# Anti-Racism Community Engagement Fund Report
# Anti-Racist Observatory for Scotland

## Introduction

*"Racism is a huge problem in Scotland." (Group 3 participant)*

GREC is a registered charity based in Aberdeen, taking a leading role in advancing equality across North East Scotland – including Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray since 1984. GREC focuses on tackling prejudice and discrimination, celebrate diversity, build positive community relations, and provide evidence to change policy and practice through a range of services and projects.

In line with this work, GREC learned about the Anti-Racism Community Engagement Fund through Impact Funding Partners correspondence and applied to it to give diverse ethnic minority community voices in the North East a new opportunity to feed into the design and future work of AROS.

Between 6th and 14th November 2024, GREC hosted six in-person focus groups of 90 minutes to 2 hours each:

- *Group 1:* Syrian New Scots (with Arabic interpreter).
- *Group 2:* African Community.
- *Group 3:* Other diverse communities.
- *Group 4:* Ukrainian Community (with Ukrainian interpreter).
- *Group 5:* Muslim Community.
- *Group 6:* Polish Community (with Polish interpreter).

Guiding questions for the focus groups included:

- *What do you think of the idea of systemic racism?*
- *Is it something that affects your community?*
- *How do you see the role of AROS in challenging the racism identified?*
- *How do you think AROS's work will affect you or your community?*
- *What advice would you give to people setting up AROS to make sure it's inclusive of your and/or other communities?*
- *Is there anything they should try to avoid of try to focus on?*
- *How do you think people in your community would like to engage or get updates from AROS?*
- *Any other thoughts or reflections?*

## Demographics

### Gender, Age, Ethnicity, and Time in Scotland

There were 35 participants in total: 27 women and eight men (each group had at least one man). The largest age group was 41-50 (12 participants), followed by 31-40 (9), 51-60 (6), 26-30 (4), 19-25 (2), 61-70 (1) and 71+ (1).

Under Census categories, nine participants were African, seven were Other White (including one Romanian), five each were Arab, White Polish, or Asian (including Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi and Other Asian), and two each were Kurdish or Mixed.

Thirteen participants were born in European countries (Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Scotland and Slovakia), ten in African countries (Nigeria, Sudan and South Africa), eight in Middle Eastern countries (Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iraq ), three in Asian countries (Hong Kong and China), and one in the Americas (Mexico).

Three participants left the write-in ethnicity section blank. Eleven described their ethnic identity using the word 'white,' including White (6), European White, White Central European, White European/Polish, White Other, and White Polish. Nine described their ethnic identity as African, including Black African (3), Black African Scottish, Scottish African, Arab/African and African (Nigerian). Two participants identified themselves as Mixed Race (South African Coloured), and Yoruba. Six included an Asian identity, including Asian, Asian - Arab, Bengali Scottish, Chinese, Hong-Konger and Indian. Four included Arab in their ethnic identity, including Arab - Syrian (2), Arab/African and Asian - Arab. Three participants listed other Middle Eastern identities, including Kurdish (2) and Egyptian.

In terms of time in Scotland, one participant was born in Scotland, eleven had lived here for more than ten years, eight for 6-10 years, thirteen for 1-5 years, and two for less than one year.

### Sexual Orientation and Disability

All participants were heterosexual or left the question blank (5). Most participants had no disabilities (19) or left the question blank (10). Among the six participants who identified as disabled, two had sensory impairments (partially deaf or blind), two were neurodiverse (dyslexia, ADHD/Autism), two had chronic illnesses, including one with 'mobility issues' as well. In terms of religion, six identified themselves as atheist or having no religion, or left the question blank (4), thirteen identified as Muslim, thirteen as Christian, and one each as Catholic, Christian Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventist.

### Caring Responsibilities, Occupation and Other Identities

18 participants indicated that they had no caring responsibilities, or left the question blank (6), including one who indicated they are the recipient of care. 18 participants (15 women and 3 men) indicated that they care for their children or other family members (3), including two with disabled children.

Six participants listed their occupation as 'housewife,' three had professional or managerial roles, three were self-employed (including one interpreter), and two were teachers. Two each worked in customer service, IT, support work, museums, and cleaning. Additionally, two participants left this question blank, and eleven were not working: four unemployed or seeking work, four students, two retired, and one unable to work due to disability.

