



# IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers

*Celebrating 50 Years in 2021*

# A NEW WAY FORWARD

DISMANTLING RACISM IN 21ST-CENTURY IRISH SOCIAL WORK

# IASW ANTI-RACISM STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021 the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) celebrates its 50th anniversary. Considering heightened consciousness around Anti-black Racism and related issues locally and globally, we felt as a National Social Work organisation it is the right time to look forward and set out a plan for what we can achieve in fighting racism in Irish social work over the period 2021–2023. We are cautiously optimistic about what social work in Ireland can achieve in this regard if we work together.

While the IASW has attempted such initiatives in the past, with limited success, there are now new Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) entrants to the organisation, with lived experience of racism in social work. These BME members of IASW, working closely with their White allies, have given a new thrust and urgency to the goal of eradicating Racism in Irish Social work.

As IASW, we believe that our work advocating for support, and developing creative partnerships in the fight against racism has never been more relevant and urgent. This three-year plan is inspired in the main by the resilience we have witnessed in recent times from the Black caucus of IASW, together with their White allies and the ambitions of the generality of our membership for the future.

To remain sustainable and relevant as an organisation and profession, we will need to adapt to the evolving multiracial and multi-ethnic 21st century global environment and enhance our relevance to the widest possible range of Irish society. As we implement this plan, the Anti-Racism Advisory Group within IASW will remain resourceful and flexible in engaging with the Board and other stakeholders.

*Dr. Colletta Dalikeni*

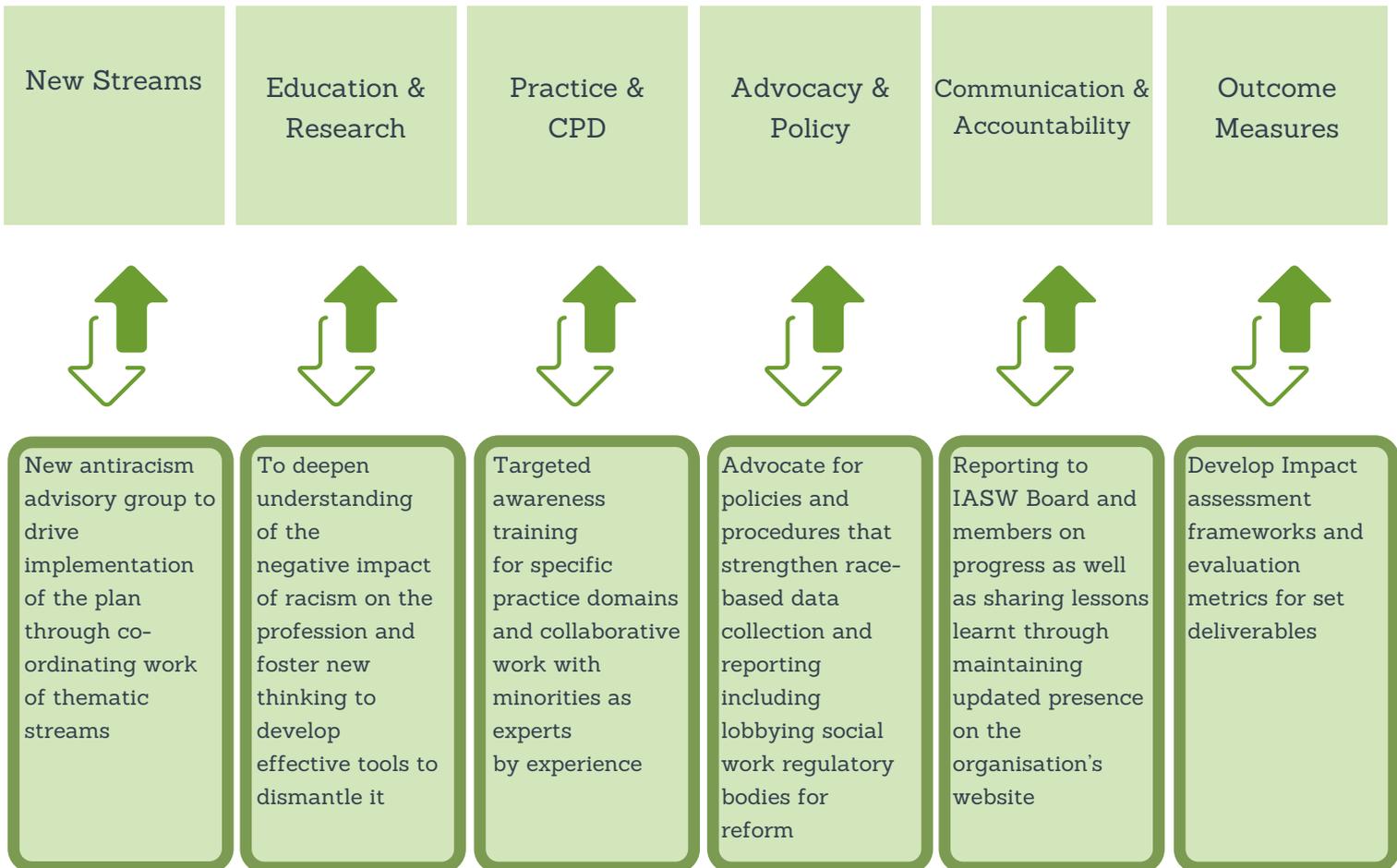
Co-ordinator Social Work Anti-Racism Advisory Group (IASW)



