JRF JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

REPORT

POVERTY AND ETHNICITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND
AN EVIDENCE REVIEW

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This report provides an overview of the research evidence on the relationship between poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland.

After a period of increasing ethnic diversity, the review was concerned with understanding how issues of poverty affect people from different minority ethnic communities and their ability to access and secure good outcomes from key services. A comprehensive literature review and focus groups with people from the Roma, Somali, Chinese and Polish communities, and with local stakeholders, provide the basis for the report.

The report discusses:
- how new migrants have joined long-standing communities of people from minority ethnic groups;
- how the policy framework to address racial inequalities in Northern Ireland is relatively new;
- how people from minority ethnic groups experience low incomes and access services; and
- how the legacy of conflict in the region may affect minority ethnic groups.

INSPIRING
SOCIAL
CHANGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this evidence review was to establish what was known about the relationship between poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland for the first time. Specifically it was concerned with understanding how issues of poverty affect people from different minority ethnic communities.

The review project had two parts. Firstly, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken. Secondly, the emerging findings were discussed in four focus groups held with people from the Roma, Somali, Chinese and Polish communities, and a fifth with local stakeholders.

Minority ethnic groups and poverty in Northern Ireland

The timing and composition of migration to Northern Ireland is different from that in Great Britain. A combination of rapid change and small numbers render determining the size of the minority ethnic population in Northern Ireland difficult, although further 2011 Census data releases may be helpful. Nonetheless, it is clear that net inward migration during the last decade supplemented long-standing minority ethnic communities and changed the ethnic diversity of many places in the region, both urban and rural. It is thought that the largest communities of people are from Central and Eastern Europe – Poland and Lithuania in particular. Irish Travellers and migrants from China, Portugal, the Philippines and various countries in Africa also contribute to the diversity in Northern Ireland.

No statistical data analysis was apparent that set out the household circumstances of people from minority ethnic groups, from which the relative extent of poverty could be determined. Although the anti-poverty strategy Lifetime Opportunities and the Child Poverty Strategy acknowledged that people from minority ethnic groups may be at risk of disadvantage, both note the lack of data and offer no targeted policies.

Equality framework

The policy framework that addresses ethnicity in Northern Ireland also differs from Great Britain's, as the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order only became law in 1997, some 21 years after legislation was passed in Great Britain. Despite revisions, legislation remains weaker than the British equivalent. The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 requires public agencies to monitor the effectiveness of organisational strategies, to promote equality for "protected" groups and to ensure "good relations" — a term for cohesion encompassing both religious and minority ethnic communities. The first Racial Equality Strategy was published in 2005. Whatever the reasons for previous inaction, it is clear that policy development and the implementation of race-equality measures remain relatively new. Policy has developed positively in a short space of time and these steps have raised awareness of the issues, but the monitoring of their effectiveness remains uneven.

Low incomes and benefit receipt

People from minority ethnic groups are represented across the workforce, including in skilled and professional employment, but on the evidence available, they appear to be over-represented in precarious low-grade, low-paid jobs. There is some evidence that recent migrants earn below the average local wage, and below that of other lower-grade employees.

Underemployment was consistently reported as problematic; a large proportion of recent arrivals are highly educated and skilled, but many have found it difficult to gain recognition for their qualifications and experience. The Department of Employment and Learning has issued UK guidance to local employers in this respect, but its impact is unknown. People from minority ethnic groups who have fewer skills face greater challenges in overcoming insecure and/or low-grade employment. Immigration rules were shown to inhibit some people's choices in the labour market and their access to social security benefits, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation. Poor employment practices were evident. Evidence also highlighted the disproportionate impact of the recession on some recent migrants and this warrants further exploration.

Small-scale surveys suggested that about half of recent migrants are married with families and the regular reporting of low pay strongly suggests that in-work and child poverty along with higher rates of unemployment could be a concern. Family benefits are considered important and, while problems with rent affordability were mentioned, little is known about the receipt of housing benefit overall. Community groups offer an important access point to social security, but administrative delays when applying for benefits have contributed to periods of destitution for some individuals. More evidence is required about how benefit agencies meet the social-security and labour-market needs of people from minority ethnic groups.

Obtaining public services

Satisfaction with education and health services was generally high, although racism among a minority of health and local council staff existed. Aside from Travellers, who experience severe disadvantage, little is known about the educational achievements of children or health status of people from

minority ethnic backgrounds. Language support is offered in schools for new pupils, but there were concerns that schools could do better in understanding diversity, as could health services, and there were reports of teachers handling racist bullying poorly.

Between half and three-quarters of people from minority ethnic groups surveyed were housed in the private rented sector, where overcrowding, unaffordable rents and poor management by landlords were reported. As with sharp employment practices, housing is an area where experiences of people from minority ethnic communities are similar to those of other low-income households, but problematic access to benefits, uncertainty about rights and language difficulties can compound difficult situations.

Belonging in Northern Ireland

People from minority groups reported frequent experiences of racism and discrimination at work and in their neighbourhood, which is likely to have ramifications for their ability to get on. Whether Northern Irish society is more racist than elsewhere is debatable; certainly, people from minority ethnic groups report negative experiences in other countries too, including Great Britain. Despite publicised race attacks, there are many positive reports of neighbourliness and acceptance. However, incidents of racism in Northern Ireland are complicated by the interplay between racism and sectarianism, and community and statutory responses to race equality have in some instances become shaped by the legacy of sectarian conflict.

Recommendations

Primary race-equality legislation could be strengthened to reach parity with Great Britain. However, the key recommendations to limit the apparent poverty among some people from minority ethnic groups focus on enhancing opportunities in the labour market and ensuring safety nets are available and used. They are made in a context of a difficult economic climate and are as follows:

- tackle underemployment to ensure career progression is possible;
- pursue openings to engage people with vocational training, language courses or self-employment;
- ensure people from minority ethnic groups are not disproportionately affected by delays in benefit applications and, if obstacles are identified, ensure systems deliver timely payments;
- examine how Jobs and Benefits Office staff support unemployed people from minority ethnic communities back into employment.

Lastly, there are major knowledge gaps in our understanding of the lives of people from minority groups in Northern Ireland. Small numbers in statistical datasets may limit analysis, but existing administrative and statistical data appear underused. To ensure effectiveness in tackling poverty among people from minority ethnic groups, the availability and use of resources that can illuminate the circumstances and service outcomes in comparison to other people in Northern Ireland should be examined.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report reviews the evidence base on the interplay of poverty and ethnicity in the context of Northern Ireland and forms part of a wider programme of work on the issue around the UK by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Migration to Northern Ireland

For a long time society in Northern Ireland was considered in binary terms of Protestantism or Catholicism, reflecting the two majority communities (Nic Craith, 2002). Although there have been long-standing minority ethnic communities, recently new waves of migrants to Northern Ireland have created greater ethnic diversity. There are concerns that public responses to this new and diverse population remain disjointed, with monitoring and awareness of the statutory obligations surrounding service delivery weak (Connolly and Keenan, 2002a; Hamilton, 2006; McAreavey, 2010a, 2012). This rapid rise in inward migration occurred during a period that saw other profound social changes, not least the establishment of the devolved Assembly, the implementation of a peace agreement, the changing socio-demographics of the two dominant communities and the growth in the region's economy. In certain localities, some sections of the population were able to grasp the opportunities of rising professional employment and incumbent gentrification processes, but these were not universal experiences (Nolan, 2012; Murtagh, 2008).

Despite the UK now being in a protracted period of economic stagnation, the Northern Ireland economy has strengths, including high research and development investment and highly qualified school leavers, but the growth in employment during the period of economic prosperity was concentrated in low-grade employment and the region is overly reliant on the public sector (Northern Ireland Executive, 2012). There are concerns that the recession and proposed public-sector cuts could have a disproportionate impact (MacInnes, *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, although greater political stability since 1998 has been achieved, the legacy of violence and conflict remain (Nolan, 2012), notably in areas of deprivation. The experience of poverty in the region can, therefore, be quite distinct in comparison with Great Britain (Horgan and Monteith, 2009).

New inward migration to Northern Ireland has had a positive impact on the local economy (Oxford Economics, 2009). In addition, evidence from Britain notes that new migrants have higher rates of labour-force participation and pay proportionately more in taxes than they receive back, in terms of health, education, benefits or other public services (Dustmann, et al., 2010). Understanding how poverty and ethnicity inter-relate is critical. New migration does not affect social cohesion, but high levels of poverty in areas of existing diversity are predictors of lower social cohesion, and so addressing deprivation is important in securing integration and cohesion (Saggar, et al., 2012).

Connolly and Keenan (2002a) note that discourse in Northern Ireland surrounding ethnicity and 'race' had historically been sidelined. The Race Relations Act was passed in Northern Ireland in 1997, some 21 years after similar legislation was passed in Great Britain. The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998 brought further progress on equalities, as the agreement intended to overcome the "culture of segregation and intolerance" and to establish a "normal civil society" where sectarianism and racism are reduced (Knox, 2011a, pp. 549, 556; see also Connolly and Keenan, 2002a). Nonetheless, adjustments to multiculturalism have been difficult, with widely publicised attacks on ethnic minority groups (Knox, 2011b; Jarman, 2009; OFMDFM, 2010). For these reasons, issues of 'race' and racism cannot be assumed to be the same in Northern Ireland as in other areas of the UK, even ones that have predominantly indigenous white populations.

There is now an emergent literature in the region addressing issues of ethnicity, but the extent to which any adverse consequences of poverty and exclusion, or otherwise, are addressed appears limited. This review brings the evidence base together for the first time, and identifies areas where we can strengthen our understanding.

The review addressed the following questions:

- What research has been carried out in relation to poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland?
  – What issues and groups does it cover?
  – What is the range of types and quality of research?
  – Where are the key gaps?
- What does the current evidence tell us about how poverty and ethnicity interact in Northern Ireland?
- How far does the current evidence base consider the intersection of ethnicity with other dimensions of identity and what can we learn from this?
- What does the current evidence base suggest should be done by policy-makers, practitioners, the voluntary and community sector, employers and businesses, and the communities themselves?
- What are the priorities for improving the evidence base to enable more effective action to be taken to tackle poverty across ethnicities in Northern Ireland?

Poverty and ethnicity

Ethnicity is not a static or one-dimensional proposition. The experiences of people from minority ethnic groups are shaped not only by their ethnicity but also by a combination of elements of their identity, such as faith and religion, culture, gender, qualifications, skills, experiences and expectations,

New inward migration to Northern Ireland has had a positive impact on the local economy.

and socio-economic status (Barnard and Turner, 2011). To this extent, Northern Ireland is no different from the rest of the UK. In examining connections to poverty, it is, therefore, crucial that consideration is given to factors that occur irrespective of ethnic origin, such as socio-economic or gender disadvantage, which may occur across all groups. The question of when ethnicity matters and when poverty is the result of other influences requires careful consideration to avoid misleading and inappropriate misrepresentations of different social groups (Atkin, 2009).

The review has primarily focused on the incidence and consequences of low incomes and accessing key services. Platt (2007) notes that the definition of poverty appears self-evident, but as with ethnicity, the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty is highly debated. While income poverty, deprivation, inequality and social exclusion are often used interchangeably, they are fundamentally different but related ideas with low incomes at the core, encompassing people's standard of living, differences between different groups and the ability to adequately participate in society. The review therefore adopts a wide definition of poverty, but although issues of civic participation and social inclusion are associated with poverty, they are beyond the parameters of this scoping review.

Minority ethnic experiences of poverty can be shaped by 'place', not least in the strength or otherwise of the local economy (Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011). This takes on added resonance in Northern Ireland where there is a close connection between contested spaces and deprivation (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011; Horgan and Monteith, 2009).

The review considers the experiences and consequences of low incomes and access to key services for people from *minority* ethnic backgrounds. That stated, the long-established *majority* ethnic Catholic and Protestant communities remain an essential context for the relationship between poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland and regarding the longer-term implications of this review. Given the complex relationship between ethnicity and poverty, this study seeks to move towards a better understanding of this intricate connection and of the ramifications for policy and practice in Northern Ireland.

Review design and methods

The review of the evidence base was undertaken in two parts:

- a comprehensive literature review;
- a set of focus groups with people from minority ethnic communities (comprising people from the Somali, Roma, Chinese and Polish communities) and one with local stakeholders.

The review comprised a wide electronic search for literature that addressed the circumstances of people from minority ethnic populations in Northern Ireland. Studies selected for review were published from 1998 onwards, were based upon empirical research, and included something about the circumstances of people from minority ethnic communities or about the policies or strategies designed to overcome inequalities based on ethnicity. The report represents a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, review of the literature found. The focus groups were designed to test the ideas arising in the review against contemporary experiences. In this way, the project aimed to provide an assessment of the knowledge in this area and identify the gaps and weaknesses in the present evidence base. A project advisory

group, comprising representatives of statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and leading academics, provided a valuable sounding board throughout the project to ensure the review met potential users' needs.

Notes on the evidence base

Research interest in the circumstances of people from minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland grew over the last decade. Few studies focused upon the financial hardship of people from minority ethnic groups, but the new evidence sought to understand new populations in the region and in particular their access to services. Much of this work is small-scale and community based, but academics and statutory agencies are also represented in this arena.

Although the evidence base is quite extensive, overall, the lack of robust quantitative data analysis in the region represents a major weakness. A parallel study to this project (Owen, forthcoming) is examining and documenting the potential statistical and administrative data resources that can be deployed to support the understanding of the circumstances and needs of people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland.

With the current absence of robust, reliable statistical or administrative analysis, significant gaps exist in the knowledge base. The relative extent of and duration of poverty among people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Northern Ireland, the educational attainment, employment circumstances, household composition, engagement with social security benefits or health outcomes remain opaque. Where surveys were undertaken, the analysis involved basic frequencies, and made few attempts at looking for associations within the data or controlling for other influences on the observed findings. Nonetheless, despite the limitations of the evidence base, insightful mixed methods, survey and qualitative evidence exist that illuminate the experiences and challenges faced by a range of people from minority ethnic communities on low incomes in Northern Ireland. This review brings this information together for the first time.

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Structure

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides contextual background about poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland; Chapter 3 sets out the policy and legislative framework. Chapter 4 presents the evidence from the literature review regarding poverty and low incomes among minority ethnic groups; Chapter 5 highlights the experiences of accessing key services. Chapter 6 considers racism and belonging in an already divided society, and Chapter 7 highlights issues revealed in the focus groups but absent from the literature. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the report with some recommendations for policy-makers.

