

Towards Integration in Sligo

Executive
Summary



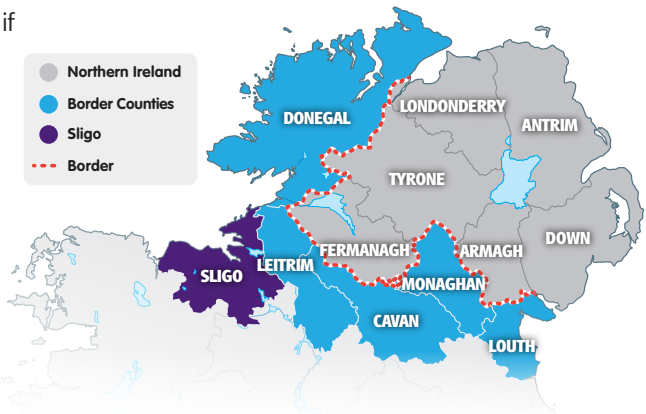
April 2011

Introduction

Ipsos Mori and Deloitte were commissioned by the Sligo County Community Forum (SCCF) and the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership Committee to carry out research to explore the nature and extent of sectarianism and racism in County Sligo. The research has been funded by EU's Peace III Programme and managed for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) by Sligo County Council on behalf of Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership Committee.

The key aims of the research as identified within the Invitation to Tender are:

- ✿ Draw up a profile (including historical context and demographical information) of the target groups of the Peace III Project in County Sligo;
- ✿ Measuring Attitudes to the 'North' and Cross Border working;
- ✿ Carry out an attitudinal survey to measure attitudes to sectarianism and racism in County Sligo, if these are an issue in the county and if so how it is manifested; and
- ✿ Present an overall 'picture' of Sligo in terms of diversity – this will be informed by secondary research that has already been carried out in this area and a 'media' study.



This publication is a summary of a full-length report of the same title, also published in April, 2011. The full publication provides comprehensive details, tables, academic references and acknowledgements and is available to download at www.sligocdb.ie

Method

The approach to the research comprised of the following elements:

- ❁ Fieldwork preparation included a research launch event attracting over 30 stakeholders, desk based review of policy context and previous research and development of an attitudinal survey;
- ❁ An attitudinal survey was undertaken with 200 people across 22 sampling points (15 rural and 7 urban) in line with the population spread across the county;
- ❁ Consultation phase including nine focus groups and six one-to-one consultations. These included a mix of minority communities and statutory authorities;
- ❁ Analysis, reporting and launch of the research.



Overall Conclusions

County Sligo has undergone a period of change, reflecting changes in wider Irish society. As Ireland has been the recipient of in-migration, so County Sligo has seen its population become culturally more diverse with the arrival of new communities, primarily from Eastern Europe and Asia. Ireland has also been the recipient of those seeking asylum from many nations across the world. There is a formal reception centre in Sligo Town, Globe House, which houses 250 such asylum seekers. In addition to new communities, Sligo also has a large Traveller population in comparison with other border counties.

The largely rural County Sligo population recognise themselves as being part of the border region and as such there is a direct connection, with the history of conflict most commonly associated with Northern Ireland, and subsequently of reconciliation and peace-building processes.

These changes have been occurring in a backdrop of substantial economic change, initially the boom years of the Celtic Tiger and more recently, turmoil, as Ireland has lost jobs, seen property prices tumble, required an international bailout and changed government.

The research undertaken has highlighted evidence of racism for individuals and groups. The racism differs depending on the minority, and is most strongly apparent in relations with the Irish Traveller community which for many has become “acceptable” or “justified”. The issue of sectarianism, is less visible, but is apparent to the minority Protestant community. The small Republican/ ex-prisoner community has also experienced prejudice, which they consider to be reducing, but only slowly. The distortions that the border made during the period of the conflict in the north, appears to be disappearing, as more people think little or nothing of crossing to visit friends or go shopping. Additionally people from Northern Ireland are welcomed, especially in relation to the economic benefit they can bring.



Local initiatives including community development processes and cultural education events have supported individuals and groups, building awareness, understanding and friendships. Institutions have participated in partnerships and networks, have invested in some relationship-building activity and staff have undertaken training to support their work within a more diverse society. There remain



challenges for institutions, some linked to national policy frameworks, as they seek to serve a Sligo society which is more diverse than ever, and as it moves on from its connections with a region in conflict to a region that is slowly building peace. Relationships need to be continually developed with new communities or with communities with whom relationships have previously been limited. The local media also have an important role as providers of information and shapers of opinion. To date, however, only a minority think the media is supporting development of positive relations between communities in how it reports issues and stories.

Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership Committee’s vision is: ***“Sligo is a community where ethnic and religious diversity is welcomed and where positive relationships exist within and between communities and across the border”***. Over the last five years, cross border relations have improved for three-quarters of people. There are also more people whose personal opinion of people from ethnic minorities has improved, than people whose personal opinion of people from ethnic minorities has deteriorated. While this shows positive movement towards the vision, it is likely that the current economic conditions, leading to changes in unemployment, welfare, service provision, and capacity of NGO sector will severely test relations with minority groups. It will be important to continue to work to build positive relations, otherwise they will likely deteriorate.



Recommendations

In looking forward it is anticipated this research will be a resource for all relevant stakeholders in County Sligo, and for regional and national stakeholders working with minorities communities and seeking to support integration. In the short-run the research is extremely relevant to those responsible for the remaining EU Peace III Programme funding, which has to be committed by 2013. Recommendations have been discussed and agreed with the Steering Group.

The recommendations are:

- ✿ this research should be considered a baseline against which changes in levels of racial and sectarian prejudice can be measured in the future.
- ✿ there are opportunities to support minority communities. This is already happening and should continue to be supported. As possible this should include:
 - ✿ continued support for community development style approaches, which empower the specific communities and bring them into connection with key statutory organisations. This approach could support religious and ethnic minorities;
 - ✿ support for specific events or activities. This should not simply be in terms of financial resource to run the event (e.g. a cultural festival, celebration of different countries national days, sporting tournaments, development of a website), but should include the wrap-around of support with marketing, attendance (especially community leaders, local political leaders etc.) and media (e.g. local radio and newspaper);
 - ✿ there is a specific need to raise awareness and understanding as to who asylum seekers / refugees are and tackle the hearsay and rumour which currently surround this community. This research has shown that the current system of accommodating asylum seekers together in separate institutions, has a negative impact on integrating communities and other research has revealed that this and the slow process of assessing cases has health impacts for those seeking asylum. At a policy level, these issues need to be addressed



if integration and equality is a goal for this society. Given that Sligo is a host community for many asylum seekers, efforts should be made to create discussion on this issue challenge current practices, that are not in line with the practice in other European countries; and

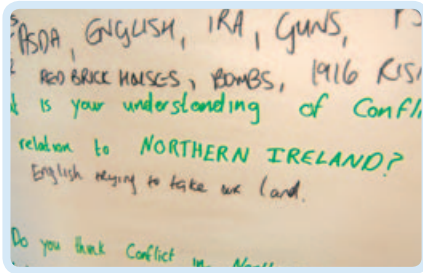


- ❁ the research indicates differential relations with the Irish Traveller community compared to experiences with other minority communities in Sligo. As a result, it is important for a continued focus on Travellers through existing structures such as the Sligo Traveller Support Group and other agencies to support further opportunities for Travellers to engage with the wider community. Specifically initiatives such as the Sligo Peace III Partnership funded education programme, which has supported Traveller women to deliver lectures at IT Sligo and local schools on a variety of topics should be continued. Further opportunities to build on this work to continue to build confidence and empower Travellers to get involved in mainstream processes should also be encouraged;

- ❁ there is a need to learn from previous efforts to tackle racism and sectarianism. Many groups, both community and statutory, have delivered projects to address this issue – in a wide range of areas including childcare, education, access to work, crossing religious divides, enhancing cross border cooperation etc. A huge amount of data has been collated in the county in relation to a wide array of anti-racism/ anti-sectarian projects that have been happening as a result of the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership’s programme 2008-to date. All of these projects were required to carry out evaluations which are now available. Learning from these projects should be collated into an archive and used in collaboration with the findings of this research.



- ❁ County Sligo has a great opportunity to work to address the issues of sectarianism and racism in the County through the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership Committee. However, funding for this initiative will only be for a limited time. It is crucial that under the next phase, plans are made for the sustainability of actions and the implementation of project that will have long term impacts. Actions that work to address the integration of various communities into the ‘mainstream’ will be crucial in achieving this objective.



