UNDERSTANDING RACISM:

Defining Racism in an Irish Context

inar
IRISH NETWORK AGAINST RACISM

About INAR

The Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), is a network organisation, founded in 1998, with over 100 civil society member organisations in Ireland, whose own members include a range of affected communities. INAR members include Traveller and Roma, migrant rights, anti-racist, Muslim, Jewish, Afro-descendent, asylum seeker, community and intercultural groups, and both funded and grassroots organisations. INAR membership includes faith groups and inter-faith organisations, as well as the principal trade unions in Ireland. Using the resources of its network members, INAR works to develop common positions and concerted approaches to the fight against racism in Ireland. These include analysis and policy submissions to statutory, intergovernmental and legislative bodies, such as the EC, ECRI, the OSCE, the UN and the Oireachtas. With its members, INAR also provides analysis to the media and the wider public.

This document gathers INAR's common positions on racism obtained following a consultation with its network members. It can be downloaded at: https://inar.ie/racism-in-ireland/learn-about-racism/

A version of this document can also be found as a part of INAR's 'Responding to Racism Guide': https://inar.ie/reporting-racism-in-ireland/

About iReport.ie

INAR's flagship project is the iReport.ie racist incident reporting system, from which we produce regular racist incident and hate crime data reports, detailing incidents as well as statutory and other bodies' responses to them. Analysis of this data informs, for example, our detailed submissions to Government and to An Garda Síochána, on hate crime legislation, policy and practice. It allows us submit robust data to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)'s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), on their annual hate crime comparative country reports. It also allows us to partner with bodies such as the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), and the European Commission (EC) by providing local data in exercises monitoring all forms of racist incidents including hate crime and hate speech in public, in the media, on social media platforms and in political discourse.

CONTENTS

UNDERSTANDING RACISM

1. DEFINING RACISM

WHAT IS RACISM?

INAR understands RACISM as: Any action, practice, policy, 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.

In other words, racism is when an individual, group, structure or institution intentionally or unintentionally abuse their power to the detriment of people, because of their actual or perceived "racialised" background

It's important to understand that racism is an ideology from a colonial past which "holds one race superior, while another inferior" in the words Bob Marley in his song 'War'.

The above understanding follows from international and civil society definitions:

● International law

The United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) defines racism as: 'Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life[I].'

● National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI, 2007)[II]

Irish civil society organisations use the working definition drafted by the **National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) which defines racism as**: 'A specific form of discrimination faced by minority ethnic groups based on the false belief that some 'races' are in essence superior to others because of different skin colour, nationality, ethnic or cultural background'.

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ARE RACES REAL?

The creation of 'races' and racialisation

It is often assumed that racism exists because of the presence of different "races" coming in to contact with each other. However, there is absolutely no basis for thinking in terms of "races"; the notion has been disproved in genetics, biology, anthropology, geography and all sciences. Nevertheless, the persistence of racism and the *racialising* of groups in society means that many people still think that "race" has some sort of scientific basis. This wrongful assumption owes much to the very strong legacy of 19th Century "scientific racism"- a European colonial ideology which falsely held that the world was divided into races, with some (i.e. the European colonising powers; the so-called "white race") being "superior", while the people who were conquered were deemed "inferior". "Scientific" racism also gave rise to **eugenics**.

Eugenics is the idea that it is possible to 'improve' humans by allowing only some people to produce children. It was most popular in the late 19th and in the 20th centuries. It informed Nazi ideology, contributing to the Holocaust but was not limited to that. There are many examples of forced sterilisation of people with disabilities and minority ethnic groups across Europe and the world even to this day.

> "Race is the child of racism, not the father".
>
> *Ta-Nehisi Coates [III]*

THE EU RACE DIRECTIVE 2000/43/CE (implemented through the Irish Equality Legislation) states that:

The European Union rejects theories which attempt to determine the existence of separate human races. The use of the term 'racial origin' in this directive does not imply an acceptance of such theories.

"Races" are then not real but are created and made real – by 'racialising' people - through historical and ideological processes in society, involving the subordination of some groups over others. This means that it is not the existence of "races" which allows racism to exist, but the persistence of the political construct of whiteness, which is at the heart of the system of racism, which continues to create and recreate "races". It *racialises* people.

