

## **The "Challenge Hate Crime" Project – Northern Ireland**

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The Challenge Hate Crime Project is a pilot programme of three years duration led by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and driven by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO).

The project is attempting to develop a definition of hate crime that is applicable within the Northern Ireland context – including sectarianism – and which will have a significant degree of consensus within and beyond the criminal justice system. The project is also assessing and quantifying the scale of the problem. Although there is specific hate crime legislation relating to Northern Ireland there are difficulties around its full enactment for what are essentially structural and attitudinal barriers both within and beyond the criminal justice system. The project is also concerned with undertaking an examination of the motivational reasons around hate crimes.

The project aims at developing a discourse around hate crime with particular regard to sectarianism within and beyond the criminal justice system. It is conscious of the fact that sectarian hate crime occurs most often in NI society yet has the least consensus in terms of its definition, never mind what to do about it.

The project has two primary objectives:

- The first is to develop an evidence based model of intervention with 30 perpetrators of hate crime.
- The second is strategic in nature and is to inform those within and beyond criminal justice around issues of hate crime. This includes interviewing politicians and media representatives, communities of interest (religious, political, gay, race, transgender and disabled), police, public prosecution, court services, prison services as well as probation. The issue of sectarianism and radicalisation are connected particularly with regard to the activities of dissent republican and loyalist groupings. There is currently a de facto radicalisation process occurring in Northern Ireland and involving groupings refer to above. However the language eg even the use of the word radicalisation is not used as part of the discourse.

The operational focus of the projects will be on prisoners who have been convicted of actual or de facto hate crime. Research and practice groups will be established and a model of intervention that is relevant to Northern Ireland will be implemented. The development of the project, in all its aspects is being recorded and will be disseminated during the life of and at the end of the pilot. It is planned by the end of the project (September 2012) to have a program that will address hate crime and which it is anticipated will evolve beyond the life of the project and will be used by interventionist from a variety of agencies.