](#))
- 17 Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality; and All Party Assembly Group on Ethnic Minority Community ([MEM0006](#))
- 18 Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission ([MEM0008](#))
- 19 Participation and the Practice of Rights ([MEM0009](#))
- 20 Seenoi-Barr, Mrs Lilian (Community Relations Officer, Belfast Islamic Centre (BIC); Community Liaison Officer, Belfast Multi-Cultural Association (BMCA); Board Member, Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Network (BMEWN); Director of programmes, North West Migrants Forum (NWMF); Chair Person, Multi-Ethnic Sports & Cultures NI (MSCNI); and Director/Founder, Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI)) ([MEM0028](#))
- 21 South Belfast Roundtable on behalf of Refugee & Asylum Forum; and Law Centre NI ([MEM0016](#))
- 22 Strabane Ethnic Community Association ([MEM0024](#))
- 23 Stronge, Bob (CEO, Advice NI) ([MEM0026](#))
- 24 Women's Centre Derry ([MEM0001](#))
- 25 YMCA North Down ([MEM0014](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

### Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Citizenship and passport processes relating to Northern Ireland	HC 158
1st Special	Cross-border co-operation on policing, security and criminal justice after Brexit Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 508
2nd Special	Citizenship and passport processes relating to Northern Ireland: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2021–22	HC 787

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Unfettered Access: Customs Arrangements in Northern Ireland after Brexit	HC 161
2nd	New Decade, New Approach Agreement	HC 160
3rd	Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past: the Government's New Proposals (Interim Report)	HC 329
4th	Cross-border co-operation on policing, security and criminal justice after Brexit	HC 766