It is vital to understand and analyse racism from the perspective of ***power rather than prejudice*** (Lipsitz, 2011, pp. 40-41)[IV] to note how racial hierarchies and domination continue to be reproduced in society.
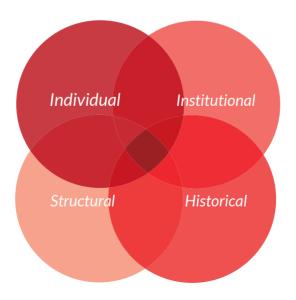
2. RACISM AS PART OF A SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION

Racism is best understood as being an expression of a system of oppression which has its roots in a history of power and the subordination of "non-white" groups. Racism is a system which complements and operates through the other systems of oppression with which it *intersects*: for example, the oppression of people based on their class (economic), their gender (sexism) or their identities as LGBTQI+ people (homophobia and transphobia). The system of oppression reinforces and strengthens existing privilege. The important thing is to understand racism as a system that is much more than something performed by racists in individual acts of bigotry.

2.1. Dimensions of racism

Like other systems of oppression, racism operates through several overlapping dimensions: historical, structural, institutional and individual.

4 Dimension of racism

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1. HISTORICAL RACISM

Definition of historical racism

HISTORICAL RACISM has to do with the specific histories of domination and subordination of groups (i.e. the racialisation of their relationships) in any given society. Different societies have different histories of conquest and domination, and so patterns of racialisation are distinct, if overlapping. In the US, the specific history of people of African descent means that to this day African Americans experience a distinct form of racialisation from Native Americans, from Roma in Europe and from Asians in Britain, for example. These histories impact on the position of groups in societies today because they continue to be reflected in the structures and institutions of those societies, in their laws and legacies, and in the language and cultural attitudes which persist.

Examples of historical racism

The racialisation of the Irish in history

Historically Irish people were "racialised" through the process of British conquest and colonialism in Ireland. Since Giraldus Cambrensis wrote in the 12th century, British colonial writing has labelled Irish people as drunken, as animals, treacherous, primitive, and illiterate. Dehumanising Irish people like this provided the ideological justification for the large scale violence and population displacements involved in the conquest of Ireland, the attempted erasure of its culture and language, the seizure of its wealth and the subjugation and impoverishment of its peoples, and the normalisation of the "Great Hunger" (the 1847 famine resulting in over a million dead), all done under the pretext of "civilising" the Irish.

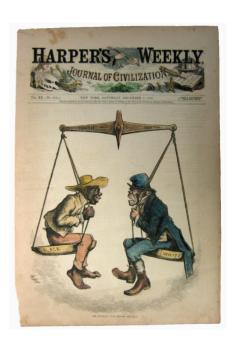**IRISH IBERIAN.** **ANGLO-TEUTONIC.** **NEGRO.**

The Iberians are believed to have been originally an African race, who thousands of years ago spread themselves through Spain over Western Europe. Their remains are found in the barrows, or burying places, in sundry parts of these countries. The skulls are of low prognathous type. They came to Ireland, and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who, in consequence of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out competed in the healthy struggle of life, and thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.

An example of 19th century scientific racism from the influential American publication Harper's Weekly which created a racial hierarchy, placing White Anglo-Saxon Protestants ("WASPs") in the role of the "superior" race, while subordinating the Irish and then Africans as "inferior".

This model of racist dehumanising was replicated throughout the world to justify the conquest, mass-killing, subjugation and enslavement of colonised peoples, a process which sometimes also involved the collaboration of other colonised people, including the Irish in many instances. This means that today, Irish people in many parts of the world enjoy the privileges of whiteness, while at the same time many aspects of anti-Irish racism still linger and, in some settings, some Irish people still face anti-Irish racism and discrimination.

How did the Irish establish themselves in the white-dominated new world?

Thousands of Irish people arrived in the Americas in the 17th century having been captured, forced into indentured servitude, and shipped initially to the West Indies. This was a very brutal experience, but a distinct one from that of people of African descent. Indentured servitude was not a system of chattel slavery; servants were indentured for a fixed-term and were not owned like property. An indentured servant could always buy their freedom and, in spite of their subservient status, did enjoy certain human rights, in addition to their status not being passed on from one generation to the next. From one generation to the next, the Irish enjoyed the ability to move up across racial hierarchies, something which people of African descent could not. This created racial distinctions which led to Irish people taking part in acts of racism towards people of African descent.