2 WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT POVERTY AND MINORITY GROUPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

In this section we consider poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland by firstly reviewing the latest indicators of poverty, before moving on to provide an overview of the minority ethnic population in the region. Reliable, accurate information is the cornerstone of informed policy and practice in this area, an issue that the rest of the UK has also struggled with, but which is particularly problematic in Northern Ireland.

What do we know about poverty generally in Northern Ireland?

Poverty is an intrinsically relative concept as it indicates individuals' inability to participate in society due to low income. MacInnes, *et al.* (2012) use Households Below Average Income data to define relative poverty as households that have an income (adjusted for household composition and inflation) below 60 per cent of median income in that year. They show that the proportion of people in Northern Ireland experiencing poverty over the last decade has remained at around 22 per cent (equivalent to approximately 355,000 people) after housing costs (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The proportion of people in poverty in Northern Ireland and Great Britain by age group (after housing costs)
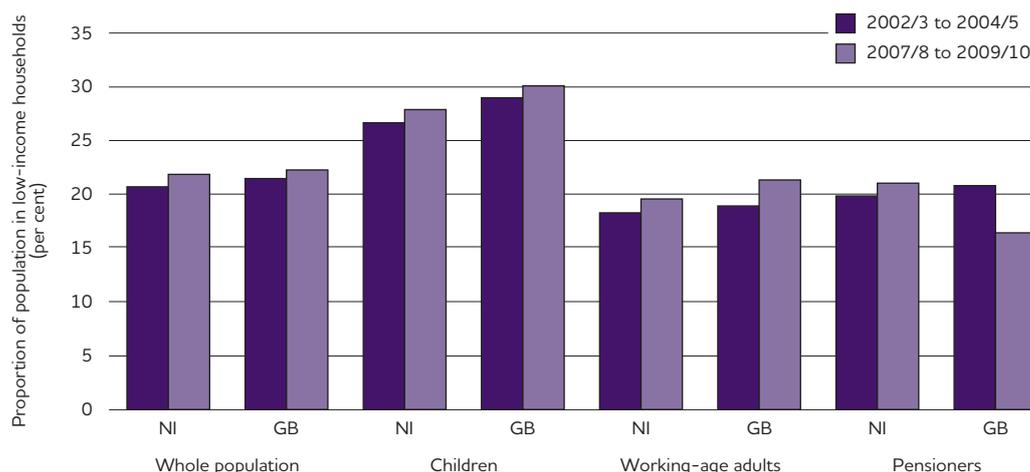
Source: Households Below Average Income in MacInnes, *et al.*, 2012

Poverty after housing costs rose slightly across age groups in the latter half of the last decade. For Northern Ireland children, the incidence of poverty is broadly similar to that in Great Britain (28 per cent compared with 30 per cent), as it is for working-age adults (20 per cent compared with 21 per cent). Meanwhile, the incidence of poverty is higher and rising for pensioners in Northern Ireland (21 per cent compared with 16 per cent) while the poverty rate for pensioners in Great Britain has been falling. The increase in poverty between the periods studied by MacInnes, *et al.* (2012), 2002/3–2004/5 and 2007/8–2009/10 was due to a rise in the proportion of retired people (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Poverty and work status in Northern Ireland
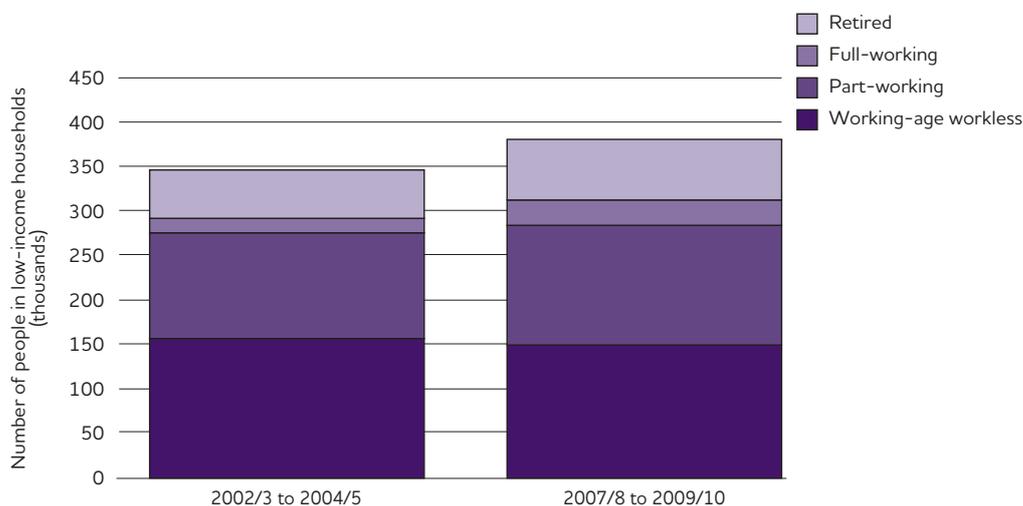
Source: Households Below Average Income in MacInnes, *et al.*, 2012

Half of children in poverty live with at least one parent in work. The proportion of workless households increased in all countries and regions of the UK between the two periods, but Northern Ireland is second only to North East England for the highest proportion of the working-age population lacking paid work. A greater proportion of working-age people claim disability benefits in Northern Ireland compared with Great Britain

(7 per cent compared with 4 per cent). People from a Catholic community background had higher rates of worklessness (35 per cent) between 2007/8 and 2009/10 compared with people from a Protestant community background (28 per cent). The gap between the two communities had been narrowing until the onset of the economic crisis in 2007/8 and subsequent recession; since then, progress on narrowing the gap has stalled.

While this data provides some context, it does not provide for how people from minority ethnic groups fit into this picture. Unlike the equivalent resource in Great Britain (Scullion and Doak, 2011), ethnicity is not included in the Households Below Average Income data in Northern Ireland and this is probably owing to small numbers. This prohibits any meaningful reflection on the comparative distribution of poverty among people from minority ethnic groups within Northern Ireland or Great Britain.

What do we know about minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland?

This section provides an overview of the size, characteristics and location of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. Rapid changes have occurred since the 2001 Census and relevant data from the 2011 Census was not available at the time of writing. Alternative data sources are limited in their ability to provide estimates of the current minority ethnic population and its composition. Nonetheless, these data sources do provide an insight into a region that has experienced rapid change, but where minorities still remain a small proportion of the overall population.

Migration patterns

There have been three phases of migration to Northern Ireland in recent times (see Figure 3). Firstly, during the 1970s and 1980s Northern Ireland experienced annual net outward migration, reflecting the political conflict of that time. The second phase from the early 1990s to 2004 was broadly in balance, with new arrivals matched by those leaving the region. The third phase from 2004 reflects the expansion of the European Union when there was a significant rise in inward migration from Central and Eastern Europe, which tailed off in line with the market downturn.

Migration to Northern Ireland is not new, however. German Jews, people from India and Hong Kong Chinese all settled in the 19th and 20th centuries and represent long-standing communities of people from minority ethnic backgrounds (Russell, 2012). Furthermore, the Traveller community has been long established in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, the evidence indicates that a significant proportion of the minority ethnic population comprises recent migrants. The composition of the minority ethnic population in Northern Ireland, therefore, does not reflect the same patterns of post-colonial migration seen in Great Britain. The relatively recent expansion of the local economy and the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 have been critical factors in Northern Ireland's migration story. Since 2004 relatively large numbers of people came from Central and Eastern Europe. Migrants have also arrived from other places across the globe during the last decade. In this respect, the situation in Northern Ireland is similar to that in the Republic of Ireland, where a long period of net emigration was reversed in the 1990s owing to economic and European expansion, although until recently the Republic had more liberal immigration and citizenship rules (Ruhs and Quinn, 2009).

The composition of the minority ethnic population in Northern Ireland, therefore, does not reflect the same patterns of post-colonial migration seen in Great Britain.

Figure 3: New arrivals to Northern Ireland 1999/2000 to 2007/8
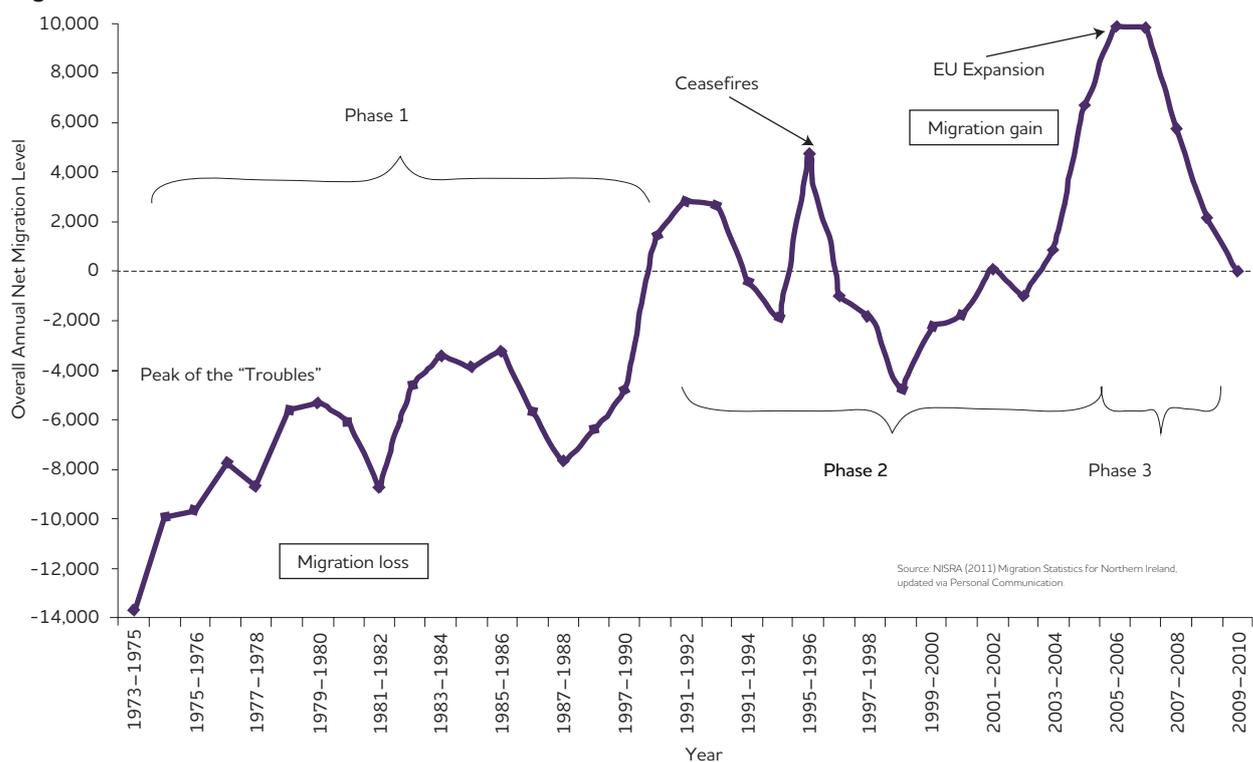
Source: Reproduced from Northern Ireland Assembly, 2012

Size of the minority ethnic population

The 2001 Census showed that the minority ethnic population was small: just over 14,000 people, or less than 1 per cent of a total population just short of 1.7 million, with Chinese people the largest minority group. The 2011 Census records the population of Northern Ireland as 1.8 million but, at the time of writing, data on the minority ethnic population is yet to be released. A range of alternative data is held by various agencies in the region – such as Health Card Registrations or Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) applications, and English as an Additional Language (EAL) records for 'newcomer' pupils into Northern Irish schools. These sources have recorded flows of new people into Northern Ireland but do not record those who then leave. Consequently, it is a challenge to establish the current size of the minority ethnic population.

The Labour Force Survey suggests that in 2010 there were 80,000 (4.5 per cent of the population) people born outside the UK and Ireland and living in Northern Ireland (NIAR, 2011). These people do not necessarily identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group. The 2008 Needs Analysis identified 1,486 Travellers in 449 households across Northern Ireland (NIHE, 2008). Young (2012) estimates that 500 people from East Africa have settled in the Belfast area since 2010, following the recent political conflict and drought, but Nic Craith, *et al.* (2008) note the difficulties in determining the exact number of Africans in the region. There is some dispute over the current size of the Chinese community in Northern Ireland, with estimates ranging from 3,000–8,000 (Meredith, 2011). Meanwhile, the Filipino community may number 2,500 (McElhinney, 2008).

Using a range of administrative data, the Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Authority (NISRA) estimated the population of A8 nationals (from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, Czech Republic) at around 39,000 in 2009 versus 700 in the 2001 Census (NISRA,

2010). New registration data for the period 2004 to 2010 shows that over half of the 40,000 WRS registrations were from Poland, nearly a fifth from Lithuania and just over one in eight from Slovakia. Two-thirds were male and just over three-quarters were aged 18–34 years, reflecting the key reasons for moving – work and family (Home Office, 2010). Proportionately, per head of the local population, 25 per cent more A8 citizens registered with the WRS than in the rest of the UK (Beatty, 2006).

Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union in January 2007. The UK government imposed greater restrictive transitional conditions on the free movement of Romanians and Bulgarians. Consequently, only around 1,000 people registered from these 'A2' countries between 2008 and 2010 (NISRA, 2010b).

Population estimates use health card de-registrations, inactive National Insurance numbers and omnibus surveys to track the numbers of people leaving the region and it is clear that some migrants have left. However, it is also clear that in the last decade new minority ethnic communities have settled in Northern Ireland.

Identifying ethnic groups

As mentioned, the composition of the minority ethnic population in Northern Ireland does not match that in Great Britain. In the absence of up-to-date census statistics and ethnic monitoring, migration and more general demography figures provide some insight into the overall ethnic composition of the population.

Interpretation figures for health and social care across Northern Ireland as shown in Figure 4 provide data on the languages spoken by recent migrants, although they do not account for people who already speak English (including people from former British colonies) or the existing minority ethnic population who may already know English. These data do, however, provide a flavour of the diversity of the minority ethnic people in the region.