Most participants (22) left the question on other personal identities blank, or wrote 'none.' Six wrote identities related to their families (mother, sister, wife, daughter), five related to nationality or language (including one descendent of refugees), four related to workplace roles, and five related to creative, leisure and voluntary pursuits like writing, painting, photography, travel and participation in a Lived Experience group.

## Experiences of Systemic Racism[1]

Each group heard the following definition of systemic racism, based on text from the Scottish Government:

- Unfair distinctions between people from different ethnic groups.
- Political and social disadvantages which shape and affect the life chances of people in certain groups.
- Does not need to be intentional or malicious – often a result of historical, cultural or institutional practices.

While participants were asked to focus on systemic racism, many talked about examples of interpersonal racism. However, these examples often took place in the context of interactions with institutions, including schools, workplaces, healthcare, public services, and the justice system.[2] Broadly speaking, the sum of many interpersonal experiences reveals significant underlying patterns. As one African participant said, "institutions seem to deny there is institutional, systematic racism. You cannot separate institutions from individuals, you cannot say there is no racism going on. It is happening at the individual level. It is happening in every aspect of society." *(Group 3)*

### Education and Children's Experiences

More than half of participants identified themselves as parents, and the education system was a key area of concern, especially because children may not have strong coping mechanisms to deal with racism. There were some positive examples of teachers and school staff treating migrant children with kindness, offering help to parents, or seeking to de-escalate bullying. However, participants in all six groups felt that **rules are enforced more strictly** for ethnic minority and immigrant children, while Scottish children "get away with anything." *(Group 1)* Several participants in each group talked about children being treated differently by teachers or school staff because of their ethnic background, immigration status, or religion. For example:

> "In schools, our children are being scrutinised more than white ones." *(Group 3)*
>
> "A Scottish child asked my 7-year-old daughter, 'Why does your mum wear an ugly hijab?' She said, 'It's not your business.' The teacher said her answer was not appropriate, and forced my daughter to apologise. She was very upset, and didn't want to go back to school. I blame the teacher – you can forgive the child for asking an ignorant question, but the teacher should know better." *(Group 1)*
>
> "You could call it microaggressions, the way teachers speak down to African kids." *(Group 2)*

Beyond the classroom, ethnic minority children tend to face **social isolation**. For example:

> "Children who are members of ethnic minorities find it difficult to make friends." *(Group 3)*

[1] While a few participants felt that racism has not been a problem for them, the majority of the discussion in all six groups acknowledged racism as a serious issue in Scotland. The discussion here will focus on these views.

[2] While beyond the remit of the Scottish Government, several participants mentioned issues with the immigration system, which they felt were fundamentally racist. These included including waiting nine months for a visa renewal that was supposed to take four weeks, and waiting a year and a half for an asylum-seeker interview.

> "My daughter was rejected by her friends at school when she began wearing a hijab." *(Group 1)*
>
> "My school banned speaking Polish on the playground, but in class they never encouraged any mixing between Polish kids and Scottish kids." *(Group 6)*
>
> "My daughter felt isolated in school. Her classmates were distant, and she often heard unpleasant comments about Ukraine." *(Group 4)*
>
> "Kids who are born here are stuck in the middle, they're Scottish but they still have to fight for their space. They have to cope with dual identities." *(Group 2)*

There were also more explicit examples of **bullying and abuse,** with teachers either ignoring or minimising the behaviour, or even blaming the child who was targeted.

> "My children in school get racially abused." *(African parent, Group 3)*
>
> "They don't care about black children in schools. Children are bullied, all my children were bullied." *(African parent, Group 2)*
>
> "My daughter was physically bullied by older children, and the injuries were serious. The teacher seemed to excuse the behaviour, suggested she slipped or misstepped." *(Ukrainian parent, Group 4)*

As we will explore later, all participants felt that education will be key to AROS's future work.

### Employment

Similar to experiences in schools, the majority of participants felt that ethnic minorities in workplace settings face **harsher standards** in hiring practices, on-the-job expectations, and thresholds for promotions or disciplinary actions. As one participant put it, "black men have to work ten times harder than white ones." *(Group 2)* Another said, "they know we really need the jobs, so they think they can just treat us badly." *(Group 3)* The issue was discussed more among participants who had the right to work in Scotland, but was generally acknowledged by all.