Blacks and Irish were for a time held in equal disdain.

In the 19th century following the Great Hunger, the ruling class also used Irish immigrants in the enforcement of violent segregation against people of African descent. Irish complicity with this violence led to their gradual inclusion of the into the 'white race'.

The racialisation of Travellers

Within Irish society, the continued racialisation of Travellers still bears some of the hallmarks of historic anti-Irish racism, as well as others that are particular to the demonisation of Travellers as a nomadic group, and to the dehumanisation of all minorities. Anti-Traveller racism has been exhibited throughout the histories of both Irish states and beyond. For example, in 1963 former Taoiseach Charles Haughey (then Minister for Justice) introducing a report of the "Commission on Itinerancy" said that there could be "no final solution" to the "itinerant problem" until Travellers were fully absorbed into the majority population. Just 18 years after the Holocaust, the use of this Nazi terminology in support of a policy forced sedentarism shows the degree of official racial disdain towards Travellers [v].

➜ **More on history of anti-Traveller racism can be found on the Irish Traveller Movement page:** https://itmtrav.ie/strategic-priorities/anti-racism-interculturalism/

➜ *A Brief History of the Insitutionalisation of Discrimination Against Irish Travellers (2018)* by Dr Sindy Joyce: www.iccl.ie/equality/whrdtakeover/

The racialisation of Roma in Europe

Another example of a racialised group is Roma. "Roma" is a name used to denote a wide range of different nomadic people who inhabit Europe and other parts of the world, who are all descended from nomadic tribes who migrated from Rajastan in northern India over 1000 years ago. Although Roma have played an important role in the development of many European cultures, trade routes and economies, they have also faced a long history of scapegoating, demonisation and oppression including multiple examples of widespread discrimination leading to persecution, segregation, enslavement, ethnic cleansing and extermination in the Nazi camps. The racialisation of Roma today continues in the form of ghettoisation, discriminatory laws and practices, widespread violence and hate crime, discriminatory policing and Eugenics-inspired practices such as forced sterilisation.

RACIALISATION

Today, many other groups of people (mostly "non-white" and non-European, but also including white-skinned groups like Irish Travellers or eastern European migrants in Ireland) still experience similar processes of racialisation. In many parts of our globalising world, migrants are racialised for being migrants. Jews are racialised for being Jews and Muslims are racialised for being Muslims.

Globally, race is one of the key bases for inequality, along with other bases with which it *intersects*, like gender, class and the marginalisation of LGBTQI+ and disabled people.

2. STRUCTURAL RACISM

STRUCTURAL RACISM, sometimes called **societal racism**, refers to the fact that society is structured in a way (including via cultural norms) that excludes substantial numbers of people from ethnic minority backgrounds from taking part equally in social institutions, or from having equal life outcomes in for example health, educational attainment, death rates, infant mortality rates, incarceration rates, arrest rates, employment rates etc.

A striking example of structural racism is the fact that only 70% of 'Black non-Irish' people are in employment, compared to 89% of 'White Irish' people. 'Black non-Irish' people are also five times more likely to report discrimination in employment recruitment compared to 'White Irish' people[VI].

Another example of structural racism is the fact that Life Expectancy at birth for Traveller men is 15.1 years less than men in the general population[VII]. The causes of death among Travellers is also an example; the disproportional suicide rate of Irish Travellers, 11% of all Traveller deaths, indicates severe structural barriers to a variety of society's resources for this minority group[VIII].

3. INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM refers to forms of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions; to the way institutions discriminate against certain groups, whether intentionally or not, and to their failure to have in place policies that prevent discrimination or discriminatory behaviour.

It can be found in processes, attitudes and behaviours which lead to discrimination through unintentional prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, unconscious bias and racist stereotyping which disadvantages ethnic minority people. Institutional racism relates to the entire institution, including people.

An example of institutional racism are the barriers to employment affecting people seeking asylum in Ireland. The state began to allow those seeking asylum to seek permission to work in 2018[IX], but people seeking asylum are unable to open a bank account or apply for a driving licence as they are not permitted to hold necessary forms of identification, impeding asylum seekers from most avenues of employment[X]. These barriers, and the continued campaign by asylum seekers for the ability to work, highlight the illegitimacy of attempts to portray asylum seekers as burdens on the welfare state, which have been made by some elected representatives.