Figure 4: Top ten languages requested for interpretation services in health service in Northern Ireland Q4–2011
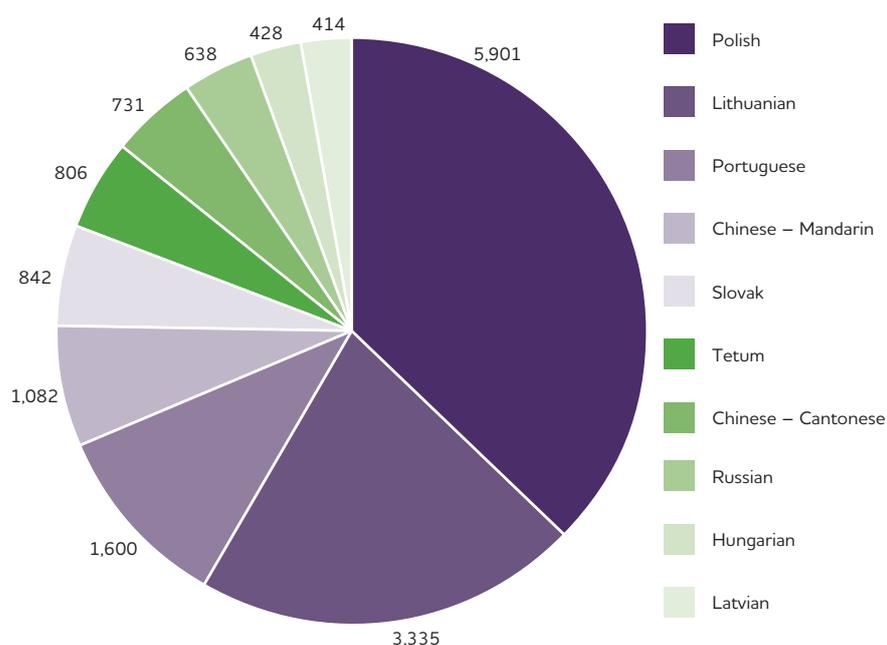

Note: N=63,868.
Source: Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS), 2012

The growing demand for interpretation services in the region's health sector is illustrated in Figure 5, but is also likely to reflect the growing availability of interpretation services over time.

Figure 5: Number of requests for interpretation services in health service in Northern Ireland 2004/5−2011/12
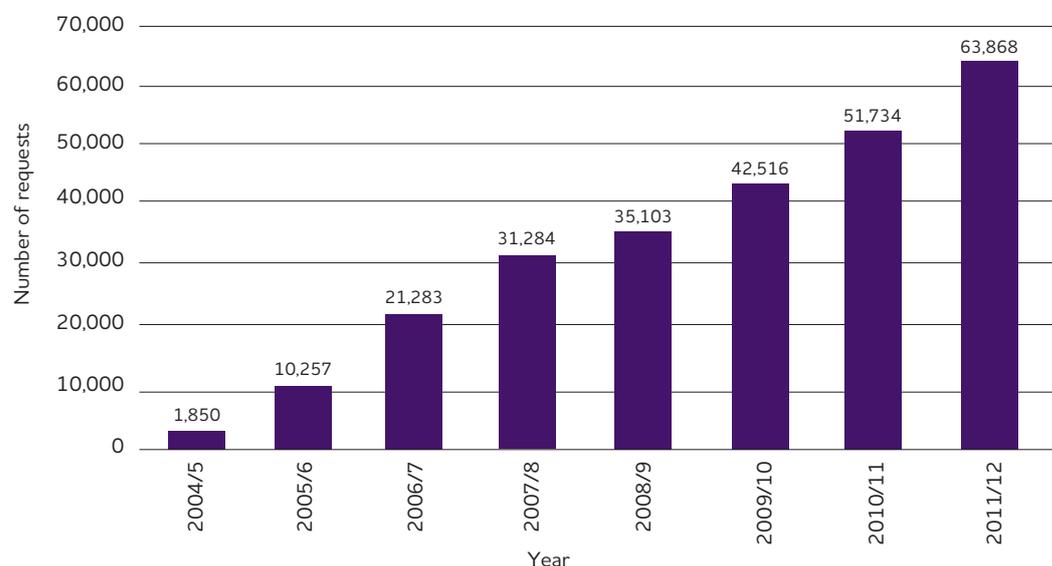
Source: NIHSCIS, 2012

Another resource for identifying the diversity of people from minority ethnic groups or nationalities in Northern Ireland is again the Health Card Registration data, which shows that in the year of peak inward migration, 2007, the countries with the greatest number of arrivals were Poland, Lithuania, the Irish Republic, India and China (NISRA, 2010).

Spatial distribution

In contrast to long-standing populations of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Great Britain, who usually live in urban areas, recent migration from Eastern Europe to all parts of the United Kingdom has resulted in settlement in urban and rural areas. In the context of poverty in Northern Ireland, the geographical spread is significant for reasons such as the greater access to employment markets that exist closer to Belfast, or isolation and transport problems in rural areas. The wide distribution of a relatively small number of people from minority ethnic backgrounds makes monitoring harder to achieve. This has added significance as, on average, people in rural areas have a higher risk of poverty (NPI, 2009).

The 'newcomer' pupil data for schools in the region illustrates the settlement of families (Figure 6). School enrolments show that in 2010 just under 7,500 school children (2.5 per cent of school population) had English as an additional language. Settlement patterns show attraction to city regions as well as rural areas, reflecting the role of many Eastern Europeans in providing extensive labour for the meat and food processing sectors' rural factories.

Settlement patterns show attraction to city regions as well as rural areas.

Figure 6: Proportion of new pupils who require language support enrolled as a percentage of all pupils by local government districts in Northern Ireland
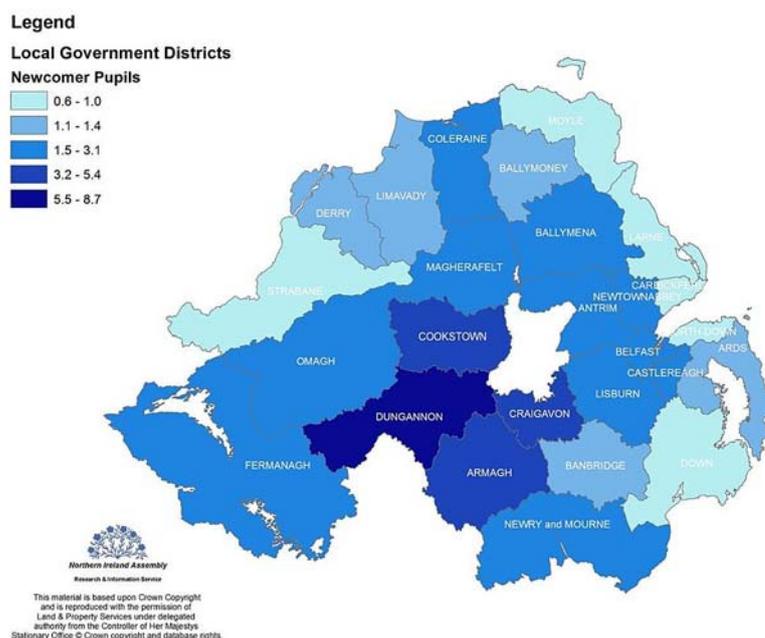
Source: Russell, 2012

The Chinese Welfare Association estimates that the majority of Northern Ireland's Chinese community lives in the greater Belfast area, with significant numbers in Craigavon, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North Down. The clustering around Belfast is similar to that of many of the more recent arrivals from countries including Romania, Somalia and Kenya. In the absence of exact figures it should be noted that this claim is based on supporting agencies' impression of the emerging situation.

Summary

This section has highlighted that aspects of poverty in Northern Ireland are comparable to that experienced in Great Britain, particularly the North of England. There has been a recent rise in in-work poverty and, unlike the rest of the UK, a rise in poverty among retired people. We cannot identify comparable statistical data that describes the extent of poverty among minority ethnic or mixed households.

Although the region has had long-standing Travellers and Hong Kong Chinese communities, the story of minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland is mostly one of recent migration. There has been a rapid change in the composition and size of the minority ethnic population in Northern Ireland during the last decade. Now people from Eastern Europe, in particular from Poland, are likely to be resident in similar numbers to these older minority ethnic populations. There is little history of post-colonial immigration; therefore, the range of people represented in Northern Ireland's minority ethnic population differs markedly from that in Great Britain.

The next chapter considers the legislative framework designed to address poverty and equality among minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland.

3 THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS POVERTY AND ENSURE EQUALITY FOR MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS

Just as the pattern of settlement of people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland is different from Great Britain, significant portions of the policy infrastructure addressing equalities are also quite different. Equality legislation is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly, although immigration policies are the preserve of Westminster. Social security policy is also the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly, but there is a commitment to maintaining parity with the Westminster system.

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998 produced significant policy advances in equality legislation. Prior to this, responses to issues of 'ethnicity' in the region were undermined by the history of sectarian conflict. This is thought to be partly due to a perception that as the minority ethnic population was small, 'race' and racism were considered unproblematic (Connolly and Keegan, 2002a; McGill and Oliver, 2002). Moreover, it was argued that introducing legislation might have prompted Catholics to seek

redress for discrimination (Lewis, 2006). A range of policy initiatives has since advanced the legislative framework on equality.

A broad anti-poverty strategy was established during the period of direct rule, and the Assembly established a child poverty strategy in response to the UK-wide Child Poverty Act 2010, but civil servants have noted a significant lack of progress on achieving poverty and social inclusion goals (Nolan, 2012).

This chapter sets out key legislation and policy to provide the legislative context to 'poverty' and 'ethnicity' in Northern Ireland. The chapter then highlights key issues in relation to policy effectiveness and ethnic monitoring.

Legislation and policy influencing poverty and equalities in Northern Ireland

Poverty

The anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland was set out in *Lifetime Opportunities: The government's anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy for Northern Ireland* (OFMDFM, 2007), which was developed under direct rule. In what was then a relatively benign economic climate, the strategy set out key areas for cross-government department initiatives to achieve, which included actions to:

- eliminate poverty;
- eliminate social exclusion;
- tackle area-based deprivation;
- eliminate poverty from rural areas;
- achieve a shared future to underpin economic performance;
- tackle inequality in the labour market;
- tackle health inequalities;
- tackle cycles of deprivation.

Interestingly, the report highlights religion, gender and disability as posing barriers to employment, but not ethnicity, although it does mention that data from Great Britain indicates that minority groups may be vulnerable to poverty and may require targeted interventions to meet their needs. The later *Improving Children's Life Chances: The child poverty strategy* report (OFMDFM, 2011) repeats the same observation about the lack of minority ethnic group data for Northern Ireland.

The *Ending Fuel Poverty: A strategy for Northern Ireland* report (DSD, 2004) set out to eliminate fuel poverty among vulnerable households by 2010 and among other households by 2016. Some 44 per cent of households in the region are in fuel poverty (NIHE, 2012).

Promoting equality

Some 21 years after the Race Relations Act 1976 was passed in Great Britain, the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 was passed to broadly replicate the provision of that Act. The Order makes it illegal to discriminate, harass or victimise on the grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origin (including the Irish Traveller community) in the fields of employment, goods and services, education and housing management and the disposal of premises, although there are some exceptions. The Order was brought into line with a European Directive on race discrimination in 2003, and again updated in 2009 to clarify that indirect discrimination is also unlawful.

Some 21 years after the Race Relations Act 1976 was passed in Great Britain, the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 was passed.

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 committed Northern Ireland to a 'shared society'. The accompanying equality legislation within Northern Ireland, although born out of political and religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics, has attracted national and international prominence because of its pioneering nature guaranteeing human rights, equality and participation (Chaney and Rees, 2004; Hill, *et al.*, 2006). Section 75 places positive duties on public authorities to have due regard to:

- promote equality of opportunity for 'protected groups' persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependents and persons without;
- promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

Section 75 obligations on public authorities came into effect from 1 January 2000 and are monitored by the Equality Commission Northern Ireland.

The key policy document, *A Shared Future: Policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland* (OFMDFM, 2005), was drawn up by the Westminster Government while the Assembly was suspended. Based on the principles of the Good Friday Agreement, it set out a vision of a shared society that would challenge the culture of intolerance through public dialogue and it set out a range of policy objectives to achieve this goal. Following reinstatement of the Assembly in 2007, this document was rejected. The Assembly proposed an alternative strategy called *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (CSI), which was put out to consultation in 2010. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the policy document and a revised report is yet to be published.

The *Racial Equality Strategy* (OFMDFM, 2005) aimed to overcome racial inequalities and eradicate racism and hate crime. In conjunction with OFMDFM's Shared Future and Good Relations strategy, it was to deliver actions to promote good race relations. It was also produced by the UK Government but was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007 when the Assembly reconvened and still stands today. There are six targets:

- to eliminate racial inequality;
- to provide equal protection under the law;
- to provide equality of public service provision;
- to increase participation and a sense of 'belonging' of people from minority ethnic backgrounds;
- to promote dialogue between different people;
- to build capacity within minority ethnic communities to develop a vibrant and sustainable minority ethnic sector.

In Great Britain, the Equality Act 2010 was introduced to harmonise and improve equality legislation across several areas. This has led to disparities between the protection that certain groups are afforded in other jurisdictions of the UK compared with that given in Northern Ireland (ECNI, 2011). For example, protection against discrimination on the grounds of colour and nationality when in employment and accessing goods and services has been introduced in Scotland, England and Wales and is currently absent in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Equality Commission is pressing for reform and for single equality legislation to increase protection by making it easier for people to claim redress and by ensuring that organisations are compliant.

Overall, much progress has been made in a short space of time in terms of legislative and policy responses to equality. More recently, the delays in producing a revised CSI report are considered by some to indicate a slowing of this process and concern remains regarding the effectiveness of the existing policy steer in this area (Wallace Consulting, 2011).

Immigration and public support

The social security system is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly, unlike the devolution settlement for Scotland and Wales, under which benefits remain a preserved power of Westminster. Despite this, the Northern Ireland Assembly is largely committed to a system of parity with Westminster and there are rare occasions when policy in the region is divergent. At the time of writing, however, the Northern Ireland Assembly was considering moves to opt out of some of the proposed welfare reforms in Great Britain.

Immigration is also a retained power of Westminster. In practice, therefore, the eligibility criteria for social security of foreign nationals mirror those of Great Britain. The system is hugely complex, as the eligibility criteria concerning residence, work and financial assistance differ depending on a person's immigration status and are governed by the UK Borders Act 2007 and the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009. There are three broad categories of people who arrive in Northern Ireland wishing to live and/or work:

- migrant workers from the European Economic Area (EEA) and from Romania and Bulgaria;
- economic migrants from other countries;
- asylum seekers and refugees.

