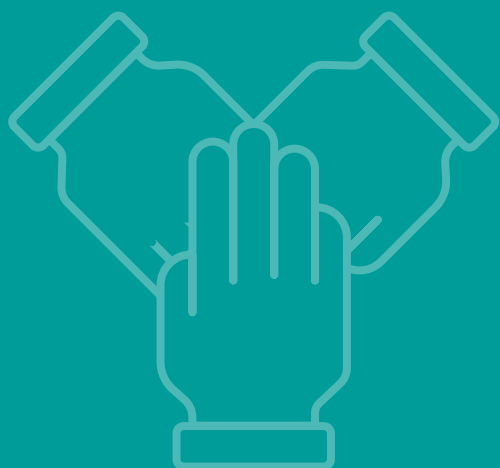


Reconciliation and deprivation: twin challenges for Northern Ireland



PIVOTAL

PUBLIC POLICY
FORUM NI

Overview

04 Introduction

06 Reconciliation

10 Areas of deprivation

14 Emerging themes

18 Issues to explore

// Despite some progress, ongoing deprivation and a lack of societal integration have contributed significantly to an absence of reconciliation. //

This report looks at the twin challenges of promoting reconciliation and tackling deprivation in Northern Ireland. It asks how these issues could be addressed to make this a better place to live, study and work for young people.

In this first of three reports, we review the literature and the public policy approach, along with 15 new in-depth research interviews with leading practitioners and academics. This report takes stock of what has been achieved in the 25 years since the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. Two further reports will give voice to young people's experiences, aspirations and ideas for the future.

This report's main conclusion is that ongoing deprivation and a lack of societal integration have contributed significantly to an absence of reconciliation.

This is not to take for granted the substantial political, social and cultural achievements of the previous generation, which were hard won by grassroots community dedication and political leadership. However, the absence of violence alone does not match up with the hopes of 1998 of a more positive reconciliation and a more united community.

The lack of sustained economic peace dividends in many of the areas worst impacted by the conflict highlights the links between reconciliation and tackling deprivation. Wards in Derry/Londonderry, Strabane, and north and west Belfast constitute the most materially disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland, while living most directly at the sharp end of the complex legacies of the Troubles.

A fear shared by many is that the cost-of-living crisis experienced by many citizens, combined with budgetary pressures across government departments, will exacerbate these challenges. The uncertain status of funding for schools, training, youth services and reconciliation programmes is raising alarm bells within communities.

Valuable programmes of activity in communities have undoubtedly positively impacted the lives of many young people. These programmes bridge divides by bringing people together to discuss shared concerns and common aspirations. However, while the evaluation evidence is usually positive from individual programmes, the dial has not shifted on reconciliation at a broader societal level.

When stark divides remain in education and housing, bringing about reconciliation between communities can feel like swimming against the tide. While most people are strongly supportive of greater integration in schools and more mixed housing, what has been achieved in practice has been very limited. New momentum is required to share more public resources, integrate aspects of life across old divides, build stronger cross-community relationships and understandings, and offer new opportunities for the next generation.

Many development programmes in disadvantaged communities can point to specific areas of progress, including an increased emphasis given to local communities in shaping schemes and local priorities. The relationship between this work in single identity disadvantaged areas and reconciliation is contested. Some voices in this report fear reconciliation can be side-lined in such work, while others insist improved intra-community confidence is a necessary foundation of cross-community good relations.

These are complex challenges, deeply rooted in our history, with no easy solutions. The scale of these challenges, especially

in the current context, means many within the public and voluntary sectors emphasise the importance of better use of available funding. Key to this is better co-design of programmes across government and making full use of the capacity of the voluntary and community sector. Defining reconciliation goals more clearly and placing them firmly across government departments is also strongly advocated.

Different approaches to community development and reconciliation are advocated by voices in this report, but we found two recurring themes. First, there is a need to address persistent material deprivation as an essential step towards building better relationships between communities. Second, achieving reconciliation continues to be hindered by the absence of integration in education and housing, meaning that many people's day-to-day experience continues to be division. This report suggests a renewed focus on these twin themes as an agenda for the next generation.

Introduction

Twenty-five years after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, what has been achieved in promoting reconciliation and tackling deprivation in our deeply divided society? How do young people today experience these two connected issues, and what can we learn from their experiences and aspirations?

This is the first of three Pivotal reports from a project focused on the twin themes of reconciliation and deprivation in Northern Ireland. This project will be shaped by the voices of young people we have engaged with through interviews, focus groups and a survey.

These young voices - their experiences, hopes, fears and opinions - will be detailed in the second and third reports, and will shape recommendations we will make at the conclusion of this project.

This first report takes stock of the public policy questions overriding any analysis of reconciliation and deprivation, setting the scene for the young voices central to subsequent reports. It is informed by a review of existing literature, and by extensive research interviews conducted with leaders in the voluntary sector, youth workers, peacebuilders, senior civil servants and government project leaders, and academics. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with these leading practitioners and scholars. To encourage open reflections, and learn from their wealth of experience

and knowledge, the interviewees were granted anonymity (See Appendix).

