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Overview of the extent of discrimination in Ireland

Cantillon, Sara
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Abstract

Irish legislation prohibits discrimination in employment and service provision under nine grounds: age, disability, family status, gender, marital status, race/ethnic group/nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community. This paper shows that despite the extensive equality legislative framework and “optimistic” perceptions of the general population about tolerance and openness, vulnerable populations continue to experience discrimination in their everyday lives. The unprecedented wave of immigration from different cultural and racial backgrounds during the economic boom have changed the face of Ireland. The term “diversity” has become part of the discourse of Government and private institutions as well as in the popular media in Irish society. This paper analyses the situation of people who are covered by the nine grounds of non-discrimination and provides an important context to understanding discrimination, equality and diversity in contemporary Ireland. It describes national strategies to implement equality in Ireland and the role of equality bodies, stakeholders and NGOs promoting equality and non-discrimination in Ireland.

Key words
Ireland, discrimination, diversity, age, disability, family status ,gender, marital status, race/ethnic group/nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation, Travellers

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Introduction

Ireland’s main anti-discrimination framework is encompassed within the Employment Equality Act 1998\(^1\) and the Equal Status Act 2000\(^2\), and in the Equality Act 2004\(^3\). These Acts promote equality of opportunity and prohibit discrimination in employment and service provision in Ireland under nine grounds: age; disability; family status (e.g. pregnant women or with children or other dependants); gender; marital status; race/ethnic group/nationality; religious belief; sexual orientation; and membership of the Traveller community. Putting these groups in context we see that in the 2006 Irish Census of population 9.3% described themselves as having a disability. Lone parents represent 3.1% of the total Irish population and 10.2% of all households. The Irish Census disaggregates four main ethnic categories: white (96.5%); black or black Irish (1.1%); Asian or Asian Irish (1.3%); and other including mixed (1.1%). Ireland is a predominantly Catholic country (almost 90%). There were 22,400 members of the Irish Traveller community in 2006, which represents just over 0.5% of the total population (CSO 2007b).

Ireland is currently experiencing a sharp economic downturn after a ten-year period of exceptional economic growth, high employment, rapidly rising income levels and declining numbers in “consistent poverty”. As is the norm in the times of recession the most economically disadvantaged are the ones most impacted through rising unemployment, static, or falling social welfare payments and reduced public expenditure on education and health. From an equality and discrimination perspective, the cutbacks introduced in Budget 2009 represents a critical loss in the equality institutional and governance infrastructure in Ireland. Budget 2010 is expected to be similarly severe. The impact of these and further cuts will be seen in coming years.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 represents the Irish strategy for non-discrimination and equality. While Ireland has quite a strong legislative framework for equality, Ireland does not have a statutory duty, as for example is the case in UK or Finland. As in the case elsewhere, the international human rights standards enshrined in ICESCR are not fully enforceable under Irish national law. The Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) has a central role co-ordinating the National Reform Programme (NRP), which draws together relevant inputs from various government departments and statutory agencies under each of the different themes. A recent development in the institutional framework in relation to employment rights and low pay is the establishment of a new National Employment Rights Agency (NERA) as well as a promotional campaign focusing on employment rights. The first national survey of experiences of discrimination in Ireland carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 2004 showed that overall 13% of the Irish population, aged 18 and over, reported that they had been discriminated against in the preceding two years (Russell et al 2008). The CSO also collected information in terms of the “perceived ground of discrimination”, age related discrimination was the most commonly reported (19%) followed by gender

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\(^1\) The Employment Equality Act 1998 (Number 21 of 1998), which was signed into law on 18th October 1999. Full text available at http://www.equality.ie/index.asp?locID=60&docID=205

\(^2\) The Equal Status Act 2000 (Number 8 of 2000) was signed into law on 25th October 2000. Full text available at http://www.equality.ie/index.asp?locID=60&docID=207

\(^3\) The Equality Act 2004 (Number 24 of 2004) was signed into law on 19th July 2004. Full text available at http://www.equality.ie/index.asp?docID=206
(16%); race/ethnicity/nationality (15%); family status (12%); disability (6%); and marital status (6%). There is a ‘hierarchy’ of perceived discrimination in which discrimination based on religious belief (0.9%); sexual orientation (0.6%), and members of the Traveller communities (0.6%) are almost absent from public opinion (CSO 2007). However, as illustrated in this report, these perceptions are not consistent with the lived experiences of these disadvantaged groups. The evidence indicates that these ‘minority groups’ are not only discriminated against in Irish society but their predicament is ignored, or at best unseen, by the Irish population.

The fairly extensive equality legislative framework in Ireland is somewhat diminished by its national practices regarding non-discrimination mainstreaming. Age discrimination in the workplace, for example, remains a common place occurrence. The Government New Strategy on Ageing (2007-2012), if implemented fully, will be an important step in this regard. In terms of equality policies for sexual minorities. The Civil Partnership Bill introduced on June 26th is due to be enacted and operational by the end of the year and will allow same-sex couples to register their civil partnership.

Ireland accomplished some goals in terms of national awareness projects, particularly in relation to racism. The project ‘Anti-racist Workplace Week’ was implemented in 2007, which aimed to raise national awareness, particularly among employers and employees about the benefits of incorporating equality and cultural diversity in the workplace and the importance of combating discrimination based on race and belonging to the Traveller community. Despite the recognition reflected in anti-discrimination and equal treatment legislation, multiple discrimination remains somewhat obscure, hence, most institutions and organisations concerned with anti-discrimination legislation and policy are still focused on the single ground approach.

1. Institutional framework and governance issues

Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Ireland plays a central role in international legal instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Racial Equality Directive. Ireland has signed the UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities on 30 March 2007. Institutions such as the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRRC), the National Disability Authority, and the Equality Authority are working together to ensure the Convention is implemented in Ireland.

The Equality Authority, established since 1998, plays a pivotal role in Irish legislation regarding minorities’ rights. There are also “quasi-judicial” tribunals set up under the Equality Tribunal, which deals with complaints of discrimination. The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (EYEO 2007) served as a support framework to address the promotion of equality and combating discrimination across Irish society. The Equality Authority established a framework for the development of a longer-term legacy based on the European Year, which includes

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4 The full text of the UE Convention as well as updates about the current situation of its implementation in different countries is available at http://www.un.org/disabilities/
three main strands: 1) networking for institutional capacity; 2) developing initiatives for positive action; and 3) developing equality data. These three strands encompass eleven specific actions:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strands</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 1</strong></td>
<td>1. Develop the work of the public sector equality network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Develop a capacity within private sector organisations to accommodate diversity and promote equality for employees, with a particular emphasis on the culturally integrated workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Develop the capacity within Chambers Ireland to promote planned and systematic approaches to workplace equality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Build on initiatives to promote planned and systematic approaches to workplace equality in the Athlone region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Plan and deliver a programme of learning events to support the NGO sector in representing the interests of groups experiencing inequality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Develop the initiative with statutory information providers on innovation in information provision on rights and redress mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Develop the inter-university network</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. Support the ICTU to continue their initiatives to embed equality within the trade union movement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Support the Local Government Management Services Board to develop equal status policies for local authorities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 2</strong></td>
<td>10. Support NGOs to build on initiatives from the ‘burning issues’ programme of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 3</strong></td>
<td>11. Ensure good data exists to support equality initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mullen 2008

However, it needs to be clearly stated that the EYEO was a once off initiative with little possibility of extension.

**Human rights approaches in Ireland**

Human rights-based approaches do not refer to a static set of standards but are centrally concerned with changing the relationship between stakeholders, and placing human rights principles at the centre of proactive policy-making and public service delivery (O'Connor et al 2008). The application of a human right framework implies the recognition that discrimination based on factors such as gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, among others, constitutes a denial of human rights principles (EC 2008a).

In Ireland, as in the case elsewhere, the international human rights standards enshrined in ICESCR are not fully enforceable under national law (AI 2006; IHRC 2006). Governments generally maintain that such rights should not be legally binding but should instead be promoted through various policies which set out general goals or targets to be achieved in given areas.
Table 2 Human rights approaches in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Non-discrimination and Equality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A rights holder has the opportunity to actively participate in a process that impacts on his or her life; s/he is an active subject, as opposed to an object of policy. Consultation does not guarantee full participation, but it is necessary to create the space for dialogue, and to promote education and awareness raising measure.</td>
<td>By granting them entitlements that give legal obligations to others. A person should not have to plead for her/his rights; rights are already present and become “operational or “active as soon as the person signals that she wants to exercise the right in question</td>
<td>By imposing enforceable duties to States about actions or omissions of individuals' human rights. There are four main mechanisms: judicial, quasi-judicial, administrative, and political.</td>
<td>By which laws and institutions that foster discrimination against specific individuals and groups should be prohibited from so doing and the rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations should be prioritized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: O'Connor et al 2008

The Irish National Strategy for equality

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 represents the Irish strategy for non-discrimination and equality. As detailed above, Ireland has a strong legislative framework for equality, dating from the 1998-2000 Acts. Discrimination in employment, recruitment and in the provision of services is covered by employment equality and equal status legislation. In its coverage of a wide range of grounds of discrimination, and of access and provision of services, Ireland's equality legislation is advanced in an EU context. Recent years in Ireland has seen a broadening of the focus on equality to cover a range of issues of minority rights (Barry and Murphy 2007).

