

# include YOUTH

**Include Youth Response to PSNI Race and Ethnicity Action  
Plan 2025-2027  
Equality in Action- Delivering Effective and Trusted  
Policing for Ethnic Minority Communities, Officers and  
Staff**

**December 2024**

For further information contact Paula Rodgers  
Policy Manager, Include Youth, 100 Great Patrick Street, Belfast, BT1 6AS

028 9031 1007      paula@includeyouth.org  
www.includeyouth.org      @includeyouth

Include Youth is a rights-based charity for children and young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities, or whose rights are not being met. We work to improve their employability, personal and social development enhancing inclusion, integration and good relations. We work with over 800 young people a year aged between 14-25. Our main offices are in Belfast, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Enniskillen, Lisburn and Omagh. We also have offices in Tallaght and Cavan, where our Give and Take programme is being delivered in association with TUSLA

The young people we work with and for include those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have had poor educational experiences, those from a care background, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, young people with mental health issues, young people who have come into contact or are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, at risk or experience of CSE. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes delivered in partnership with community-based organisations.

One of our programmes, the Give & Take Scheme, adopts a youth work approach to improving the employability and increasing the self-esteem and confidence of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not yet ready to participate in mainstream training. We work across 9 primary sites and a number of outreach locations. The core components are personal development, mentoring, training, work experience, essential skills and transitional support.

The Give and Scheme also provides a One to One specialist programme for young people who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Include Youth also delivers an Employability Service on behalf of two of the five Health Trusts for young people aged 16 + who have had experience of the care system. This service is designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to assist young people leaving care to prepare for and engage in work.

Strive is a cross community, cross cultural, and cross border programme that engages young people aged 14-24 in good relations, person development and citizenship. We deliver this with our partners Newstart Educational Centre, Northern Ireland Alternatives, Youth Initiatives and Lifford/Clonleigh Resource Centre.

Our Care for Change project which started in September 2022 will employ 15 care experienced Expert By Experience (EBE) Youth Mentors over two years and across 6 Give and Take sites. Our Youth Mentors are trained and supported to mentor other

young people to become change makers and policy advocates and to contribute to consultations and policy responses, meet with decision makers and co-facilitate focus groups.

Include Youth also engages in policy advocacy work in a range of areas including employability, youth justice and policing. This work is informed by relevant international human rights and children's rights standards, is evidence based, including that provided by young people and practitioners and is based on high quality, critical analysis.

## **General Comments**

### **Include Youth's work with separated children and young people seeking asylum:**

For the last seven years, the five Health and Social Care Trusts have been referring separated children and young people seeking asylum to our Give and Take Core Programme. Belfast Give & Take programme has worked with the highest numbers of these young people, but we also work with young people in our offices in Armagh, Ballymena, Derry and Lisburn. We have recently received approval from NOCN and are now an accredited centre for ESOL. From April 2023 to March 2024 30 young people engaged in weekly ESOL classes.

A high percentage of the young people we have worked with over the years have progressed beyond further education and are currently doing higher education courses such as foundation degrees at local colleges. The young people are supported in their move on and provided with practical support for any challenges including support to apply for job/training, identify area of employment/training they are interested in, build CV, prepare for interviews, identify challenges while in the new job/training, maintain regular contact with ETE provider.

As well as providing classes, we also provide additional support and culturally supportive services to help promote the young people's integration into society

Because of our direct service delivery programme, we have considerable experience of working directly with separated children and young people seeking asylum. Currently, separated young people make up 45% of the total number of young people on our programme. Young people have arrived from a range of countries including Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Syria. Many young people have fled their country, leaving family behind, because they are facing discrimination, persecution, threats and war. The trauma that the young people experience is deeply rooted. They arrive here feeling scared, lost and alone. The PSNI will often be some of the first line of professionals that these young people will come into contact with, followed by social

services. Those under 18 years of age will be placed in children's homes initially and then moved to hostels or independent accommodation anywhere across NI. The young people face a multitude of challenges as they try to settle into life here, such as language barriers, access to services and information, finding support with their mental health/ trauma, stigma, racism, finding suitable housing, navigating the Home Office process to secure refugee status and integrating into a new culture. The current Home Office process compounds the fear and anxiety many of the young people fear, characterised as it is by delays, lack of communication, and limited flow of information.

Include Youth are committed to providing a safe, secure, inclusive, welcoming and nurturing environment where the young people can learn, increase their confidence, feel respected, develop personally, progress and achieve.