In line with existing research, participants in several groups found they were called for interviews more often when they put **'British' names** on their CVs. Participants in two groups were even told directly that employers wanted to hire someone 'White' or 'Scottish,' despite this being illegal under the Equality Act 2010. In other cases, 'White' Scottish people were promoted ahead of ethnic minority colleagues, despite having years less experience in a company. Meanwhile, Polish people who achieved managerial positions faced resentment, with a general sense of 'how dare you?'

Overall, participants talked about **qualifications and work experience being ignored or undervalued**. For example:

> "People don't believe I have a university degree with a masters." *(Group 2)*
>
> "There's a mindset that foreigners will make mistakes." *(Group 5)*
>
> "They don't want experience from abroad, they don't want to contact your references, even if they speak English." *(Group 6)*

As a result, many ethnic minority people are **under-employed,** working in jobs that do not make use of their skills and experience, or pressured to work in specific fields, regardless of their preference.

> "So many highly qualified people are stuck in jobs they don't deserve, while there is a lack of ethnic diversity in [workplaces]." *(Group 5)*

> "People assume we should look for jobs as carers, not professionals. We get boxed into the care sector because that's all they think Nigerians can do. But it's so expensive, you know that every Nigerian who comes here as a student had a good job back home. Now we have to start again on the ground floor." *(Group 2)*

> "Even if you get the job, you're not treated equally. You have to work extra hard, with a lower starting salary, you're not promoted. Even things like, I was asked to clean all the time, even though it wasn't part of the job." *(Group 5)*

> "They try to intimidate you so you can't rise. Less qualified people are promoted, and you're almost begging for more responsibility." *(Group 3)*

> "At my job, someone told a Turkish guy, 'you shouldn't be working here.' They told him that Turkish people have kebab shops, they don't work in offices." *(Group 6)*

Indirectly, career paths are also shaped by **visa rules**. Student visas only allow 20 hours of work per week, and even partners on student visas are not allowed to train as medical professionals. One participant explained that she "would have loved to be a medical doctor," but was only able to start training after getting Indefinite Leave to Remain – by which time she had children. Instead of pursuing her dream of becoming a doctor, she opted to train as a nurse, to accommodate her caring responsibilities *(Group 2)*.

Within workplaces, ethnic minority people often faced **communication challenges**, even when they were excellent (or native) English speakers. Customers and colleagues claimed to not understand 'foreign' accents, demanding to be transferred to "someone who speaks English," or "someone in the UK" *(Group 2).* African participants, in particular, were often criticised for being 'too loud' or 'too direct,' and Polish participants felt that Scots consider their native language 'aggressive.' For people learning English, language presented specific types of barriers:

> "I wanted to work as a taxi driver, but when I asked a client to speak more slowly, I had trouble getting the job." *(Group 5)*

> "My Romanian colleague was often made fun of because of her pronunciation, so she got nervous speaking in English. She tries really hard but one mistake and the whole bar is laughing at her." *(Group 6)*

> "All the Europeans were banned from speaking Polish at work, even when they were speaking other languages! For Scottish people, Polish is the only other language." *(Group 6)*

> "When I take phone calls, the local people speak in such a strong accent that I have to pass the phone to Scottish colleagues, because people won't tone down their accent." *(Group 3)*

Beyond communication, ethnic minorities faced **discrimination and segregation** in the workplace. For example, African and Polish participants heard colleagues make disparaging comments about their ethnicity, but supervisors refused to take action. In one case, Scottish staff were paid on time, while

African and Indian staff frequently had to 'hassle' bosses for their pay *(Group 3)*. There was a strong sense that ethnic minorities need to learn their rights and stand up for themselves, whereas Scottish people can take proper treatment for granted. Additionally, one participant explained the kinds of **extra responsibilities** associated with being the 'non-Scottish' person on a team:

> "Scottish people never get the ethnic minority clients, it's always us, whether you're the same background or not. They say, 'oh, I don't know how to help that person.' It limits integration and puts extra pressure on us. And we also have to do everything relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, on top of our main jobs." *(Group 5)*

Meanwhile, many participants felt that ethnic minority staff are held to **higher standards** than everyone else, for example being required to follow all the rules precisely, while Scottish colleagues are given more leeway and flexibility. One participant explained that she has to be very careful about what she writes in the office group chat – the kinds of comments her colleagues make, she tends to be challenged about *(Group 2)*. Another participant recounted how a manager refused to let her leave early to go to Glasgow for her Life in the UK test, insisting that she finished her shift. When she left 15 minutes early, she expected they would dock her pay, as they did with Scottish colleagues in similar circumstances. Instead, she lost her job. The manager claimed she had 'defrauded' the company (out of 15 minutes of pay), which made it nearly impossible to get another job *(Group 2)*.

