Migrants and racial minorities in the labour market in Ireland

Vasquez del Aguila, Ernesto
Cantillon, Sara
University College Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

This report analyses the situation of migrant workers and ethnic minorities in Ireland over the post-economic boom period. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, Ireland experienced extraordinary economic growth and this brought with it an unprecedented increase in the migrant population. As a result of the economic crisis, the total number of migrants coming to Ireland has fallen dramatically. However, despite this situation, Ireland is likely to remain a multicultural society and ethnic diversity and immigration have become an important issue in the everyday lives of people living in Ireland. This report demonstrates that not all migrants in Ireland experience the same situation of marginalization and vulnerability. Migrant status is not isolated from other factors such as nationality, race and language. Those most at risk of discrimination are black migrants and those from non-English speaking countries. There is evidence that the current recession and the sharp fall in employment has created racial tensions and reinforced racism and discrimination against migrants. Racial/ethnic minorities constitute the main group reporting discrimination in Ireland. Non-Irish nationals are more than twice as likely as Irish nationals to report discrimination in the work place and when looking for work.

Key words
Ireland, discrimination, migrants, labour market, Travellers, racial and ethnic minorities, racism

Corresponding authors:
E. Vasquez del Aguila: ev2035@caa.columbia.edu and S. Cantillon: sara.cantillon@ucd.ie
Social Justice Series, 2010, 10(7): 126-148
UCD School of Social Justice, University College Dublin, Ireland
www.ucd.ie/socialjustice
Introduction

Since the period of the Famine, 1845-1847 Ireland has generally been a country of net emigration rather than immigration. Over the period of the economic boom, from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000’s Ireland experienced a sharp reversal in this trend and there followed unprecedented growth in its migrant population. Irish emigrants returned home in great numbers, potential emigrants were deterred from leaving by the prospects of employment and high standards of living, and Ireland became a destination for economic migrants from other countries including Eastern Europe, North Africa and Asia, especially the Philippines as well as from the UK (McGinnity et al. 2006). There was also an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers coming to Ireland in this period. Between 2002-2006 immigration growth doubled from 5 to 10%. UK nationals represented the largest group (112,000), followed by Poland (63,200), Lithuania (24,600), Nigeria (16,300) and Latvia (13,300) (CSO 2008b).

As a result of economic recession, the total number of migrants coming into Ireland has fallen from 109,000 in 2007 to 83,800 in 2008 and 57,300 in 2009, which represents a return to net outward migration (-7,800) for the first time since 1995 (CSO 2009). This decline is particularly high among migrants from the EU12 countries (30,100) followed by Irish Nationals (18,400). Even though Irish people are among the least willing in Europe to move country to find work (36% in contrast with 66% in France, Sweden and Cyprus), more people are leaving Ireland than anywhere else in the European Union. The rate of departures from Ireland in 2009 was almost twice as high as the country with the second-highest exit rate, Lithuania, which lost 4.6 people per thousand. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) estimates that 120,000 will leave Ireland by the end of 2011.

This reverse is also evident among asylum seekers. The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) estimates a reduction of 30% in applications in 2009 compared to 2008, which constitutes the lowest annual number of applications since 1997. The fall in applications for 2009 is interesting to note given that in many other EU Member States there was an increase in application numbers in 2009 (ORAC 2009). Despite this outward migration, Ireland’s population has increased due to its high birth rate (10.2 per thousand) and low death rate (6.6 per thousand). These combined effects resulted in a population increase of 37,300 (+0.8%) bringing the population estimate to 4.46 million in April 2009 (CSO 2009).

The Equality & Rights Alliance considers that the Irish Government’s cuts on budget to bodies that promote equality, defend human rights and address discrimination were a deliberate attempt to undermine the effectiveness and independence of important watchdog bodies (ERA 2010).

1. Discrimination, migration, race, and ethnicity

Not all migrants in Ireland experience the same situation of marginalization and vulnerability. Migrant status is not isolated from other factors such us nationality,

1 Available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/
race and language. A recent report on Migrants in the Irish labour market indicates that migrants from English speaking countries do not differ from Irish nationals in terms of risk of unemployment. The ones most at risk of discrimination are black migrants and from non-English speaking countries. Earlier reports on ethnic and national minorities (Black and other South/Central African; North African; Asian; and East European backgrounds) showed internal diversity among these populations, and revealed that migrants with a black background are the ones who experienced more discrimination than other minorities such as Asians and East Europeans (O'Connell and McGinnity 2008).

**Definition of 'migrants' and 'ethnic minorities'**

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) uses the term “Non-Irish Nationals” to refer to the “immigrant population who resides in Ireland”. In the 2006 Census, the CSO identifies as Non-Irish Nationals based on these individuals responses to the question “what is your nationality?” (CSO 2008a). The Government through the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) uses the term “immigrants” to refer to the migrant population. The INIS also uses the terms “irregular” and “undocumented migrant workers” to generally refer to non-EU/EEA nationals whose residency status in Ireland has expired, or who are working without permission. Most NGOs use the term “migrant” and among the media they use the terms “immigrants” and “migrants” exchangeably.