Structural and institutional racism create the conditions that make forms of individual racism seem normal and acceptable, making discrimination and violence more likely.

4. INDIVIDUAL RACISM

INDIVIDUAL OR "INTERPERSONAL RACISM" is the term which covers the forms of racism which most people commonly understand as racism because they are the most visible forms. It covers all interactions or behaviour between individuals that are racist or have racist content. The term **interpersonal racism** covers a range of types of **racist incident**, from **"microaggressions"** to racist name calling and **racial bullying and harassment**, to **discrimination** and **racist hate crimes**. Although incidents of interpersonal racism will be the most commonly recognised forms of racism, they happen because of the wider context of the historical, institutional and structural racism of society. The impacts they cause are magnified because they reinforce and are reinforced by the wider structures of racism.

- **"Microaggressions":** these are comments or actions that subtly and sometimes unconsciously or unintentionally express a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalised group. While any single one of these incidents may seem relatively minor, if they are part of a pattern or taken in the context of other forms of racism, they can have a corrosive effect on the person on the receiving end. They can make someone feel uncomfortable or unwelcome, and they can have negative effects on a person's mental health. Examples of microaggressions include being constantly asked "where are you from?", or "can I touch your hair?".

- **Racist discrimination** refers to the practice of treating a person or a particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their real or perceived "racial", national, ethnic or cultural backgrounds. This generally occurs in the context of an employment setting or in the accessing of goods or services. Racist discrimination can frequently be an act of **individual or interpersonal racism**, but if an organisation's culture or policies fail to prevent acts of racist discrimination, this can be said to be an example of **institutional racism**.

- **Labelling and stereotyping** of a whole group or community occurs when persistent assertions are presented as facts over a period of time, when a minority community is blamed for the broader problems of society or when the anti-social actions of some members of a community are deemed to be the defining characteristics of a whole community. Myths and misinformation can fuel or contribute to an environment where assaults, threatening behaviour and discrimination are more likely to occur.● **Racist hate crimes** are crimes in law that are committed against people, that have been at least partially motivated

by a bias against them because of their real or perceived background. Hate crimes have two elements; 1) they are ordinary crimes in law 2) they have been motivated (at least in part) by bias. *See www.inar.ie/hate-crime-legislation for more information.*
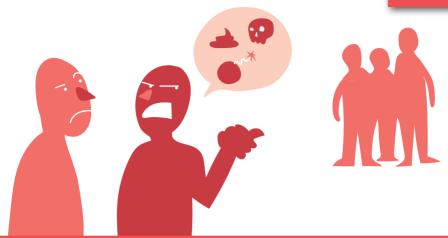
THE COALITION AGAINST HATE CRIME

Irish law does not, as yet, fully recognise hate crime or hate speech as a criminal offence, however INAR, as part of the Coalition Against Hate Crime, is working hard to change this. For more information visit our website at www.inar.ie/our-work/policy-and-advocacy/coalition-against-hate-crime-ireland/

- **Racist hate speech:** Hate speech covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or attempt to justify any form of hatred, stereotyping or discrimination that is based on intolerance. Racist hate speech includes intolerance of people based on their real or perceived "racial", national, ethnic or cultural backgrounds, or their real or perceived religious identity. The presentation of measures to curb racist hate speech as an attack on the right to free speech is inaccurate, as racist hate speech has very real consequences which affect the rights, including the right to freedom of speech, of minorities.
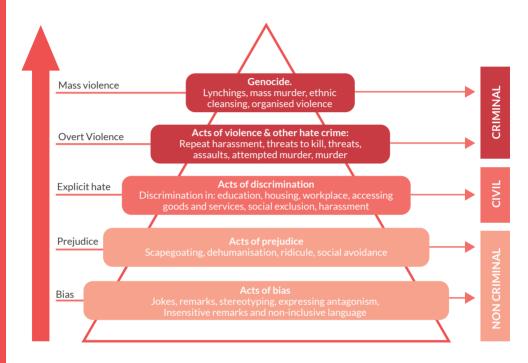
ONLY WORDS? THE LANGUAGE OF RACISM IS THE LANGUAGE OF VIOLENCE.