### Healthcare and Public Services

There was disagreement about racism in the NHS; some participants felt they had been treated differently because of their ethnicity or religion (wearing a hijab), while others attributed long waiting lists and difficulties getting appointments to lack of capacity in the system. In several instances, participants could see both sides, acknowledging that explicit racism in other contexts might be influencing their views of the NHS. This emphasises the importance of addressing racism across all areas of society, if only to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

Despite broader systemic issues in the health service, many participants discussed **difficulties with healthcare and public services** faced by ethnic minorities in particular:

> "It's not outright racism, but if you don't speak good English, public service staff lack patience and treat you differently. […] We were refused access to a dentist because there was no interpreter. We were told to go to another practice." *(Group 4)*

> "Women of colour are more likely to face complications during childbirth because their concerns are dismissed. And they're pushed into getting C-sections, while Scottish women are given a choice." *(Group 5)*

> "I was at the GP, and the receptionist just assumed I could translate for someone from my home country. But what if I wasn't there? The person had to come back for another appointment, and they would have had no idea." *(Group 3)*

> "My friend was checked for Lyme disease during a holiday in Poland, and was told they needed treatment when they got back to the UK. But the GP here said, 'why didn't you get antibiotics from the Polish doctor? You should have stayed in Poland to get treatment there.' Eventually they got the pills, but it took some time." *(Group 6)*

**Public transport** was another area where participants raised concerns. For example:

> "Nobody sits near me on the bus, they'd rather stand. I used to be offended, now I just enjoy the space!" *(Group 2)*
>
> "Working as a bus driver, some teenagers told me I should go back to my country. They said all the Polish people on the bus should leave. They also told people from Kurdistan to leave." *(Group 6)*
>
> "When you're waiting for the bus with other Africans, sometimes the bus driver sees you but he doesn't stop. If there's a white person, he always stops." *(Group 3)*
>
> "I was looking for my bus ticket, and I couldn't find it. I was trying to explain to the driver, but he refused to interact with me. I think it's because I was wearing a hijab." *(Group 1)*
>
> "Some teenagers followed an African guy onto the bus and assaulted him. They jumped off the bus and got away with it. Nobody did anything." *(Group 2)*

In other support contexts, participants felt that **ethnic minorities received less help and understanding**. For example, one participant explained that a local charity is very strict with ethnic minority clients, limiting them to the bare minimum of supplies. On the other hand, Scottish clients are allowed to take "whatever they want, sometimes they walk out with three or four coats, loads of shoes, really more than they need." *(Group 5)* Another participant described a situation where a teenage girl was harshly criticised and spoken over by her support worker, but a Scottish girl would not have been treated this way.

### Police, Social Work and Legal System

While structures to protect people should work equitably for everyone, several participants described experiences of **discrimination or bias.** For example:

> "My son is 18, he lives alone, he's autistic, he's vulnerable. He was assaulted in his flat by ten men. It was reported and he went to hospital, but no action was taken. The inspector's report said it was an 'argument' not an assault. Police were present, there were hospital records and other evidence, but no arrests. Officers said 'we can't take ten people to jail.' Why not? Is it because he's an Arab?" *(Group 1)*
>
> "A Muslim woman was attacked by a drunk person at a cash machine, then she was charged with assault. She was defending herself, but the authorities didn't listen. Now she has a criminal record. […] White Scots are not treated the same way in the court system. There's bias in how foreigners are treated, we're judged more harshly." *(Group 5)*
>
> "There's a serious lack of legal support. Recently there's been a lot of deportations of Ghanaians and Nigerians, and there's nothing people can do. It's happened before, but now it's much more frequent and very fast." *(Group 2)*
>
> "I had to seek trade union help when a colleague accused me of stealing something. The manager believed it, but when they checked the CCTV, the manager had to apologise. Now people know I'll stand up for myself, but they treat me differently." *(Group 3)*