This project extends Pivotal's previous work with young people in Northern Ireland. The project is informed by two reports about education and training: Transforming the 14-19 education and skills system (Pivotal, 2021) and Should I Stay or Should I Go – reasons for leaving Northern Ireland for study and work (Pivotal, 2021). The first study highlighted that those most marginalised in society often do not receive the support they need within mainstream education and training. This study and others found that those living in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to achieve poorer educational and subsequent occupational outcomes.

The second study of over 300 young people indicated many students leave home for university education elsewhere as they feel disillusioned by politics and government functioning in Northern Ireland (Pivotal, 2021). Young people in this study argued politicians are too focused on issues related

to the past referring to the Northern Ireland conflict, and less focused on developing solutions for the future. They suggested that policy makers in Northern Ireland need to focus on youth orientated issues such as unemployment, increasing graduate jobs and mental health.

This project will further explore some of the primary themes raised in our 2021 research with young people. We will consult with young people on two issues: firstly, to develop an understanding of what policy solutions would make Northern Ireland a better place to live, study and work; and secondly, targeted work with marginalised young people to develop solutions to cycles of disadvantage in local communities.

We see reconciliation and tackling deprivation as central to the wider challenge of encouraging more of our young people to choose home as the place where they want to build their lives. Old divisions and a paralysed politics continue to push many young people away; as an interviewee with decades of experience addressing these issues told us, still today *“young people are frustrated by the constant sectarian constraints they still feel living day-to-day in many areas.”* (Interview D).

Alongside social justice concerns there are also major economic imperatives to review how public policy can expand opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of the marginalised are literally at the interfaces of our divided society. With Northern Ireland's continuing divisions, extensive financial pressures on public services and the voluntary sector, and the persistent problems of low educational attainment, low productivity, and high economic inactivity, there is no shortage of motivations to look again at confronting these complex mutually reinforcing problems.

By integrating specialist and practitioner analysis with the experiences of young people, this project will bring fresh ideas and new focus to some old questions. How can a more united community emerge while respecting competing political aspirations and cultural diversity? How does

highly segregated schooling and housing impact our society's future, and how can these separations best be understood and addressed? How can scarce public money best be spent to promote good relations? Connecting all these complexities is the profound question of what a reconciled Northern Ireland could look like, at a time of severe pressures on household and departmental budgets. Is there a risk that reconciliation is becoming an objective on the margins?

// Young people are frustrated by the constant sectarian constraints they still feel living day-to-day in many areas. //

Interview D

Section one: Reconciliation

Perspectives on reconciliation since 1998 should begin by acknowledging the scale of previous violence and division. The intimacy of this violence within communities, and the sectarian divisions the conflict fed off and reinforced, could not have faded within a generation, whichever reconciliation strategy was employed.

Much of this trauma is concentrated in districts facing overlapping challenges of conflict legacies and material deprivation. This is evident in the areas of north and west Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Strabane that make up the ten most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Responding to this 2023 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency data, Gordon McDade, a community worker on a Belfast interface, told *The Detail*: “I don’t know if there’s anybody who would say that the actual quality of life is massively different from 1998 economically,” adding: “Peace is about prosperity. Peace is about jobs, about hope, about collaboration, about investment. It has to be

better. It can’t just be the same without the violence.” (*The Detail*, 2023).

One interviewee defined the achievement of 1994-2006 as one of “peace-making”, as opposed to shortcomings in later “peacebuilding” (Interview K). Nonetheless, the broad success of this “peace-making”, sustained reduction in political violence, should never be taken for granted. As another interviewee stated: “Because of the peace we have had...for all its flaws - thousands of people are alive, and thousands are uninjured.” (Interview F). This broad achievement shouldn’t obscure the 155 victims of “security related deaths” in the *PSNI record* since the Agreement.

Some argue NI has a negative peace, the absence of violence as opposed to positive reconciliation. However, there are also elements of a more positive peace breaking down old barriers. Despite competing narratives of the conflict and legacy issues, understanding of the ‘other’ community’s suffering during the conflict has increased. There has been “a spread of these stories of empathy” (Interview O). Embedded equality legislation in employment has increased ‘mixing’ in work, and the growth of shared safe spaces in urban centres has increased opportunities for socialising together open to young people. A common refrain from interviewees is that young people want to “move on”.

Another prominent theme, however, is the persistence of sectarian tensions, no-go areas, physical threats and paramilitarism experienced by young people in some communities. Some psychological barriers have gone or become blurred: “divisions are just not as stark as they were” (Interview G). It is a frustration shared by many that other major social barriers actively keeping people apart remain stubbornly in place.

// Because of the peace we have had... for all its flaws - thousands of people are alive, and thousands are uninjured. //

Interview F

Reconciliation policy

Reconciliation policy has had two landmarks since 1998: the 2005 Shared Future document and 2013’s Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC). Advancing ambitious objectives, Shared Future stated “*separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable, morally and economically.*” (*Shared Future*, 2005).