In previous consultation responses and advocacy work, we have highlighted the issues and concerns that these young people have raised with us that they believe need to be addressed and improved. Through focus groups and one to one discussions, the following issues have been highlighted: the need for additional support, improved access to appropriate accommodation, better access to the welfare system, healthcare, education, training and employment, tackling delay in the Home Office process, reform of Home Office process to ensure that respect, rights and dignity are upheld, improved legal representation, increased supply of interpreters, better and widely available ESOL provision, enhanced cultural awareness and combatting racism and discrimination.

### **Young People`s Voices:**

We would welcome details on how the PSNI consulted with children and young people from ethnic minorities in the development of the Race and Ethnicity Action Plan.

The development of a children and young people's version of the consultation document would support the engagement of young people in the content of the Plan.

Information on what feedback the PSNI has received as a result of the consultation should also be shared with children and young people in an accessible way.

### **International human rights and children's rights standards:**

We welcome the PSNI's commitment to take practical steps to eradicate racial and ethnic disparities in policing. Particularly welcome is the reference within the Introduction to the plan to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the commitment to place the Action Plan within the principles of the ECHR. It would be

beneficial to also cite the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to ensure that the Plan is compliant with key articles of the UNCRC regarding both policing and justice and the specific needs of children in the immigration and asylum process.

We would welcome reference to the recent publication of the Northern Ireland Policing Board Thematic Review on Children and Young People.<sup>1</sup>

The Committee on the Rights of the Child in their 2023 Concluding Observations raised concerns about a number of issues which are relevant to the content of this Plan, in relation to children and policing<sup>2</sup>. They called for improved collection of data, freedom from all forms of violence, and rights compliant policing and justice. The collection of disaggregated data is a consistent recommendation from the UNCRC Committee. If the PSNI is to adequately and effectively monitor how they deliver policing to children and young people from ethnic minorities and wish to be confident that they are delivering an accessible and equitable service to this group, then they must collect the necessary information.

The Committee also made the following recommendation in relation to the importance of children and young people seeking asylum and their access to child friendly justice:

(c) To review and strengthen the asylum process to ensure that children receive age-appropriate information and legal advice about their rights, asylum procedures and requirements for documentation, that their best interests are given primary consideration in all asylum processes, that their views are heard, taken into account and given due weight and that they have access to child-friendly justice mechanisms and remedies;

### **Specific section on children and young people within the plan:**

We would like to have seen a clear and specific section and associated dedicated actions to address the particular policing needs of children and young from ethnic minorities within the Race and Ethnicity Plan.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Final Human Rights Review of Children and Young People and Policing.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> UNCRC, 'Concluding observations on the combined 6th and 7th periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' (2023), [CRC C GBR CO 6-7-EN.pdf](#)

We know that the relationship generally between young people and the PSNI can be a challenging one, and we remain committed to improving that relationship and increasing PSNI understanding of the key issues facing the young people we work with. We have consistently submitted responses to policing related consultations and most recently provided written evidence to the thematic review of children and young people and policing that the Northern Ireland Policing Board conducted.<sup>3</sup>

We welcome the development of the PSNI Children and Young People Strategy and the commitment that this demonstrates to improve the relationship between young people and the police.

It would be beneficial to produce a children and young people's version of the Race and Ethnicity Plan and highlight the actions and commitments that will be directed specifically at children and young people. The Plan should then be disseminated to organisations working with children and young people from ethnic minorities to ensure that children and young people are informed of and are aware of how the police will respond to their needs. This dissemination and awareness raising should include organisations who are supporting separated children and young people seeking asylum.

## **Young People's Views on the Race and Ethnicity Action Plan:**

As part of our preparations to inform this submission, we consulted with some of our separated young people from across our programmes. We also sought the views of young people from our partners in the Heal Programme in Derry who are all young asylum seekers and refugees. In total we consulted with 25 young people.

### General comments on the overall content of the action plan:

Most of the young people were supportive of the action plan and welcomed the PSNI's commitment to improve policing for them. They were largely content with what has been covered in the plan and could not identify any gaps, apart from the need for more translators to improve communication, and a more specific focus within the plan for the police to connect with organisations and agencies providing support to asylum seeking and refugee children and young people.

*'I think it is a good idea if all of these actions come to me.'*

*'Everything that I would have wanted to say, you have mentioned.'*

---

<sup>3</sup> [Include-Youth-Submission-to-NI-Policing-Board-Thematic-Review-Children-and-Young-People-Jan-24.pdf](#)

*'More translators.'*

*'They should connect to the Heal Programme.'*

Specific comments:

We asked the young people several specific questions to ascertain the levels of willingness that young people had to report to the police if they were a victim of crime, how they felt generally when they saw the police on the street on a day to day basis and how much they thought the police understand their culture, experiences and challenges.