There were also several examples of the authorities being used as a means of discrimination or bullying – "**harassment through bureaucracy**," as one participant put it:

"Going to the shop, [they make you] step aside to get your items checked. It doesn't happen to the white people, only the black people." *(Group 3)*

"My neighbour calls ACC every week about so-called antisocial behaviour, complaining that my service dog is barking too much, that we don't cut the grass, stupid minor things. So, the officers come out all the time, they never find any problems, it's a real nuisance." *(Group 6)*

"My child missed a jab at school because they were unwell that day. The teachers reported me the next day, without any warning, and social workers came to inspect my house." *(Group 3)*

"I had to stop working when I developed cancer, and with No Recourse to Public Funds they wanted to take my youngest child away. My oldest had to drop out of university to work and support us all, and we had to fight to keep the children together." *(Group 2)*

"So many fights are really about racism. Neighbours wanted to hurt my son, so they said he was mistreating his dogs, tried to get them taken away. But someone came out to check and saw the dogs were loved and well cared for. That was a situation where the police actually helped resolve the matter. But it doesn't always go that way." *(Group 6)*

Additionally, participants discussed **barriers to reporting racism**, whether hate crime or less severe incidents in workplaces, schools, and other contexts. The process was described as 'complicated,' 'onerous,' and 'exhausting' – and sometimes pointless. For example:

"Once you report someone, now you're a bigger target. They try to segregate you, raise their voices, use swear words, managers just allow it. They don't take you seriously." *(Group 3)*

"Some managers just avoid uncomfortable conversations. When you raise something, they say, 'maybe it's a personal issue,' they try to ignore it. […] And if you insist they report it, they usually try to label it as bullying, not racism." *(Group 2)*

"She attacks people at meetings all the time, but I'm not making a complaint because I don't want it to take over my life. And nobody else complains because everyone is scared to lose their jobs." *(Group 5)*

"People are scared to speak to the police. They don't want to make things worse." *(Group 3)*

### Media Representation & Everyday Racism

Nearly all groups raised concerns about the role of the media in **perpetuating negative stereotypes** about Muslim and immigrant communities. For example, one participant explained that "the media demonises migrants […] They encourage people in low-income areas to believe they're being fleeced by immigrants." *(Group 5)* Another pointed out that "immigration is always used to score political points, immigrants are blamed for everything." *(Group 2)*

At the same time, participants identified a **lack of reporting about racist incidents.** For example:

"There are many cases in the Sheriff Court about racism, I know people who are involved, but it's not widely reported. Local people don't want to know about it, they don't want to change their sense of superiority." *(Group 3)*

In all six groups, participants discussed the **subtle and pervasive nature of racism** they experience in social contexts and everyday life:

> "Working in customer service, people always ask, 'where are you from? Are you Polish? Your English is so good!' I speak to hundreds of customers a day, so I have to explain that I grew up here, over and over again. It gets tiring, I'm made to feel different. How many generations are needed to say you're Scottish?" *(Group 6)*

> "I see here a lack of understanding about the scale of the war [in Ukraine]. Thousands of people can be killed in a day, some Ukrainians have lost everything. But people accuse us of sitting on benefits or being handed everything. It's not true." *(Group 4)*

> "As immigrants, we have to be on our toes all the time, we have to fight for everything. It's tiring. We have to know the law, what we're entitled to, show that we know our rights. Otherwise, we get nothing." *(Group 2)*

> "As children, we were often shouted at, made to feel inferior. Micro-aggressions are very common." *(Group 5)*

> "On the bus, in shops, on the street, people tell me to speak English." *(Group 6)*

> "Scottish people are friendly but they don't try to learn your name. We're doing 80-90% of the effort." *(Group 2)*

> "They try to make it as subtle and passive as possible, they know it's wrong but they see what they can get away with." *(Group 3)*

### Tensions Between Migrant Groups

Notably, there were several instances where participants discussed **racism between different ethnic minority groups.** For example, while African and Asian parents felt that their children were being targeted because of visible markers of difference – skin colour, religious clothing – some Ukrainian and Polish participants felt that schools take racist incidents more seriously when racialised pupils are involved. Other examples included a participant being rejected for English classes by a teacher from Turkey, who gives preference to Turkish students *(Group 3)*, and people from Poland and Lithuania complaining that Ukrainian refugees get too much support, compared to those who came to the UK to work *(Group 4).*

## Recommendations for AROS

After reading a four-page leaflet about AROS (in English, Arabic, Ukrainian or Polish), participants were enthusiastic about its potential to make positive changes across Scottish society, and they shared a wealth of ideas to ensure its success. These ranged from the broad to the specific, and from the abstract to the practical.[3] Key points included the absolute necessity of stable, long-term funding; inclusion of all ethnic minority groups across different geographic regions; and collaboration with communities and local organisations.