- Globally the language of **Anti-Black racism** is the language which evokes and celebrates the historic violence against Africans. Dehumanising language has been the precursor to racist violence, lynchings and mass murder throughout history.

- In the period leading to the **Nazi Holocausts against Jews (the Shoah) and against Roma (the *Porajmos*)**, Jews and Roma were described as sub-humans, as vermin, as rats, and as disease. Having been dehumanised discursively as pests, 6 million Jews and half a million to a million Roma were then systematically murdered.

- In the time leading up to the **genocide in Rwanda**, radio stations described Tutsis as cockroaches, as vermin. Over one million were murdered.

- In Bosnia, the massacre of thousands of **Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica** was preceded by Serb radio and newspapers referring to Bosniaks as "others" and "aliens".

- Following the recent genocide against **Rohingya Muslims in Burma**, social media platform Facebook was criticised by the UN for facilitating the genocide by failing to restrict a proliferation of hatred-inciting posts which encouraged the violence.

Pyramid of hate

Mass violence	**Genocide.** Lynchings, mass murder, ethnic cleansing, organised violence	CRIMINAL
Overt Violence	**Acts of violence & other hate crime:** Repeat harassment, threats to kill, threats, assaults, attempted murder, murder	CRIMINAL
Explicit hate	**Acts of discrimination** Discrimination in: education, housing, workplace, accessing goods and services, social exclusion, harassment	CIVIL
Prejudice	**Acts of prejudice** Scapegoating, dehumanisation, ridicule, social avoidance	NON CRIMINAL
Bias	**Acts of bias** Jokes, remarks, stereotyping, expressing antagonism, Insensitive remarks and non-inclusive language	NON CRIMINAL

The pyramid of hate is a schema for explaining the relationship between the most extreme acts of racial violence, including genocide, and other lesser acts of violent and verbal hatred and prejudice. Every escalation of hatred is more likely to occur if the context includes the presence 'lesser' manifestations of prejudice and hatred. The people responsible for escalating acts of hatred, do so under the pretext that they are expressing the views of the group they claim to represent; they are enabled to escalate to the next level by the normalisation of prejudice around them. As each level of hatred becomes accepted as normal, the society moves up the scale of hatred towards genocide. *What acts of hatred are normal in Ireland and other societies today and historically? What has enabled these acts? Where on the scale would you place us?*

3. FORMS OF RACISM IN IRELAND

PRINCIPAL COMMON FORMS OF RACISM IN IRELAND:

- **Anti-Traveller racism:** This refers to racism or discrimination experienced by people because they are or are perceived to be Travellers or from a Traveller background.

- **Anti-Black racism:** Sometimes referred to as *Afrophobia* this refers to racism or discrimination experienced by people because they are or are perceived to be black or African or from a black or African background.

- **Anti-Muslim racism:** Also referred to as Islamophobia this refers to racism or discrimination experienced by people because they are or are perceived to be Muslims or to be from a Muslim background.

- **Anti-Roma racism:** Sometimes referred to as *anti-gipsyism* or *Romaphobia* this refers to racism or discrimination experienced by people because they are or are perceived to be Roma, Gypsies or from a Roma or Gypsy background.

- **Anti-Migrant racism:** Also referred to as *Xenophobia* this refers to racism or discrimination experienced by people because they are or are perceived to be migrants or from a migrant background.

- **Anti-Jewish racism:** Also referred to as *antisemitism* this refers to racism or discrimination experienced by people because they are or are perceived to be Jewish or from a Jewish background.

RACISM TOWARD RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Because the history of racial and religious oppression are closely connected and intersect widely, for example religious sectarianism in Ireland has its origins in the *racialisation* of Irish identities, and because Jews and Muslims are similarly *racialised*, INAR considers discrimination and hatred towards minority religious groups as being related to racism. In all these cases it is not someone's theological beliefs that are at stake but the perceived traits that are attributed to their real or perceived "Muslimness", "Catholicness", "Jewishness", "Hinduness", "Protestantness" etc.