A recent development has taken place in the institutional framework in relation to employment rights and low pay - the establishment of a new National Employment Rights Agency (NERA) as well as a promotional campaign focusing on employment rights. NERA has specific responsibility for ensuring the enforcement of the National Minimum Wage (together with other employment rights) and with gathering data and commissioning research in relation to compliance with labour law and labour standards. This initiative is particularly important to protect the rights of disadvantaged groups such as immigrants or disabled people.

The Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) has a central role coordinating the National Reform Programme (NRP), which draws together relevant

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6 The NERA provides information to employees and employers through its information unit; monitors employment conditions through its inspection services and can enforce compliance and seek rectification. NERA covers many aspects of employment rights including wages, working hours, dismissal, and notice. See detailed information at http://www.employmentrights.ie/en/
inputs from various government departments and statutory agencies under each of the different themes. In the past, the preparation of Employment Action Plans was the responsibility of the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment and the Social Inclusion Action Plan has been the responsibility of the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs. A limited consultation process takes place through the circulation of a draft NRP for comment and feedback to the Equality Authority, Equality Units and the main social partner organisations including the National Women's Council of Ireland. In addition, all public agencies in Ireland are obliged to produce an equal opportunities statement but for the most part these statements refer to policies in relation to recruitment, promotion and issues of sexual harassment.

2. Contextual Background

a) Employment and recession
There has been a very significant increase in unemployment since mid 2008. While initially affecting construction unemployment currently affects all sectors of the economy and particularly construction, manufacturing and the services sector (CSO 2009). Annual production decreased by 13% and the numbers employed in private firms in the construction industry decreased by 22% in over the year to December 2008 (CSO 2009). The Government has recently launched a series of economic measures to combat the economic downturn, which have had direct impact on the budget allocated to disadvantaged populations.

There is a gendered distribution of the employment rate with 75.6% of males employed compared to 60.5% of females aged 15 and over in 2008 (Barry and Vasquez del Aguila 2009). Marriage impacts differentially on men and women in relation to employment. Among married persons aged 25-44, married men were mostly employed (92%) compared to lower percentages (65%) among married women (CSO 2007a).

Ethnic background appears to have an enormous impact in employment in Ireland. Among those aged 25-44, white residents are employed in higher proportion (80%) than any other ethnic group: 44% of Blacks; and 66% of Asians (CSO 2007a). As stated earlier members of the Traveller communities are the most vulnerable to unemployment and the most prevalent group not participating in the Irish labour force. Among those aged 16 and over, 41% of white Irish Travellers were unemployed in 2006 compared to 5% of the total population. Irish Travellers were also over represented among the group outside the labor force (45%) compared to 37% of the total population. Non-Irish nationalities of African, or other black background, are the second group to have a significant level of exclusion from the Irish labour market with 27% unemployed and 33% who are not in the labour force. Among disabled people, 22% are unemployed and 74% are outside the labor force. Disabled men have more chances to be employed (50%) that their female counterparts (41%) (CSO 2007a).

b) Poverty
The latest EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) showed a reduction of the rate of consistent poverty from 7% in 2006 to 5% in 2007. At the
same time there was an increase in the risk of poverty rate for children, with a rate of 20% compared to 15% among people of working age (CSO 2008b). By 2007, Ireland had a high percentage of elderly people (65 and over) at risk of poverty (16.6) (SCO 2007b). Interestingly, there was an increase in the ‘at risk of poverty’ rate for unemployed people, rising from 40% in 2005 to 44% in 2006 perhaps reflecting the higher increase in market wages compared to increases in social welfare rates. Non-Irish nationals present a higher ‘at risk of poverty’ rate (24%) compared to Irish nationals (17%). Non-Irish nationals also experience a higher consistent poverty rate at 9% compared to Irish nationals at 6% (CSO 2008b). Numerous studies have demonstrated the link between poverty and discrimination. Poverty produces and reproduces inequalities and social exclusion for minority groups. For example, disabled women who are poor are most often poor because of their dependence on low levels of disability-related welfare (O’Connor et al 2006).

c) Immigration

In contrast to other European countries where immigrants tend to be concentrated in towns and cities, immigrants in Ireland have a ‘highly-dispersed settlement pattern’ of living and working between urban and rural areas. By 2006, 14% of Latvians and 12% of Polish Immigrants were residing in rural areas of Ireland, which is above the average percentage of the total non-Irish residing in rural areas (10%) (IRL 2009). Migrant men and women in Ireland are heavily represented in traditional gendered sectors (e.g. services and care work for women, and construction for men), while only a narrow range of sectors are important employers for both genders (Barry and Vasquez del Aguila 2009). As a result of economic recession, the total number of migrants into Ireland has fallen from 109,000 in 2007 to 83,800 in 2008, which represents a decline in net migration from 67,300 to 38,500 in a year (CSO 2008a).

Figure 1 Population and migration estimates
April 2008

![Population and migration estimates](chart.jpg)

Source: Based on CSO 2008a

This decline is particularly high among immigrants from the EU12 countries, almost 20,000 in a year period, representing a fall of over 36%. As the figures for net
migration fall, the percentage of women is increasing. Between 2006 and 2008 the female percentage of net migration increased very significantly from 42% to 68% (CSO 2008a). This reflects a steeper fall in immigration among men as employment opportunities in the predominantly male construction sector were the hardest hit. Ireland seems to be heading towards a feminisation in its immigration trends (Barry and Vasquez del Aguila 2009). This situation is particularly relevant due to the reported ‘double disadvantage’ (EC 2008d), by which migrant women are at disadvantage compared with both migrant men and native-born women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of EU 15</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU 12</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>43.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on COS 2008a

### d) Social exclusion and racism

There is evidence that the current recession and the sharp fall in employment has created racial tensions and reinforced racism and discrimination against immigrant workers (Cross and Turner 2007; Fanning 2007; O’Connell et al 2008). Consistent with this data, a national poll conducted by the Irish Times in 2008 found out that almost 60% of men feel there are far too many immigrants coming into the country. This perception is particularly high among older men in their 50s and 60s. By August 2008, almost two-thirds (63%) of Irish men were extremely, or very, concerned about having enough money to pay for day-to-day expenses. This is highest among men aged 25-44 (Irish Times 2008) which might explain the increasingly negative attitudes towards new immigrants. The poll also shows that a significant number of Irish men would disapprove of their son or daughter marrying a foreign national, with disapproval ratings again higher among older men (Irish Times, 2008). Racism and social exclusion intersect with migrants’ legal status as “non-citizens”, which means lesser rights and entitlements, and imposes structural barriers to participation in society.

### e) Education and social exclusion

The economic boom during the nineties impacted positively across the educational system in Ireland, but in particular for higher or third-level education. Education for Irish nationals and for those from EU member states is free at all levels in Ireland. Nevertheless, educational outcomes reflect social exclusion and the inequalities that are still present in Irish society. While 31% of the total population aged 25 and over
have attained third level or higher education, only 17% of disabled people and 1% of Irish Travellers have achieved the same. In terms of race and nationality, the immigrant population has higher levels of education than the White Irish nationals, which illustrates the high qualifications of the immigrant population in Ireland (CSO 2007a).

f) Economic recession and its impact on equality and non-discrimination

The 2009 Budget introduced against the background of economic recession and deteriorating public finances, brought in a range of cuts in health and education. A particularly negative cutback from the perspective of equality and fight against discrimination was the sharp reduction in the budget of the Equality Authority (the key statutory agency with responsibility for promoting and implementing equality policy). The Authority has played a central role in supporting cases challenging discrimination in employment and service provision and the cut in funding represents a critical loss in the Equality Authority’s infrastructure. There are substantial concerns that these cuts will diminish the Authority’s ability to promote equality and to fight against discrimination in Irish society. In addition, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) whose role was to provide advice and initiatives to combat racism in areas outside the capital city has closed since December 2008 due to cutbacks. The budget of the Human Rights Commission was also severely reduced and the statutory agency, Combat Poverty, was merged into a Government Department. Further, funding from Atlantic Philanthropies has been critical to the work of many NGOs engaged in non-discrimination and equality issues. However, the Charities Bill excludes human rights issues from the coverage and this is expected to impact negatively on funding (when linked to tax relief) to NGOs who may not in the future be in a position to claim charity status.