Participants identified key institutions that should benefit from AROS's work, including schools, the NHS, the Police, public transport, local government, the public sector more broadly, the media, and the private sector. They also identified key tasks for AROS, including development and enforcement of laws and policies; education work, both with schools and more broadly; challenging media narratives; promoting positive messages, cultural mixing and diverse leadership; data collection and research; and providing support for communities experiencing racism.

### Funding and Scope[4]

Above all, participants highlighted the need for AROS to have **stable, long-term funding**, using words like 'continuity,' 'sustainable' and 'consistent.' They emphasised that anti-racist work takes time, and many had experienced the frustration and disappointment of projects ending too soon, or being consulted on the same questions multiple times over the years. Some participants pointed out that long-term funding is actually more cost-effective than repeatedly 'reinventing the wheel' or 'starting from scratch.'

Additionally, there was a strong sense that **tackling racism would benefit everyone** in Scotland, not just ethnic minorities, so something like AROS should remain a priority, even if other political priorities change. Along these lines, all six groups were very clear that **AROS must pursue practical goals**, rather than becoming a 'talking shop.' For example:

> "There's so much hype about Black History Month, but then everything goes back to being the same. You need to make sure this doesn't happen again." *(Group 3)*
>
> "Don't just paper over the problems, you need to do something about it." *(Group 2)*
>
> "We need to see practical results, otherwise what's the point?" *(Group 1)*
>
> "It shouldn't be symbolic, I want something that will create a positive change." *(Group 3)*

[3] There were also practical comments related to the consultation process, including pointing out that the QR codes on the leaflets pointed to a survey that had already closed, and expressing confusion with the wording of questions on the demographic form. While many participants understood the rationale for allowing people to write-in their answers, most felt that tick-boxes were an easier option, especially where English was not their first language. However, some participants also felt that the Census categories were inherently racist, forcing many people to identify themselves as 'other.' Additionally, participants in all six groups were unclear about the meaning or purpose of questions about other identities, and to a certain extent, the question on caring responsibilities. Some felt the demographic form had probably been designed for a different kind of project, then mistakenly used here.

[4] It is worth noting that participants suggested tasks for AROS that are reserved to Westminster, including working to change immigration and asylum law.

## Inclusion and Participation

While the word 'racism' tends to be associated with racialised groups, especially Africans and Asians, participants felt that AROS should be **inclusive of all ethnic minorities**, because even 'white' ethnic minorities experience racism, though in a different form. There was particular concern about **immigrants and religious minorities**, because their experience of prejudice often intersects with more 'typical' forms of racism, driven by similar patterns of judging people on appearance and cultural expression.

"**Equality of geography**" was also highlighted. As one participant said, "there's too much focus on the central belt, they need to remember there's people in other parts of Scotland, too. Not just the cities, but towns, rural places, islands. They shouldn't be excluded." *(Group 5)* Overall, participants felt it would be unwise to exclude any groups from AROS's remit, and that different groups would have valuable insights to share with each other.

Along these lines, all groups agreed that **ethnic minority individuals and organisations should play key roles** within AROS from the start. Not only would this bring necessary insights and make use of existing networks and relationships, but it would also demonstrate, on a practical level, that AROS is serious about listening to people affected by racism, and **taking their views seriously**. As one participant explained through a Nigerian proverb: "Only the person wearing the shoe knows where it pinches." *(Group 2)*

## Facilitating and Enforcing Anti-Racist Policies

Participants felt that AROS could support organisations to **develop effective anti-racist policies**, by providing advice and guidance to employers, trade unions, local authorities and others. In some cases, these kinds of policies already exist: several participants suggested that AROS could compile 'gold standard' examples of policies and codes of conduct for others to learn from. For example:

