

27<sup>th</sup> April 2021

FAO:

### **NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE NEW INQUIRY**

#### **Call for Evidence**

- the experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people living in Northern Ireland;
- the challenges that minority ethnic and migrant people face in Northern Ireland;
- the steps the UK Government can take to help ensure effective racial equality legislation in Northern Ireland;
- the health and economic outcomes of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland, and the steps the UK Government can take to help improve them;
- successful initiatives and programmes to encourage cultural exchange and diversity among people in Northern Ireland;
- people's experiences of applying for the EU Settlement Scheme.

#### **Introduction**

**WOMEN'S CENTRE DERRY** provides a safe, secure, environment for women and children, aimed at supporting them to achieve their full potential.

Our aims are primarily to combat poverty and promote prosperity in disadvantaged communities through a feminist model of empowerment and education.

We do this by providing educational and other development opportunities for women and children and providing onsite childcare.

In everything we do we strive to:

Deliver the highest quality person centred services which address the needs of women and children who live in disadvantaged and marginalised communities;

Engage with respect, maintaining confidentiality and building trust;

Provide a warm and friendly space where women and children are welcomed, empowered and valued.

The Centre has a number of key advantages: its educational provision, which it delivers to large numbers of women from many of the key social exclusion demographics; its track record in terms of its advocacy for women's' rights; the fact that it is a women-only space; its fully-supervised, professional child care service, on-site for all of those women undertaking programmes at the centre.

#### **Reason for submitting evidence**

We have worked to support Syrian Refugee women and families over the past 5 years and have become acutely aware of their struggles and challenges as they settle in to life in Derry. The New Enquiry Call for Evidence is an opportunity to tell what we know of their situation and the obstacles they encounter as regards building a decent quality of life in our communities, integrating and contributing through social and economic inclusion.

#### **Our Response:**

Since March 2020 the UK hasn't welcomed a single person through its resettlement programme – the safest route to escaping war and rebuilding lives. That was understandable at the start of the coronavirus crisis, when flights were grounded and it was deemed unsafe to travel abroad. However, air travel for summer holidays is now allowed,

and removal flights are happening too. There are no reasons why life-saving flights cannot resume.

- The Home Secretary just needs to give the go-ahead.

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

Experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in NI varies in terms of the location where they have settled and the circumstances by which they have come to resettle in Northern Ireland. The Syrian Refugee families who have been resettled as part of the NIRRS/VPRS scheme will have a different experience to the families who come to work in NHS or study in universities.

The families that Women's Centre Derry are mostly engaged with are NIRRS/VPRS refugee families and I will refer mostly to them in this paper.

### **The challenges that minority ethnic and migrant people face in Northern Ireland**

- **Housing:**

Welcoming families has not been given due care and attention.

Poor standards of welcoming families into empty houses with old bedding and No Tea Pot, Delph or Cutlery. Blankets described by one refugee women with 2 small children as

*"Thin, grey blankets with holes, like prison blankets, stained mattress."*

- **Housing Standards:**

Houses are Temporary, Private, old stock, poor condition, in disrepair.

Communication between families and NIHE totally inadequate. No attempts during the Pandemic to support the families in a meaningful way.

- **Learning English:**

Lack of access to Regular **English classes** by qualified teachers.

- **Benefit System;** Claiming Benefits, finding out about benefit System,

Families are in poverty and generally use charity shops for clothing and furniture. They have received food boxes during pandemic but these were poor quality and didn't contain Halal food.

- **Education:**

Nursery/Primary/Secondary/University - Not enough or No Extra help within Schools.

Parents unable to help children as they can't speak English themselves. Therefore, the children who have no extra support in school have no adequate support at home either.

**NB** It was pointed out that, given limited education, some of the Syrian families cannot read or write Arabic. Providing Arabic classes could be useful.

- **Employment:**

Inadequate or No Access to employment, apprenticeships, support, employment Schemes

- **Key Personnel:**

Too many issues and not enough time for one Key worker.