The Quarterly National Household Survey will include a module in Equality issues in the fourth quarter of 2010. This module will update the data collected in 2004. The QNHS survey includes questions on discrimination among the nine groups covered by Irish legislation. Race/ethnicity and migrant status are included under the category of “race/skin colour/ethnic group/nationality”. The survey also includes a question on ethnic group with for main categories: 1) “White”, disaggregated in three subcategories “Irish”, “Irish Traveller”, and “Any other white background”; 2) “Black or Black Irish”, disaggregated in “African” and “any other black background”; 3) “Asian or Asian Irish”, disaggregated in “Chinese”, and “Any other Asian background”; and 4) “Other, including mixed background”. As per the previous QNHS survey, Travellers are included within the “white” category.

Drawing upon the discussion on the differences between race and ethnicity by de Schuter (2009), we consider ‘race’ to refer to situation where persons are discriminated against based on physical features such as the colour of their skin. The term ‘ethnicity’ on the other hand, refers to membership of a group that has certain shared common characteristics, such as language, a shared history or tradition, and a common descent or geographical origin (De Schutter 2009). In the Irish context, this differentiation is relevant to illustrate the case of racial and ethnic minorities with migrant background and ethnic minorities without migrant background.
The CSO report on Non Irish Nationals living in Ireland categorizes four main groups: 1) The United Kingdom constitutes the largest non-Irish group. They were over 112,000 UK nationals living in Ireland with large numbers residing in Ireland since the 1970s and 1980s. 2) The majority of EU 15 (excluding Ireland and UK) migrants arrived during the period of 2001-2006, but a substantial number had been in Ireland since the 1990s.

Migrants from EU15 to EU25 Accession States represented the largest growth between 2002 and 2006, as a consequence of the accession of these states to the EU in 2004. Over 44% of the citizens of these countries arrived in Ireland in 2005 or later. 4) The remaining migrants come from rest of the world and comprise a varied group, but mainly migrants from the USA, Africa and Asia (CSO 2008a).

The demographic profile of the non-Irish population is strikingly different from the Irish nationals. The non-Irish were dominated by people in their twenties and thirties with significantly more men than women. In terms of their economic profile, the participation rate of non-Irish in the labour force is higher, with fewer students, homemakers or retirees. There are marked differences within different nationality groups. Nationals from the accession states are predominantly workers while there is a higher percentage of students among those from outside Europe. There were few children and older people among the non-Irish population (CSO 2008a).

It is difficult to estimate the numbers of undocumented migrant workers in Ireland. The Central Statistics Office, based on data from the Department of Justice and Law reform, estimated 30,000 undocumented people living in Ireland by 2009 (0.67% of the total population) (MRCI 2010d). The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland reveals that in a sample of 378 people, 171 had become undocumented as a result of some form of workplace exploitation. All migrants of the sample had reported that they accessed Ireland on a work permit and upon becoming undocumented migrant workers, they find themselves in increasingly vulnerable situations. The process of regularisation of undocumented migrants, by which States allow these migrants the opportunity to legalise their migration status, provides a supportive framework and prevents these workers from labour exploitation.

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 2002; 2007). In 2006, an ethnicity question appeared for the first time on the Irish Census disaggregated within 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.

The terms ‘nationality’, ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are not easy to define. In this report we define ‘nationality’ as the link between a State and an individual whom that State recognises as its citizen or ‘national’ (national origin in contrast refers to the country of origin). The concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ tend to be blurred due to the recognition that both are social or cultural constructs that may not correspond to an objective “reality” independent from either self-identification or labelling by external “observers” (De Schutter 2009). In this sense, these terms should be understood
taking into account structural and social cultural aspects. In this report, we consider “race” “ethnicity” and “nationality” as key issues that shape the everyday life of men and women and in Ireland, and create hierarchies of individuals where some are in disadvantage and vulnerable positions.

**An overview of the main discrimination issues and groups**

In terms of perceived discrimination, some grounds of discrimination are seen as growing in the past five years in Irish society. These groups include discrimination based on disability; religion; gender; and age. Interestingly, sexual orientation (54%) and ethnic origin (53%) are considered less prevalent forms of discrimination as compared to 2003 (EC 2008a). This apparent “positive” situation of ethnic minorities in Ireland contrast with the experiences of individuals who report being discriminated against due to their ethnic and racial background.

In terms of reported discrimination, the Equality Authority registered racial/ethnic minorities as the main group reporting discrimination. The unemployed is the next highest group showing reported discrimination (29%); followed by lone parents (23%); and people with disabilities (20%) (Russell et all 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 migrants 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).

Ireland is a predominantly Catholic country with almost 90% 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 2008a). Pentecostalism is developing a new base in Ireland with followers from African and Caribbean backgrounds gathering 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 defined themselves Catholics; and 97% of Pakistani Muslims (CSO 2008a).

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) and National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) published a study about the lives of sixteen Muslim women in Ireland, from both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The testimonies of these women illustrate their experiences of discrimination with different groups of Irish people due to their Muslim religion and the fact that their wear the hijab, which transform them into a “visible minority” (NWCI 2010).

The Garda Racial and Intercultural Office coordinates, monitors and advises on all aspects of policing in the area of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. The project assists victims of hate crimes, raises awareness and liaises between the police and the increasingly diverse 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 Garda force (police force) about cultural diversity in Ireland. They also have developed a recording mechanism within
the existing PULSE (Police Using Leading Systems Effectively) programme which captures data concerning racially motivated incidents. The Garda implementation plan 2009-2012 seeks to build partnership and mutual trust with diverse communities, including ethnic minority populations.