# VALUES & VISION

Our Values and Vision based on egalitarian and social justice ethos find expression in this strategic plan's thrust towards achieving racial justice through dismantling racism and its various manifestations. To remain true to our values and mission it is imperative that we change the way we approach and dismantle racism to advance racial equity.

## STRATEGIC GOALS & ACTIONS



# IASW ANTI-RACISM ADVISORY GROUP: THE JOURNEY

This strategic plan constitutes a potential historic departure in how IASW as a national social work organisation aims to deal with issues of Race and Racism in Social Work going forward. Following Gorge Floyd's murder and the subsequent climate created by the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, some IASW members strongly felt it was time for the organisation to review its overall business strategy on this issue beyond tokenistic statements.

Antecedent to this organisational reset strategy was the adoption and acceptance of the Motion Proposed by three of its Black members which was backed by several white allies:

**That the IASW incorporates learning about Racism, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion into its CPD activities and advocate for updating current social work education curriculum and practice to include other world views, diverse knowledge systems, and intervention methods that reflect the multicultural makeup of Ireland today. We believe it is crucial that the IASW provides a platform for ongoing discussion of 'Racism' in social work given the evidence that racism is a reality for ethnic minority social workers and service users. Such a platform would potentially encourage the required learning to effectively challenge systems and practices that perpetuate racism in social work and the wider society.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhLREwPfyBc>

Three 'Talk Time' (Loughran & Murphy 2020) sessions on anti-racist social work practice were subsequently held. The aim of these discussion was to provide an opportunity for the membership to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences of racism in social work. Discussion included experiences of racism among colleagues as well as from service users, awareness/lack of awareness of bias, implications for social work as a profession at training, practice, and professional development levels as well as consideration of more structural or systemic concerns which may support or leave unchallenged incidences of racism. The overall outcome position of the Talk Time sessions was that racism exist in Irish social work education, practice and research and this is confirmed by existing and most recent internal research (Marovatsanga, 2020; Coulter, 2013; Dalikeni, 2019 - 2013).

It was also agreed that racism in any form is unacceptable given that the values, principles, and mission of social work is to challenge racism and advocate for social justice. The culmination of these sessions was the Anti-Racist IASW Forum on Nov 11th 2020, attended by participants of the 3 Talk Time sessions and interested others. Wayne Reid, Professional Officer, Social Worker & Anti-racism Visionary at the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) addressed the Forum and generated ideas about how the commitment to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice is realised in BASW. These initiatives in conjunction with a report on the outcomes of the Talk Time discussions formed the focus of the Call to Action in the form of a strategic plan. An IASW Anti-Racism Advisory Group led by BME members with lived experience of Racism was formed to work with their white allies to come up with a strategic plan.