Poland, Latvia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. People from these countries – A8 nationals – are able to reside and work in the UK. Under the transitional arrangements, they were required to register under the Worker Registration Scheme and were entitled to benefits if they had one year's continuous registration. The WRS expired in May 2011 and since then A8 nationals have been entitled to live, work and receive financial assistance in the same way as other EU nationals. This includes access to many of the same benefits as other UK nationals. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 and people from these countries – A2 nationals – have more restrictions on their residence and ability to receive support, depending on their skill level. Until the end of 2013 they also require authorisation to work.

Migrants from non-EU countries are subject to a five-tier points-based immigration system that replaced a range of different work permits from 2008. Individuals who enter the UK from outside the EU fall into one of the following categories: high-value migrants; skilled workers; temporary workers; Commonwealth citizens with ancestry; or 'other'. With the exception of asylum seekers and refugees, in most circumstances if individuals wish to avail themselves of benefits they must be registered to work and prove residency. By and large individuals with indefinite right to live and work in the UK are able to access benefits in Northern Ireland in the same way as UK nationals.

The majority of people seeking asylum in the UK and awaiting a decision on their application for refugee status are excluded from most benefits. There are several exceptions, depending on a person's nationality, date of arrival and individual circumstances. Cash support is available for asylum

seekers from the UK Border Agency but is limited and less generous than benefits paid to UK nationals. Asylum seekers are not able to work while awaiting their refugee decision, and failed asylum seekers are unable to work while awaiting their removal.

Obtaining housing and health services is considered to be public support. For this reason, with the exception of emergency treatment, asylum seekers' and other classes of migrants' eligibility to social housing and assistance with homelessness or health care is restricted. For those whose immigration status includes no recourse or entitlement to public funds, social security benefits are also absent.

Shared futures, good relations and equality

Despite the lack of focus on outcomes, evaluation of the equality legislation has been undertaken. Using a survey of key public officials' perceptions of the impacts of Section 75 (see page 19) on securing and promoting equality for various groups, Reeves Associates (2007) found that Section 75 had had a positive but partial effect. The evaluation noted that assessing the impact was difficult as legislation included no measurable indicators and presented no baseline data. An earlier qualitative study of senior public, private and voluntary sector managers found that 'race' was considered a peripheral issue and that although some progress had been made in addressing equalities issues on the back of Section 75, few recognised any demand for 'race' specific actions, as they viewed existing fair employment and equality legislation to be sufficient (McGill and Oliver, 2002). Later, another survey found that 65 per cent of public-sector staff thought that Section 75 had raised awareness of issues not previously understood and had improved their organisation, but less than half were aware of the Racial Equality Strategy and any awareness that did exist was limited (Watt and McCaughey, 2006).

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 introduced the term 'good relations' to Northern Ireland policy discourse, which is widely understood to encompass all sections of Northern Ireland society, including minority ethnic groups, as opposed to 'community relations', which refers only to the majority Catholic and Protestant populations. Minority ethnic communities are often mentioned in discussions of equality and good relations but little clarity exists over how the two approaches interact (Reeves Associates, 2007); Kelly, 2012; Nolan, 2012). It is clear that the legacy of conflict affects people from minority ethnic backgrounds, whether they are new to Northern Ireland or form part of a long-standing community. This is notable in terms of the immaturity of race relations legislation, as well as migrants' arrival into, and navigation of, highly territorialised and segregated residential space, which was little explored in the literature.

Some reports were critical of the lack of political leadership on this legislation, suggesting that politicians lack a clear vision of the type of society that they want to build and of how to operationalise such change through the development and implementation of strategies (Kelly, 2012; Knox, 2011a; Graham and Nash, 2006). This is reflective of a lack of political oversight, and the 'policy vacuum' that exists within Northern Ireland (Knox 2011a). However, Nolan (2012, p. 21) notes that Northern Ireland's efforts to build peace have been "hailed internationally as a model of conflict resolution". ECNI (2005) considered 'race' to be an area where there had been a lot of activity on good relations to ensure appropriate service provision, notably in further education and health. This perspective reflects a growing demand for interpretation, and recruitment of overseas staff. Kelly's

> Reeves Associates (2007) found that Section 75 had had a positive but partial effect.

(2012) report on the effectiveness of good relations and equality initiatives also recognises that there has been a plethora of activity in this area, but a lack of shared learning and evaluation has meant a duplication of activities and resources and a loss of hard-won knowledge.

Gray and Birrell (2012, p. 16) note a "policy impasse" on a range of social policy issues since the restoration of the Assembly in 2007 owing to a lack of consensus in key areas. The implementation of the actions and objectives of the key anti-poverty strategy, Lifetime Opportunities, and the further development of equality and good relations legislation and policies are said to have suffered as a result. There are also concerns that despite significant EU funding having ended, the new CSI strategy may not attract sufficient funding to ensure effective implementation (Knox, 2011a; Nolan, 2012).

The Northern Ireland Executive recognises that social cohesion can only be achieved through the involvement of all groups, including migrants, and the traditionally divided Protestant and Catholic communities (OFMDFM, 2010). Meanwhile, the current Programme for Government correlates to existing government priorities of supporting the economy and of overcoming inequalities (NIE, 2011). However, a silo effect and a somewhat ad hoc approach within key government strategy documents in Northern Ireland is evident. Specifically, the Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland (DETI, 2012a) and the accompanying Action Plan (DETI, 2012b) omit to mention migrants and minority ethnic groups as a potential economic resource, while the Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland is focused on overcoming inequalities such as access to the labour market (OFMDFM 2005). Moreover, the Lifetime Opportunities anti-poverty strategy (OFMDFM, 2007) only notes the absence of data on people from minority ethnic backgrounds and omits to consider other evidence available at that time that suggests that additional support may be required to overcome hardships.

Ethnic monitoring

Despite the policy progress on equalities, any impact on outcomes for people of minority ethnic backgrounds is unclear as data is required to demonstrate the policy effectiveness. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) noted the lack of statistical data on the experiences of migrant workers living in Northern Ireland. It did acknowledge that this was made difficult by the speed of change and dynamic nature of the population flows that were occurring at that time. The need for greater ethnic monitoring in Northern Ireland is also recognised through the Racial Equality Strategy (OFMDFM, 2005). Since then, pressure has been placed on government to take the lead on ethnic monitoring by providing guidance and support to the range of organisations that deliver services to ethnic minorities. The publication by government of an ethnic monitoring guide (OFMDFM, 2011) is part of the implementation of its racial equality strategy. It places ethnic monitoring centre stage in helping to overcome issues of inequalities and disadvantage, although many would argue that this falls short in overcoming the lack of data, as there is no clear lead from the top in respect of implementation.

A repeated theme within the research reviewed confirms the requirement for resources at the administrative and regional dataset level. Despite Section 75 requirements to do so, the lack of monitoring in a number of policy domains means the impacts of initiatives are unknown (Geraghty, *et al.*, 2010; Holder and Khaoury, 2005; Betts and Hamilton,

2006; STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown). However, monitoring must not be an end in itself. As Taylor (1994) observes, there is an important distinction between the "politics of representation" and "the politics of difference". In effect, recognising difference and describing it is not the same as doing something about it.

Summary

This chapter has shown that there have been significant advances in the legislation to limit poverty and ensure equality for minority ethnic groups. It has nonetheless been hampered by a slow-moving legislature that, some argue, lacks a clear political will to deliver on the policy promises. Some work is being undertaken in the areas of poverty and equality, but this is often fragmented and lacks stringent data collection and evaluation.

4 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF LOW INCOMES AMONG MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS?

We have so far noted the different patterns of migration and composition of the minority ethnic population in Northern Ireland and the distinct policy framework in which issues of 'poverty' and 'ethnicity' are considered. This chapter examines the experiences of low incomes among people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Robust research that measures the extent of poverty among people from minority ethnic groups and how their experiences compare with other groups, within Northern Ireland or with the rest of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, is largely absent.

The evidence base is not as robust as would be desirable, but the evidence reviewed does suggest that experiences of poverty and hardship exist for some people from minority ethnic groups. In particular, those at risk appear to be those with children or low incomes/earnings; low receipt of, and/or problematic access to, benefits; and, possibly, those experiencing unevenly distributed impacts of the market downturn that began after the economic crisis of 2007/8. Moreover, there are constraints on some people's ability to improve their circumstances in the labour market owing to a range of factors including language difficulties, limited recognition of overseas qualifications and access to childcare.

Low incomes and employment

Low pay

Migrant workers are represented across the workforce in Northern Ireland, including in skilled and professional occupations such as engineering, IT and higher education (Oxford Economics, 2009; Bell, *et al.*, 2004; Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008; Kampney, 2010). However, a degree of employment segregation is evident in the local labour market as some minority groups are concentrated in particular work sectors, such as Filipino nurses and fishermen, Polish food-processing factory operatives, Eastern European and Portuguese agricultural workers and Chinese restaurant workers (Bell, *et al.*, 2004).

Many studies show evidence of low pay within industries in which migrant labour is apparent (Campbell and Frey, 2010; Devine, *et al.*, 2007; McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; Bell, *et al.*, 2004). Bell, *et al.* (2009) compared migrant earnings with wider labour market data and showed that migrants regularly reported that they earned less than the wider population, including other workers in the lower two occupational classes. However, Bell, *et al.* were unclear whether respondents had reported their wages correctly. Further, anecdotal reports of migrants being paid below the National Minimum Wage were not substantiated within the available evidence.

Poor employment practices

Exploitation and poor employment practices, some of which affected incomes, were evident. Migrant workers with insecure immigration or employment status were identified as being particularly vulnerable. Unauthorised deductions, debt repayments to agencies that brought individuals from their home country to Northern Ireland and pay rates below those promised were frequently reported (Allamby, *et al.*, 2011; Geraghty, *et al.*, 2010; Bell, *et al.*, 2004). Allamby, *et al.* (2011) found evidence of exploitative and coerced or forced labour in some industries, including fishing, mushroom picking and catering, because of a combination of isolation, lack of language skills, immigration status and lack of advice and information. Chinese, Filipino and Roma communities in Northern Ireland were particularly affected but other nationalities also experienced adverse employment conditions. Other employees in Northern Ireland as well as migrants experience poor employment practices (Citizens Advice, 2008). However, McVeigh (2006) indicates that the most vulnerable in the labour market were undocumented, unregistered and/or unauthorised non-EEA nationals, who may have the right to reside, but not the right to work. A lack of regulation and/or enforcement of existing regulation in the labour market and employer hostility to unions provide a context in which workers feel vulnerable to challenging employer shortcomings (McVeigh, 2006).

Subsistence existences are also evident in the region. Some groups have limited access to employment or benefits and, like people from the Roma community, exist on unskilled, insecure self-employment. This is often in exploitative conditions where they earn as little as £20 for an 11-hour shift or may receive £3 per day selling newspapers for long hours (Allamby, *et al.*, 2011).

Ability to improve labour-market position

People from minority ethnic backgrounds have varying skills and some are closer to the labour market than others. For example, a significant and long-standing problem is the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications among Northern Irish employers (NICEM, 2012). Several reports note that the underemployment of migrant workers is significant, as sizeable proportions

of people from minority ethnic groups have higher education and vocational qualifications but are regularly employed in routine jobs below their skill levels (Holder and Lanao, 2002; Bell, *et al.*, 2009; Devine, *et al.*, 2007; Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008; McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; McQuaid, *et al.*, 2010). This underemployment is not only an issue for those employed and their job or career progression, but also represents an underutilised resource for the Northern Irish economy (Oxford Economics, 2009). Some employers run adaptation courses to convert overseas qualifications but this is limited (McElhinney, 2008; NICEM, 2012; Bell, *et al.*, 2004). The Department for Employment and Learning provides a service whereby residents in Northern Ireland can check their qualifications against UK requirements (DEL, 2011), but its impact is unknown.

Other groups of people such as Travellers have low employment rates as a result of changing labour markets meaning that their traditional, formerly agrarian, skills have limited use in modern markets (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010). Increasing regulation has also meant they are squeezed from other self-employment opportunities such as tarmac laying, gardening and labouring, often leaving young men disengaged. The focus of women Travellers' lives is their husbands and families, and they rarely work outside of the home. However, there are signs that younger Travellers will consider vocational courses such as trade skills for young men or beauty and hairdressing for young women (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown).

For asylum seekers, the critical obstacle of moving on was statutory exclusion from the labour market while awaiting their decision on refugee status (McGovern, *et al.*, 2011). Their lives remain on hold while the Home Office processes a backlog of cases.

Setting up in business is often a way out of low household incomes. The problems encountered by minority ethnic women, such as a lack of finance and a lack of knowledge of where to access support, although common across other groups, were compounded by their ethnicity and gender, as they felt others' expectations of the roles they should fulfil precluded them from entering business on their own (Potter, 2006).

Children

Without robust statistical evidence, the exact circumstances of different minority ethnic households will remain uncertain. However, small-scale surveys of migrants regularly suggest that around half are married and/ or have dependents, but as small-scale surveys have been conducted at an individual level there is an absence of household data, and so it is unclear what the patterns of work are between spouses. Some may have little access to or confidence in childcare so may not wish to work (Young, 2012). Whether and to what extent a second full- or part-time wage lifts low-income minority families out of poverty, or out of dependence on tax credits, is uncertain. The prevalence of families and of low-grade employment does suggest that people from minority ethnic groups are at risk of in-work poverty.

The availability of affordable and appropriate wraparound childcare was often cited as a barrier to further engagement of minority households with children in the labour market. This is especially so for shift workers, those on a low income and for those with no family support (Young, 2012; NICEM, 2012; McVeigh, 2006; Potter, 2006; Holder and Lanao, 2002). This is perhaps a key issue shared with other low-income households (Horgan and Monteith, 2009). It was unclear from the literature whether there are suitable childcare places available locally, whether the provision is felt

The prevalence of families and of low-grade employment does suggest that people from minority ethnic groups are at risk of in-work poverty.

to be acceptable or whether people prefer to undertake the caring role themselves.