**Ethnic minorities with migrant background**

In the first large-scale nationally representative sample of migrant’s experience of racism and discrimination among recent migrants in Ireland, McGinnity and colleagues show the intersections of race, nationality and migrant status. Migrants who belong to ethnic minorities experience more discrimination than their white compatriots. For instance, black South/Central Africans experience the most discrimination of all the groups surveyed (McGinnity et al. 2006).

In terms of integration into Irish society, migrants are more likely to socialize with people from their own country of origin and are less likely to socialize with other ethnic or national groups. Additionally, rates of socialisation with Irish people are highest among white Africans, and this group showed the lowest rates of socialisation with people from their own country or other ethnic or national minority groups.

Even though Irish respondents perceive discrimination based on ethnic origin in lower percentages (52%) than its EU neighbours (62%), Irish people consider that such discrimination has become a more widespread phenomenon in the last five 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 2008a).

**Ethnic minorities without migrant background**

Travellers constitute the most important ethnic minority without a migrant background in Ireland. The ethnicity of the Traveller population has been challenged by different institutions, and the debate continues whether or not this nomadic group constitute an “ethnic” group or not. The status of the Traveller community as a minority group vulnerable to discrimination is recognised by law by their inclusion under equality legislation as a specific ground.

An early report by the Equality Authority provides a general overview of the main academic literature on Traveller ethnicity, from public policy literature to academic frameworks. The report examines the controversies around Travellers constituting a distinct ethnic group from the rest of Irish society (EA 2006). Most of the questions and controversies raised by this report are still unresolved in Irish legislation.

In a recent report on attitudes and prejudices of the Irish people towards Travellers, entitled *Emancipation of the Travelling People: A Report on the Attitudes and Prejudices of the Irish People towards the Travellers*, Mac Greil traces the trends of public attitudes over a period of 35 years. The study shows how almost

---

3 This report on is based on a national social survey (sample of 1,015) of adults in the Republic of Ireland between November 2007 and March 2008. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) was commissioned to carry out the fieldwork. The questionnaire replicated questions from two
40% of respondents would welcome a member of the Travelling Community into the family through kinship; 18.2% per cent would deny Travellers citizenship, including 9.3% who would "debar or deport" Travellers. Even though the report shows some positive changes since 1972-1973, there is evidence of strong prejudice against Travellers. For instance 79.4% “would be reluctant to buy a house next door to a Traveller” (Mac Gréil 2010). These findings illustrate the negative perception of travellers in Irish society and the need to develop comprehensive measures that tackles structural factors as well as attitudes towards Travellers. There are no other “indigenous” populations that can be considered minorities in terms of race or ethnicity. In terms of language, there is no racial or ethnic difference between English speakers and Irish speakers in Ireland.

Comparison discrimination factors and experiences of different groups

There is evidence that the current recession and the sharp fall in employment has created racial tensions and reinforced racism and discrimination against migrant workers (Cross and Turner 2007; Fanning 2007; OConnell and McGinnity 2008). Consistent with this data, a national poll conducted by the Irish Times in 2008 found that almost 60% of men feel there are “far too many migrants coming into the country”. This perception is particularly high among older men in their 50s and 60s. 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 (IT 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.

In terms of asylum seekers, the reception and Integration Agency statistics shows that in November 2009, 6,650 asylum seekers were in direct provision accommodation with 1,597 (24%) having been there for one to two years, 1,276 (19%) for two to three years and 2,161 (32.5%) for over three years. Therefore, over 75% had spent more than a year in direct provision accommodation (RIA 2009). These hostels type accommodation are overcrowded. Since November 1999 and the introduction of the ‘Direct Provision’ policy, adult asylum seekers receive food and a small cash payment of €19.10 per adult or €9.60 per child each week. Asylum-seekers are not allowed to work (only recognized refugees are allowed to take up employment), which reinforces their economic disadvantages and vulnerabilities. According to the Irish Council of Civil Liberties, in 2009, Irish authorities dealt with 4,790 applications for asylum and granted it to 1,465 people, which constitutes about one-third. Applicants from Nigeria constituted the largest group (21%), followed by Pakistan (10%), China (7%), DR Congo (4%) and Zimbabwe (3%). Single male conform the largest group among the applicants (62.48%) followed by single women (21.17%) (RIA 2009).

major surveys carried out by the author in 1972-1973 (of Greater Dublin) and 1988-1989 (of the Republic of Ireland), which covers 35 years of analysing Irish attitudes towards Travellers.

4 A very comprehensive report about the health of Travellers living on the island of Ireland, North and South entitled ‘All Ireland. Traveller Health Study. Our Geels’, the authors compile information based on quantitative and qualitative research methods (Keheller et al 2010). The report constitutes a fundamental piece in analysing the implications of social exclusion and structural barriers that impact on the health and wellbeing of Travellers in Ireland.

5 Even though almost 1.7 million people aged 3 years and over defined themselves as being able to speak Irish in 2006, just 3.3% spoke Irish on a daily basis outside the official education system (CSO 2007)
In an early report in 2007, AkiDwa, the national network of migrant women living in Ireland, examined the experience of Black African migrant women in accessing and participating in the labour market in Ireland. The report was based on literature review, surveys, focus groups and individual interviews. The report found that 70% of the women who participated in the survey were unemployed. The main barriers in accessing employment were lack of recognition of their qualifications, lack of work experience in Ireland, lack of childcare, lack of Irish references, multiple discrimination on the grounds of race, gender and religion, and poor interview skills. 70% of the women experienced barriers to accessing employment, and of those employed, 57% indicated their jobs did not match their skills (Hegarty 2007).