This strategic plan is therefore an action plan based on adaptive strategies that set long-term ambitions but still flex with evolving conditions. The strategy first articulates, what the IASW will do to achieve its mission. This is followed with functional mini strategic plans setting a roadmap of initiatives and investments and showing how these will contribute to the overall goals. The focus is only on what's material to the strategy in terms of critical assumptions, relevant metrics, and the key initiatives in contributing effectively to set goals, even as they shift.

# CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

## 1- IASW VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

While the IASW vision, mission and values largely echo International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) definition of social work, however the prevalence of racism and related experiences for ethnic minorities within Irish social work suggests the enunciated values remain an unattained utopian ideal at best, or at worst betrays an entrenched insular infidelity in translating and embedding the real emancipatory and egalitarian values of social work into everyday practice and institutional and organisational cultures. The post George Floyd and Black Lives Matter (BLM) resurgence climate provides a historic opportunity for IASW to bridge the gap between rhetoric and action in terms of what Irish social work says and, does, and in so doing perhaps liberates itself from potentially selling a vision it does not embody or have the political will to implement at the collective ethos level.

## 2- MACRO LEVEL ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK:

### **2:1 Political:**

Generally, there is a lack of political will to support anti- racist initiatives and tackle racism at the level of the state and its institutions with concrete action beyond tokenism. Contradictions exist between equality policies and punitive policies on Travellers and immigrants more particularly with those of African descent: Various in-depth research investigations of race-based discrimination in the areas of employment, education, housing, and service access suggest these areas have not been prioritised as urgent areas for action. Outdated and misguided nativist understanding of Irishness pervades the white Irish society with no meaningful corrective efforts. (Fanning & Michael, 2018; Stout & Fanning 2010; Fanning, 2002).

### **2:2 Economic:**

Ethnic nepotism breeds inequalities based on Race in labour market recruitment/retention leading to an absence of real Equality diversity and inclusion in the national workforce. (Joseph, 2018 - 2020).

## **2:3 Social:**

There still exists a nativist assumption of Irishness that promotes ethnic nepotism, explicit and implicit racial and cultural biases based on 'them vs us'. The mainstream media lacks self-regulation as it relates to ethical media reporting of ethnic and cultural diversity and difference. Given that social workers are products of their societies it is not surprising that what is happening in society in terms of racist attitudes, implicit and explicit racial biases is reflected within social work education practice and research. (Fanning, 2018).

## **2:4 Technological:**

The volatility brought in by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is challenging traditional business operating models, leading to the overreliance on online technologies. The use and abuse of social media to peddle unproven claims and racism anonymously has become prevalent. On the other hand, social media has also enlarged the public sphere whereby hitherto silenced and unheard voices can be heard without first seeking authorisation of the powerful. (Habermas, 2006).

## **2:5 Regulatory Environment:**

Apart from the newly proposed hate crime legislation, (see INAR) at <https://inar.ie/hate-crime-legislation/> 'the regulatory framework, as currently constituted, does not reflect a readiness to meaningfully embrace racial and cultural diversity to support the required changes in related areas. The presence of a liberal constitution and equality laws has not translated into tangible equality outcomes for ethnic minorities. The laws largely reflect legalised Irish social and cultural norms therefore the regulatory framework is neither neutral nor colour blind.

# **3- INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:**

## **3:1 Internal professional organisations comparative analysis benchmarks:**

E.g.: Nurses and Psychologists

- What can we learn from how similar organisations in the state are dealing with racism?
- What achievements should we build on?
- What mistakes should we learn from?

### **3:2 External organisations;**

E.g: BASW, Canadian, Australian and American Organisations

- What can we learn from how similar organisations in other countries have dealt with racism?
- What aspects of their achievements should we copy /build on?
- What mistakes did they make that we should learn from?

### **3:3 Trends: are there any external trends or behaviours that are relevant to this area that should be considered?**

- A heightened awareness issues of race since the death of George Floyd - Black Lives Matter Movement.
- An increase in Equality and Diversity training and the appointment of Equality and Diversity Officers in many organisations.
- The activist role of International Social Work during Black Lives Matter protests and Covid 19 and Irish social work's reactions on the same issues.