3. Nine grounds of non-discrimination in Ireland

The Report on Equality in Ireland shows how “minority” groups are overwhelmingly less informed compared to other groups: 32% of disabled compared to 18% of non-disabled; 42% non-whites compared to 19% of whites; 38% non-Irish compared to 18% Irish and 21% of women compared to 18% of men. The same figures applied for the elderly (28%) and younger individuals 18-24 (24%), compared to those aged 25-64 (CSO 2007). The Equality Report shows that overall 13% of the Irish population aged 18 and over felt that they had been discriminated against in the preceding two years. Among those respondents, 9% stated they were discriminated while accessing services and 7% reported work-related discrimination (CSO 2007a). In terms of “perceived ground of discrimination”, of the nine grounds covered by Equality Legislation, age related discrimination was the most commonly reported (25%) followed by gender (16%); race/ethnicity/nationality (15%); family status (12%); disability (6%); and marital status (6%). In this 'hierarchy' of perceived discrimination in Irish society, the Irish population perceives other forms of discrimination as less recurrent or prevalent. In this sense, discrimination based on religious belief (0.9%); sexual orientation (0.6%), and members of the Traveller communities (0.6%) are almost absent from data on public opinion (CSO 2007a).

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7 Cuts in the Education budget, amounting to €81m, include cuts to the capital expenditure programme, and Higher Education. The higher education budget is down by €24m. The Strategic Innovation Fund will also have its budget cut by €2m.
However, as it will be described later in this paper, these perceptions are not necessarily consistent with the experiences of disadvantaged populations. Indeed the evidence would suggest that Travellers are the group most discriminated against, both directly and indirectly. The result is that these ‘minority groups’ are not only discriminated against in Irish society but their personal situation is invisible to, or ignored, by the Irish population.

**Figure 2**
Perceived discrimination by type of discrimination

In terms of work-related discrimination, discrimination in the workplace differs from discrimination while looking for work. For instance, gender based discrimination is perceived as more prevalent in the workplace (18%) compared to when looking for a job (6%). In contrast, age related discrimination is perceived as higher when looking for work (33%) compared to 16% in the workplace. The same situation applies for disability (7% and 4% respectively), and race-related discrimination (23% and 17% respectively) (CSO 2007).

Some grounds of discrimination are seen as growing in the past five years in Irish society. These groups include discrimination based on disability (65%); religion (63%); gender (62%); and age (61%). Interestingly, sexual orientation (54%) and ethnic origin (53%) are considered less prevalent forms of discrimination as compared than they were in 2003 (EC 2008b).
This perception, based on a more medium-term comparison does not necessarily reflect the current perception of the situation, or more importantly, the real situation as reported by the individuals who experienced discrimination. In terms of reported discrimination, the Equality Authority registered racial/ethnic minorities as the main group reporting discrimination, 31% among Blacks, Asians or other non-white ethnicity; and 24% among non-Irish nationals. The unemployed is the next highest group showing reported discrimination (29%); followed by lone parents (23%); and people with disabilities (20%) (Russell et al 2008). Non-Irish nationals are more than twice as likely as Irish respondents to report discrimination in the work place and when looking for work. Consistent with this study, a report on racism and discrimination among recent immigrants in Ireland, found that over 30% of the respondents experienced insults or other forms of harassment at work. Access to public services, both health and transport, are domains particularly relevant for discrimination based on family status, disability, race and sexual orientation (McGinnity et al 2006).

a) Age related discrimination

Ireland has a predominantly young population, with 35% under 25 years of age and 32% aged between 25 and 44 (CSO 2007b). This population will age considerably over the coming decades. The proportion of the population 65 years and over in 2005 was 11% by 2020 it is projected that it will represent 15% and by the end of 2030 it is projected that this cohort will represent 18 % of the Irish population. The population under 15 has decreased by 10% in the 25 years between 1981 and 2006, and it will drop from 20% in 2006 to a projected 17% by 2030 (Eurostat 2008). The perception of age based discrimination is relatively low in Ireland (25%) compared to other EU27 countries (42%). However, Irish respondents consider that compared to the situation five years ago, discrimination against elderly people has increased (61%) compared to lower rates in the other EU27 countries (57%) (EC 2008b).

Reports of age related discrimination more often come from individuals under 25 years of age. Young people are more likely to report harassment or discrimination because of their age. Interestingly, people 65 and over are less likely to report
discrimination, which might reflect cultural changes in Irish society in terms of the perception of inequality and discrimination (Russell et al 2008).

b) Disability related discrimination

In the 2006 Irish Census of population 9.3% of the population described themselves as having a disability. 68.2% of these persons had more than one disability. Among those aged 25-44, only 28% had a third level education, compared to 43% for the rest of the population in the same age group. In terms of the workforce, persons with disability represent 4% of all persons at work. The participation rate of male workers with disabilities aged 15 to 64 years is 46% compared to 81% for all males in the same age group. Almost 70% of people with disabilities are single, separated or widowed, and among those living in private household, one in five live on his/her own (CSO 2007b).

The Disability Act 2005 is the primary piece of legislation that protects the rights of people with disabilities in Ireland. However, this Act has had more impact on the public sector and only limited implications for the private sector. A report by the Citizens Information Board (CIB) on housing and accommodations needs of people with disabilities found a gap between policy aspirations and the everyday experience of people with disabilities. Many of them were living in accommodations not of their choosing. There were limited options for housing either for renting or owner-occupation. The low incomes/borderline poverty levels of the majority of people with disabilities play a crucial role in their disadvantaged position in Irish society (CIB 2007).

Ireland is among the countries in which discrimination towards people with disability is perceived to be fairly low (25% compared to 45% in the EU27) (EC 2008b). The Equality Report shows that disability represents the fifth highest perceived ground of discrimination by just over five percent of the population (CSO 2007a). Irish society does not seem to see discrimination in the lives of people with disabilities. In sharp contrast people with disabilities report a very high incidence of discrimination. In Ireland 77% of disabled people report that they were discriminated against more than once (Russell et al 2008). This would suggest that disability is one of the strongest predictors of discrimination in Ireland. Disabled people are also discriminated in the minimum wage in the so-called “sheltered workshops”, which are places where disabled people are employed and paid far less than the minimum wage. There is also a very limited application of the 3% quota system, limited only to public sector and certain large private employers. In terms of the physical and/or mental health of disabled people, members of the disabled community emphasize the need to address the impact of institutionalization in the lives of disabled people.

c) Family and marital status related discrimination

Family composition in Ireland has changed in recent years with an increase in the number of single persons relative to married’s persons. There has been an increase in the number of co-habiting couples. In 2006 there was about 1.5 million single persons in Ireland (43% of the population aged 15 and over) and over 1.7 million married individuals (46%); of whom about 5% were separated or divorced and about 6% were widowed. Of this latter group almost four in five were females (CSO 2007b).
There has been a considerable increase in the number of cohabiting couples from 8% in 2002 to 12% in 2006 (CSO 2007b).

Lone parents, defined as someone raising children on their own – whether they are a single parent, separated, divorced or widowed - represent 10.2% of private households and 3.1% of the total population (CSO 2007b). Lone parents are more likely than any other social group to be living in poverty. 33% of lone parents were living in consistent poverty, compared to 7% of the total population (CSO 2008b). Lone parents tend to have lower employment rates (55%) compared to other parents (74%) and they have lower participation rates in third level education (23% compared to 34% for other parents). This situation reinforces the vulnerability of this population and creates a “poverty trap” that limits their mobility routes out of poverty (CSO 2007a). Women constitute over 90% of lone parents (CSO 2007b).

Discrimination based on family status, for example, towards pregnant women or towards women with children or other dependants, is considered as the fourth most prevalent form of discrimination in Irish society (CSO 2007). Marital status represents the sixth most important form of discrimination in Ireland (5.5%) (CSO 2007). Lone parents have one of the highest probabilities of experiencing discrimination in Ireland. Over 12% of respondents addressed this form of discrimination particularly while dealing with the services domain, such as accessing health services (10%), and using transport services (14%). They are also discriminated against in the work environment, 8% in their work places, and 10% when looking for work (CSO 2007). Women are more likely to report discrimination because of their marital status and family status than men (Russell et al 2008).

d) Gender related discrimination

Discrimination on the basis of gender is seen as the least widespread form among the EU27 countries (36%) and it is perceived as even lower among Irish respondents (20%). Irish respondents also see positive changes in their society in terms of gender equality in the past two years. Ireland also shows one of the lowest percentages (1%) of people experiencing gender discrimination in the EU27, where the average is 3% (EC 2008b). This positive picture contrasts sharply with the perceived gender discrimination by the Equality Report, in which gender represents the second highest form of discrimination (16%) (CSO 2007a).

Despite the fact that more women (81%) than men (79%) completed secondary education in 2006, women are underrepresented at medium and higher levels of business and politics. Just 8% of members of boards of public companies and 13% of TDs in the Dail (national parliamentary representatives) are women. The report also shows the gender pay gap in Ireland to be around 17% on average (CSO 2007a). The gender pay gap creates inferior pensions for women, which puts almost one third of Irish women over 65 years of age at risk of poverty (EU 2009). In contemporary Ireland, gender stereotypes continue having a major impact on women’s lives; restricting their career plans, and limiting their opportunities to balance work and family life.