T:BUC announced “*the Executive’s commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.*” (T:BUC, 2013). It placed emphasis on community development, especially within the Urban Villages schemes, and the expansion of Shared Education and shared housing schemes. Meeting its target for shared housing pilots and “*mainstreaming*” shared housing are viewed as successes by those involved. T:BUC camps are a further large intervention, bringing thousands of young people together across the divide. This approach highlights the continuing importance given to “*contact theory*” (Allport, 1954), where prejudices are challenged by direct social contact and building friendships.

The Children’s Services Co-operation Act (2015) underlined the statutory requirement to actively promote positive attitudes and develop good relations among young people. Despite these obligations, and broad continuity in stated policy objectives, some see a retreat from community integration as a goal, to less ambitious reconciliation objectives. One interviewee’s assessment of Urban Villages as “*fine as community development but not as an intentional Good Relations strategy - it isn’t explicit at giving priority to Good Relations*” (Interview K) gets to the heart of differing analyses of how to advance reconciliation while developing under-resourced communities.



Fig. 01 Social housing segregation in Northern Ireland

Source: Housing Executive Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020

Voices working within largely single-identity areas argue there is often a need to prioritise intra-community relations, due to ongoing paramilitary activity, and deprivation (Interview I). Much of this work seeks to build community confidence “*before outreach can succeed*”. Often “*cross-community work is easier than work with different groups within this community*” (Interview J).

Ironically, despite criticism of T:BUC’s perceived lack of ambition, it is the failure to reach its most ambitious target to “*remove interface barriers by 2023*” that best symbolises the distance left to travel towards reconciliation. Defining and counting interfaces is contested territory, but the prevalence of physical barriers remains broadly unchanged (Belfast

only **7%** of pupils attend integrated schools but **71%** want integrated to be the main school model

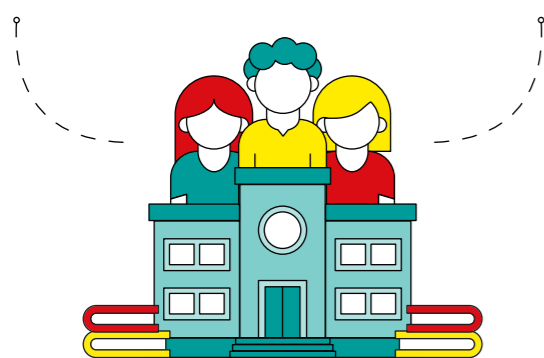


Fig. 02 Pupils in integrated education and people in favour of integration.

Source: Dept of Education, Lucid Talk

Interfaces Project, 2017). The upcoming strategic review of T:BUC is an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and future policy.

Settling for separation?

Policy choices impacting good relations often produce a spectrum of options, ranging from accepting divides within communities and institutions but building links across these divides, through to creating new integrated structures. The challenges of high residential segregation (Fig. 01) and education are the most contested and consequential policy areas with options across this spectrum.

Public support for integrated education has long been evident, yet has not translated into sustained growth in the sector. (Fig. 02) Support for the sector is wide but shallow, with family traditions, faith and school reputation often taking priority over broader hopes for integrating society.

Nonetheless, the absence of quicker growth for a sector with such potential is telling. As Fig. 08 shows (see page 14), the school playground remains shockingly segregated for a

large majority of pupils, and a profound challenge to visions of a more united community.

The Integrated Education Act (2022) requires the Department of Education to “support” as well as “encourage and facilitate” integrated education. This requires a new momentum towards integration at community level and negotiating opposition from other education organisations.

The models of integrated education and shared education have become symbolic of differing approaches to reconciliation. Rather than full integration, shared education offers “schools from different sectors working in partnership to provide opportunities for pupils, staff and the community to engage in collaborative and meaningful learning experiences.” (Education Authority, 2021). The shared model does not necessarily contradict a growing integrated sector, indeed it may lay the foundations for future integrated schools. One official suggested: “shared to integrated should be seen as a continuum” (Interview O). For proponents of shared education, it can “build porous relationships between schools” (Interview M), and “respects differences but builds social networks...and it can distort and disrupt sectarian networks” (Interview B).

There are also notable examples of increasingly ‘mixed’ schools outside of the integrated sector. Reflecting on all these complexities an experienced peacebuilder notes: “We can debate between models but the more we share the better”. However, they asked, “are we settling for separation, rather than reconciliation?” (Interview F).

Often residential segregation in an area challenges the feasibility of increasing cross-community education. Closing small schools often has the consequence of exacerbating segregation, as minority communities move to be closer to ‘their’ school. A voluntary sector leader argues in some areas “these closures potentially have a greater impact on segregation than the Troubles ever did” (Interview M).