Some young people said they would be reluctant to report a crime to the police, because it could mean that they would put themselves in danger.

*'a lot of people waiting for a claim (asylum) might not want to report to the police.'*

This highlights the fear that exists of the repercussions of reporting a crime. Many of the young people who have travelled here from other countries and are seeking asylum are reluctant to do anything that would draw attention to them in a negative way. While going through the asylum process, young people are keen to 'keep their head down' and avoid any unnecessary interaction with authorities, for fear that it will jeopardise the outcome of their Home Office interviews and decisions on achieving refugee status.

However, most of the young people generally said they would report to the police, if they had been a victim of crime. Overall, they would be happy to contact the police, but some young people doubted how serious the police would take their report.

When asked if they would contact the police if they were subject to racist/ hate language, there was a mixed reaction. Some said they would absolutely contact the police while others said they definitely wouldn't contact the police because they think in doing so they would be more likely to attract even more racist hate crime.

*'I wouldn't call the police, but I would stand by myself and defend.'*

*'They are supposed to help you with everything you are complaining about, threats or scams or hate crime, so all these things police can help you with.'*

When asked about how they feel when they see the police on the streets many said they felt 'safety' and were reassured by their presence.

*'They are doing a great job, because without police the country is nothing'.*

Others were unsure if having the police on the street makes a difference to their sense of safety or even if the police would care how they feel, because they come from another country.

A considerable number of young people said their immediate reaction when they see police officers on the street is fear.

*'I feel scared, I don't know why, maybe belief from my country that they arrest people close to them.'*

*'I'm scared.'*

This indicates a need for the police to improve awareness of the service they provide to ALL our communities, including those who are unfamiliar with the PSNI and our policing structures in NI. It also points to the need for the police to be aware of past experiences that young people may have had with police authorities in their home countries which will make them reluctant to approach the police or could result in a challenging encounter, if they feel afraid.

When asked how much they think the police understand their culture, many of the young people felt that police do not particularly understand their culture, know much about their countries of origin or what challenges they have faced and continue to face as asylum seekers and refugees.

*'Some of them might understand, while the rest of them don't get it.'*

*'They don't respect your religion, they are trying to help you but they don't respect your culture.'*

*'They should listen to refugees' stories.'*

The young people we support were heavily impacted by the civil unrest and racist protests that occurred earlier this year. They felt fearful and were reluctant to leave their places of accommodation for any reason, even to get basic groceries and shopping. Travelling on public transport and being visible on the street was a nerve wrecking experience and some of our young people did experience racist verbal abuse. On one occasion our youth worker raised concerns with the police about several young people who were very worried about their own safety. Our worker was not satisfied with the level of response from the police and felt that their telephone call had not been taken seriously.

However, on other occasions, police were proactive in approaching our offices and checking in to see if staff and young people were safe. Some of our young people were



offered ‘safety packs’ from their Community Police Officers, containing personal alarms etc, and this was greatly appreciated by both staff and young people.

*‘The police came out to my home during the riots.’*

*‘They keep you safe, they are right by my house’.*

*‘When people attacked the Belfast mosque, the police protected it’.*

Several of our staff teams in regional offices have appreciated the efforts that local neighbourhood police teams have gone to to improve relationships between themselves and the young people, calling in to chat informally with the young people or inviting young people to visit the station or see inside a police car. While initially it appeared that there had not been enough preparation done by the officers to ensure that they were as well informed as possible in advance of meeting the young people, more frequent interaction has improved the nature of the conversations.

Because of the previous experiences that some of our separated young people have had with the police forces in their countries of origin, or the police forces in the countries they have travelled through to get here, they can be mistrusting or fearful of anyone in a police uniform.

*‘Police in other countries can be hard’.*

The PSNI need to be aware that young people are living with memories which are extremely traumatic and there is a danger they will be triggered on seeing a police uniform.

We feel strongly that the PSNI would benefit from an awareness raising training programme being rolled out to all officers on the specific needs of care experienced young people/ separated children and young people seeking asylum. This co-designed, rights-based training would address cultural learning, the need for trauma informed policing, provide information on the challenges facing young people and be delivered in partnership with young people with lived experience. Include Youth are currently in the process of developing a training package to raise awareness of issues relating to children and young people seeking asylum. The content of the training has been informed and co-designed by the young people we support on our programme.

## **Specific Comments on Race and Ethnicity Action Plan Workstreams**

### **Workstream 1: Internal Culture and Inclusivity**

We support the development of robust training programmes to increase the awareness of and impact of racism. This training should be co-designed and delivered by people from ethnic minorities. There should be specific training developed on the needs of separated children and young people seeking asylum.