The experience of discrimination of men and women is differentiated by context. Women are more likely to report discrimination in the workplace and while accessing health services, while men are more likely to report discrimination while
looking for work and accessing financial services. Finally, while women are more discriminated on the grounds of family and marital status, men are more likely to be discriminated against based on their age or nationality/ethnicity (Russell et al 2008).

e) Race/ethnicity related discrimination

The Irish Census disaggregates four main ethnic categories: white (96.5%); black or black Irish (1.1%); Asian or Asian Irish (1.3%); and other including mixed (1.1%). This broad classification makes it difficult to measure internal diversity among ethnic minorities residing in the country. Over the period of the economic boom, from mid 1990s to mid 2000’s Ireland experienced unprecedented growth in its immigrant population. In the period 2002-2006 immigration growth doubled from 5 to 10% (CSO 2008a). UK nationals represented the largest group (112,000) followed by Poland (63,200), Lithuania (24,600), Nigeria (16,300) and Latvia (13,300). Non-Irish groups were dominated by people in their 20s and 30s, with significantly more men than women. There were few children and older people among the non-Irish population. As is discussed in other sections of this report, the current economic downturn is having a direct impact on net immigration, particularly from the neighboring countries.

Racism interacts with other social and political processes to produce distinct forms of ‘racialised’ inequality. Hence, racist ideologies and beliefs function as a mechanism for demarcating defined groups, such as ethnic minorities, in ways that legitimise their marginalisation or social exclusion (Fanning 2007). Even though Irish respondents see discrimination based on ethnic origin in lower percentages (52%) than its EU neighbors (62%), Irish people consider that such discrimination has become a more widespread phenomenon in the last 5 years (53% vs. 48% in the EU27). Ireland also has the highest percentages in terms of witnessing ethnicity-based discrimination in the past 12 months at 17% compared to 14% which is the EU27 average (EC 2008b).

Race constitutes the third (15%) form of perceived discrimination among the Irish population (CSO 2007). Consistent with these data, 24% of non-Irish nationals feel that they have been discriminated against at work and accessing other services such as housing, shops/pubs/restaurants, financial service and transport. Non-Irish people feel particularly discriminated when searching for work. Respondents of Black ethnicity have the highest “raw” risk of discrimination (40%) among all the ethnic groups in Ireland (Whites: 12% and Asians 25%) (Russell et al 2008). Not all immigrants in Ireland experience the same situation of marginalization and vulnerability. Immigrant status is not isolated from other factors such us nationality, race and language. In a recent report on Immigrants in the Irish labour market, O’Connell and McGinnity (2008) found that immigrants from English speaking countries do not differ from Irish nationals in terms of risk of unemployment. The ones who are at risk of discrimination are black immigrants and from non-English speaking countries. An earlier report on ethnic and national minorities (Black and other South/Central African; North African; Asian; and East European backgrounds) showed internal diversity among these populations, being immigrants with black background the ones who experienced more discrimination than the other minorities such as Asians and East Europeans (EUMC 2006).
f) Religion or belief related discrimination

Ireland is a predominantly Catholic country with 86.8% of its population identifying themselves as Catholics in the Census of Population. The second largest religion, Church of Ireland, represents 3%, followed by other religions with less than 1%. Muslims constitute the third largest religion identified in the Census (CSO 2007b) (see figure 4). Pentecostalism, considered the world’s fastest growing religion, is also experiencing a steady development in Ireland. Followers from African and Caribbean backgrounds have begun to gather in considerable numbers in newly established churches across Ireland in the past ten years. There is a strong link between nationality and religion. For instance, over 90% of Polish nationals in Ireland define themselves as Catholic; and 97% of Pakistani population as Muslims (CSO 2007b).

Discrimination based on religion or belief is perceived as being rare in Ireland at just over 19% of Irish respondents stating it as a ground compared to 42% in the EU27 countries by 2008. The perception of religion based discrimination has fallen six points since 2006 (25%). Irish people also see current times being more tolerant about other religions in contrast to five years ago in Irish society (63% compared to 52% among the other EU 27 countries). Irish people are among the most comfortable (9.2 out of 10 points with a neighbor of a different religion or belief compared to other European respondents (8.5 points) (EC 2008b).

![Figure 4 Religious communities in Ireland](source: Based on CSO 2007b)

**g) Sexual orientation related discrimination**

Official data about the proportion of gay and bisexual population is widely recognised as an unreliable profile of sexual diversity. Over 96% of males and 99% of females identify themselves as heterosexual. Gay and bisexuals are almost invisible in the Irish census: 2% of males and 0.4% of females identified themselves as “homosexuals”; and 1. % of males and 0.8% of females as “bisexuals” (CSO 2007a).
The perception of discrimination based on sexual orientation is relatively low in Ireland (38%) compared to the average among other EU27 countries where this perception is expressed by over half of the population (51%) (EC 2008b). The Irish census shows that for Irish people, sexual orientation is perceived among the lowest form of discrimination in the country (0.6%) (Russell et al 2008). However, this “positive” perception of the general Irish population contrasts with the discrimination that LGBT individuals experience in their everyday lives in Ireland. A recent report about the mental health and well-being of LGBT individuals in Ireland (Mayock et al 2009), shows that 80% of on-line survey participants had experienced verbal abuse, and a quarter of all respondents reported having experienced physical violence. A quarter of respondents report having being punched, kicked or beaten; almost 8% being attacked with a weapon; and 9% being sexually attacked on at least one occasion as a consequence of their LGBT identification. School and the workplace constitute scenarios for harassment and discrimination for LGBT people. Almost 60% of respondents refer to the existence of homophobic bullying in their schools; 40% being verbally abused; and 25% being physically threatened by their peers. In terms of the workplace, over 25% of those who had been employed reported having being called abusive names related to their sexual orientation, and almost 7% being physically threatened by a work colleague, while almost 10% admitted to having missed work because they were afraid of being hurt of felt threatened because of their sexual orientation (Mayock et al 2009). This substantiated the findings of two earlier reports on the lives of sexual minorities in Ireland. In a quantitative research, Devine et al (2006) show the impact of homophobia, stigma and discrimination in the sexual health of gay men in Ireland. Confirming these findings, a qualitative study about LGB individuals in North West Ireland, (Gibbons et al 2007) illustrates the barriers that restrict LGB people from accessing health services. In terms of legislation, Walsh et al (2007) found out that amongst other reasons, being denied access to marriage was directly linked to LGB people not being able to be “out” and therefore not being in a position to take a case under the Equality legislation. This negative picture contrasts with the general perception of the Irish population that discrimination based on sexual orientation does not represent a problem in Irish society.

A recent report on the situation of homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation in Ireland (FRA 2009b) shows that despite the significant improvement in the legal framework for prohibiting discrimination, sexual minorities are still facing oppression in Irish society. Based on several studies, the report concludes that the general population has experienced major attitudinal changes towards homosexuality and the rights of LGBT populations (strongly negative attitudes towards homosexuality had declined to 38% in 1990-2000 from 62% in 1981), but Ireland still remains on the “conservative side of the European average”. The report also shows that cases of discrimination because of sexual orientation are still very low because these claims imply the need to “come out”, which many individuals are not able to do for a variety of reasons.

There is no provision for transgender populations in Irish legislation that officially recognizes the gender identity with which these individuals identify. In this sense, transgender people in Ireland are not entitled to any right legally confined to the gender to which they belong (FRA 2009a, 2009b). Additionally, there is a systematic invisibilization of transgender populations from the Irish society which reinforce their vulnerability and inability to fight for their rights.
The European Parliament has been consistently supportive of gay and lesbian rights, from the 1984 non-binding resolution which called for an end to work-related discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation to more recent legislation aimed to protecting the rights of sexual minorities (Commission of the European Communities 2008a, 2008b). The Employment Equality Directive prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in both the private and public sectors, in work and employment (Quinn and Paradis 2007; De Schutter 2008). Ireland belongs to a group of Member States in which the protection of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation has been partially extended beyond employment and occupation in order to cover certain fields, to which the Racial Equality Directive applies, particularly service provision. The role of the Government regarding the rights of sexual minorities has been constantly criticized due to its inconsistency and lack of real commitment. For instance, in 2004, the Government introduced legislation to overturn an Equality Tribunal decision that found excluding same sex partners from travelling as partners on public transport was against equality legislation (Social Welfare Miscellaneous Act 2004).

Irish legislation does not recognize same-sex marriage. The Government have argued that their legal advice is that such recognition would conflict with the definition of marriage as derived from the article 41 of the Irish Constitution 1937. The Zappone & Gilligan case has challenged the Supreme Court to recognise their same sex marriage which took place in Canada and still waits for its final decision. Additionally, there is no registered partnership in domestic Irish legislation, therefore, the registered same sex partner of a citizen of the Union is not granted automatic rights of entry and residence in Ireland. Finally, there is no clear guidance available for de facto same-sex cohabitant of the citizen of the Union who seeks to join him/her in Ireland. However, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform may grant permission of residence for “de facto relationships” both with an Irish National and with a non-EEA National without specifying or restricting to the gender of the couple. 8

The Equality Act 2004, which amended the pre-existing Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000, purports to implement the Employment Directive. The scope of protection from sexual orientation discrimination is broader than that required under the Employment Directive in that access to goods, services and other opportunities are covered by the Equal Status Act 2000, as amended by the Equality Act 2004. The Equality Authority is the institutional body that protects the rights of sexual minorities. The Equality Authority prerogatives includes legislation, implementation of initiatives, monitoring tools, following cases of cases of discrimination based on sexual orientation, and serve as the liaison between the Government and other public and private institutions (Walsh et al. 2007).