Impacts of recession

Whether the recession has exerted a disproportionate burden upon people from minority ethnic groups warrants further examination, as the evidence seemed mixed and unclear. Migrant workers certainly perceived themselves to be vulnerable and thought they would be made redundant ahead of people born in Northern Ireland (Donnolly, 2009). Indeed, the frequency of insecure flexible employment in sectors employing people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland has led to reports that migrant workers are at greater risk of redundancy, are less likely to challenge decisions and can be laid off to satisfy the anxieties of local workers (McQuaid, *et al.*, 2010). Survey evidence of Polish people reported that 20 per cent of respondents were unemployed, a rate much higher than the wider population (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009). Moreover, another survey of a range of minority ethnic nationalities found 87 per cent of men and 72 per cent of women were in employment, but without knowing the proportion of students or other economically inactive people, the unemployment rate is difficult to discern (Bell, *et al.*, 2009). It is likely to be the case that the weak position of those already disadvantaged in the labour market is exacerbated in the downturn, resulting in them being knocked further back in the employment queue (McQuaid, *et al.*, 2010). However, a survey of private renting in the Dungannon area found migrants had a higher employment rate but lower wages than locals (Campbell and Frey, 2010).

Despite reports that migrants could be vulnerable in the economic downturn, there is little evidence that the recession has resulted in new migrants returning home in any great numbers because they and their families are now settled in the region (Svašek, 2009). However, new flows to the region have undoubtedly reduced. Furthermore, the impact of the global recession or conditions in their home country is often considered to be worse than in Northern Ireland (Allamby, *et al.*, 2011).

Travellers experience long-term disadvantage, and one report suggested that 89 per cent were unemployed, compared with only 4 per cent of the wider population (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010).

Receipt of benefits

Given the prevalence of low-wage employment, not least for those with families, accessing in-work benefits is of critical importance to militate against the risk of in-work poverty. There was mixed evidence regarding receipt of these benefits among people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Child benefit and tax credits were important to their household income. Housing benefit receipt appeared to be much lower than benefits associated with children (NICEM, 2012; McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; Campbell and Frey, 2010; Bell, *et al.*, 2009). It is unclear from these studies whether the migrants surveyed were ineligible to claim housing benefit or whether they were not entitled as their income was above the threshold. Confusion surrounding eligibility to benefits among people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland was noted as a key issue (Bell, *et al.*, 2004; McQuaid, *et al.*, 2010).

There is evidence that people from minority ethnic backgrounds have experienced periods of poverty and/or destitution because their immigration status is such that they are not entitled to public support. There were regular

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reports of A8 nationals falling through safety nets due to non-compliance with the Worker Registration Scheme. People did not recognise the benefits of registration, or they misplaced trust in employers to pay National Insurance and complete the WRS paperwork for them, and the gaps would only become apparent when workers required public support (Bell, *et al.*, 2009; Campbell and Frey, 2010; McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; Allamby, *et al.*, 2011; NICEM, 2012). Twelve months' continuous registration was also hard to satisfy because of short-term contracts or breaks due to ill-health (Devlin and McKenna, 2009). This left charities, social services and other agencies with the responsibility of meeting the costs of medical care, flights home or temporary support for families. The lack of a welfare safety net leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation, as the consequences of making complaints and potentially losing employment are more serious if destitution becomes a real possibility (Allamby, *et al.*, 2011; Devlin and McKenna, 2009). The expiration of the WRS has the potential to increase support available to A8 nationals, but the impact of this change is uncertain.

There was one report of long delays in benefit applications leaving a family destitute while awaiting a decision (McGovern, *et al.*, 2011). Benefit delays contributed to nearly a fifth of the cases of destitution identified by agencies supporting migrants, where relief funds were accessed from the Community Foundation and Red Cross (McCann and McKittrick, 2012). Other causes of destitution were no recourse to public funds, unemployment, ill-health and domestic violence.

Remittances

NICEM (2012) found that 79 per cent of respondents in their survey of Filipinos in Northern Ireland regularly sent money home as did other migrants to Northern Ireland. As the exchange rate of the pound has fallen against other currencies during the recession, many migrants have increased the amount they send home to ensure their family receives the same benefits (NICEM, 2012; Donnolly, 2009; Devine, *et al.*, 2007). Remittances are important to consider in relation to poverty among people from minority ethnic groups as they mean fewer resources from which the household can draw.

Financial inclusion

Access to financial services ensures households can maximise their incomes; for example, by holding a bank account people can access lower-cost energy services by paying through direct debit. Generally, although there are high levels of migrants accessing bank accounts, barriers to accessing these services exist. Previous research found these include living in rural areas away from services, lack of language skills, lack of translation or interpretation in banks, unclear or impossible-to-meet documentation requirements to prove identity and inconsistent policies across banks (Gibbs, 2010). Generally, EU migrants have been able to access accounts, and these individuals have been able to draw on support from community groups to set up accounts. However, non-EU migrants without a good level of English and possibly without legal status have little access or understanding of the UK banking system and have great difficulty in managing day-to-day finances (*ibid.*). The Citizens Advice service has instituted a project to

resolve problematic access to financial services for migrants (Gibbs, 2010) and employers are regularly called upon to provide proof of residence and employment to banks when other forms of ID are unavailable or unacceptable (Devine, *et al.*, 2007).

Summary

For working people from minority ethnic communities, lower wages and job insecurity appear to be common. In addition, underemployment, vulnerability to exploitation and changing labour markets mean that some people may find it hard to move on from low-grade employment, rendering them at risk of persistent poverty. Adherence to traditional gender roles may also mean income opportunities are foregone.

Even without overarching data, and despite not being a universal experience, the evidence suggests that for sections of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland low pay, poor access to benefits, possible vulnerability due to the economic downturn and limited access to financial services and support are unexceptional.

The evidence of poverty among minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland is incomplete. It is unclear why there is no detailed analysis of key datasets, but we may assume that small numbers and inadequate categories may limit the utility of these datasets for researchers. This limits our understanding of critical issues such as employment rates, the extent of poverty, the composition of households and their pathways into and out of poverty, and limits comparison with majority communities.

Small-scale surveys and qualitative work indicate that in-work poverty, particularly for households with children, is likely to be an issue, as is the limited and sometimes restricted access to income maintenance, as well as the uneven impacts of the recession.

5 EXPERIENCES OF ACCESSING KEY RESOURCES OR SERVICES

The previous chapter examined the experiences of low incomes and poverty among people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. The ability to improve material circumstances through the labour market and benefit systems was also considered. This chapter examines the evidence relating to access to the key services of health, education and housing that protect against the impacts of poverty and influence future outcomes.

Housing

Access and satisfaction

Small surveys indicate that between 54 and 74 per cent of people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland reside in the private rented sector (Bell, *et al.*, 2009; Campbell and Frey, 2010). The local private rented sector has improved, but remains the tenure with the greatest level of unfitness or disrepair (McAnulty and Gray, 2009).

Migrants from a range of countries and living in the Dungannon area were generally satisfied with their privately rented homes. However, migrants shared complaints similar to those of other privately renting tenants in the wider housing market: for example, poor landlord management and high costs (Campbell and Frey, 2010). People from East Africa experienced problems with finding accommodation and securing a guarantor for the tenancy agreement (Young, 2012). Although some employers facilitate access to housing for migrant workers, tied accommodation can also present problems for people as it is often expensive; landlords were reported to exert

excess control over the premises; and properties could be overcrowded, unsuitable for children and insecure (Allamby, *et al.*, 2011). Other problems with housing were reported by asylum seekers who are provided with an allowance and housing, but have no choice of location or region and can be moved frequently and often at short notice (McGovern, *et al.*, 2011).

The All Ireland Travellers Health Study finds on many counts that Travellers north of the border fare better than those in the Republic; however, poor living conditions are still significant for Travellers (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010). Most Travellers in Northern Ireland (55 per cent) are in Northern Ireland Housing Executive accommodation, a greater proportion in social housing than in the south (38 per cent). In Northern Ireland, 23 per cent live in a mobile home or trailer. As such, a greater proportion of Travellers than the wider population lack basic amenities such as water, hot water, drainage, refuse collection and sewerage, and also experience damp and water ingress.

Housing costs

Campbell and Frey (2010) noted that the rents charged in the Dungannon area to migrants exceeded the local housing allowance rate, and a third of survey respondents said it was hard to pay the rent. However, take-up of housing benefit appeared low (Bell, *et al.*, 2009; NICEM, 2012). Reports of larger households and overcrowding as a response to these affordability problems are reported (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown; Campbell and Frey, 2010; NICEM, 2012).

Exclusion from housing assistance, among other services, owing to a person having limited or no recourse to public funds, has prevented victims of racial harassment from obtaining homelessness assistance (Bell, *et al.*, 2009). This has occurred in circumstances where there was a perceived risk to life, and has frustrated attempts to support victims of domestic violence (Devlin and McKenna, 2009). A UK survey of homeless people that included the Belfast area found that migrants are more likely to have slept rough than the rest of the population because of problems experienced since arriving from abroad rather than issues they brought with them (Fitzpatrick, *et al.*, 2011).

Local victimisation

When migrants in Northern Ireland have entered the social housing sector, they have often experienced resistance and hostility from local residents, although more recently this situation has improved (Campbell and Frey, 2010; Young, 2012). Black Africans in the west of Northern Ireland have also experienced harassment around their home (Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008). The home being a site of victimisation is, however, a key experience for minorities establishing themselves in an already spatially segregated region and is considered in the next chapter.

Health

There was little evidence regarding the health outcomes of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the region, but several studies were concerned with access to services and satisfaction with the services received.

Health outcomes

Little evidence was revealed about the health status and needs of people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, except for the Traveller population, which has been the subject of several studies.

Travellers' health needs are explored in all-Ireland studies, which reveal the poor health status of Travellers, although, as with housing, those in Northern Ireland fare better than their counterparts south of the border (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010; Hamid, *et al.*, 2011). The Traveller population is characterised by a large family size and premature mortality, and has a similar profile to that of developing countries, with few old people and many children (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010). Travellers have a greater burden of chronic disease, such as back conditions, diabetes and heart attacks than the wider population and have lower birth-weight babies. Although fewer Travellers drink alcohol in comparison with the wider population, those that do, drink more heavily.

Other than Travellers, little is known about the health outcomes of minority ethnic groups. Mortality data identifies that people born outside of Northern Ireland have better health than those born in Northern Ireland and Scotland, but this is owing to the youth of newcomers and their socio-economic characteristics (Connolly, *et al.*, 2011). Those born outside of Northern Ireland may include white Irish people born in the Republic as well as people from a minority ethnic background.

Fewer Travellers perceive their health service to be good (two-fifths) compared to the wider population (almost four-fifths) (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010). Stress and anxiety seem to be significant experiences for people from minority ethnic groups. People from the Horn of Africa (Young, 2012) reported stress caused by unemployment, financial hardship and because of the distance from their families. Guo and Wright (2005) used a robust survey and found that the psychosocial health status of Chinese women in Northern Ireland was below that of the wider population, possibly due to greater stress, acculturated diet and a tendency to downplay mental health issues.

Access and satisfaction with health services

More is known about people from minority ethnic groups' access to and satisfaction with health services. Generally, people from minority ethnic backgrounds seem to value the health-care support in Northern Ireland (Bell, *et al.*, 2009; Holder and Lanao, 2002; Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008). Some problems existed, including contrasts with health systems in their home country, gatekeeping, racism of frontline staff, lack of recourse to public funds and awareness of services, and problems communicating their needs (McAreavey, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Martin and Phelan, 2010). Chinese women are mostly satisfied with health services but have expressed dissatisfaction with securing appointments and waiting times (Guo and Wright, 2005).

Among people from minority ethnic groups, those whose English was poor and/or who were in lower-skilled employment had lower rates of GP registration (Bell, *et al.*, 2004; McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; Bell, *et al.*, 2009; McAreavey, 2010a). There was evidence that some medical practices were reluctant to accept migrants and Travellers. Although newcomers had exerted additional pressure on local services in some areas, some staff advanced openly racist reasons as to why they did not want to accept people from minority ethnic backgrounds to their practice (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown). Community groups were active in overcoming such obstacles and achieved successful registrations (*ibid*.). Travellers found it difficult to articulate health problems and would travel a long distance to secure sympathetic GPs with whom they could build up a rapport (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010). Travellers were also concerned that some GPs did not explain how to take medication, as low literacy means they cannot always read the

Among people from minority ethnic groups, those whose English was poor and/or who were in lower-skilled employment had lower rates of GP registration.

instructions. There was also limited awareness among people from East Africa of how to access key health resources (Young, 2012).

Education

Educational attainment

There is little data regarding the attainment of children from minority ethnic communities in the region's education system. The published statistics on pupil qualifications and destinations after GCSEs aggregate all people from minority ethnic groups (DENI, 2012). In 2010/11, 71.6 per cent of pupils from minority ethnic groups (including young people from white Irish Traveller backgrounds) achieved five A*–C grades at GCSE compared with 73.2 per cent of white pupils. However, UK data suggests that there are widely different rates of educational attainment between pupils from different minority ethnic groups. For example, at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4 across the UK, Chinese, Indian and mixed Asian and White heritage children outperform children of other groups, but children of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma significantly underperform (Lawrence, 2012). MacInnes, *et al.* (2012) also note the association between school attainment and free school meals as an indicator of poverty in Northern Ireland. Three-quarters of the region's Traveller children are entitled to free school meals (Traveller Education Taskforce, 2011), but it is unclear what proportion of children from other minority ethnic communities fall into this category (although it is noted that some pupils from minority ethnic groups may be ineligible to claim free school meals owing to their migration status). Understanding the outcomes of pupils from different groups and the impact of poverty, therefore, is critical in targeting interventions and allocating resources to improve pupils' achievements.

The report on inequalities in education in Northern Ireland includes no data for minorities other than Travellers (ECNI, 2009b). Indeed, Travellers are the only group for which significant work has been undertaken regarding their educational needs in Northern Ireland. These studies show remarkable educational disadvantage, and overcoming health and employment inequalities is seen as a key intervention (Abdalla, *et al.*, 2010; ECNI, 2009b; Knipe, 2005; Traveller Educational Taskforce, 2006). Only 5 per cent of non-Traveller pupils leave school with no qualifications in Northern Ireland, compared with 58 per cent of Traveller children (Knipe, *et al.*, 2005). Abdalla, *et al.* (2010) found that although literacy and numeracy were increasingly important for day-to-day life, Travellers generally did not consider qualifications to be necessary, although there was more interest in vocational courses among younger people. In addition, Traveller children experience name-calling, bullying and fights in schools and miss a lot of schooling for family and cultural events. Parents and children value schools with other Traveller families, and educational outreach work specifically with Traveller children is appreciated (Knipe, *et al.*, 2005). Teachers in mainstream schools say they are aware of Traveller culture but do not use any specific materials designed for their use and, overall, were uncertain of what was expected of them in the classroom.