- ❁ the SCCF should share the findings of this research with the leadership of the statutory agencies. While the research recognises the importance of local initiatives, it also recognises the policy and legislative context as being critical. This research provides evidence to assist statutory sector policy makers as they seek to continually improve policy and delivery of services for all Irish society, including minority groups;
- ❁ this research should be used to inform local implementation of training programmes relating to equality and tackling racism within these statutory organisations;
- ❁ while it has been difficult to engage statutory agencies locally in the research process, building integration and acceptance of diversity needs a strategic approach involving groups from the statutory, community, private and public sectors. Future actions to address racism and sectarianism, by the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership or others, need to take this into account and build 'cross-sectoral' responses to the issue to embed positive 'diversity' practice into community, agencies and businesses;
- ❁ there should be continued support for inter-agency working and partnerships that include representatives from minority ethnic communities. Existing networks and partnerships should consider whether there is a need to develop relationship with ethnic minorities, for example through specific sub-committees. The key statutory agencies that should be involved in these should include the Garda, HSE, Local Authorities and education bodies. Continued development of these relationships builds two-way understanding and trust. This should support the statutory organisations in their delivery of services to ethnic minorities, and can help hold public services to account when there are issues or concerns in relation to service delivery to specific minorities;
- ❁ statutory agencies, boards, community organisations, sports clubs, businesses and decision making bodies in the county can work to ensure the inclusion of minority groups by carrying out a review of the make-up of their boards, workers, participants and volunteers. Where 'gaps' in representation and participation exists, efforts should be made to include the minority group/s and support given to ensure their welcome and participation. A lot of work has already been carried out in developing anti-racism codes and equal work



practices in organisations. Support for such initiatives could be included under the actions of the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership Committee (phase II) and promoted by the SCCF.

- ❁ the research has identified that the segregated education system is perceived to contribute to separation between the Catholic and Protestant communities in the county. In addition a small but increasing minority identify themselves as non-religious or from other religions. It has also been noted that the current Minister for Education has opened up debate on this subject. As part of the actions of the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership Committee under phase II, space should be made to have local debate about these matters, to feed into the national debate;
- ❁ the SCCF should share the findings of this research with local elected politicians. In line with the recommendation from the UN CERD for Ireland as a whole, given the current economic conditions, there is a concern that work done to improve relations with minority communities, and ethnic minorities in particular, will unravel. The research has shown there is still a minority who feel that racism or sectarianism is acceptable in some circumstances. Also several individuals from ethnic minorities interviewed for the research were able to name racist or sectarian incidents that had happened to them. Hence there is a need to challenge prejudice and opinions which may or may not become the normal or accepted opinion. Local politicians need to recognise the current challenge of maintaining and sustaining efforts at individual, community and institutional level, to tackle prejudice, whether racist or sectarian, and promote good relations. Politicians should be encouraged to keep these efforts and issues on the agenda, to ensure they are properly funded and not neglect them in the face of economic pressures;
- ❁ the media section of this report highlighted some of the articles that have been covered in the local press in recent years. The research identified that there is a perception that the public feel that the media can contribute negatively as well as positively to community relations – both in the broadcast (e.g. radio) and print media. It is important that the media can discuss and explore these issues, discuss the issue of ‘balance’ and identify needs, to address some of the negative perceptions that exist. This could be included as an action under phase II of the Sligo Peace and Reconciliation Partnership plan;

- ❁ the findings of this research should be shared with the local media, highlighting the opportunity to develop stronger relationships with minority communities. To complement this, the SCCF should support communities to engage more directly with the media – both print and radio media. This could involve media training, identifying potential articles and stories of public interest, and direct relationship building with local newspapers and radio;



- ❁ the SCCF should consider whether a suitable organisation or partnership of organisations should host a confidential third-party reporting system which could record sectarian and racist incidents and complaints. This should be managed by an organisation trusted by ethnic minorities. Currently there are limited reports of racist incidents to statutory authorities. The research indicates the large proportion of racism and sectarianism goes unreported and unchallenged. The collection of such data should be helpful evidence in challenging any 'norms' of tolerated levels of racism or sectarianism in society. A model for reporting racist/sectarian incidents has been developed in Donegal and this could be emulated in County Sligo. Local statutory authorities should seek to learn from such a process, in terms of how the system collates, analyses and uses the data in challenging sectarian and racist behaviour. For example the analysis of this data alongside statutory collated data could allow the 'tracking' of community relations, develop understanding of the issues among statutory authorities and encourage reporting of such incidents.

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Disclaimer

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