In 2010, AdkiDwa published a report on the experiences of women seeking asylum in Ireland. The report is based on the experiences of 121 women living in direct provision accommodation centres across the country. The report addresses the complexities of gender inequality within the direct provision accommodation system within the Irish state, and shows the challenges that these women and their children face living in this vulnerable stage of their migratory process, such as experiences of racism when attempting to access services and incidents of racism towards black African women. Some women also reported that stress, poor living conditions and poverty were possible contributors to the domestic violence they were struggling with (AkiDwa 2010).

On the numbers of foreign residents granted naturalisation (citizenship) by the Member States of the EU, Ireland has the second lowest rate of acquisition of citizenship in the EU after the Czech Republic. The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) have expressed concern about the ground for refusal of applications and the lack of transparency around Ireland’s naturalisation process.

According to the Eurobarometer report, personal experience of discrimination is a key factor that impacts 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 Ireland (EC 2008a). Racism intersects with multiple forms of discrimination such as socio-economic status, gender or age. In this sense, individuals who belong to more than one minority group (e.g. migrant women) are more likely to experience discrimination and social exclusion. It is important also to recognise diversity within ethnic minority groups and take into account other grounds (e.g. sexual orientation, age, etc) that shape these individuals’ experiences.

---

2. Employment situation of ethnic minorities with/without migrant background

Ethnic background appears to have a significant impact on employment in Ireland. Among those ethnic minorities with migrant background, the level of employment is lower than white residents, despite their generally high levels of education. Members of the Traveller community constitute the most disadvantaged group in the labour market among minorities in Ireland.

Quinn and Curran (2009) produced a comprehensive report on the impact of the Racial Equality Directive on Irish trade unions and employers. The authors state that all institutions consulted were aware about the inclusion of race/ethnicity discrimination within the nine grounds of discrimination covered by Irish legislation. In some cases, the interviewees were aware about the increased importance of race on the labour market due to the increased number of migrant workers, rather than the law per se (Quinn and Curran 2009). There are a number of policies and measures regarding the rights of migrant workers that employers have implemented in Ireland. The Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) produced guidelines for addressing discrimination and promoting a culture of integration in the workplace. IBEC also has a Diversity Working Group where members can discuss issues related to migrant workers (Quinn and Curran 2009).

The Trinity Immigration initiative recently published a three-year research project found that despite the current economic crisis, many migrants who arrived to the country for economic reasons develop social networks and friendships that persuade them to stay. For instance, Polish migrants develop a strategy of “deliberate indeterminacy”, which means that they “decide not to decide” on the basis that opportunities in the Irish labour market might emerge which they do not yet anticipate. The report highlights the difficulties that second generation migrants will face integrating to Irish society, including the labour market. The report also shows how children of migrants experience racism and bullying across all age ranges in Irish schools (TII 2010).

Language barriers are often an issue among migrant workers and their families. Several studies and institutions such as the Immigration Council of Ireland have addressed the lack of resources and inadequacy of the services provided. There are some initiatives to provide English language training to non-English speaker employers and in some cases is open to employees’ families. The Equality Authority guidelines are available in twelve languages besides English and Gaelic: Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, French, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and Spanish7. Also the guide to social welfare services is available in a number of languages.

A report on the experience of migrants with ethnic and racial minority background shows how migrants from non-English speaking countries face more difficulties and discrimination than Irish nationals in the labour market. Among migrants from non-English speaking countries, those of Black ethnicity were nine times more likely than Irish nationals to be unemployed, while those of White, Asian and Other ethnic backgrounds were two to three times more likely to be unemployed.

---

7 For full versions of these guidelines, see www.equality.ie/index.asp
than Irish nationals (O’Connell and McGinnity 2008). The report also found that overall migrants from non-English speaking countries suffer labour market disadvantage in terms of wages and of access to the most privileged jobs in the occupational structure. In its 2009 annual report, the Equality Authority registered 318 case-files processed under the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2008. Of these, race related cases represented 17% of the total cases (EA 2010).

**Ethnic minorities with migrant background**

In general, migrants to Ireland are highly educated. The most highly educated group are “East Europeans”, 71% of whom have attended tertiary education (McGinnity et al. 2006). This data is consistent with the CSO Census of Population by which Black/Black Irish and Asian/Asian Irish have better education on average than White Irish. Among those with Black background, 52% aged 25 and over had third level education; and among those with Asian background, this figure rose to 65%, compared to 30% among White individuals (CSO 2007). Several studies have reported how despite the fact that migrants in Ireland are highly educated in relation to the native population, their occupational distribution does not reflect their educational achievements (Barret et al. 2005; McGinnity et al. 2006). This situation is particularly relevant for migrants with Black or Asian background. 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 2007).

In a report commissioned by Cairde, Sanders and Whyte interviewed 101 ethnic minority community members in Dublin North Inner City about their health and related needs. Among the respondents, 55% considered their migrant status to be a barrier in accessing suitable employment. Nearly three quarters (70%) are not active in the labour market. Thirty percent are in employment; 30% are unemployed; 22% were not entitled to work because they were either undocumented or asylum seekers. A closer look of those who were active in the labour market, nearly two thirds (66%) were working in low paid, insecure jobs, often with irregular hours. The report also found high levels of education among this ethnic minority group of migrants. However, this was not reflected in type of paid employment among respondents. These men and women had more qualified jobs in their country of origin than in Ireland where they were working mostly in unqualified positions (Sanders et al. 2006).