Language provision

English language support is of critical importance as it provides access to the curriculum and allows greater participation of pupils and parents in the education of their child. The number of children requiring language support has grown, from 1,366 in 2001/2 to 8,418 by 2011/2. An early report

notes that the provision of English as an Additional Language (EAL) support was patchy and that uncertainty about how best to deliver the support was evident (Hansson, *et al.*, 2002). A later report canvased the opinions of teachers and heads about EAL and teachers recounted that there were insufficient resources to access interpreter and translation services to help to communicate with parents and pupils (DEL Equality Unit, 2006). It showed how other schools had used the EAL funding to buy in the services of peripatetic teachers to support children (*ibid.*). One study noted that some schools had employed Portuguese support staff to facilitate communication with pupils with limited English language skills but the study also showed how community organisations were important in providing support (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown).

Appreciating diversity

There are concerns that educational support for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is limited to the provision of EAL support and that schools inadequately engage with promoting good relations and understanding diversity (Geraghty, *et al.*, 2010). For example, there is evidence that pupils from minority ethnic groups experience racist bullying and name calling and of teachers handling racist incidents poorly (Connolly and Keenan, 2002b; RSM McClure-Watters, 2011).

At the time of Geraghty, *et al.*'s (2010) study, few schools were enrolled with the Inclusion and Diversity Service designed to support schools in promoting diversity. An earlier ECNI study (Elwood, *et al.*, 2003) raised concerns regarding the ability of teachers to provide equality and good relations guidance in the classroom, having come from divided schools themselves and with less understanding and experience of the issues than their counterparts in Great Britain. These issues were recently highlighted in teacher training education in Northern Ireland (Montgomery and MacGlynn, 2009).

Parental involvement

Several reports noted that education in Northern Ireland was seen as a positive experience and something that was particularly valued by parents of children from minority ethnic groups (Geraghty, *et al.* 2010; Bell, *et al.*, 2009). On the whole, many parents wanted to be involved with their children's education but felt isolated from the school owing to their poor English language skills, and felt that schools should provide greater opportunities for school–parent liaison (McGovern, *et al.*, 2011; STEP/Southern Health Board). Facilitating parental involvement may be critical given its importance in raising educational attainment (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012).

Young people from East Africa noted in Young (2012) that they wanted to attend further education college but were prevented from doing so by the high fees that would be charged as they were considered overseas students. Improving skills and responding to unemployment is therefore difficult for young people from some minority ethnic groups in particular circumstances.

Language

The importance of language in explaining disadvantage is sometimes overplayed and misunderstood (Atkin and Chattoo, 2007), as many of the difficulties faced by ethnic minorities occur independently of language difficulties. Nonetheless, the language problems encountered by people

Many parents wanted to be involved with their children's education but felt isolated from the school owing to their poor English language skills.

from minority ethnic backgrounds were a strong theme arising from the review. Of course, not all people from minority ethnic groups have language problems (Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008). However, for those people who do have difficulties with the English language, overcoming them was of great importance as language skills unlock significant opportunities for minorities (McAreavey, 2010a, 2010b) and, therefore, help to overcome poverty and exclusion. Indeed, those with greatest fluency in English had a higher rate of GP registrations (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown) and earned more money (Bell, *et al.*, 2004).

For those who did lack English skills, the impacts were profound, such as the Chinese woman who did not present for care until seven months into her pregnancy as she could not communicate her needs (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown) or because trying to communicate induced stress and anxiety (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009). Allamby, *et al.* (2011) note that much employment is segregated so an inability to speak English does not preclude work, but does limit opportunities to poor-quality jobs, leaves people vulnerable to exploitation and limits their social networks.

Several studies made repeated claims of the centrality of language barriers to exclusion and the problematic access to both interpretation and translations services and to English language classes so people can learn to communicate independently (McGovern, *et al.*, 2011; McVeigh, 2006; Dunn and Morgan, 2001; McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; Bell, *et al.*, 2009; McAreavey, 2010a, 2010b; Devine, *et al.*, 2007; Young, 2012). Moreover, the use of children and younger family members to interpret sensitive issues such as domestic violence, health problems or parent and child conflicts was considered to be inappropriate (Geraghty, *et al.*, 2010; McAreavey, 2010a, 2010b). It was acknowledged that great strides have been made in the provision of interpretation and language services in recent years but it remains a key issue (STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown).

Summary

This chapter reported the evidence on the experiences of key services among people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Little precise data is known about the health and education outcomes of minority ethnic groups in the region, and much emphasis had been placed on understanding their access to services and satisfaction with services received. With some exceptions, people from minority ethnic groups generally reported satisfaction with services. Difficulties included health staff blocking access and teachers responding inadequately to diversity in the classroom.

Availability of housing was reasonable. People from minority ethnic groups seemed to be over-represented in the private rented sector, known to be problematic in terms of quality and management, and so overcrowding and high rents were of concern.

6 BELONGING IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY

The report, based on the evidence available, has highlighted experiences of low incomes and disadvantage for some people from minority ethnic groups in the labour market and in accessing services in Northern Ireland. These experiences may be shared by minorities in other jurisdictions, and in some instances by other people on low incomes. However, the policy and legal context, and relatively recent arrival of some of the minority ethnic groups to an area with an existing history of conflict, represent distinct circumstances.

Attitudes towards people from minority ethnic communities may influence critical life opportunities and ultimately the experience and incidence of poverty. This chapter, therefore, considers the experiences of individuals from minority ethnic communities of belonging and of racism in Northern Ireland. It considers the interplay between these issues and the legacy of sectarianism in the region.

Racism in Northern Ireland

Many migrants viewed their life in Northern Ireland positively and felt welcomed by local people (Bell, *et al.*, 2009; McVeigh, 2006). On balance, more recent arrivals view life in Northern Ireland as preferable to that which they left in their home country (Svašek, 2009). It is unclear whether racism in Northern Ireland is more or less of a problem than in other parts of the UK. In the latter half of the last decade and after some highly publicised attacks in which Roma and Polish people were displaced from their homes, the reputation of Northern Ireland in terms of race relations was poor (Knox, 2011b). There were concerns that reported incidences of racially motivated

hate crimes were increasing (Radford, 2007). Although the number of recorded incidents has since reduced, the level of reporting and confidence in the police to resolve the situation among people from minority ethnic communities is unclear (Young, 2012).

McGill and Oliver (2002) flagged concerns that statutory organisations had to do more to consider institutional racism. This review identified clear research significance regarding minority ethnic people's access to services in Northern Ireland, particularly health services. However, possibly because outcomes data is limited, these reports were often concerned with racism among individual staff, rather than unwitting patterns of poor outcomes and indirect institutional racism. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that racist attitudes remain an important barrier to social inclusion for minority ethnic groups even though there is willingness for cultural change among the majority of the population.

Racism in the labour market

Hills (2010) identifies 'ethnic penalties' in the UK labour market that can, after taking other factors into account, explain why some people from minority ethnic backgrounds remain disadvantaged. It was clear from the Northern Ireland evidence that some employers favour employing individuals from particular minority ethnic backgrounds and have actively recruited from overseas (Devine, *et al.*, 2007). McElhinney (2008) found that Filipino nurses in a public hospital seemed to be as likely to gain promotion as their white counterparts. Even so, a range of small-scale survey and qualitative evidence reveals that workers from minority ethnic backgrounds have experienced racism and discrimination at work (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009; Bell, *et al.*, 2009; Betts and Hamilton, 2006; Donnolly, 2009; Holder and Khaoury, 2005; Devine, *et al.*, 2007: Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008). The extent of racism and discrimination varies in each study, from one in eight to four out of five workers having experienced racism from colleagues, managers and/ or customers. Racism manifested itself in subtle and overt ways, such as being passed over for promotion, not given extra money for additional duties in comparison with others, by people being impatient with poor English language skills and through verbal abuse.

McVeigh (2006) also reported that migrant workers felt impotent and unable to challenge managers. However, in another study, migrant workers who complained to their managers about racism felt satisfied with the outcome and considered their colleagues to be, on the whole, committed to tackling racism (Betts and Hamilton, 2006). In a study combining council and health-care workers, a majority of staff held favourable views of minorities but a significant minority expressed racist attitudes that were a cause of concern (Holder and Lanao, 2002).

Muttarak, *et al.* (2012) found that fair employment policies were effective in altering the balance of the workforce between people of Catholic and Protestant community backgrounds. The ECNI (2009a) recommended that registered employers be asked to monitor the workforce by nationality and ethnic origin, in addition to community background and sex, with the intention of securing similarly positive results.

Overcoming racism in the provision of public services

Some studies identified 'front desk' problems, a euphemism for racism from public servants directed towards clients or customers (Dunn and Morgan, 2001; STEP/Southern Health Board, date unknown). Several studies noted that cultural awareness and diversity staff training varied between different sectors and that some staff were resistant to such training as they held

negative attitudes (Watt and McGaughey, 2006; Holder and Khaoury, 2005; Betts and Hamilton, 2006). It was unclear how diversity messages have been reinforced within organisations since these studies, and the Racial Equality Strategy (OFMDFM, 2005) were published. Watt and McGaughey (2006) noted, at that time at least, that such activities were rarely 'mainstreamed' or incorporated into everyday organisational practices.

Community organisations and the voluntary sector, whether in partnership or alone, were identified as a critical conduit to services for minority ethnic groups, overcoming information gaps and language difficulties as well as obstacles put up by resistant staff (McAreavey, 2010a; Allamby, *et al.*, 2011; McVeigh, 2006; Dunn and Morgan, 2001; STEP/ Southern Health Board, date unknown).

Home and neighbourhood as a site of racial harassment

Racially motivated hate crimes, including abuse and assaults on people and property, have been recorded in Northern Ireland since 2004/5. They increased from 634 to 861 in 2006/7, but have since fallen back to 531 in 20010/11 (PSNI statistics). These crimes include violence against the person, assaults, threats to kill, for example, as well as criminal damage to a dwelling, to a motor vehicle or arson threatening life. The majority of these crimes have been perpetrated on white people, with the largest group being of Polish nationality.

In a survey of Polish migrants, only 29 out of 420 respondents felt unwelcome in Northern Ireland, but a quarter of respondents (108) had experienced harassment or victimisation, 52 felt unsafe in their home and 70 in their neighbourhood (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009). People wishing to exclude others who are not coreligionists from their neighbourhood have attacked asylum seekers' homes, compounding trauma from past events (McGovern, *et al.*, 2011). Another survey of migrants found 12 per cent had experienced abuse, 20 per cent felt unsafe in their homes, rising to 50 per cent of migrants housed in Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) accommodation (Bell, *et al.*, 2004). Other studies reported that people had been attacked or abused in the street (Young, 2012; Nic Craith, *et al.*, 2008).

Sectarianism and ethnic identity

Few studies explicitly examined how people from minority ethnic communities perceived the sectarian conflict in the region, although some views were expressed in passing. Few migrants may have knowledge of Northern Ireland's history of conflict, but Bell, *et al.* (2009) found that among those who were aware of the sectarian conflict, any emerging fears were unfounded. Another study reported that a minority cited problems surrounding religious tensions as a possible reason to leave in the future (McVeigh and McAfee, 2009). However, it seems that most migrants avoid engaging in sectarian conflicts and do not perceive the historical conflict as having any relevance to their lives (Kampny, 2010; Geoghegan, 2010). The literature suggests that the legacy of sectarianism affects people from minority ethnic backgrounds in three ways: firstly, by being an important determinant of racist attitudes; secondly, with regard to residential choices and, thirdly, with the shaping of policy and legislative responses to overcome inequalities. These matters are underexplored but may have ramifications for other issues, such as job search or integration.

Sectarianism and racism

Some minorities with experience of other countries perceived there to be a lower level of racism among people in Northern Ireland than in Britain or the USA (Holder and Lanao, 2002). Nic Craith, *et al.* (2008) report how Africans found people in Northern Ireland more pleasant than those in Scotland and England but they indicated that people in the region had become less friendly over time. The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILTS) survey shows that although people perceived racism to have fallen, the number of people identifying themselves as prejudiced against minority groups had grown from 11 per cent in 1994 to 32 per cent in 2008 (Knox, 2011b). People identifying themselves as prejudiced against people from minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be Protestant, older, hold sectarian views and to never have lived outside of Northern Ireland (*ibid.*).

Based on further NILTS evidence, Gilligan (2008) argues that Northern Irish society overall appears ambivalent to minority ethnic groups. He shows how people were concerned about the pressure new arrivals have exerted on employment and public resources, but were unsure whether to blame the government or migrants (*ibid.*). Hayes and Dowds (2006) found that economic self-interest, that is the view that minorities would threaten their employment, was not as important a factor in influencing attitudes as meaningful contact between groups and being from a minority themselves. More positively, Gilligan (2008) notes that in respect of good relations, overall the public wants more interaction between different social groups than that assumed by politicians. Attitudes change across generations and the Young Life and Times Survey shows that the cohort born after the ceasefires in 1994 show a greater propensity to mix and have more friends with people from other community and ethnic backgrounds than those born pre-1994 (Devine and Robinson, 2012).

Residential choice

Residential segregation on religious lines is very high in Northern Ireland, and space and territory are often highly contested. Thirty-five out of 51 electoral wards comprise 90 per cent or more Catholic or Protestant populations (Lewis, 2006). This is especially true for NIHE houses, which are virtually all single-identity estates. There are many privately rented properties available on these estates due to previous house sales (McAnulty and Gray, 2009), but they contain many physical and symbolic barriers that serve to reinforce and remind of ongoing divisions and territoriality (Jarman, 2008; Leonard, 2010). Residential segregation is, therefore, off-putting for some people from minority ethnic groups when looking for homes (Kempny, 2010). Migrants enter communities where local residents already navigate a complex mosaic of safe and unsafe zones in their neighbourhoods (Kempny, 2010).

Studies discuss the seemingly more prevalent incidences of attacks on minority ethnic groups in Protestant areas (Kempny, 2010; Svašek, 2009). One popularly cited reason for this is the availability of low-cost housing in Protestant areas owing to a declining birth rate, although as Anderson, *et al.* (2004) point out, demography in a divided society is highly politicised. Thus the situation is more complex than this and explanations may include the internal fragmentation of Orange organisations, the threat of gentrification and commercialisation of local neighbourhoods, and insecurity felt by a Protestant working class no longer protected in new globalised markets (Chan, 2006). Chan argues that it is facile to infer that nationalists are more empathetic to minorities than Protestants. Furthermore, to concentrate on attacks from one of the majority communities minimises the incidences that

The cohort born after the ceasefires in 1994 show a greater propensity to mix and have more friends with people from other community and ethnic backgrounds than those born pre-1994.

occur in nationalist communities (Geoghegan, 2010). Even so, there are areas of south Belfast in particular where minority ethnic communities feel comfortable, are concentrated and are growing, such as the Ormeau Road (Chan, 2006).