### **3:4 SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats:**

#### **Strengths:**

There is IASW Board support for the plan and it's being led by suitably motivated individuals with lived experience of racism and their white allies. The overall climate in Ireland is trending towards equality diversity and inclusion in the aftermath of George Floyd murder and BLM protests worldwide.

- 1.IASW has the Resources and Assets available to implement this plan: People, skills, time, budgets – as long as there is genuine professional will and commitment to do something substantial about Racism in Irish social work.
- 2.Commitment from several Special Interest Groups to working on and supporting an IASW Anti-Racist Strategy.

#### **Weaknesses:**

The risk of Special Interest Groups setting up parallel and competing initiatives which would serve to dilute the impact of the strategy's originality and thrust. Communicating and selling the importance of the anti-racism plan to the wider membership may help mitigate any fears associated with this new initiative and hence convince members that unified and aligned tactics are required and to see the benefit of this strategic plan. This weakness could also be ameliorated by the IASW Board

unequivocally making it explicitly clear that the official and sanctioned anti-racist initiatives are those incorporated in the current Anti-racism strategic plan.

### **Opportunities:**

- This strategy provides a predominantly white organisation like IASW a once in a lifetime opportunity to escape and shed its traditional 'White only' image and perception among ethnic minorities and could possibly begin to be seen as an organisation capable of moving with the changing times - Promoting a more active and central role for ethnic minorities.
- It allows IASW to inform and shape how Irish social work areas of education practice and research could be reconfigured to become truly faithful to the profession's egalitarian ethos and thereby align with international best practice for globalised multicultural realities of 21st century practice contexts.

### **Threats:**

Any change often results in some resistance-Not all White people and some Black people in the organisation are enthusiastic about this plan. The attempt to undermine the motion at the AGM on 1st July 2020 were unsuccessful and in fact paved the way for the initiative to be adopted. So, it is possible for this initiative to face resistance from some colleagues.

- 1.The idea of Experts by Experience leading /chairing panels is new and will need to be understood and accepted by all otherwise there is a potential threat that this may undermine the leadership of this initiative.
- 2.To date white allies have worked collaboratively with the Anti-Racism Advisory group and have been helpful in sending the message that not all white people are racists. Provided the current positive allyship continues the work will yield positive results. However the threat of the phenomenon of false allyship prevalent in other countries with long histories of pursuing similar initiatives if it arises can be seen as a potential threat. (Tomkin, 2020).
- 3.Funding: This can be deployed to dilute the more radical aspects of the plan. Lack of funding could challenge progressing areas of the strategy that require funding, for example, inviting international guest speakers to input in CPD training programmes.

### **3:5. Resources and Assets available to the organisation:**

It is necessary to explore and understand the people skills, the time, and the budget, and how they relate to the plan.

# CORE PLAN OBJECTIVES

It is important now that leaders in the organisations take time to address issues with their members to be the organisation they want to become. There are four key principles they can adopt:

## OBJECTIVE 1

Create new streams or structures to drive and implement the change by ensuring the assigned persons have the requisite motivation beyond the functional duty of care and enjoy the unwavering support of the organisation e.g., Clarifying the organisation's stance and values placing emphasis on zero tolerance to racism.

## OBJECTIVE 2: EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- Reiterate the message in teaching social work that social work is a political profession concerned with the fact that there is a macro-level structural element in every individually experienced problem. Therefore, there is need to engage macro-level structures to attain optimal outcomes for individual service users. This involves challenging oppressive policies, for example, Direct Provision policies regarding restricted access to the labour market for those still in the asylum process.
- Deepen understanding of the socially constructed nature of race and racism through teaching and research to highlight the contradictory message of racism to what the profession stands for.
- Utilise research to foster new thinking around postmodern perspectives' many variations of racism and the focus on asking questions such as 'why has "race" consciousness developed?', 'How has science created the "facts" of "race"?' etc. and the relevance to social work.
- Develop a wide range of strategies and tools to enable us to analyse and combat different forms of racism as they exist and evolve across time, and different contexts and how they are explained.