In a recent study on the impact of the current economic crisis on the migrant’s situation in the labour market, the authors find dramatic job losses among migrants with an annual rate of job loss of close to 20% compared to 7% for Irish nationals in 2009 (Barret and Kelly 2010).

**Ethnic minorities without migrant background**

The Irish Traveller community accounts for around 0.5% of the total population. The Irish Traveller community is predominantly young, 24% are under 14 years (twice the national composite figure); and 45% are between 25-44 years, compared to under a third of the total population (CSO 2007). Travellers are one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Irish society and 40% of Irish people.
report feeling uncomfortable with Traveller people which is well above the EU27 average of 24% (EC 2008a). However, the Irish population refuses to recognize Travellers’ marginalization with 0.6% of Irish population thinking that Travellers experience discrimination despite clear evidence to the contrary (CSO 2007). 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 (Helleiner 2000; Mac Gréil 2010; NCCRI 2007). Traveller women tend to be 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).

According to the 2006 Census Report, among individuals aged 15 and over, only 14% of Irish Travellers were employed, which represent the highest rate of unemployment when compared with the national population (CSO 2007). Gender is also a key factor in understanding the labour situation of the Traveller community in Ireland. Only 12.1% of female Travellers aged 15 and over were employed compared to 20% among their male counterparts. Several scholars have demonstrated that those leaving school without qualifications experience the highest levels of unemployment and the lowest levels of employment (Barry 2010). Only 15% of Irish Travellers, aged 25-44, had secondary level education compared to the national average of 49%. This situation is more dramatic in third level education, where less than one percent of Irish Travellers accessed this level, compared to the national average of 31% (CSO 2007). In the report by Mac Greil previously mentioned, the author estimates that the unemployment rate in the Travelling community is 63.8%. Only 25.1% of the 7,200 strong workforce of Irish Travellers are in gainful employment while a further 11.1% are seeking their first job (Mac Greil 2010). These figures evidence the exclusion of travellers from the Irish labour market.

The same report shows some positive responses regarding employing a member of the traveller community: 59.1 of respondents agree with the statement "I would be willing to employ a Traveller." According to the author, one of the most encouraging findings is in relation to the competence of a Traveller to be a member of a jury: 73.2% of respondents would "consider a Traveller competent to serve on a jury.

According to the author, it is necessary to implement comprehensive measures in order to capitalize some of these positive attitudes towards Travellers. Some of the key recommendations of this report are: the removal of the culture of poverty and deprivation; the recognition of the Travelling Community as a unique ethnic group within Irish society; and the need of a comprehensive statutory commission to review public policy in relation to the emancipation of the Travelling People (Mac Greil 2010).

3. Access to employment

Discrimination in the workplace operates at a number of different levels: in training and promotion, in unfair selection for redundancy and dismissal, and in harassment. Several studies have reported how migrant workers in Ireland have been hindered from accessing employment because of racism. Migrant workers from outside the EU require permission to work in Ireland. A work permit is normally issued for two years and can be renewed for three years. The employer must show that there are no Irish or EU candidates available to fill that job position. A Green Card is a type of
work permit issued for selected professional areas and for jobs with a salary of €60,000 and over. It is valid for two years (MRC 2007).

According to a report by the OECD, the primary responsibility for job matching and placement in Ireland lies with FÁS Employment Services (FÁS-ES). Employment job assistance and placement’ services are provided by the ‘Local Employment Service’; facilitators within the Department of Social and Family Affairs (who implement an “Activation Programme”); and the ‘Services to the Unemployed’ (Grubb et al. 2009). This report about Activation Programmes analyses the current situation in Ireland in terms of client activation, job-search assistance, career guidance and employer outreach for minority groups, including ethnic and racial minorities.

The Equality Authority8 together with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) published two guidelines on Equality and Diversity in Enterprise. The Guidelines on Equality and Diversity Training in Enterprise (EA et al. 2003) and the Guidelines for Employment Equality Policies in Enterprise (EA at al. 2005), which constitute the Irish National Framework Committee for the development of equality policies at the level of enterprise. The first report provides practical guidance on ensuring the promotion of equality and diversity training in the workplace. Both reports target employers, employees, trade unions and employer organizations in order to build a comprehensive approach addressing equality and diversity training. The reports recommend paying proper attention to the training process (e.g., topics of training, methods, trainers, etc) in order to ensure that equality, non-discrimination and diversity guidelines are fully implemented.

According to DETE statistics in 2009, there were approximately 30,000 non-EEA migrant workers holding employment permits in Ireland. Approximately one out of three of these permits were held by those in the catering sector. Other important sectors are medical, nursing, agriculture and industry. Between 2006 and 2009, MRCI assisted over 250 exploited migrant workers in lodging formal complaints and in achieving settlements and awards of €1.3 million for unpaid wages and other gross violation of their employment rights. Approximately 80% of MRCI’s exploitation cases involved migrant workers holding employment permits. Due to Irish legislation on work permits, the holder of an employment permit is only allowed to work for the employer and in the employment stated on the permit. Research published by the MRCI involving domestic workers (MRCI 2004); agricultural workers (MRCI 2006); and restaurant workers (MRCI 2008), all identify that binding a worker to one employer under the current employment permits system is leading factor in the exploitation and vulnerability of migrant workers. Additionally, migrants’ are reluctant to report exploitation to the official authorities due to the fear of deportation (MRCI 2010a).