UNDERSTANDING RACISM

MANIFESTATIONS OF RACISM CAN DIFFER

Manifestations of racism can be specific to the group being targeted, often using specific vocabulary or imagery, and shaped by historical stereotypes, labels, myths and misperceptions about certain groups. For example:

- Pigs heads and other pork products have been used to target Muslims and Jews, references to the Nazis and the holocaust are commonly associated with attacks on Jews and Roma;

- Travellers, Roma and Jews are accused of being thieves, or of kidnapping children;

- Jews are portrayed as engaging in secretive conspiracies to control the levers of power, for example in banking and finance, or in governmental, non-governmental or intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations. The terms 'Globalist' and 'Globalism' are part of the antisemitic conspiracy lexicon.

- References to the language of and history of slavery are made in attacks on black people;

- "Go home" is often shouted at people perceived to be migrants;

- Migrants are frequently accused of taking locals' jobs and 'sponging' of the system;

- Most minorities have been compared to animals and have been accused of being a sexual threat;

- Muslims are accused of being terrorists; or as being part of a global terrorist conspiracy.

- Muslim women are frequently targeted for wearing a veil;

- In Ireland since the 2004 Citizenship referendum campaigns, minority women with children have been particular targets of racial scorn.

Report all racist incidents to **www.iReport.ie**

4. EFFECTS OF RACISM

IMPACT OF RACISM ON INDIVIDUALS

The iReport.ie data on racism in Ireland indicates that racism can have a devastating impact on the lives of those targeted. Victims can suffer not only physically and psychologically, but also feel an impact on their finances and social connectedness:

- **Physical impacts:** loss of or damage to property; physicalinjuries and their effects which may lead to ill physical health and mental health.

- **Psychological impacts:** racism can have a deeply damaging effect on people's mental health. It humiliates, dehumanises and goes to the heart of a person's identity, undermines people's dignity and forces them to change their usual behaviour and daily routines to avoid 'marks' of their identity (for example avoiding certain places or activities, being afraid of leaving house or travelling alone, changing the way they dress and avoiding traditional or religious symbols). It can also lead to other emotional impacts such as distress, PTSD, insomnia, depression, fear, a sense of isolation and lack of trust in people.

- **Social impacts.** Feeling of isolation and low trust in others, including in the victims' area of residence can have significant consequences not only for the person's social life but also for a long-term cohesion and integration, particularly so in cases of repeated harassment, institutional racism and housing discrimination.

INAR's 'Afrophobia' report, on racism against people of African descent, finds that racism '(…) has the effect of marking them out as being out-of-place in Irish work and leisure spaces, isolating them from the wider communities in which they live. While racism of this kind becomes 'everyday', in the sense that there are routine situations in everyday life in which it occurs repeatedly, it produces a distinctly abnormal and inhumane experience of life in Ireland.' (Michael, 2015 p. 39)

- **Financial impacts** Racism can also have financial impacts, for example those caused by having to move to a new house to avoid being a target, the costs related to repair of damaged property, avoiding public transport or taking longer routes, lost employment or barriers to accessing it, depressed wages, discrimination in access to housing, and the illegal denial of social security.

IMPACT OF RACISM ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY

Racist incidents can have a negative impact not only on an individual who directly experienced it, but also on the person's family or even the entire community. Racism can lead to fear spreading through the community, especially when there is a poor response of the community leaders, local people and/or authorities. Members of the same minority groups can react as if the same has happened to them and feel that racism is accepted and supported by society, and that they are vulnerable to similar harassment and violence because of their identity. On a wider scale this serves to isolate and polarise groups creating tensions within society[XI]. Communities can become isolated and torn apart.

THE ROLE OF BYSTANDERS

The impacts of racist incidents can be compounded severely by the lack of intervention and support from people present. In such circumstances, victims can feel that they are completely alone, helpless and surrounded by people indifferent to their experiences.

The evidence from the 2013-2017 iReport.ie data shows that when people who are targeted by racism do not feel supported in any way by others, then they are more likely to report more severe psychological impact. This further increases their isolation and sense of exclusion and makes them more vulnerable to racial harassment. When offered support and compassion, whether during or after the incident, the effect of such interventions is powerful and the impact on targeted persons likely to be significantly reduced.

*Information on what **you** can do as a bystander can be found at inar.ie/reporting-racism-in-ireland or by referring to INAR's Responding to Raacism Guide*

Report all racist incidents to **www.iReport.ie**

ENDONTES

[I] UN International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), (1969), Article 1

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