8 De Schutter (2008) defines three situations in which the freedom of movement of LGBT persons is restricted: 1) when a married partner of the citizen of the Union seeks to join him/her in another EU member State; 2) a same-sex registered partner of the citizen of the Union seeks to join him/her in another EU Member State; and 3) when a de facto same-sex cohabitant of the citizen of the Union seeks to join him/her in another EU Member State.
h) Members of the Traveller community and discrimination

There were 22,400 members of the Irish Traveller community in 2006, which represents just over 0.5% of the total population. The Irish Traveller community is predominantly young, 23.5% are under 14 years (twice the national composite figure); and 45% between 25-44 years compared to under a third of the total population (CSO 2007b). Only 0.8% of Irish Travellers had attained third level education in 2006 compared to 30.5% of the population as a whole. Female Travellers have lower rates of attendance of higher education (0.6%) compared to males (1.1%) (CSO 2007). While it is believed that Irish Travellers are predominantly Catholic (Helleiner 2000), there is a lack of official data available about the religion of Irish Travellers.

Travellers are one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Irish society. However, the Irish population does not seem to recognize Travellers’ marginalization and only 0.6% of Irish population considers that Travellers experience discrimination in Ireland (CSO 2007). On the other hand, 40% of Irish people report feeling uncomfortable with Traveller people, which is above the EU27 average of 24% (EC 2008b). Irish Travellers fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage: unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, gender equality, life expectancy, among others (EC 2004; NCCRR 2007, 2008). Because of particular clothing, Traveller women are more easily identifiable than Traveller men, so they and their children are the most common target of discrimination while dealing with everyday social interactions (NCCRI 2007).

4. Other disadvantages groups in Irish society

Irish Language

Almost 1.7 million people aged 3 years and over defined themselves as being able to speak Irish in 2006 - 45% among females and 38% among males. However, 60% of those who reported that they are able to speak Irish either never spoke the language, or spoke it less frequently than weekly. The majority of Irish speakers are concentrated in urban areas (56.9%) rather than to rural places (43.1%). Just 3.3% spoke Irish on a daily basis outside the official education system (CSO 2007b). These figures and the fact that the Irish language has been officially recognized as an “endangered language” illustrate the minority nature of the Irish language despite Ireland itself being officially recognised as a bilingual country.

Unemployed population

The unemployed are not covered under Irish equality legislation. Studies on discrimination against the unemployed however have shown that they clearly emerge as a vulnerable group, particularly “while looking for work” which reinforces a circle of discrimination for this population (Russell et al 2008). In the 25-44 cohort groups, less women were employed (70%) compared to men (87%). The employment rate for female lone parents is lower (53%) compared to other female parents (59%).
Among people with disabilities, 45% were employed and only 16% among Irish Travellers (Russell et al 2008). The Central Statistics Office estimates that Ireland’s standardised unemployment rate has increased to 11.8% in May (more than 400,000 individuals). Additionally, the total number of people on the Live Register (claiming jobless benefits) has nearly doubled over the past year to 397,000. The Economic and Social Research Institute predicts that the unemployment rate will hit 17% in 2010.

**Multiple discrimination**

Multiple discrimination occurs when a person is discriminated against on more than one ground. Personal experience of discrimination is a key influence on perceptions of multiple discrimination. Ireland is among the European countries with the highest perception of multiple discrimination. Of the Irish population, 7% compared to 4% in the EU27 consider multiple discrimination to be very widespread in their country (EC 2008b).

5. Non-discrimination mainstreaming-National situation


The Irish Government approved in 2005 the establishment of a new Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In relation to migrant workers’ rights, the Government ratified its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights and its commitment to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Ireland has ratified the Forced Labour Convention (C.29), the Freedom of Association and Protection of Rights Convention (C.87), the Discrimination (Employment and occupation) Convention (C.111), the Equality of Treatment Convention (C.118), among others.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) provides advice on policies that seek to achieve equality and social inclusion in Ireland. In a report from the Equality Authority, O’Leary (2008) analyses a recent report by the NESF on policies related to equality implemented by the Irish Government. In terms of older workers, age discrimination in the workplace remains to be tackled and initiatives have been introduced by the Equality Authority, the HSE and the National Council of Ageing and Older People. These include initiatives on issues such as low wages for older workers, flexible working arrangements and life-long learning. The NESF also recommends the application of policies that allows older people live active lives and full lives independently in their own homes and communities as long as possible. The
Government New Strategy on Ageing (2007-2012) if implemented fully will be an important step in this regard.

In terms of equality policies for sexual minorities, the NESF recognizes the commitment in the Programme for Government 2007-2012 to ‘legislate for Civil Partnership at the earliest possible date in the lifetime of the Government’. However, at the time of writing this has still not happened. The report also highlights the work of the Department of Social and Family affairs in equality proofing the Social Welfare Code, including on the ground of sexual orientation. The NESF however, calls attention on the need for the Department of Education and Science to play a lead role in tackling homophobia in schools. As with the case of sexual minorities, the background of disadvantage populations, as well as messages of equality and human rights approaches should be reflected in materials across the curriculum.

The Irish Government has strengthened valuable initiatives to tackle racism and manifestations of intolerance, particularly in the Action Plan Against Racism, which was prepared through a consultative process with civil society and key actors and institutions. As previously mentioned, the 2007 European Year of Equality for All (EYEO 2007) framed the Irish national strategy for implementing policies on non-discrimination in Ireland (EC 2007). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recognizes some of the positive aspects that the Government has taken to oversee the implementation of the Plans Against Racism. However, the ECRI also recommends the implementation of monitoring systems to follow up the continuity and success of this national plan.

Finally, Ireland is a very centralised country, with most major governmental and public institutions in the main cities or in the capital, Dublin, which limits the access to these services of disadvantage populations living outside these cities. An exception has been the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), with regional offices that provide advice and initiatives to combat racism in diverse areas of Ireland. Several institutions that work with minority groups have stated the need to integrate dissemination initiatives to the existent legislative framework. In many cases minority groups are not aware of their rights and of the institutions they can turn to in case of discrimination (e.g. Equality Tribunal, the Labour Court, and the Employment Appeals Tribunal). The participation of minority groups in developing the programs, participating in the decision-making, and monitoring their further implementation is crucial to achieve greater strides in combating discrimination in Irish society.

**National awareness projects**

The Government of Ireland, through the Equality Authority and the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, implemented the project ‘Anti-racist Workplace Week 2007 (ARWW), which aimed to raise national awareness, particularly among employers and employees about the benefits of incorporating equality and cultural diversity in the workplace and the importance of combating discrimination based on race and belonging to the Traveller community (Government of Ireland 2007). The ARWW initiative constitutes a tool for good practice to combat discrimination at ‘micro’ (with minority groups) and on a national scale. The ARWW, through outdoor advertising, national and local radio and local events, informed the public about
existing legislation and the concept of creating positive environments free of discrimination. The success of this initiative resides in the involvement of broad range of partners, including public and private institutions such as the government; trade unions (Congress); association of employers (IBEC); Irish farmers (IFA); small firms (Chambers of Commerce of Ireland); and the Construction Industry (EYEO 2007; EA 2009).

Additionally, the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland implemented the project ‘Tipping the Balance’, which operates closely with the Irish National Implementation Body in order to enhance the overall impact of activities tackling potential barriers for the implementation of equality in Irish society. The project fits the overall agenda of the Irish national campaign, and in turn, the broader pan-European campaign. The report about the EYEO in Ireland by the European Commission and Equality Authority (EA 2007b; EC 2007) with stakeholders from Ministries, National Equality Bodies and NGOs from ten Member States, concluded that despite the recognition reflected in anti-discrimination and equal treatment legislation, multiple discrimination remains somewhat obscure, hence, most institutions and organisations concerned with anti-discrimination legislation and policy are still focused on the single ground approach.

Following the objectives by the “European Year of Equal Opportunities for All”, the Government of Ireland has defined specific objectives defined in terms of rights, representation, recognition and respect (EC, 2007; Lynam 2008):

- **Rights**: raising awareness of the right to equality and non-discrimination and of the problem of multiple discrimination. There is a focus on information and advocacy, and a liaison with agencies, NGOs and other organisations that have a role in providing information to the public

- **Representation**: stimulating debate on ways to increase the participation in society of groups that are victims of discrimination and to ensure balanced participation among men and women

- **Recognition**: facilitating and celebrating diversity and equality, emphasising the positive contribution that people – irrespective of their sex, racial/ethnic origin, religion/belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, can make to society as a whole, in particular by accentuating the benefits of diversity.

- **Respect**: promoting a more cohesive society, focusing on key equality issues for groups experiencing inequalities

### 6. Implementation of the national strategy of equality

Several institutions and organisations, in the public and private sector, constitute the framework for the implementation of a strategy aimed at tackling equality and non-discrimination at national level (EA 2008a). These initiatives include:

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9 This initiative was founded by Progress under NAR 2007
• **Information and Advocacy**, which includes actions such as research, staff training, public awareness campaign, public exhibitions.