Migrant workers employed as restaurant workers have been the largest group reporting workplace exploitation to the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI). In 2007, the MRCI initiated the ‘Restaurant Workers Action Group’ to begin to bring migrant workers employed in restaurants together to work for their rights. This

---

8The Equality Authority coordinated the Anti-Racist Workplace Week, a social partnership initiative that run from 2000 to 2007. It was designed to create workplaces free of racism. The campaign stimulated discussion and social dialogue on migration policies and migrants’ lives.
group later conducted an extensive survey with 115 migrant workers employed in restaurants in Ireland. The results of the study showed that among these group, 53% earned below the minimum hourly wage; 45% worked 9 or more hours per day; 44% did not get rest breaks; 85% did not receive extra pay for Sunday work; 85% did not receive overtime pay; 48% did not receive bank holiday pay; 34% did not receive their annual leave entitlements; 51% did not receive a pay slip; 84% did not receive a contract or terms of employment; 89% stated that their employment rights are not displayed at work (MRCI 2008).

Forced labour is a matter of concern in Ireland due to the lack of legislation in this regard. Many cases of forced workers do not fit under the current trafficking legislation and their cases are not entitled to any State protection and exploitative employers cannot be prosecuted.

According to MRCI the limitations of the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 includes: 1) It is Restrictive, only criminalises trafficking; 2) it is vague and restrictive in how trafficking is defined; 3) fails to name the elements involved in forced labour; 4) does not define exploitation, and 5) there are limited protections for people who have experienced trafficking for forced labour (MRCI 2010).

The Immigration Council of Ireland conducted a research between January 2007 and September 2008 with 102 women who were trafficked into and through Ireland for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The report revealed a highly lucrative sex industry contrasting with the situation of the women trafficked. The research found that 11% of the 102 women were children at the time they were trafficked to Ireland. Due to the clandestine nature of trafficking, the report addresses the lack of information about the real situation of these women, since the study could only have access to women who were in indoor prostitution. The vast majority of women trafficked were from African countries. None of the 102 women knew that they were specifically being recruited for the sex industry (ICI 2009).

Ethnic minorities with migrant background

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. However, policies such as the dismantling of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) has had very negative impact on the protection of migrant workers rights.

Amnesty International Ireland commissioned the Irish Centre for Human Rights to conduct a research about racism at the level of the State and its institutions. The authors interviewed representative from the Government, NGOs and members of minority ethnic communities. In terms of migrants’ experiences dealing with the labour market in Ireland, respondents addressed that finding employment in Ireland
might not be the most important issue for them, but instead, finding a job that matches their qualifications attained in other countries. Participants reported experiencing discrimination in access to employment due to “their visible ethnicity”. Knowing where to access information and advice on employment and jobs was another issue for many participants. They felt that there was a lack of guidance and support and this made it more problematic to access employment (Beirne and Jaichand 2006).

Migrants are less likely to receive training from employers than Irish nationals. A study that uses data from a large scale survey of employees in Ireland, confirmed the migrant training disadvantage in Ireland. The authors consider that this situation is in part because of the inability of migrants to get employed by training-oriented firms. However, the authors also find that this training disadvantage of migrant workers persists even when compared with Irish nationals working in firms where less training is provided (Barret et al. 2009).

**Ethnic minorities without migrant background**

The Equality Authority commissioned a report on positive initiatives and outcomes for Traveller employment in Ireland. The report examines ten cases and approaches to employment creation in the Traveller community. The ten initiatives are: 1) South Dublin Country Council Pilot Traveller Training and Employment Initiative- (Outdoor Duties; 2) South Dublin County Council’s Pilot Traveller Training and Employment Initiative-Clerical/Administrative Duties; 3) Pavey Point’s Primary Health Care for Travellers Project; 4) Travellers’ Work Experience Programme in the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources; 5) Shuttle Knit Limited. A traveller Enterprise; 6) Donegal Travellers Project’s Creche and Childcare Centre; 7) Traveller Youth Worker in Let’s Stay Programme; 8) Legal Education for All Project; 9) Waste Disposal Business Supported by the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme; and 10) Traveller Support Worker Pilot Project, Ennis, Co. Clare (Peelo et al. 2008).

Travellers in Ireland were traditionally found within seasonal farm labour, door-to-door sales, recycling and tinsmithing. More recently, Travellers are employed in a variety of activities, including market trading, scrap collecting, and antiques dealing. A small number of Travellers have their own businesses, such as shops and garages. Other Travellers are employed in community enterprises established by Traveller groups, or with voluntary organisations, and training centres. However, some Traveller families have become deskillled and are dependent on social welfare for survival.

A common response to Travellers exclusion from the Irish labour market is that they “do not apply to jobs”. The Equality Authority report entitled *Travellers experiences of Labour Market Programmes* tackles some of these perceptions. Based on focus groups, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews among members of the Traveller community as well as interviews with employers and providers of programmes for Travellers, this report shows how in most cases there is an “unintentional, indirect exclusion” by private and public organizations. In many cases, most of these programmes provided for Travellers are perceived by male Travellers as only targeted to female audience. There are also misconceptions and stereotypes related to the Traveller community that directly impacts on their
incorporation into the labour market. There is also association of travellers with trading work due to the assumption that they were not interested in manual work (Pearn Kandola 2003).