- **Interpreters:**

Lack of access and no free choice, Telephone services not good enough.

Inadequate interpreting service in NW. Refugee families are dissatisfied with the interpreting services.

- **Community Groups need funding:**  
To do the essential support work with the families. Community Groups who are actually providing the support need to be on the VPRS Consortium.
- **Family Reunion:**  
Months spent trying to communicate with UNHCR.  
**Equal Freedom to Travel:**  
No access to Republic of Ireland and therefore unable to travel to meet Syrian friends and family just over the border
- **Legal Assistance and access to Advice services:**  
This is completely inadequate especially in NW. All centred in Belfast, hard to access , difficult to understand and no real support to orientate the system.  
**Integration:**  
Not enough opportunities to integrate families and the Pandemic has accentuated the problem.

**The steps the UK Government can take to help ensure effective racial equality legislation in Northern Ireland;**

- Reform of the law, to address key shortfalls in legal protections
- Tackling Prejudicial Attitudes, Racism and Hate Crime
- Ensuring equality of opportunity in education, employment, accommodation, healthcare and access to social welfare
- Ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation, supported by data collection
- We also highlight the importance of taking account of multiple identities and the importance of the appropriate development and implementation of a revised Racial Equality Strategy.

**The health and economic outcomes of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland, and the steps the UK Government can take to help improve them;**

**The health and economic outcomes:**

- Physical and Mental Health. Traumatized people with no access to Talking Therapies in their own language.
- Isolated/ Traumatized teenagers and children given no consideration for the reasons they came here in the first place.
- Cultural differences between Syria and the UK These are a preference for women to see female healthcare staff for themselves and their children, of differences in how services are delivered.
- Accessing primary care, with the development of telephone triage (where a receptionist does not offer an appointment but asks a GP to telephone a patient to assess them) is very difficult for non-English speakers.

- A telephone conversation between the GP and the patient would only be possible with a three-way interpretation system that included the interpreter.
- Registering with GP, Dentist, Optician, and attending appointment given that many families have chronic health problems and are then left to fend for themselves in benefits, form filling, interviews, phone calls, reading letters from authorities and not understanding them even to be aware that the matter is urgent.
- Ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by socio-economic deprivation, a key determinant of health status. This is driven by a wider social context in which structural racism can reinforce inequalities among ethnic groups, for example in housing, employment and the criminal justice system, which in turn can have a negative impact on their health. Evidence shows that racism and discrimination can also have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of people from ethnic minority groups.

**Steps the UK Government can take to help improve them;**

- Covid-19 has shone a light on inequalities and highlighted the urgent need to strengthen action to prevent and manage ill health in ethnic minority communities. A cross-government strategy for reducing health inequalities, and the wider socio-economic and structural inequalities that drive them, should be an urgent priority.
- Comprehensive, good-quality data is essential for enabling policy-makers and health care professionals to identify the specific needs of different ethnic minority communities, respond with tailored strategies for addressing inequalities, and track the impact of these strategies.

**Successful initiatives and programmes to encourage cultural exchange and diversity among people in Northern Ireland;**

Women’s Centre Derry delivers a successful initiative to engage Syrian Refugee families. Our Centre empowers and enables women to return to education in a safe and motivating environment. This is supplemented with free on site creche facilities for 0-4 year olds. BAME women engage in integrated Multi-cultural events and activities, for example this Human Rights project illustrated below was completed just before the lockdown in 2020.



We deliver informal conversational English Classes supported with childcare to open up access for women. We deliver a Children’s Advocacy project to address the disproportionate disadvantages endured by BAME children as a result of the COVID 19 emergency.

Working from a feminist ethos and model of delivery Women Centre Derry is unique in addressing the needs of Minority Ethnic women, supporting them to gain the skills and

confidence to navigate the systems in Northern Ireland. Within our Centre women from minority ethnic communities are integrated into education programmes and signposted to community services. They have access to one-one support and they in return bring their wonderful talents & qualities, their diversity & cultural riches to us.

*April 2021*