The Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland

Vision and Mission

May 2023

How to read this report

Important documents and information

To make it easy for readers to find certain important documents and information, we have put in electronic links to them where we first talk about them. These can be found in both the main body of the text and the footnotes.

The words we have used

We have tried to make our language clear and easy to understand. However, we may still have used some words or phrases that readers have not seen before or do not understand. Where we think we have done this we have explained them, either in the text where the words appear or in a footnote on the same page.

Introduction

Why we need an Anti-Racism Observatory

Over the last 20 or so years, Scotland has brought in 39 policies[1] containing 817 commitments or actions[2] to bring about "race"[3] equality. Despite this, little progress has been made. One reason for that is that we failed to make sure these commitments were acted on. Another, is that we did not understand that racism is "baked into" the way our public institutions[4] create those very policies and services.

More recently, COVID-19 showed governments across the world that long-standing, systemic racism[5] still exists and can have fatal consequences. In Scotland, as elsewhere, racism, poverty, low pay and poor housing combined to create life-threatening conditions during the pandemic. Now, the current cost-of-living crisis is doing the same, with poverty levels rising yet further[6].

The Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland (AROS), as recommended by the Scottish Government's [Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity](), is one part of the answer. This new body will focus on tackling systemic racism to support and drive Scotland's "race" equality work. To that end, the AROS will work with communities[7] to draw up a set of anti-racism principles for how public institutions should work. Importantly, together they will also develop ways of making sure our public institutions apply them.

---

[1] A set of ideas or ways of doing things, e.g. a law, rule or process, put in place by a government or organisation.

[2] Independent report by the [Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights](), 2021

[3] Please see ["A final note on our wording"]() at the end of this document.

[4] Organisations run by the government and paid for by our taxes, e.g. the NHS, police, schools, etc.

[5] Racism that is built into our systems and our society.

[6] [Poverty and Inequality Commission](), 2022.

[7] Please see ["A final note on our wording"]() at the end of this document.

The Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland

Our vision

That our public institutions work equally well for everyone, no matter what their "race" or ethnicity.

We will draw up a set of anti-racism principles or ways of working. We will expect all Scotland's public institutions to adopt these principles and we will monitor them to make sure they do. Both this work and the Anti-Racism Observatory (AROS) itself will be led and co-produced by communities adversely affected by racism.

Our mission

There are seven strands to our mission. They are as follows:

1. Co-producing anti-racism with communities
— Communities leading us as together we build anti-racism principles into our work and the work of Scotland's public institutions.

2. Building the capacity[8] of institutions and communities
— Public institutions: Giving those working in our public institutions the capacity to be intersectional[9] and anti-racist in their policies and services.
— Communities: Giving communities the capacity and power to scrutinise and shape the policies and services of our public institutions.

3. Holding our public institutions to account
— Co-creating, with communities, effective ways to make sure that the Scottish Government and other public institutions are building anti-racism principles into their work.
— Co-creating, with communities, tools and ways to assess how the Scottish Government and other public institutions are building anti-racism principles into their work.

---

[8] By "capacity" we mean skills and ability.

[9] Here, when different forms of discrimination (e.g. because of gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) come together with racism to create further discrimination and oppression.

4. Building a digital anti-racism library

—   Building and hosting an interactive, digital library of information on anti-racism policy and action. This will allow those adversely affected by racism, as well as those whose role it is to tackle it, to:

    —   Learn about, and from, past work on anti-racism.

    —   Keep up to date with what is being done now.

    —   Assess how well Scotland's public institutions are doing to become anti-racist.

5. Improving data and research

—   Making it easier to assess public institutions' progress on becoming anti-racist, by:

    —   Agreeing on what good-quality "race" and ethnicity data looks like.

    —   Investing in ways of researching, collecting and analysing data that do not:

        —   Reinforce the false ideas of "race science"[10] and other systems of racism,

        —   Create systemic inequality in other ways.

    —   Working with communities to build their capacity and that of researchers.