There has also been huge financial investment in community-based reconciliation programmes over many decades,

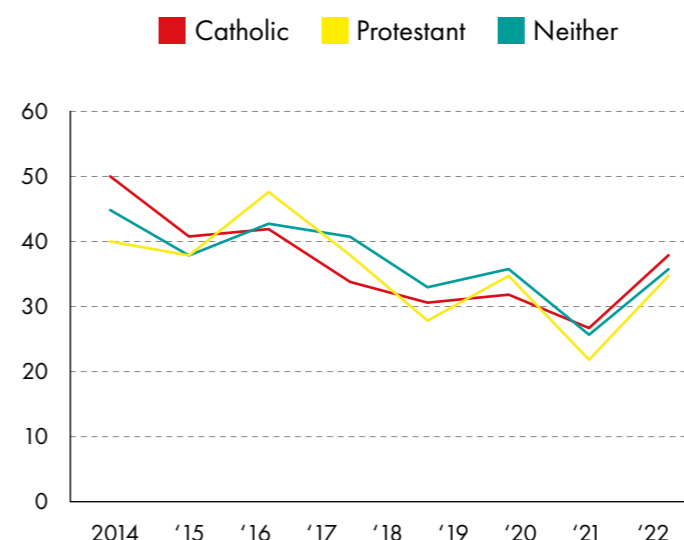


Fig. 03 Percentage of 16 year-olds saying relationships between Protestants and Catholics will be better in five years time

Source: Young Life and Times Dataset, Northern Ireland Life and Times

notably through the EU PEACE funding, in particular PEACE IV’s reconciliation objectives. Overall, these programmes have been highly valued by communities and a massive number of young participants, but doubts remain over their lasting societal impact.

Programmes such as Shared Education, PEACE4Youth and T:BUC camps have reached thousands of young people. Evaluations of specific programmes tend to show positive results in terms of improved engagement with peers from different backgrounds, respect for diversity, and making friends with others in a shared space. But outside of specific programmes, wider community benefits are tougher to measure. The percentage of 16 year-olds who agree that community relations will improve in the next five years has actually slightly declined between 2014 and 2020, across all backgrounds (Fig. 03). Some interviewees fear an emphasis on quantity of social contacts can distract funders and projects from the challenge of measuring how meaningful cross-community interactions have been.

Well resourced, closely evaluated, reconciliation programmes have undoubted positive impacts. However, as Knox and McCrory (2018) conclude, continued segregation in education, housing, and culture limits long-term and wider societal impact. Young people living segregated lives day-to-day may cancel out the positive work done through many programmes once they close their doors (Hamilton and McArdle, 2020).

// Are we settling for separation, rather than reconciliation? //

Interview F

Section two: Areas of deprivation

Deprivation and reconciliation are deeply entwined. Sectarian divisions make addressing deprivation much more difficult, and vice-versa. Many of the most marginalised communities, in terms of economic indicators and educational attainment, also live at the sharp end of the legacy of the conflict.

86% of those living within 400 metres of any peace-wall in Belfast are in the lowest 20% of the city's population as measured by the Multiple Deprivation Index. (Morrow et al, 2019). For many deprivation is experienced through stark local sectarian divisions, divided infrastructure, and diminishing resources often allocated along 'us-and-them' lines. To state: "Some areas just have not moved on" (Interview C) is to reflect both the persistence of old attitudes and the lack of a visible peace dividend in some areas.

Highlighting the connections between socio-economic challenges, community cohesion and reconciliation, an official noted: "People can't have good relations if they do not have confidence in themselves" (Interview C).

Number of ACEs	Most Deprived	%	%	%	Least Deprived
0	36.0%	47.9%	56.3%	59.6%	59.9%
1	44.4%	36.8%	29.0%	28.9%	28.7%
2	13.8%	9.4%	7.9%	5.8%	6.9%
3+	5.9%	6.0%	6.7%	5.8%	4.5%

Fig. 04 Number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) by deprivation quantile

Source: NI Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey (2020)

A practitioner in a single identity area argues, with sadness, "we need to tackle deprivation before we can even approach reconciliation here." (Interview I). Discussing the difficulty of intra-community divisions, they noted: "Because the area is so fractured, it sometimes isn't open to others." These fractures, they argue, have roots in economic insecurity, a lack of secure well-paid employment, and a parallel lack of cultural confidence.

The commitment of many from marginalised communities to promote reconciliation and tackle deprivation, through community groups and as private citizens, cannot be overestimated. Grassroots dedication and courage have often kept the peace and social cohesion in many areas.

// We need to tackle deprivation before we can even approach reconciliation here. //

Interview I

Transgenerational trauma

A gateway to understanding the marginalisation of younger people, and how it can be replicated down generations, is through analysis of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These traumatic or stressful events occurring before the age of 18 have a significant impact on health and economic outcomes in later life. ACEs can range from physical, emotional or sexual abuse, to neglect, domestic abuse, mental health issues, substance abuse, separation/divorce, or having an incarcerated household member (Felitti, 1998).

ACEs can be exacerbated by the impact of conflict related trauma on the wider population (Tomlinson, 2016; Webb et al 2013). The legacy of the Troubles has been recognised in the first Mental Health Strategy 2021–2031 as having a significant impact on mental health. Following the trend of rates in the adult population, children and young people in NI have high rates of poor mental health, with anxiety and depression being 25.0% higher in comparison to other UK nations (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2014). Children and young people growing up with multiple ACEs in NI are concentrated in the most disadvantaged areas, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage (Fig. 04).

Education and opportunity

54.1% of pupils entitled to free school meals achieved five GCSEs A-C, including English and Maths, compared to 72.8% of all pupils. (Fig. 05) These figures point to a continuing pronounced social segregation in our school system.