The report also highlights the lack of acceptance of the Traveller culture, which has taken many forms in the past within programmes including stereotypes about Travellers as a group, lack of recognition of Traveller skills and a failure to treat Travellers with dignity and respect. The lack of acknowledgement of the Traveller culture in the planning and delivery of labour market programmes is reflected through the process from issues such as access to jobs, recruitment procedures, selection criteria and achieving outcomes. The importance of employing Travellers in training positions would provide “role models” for other Travellers. Several organizations have suggested that employers should ensure that Travellers hold posts as trainers or teachers and create the post of assistant teacher. These positive role models will attract and sustain the participation of Travellers in labour market programmes (Pearn Kandola 2003).

There is also a lack of provision of additional support for Travellers during labour market programmes. There are three areas where the need for additional support for Travellers is needed: 1) Flexible training provision, including bridging courses for Travellers with negative experiences of formal education, the gradual build-up of the formality of training, flexible hours and the provision of a comfortable training environment; 2) Childcare support, accommodating childcare support to women’s preferences; and 3) Financial assurances in regard to the impact of programme participation on their financial situation, in particular to any financial incentives and the effect of participation on social welfare benefits and medical care eligibility.

The report by the Irish Centre of Human Rights questioned the Government about the over representation of Travellers among the unemployed despite the existence of programmes that aim to improve access to the labour market for people from minority ethnic groups, these officials considered the lack of success to the low retention rates of Travellers in formal education. However, the Irish Traveller Movement considered this to the low impact of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment’s targeted employment programmes (Beirne and Jaichand 2006).

From this perspective, when designing labour market programmes, it is pivotal that providers examine the needs of the Traveller community as a group, but also their individual needs. Although travellers have a group identity, that is, “Traveller”, they also have an individual identity that has to be taken into account. A thorough needs analysis at group and individual levels is required in order to assist Travellers to set their career goals and to make plans to achieve them.

4. Discrimination in employment

In Ireland, discrimination in employment, recruitment and in the provision of services is covered by employment equality and equal status legislation9. In its

---

coverage of a wide range of grounds of discrimination, and of access and provision of services, Ireland’s equality legislation is quite advanced within the EU context. The Equality Authority supports studies workshops, public campaigns and coordinates diverse initiatives with other public and private institutions. There is an integrated workplace strategy underway between Congress, IBEC and the EA which aims to support employers and unions on inter cultural issues and for integration in the workplace.

In the largest EU’s 27 Member States-wide survey on minorities’ experiences of discrimination, racist victimisation and policing conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, discrimination in employment is the most significant area for discriminatory treatment among the nine grounds covered in the survey. The report calls attention about the pivotal role that paid employment and education play in terms of integration and social inclusion, areas in which most respondents express their vulnerability. An alarming outcome of this situation is that the overwhelming majority of respondents did not report their experiences of discrimination to an organisation or at the place where it occurred, which means that most cases of discrimination and racist crime remain invisible (FRA 2009). The report shows how Ireland is among the top five countries in the EU in terms of racial discrimination and abuse for ethnic minorities, particularly towards respondents with black background: 73% of respondents from Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 25% among respondents from Central and Eastern Europe.

The Minister of State for Equality, Integration and Human Rights announced the establishment of a Ministerial Council on Integration for migrants. The initiative seeks to incorporate migrants into the “official” Ireland through direct communications with the Minister’s office. The Council will be open to “all immigrants regardless their affiliation of NGO or other institutions”, and will be held two to three times a year in each of the four regions of the country. The Council is only open to migrants who are legally resident in Ireland for two or more years, or who have acquired Irish citizenship, however. Applicants for asylum or subsidiary protection will not be eligible to apply.

According to MRCI, Irish workforce is composed of approximately 15% non-Irish nationals and the CSO estimated that there are 188 different nationalities in Ireland (CSO 2008a).

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


10 For more information see Office of the Minister of State for Integration. Available at: www.integration.ie

11 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/
and labour standards. This initiative is particularly important to protect the rights of disadvantaged groups such as migrants or disabled people.

**Ethnic minorities with migrant background**

Race constitutes the third (15%) form of perceived discrimination among the Irish population (CSO 2007). An experimental research project to measure discrimination in recruitment in the Irish labour force was commissioned by the Equality Authority and ESRI and compared employers’ responses to job applications from candidates who were identical on all relevant characteristics other than their ethnic or national origin. The report indicated that people applying for jobs in Ireland are twice as likely to get an interview (33%) if their name is perceived as Irish rather than ‘foreign’ (16%), even though both groups submitted equivalent curriculum vitae (McGinity et al. 2009). These figures suggest substantial racial and ethnic discrimination in the Irish labour market.

The extent of racial and ethnic discrimination across migrants can also be seen ‘within employment’ contexts. For example, the difference in relation to managerial positions with only 5% of Nigerians are employers or managers compared to 18% of UK nationals (CSO 2008).

**Ethnic minorities without migrant background**

Discrimination in the labour market is a substantial barrier to Traveller progression. The Equality Authority recommends the development of links with private and public sectors employers to create job opportunities for traveller progression, particularly in the areas of health, education and training (Pearn Kandola 2003). Social exclusion and “institutional” racism are still limiting Travellers’ access to employment. As Pavee Point states, this institutional discrimination excludes Travellers from key aspects of Irish society, including the educational system, which makes little provision to understand the culture of Travellers; the media that often reinforces negative stereotypes; and the practices of local authorities that actively discourage nomadism.