Policy and community responses to racism

Nolan (2012, p. 121) cites Trench, who says of general policy-making in the region that everything is "seen through a prism of the position of the respective communities". It seems that moving beyond this viewpoint remains a challenge for society in Northern Ireland as reflected in the stalled *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* policy document. Part of the criticism has been a perceived lack of vision, a view that the document shies away from difficult issues including racism and sectarianism and a more general belief that it is "a step back" from *A Shared Future* (OFMDFM, 2005; Wallace Consulting, 2011, p. 12)

Geoghegan (2010) argues that sectarianism also shapes responses to racism, with the two communities attempting to co-opt minorities into existing divisions. He uses examples of communities in the Falls Road and Shankhill Road areas of Belfast having distinctly separate anti-racist strategies. There is evidence of nationalist activists proposing that Catholics and minority ethnic groups share oppression and therefore are natural affiliates. As such, people from minority ethnic groups in these neighbourhoods may guard against reporting racist incidents or avoid the involvement of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, unionists have conveyed aggressive messages incorporating minority ethnic groups into a particular view of the British state, with the danger of entrenching recent ethnic minority groups into established community divisions. Kampney (2010) also notes that, when undertaking Catholic mass, priests reinforce existing divisions, suggesting to their congregations that Protestant areas are unsafe. This increases insecurities despite there being clear examples of positive neighbourliness in Protestant areas reported by others in her study and, anecdotally, elsewhere (McDonald, 2007). Acts of positive neighbourliness have also occurred in places where racist attacks happened, including anti-Chinese attacks in the Village area of south Belfast during 2003.

There are possible dangers inherent in minority ethnic groups becoming associated with either majority community. So-called 'chill factors', where employees are reluctant to seek employment in some locations for fear of being victimised for their community background, are evident in the Northern Ireland labour market (Shirlow, 2006; Hossain, *et al.*, 2011; Shuttleworth and Green, 2009). Segregated employment markets would only be problematic for minority ethnic groups if, *all other things being equal*, they became associated with one part of the religious divide. Conversely, as potentially neutral parties, minority ethnic groups could be in advantageous circumstances and have wider access to employment and housing markets than the existing majority communities.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted that some barriers to moving on from poverty are shared with other people on low incomes, while other issues are faced by minority ethnic groups precisely because of their ethnicity. In the context of a divided and territorialised space, it is occasionally unclear what aspect of a person's identity attracts adverse reactions – their religion, their presence

in Northern Ireland during a recession, their residential location, their nationality or their skin colour.

Although no comparative data was identified, the incidents of racist abuse and attacks in the workplace, as well as surrounding homes and neighbourhoods, appear significant. This potentially inhibits engagement and/or access to work and services, as well as having negative impacts on individuals' identity, self-esteem, quality of life and well-being.

The impact of the divided society in shaping the disadvantages of minority ethnic groups is evident, in terms of residential location and their reception in communities already struggling with global changes. The immaturity of policy and social developments in this area also affect disadvantage, but the precise impacts of the legacy of conflict on minorities establishing themselves in this environment requires further exploration.

7 FINDINGS FROM MINORITY ETHNIC AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS

This chapter presents the findings from four focus groups (FGs) undertaken with low-income Polish men and women, and with Somali, Roma and Chinese women, along with findings from a stakeholder focus group held with representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies that provide support to minority ethnic groups.

Focus groups were undertaken to check the salience of the research evidence to a contemporary audience and identify priority areas not addressed in the literature.

Some issues were evident during focus-group deliberations that are underexplored, not recognised or not fully understood in the literature. These include the existence of severe hardship and people's coping strategies; the support and constraints offered by family and social networks; the choices and constraints around underemployment; a further emphasis on language; the lack of knowledge of the way in which migrants are integrating into an already divided society; and the permanency or otherwise of recent migratory movements.

Income

No studies reviewed as part of this project focused specifically on income poverty or financial hardship among people from minority ethnic groups in the region, although they did shed light on some of these issues. The focus groups with lay people illuminated some of the coping strategies deployed to overcome poverty. These discussions highlight how, in some cases, the self-

assessment of people from minority ethnic groups may relate not to others within Northern Ireland, but to their experience of life in their country of origin. The importance of community groups in offering material support, rather than just advice and advocacy, was also revealed.

Reflecting current knowledge, individuals and families move to enhance their quality of life by availing of job and educational opportunities. Much of the desire to remain in Northern Ireland was for money and wages, as one individual explained:

> … in Poland the wages are much lower and if [she] did the same work in Poland she would have a lot of difficulty to make ends meet and here whatever the situation, even if you have £200 you will still have a decent life.
> – Participant, Polish FG

This is a relative and subjective matter, with cultural differences and experiences influencing expectations of what constitutes an acceptable standard of living. One participant explained that, unlike a person from Northern Ireland, someone from Poland could create a 'feast' with £20, buying potatoes and vegetables and cheap cuts of meat.

Roma women, and to a lesser degree Somali women, reported hardship from barely subsistence incomes. A Romanian woman reported how her husband works in a car wash earning about £25 each day while she earns £5 per hour working as a cleaner for a few hours each week for a local charity. Their rent is £600 per month and they make ends meet by living with extended family in their rental house. On top of rent, utilities such as electricity (metered and costing £10 per day) must be paid and this often means there is little or no money left for food or for school bus fares and lunches. If the woman can pay for school bus fares then her children get free school meals, otherwise they might have to go without lunch. Overcrowded conditions, unheated housing, missing school and skipping meals were thus some of the coping strategies highlighted by Roma focus-group participants. This was reflected through discussions with Somali women as they described not being able to afford oil to heat their homes and also skipping meals when they did not have enough money. This was less apparent for the participants in the Polish and Chinese groups.

According to the focus-group discussions, many minority ethnic groups do not in general consider it prudent to borrow money; they would prefer to live within their means. In times of necessity or desperation and where possible, Somali and Roma women indicated that they would borrow money from friends or family, but they strive to repay this as soon as possible. The Chinese women did not suggest that they borrowed money; their ethos was very much one of living within their means. They explained that they would never skip meals as it is such an important part of their lives but they would cut back on other consumables, including clothing. Polish focus-group participants described how they would live within their means and so:

> Even if you are poor here, there is still some dignity in your life, you can survive one week to the next. You realise that you cannot buy this or you cannot buy that, but you can have a good life.
> – Participant, Polish FG

They went on to explain that in a similar way to the descriptions of the Chinese women, they would cut back on consumables and if necessary seek help from Polish friends and family. This is a significant cultural difference

Roma women, and to a lesser degree Somali women, reported hardship from barely subsistence incomes.

from the majority populations and within a credit-based society it suggests exclusion from other benefits that might flow from having access to credit.

Across all discussions there was a belief that minority ethnic groups do not understand 'the system' for accessing benefits and other services including health care, housing and finance and instead use their family, social and community networks to access services. Despite the support available for accessing benefits, there was evidence of blockages in the system:

> I think there are certain issues associated with individual cases that can delay the processing for a year even though you can claim it back. But in the time being you can lose your house, you cannot pay for anything and you suddenly become homeless. You are talking about a huge impact because of the waiting time for a decision … you are not talking about one or two months, you are talking about a six- to nine-month period.
> – Participant, stakeholder FG

This resonates with the distribution of OFMDFM's emergency fund where:

> Only 5 per cent of that money went to people with no recourse to public funds, so the majority of the money was going to people who should have been able to work or on benefits, so it was that gap that was causing the problem.
> – Participant, stakeholder FG

Only one study raised this issue in passing, but administrative delays in benefit applications appear to be an important source of financial distress for some people from minority ethnic groups:

> I have asked the staff and half the time they don't know what the rules are … it is very complicated … This lady made an application twelve months ago for Child Benefit and Working Tax Credit and she has heard nothing yet and when she phones they tell her that it has not yet been processed … this lady's husband is self-employed and she can register with a GP and she has made the application and she is waiting.
> – Participant, Roma FG

Employment

Most of the Polish and Chinese focus-group participants worked, some of the Roma women had some employment but no Somali women were working. The Somali women identified limitations on employment imposed by immigration rules to be the biggest obstacles to improving their household income.

Friends, family and community contacts were important sources of information about work. However, focus-group discussions indicate that reliance on one's own community can offer constraints as well as opportunities for some people.

Focus-group participants described how family and friends were important contacts for employment, with just a few using agencies. For instance, there is evidence of Chinese nationals moving to Northern Ireland, not on an individual basis, but through a (Chinese) employer. Similarly, for the Roma the *bulibasa* (roughly translated as leader) organises employment (namely selling the *Big Issue*, car washing or selling flowers). Networks also

form an important route into employment for the Polish community; for example, many Polish people in Newry work in just a few meat-processing plants. Social capital can therefore be used to support migration by providing access to the labour market as illustrated by the experiences of the Roma community in Belfast:

> There is a Roma man who has been here for years and all of the women came through him and he was able to signpost the families arriving and they are all very grateful for the help that he provided … He organises the *Big Issue* here in Northern Ireland, but he can't give any other kind of support.
> – Participant, Roma FG

Stakeholder and ethnic minority group participants described how employers often favoured employing a single nationality. For instance, in one meat-processing factory, out of a total of 48 staff, 40 employees were Polish nationals and the remainder Irish. However, a community stakeholder suggested that such labour-market segmentation can hamper pathways out of poverty as it does not support the development of English language skills or encourage economic mobility, nor does it nurture contact between different ethnic groups:

> … the employer is creating Polish teams in the workplace and so you spend eight or ten hours working with members of your own community and you don't spend any time with the local community and you don't have to because the employer will actually appoint a bilingual person who will speak on your behalf then you don't have to learn the language – you have a Polish-speaking supervisor. So there is no chance to improve your skills, so if you are working there for two or three years and after two years it's too late because they see you as a Polish person who sticks together with other Polish people and who is not interested in integrating with the local population.
> – Participant, stakeholder FG

Subtle discrimination was also evidenced through examples of workers being locked into contracts without pay, on contracts with zero hours' work, but unable to claim benefits while sick. It is evident that because of the particular way in which migrants and minority ethnic communities tend to be contained within certain industries (meat processing, mushroom picking, cleaning and domestic services, etc.), they become more prone to the discriminatory activities of certain employers. So by their very position of being from a minority ethnic group there is a link between ethnicity and poor employment practice. In addition, formal redress for sharp employment practices was poor:

> Even where the trade unions were coming in, the employers were giving the finger to the employee and if you go down the tribunal road it takes a long time … and people don't want to pursue that, they will give up.
> – Participant, stakeholder FG

Negative aspects of this type of chain migration can be containment within a particular labour market with dependency on the employer and possible exclusion from other parts of the employment market:

> You might have people working in the same place on the same production line for five or six years who get a wage increase of maybe 5p in the year. And they are happy because they get their wages and these are much higher than where they come from and so they can get by … but at the same time they might have skills that are not recognised. But one issue is the language barrier because they are working at the lowest of the low [jobs] and that creates a vicious circle where they are dependent on that particular employer and in that particular sector, and for many men and for many women it would be the cleaning sector. So we would see a lot of people like that — they are completely dependent and helpless.
> — Participant, stakeholder FG

There was further evidence of underemployment, or what Goldin, *et al.* refer to as "brain waste" (2011), with many participants in the focus groups working below their skills level. For instance, a dental nurse was working in a hot food takeaway; a psychology teacher (not currently working as she was looking after two young children) did not envisage that she would be able to find a job using her qualifications; a teacher was working in a meat-processing plant; and a qualified electrician was working as a school caretaker. Although documented in the literature, the matter of underemployment was not straightforward.

> In China she is a qualified psychology teacher but to do that here her English would need to be a lot better. She has friends who have told her that there are jobs available but she is not able to work because she has to take care of the children, so this is something for her to consider in the future.
> — Participant, Chinese FG

> There are a lot of people in [name of factory] who are well qualified e.g. teacher, historian and they work alongside them [one another] in the meat-processing [factory] — they are happy to do this because they get paid more money than they would do in Poland.
> — Participant, Polish FG

Parents in the focus groups of Chinese women in particular perceived their sacrifice as one to provide opportunities for their children.

> First of all they are concerned about their children and their education and so they wouldn't move that easily. Also most Chinese are in the habit of saving and so if they have financial problems, the savings will keep them going for a while.
> — Participant, Chinese FG

> It's the fact that they can provide for their children, more than they can do in Romania and that makes them happy. What the children have in this country, they cannot get in Romania.
> — Participant, Roma FG

A stakeholder focus-group participant raised the issue of benefits staff doing little to reconnect unemployed people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the labour market and perceived them to be 'parked' in the difficult-to-deal-with pile. There was an absence of research into active labour-market policies and minority ethnic groups. The role of Jobs and Benefits Office staff and contractors in the region would require further exploration.

Seeking support from public services

Language

Language barriers were raised in the literature review. Focus-group participants emphasised the importance of language proficiency for career progression, accessing services and integration. Language competences differed across the generations and not all participants were literate in their first language. However, there was a strong desire for access to appropriate language courses as a way of improving life opportunities.

> [She] found that not having English is her main barrier; she has found that things like homework are becoming a bit of a problem … because her English is not that great; whenever she needs to use the GP or have medical advice she finds some difficulties.
> – Chinese interpreter

> The women feel very settled in their neighbourhood and like where they live, they mix with their neighbours as much as they can, but language impedes very much exchange.
> – Facilitator, Roma FG

Meanwhile, interpretation services were welcomed but considered to be insufficient in some circumstances when accessing certain services, such as support for domestic violence or mental-health problems where "cultural intelligence" (Barnard and Turner, 2011) is also required to appreciate a person's background.

> For some women who are settled in the community there are additional barriers [that] prevent them from seeking help that they might need … including the language issue … I suppose what we are finding is for the specialised services [dealing with domestic violence], you've got to have that knowledge and understanding first of all.
> – Participant, stakeholder FG

But a lack of bilingual professionals who are able to deal with cultural and religious sensitivities makes accessing specialist services very challenging. Consequently, individuals sought help on all types of issues from single points of contact, often within voluntary and community sector agencies.

