

# **Meeting of Ethnic Minority – Race, Equality and Human Rights Network**

## **Briefing**

### **Context and inputs**

The third EM-REHR Network meeting was hosted by GREC in Aberdeen on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The main topics of the meeting included updates from the Scottish Government on Anti-racism national policies as well as highlights from anti-racism work in the North East of Scotland, including the University of Aberdeen Anti-Racism Roundtable, Aberdeen Third Party Reporting Network and local co-production initiatives (Reboot Aberdeen).

Over 40 representatives attended the event with a wide range of representatives from public and third sector organisations (see full list of organisations at the end).

Amanda Gordon, Head of Strategic Anti-Racism and Disability Equality at the Scottish Government, attended to share updates in relation to Scotland's strategic anti-racism and race equality work. A summary of the main points covered are provided here:

-Having reached the end of the Immediate Priorities Plan (IPP) for tackling racism, it is key to consider the next phase to take forward the Race Equality Framework and how to make a real difference. How to build on the IPP will be with:

- 1- Participatory democracy and voices with lived experience must feed into policies.
- 2- Upcoming roundtable event planned by the Scottish Government to hear different stakeholders. Attendees will receive an invitation in July-August.
- 3- Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland (AROS) and an Equality Impact Assessment for it are part of next steps and AROS will be one of the voices feeding into anti-racism policy.

### **Discussion and feedback**

The meeting included time for group discussions (structured around key questions) to reflect on the anti-racism national policies, the development of the Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland (AROS) and any additional feedback. A summary of the group discussions is provided here, to be considered in future EM-REHR Network meetings and by the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders as the development of the AROS and the anti-racism infrastructure continues.

- **Reflection on Anti-racism national policies and the updates from the Scottish Government.**

There was acknowledgement that relevant anti-racism work has occurred as governments have learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on improving data gathering. However, the process to arrive at concrete delivery plans and anti-racism action was not clear for most attendees. There was general agreement that additional information on the Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland is required as well as policies' expected outcomes and how they have and will be evaluated.

The need to pair long-term strategies and plans with appropriate funding was also identified as a requirement to create long-term change. There needs to be a correlation between these two aspects.

Attendees also highlighted that strategies and plans to promote equality and prevent hate crime should be written and explained in a way that is accessible for everyone, which should not be an issue as long as communities' voices are involved from early stages in the planning process. Due to this, attendees mentioned that it is key to check constantly who are we involving in the processes so lived experience is directly feeding into key decisions with community representatives connected to decision-makers. Building relationships through time with communities and key organisations is key for this effect. However, some attendees expressed frustration at seeing new plans in place with no connection to previous work and a better understanding of why it has not been as effective as expected, stating that "every time there's a new person in charge, we get a new strategy" which makes it harder to build trust with communities and strengthen anti-racism work.

- **Knowledge about the Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland.**

Though some attendees were aware of AROS and acknowledged the positive steps towards an infrastructure, most had not heard of it and expressed they would like more information about its origins and aims. It was understood that though AROS is currently being developed, diverse voices should be involved in this process from early stages and questions were raised in terms of its outcomes and how to evaluate progress towards them.

Those attendees that were aware of AROS mentioned there is some information published in a website, but it is still not enough to understand what are the next steps and how to get involved. Questions were raised as to the role of the many equality organisations (such as GREC) across the country and if linking with them will help support further engagement with AROS and the wider anti-racism infrastructure.

Participants highlighted the importance of considering the voices of people with lived experience outside the central belt, as well as how AROS should consider qualitative

information in parallel to quantitative to ensure a better understanding of people's experiences on the ground.

At the very least the assumptions about why and how the AROS will make a difference need to be openly shared for everyone to understand.

- **Who do you think an effective anti-racism policy for Scotland should support?**

Some participants raised the question as to whether we should be focusing on 'race' and if it is a helpful conceptualization to guide equalities efforts in an increasingly globalised world where systemic racism goes beyond skin colour. The understanding of race-racism has changed through history. Therefore, we need to adapt, including adapt our language. Other attendees mentioned that race equality is a more useful approach to this work, rather than anti-racism.

Some asked about the question of "who" in terms of not addressing where the problem is coming from if there is exclusive focus on those experiencing racism and not on where racism comes from. The need to focus resources on prevention and education of younger generations was highlighted, as well as how the language we use is key when considering what is taught, so it doesn't reinforce hierarchies and children and young people grow up without being afraid to ask questions and have conversations about our differences.

There was broad agreement across discussion groups that an effective anti-racism infrastructure should provide support for everyone so no one is left behind and Scotland does not perpetuate a logic of hierarchies. The complexities of using the term "race" to guide equalities work and how to precisely define who is racialised and who is not and how this can be confusing for people of mixed ethnicities, was also raised by participants. Nationality was mentioned in different groups as part of the Equalities Act, and how discrimination and prejudice are often expressed as xenophobia, which also affects ethnic minority communities from Europe or European descent. Participants gave examples of discrimination experienced by EU citizens, and how anti-immigrant rhetoric is pervasive nowadays. NRPF (no recourse to public funds) was also often mentioned as affecting people from ethnic minority communities - racialised and not - and therefore is helpful to exemplify how a broad approach should guide the development of equalities infrastructure. Some participants also highlighted how this wider approach would also fall in line with an overarching Human Rights approach, especially in the context of developing the new Human Rights Bill for Scotland. Some participants suggested that though an initial focus on so called 'most' racialised communities is understandable, if the intention is for it to eventually benefit everyone impacted by systemic racism and discrimination, then we should ask all ethnic minority communities "would this be beneficial for you?"

Participants also mentioned how key it was to have these conversations outside the central belt to consider the voice of people in more rural areas. How to effectively mainstream was also raised by some attendees.

- **Additional thoughts about the national anti-racism infrastructure**

One of the most often mentioned points by attendees was how does lived experience, public engagement and co-production/co-design fit into the development of the anti-racism infrastructure and how key it is to consider this from early stages and throughout, so policies are effectively connected to what is happening to people on the ground. Attendees expressed a clear appetite to receive more information and updates from the Scottish Government to contribute to the development of the anti-racist infrastructure and AROS going forward.

**Attending organisations:**

<b>Feniks</b>
<b>Inspiring Scotland</b>
<b>Scottish Government</b>
<b>Maryhill Integration Network</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council</b>
<b>GREC volunteer (Language Cafe)</b>
<b>BEMIS</b>
<b>CSREC</b>
<b>GREC</b>
<b>Reboot Aberdeen</b>
<b>Interfaith Scotland</b>
<b>The Mission / Shared Futures</b>
<b>Aberdeen Hindu Association</b>
<b>NESCAN</b>
<b>Kairos Women+</b>
<b>Turning Point Scotland - Fair Way Scotland</b>
<b>NHS Grampian</b>
<b>Masjid e Imam Ali (ع)</b>
<b>ACVO (Third Sector Interface for Aberdeen)</b>
<b>Abwt</b>
<b>Interfaith Aberdeen</b>
<b>University of Aberdeen</b>
<b>Aberdeen Mosque &amp; Islamic Centre</b>
<b>Aberdeen Climate Action/ NESCAN Hub</b>
<b>Social Worker in Training</b>
<b>No Recourse North East Partnership</b>
<b>Voluntary Health Scotland</b>

<b>Call it Out</b>
<b>Sikh Sanjog</b>
<b>Shelter Scotland</b>
<b>Aberdeenshire Council</b>