> "I used to work for [an international company], and their EDI is perfect. They don't mess around. Zero tolerance for racism. There's loads of trainings, and they take complaints seriously." *(Group 3)*
>
> "I work for [a French company], where there's lots of diversity. I've never heard about anyone having problems with racism, and I've worked there for a long time." *(Group 3)*
>
> "[A professional body] has a better system for verifying foreign qualifications, and you get recognition for past experience where it's relevant. This should be done in other industries." *(Group 2)*
>
> "There needs to be education for HR about how to sponsor people for work visas. They always assume it's too difficult, and that means immigrants don't get jobs." *(Group 2)*
>
> "Aberdeen University has a Race Equality Charter Bronze award, and they're working towards Silver. This kind of scheme could apply to other public organisations." *(Group 5)*

Similarly, while there was a general consensus that racism is considered unacceptable in Scotland, most groups felt that AROS should **improve enforcement for existing laws and policies**. As one participant put it, "they say racism is a crime, but how often do you see it prosecuted? Never." *(Group 3)* Another said, "regulations are good, but they're not enforced." *(Group 6)* Participants made several suggestions on how to address this, including:

"AROS should simplify the process of reporting racism and hate crime, making it easier for people to come forward and share their experiences." *(Group 5)*

"Maybe a structure focusing on racism like Action for Fraud. Easy to call, in charge of policies and enforcement, keeping track of data, what's happening most frequently, what's improving, that kind of thing." *(Group 2)*

"There needs to be accountability, with actual consequences for racism, like for people breaking the law." *(Group 6)*

"The government needs to be strong and proactive in enforcing the laws and preventing segregation. They need to ensure that everyone is treated as human, regardless of race, religion, or anything else." *(Group 1)*

"Some teams in [a particular organisation] only hire Scottish people. There's an inclusion policy, but how is it enforced? Who's following up?" *(Group 3)*

### Education and Training

While a systematic approach to addressing discrimination is key, participants also emphasised the need for **anti-racist education**, whether in schools, workplaces, or society at large. For example:

"The biggest focus should be schools, to create cultural change in the new generation. They need to understand and accept that people are different, so when they grow up, it won't be a problem. The school curriculum should be updated so they can understand the reality of racism." *(Group 1)*

"It's crucial to teach children about systematic racism and how it affects people. Educating from a young age can help foster understanding and empathy." *(Group 5)*

"Teach kids about diversity, tell them about the experiences of immigrants, so they can understand." *(Group 2)*

"Build a culture of anti-racism from the start, in primary schools. Kids are also good at bringing lessons home. *(Group 6)*

"You can't change adults' minds, so you need to focus on the kids." *(Group 3)*

Despite a certain level of cynicism, it was generally agreed that schools can also **help tackle racism among parents**. For example:

"Start from the schools – you get the kids, but also the parents." *(Group 2)*

"Where children are being racist at school, you need to look into why. You need to work with the parents." *(Group 1)*

"It's hard for locals to understand the situation in Ukraine, so they should set up regular meetings with parents of local children to explain why we're here. That would help get rid of all the misconceptions." *(Group 4)*

> "It's just as important to work with the parents, that's where the kids are learning racism." *(Group 6)*

Participants also highlighted **workplace equality, diversity and inclusion training** as an important tool for changing attitudes. For example:

> "AROS should push for training to address systemic racism, especially in the public sector." *(Group 5)*

> "Diversity training is only required when someone starts at a job. It should be more frequent. I have to update my first aid training every 3 years, why not diversity training too? That way you learn more as things change over time." *(Group 3)*

> "There was a lot about racism in the office admin course in the college, but it was mostly theory, very little practice. They should take it more seriously and include more practical material.