• **Equality Mainstreaming**, including the constitution of an equality mainstreaming infrastructure to provide resources and useful tools about the current situation of disadvantage populations in Ireland. These efforts include the development of data by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). In 2007 the CSO launched a very comprehensive report on Equality in Ireland, which provides summary demographic and participation data across the nine grounds (CSO 2007).

• **Equality Competence**, through an institutional capacity within public sector organizations to accommodate diversity, promote equality and combat discrimination by supporting institutions to be planned and systematic in their approach to equality for customers and employees. This also includes working with staff, and carrying equality audits in the workplace. A collaborative effort between the Irish Business Employers Confederation (IBEC), Pobal, Chamber of Commerce, and the university sector seeks to implement equality in public and private sectors.

• **Equality Debate**, developing public awareness of the nine ground of discrimination through conferences, colloquiums and national campaigns, it seeks also to stimulate debate about equality and non-discrimination within the political process

• **Burning Issues**, incorporating the work of national NGOs with an expertise and experience on equality issues at national level.

• **Multiple Discrimination**, supporting research on the diversity of women and multiple discrimination (transsexual women, women parenting alone, women carers, women Travellers, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, women from different religious backgrounds, black and minority ethnic women, young women and older women) (EA 2008a).

### 7. Good practices in the field of non-discrimination

Irish people are among the most supportive, among the EU27, of specific measures to provide equal opportunities for everyone in the field of employment. Ireland is above the EU27 average in relation to every ground of discrimination (see figure 7). However, there is a hierarchisation of priorities in the perception of equal opportunities. Irish people consider age, disability, gender and religion belief as the main domains for equal opportunity, while relegating other grounds to lower positions. In this sense, support for the creation of specific protection for persons belonging to ethnic and sexual minorities does not appear to be part of the Irish public agenda.
However, this apparent positive outcome should not imply any complacency in terms of equality and human rights issues. As the same report states, there is also a decline in the awareness of rights among the Irish population, from 39% in 2006 to 30% in 2008 (EC 2008b), which might signal a change of the situation of civil rights in Irish society. Additionally, Ireland is slightly below the European average in terms of perception of efforts made to fight all forms of discrimination (45% and 47% respectively). Irish people are also below the European average in knowing about their rights if they are victims of discrimination or harassment: 30% in comparison with 33% in the EU27.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) defines four sets of good practices in relation to protecting the rights of sexual minorities: improve the means
of reporting cases of discrimination; count with reliable statistical data; proactive policies from public authorities; and to protect transgendered persons from investigations into their past in the context of job applications (De Schutter 2008). The government of Ireland and civil society has been implementing a series of ‘good practice’ initiatives that have demonstrated a positive impact on the problem of homophobia among the defined stakeholders.

**a) Sexual Minorities**

The Irish police (*An Garda Síochána*) are active in dealing with and addressing homophobic violence, harassment and hate speech. There are specific Garda Liaison Officers who deal with issues of discrimination and violence against LGBT populations. In a 2006 report, 70% of respondents were aware of these Liaison Officers. The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) has worked with the Garda to develop a LGBT Community Safety Strategy for the Dublin Metropolitan Region, which was launched by the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2006, and it is expected that this initiative will be expanded to a national level. The "Be Proud, Be Safe campaign" includes specially trained Garda gay Liaison Officers who work with LGBT people who have been victims of hate-motivated incidents, during a weekly 'drop in' session in the Dublin-based gay community centre. The Gardaí have also established a National Advisory Panel (NAP) that will meet four times a year and be hosted at Chief Superintendent level. Lesbian and gay representatives will sit on the panel and membership will be renewed annually. The NAP will produce a yearly Action Plan. Other positive practices being carried out by the Garda include developing leaflets for the LGBT community encouraging people to report homophobic crimes; providing information of Garda Liaison Offices to members of the LGBT community; and providing training for GARDA on LGBT issues.

The Irish National Teachers Organization (INTO) and the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI), have established LGBT networks with the aim to provide support, advice and a code of conduct about discrimination based on sexual orientation (including transgender populations) in the educational environment. The main teachers unions in Ireland have endorsed the joint BeLonG To/ Equality Authority Campaign on Homophobic Bullying in Schools. Additionally, posters and booklets have been distributed to all post primary schools. The main slogan was “Homophobic Bullying is not acceptable in our School”. A flyer to publicise the initiative was also distributed nationwide in venues frequented by young people.

The Guide, *More than a Phase. A resource Guide for the Inclusion of Young, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Learners* Published by Pobal (2006) constitutes a useful resource and a positive experience to address the situation of sexual minorities in Ireland. GLEN in collaboration with BeLonG To Youth Project supported the first significant study on LGBT mental health and well-being in Ireland with scholars from Trinity College and University College Dublin (Mayock et al 2009) Also Gibbons study on LGBT access to health in North-West of Ireland. This study, which is also part of this report, identified risk and resilience factors for LGBT mental health and suicide and also proposed a model of best practice for LGBT mental health promotion in Ireland. Finally, the Equality Authority, as one of the few equality bodies in the EU, produce detailed statistics on discrimination of sexual minorities, including its intersection with other grounds.
A network for Transgender Youth has been created, which addresses the needs of a particularly vulnerable group within the LGBT communities.

**b) Race/ethnic and national minorities**

The Equality Authority supports studies (e.g. the National Action Plan against Racism), workshops, public campaigns, and coordinates diverse initiatives with other public and private institutions. One of these programs is the “Anti-racist Workplace Week”, which stimulates discussion and social dialogue on migration policies and migrants’ rights across Ireland. As discussed above, the cuts in the Authority budget in April 2009 jeopardize the Equality’s ability to fulfil its goals.

Since 2004, the Irish Department of Education and Science has been supporting the Intercultural Education in the Primary School Curriculum, with the aim to develop an intercultural approach to teaching in primary school level. The project trains teachers in the principles of cultural diversity and intercultural education. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform implemented from 2001 to 2003 a national media campaign called “Know Racism”, aimed to raise awareness on racism and xenophobia, and stimulate respect for cultural diversity through advertising, publicity events and other media activities (ECRI 2006; Lynam 2008). An anti-racist emblem pin was created to be worn on International Day Against Racism; a music CD of anti-racist songs; distribution of anti-racism video to all secondary schools in the country; participation in the Anti-Racist Workplace Week (held each November).

The Garda Racial and Intercultural Office was created in 2000 in order to coordinate, monitor and advise on all aspects of policing in the area of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. The project assists victims of hate crimes, raises awareness and liaisons between the police and the increasing ethnic and religious communities in Ireland. The scope of this organisation covers all Ireland and its staff has developed a training video and resource booklets that inform members of the force about cultural diversity in Ireland. They also developed a recording mechanism within the existing Pulse (Police Using Leading Systems Effectively) programme which captures data concerning racially motivated incidents.

The Government has market Holocaust Memorial Day on the Sunday nearest to 27 January each year since 2003. This day serves as reminder of the dangers of racism and to provide lessons from the past that are relevant for Irish society today. Members of the government as well as from civil society participate in this memorial. Additionally, the Crocus Project is intended for pupils aged eleven or twelve years and upwards. The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland provides school with yellow crocus bulbs to plant in autumn. A well-illustrated booklet with key messages is also created each year and some 6,000 copies are distributed in the country.

**8. Diversity in Irish society**

The term “diversity” has become part of the discourse of Government and private institutions as well as in the popular media and social narratives in current Irish society. In addition, “diversity” is understood not only in terms of racial and ethnic
issues but also relates to other grounds of non-discrimination such as sexual orientation, age and disability.

Despite the existence of a National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Ireland, minority groups and their families continue to face structural disadvantages due to an inadequate implementation of the equality policies and practices. In May 2009, four NGOs that represent minority families in Ireland called the Government’s attention in relation to the vulnerability and lack of official recognition of these families’ rights. Representatives from the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI); One Parent Network (OPEN); Marriage Equality, and the Refugee Information Service outlined the inequalities that families from these populations face: from having a greater proportion in poverty, to poorer health outcomes, to discrimination in the labour market and their general marginalisation in Irish society.

Several scholars have showed how the current recession and the sharp fall in employment has reinforced racism and discrimination against immigrant workers and racial minorities in Ireland (Fanning 2007; O’Connell et al 2008). However, not all immigrants in Ireland experience the same situation of discrimination and marginalisation. Immigrant status is not isolated from other factors such as nationality, race and language\(^\text{10}\). The Equality Authority annual reports identify ‘race’ discrimination as “the key factor” in all reported cases, files and this figure is growing (EA 2008a).

Research among the Traveller community have reported the failure of a multicultural approach in relation to these Travellers in Ireland. They continue to be associated with negative stereotypes and the controversy continues either if they represent a distinct ethnic group or are part of the “white Irish group”. For some scholars, this situation shape anti-Traveller policies and the compliance of the Irish society toward the exclusion of Travellers (Fanning 2007). There are also few spaces within which the settled community discusses how to integrate Travellers into Irish society. The current economic crisis increases the negative attitudes towards this population.