We welcome the commitment to improve the recruitment, retention and progression of ethnic minority people within policing. More detail is required on how people are encouraged and made aware of opportunities to join or progress within the PSNI.

## **Workstream 2: Professionalism, Powers and Policies**

### 2.1 Eliminate racial bias, stereotyping, profiling and discrimination

We agree that the PSNI should tackle racial bias, stereotyping, profiling and discrimination in their actions. We note that one of the actions under this commitment is 'dealing' with ethnic minority children in an age appropriate and culturally sensitive way' (2.1.1). We recommend changing the wording to 'interacting with ethnic minority children in an age appropriate, rights based, culturally aware and sensitive way'. We would welcome more detail on how officers will be supported to interact with children in this way. Will there be child focussed specific training developed? And if so, will the training be informed by ethnic minority groups working with children and with input from children and young people? Which officers will receive the training? We would support a co-design approach to such training and for the training to be delivered service wide. Include Youth are currently developing rights-based awareness training on separated children and young people seeking asylum. This training has been developed with our young people and we will work towards delivering this training in partnership with young people.

We support the delivery of service wide training on Cultural Intelligence (2.1.2). Again, we would welcome detail on how that training will be developed and who will inform the content.

### 2.2 Service specific to need

We agree that the service provided by the police should take account of cultural identity, heritage, vulnerabilities, experiences and circumstances, such as trauma. The actions identified to meet this commitment are not sufficiently detailed to allow for us to provide specific comments. We do not disagree with the statements 2.2.1, 2.2.2 or 2.2.3, but they are more statements of intent than detailed action plans.

The statement in 2.2.2 is especially vague and we believe could be much more detailed and specific, within the context of race and ethnicity. For example, what will the police do to ensure they are fully aware of and responding appropriately when interacting with separated children who are undoubtedly experiencing trauma and may have been trafficked.

It is essential for frontline officers to be supported to develop and understand their knowledge and skills on immigration and modern slavery to identify, support and protect children and young people. As well as dealing with the trauma they have witnessed and experienced in their country of origin (violence, family loss and separation, unsafe living conditions) some young people on their journey here may have suffered sexual, economic and/or criminal exploitation and trafficking.

We look forward to further details on how the police will respond to these needs and identify specific actions.

### 2.3 Appropriate Use of Powers

While this section is titled ‘use of powers’ it does not provide information on how police powers are currently being used on people from ethnic minority communities. It would be helpful to have data and statistics provided which demonstrate how police powers are currently being used on people from ethnic minority communities. We would welcome disaggregated data and statistics on numbers of children and young people from ethnic minority communities who are currently subject to police powers, have come to the attention of police, received disposals, and have had contact with youth justice system.

We welcome the commitment in 2.3.1 to ‘actively supporting services that make a difference to young people’s lives and reducing the need for police to be involved at later stage’. But we would welcome detail on what ‘actively supporting’ will mean in practice and if that will include the invaluable services provided by the voluntary and community sector.

2.3.2 would benefit from an expansion on what the ‘crime and disorder problems’ are that are currently known to the police. It is unclear what ‘problems’ the plan is referring to within the context of reducing the risk of criminalising people from ethnic minority communities, especially young people. We would welcome clarification on the purpose behind this statement.

### 2.4: Strengthen workforce knowledge/ oversight of use and impact of police powers

This section would benefit from background information and statistics/ data on the current use of police powers, such as stop and search, on people from ethnic minorities, including children and young people. If the intention, as stated in 2.4.2, is to ‘reduce racial disparities in the use of police powers and criminal justice outcomes’, there must be a baseline from which to measure a reduction.

Include Youth remain concerned generally about the high numbers of children and young people subject to stop and search and questioning, regardless of their community or cultural background. We are also concerned that stop and search powers are being used inappropriately. While we have not consulted specifically with separated children and young people on the issue of stop and search we have over the years conducted a number of consultations with children and young people from NI on issues of policing. Almost of all of the young people we spoke to had negative experiences of being stopped and searched, more often than not this was on a consistent basis and was itself a factor in the level of confidence they held in the police. In some cases it was reported that negative stop and search incidents had led to additional charges for young people. Include Youth consistently raise the issue of ‘stop and search’ and point out that young people feel targeted and victimised as a result of the use of ‘stop and search’ powers. They also report inconsistent experience of Officers’ communication when it comes to providing a rationale for the ‘stop and search’ and their rights within that process. Young people also believe that ‘stop and search’ powers are used against them at a much higher rate than against adults.

We would welcome an analysis of the use of stop and search powers on children and young people specifically from ethnic minorities, to help inform the actions arising from this Plan.