For one leading youth community worker: "Finding new pathways to further education is so important for those who just weren't suited to school, or just didn't settle in school." The voluntary sector and youth groups, they argue, have the capacity to create new pathways (Interview H).

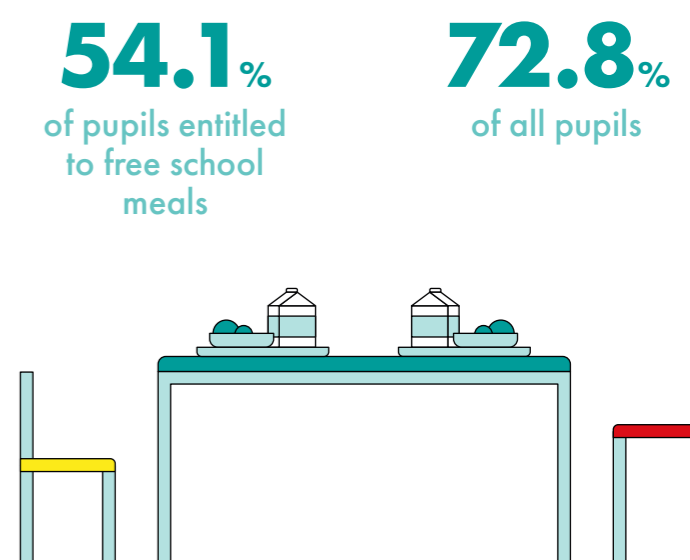


Fig. 05 Percentage of Year 12 pupils who achieved 5+ GCSEs by free school meal entitlement

Source: Department of Education (2019)

The fear is, however, current budget decisions could exacerbate inequalities. The Extended School Programme - which funded afterschool clubs, parenting programmes and counselling for young people, parents and the wider community - is a casualty of budget cuts, despite a positive evaluation of its impact on disadvantaged pupils (Education and Training Inspectorate 2019). The challenges of improving opportunities for marginalised young people in such a pressurised budgetary environment are stark. The impact of the Targeting Social Need (TSN) policy, which invested almost £1 billion over 15 years in attempting to narrow the gap in educational

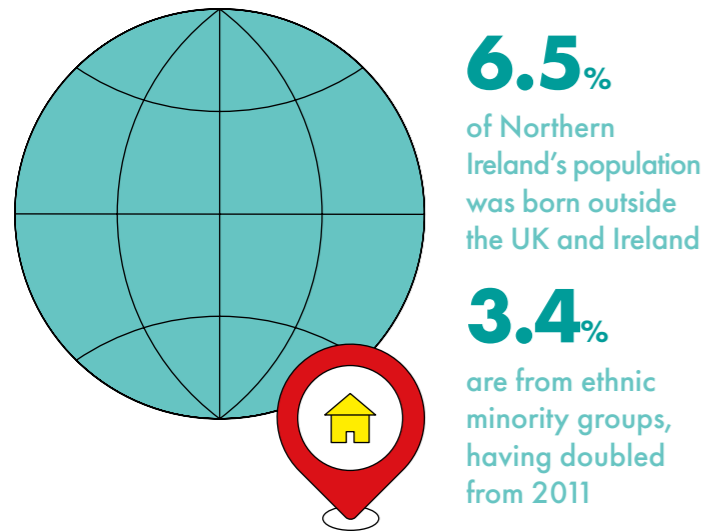


Fig. 06 Census data shows that Northern Ireland is increasingly diverse

Source: Northern Ireland Census 2021 (1, 2)

attainment, remains unclear. The NI Audit Office (2021) noted a lack of data providing evidence TSN had improved outcomes for the poorest young people.

New diversity

It is important to note the new diversity of Northern Ireland (Fig. 06). Some areas now have significant ethnic minority populations, while other districts have smaller but visible minority populations for the first time. Accompanying this new diversity are many positive opportunities, but also serious concerns regarding racism and other forms of marginalisation experienced by ethnic minorities, migrants and newcomer families. The accommodation of some asylum seekers in hotels is a serious concern in some areas.

The challenge of poor English language provision and a lack of resources for schools to integrate newcomer children is a further challenge: "Newcomer families often only become visible when the children go to school" (Interview D). In this context it is notable that Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK without an implemented Racial Equality Strategy. More generally, some fear a potential weakening of the human

rights framework envisaged in the Agreement, highlighted by the ongoing lack of a Bill of Rights (Interview N).

Old Problems

The continuing presence of paramilitaries remains a significant impediment to the lives of some young people. In addition to perpetuating divisions, paramilitaries continue to expose young people to organised crime, drugs and other risks. Between 1998 and February 2023 there were 3260 so-called 'punishment attacks': 97.5% of the victims male; 63.3% carried out by loyalists and 36.7% by republicans; and 51.9% of victims aged 25 years or younger (PSNI Dataset, 2023).

Paramilitarism remains a significant 'push factor' for many young people's negative appraisal of the future their home community can offer. The ongoing recruitment of young people into paramilitary groups and the wider exposure of young people to paramilitarism is not a legacy issue for many communities, despite the important work of the Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime strategy and the Independent Reporting Commission.