In terms of religion, despite the recorded census data that Ireland is predominantly Catholic (90%), there is an increasing number of other religious, particularly among immigrants, and non-religious which also shows the increasing diversity of the country.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 seeks to combat ageism in Irish society. However, there is a lack of a legislative framework to protect older people\(^\text{11}\). The Older & Bolder organisation set out a baseline for the development of a National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) for Ireland (Older and Bolder 2008). This alliance of eight NGOs is seeking government recognition of older people’s rights, as well as those with disabilities, and the implementation of a

\(^{10}\) The 2006 Irish Census disaggregates four main ethnic categories: white (96.5%); black or black Irish (1.1%); Asian or Asian Irish (1.3%); and other including mixed (1.1%) (CSO 2007c). This broad classification makes it difficult to measure internal diversity among ethnic minorities residing in the country. Recent economic recession impacts into the total number of migrants into Ireland: from 109,000 in 2007 to 83,800 in 2008, which represent a fall of over 36% (CSO 2008a)

\(^{11}\) Age related discrimination was the most commonly reported case (25%) among the nine grounds of non-discrimination (Russell et al 2008).
coherent framework that will guide a national strategy that integrates this population to the Irish society.

Just over 4% of people are recorded in the Census as speaking Irish on a daily basis in Ireland outside the official education system (CSO 2007c), which illustrates the minority nature of the Irish language despite Ireland itself being officially recognised as having two official languages (English and Irish).

**a) Dominant opinions and actors in the debate**

The most recent local and European elections during the first week of June 2009 were a platform for LGBT candidates to openly raise issues such as gay marriage and equality for sexual minorities. The vast majority of political parties agreed the need for legislation to establish partnership rights for same-sex couples. The two more important parties Fianna Fail (in power) and Fine Gael (main opposition) supported civil partnership and three parties: Labor, Green and Sinn Fein supported same sex marriage. However, none of these parties were open on their position during the election campaign.

Public opinion towards same-sex unions is increasingly favourable according to national polls. A 2006 public poll showed that more than 80% of the population supported the introduction of some partnership rights for same-sex couples, with a slim majority favouring full marriage. A survey carried out in 2008 showed that 84% of Irish people supported civil marriage or civil partnerships for same-sex couples, with 58% supporting full marriage rights. Those who only support civil partnerships instead of full marriage fell in the same period, from 33% to 26%.

According to a latest national poll, 62% of adults would support to extend civil marriage to same-sex couples in Ireland. The support is strongest among younger people and in urban areas. Women were more supportive at 68% compared to 56% of men. There was slightly less support for same-sex couples being given the right to adopt. A total of 58% of those under 50 believe same-sex couples should be able to adopt, falling to 33% among the over-50s. A total of 54% believe the definition of the family unit in the Irish Constitution should be changed to include same-sex families.

Unlike in New York City where the organisers of the Saint Patrick Day Parade prohibited gay organizations from marching, the Dublin and Cork Saint Patrick parades include sexual minorities as well as transgender populations as part of their active participants. These parades have abroad audiences (over half-million spectators in 2009) who have the opportunity to share these festivities and public spaces with LGBT people and organisations that promote diversity and equality. The

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12 "Increased support for gay marriage. BreakingNews.ie, 31/03/2008. Available at http://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/mhojojeyaud/


14 The New York City Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, an Irish-American who is the city’s most prominent openly gay official, has stayed away from the New York Saints Patrick’s parade since being told she could not wear even a pin, button or sash indicating gay pride.
successful LGBT parades organized every year in the major cities of the country also reflects a positive approach towards LGBT rights.

The economic crisis has also impacted the Irish media which affects the scope of dissemination of topics of non-discrimination and respect for diversity. This situation is particularly relevant in the case of recognized “progressive” newspaper such as The Irish Times, with a turnover of around €130 million and a drop in its advertising revenue of €20 million this year (Irish Times 2009). It is also reflected in the dropping of a community based television programme ‘pobal’ by the national broadcaster RTE due to budgetary constraints.

b) Overview of the literature on diversity in Ireland

A recent report by the Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute revealed strong discrimination against job applicants with non-Irish names. People applying for jobs in Ireland are twice as likely to get an interview (32.5%) if their name is perceived as Irish rather than ‘foreign’ (15.8%). The report said the measured level of prejudice was much higher than international norms, and suggested that many Irish employers “may never have read past the names” (McGinnity et al 2009).

The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) published the report “Diverse Voices: International Students in Irish Higher Education” (ICOS 2007), which gathered information about the lives of 130 students from 30 countries studying at 20 different higher education institutions in Ireland. The forum constitutes a valuable resource for understanding the problems facing non-Irish students integrating into Irish society and dealing with issues of racism and discrimination.

The recently dismantled National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) have been a key actor in developing research activities as well as training general, and targeted populations, on topics of cultural diversity, rights of vulnerable populations and promoting equality in Irish society. The NCCRI has published important toolkits including the following: “Improving Government Services to Minority Ethnic Groups: Key Consideration for Service Providers” (NCCRI 2007b); Community Development Support Unit: An Easy Guide to Funding Supports for NGOs Working with Minority Groups in Ireland” (NCCRI 2007c). Another interesting experience introducing a multicultural approach in the workplace was carried out among health providers to respond to the increasing needs of non-Irish patients (NCCRI 2002). The NCCRI also published significant reports on the diverse ethnic minorities in Ireland, including Traveller communities: “Polish Migrant Workers in Ireland” (NCCRI 2006b); “Chinese Students in Ireland” (NCCRI 2006c); “Changing Ireland” (NCCRI 2006a), among others.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) recently launched the first report on the health and care needs of the LGBT communities in Ireland (HSE 2009). The Report not only shows the health vulnerability of the LGBT populations in Ireland, but more importantly it draws guidelines for hospitals on recognizing the rights of LGBT patients and their partners during their medical treatment. A €100,000 budget had been committed to implementing the report recommendations.
In 2008 the Equality Authority produced a Report on the issues affecting transgendered people. A recent report by the EU-Agency for Fundamental Rights found strong discrimination against transgenders while seeking health care and in the workplace. Additionally, transgendered people are victims of hate crimes and hate speech (FRA 2009). Transgendered individuals experience multiple forms of discrimination not only based on sexual orientation but also because of their gender identities (“transphobia”). There is a lack of legislation protecting this population, as well as a comprehensive health treatment plan, which reinforces transgender people’s vulnerability.

The Equality Authority has published reports on the labour market situation of people with disabilities (Gannon and Nolan 2004), and older people (Russell and Fahey 2004). Based on nationally representative data sources, these reports provide detail analysis of the impact of age and disability on labour market participation, states important recommendations, and places the Irish data in a comparative European context.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) has published important reports on equality policies for LGB populations (NESF 2003a); older people (NESF 2003b); and other studies about creating a more inclusive labour market (NESF 2006). The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is preparing a follow-up report on race and ethnicity from the 2006 national census.

c) National initiatives on equality and diversity

There are several national initiatives intended to create awareness about discrimination and educate the Irish population on issues of equality and cultural diversity.

- Sports associations and City Councils created the initiative “Show Racism the Red Card”, which seeks to integrate sports in combating racism and the promotion of a culturally diverse Ireland\(^\text{15}\).

- The annual project “Anti-racist Workplace Week”, implemented by the Equality Authority, aims to raise national awareness, particularly among employers and employees about the benefits of incorporating equality and cultural diversity in the workplace and the importance of combating discrimination based on race and membership of the Traveller community\(^\text{16}\).

- In 2003, the “European Commission Award for Diversity in the Workplace” created an important precedent for Irish employers. This award promoted measures to combat discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation in Ireland. There was also the “Excellence in gender equality award” won by IBM Ireland\(^\text{17}\).

- Microsoft Ireland has earned the title of Best Workplace in Ireland 2009 due to its inclusive policy and promotion of cultural diversity. Among the 1,200 employees in Microsoft Ireland, 25% come from outside Ireland, from one of the 40 nationalities

\(^\text{15}\) For further information about the campaign, visit \url{http://www.theredcard.ie}.

\(^\text{16}\) The Equality Authority publishes information about these past events and also how to incorporate this approach in the workplace. Available at \url{http://www.equality.ie/index.asp?locID=109&docID=219}.

\(^\text{17}\) \url{http://www.diversityatwork.net/EN/en_awards_ireland_001.htm}.
registered in the company. The Diversity and Inclusion Council, comprising staff
from across the business, was established in 2006 in order to promote diversity and
inclusion through education, events, participation and networking.

- The Civil Service Training and Development Centre (CSTDC), in partnership with
  Government Departments and Offices is responsible for developing a comprehensive
  set of programmes and courses for civil servants whose duties involve engaging with
  people of different nationalities, culture and ethnic origin\(^{18}\).