6. Communicating clearly and openly with communities and partner institutions

—   Although the AROS will be fully independent of the Scottish Government, it will:

    —   Be overseen by a unique partnership that includes representatives from across Scotland's public sector and its adversely racialised communities.

    —   Build strong, open, successful working relationships with its partners.

    —   Share best practice from across Scotland and beyond.

    —   Share, with help from creative-industry partners, the real extent of racism and anti-racism action in Scotland and the world.

7. Being an advocate[11] and speaking up for adversely racialised communities

—   Calling for:

    —   The power and means to a) decide what should be done, b) scrutinise what is done and c) hold institutions to account for what they have or have not done, to be shared equally with adversely racialised communities.

    —   More training on anti-racism in and across Scotland's public institutions.

---

[10] Please see "A final note on our wording" at the end of this document.

[11] Helping people to express their views or stand up for their rights.

How the Anti-Racism Observatory will work

We will apply the following principles to our own work.

1. ## We will work with communities, for communities

2. ## We will work to a particular definition of anti-racism

     That definition comes from Professor Camara Phyllis Jones:

     "Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call "race"), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources".

3. ## We will take an intersectional anti-racism approach

     Our focus is on past and present-day systems of racism, including white privilege[12], whiteness[13], oppression and discrimination. We also recognise that racism can be linked to other prejudices (classism, i.e. against certain social classes; sexism, usually against women; ableism, i.e. in favour of people who are not disabled; homophobia, i.e. against gay people; transphobia, i.e. against transgender people; antisemitism, i.e. against Jewish people; islamophobia, i.e. against Islam or Muslim people; and xenophobia, i.e. against people from other countries).

     So, while we will focus mainly on racism, we will also consider how it overlaps with other prejudices to increase unfairness and inequity.

4. ## We will be inclusive and accessible

     We will use language that everyone can understand and hold activities that everyone can take part in. We will take expert advice on how to do this.

5. ## We will be independent, open and accountable

     We will apply these three values to our own work as well as to the work of Scotland's public institutions. Being independent will allow us to truly hold Scotland's public institutions to account; being open will include publishing regular updates on what we are doing; and being accountable means that we, too, will be held to account by communities.

---

[12] The advantage that white people have in societies where such racial inequity exists.

[13] The idea that white people, and their culture, beliefs, etc., are superior to other "races".

6.   We will evolve, learning and adapting as we go

We will take this work one step at a time, building on the work of others internationally. That means setting the right pace and space in order to learn from those with lived and learned experience. And it means sharing what we learn along the way. Our aim is to become a world leader on anti-racism.

You can read more about what these principles mean in our Summary document.

A final note on our wording

There are several words that we use a lot and which we would like to explain here:

— "Race": It is widely understood that "race" is not a biological fact but a political idea that we, as a society, have invented[14]. When differences between groups are understood in terms of differences in appearance (e.g. skin colour) or other biological features, they are said to be racialised[15]. All groups in society can be said to be racialised in some way. But certain groups, such as communities of colour, are racialised with the aim of making them out to be somehow less worthy or important. For this reason, we refer to these groups or communities in this report as being adversely racialised or racially minoritised.

— Community: We recognise that this word is too broad to do justice to the diversity of Scotland's people. We use it here as a shorthand way of talking about communities of colour, as well as those who face racism generally, living in Scotland.

---

[14] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023) *Using population descriptors in genetics and genomics research: A new framework for an evolving field.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/26902

[15] 1. Miles, R. & Brown, M., 2003. *Racism.* Second ed. London: Routledge; 2. St Louis, Brett. 2005. Racialization in the "zone of ambiguity". In: Karim and S. John, eds. *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice.* Oxford University Press, pp. 29–50; 3. Banton, M. (2005) Historical and contemporary modes of racialization. In K. Murji, & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (pp. 51–68). Oxford University Press; 4. Erel, U., Murji, K. & Nahaboo, Z. (2016) Understanding the contemporary race-migration nexus. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 39(8), pp. 1339–1360.