The visible signs of division, conflict and armed groups also cause significant harm to young people. McAlister (2021) highlights that visual signs of segregation in deprived areas could contribute to a heightened sense of difference, which may intensify feelings of fear and sectarianism for young people.

Increased costs and stretched budgets

These challenges are now addressed in the context of a cost-of-living crisis for many citizens. Marginalised young people face increased holiday hunger for school pupils, increased use of foodbanks, a reduction in school counselling and other support, and cuts to community organisations and youth services that provide a vital lifeline. Intense pressure on departmental spending is impacting education. Policy recommendations from 'A Fair Start' strategy, addressing low educational attainment, are one example of a possible casualty of budget pressures.

Many in the youth work sector are asking how reduced funds can be better spent, how duplication can be avoided,

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals

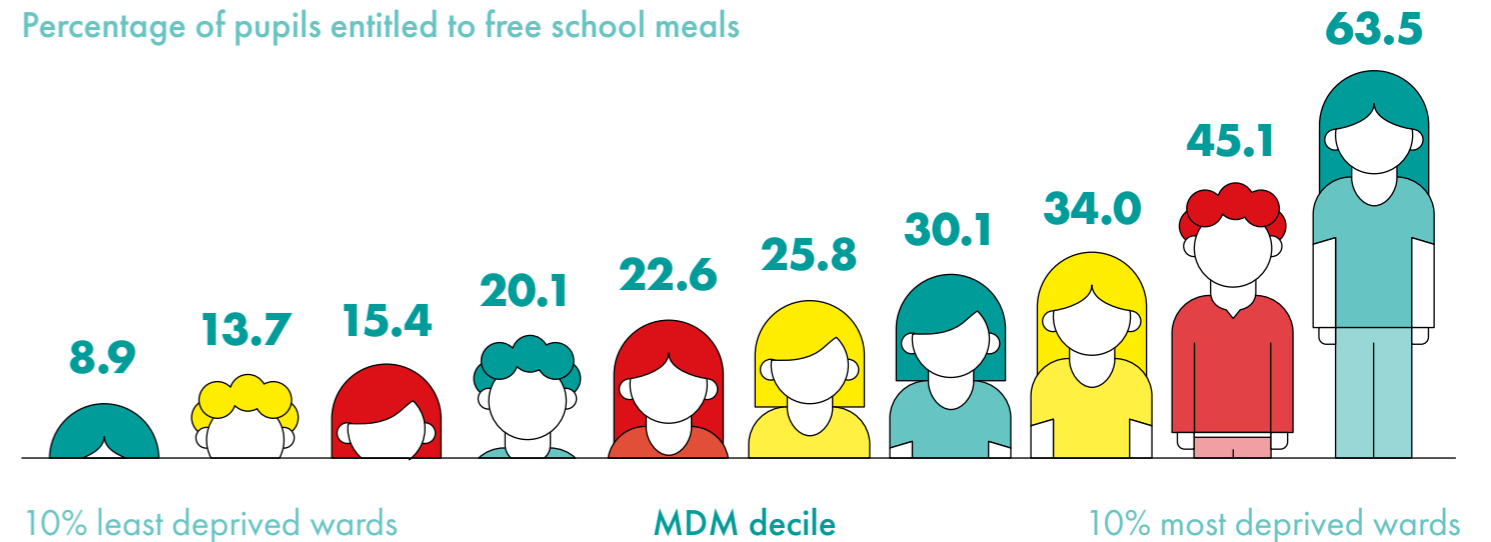


Fig. 07 Free school meals entitlement and area deprivation

Source: Department of Education School Census

how data collection and sharing could improve, and if more radical solutions are needed. One interviewee, with long experience in youth work, argues "we just can't afford to continue the old model"; suggesting commissioning the voluntary sector to provide more services directly should be considered: "all these community centres right on the ground in these areas [of most need] are an untapped resource." (Interview H).

Central to successful Urban Villages projects has been the role of residents shaping schemes and setting community development priorities. One official noted: "the community tells us their priorities", and "quick delivery on the ground is important – it gets buy-in from the community". Completed popular projects, they argue, help by: "Breaking down perceptions of the area and creating internal community spirit, and confidence." (Interview E). Equally when development projects are delayed the wider agenda of Urban Villages stalls: "Before something is done with this space [earmarked for development] local people won't buy into what is happening here." (Interview J).

Positive examples of community development highlight the importance of local people, weary from experience

of exclusion from decision-making, having the power to set priorities. Civic participation is especially important in nurturing young people's hopes and pride in their community. An academic and youth worker argues an objective should be increased "political participation", enabling young people to challenge old ideas of where power lies, and to "encourage communities to use [the phrase] 'working class' and identify with their areas positively." (Interview A).

One voluntary sector leader especially concerned about the sustainability of many rural communities if large numbers of young people continue to leave, argues: "We need these young people, future leaders, to stay for reconciliation to happen". More broadly he concludes: "We have an older, conservative, and risk adverse, public-sector dominated culture among decision-makers." (Interview M).

Section three: Emerging Themes

The entwined objectives of tackling deprivation and promoting reconciliation are extremely challenging. There are no easy answers and progress will always be incremental: “meaningful outcomes may come years down the line” (Interview L).