### **Workstream 3: Communities and Engagement**

#### **3.1: Stronger and consistent approach to engagement**

It is welcomed that the plan acknowledges the need to learn from the past and is transparent about how bad policing has led to distrust. But we believe that the statement in 3.1.1 should not refer only to what has happened in the past. There are examples of existing UK policing practice, not just in the past, but also in present day, that is leading to community trauma and distrust.

3.1.2 commits to ‘addressing and reconciling the divisions between the police and people from ethnic minorities’. This is not a description of ‘how’ this will be achieved. No clear or specific actions are identified which will result in such reconciliation. Further detail is required.

### 3.2 Review and develop policing response to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

The inclusion of a specific reference to the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants within the Plan is welcomed. We would like to see specific reference, commitment and actions also on how policing will respond to the individual needs of separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. We support the actions identified under this commitment and would just reiterate the need for specific actions regarding children and young people.

While we support the statements within sections 3.3 and 3.4 there appears to be duplication and some confusion over what is included in the 'what we will do' sections and 'how we will do it' sections. For example, 'actively supporting services' appears in both a 'what we will do' and 'how we will do it' section.

#### **Workstream 4: Protection, Partnership and Justice**

We welcome the commitment to reducing the harm caused by crime against people from ethnic minorities (4.1.2) and to preventing ethnic minorities becoming victims, but we would like to have seen a clearer plan of action for how perpetrators of racist crime/ hate crime will be pursued and brought to justice.

In talking to the young people we support in Include Youth, it is evident that the majority of the young people have been victims of racist hate crime. In our 2023 submission to the Executive Office consultation on the Race Relations Order<sup>4</sup>, we asked young people what their experiences of racism and hate crime were:

*'We have been called many names, I mean two A4 pages wouldn't be enough to write them all down.'*

*'Yes, I get it (racist abuse) all the time, I used to work in surgery reception and the first one was because I am a woman of colour, the second one was because of my religion, that's why I don't work anymore in public facing jobs. I prefer to work just in the back.'*

*'Yes, I get a lot of it in shops, or you always have someone to follow you when you are in a shop, it's so bad.'*

*'We went to a shop where I live and we went to buy something and the price was like a pound and she said 'it's five pounds for you'.'*

---

<sup>4</sup> Include Youth, 2023, Response to Executive Office consultation on Race Relations Order, [Include-Youths-Response-to-Race-Relations-Order-TEO-June-2023.pdf](#)

Another young person had been intimidated in her home and despite reporting it to the police she still did not feel safe or protected. This young person explained how she no longer felt safe not just in her home here but in Northern Ireland generally, and is now considering moving away.

*'Things do get reported to the police. I had this issue and we spoke to the police and I don't feel like they do care, and we have been blackmailed that if we don't move from this house that something bad is going to happen to us, so we are not safe, last night we didn't sleep. And the police came but they said we can't do anything about it, you guys just need to move, like why we would you have to move, why would I have to move from my own house? I pay for the rent, we do everything, we feel like it is our house, but instead of doing something to that person, they are just moving people. Our landlord got a letter from someone saying because he doesn't like women of colour, that if he doesn't move us, then.... I just want to do my own thing. ..I feel like racism is coming more at me during 2023, I've dealt with it three times, I feel like Northern Ireland is not a safe place for us anymore.'*

The experiences of the young people leave us in no doubt that hate crime is a common occurrence for too many young people seeking asylum and safety. It is vital that the Race and Ethnicity Action Plan provides clear direction and commitment to tackling this.

Like other sections within the Plan, this section is light on specific details and actions. The 'How we will do it' sections do not adequately provide information on tangible, time bound, measurable and resourced actions. We look forward to seeing specific outcomes being developed to bring the commitments within the plan to fruition.

### **Workstream 5: Performance and Accountability**

It is evident that this workstream is central to the success of all the other workstreams. The development of evidence, baseline data, performance and outcomes frameworks, targets and trajectory, reporting and governance structures are critical to the outworkings of the commitments made within the Plan. We look forward to seeing the detail of this workstream as it develops.

### **Closing Comments**

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Race and Ethnicity Action Plan and are happy to be contacted if any clarification is required on the points raised in the response. We look forward to engaging in the next steps of implementation of the plan

and are keen to work in partnership with the PSNI to ensure the delivery of equal, effective and trusted policing for ethnic minorities. We are particularly keen to engage further on the training needs identified through the Race and Ethnicity Plan, with specific reference to separated children and young people seeking asylum. We are also keen to make links with the Ethnic Minority Police Association and would be interesting in setting up a meeting between members of EMPA and some of our young people.