- The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) publishes an
  online section called “Equality News”, which advocates for equality and non-
discrimination for Irish workers across the nine grounds. SIPTU also publishes the
  pamphlet “The Union Post” that addresses these issues. There are also significant
  training programmes within trade unions on equality. The Irish Congress of Trade
  Unions (ICTU) has also significant equality initiatives.

- The Garda Racial and Intercultural Office, created in 2000, coordinates, monitors
  and advises on all aspects of policing in the area of racial, ethnic and cultural
  diversity.

- An inter-university creative competition *Challenging Stereotypes* for staff and
  students of the seven Universities of Ireland is carried out each year. The aim of this
  competition is to challenge stereotypes in relation to the nine grounds of equality
  legislation (gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, marital status, family status,
  sexual orientation and membership of the traveller community) and to foster a
  positive approach to diversity in the University sector.

- Suas Educational Development Ireland promotes multiculturalism and cultural
  diversity in Ireland. One of its programs, “Building Unity” presents engaging series of
  images of families from across the world entitled ‘1000 Families: A Family Album of
  Planet Earth’. The images challenge stereotypes and promote positive approaches
  towards non-Irish families\(^{19}\).

- The Department of Education and the Southern Education and Library Board
  developed a cross-border program (North and South Ireland) to include diversity and
  Interculturalism in primary schools. The toolkit promotes a positive approach to
  cultural diversity in a “diverse Ireland”.

- The Irish National police launched a nationwide campaign “Be Proud, Be Safe”
  during the middle of Gay Pride Week in 2008 to combat attacks on the gay
  community. The initiative followed a reported rise in violence, including serious
  assaults, directed at members of the gay community, which in itself only represents a
  minor proportion of the real picture and unreported cases. The Garda Racial and
  Intercultural Office has also established Lesbian and Gay Liaison Officers within each
  district and has developed a range of promotional materials aimed at LGBT
  communities. However, some concerns have been placed in the sense that many

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\(^{18}\) The topics covered include the following: *Addressing Racism; Promoting Interculturalism context; Homogenity or Diversity?; Jane Elliott's Powerful Racism Exercise; Blue Eyes Brown Eyes; Prejudice;Understanding Terms; Living and Working in a Diverse Ireland Presentations; Member of a New Community; Member of the Irish Traveller Community; and Discussion Ireland Today.* The CSTDC also offer web-based resources since January 2009. For further information visit: [http://www.training.gov.ie](http://www.training.gov.ie)

\(^{19}\) For further information about the SUAS, visit [http://www.suas.ie/in-ireland.html](http://www.suas.ie/in-ireland.html)
times the Garda LGBT Liaisons are not available for assistance, or lack resources to provide protection to vulnerable groups.

- Some LGBT organizations such as the LGBT Teacher’s Organizations, which are very important for support and visibility of sexual minorities, face serious difficulties because of section 37 “Religious Ethos” exemption in the Equality Legislation which acts as a threat to keep LGBT teachers who work in religious run schools to remain “in the closet” for fear of being fired. There are strong persistent misperceptions and stereotypes about minority populations such as racial and sexual minorities. There is a real need for civil society and other institutions to continue coordinating their efforts and initiatives to challenge these stereotypes, combat discrimination, promote equality and multiculturalism, as well as emphasising the contributions that minority populations make to Irish society.

- Finally, as previously stated, there are already important frameworks in place in terms of equality and diversity in Ireland. The Government and several public and private organisations have been monitoring and responding to combating discrimination. There is a significant development of research and other initiatives on a wide range of issues related to diversity and equality. However, there is still widespread discrimination and disadvantage in Irish society. The protection against discrimination provided by the equality legislation is limited. For example there is a restriction on the level of protection provided within religious institutions – they have the right to protect their ethos which can threaten for example the employment rights of lesbian and gay teachers. Also the Licensed Vintners contested equal status legislation and succeeded in creating a situation in which cases taken predominantly by travellers (against pubs and hotels who had refused service) were transferred to the District Courts rather than the Equality Tribunal. In practice, where cases have been taken to District Court costs are frequently not being awarded to complainant.

Conclusion

The current economic recession and particularly the extent of the Governments cuts to the budgets allocated to institutions working to combat discrimination and promote equality and diversity in Irish society are having a critical negative impact. There is a genuine fear that the important progress on equality and anti-discrimination issues that has occurred over the last decades will be greatly impeded. This economic climate had increased misconceptions and negative attitudes towards immigrants from racial minority groups. The pressure on the Government and its focus on economic issues and other national crises is also likely to push the implementation of progressive policies to protect vulnerable populations in Ireland off the agenda for quite a while.

The term “diversity” has become part of the discourse of Government and private institutions as well as in the popular media in Irish society. “Diversity” is understood not only in terms of racial and ethnic issues but also relates to other grounds of non-discrimination such as sexual orientation, age and disability. However, despite a strong legislative and policy framework and the equality and diversity language that accompanies it, there are persistent misperceptions and stereotypes about minority populations in Ireland. This is especially true in relation to racial and sexual minorities who continue to face significant disadvantage and discrimination.
There are already important frameworks in place in terms of equality and diversity in Ireland. The Government and several public and private organisations have been monitoring and responding to combating discrimination. There is a significant development of research on a wide range of issues related to diversity and equality. However, there is still widespread discrimination and disadvantage in Irish society and there are persistent misperceptions and stereotypes about minority groups especially racial and sexual minorities that need to be challenged.

There are important disparities between the Irish data collected at national level and the data presented in European reports about Ireland on issues of discrimination and equality and it is important to take into account internal and cross-national inconsistencies of the data. Ireland is one of the few countries in the EU in which a national statistical agency, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) produced a report on equality that covers the nine grounds of non-discrimination (CSO 2007a). However, most of the indicators requested for this second report are not available in this report. As for additional indicators it would be useful to include health indicators (i.e. mortality rate, life expectancy, etc); individuals at risk of poverty; rate of employment by equality ground; highest level of educational; knowledge of rights under Irish non-discrimination legislation; level of poverty; level of pay/earnings.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (Government of Ireland 2007a) constitutes the Irish framework to tackle equality, combat discrimination, and promote an inclusive society. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013 (Government of Ireland 2007b), seeks also to combat consistent poverty and social exclusion primarily through the promotion of employment opportunities and combating unemployment. The Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) has a central role co-ordinating the National Reform Programme (NRP), which draws together relevant inputs from various government departments and statutory agencies under a range of different themes. There are no major changes in this legislation since the last report.

The current economic recession and the Governments cuts on the budgets allocated to equality organizations had impacted in the implementation of progressive policies. The Equality Authority, widely regarded as a model of its kind, experienced a dramatic reduction in its budget. The chief executive resigned in protest, so did half the board and many of the staff. Additionally, the chief legal officer has recently resigned due to lack of resources to develop the programmes. The Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) has had finding reduced substantially. Additionally, agencies such as Combat Poverty Agency, the National Consultative Committee of Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) and Crisis Pregnancy Agency had been either merged or dismantled. A significant impact is the loss of the collective expertise of these institutions that have played a pivotal role in the past decades in shaping government policies, promoting equality, and fighting against discrimination in Irish society.

Public demonstrations such as marches, parades and public meetings in favour of LGBT rights are covered by the constitutional and legislative provision. Official barriers to freedom of assembly on the grounds of sexual orientation do not exist in contemporary Ireland (O’Connell 2008). As an example of this environment, Pride Marches have taken place in major cities of Ireland. The last Dublin LGBT parade attracted more than 12,000 people. In its 26th edition, the parade provided the platform for LGBT organizations and individuals to express their disagreement with the Civil Partnership Bill introduced by the government the day before. Many people dressed in a half tux or wedding dress, symbolizing the "half measures" offered in the Bill. Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan, the lesbian couple married under Canadian law in 2003 who are pursuing a High Court claim to have their marriage recognised for Irish law, also marching in the parade. The couple is still waiting the Court final decision. Dublin City Council facilitates LGBT events taking place during June. This year the Dublin’s city’s Quays show again erecting rainbow flags along the River Liffey. There were 75 prominent flags in the hearth of the city celebrating June as the LGBT month of the year.

This report indicates quite a variety in both the experience and perception of discrimination. Awareness on some issues, such as ageism, is high whereas discrimination against, Travellers, for example, hardly seem to register in terms of perception of the general public. This situation can perhaps have two different interpretations. On one hand, it could be argued that it reinforces the “invisibilisation” of some forms of discrimination, particularly for disabled people, sexual minorities, and members of the Travellers communities as Irish public opinion does not include these disadvantaged populations among the groups who are exposed to discrimination and social exclusion in Ireland. On the other hand, it could be argued that this “positive” perception of the Irish population reflects how people think things “should be” in relation to social issues, which in turn represents a potential positive scenario for promoting equality and non-discrimination in Irish society. The latter seems unlikely in view of the actual experience of discrimination by these groups, which is prevalent in practice if not in perception. While there has been much improvement in producing both qualitative and quantitative data in areas such as employment, debt, poverty, and social exclusion at national and EU level, it is important to take into account internal and cross national inconsistencies of the data, particularly small differences in quotations in relation to perception of discrimination and attitudes towards disadvantaged populations.

References