14% of schools have at least 10% Catholic and 10% Protestant pupils

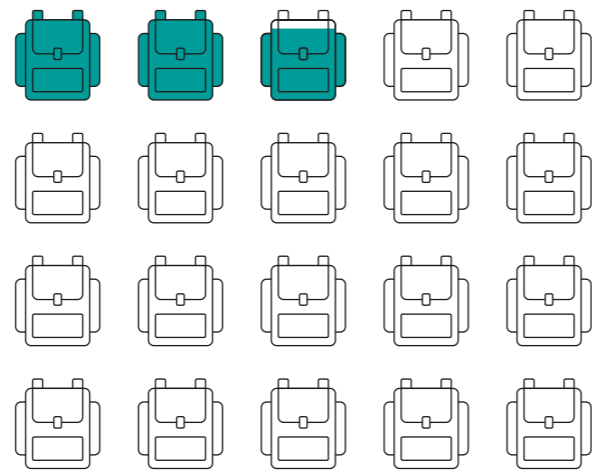


Fig. 08 Schools with a mix of pupils
Source: NI Council for Integrated Education DoE analysis

The dedication, and courage, of a generation of community workers, public servants, and private citizens – often working in precarious conditions with limited resources - deserves more recognition. Important progress has been made over the last 25 years, however, many communities have not yet seen benefits in terms of prosperity or positive reconciliation.

Multiple reconciliation programmes, with significant expenditure, have not been accompanied by, or led, larger societal change. The continuing divisions in education and housing are huge obstacles to sustained integration and reconciliation, and they play a significant role underpinning the marginalisation many communities and young people experience (Fig. 08).

The equality agenda of the 1998 Agreement should remain central to how policymaking and service delivery should approach these issues. The Agreement stated: “An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.” 25 years later these segregated buildings-blocks of our society remain largely in place.

The fear expressed by many working in these fields is that policy objectives have drifted away from positive reconciliation, tackling these large societal issues, to ‘shared’ approaches. This raises the profound question: are we settling for separation, not reconciliation?

// An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing //

Belfast Good Friday Agreement

Different segregated parts of our society continue to underpin each other. For example, the cycle of closures of single identity schools increasing residential segregation deserves much more scrutiny from policymakers and researchers. This is an especially potent cycle of segregation in some small towns and rural areas.

T:BUC has been criticised by some as strong on community development, but weak on reconciliation. Equally, however, the relationship between deprivation and reconciliation suggests that community development is a necessary component of reconciliation work. Visible community development has proven essential for building community confidence in popular Urban Villages projects.

Some communities face concentrations of material deprivation, which in turn helps embed a lack of confidence within certain single identity areas. Many interviewees felt these material and intra-community tensions need to be addressed before reconciliation can be properly considered.

A prominent theme from those working in reconciliation is the success of programmes that move away from the approach of bringing people together to discuss their differences, and instead bring people together to discuss shared aspirations and shared problems.

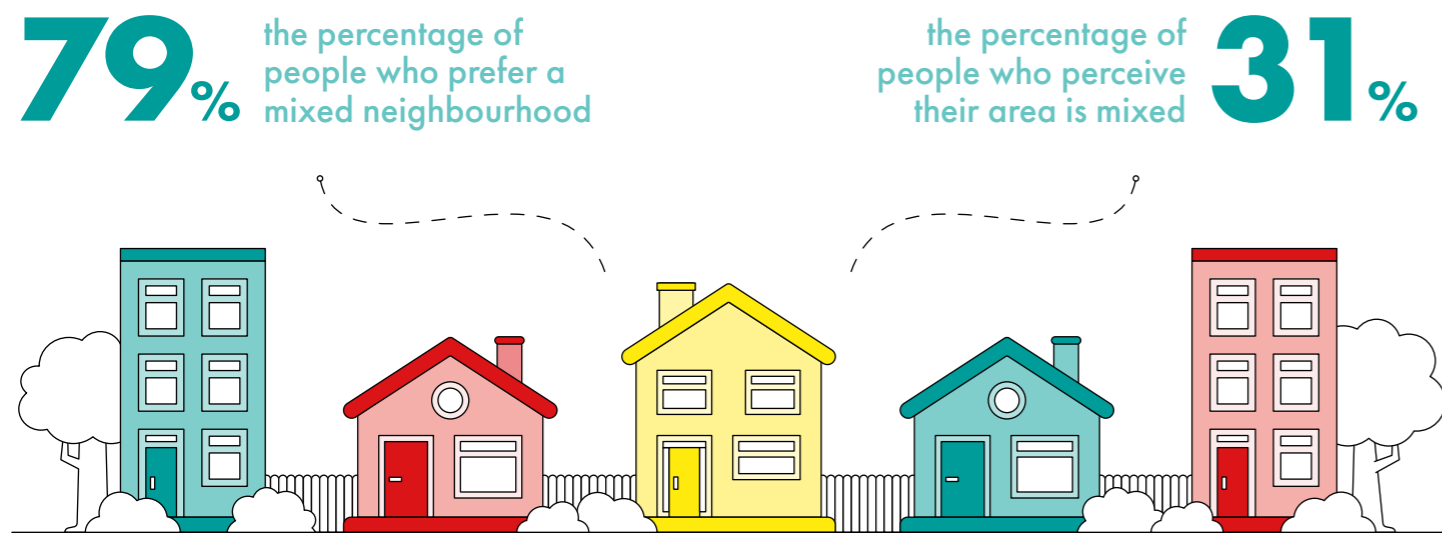


Fig. 09 People want to live in an area where housing is mixed
 Source: Good Relations Indicators Report, 2020 (Published March 2023)