- Initiate a critical evaluation of how the law deals with issues of race and racism and conduct research that evaluates the impact of the law on ethnic minorities and the role of the law in producing and reproducing racism at a structural level.
- Actively engage with social work education providers to strengthen the social work curriculum in relation to understanding and challenging racism, discrimination, cultural dominance, and oppressive practice.
- Actively engage with social work educators to support measures to ensure diversity at all levels of social work education to ensure that the workforce in social work academia and practice appropriately reflects Ireland's population into the future.

### **OBJECTIVE 3: PRACTICE AND CPD TRAINING**

- Identify, promote, and build on good practice initiatives to prevent and reduce racism by providing training where all staff are invited to explore their own attitudes to cultural diversity.
- Empower social work agencies, colleges and individuals to take action to prevent and reduce racism and seek redress when it occurs.
- Share strategies or approaches that can be used to help individuals and organisations who experience racism to speak up or act.
- Connect members to the communities by talking openly, creating an environment of respect and safety, and to share experiences and learn from each other e.g. use of cultural mediators.
- Provide training and develop incentives for managers, commit to sustained action, visible leadership, and a willingness to change.

### **OBJECTIVE 4: ADVOCACY AND POLICY**

- Work in solidarity with community organisations to advocate for policies and procedures that strengthen race-based data collection and reporting including lobbying social work regulatory bodies for reform necessary to embed race consciousness.
- Lobby for the development and enhanced race-based discrimination and harassment policies and procedures to deal with racism in a consistent and effective manner.
- Implement processes where staff, service users and parents can participate in the development and review of anti-racism policies within social work organisations.

- Promote inclusion of anti-racism modules into the school curriculum that also incorporate gender differences. These modules require students to examine their own behaviour and promote respectful relationships among all students.
- Involve the student working group in the development of an anti-racism strategy that is tailored for the specific context.
- Advocate that anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practices should be at the forefront of CORU - Codes of Professional Conduct and Ethics and should reflect that under the Equal Status Act 2000, discrimination based on race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins is an offence and can lead to indictment and imprisonment.
- Advocate for CORU to adopt a restorative justice or remedial approach concerning complaints against Social Workers for their discriminatory behaviour.
- Advocate that social workers take an active role in asking if their organisation's strategy references anti oppressive and anti-racist practices in its policies and if not take practical steps to ensure these are included. This should extend to promoting discussions about race/racism-based issues at team meetings.
- Raise awareness among social workers of the Public Sector Duty which applies to all public bodies including CORU and other professional registration bodies, so these organisations too should have explicit statements on how they will uphold human rights.

## **OBJECTIVE 5: COMMUNICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

- Establish communication protocols for reporting on progress and challenges and for ongoing consultation with the IASW Board.
- Establish a presence on the IASW website for updating and sharing information.

## **OBJECTIVE 6: EVALUATE/OUTCOME MEASURES**

- Develop impact assessment frameworks for work in progress on an ongoing basis.
- Develop and apply evaluation metrics for set deliverables over time.
- This strategy will be evaluated annually.

# CONCLUSION

The process of fighting racism is an ongoing project with no end point. It is generally accepted that while it is impossible to completely eradicate the scourge of racism, initiatives such as this strategy go a long way to reduce and perhaps mitigate its most extreme manifestations.

Creating awareness of unconscious biases and everyday microaggressions through a combination of strategies found within the strategic goals of this plan may help immensely in this regard.

The benefits that are likely to accrue to IASW in embracing such a progressive initiative arguably transcend what it has achieved in the last 49 years in terms of projecting an image of a truly professional and progressive forward looking inclusive organisation fit for purpose for the 21st century social work realities.



# HOW TO BE AN ANTI-RACIST

**‘NOT BEING RACIST IS NOT ENOUGH. WE MUST BE ANTIRACIST’ (KENDI, 2019).**



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**NEW MEMBERS WELCOME!**

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