Accessing housing

Many of the focus-group participants rented privately, and problems associated with conditions were discussed which were similar to the examples in the literature in terms of lack of repairs and poor management of the home by the landlord. The difficulties of accessing and paying for private housing were raised in the Roma and Somali women's focus groups. These were not identified in the review, possibly as the studies often concentrated on new Eastern European migrants. However, Roma families reported how they repeatedly found that they were not always accepted as tenants and on many occasions landlords increased the rental rate on learning of their ethnicity. Both Roma and Somali women reported living in multiple-occupancy households to enable them to cover the rent. Furthermore, these women reported the difficulty of finding a guarantor.

There was a strong desire for access to appropriate language courses as a way of improving life opportunities.

Funding specialist services

Among the stakeholder group, questions arose in relation to transparency of policy and funding. The specific example of education was given where funds for integration of minority ethnic groups was allocated to schools, but was not ring-fenced. Systematic monitoring does not yet exist even though it has been debated at length, making it difficult to predict future trends and demand.

A sense of belonging

Across all focus groups, individuals expressed a desire to improve the life they left behind and to be able to work so that they could achieve this fundamental goal. However, perceptions of whether they would stay in Northern Ireland differed.

Apart from the study on forced labour (Allamby, *et al.*, 2011), there were no studies of the Roma in Northern Ireland and yet they reported great hardship and perceived exclusion, with negative consequences for their children's education. The Roma women were attuned to matters of integration and a desire to get on with people in Northern Ireland, but were uncertain of their plans to remain in the region.

> If only they were able to work and could make more money they would make Northern Ireland their home, but at the moment it is only a temporary arrangement. They would not ask for benefits or food or anything if they could work. They would like to have more rights here to be equal to the other people.
> – Participant, Roma FG

This contrasted with the Polish participants who, with the exception of one individual, all expressed a desire to remain in Northern Ireland. But even that hesitant person indicated that he got on very well with his Irish neighbours and was not sure how he would feel if he moved back to Poland, having lived in Northern Ireland for two years.

Education was reported as an important factor for the Chinese women, who indicated that they would not be in Northern Ireland were it not for the fact that their children were being educated and that they were developing English language skills.

As mentioned, other participants described how they would really like to be able to have a 'proper' conversation with their neighbours. They felt that this would help them get to know a little bit more about the local area and would help them to make connections with local people.

Most participants expressed satisfaction with their life in Northern Ireland. However, on questioning some of the support workers it became clear that this is a relative judgement to be considered in the context of the participants' recent past and particular experiences. Further, many of them do not wish to question their circumstances as they feel they might somehow lose their rights to services.

Most participants did not seem to understand the traditional binary divisions of the majority Catholic and Protestant communities. The Polish perceive themselves to be European first and foremost. Focus-group participants did not 'align' to the Catholic majority because of religion. Further, while many of their children attended Catholic schools, little of this was down to choice as there were few Protestant schools in the Newry locality. However, there is potential for the creation of 'accidental' Catholics/

Protestants simply as a result of geographical location and accessing services in an already divided society. The ramifications for future society are unknown and little understood. Stakeholders reported perceptions that there is a drift towards groups such as Poles being allied to the majority Catholic community and Latvians to the Protestant community, but they appeared sceptical of it being a significant development.

Summary

Much of the focus-group discussions confirmed issues raised in the literature, but notable issues were identified.

- The immediate consequences of income poverty were apparent, with people cutting down on food, children missing school, overcrowding and accepting a low income because the situation was better than they experienced in their home country. These issues and the long-term consequences on issues such as health and educational attainment were largely absent from existing research.
- Labour-market segmentation and community containment seemed to offer both opportunities and constraints. Aside from the matter of forced labour, labour market issues were not examined in the Northern Ireland literature and so the implications are not fully understood.
- Underemployment is raised in the literature and in the focus groups. This is not fully understood and employee attitudes, and choices made because of caring responsibilities could be examined further.
- The issue of severe benefit delays was raised in the focus groups, as well as the role of Jobs and Benefit Office staff in supporting job-search activities for people from minority ethnic groups. This was largely absent in the literature but would be important in relation to alleviating and moving people out of poverty.
- Domestic violence among minority ethnic groups was absent from the evidence base and was identified as an emerging issue, often in respect of those with no recourse to public funds.
- The role of community organisations was recognised and a nervousness about future funding was apparent; a reduction in funding may be a significant loss given the critical role that community organisations play in supporting minority ethnic groups.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Few studies expressly examined the circumstances of poverty among people from minority ethnic groups, but a range of studies provided insights into their experiences of the labour market, public services and their life in Northern Ireland.

Conclusions

There have been long-standing minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland, but the story today of people from minority ethnic groups is predominantly, but not exclusively, one of recent inward migration. The composition of these minority ethnic communities differs from that in Great Britain as there has been a limited history of post-war post-colonial migration in Northern Ireland. The largest set of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland appears to be people from Poland and China, and Travellers, although at the time of writing robust population data is unavailable. The latest 2011 Census data will be of great assistance but robust and appropriately categorised data resources are required to track intercensal changes. Although the last decade saw a rapid expansion in inward migration, significant numbers of migrants stayed only a short time, but new data is likely to reveal a new and settled minority ethnic population in the region.

The legacy of conflict in the region means that equalities issues have historically been a difficult subject to broach and thus equalities legislation was only instituted in 1997. The period since then and the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 has seen more rapid policy progress, but legislation in Northern Ireland remains weaker than the equivalent in Great Britain. Undoubtedly, progress has been made; however, implementation and monitoring lack coordination. Little remains known about key outcomes for people from minority ethnic backgrounds, thus the effectiveness of policy to reduce inequalities in this area is difficult to determine.

The evidence reviewed shows that, although people from minority ethnic groups are employed across the labour market, they appear to be over-represented in precarious, low-grade and low-paid employment, often below

their skill levels. Some evidence suggests that half are married with children, so the issue of in-work and child poverty is likely to be important. Moreover, there are indications that the recession may have had a disproportionate impact on migrant labour. The extent of unemployment among people from minority ethnic groups is difficult to establish but some reports suggest it is greater than the Northern Ireland average.

Little, if anything, is known about ethnic minorities' outcomes in relation to health, education, housing and benefit receipt. The exception is the Traveller community, which experiences severe disadvantage across these domains. Extensive work has been undertaken in some health areas to connect with minority ethnic groups, and schools provide language support to newcomer pupils. However, studies raise concerns that not enough work is undertaken to teach cultural awareness and help pupils to appreciate diversity. Community groups are an important source of assistance in connecting people from minority ethnic groups to key support services, as a lack of information and English language skills make it difficult for them to access services independently.

Attitudinal data exists but determining the relative extent of racism in Northern Ireland society is difficult. Some argue that the population is largely ambivalent to minority groups as they are uncertain about the impact of new populations and of whether the government should be responsible for providing additional resources. Sectarianism coexists with racism and shapes the residential choices of some minority ethnic groups and the policy responses to equalities. However, young cohorts indicate a greater propensity to mix with people from different community and ethnic backgrounds from themselves.

Much of the evidence may be similar to experiences of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in some areas or in similar circumstances in Great Britain. A cautious approach to reading across evidence from other jurisdictions uncritically is suggested for a number of reasons: the relative immaturity of the policy environment, the different composition of the minority ethnic population and the legacy of conflict and civil unrest.

> A cautious approach to reading across evidence from other jurisdictions uncritically is suggested.

The literature has grown since the European expansion in 2004 and the evidence base is likely to grow further. Greater data resources and use of administrative data already collected would provide a more robust knowledge base from which to understand the unfolding situation in terms of the income, household circumstances, economic well-being and needs of people from minority ethnic groups. This would enable comparison with other people on low incomes in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. It would also allow detailed analysis of the circumstances surrounding entry and exits from poverty. However, there is sufficient evidence to identify some important activities that have the potential to improve the current circumstances of people from minority ethnic groups. These recommendations and key gaps and weaknesses in the evidence base are set out below.

Policy and research recommendations

This section outlines tasks that should be undertaken to overcome income poverty and to further understand the needs of minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland.

Policy recommendations
There is a case for embedding equality principles in society by strengthening equality legislation to make it more difficult for employers and organisations

to act with impunity. Removing circumstances where people from minority ethnic groups suffer disadvantage can only be advantageous in the long term and in respect to poverty. This would need to be bolstered by a robust system of enforcement. The activities below focus on what could be accomplished without legislation and often within mainstream services.

Pursuing opportunities within the labour market has been an important route out of poverty, although the growth in low-wage employment offers little progression and does not necessarily mean that people escape poverty (Bivand, *et al.*, 2010). As demand for labour has weakened in the region, competition for jobs is intense, but it is critical to ensure equal access to the labour market for all, including those from minority ethnic groups. Policy-makers need to understand that a range of responses will be necessary as there are diverse skills, education, qualifications and work experience within the minority ethnic population. Different ethnic groups have different patterns of risks associated with entry to or persistence of poverty, such as the incidence of disability or lone parenthood, and will benefit from policies targeted at these circumstances across the population (Platt, 2009; Nandi and Platt, 2010). It is critical to understand the way in which these different factors intertwine and affect links to poverty, and it requires a nuanced approach to ethnicity. The circumstances described in this report may fall disproportionately on people from minority ethnic groups for a number of reasons that include isolation, language skills, educational attainment or 'ethnic penalties'. All of these factors limit a household's capacity to increase its income.

On the basis of the current evidence base, the following recommendations are made.

Tackling underemployment
Underemployment is a key issue. Not enough is known about the job choices people make to understand why some individuals are working below their skills level. Ensuring the effective recognition of overseas qualifications through better knowledge of, and easier access to, the National Recognition Information Centre could represent a quick win. This has the potential to allow career progression for portions of the migrant workforce who may be restricted to low-grade, low-pay jobs. It would help to limit in-work and child poverty among these groups. Furthermore, many underemployed people represent an underutilised pool of skilled labour. As well as more general benefits accruing to society, specific benefits would include employment of people from ethnic minority backgrounds as link workers in health and social care.

Connecting with the labour market
Some people from minority ethnic groups have limited education and are distant from the labour market. Research reveals an appetite among individuals from minority ethnic communities to work in some capacity in pursuing vocational qualifications, self-employment or to receive support to get into work. Examining barriers to the labour market and working with community groups and employers could move people closer to employment through further education, social enterprise or self-employment.

Developing independent language skills
The requirement for affordable and accessible language courses to develop independent communication skills was a common theme in the literature. Provision of such courses could overcome obstacles to quality employment and support parental involvement in their children's education.

Jobs and Benefits Offices
There was an absence of literature relating to the role of Jobs and Benefits Offices or their contractors in supporting people from minority ethnic groups regarding their access to employment, despite this being a critical route out of poverty. Consideration should be given to ensuring that staff respond appropriately to the specific barriers faced by people from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Working with community organisations could be both effective and economic as they represent a conduit to minority ethnic groups.

Benefit claims
There were suggestions that people from minority ethnic groups were disproportionately affected by the recession, and yet there was little evidence related to the receipt of benefits by people from minority ethnic groups. However, there were sufficient indicators of the importance of benefit support for some groups who needed assistance with housing and living costs. Timing of benefit payments arose as a concern as delayed payments have in the past caused destitution until the relevant case is handled. Ensuring people from minority ethnic groups are not disproportionately affected by benefit delays is important.

Recognising the role and importance of the third sector
The exploratory research conducted as part of this review demonstrates the central role of community and voluntary organisations in supporting minority ethnic communities. Without this support it is apparent that more people from minority ethnic backgrounds would be rendered more vulnerable as they attempt to access the labour market, education and other services in Northern Ireland. Addressing the organisational challenges that emerge due to short-term funding would strengthen these agencies and divert resources from a constant cycle of fundraising to service delivery and advocacy.

Institutional and policy coherency
There has been much activity in relation to identifying needs and services for people from minority ethnic groups, but there is little coordination, shared learning or measurement of effectiveness. Much of the emphasis should now be on mainstreaming these often disparate activities and measuring outcomes to see what has been achieved. Achieving this coherence across government will require a strong steer from politicians.

Strengthening the evidence base
There is much that is unknown about the extent of poverty among people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. For example, very little is known about the educational, health, housing, employment or social security outcomes of the minority ethnic population.

Improving data resources
Many of the equality policy measures are ongoing, including securing strong equality legislation, increasing access to public services and providing access to the curriculum through language support in schools. However, the effectiveness of these measures is hard to demonstrate as the data is either absent or goes unused. A parallel study to this (Owen, forthcoming) is examining and documenting the data resources available to assist with producing robust analyses of the circumstances of people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. Developing new booster datasets of the Family Resources Survey/Households Below Average Incomes

There is much that is unknown about the extent of poverty among people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland.

or Understanding Society may be desirable but may be costly. Utilising data from Great Britain may be cost effective if data from appropriate populations can be discerned, but assuming parity in circumstances may be difficult, owing to the different patterns of immigration as well as different policy, economic and legislative frameworks. However, without assurances that policy-makers will act on the findings revealed, developing further data sources is unlikely to be a panacea.

Utilising current administrative data
Calls for ethnic monitoring from public agencies have been loud, but it appears that further use could be made of current administrative data. For example, there was limited analysis found of educational outcomes by minority ethnic origin, or health outcomes by ethnicity. It is likely that useful insights can be gleaned from considering outcomes and thinking more about the data sources that are already available.

Learning what works
The will to undertake any of these exercises may have to come from the top in the face of competing tasks and diminishing resources. Much work is evident from statutory and community agencies in trying to improve the circumstances and engage people from minority ethnic groups with services enjoyed by other members of society in Northern Ireland. However, several studies were concerned about the lack of shared learning and the possible duplication of resources and called for strong political oversight to drive through a positive agenda in this area.

Civic participation and social inclusion
This review has only briefly considered how people from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland navigate a distinct and often divided society. The review parameters limited the focus to considerations of poverty and access to services, but the process revealed a complex context to these issues that warrants further examination. There were indications that existing divisions in the region may influence many facets of ordinary life, including political representation and housing, but positive examples of neighbourliness and work being undertaken to welcome and involve people from minority groups in Northern Irish society were also evident. Consideration should be given to the extent of or opportunities for social inclusion among minority ethnic groups, particularly when set against the historical context and the effectiveness of practice in this area, as exclusion may also have negative impacts on poverty.

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