Current funding cuts mean reduced support for some of the most disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Among the serious future social problems sharp budget cuts will create is the loss of capacity for significant parts of the voluntary and youth sectors, as they struggle to retain funding, jobs and skilled staff. Sustained funding, especially for youth work, is necessary over a long period of time to bring about real change. Short-term funding and incentives do not create sustainable programmes or change.

With extensive pressures on budgets likely to be the reality across most Executive departments, the better use of resources, including a reduction in the duplication of public and voluntary services, has never been more urgent. There is also a need for sections of the voluntary sector to explore other revenues streams, either through social enterprise models or collaboration with business.

Co-design of programmes involving communities has long been recognised as a priority, but senior officials acknowledge that more progress is needed. Effective

working across the public sector, rather than separate programmes competing for resources, would also further embed good relations objectives into policy decisions taken across all departments. *“Reconciliation should be within the ethos of all departments.”* (Interview D).

The sharing out of resources between the two major traditions, meaning communities don’t need to use the ‘other’s’ resources, perpetuates division. There is a segregating dynamic to rarely building large ‘shared use’ projects in single identity areas, instead using ‘neutral’ urban space (Interview K). A change to this approach is needed if the broader public reform agenda of rationalising services is to be achieved.

Political prioritisation of reconciliation is vital. Some believe reconciliation has not been given a high enough priority: *“There are some forces who aren’t that interested in reconciliation - they don’t push it as a priority. Some political leaders, intentionally or unintentionally, just reflect their separate community’s experiences.”* (Interview G).

// Reconciliation really means constructive engagement, which is what democracy is supposed to be about //

Interview B

This contested charge can only be countered by renewed political leadership on these issues.

Good policymaking requires good data and sound evidence. Improved data collection and sharing across government departments and agencies, funders, and the voluntary sector is required. *“We need better collective data and collective outcomes to understand better where funding is going and what the priorities should be.”* (Interview C). *“More data is required to create joined-up policy”* (Interview L). With a review of T:BUC due, and an ongoing wider reappraisal of good relations policy, improved data is key.

Young people should be at the heart of approaches to reconciliation and tackling deprivation. They have invaluable experiences and solutions to offer, especially as they experience the sharp end of reduced services. A healthier democratic culture, inclusive of young people, is vital to making Northern Ireland a more attractive place to live and to tackling the twin themes of this report. *“Political participation works as peace building”* (interview A) and,

as another interviewee concluded, *“Reconciliation really means constructive engagement, which is what democracy is supposed to be about”* (Interview B).

A leading advocate for improved community relations acknowledges that in tackling these issues: *“you can’t go any faster than the community wants”* but concludes by stating: *“we need to take advantage of any unfrozen moments, as in 1998. Are we utilising our moment enough? Can we afford the time? History will judge...but don’t waste a crisis.”* (Interview L).

Issues to explore

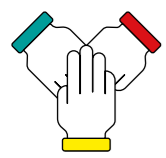
In the next stage of this research we will work with young people to get their views on reconciliation and marginalisation, asking in particular ‘What would make Northern Ireland a better place to live, work and study?’. The project so far has raised the questions below to explore further:



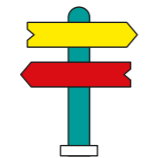
1. What are young people’s ideas and aspirations for the future, for their local communities and beyond?



5. How can young people facing particular challenges be best supported?



2. What priority do young people put on greater integration in education and housing?



6. How can young people be included in civic participation and decision-making?



3. How are young people experiencing pressures on public spending and the cost of living?



7. What are young people’s views and experiences of good relations and other reconciliation programmes?



4. What are young people’s experiences of division and sectarianism?

Interviewees

- A Academic, working in the fields of youth work and reconciliation
- B Academic, working in the fields of community relations and education
- C Senior civil servant
- D Community development and reconciliation programme leader
- E Community development and reconciliation programme leader
- F Leader in peacebuilding and community relations
- G Voluntary sector leader
- H Leader in third sector youth training and community development
- I Community development and reconciliation programme leader
- J Community development and reconciliation programme leader
- K Academic, working in the fields of community relations and peacebuilding
- L Leader in community relations
- M Voluntary sector leader in community relations
- N Voluntary sector leader in community relations
- O Senior civil servant

Pivotal is extremely grateful to Dr Donna Kernaghan of Stats & Stories for her contribution to this report.

25th May 2023
www.pivotalppf.org



@PivotalPPF

PIVOTAL

PUBLIC POLICY
FORUM NI