### Media

Beyond formal education and training, the media was identified as the place where most people learn about the world, and where many negative stereotypes are perpetuated. All six groups emphasised the importance of **challenging media narratives about ethnic minorities** and working to expand people's understanding:

> "The media is such a big factor in how things are perceived, and it's not in our favour. Can AROS try to influence the media?" *(Group 3)*

> "There needs to be financial education that's accessible for people. Why are they struggling, really? Then they can't just blame immigrants for all their problems." *(Group 5)*

> "You need to provide opportunities to amplify community voices, let people tell their stories." *(Group 2)*

> "It's all about the narrative – we need to push a positive narrative to counteract the negative lies." *(Group 1)*

Participants suggested a range of ways to promote positive narratives, including personal stories, 'myth busting' with facts and statistics, conversations between locals and immigrants, and humourous videos like those produced by The Social. Suggestions for formats included TV programmes for children, YouTube advertisements, TikTok videos and other social media, displays in museums and libraries, newspaper articles, posters, promotion of foreign films in cinemas, and in-person events (more on this below). Regardless of format or content, they emphasised the importance of maintaining **long-term commitment**, through consistent and serious communication efforts, using **clear and straightforward language**.

### Positive Messaging and Cultural Mixing

After spending most of her childhood in Scotland, one participant warned that respect for diversity "doesn't happen automatically," explaining that she enjoyed lessons about different cultures and religions in primary school, but still experienced racism in secondary school *(Group 6)*. One problem was a lack of consistency. Her primary school organised frequent opportunities to "educate people in

a fun way" through evening events, open to pupils, their families, and the wider community, with food, music, art and dance from different cultures. These activities were not available in her secondary school, and their lessons were soon forgotten.

Her account highlights the importance of **promoting positive messages**, especially because mainstream media narratives present diversity as a threat, and EDI policies often focus on punishing bad behaviour. Several groups suggested different ways to **encourage cultural mixing**:

> "Racism is worse in Scotland than in Canada and New Zealand. There's lots of projects for immigrants there, locals show international students around, teach immigrant kids about the local culture, and that gets them talking to each other. I think it helps." *(Group 3)*

> "Getting to know people clears away hate and prejudice. It works both ways, locals and immigrants learn to understand each other when they have a chance to talk." *(Group 2)*

> "There should be more small festivals, to provide places for different groups to show what they're doing." *(Group 3)*

### Representation and Leadership

In addition to media narratives, several participants pointed out that racist attitudes 'come from the top,' whether from politicians and celebrities, or the upper levels of management in an organisation. All six groups felt that AROS should work proactively with decision-makers at all levels, to **promote accountability and anti-racism with leaders** across different sectors:

> "Guidance and cultural change from management and leadership makes all the difference. If your manager supports you, it's much easier to stand up for yourself. The same is true all through society." *(Group 2)*

> "You can't change individuals but you can give them less power, restrict their ability to be racist on a wider level." *(Group 6)*

> "MPs and MSPs should be invited to groups like this, so they can hear about our experience. And they can tell us what they're doing to solve the problems." *(Group 3)*

More broadly, participants felt that AROS should **challenge the lack of diversity** in public institutions:

> "What's the representation of ethnic minority people in society? Who can speak? Who's being listened to? Who's being taken seriously? Who's making decisions?" *(Group 3)*

> "AROS should ensure there are more ethnic minorities represented in public sector jobs. We need to challenge the system to be more inclusive and reflect society's diversity." *(Group 5)*

### Other Tasks for AROS

Some groups emphasised the role of **data collection and research** in helping AROS support its wider goals. They suggested that AROS should maintain clear, easy-to-understand, publicly-available data on topics like health inequalities, workplace discrimination, and media bias. As one participant said, "we want data, we want to have information that can prove the level of oppression." *(Group 2)*

Another key task was **supporting communities experiencing racism**, including providing targeted mental health support, and providing space to report problems.

## Community Engagement

In discussing how their community would like to engage with AROS, all six groups were enthusiastic about taking part in future conversations. There was a wide range of suggested approaches. At the most basic level, participants wanted to be **kept informed** of AROS's work through newsletters and social media, which could also help to recruit people for more active participation. For **contributing to AROS's work**, face-to-face focus groups or larger events were preferred by some groups, while others preferred online meetings and social media engagement. Regardless of format, **information should be provided in 'clear and simple' language,** with translated materials and interpreters where needed, to allow wider participation. They also felt that **ethnic minority voices should be central**, with AROS's role as providing a platform, rather than 'just talking at us.'

Finally, participants emphasised the importance of **working with existing organisations and community groups**, including faith-based groups, ethnic minority social groups, migrants' groups, international student groups, charities and small businesses. They highlighted libraries, community centres, schools, colleges and universities as good sites for outreach, and suggested active recruitment processes through social media and leaflets.