The previously mentioned report by Pavee Point, challenged traditional perceptions about Traveller workers, particularly in terms of “settled” Travellers who question the widespread idea that all Travellers are nomadic or interested only in self-employment. A pivotal aspect for these “settled” Travellers engaged in “standards” jobs is the presence of negative stereotypes against them in the workplace. Traveller workers struggle managing their Traveller identity in the workplace fearing rejection from their workmates (Pavee Point 2006).

**5. Socio-economic analysis of discrimination of ethnic minorities in employment**

In a recent report by TASC, Irish people are not only aware of economic inequality, but they want steps to be taken to address it (TASC 2010). The report, based on a
nationally representative survey of 1,000 adults, found that 87% of respondents believe that wealth is unfairly distributed in Ireland, which represents an increase in relation to previous years. Irish people are not only concerned about their current and future employment status, but they are also concerned about their retirement prospects.

By July 2010, the CSO calculated the unemployment rate in 13.7% (CSO 2010). When taking gender into account it’s clear that more males have lost their jobs than females. The unemployment figures state that 80,400 men lost their jobs (7.5%), while 27,500 women lost their jobs (3.1%) (CSO 2010). Young men who often left school early to take up job opportunities in construction now find themselves unemployed and without even basic second level qualifications: 33% of young men aged 15 to 24 are currently unemployed compared to 18% of young women. The rise in these rates has been dramatic over the last two years (CSO 2010). Young people are clearly suffering disproportionately as the recession in Ireland persists.

Opposition parties argue that the increasing level of emigration among young people is hiding the real impact of unemployment. The Irish media sharply coined the phrase *No country for young men* (and women), which captures the dramatic phenomenon that has been forcing young Irish people to leave the country due to increasing unemployment. Even for those who are employed, lower wages and shorter contracts constitute push factors to emigrate. The estimated figure of 120,000 people expected to migrate by the end of 2011 constitutes an alarm about the consequences of the economic crisis for Irish people, and particularly for ethnic minorities with and without a migrant background.

This situation is supported by a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). According to the OECD, young people have been severely affected by the contraction in labour demand and higher unemployment in Ireland. Those with less experience are also more vulnerable to the relatively high benefit replacement rates and minimum wage. Training and activation measures will need to focus on this group. Early school leavers and those with limited education are particularly prone to being neither in the labour force or training. The employment rate falls off sharply for older workers and there is a risk that job losses now will be permanent. Stronger activation measures would provide more encouragement to those close to retirement to find new jobs (OECD 2009).

According to the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), the situation of ethnic minorities can be assessed by measuring the rates of labour force participation, employment and unemployment. Other indicators include the level of segmentation of the occupations, levels of self-employment and of educational achievement. Income gaps and working conditions (including safety at work) also represent useful indicators. Despite the lack of comprehensive data on the situation of ethnic minorities in the labour market, there is evidence of gaps in employment rates and of differences in the quality of employment in the EU (ENAR 2009). In most EU Member States, third country nationals and minority groups have a much lower labour force participation rate and employment rate, and a much higher unemployment rate than the majority population. For instance, Eurostat data on unemployment rates from 2006 shows a gap of 8.8% to the detriment of non-EU nationals. Where disaggregated data is available, the analysis of the participation rates and unemployment rates of ethnic minorities in the labour market provides
evidence that membership of an ethnic minority can be a significant disadvantage (ENAR 2009). The European Commission’s 2008 Employment Report highlights that migrants tend to be more likely to have considerable job insecurity, with jobs of lower quality and precarious employment.

Data from the 2006 Irish Census reveals that the migrant population has higher levels of educational qualifications than the White Irish nationals (CSO 2007). This situation, however, does not translate into better job opportunities for migrant populations with racial minority background.

McGinnity and colleagues show that harassment on the street or on public transport/ in public places represents the most common form of discrimination that migrants experience in Ireland (35%); followed by insults and other forms of harassments at work (32%); access to employment (21%); and bad treatment from immigration services; (17.6%); denial of credit and being harassed by neighbours (15%); badly treated by healthcare or social services (10-15%); and victim of violence or crime (10%) (McGinnity et al. 2006). Consistent with these data, a more recent study found out that 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 services 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).

Conclusion

Even though there has been some research undertaken that analyses the situation of racial/ethnic minorities and migrant populations in Ireland, there is still a lack of information on this issue and in particular at the intersections of employment, race/ethnicity and migrant background in the labour market.

Ethnic diversity and immigration are relatively new experiences for Ireland—traditionally a very homogenous country. On 23 April 2006, an ethnicity question appeared for the first time on the census in Ireland, which has had a positive impact on the visibility of these communities and provide an important initial framework for those scholars interested in race and ethnicity issues.

Despite the fact that many migrants are leaving the country, Ireland is likely to remain a multicultural country. In the past decade, non-white migrants have entered Ireland in larger and more visible numbers, challenging existing understanding about racial and ethnic backgrounds. The coming years will be particularly interesting for the children of migrants born in Ireland and growing up as Irish residents/citizens. This second generation migrant population is reshaping the face of Ireland and the country will face new challenges in relation to this underscored by the poor economic climate.

With the unprecedented presence of recent migrants, particularly those with non-white background, racial/ethnic discrimination have become an important issue in the everyday lives of people living in Ireland. Even though Irish respondents perceive discrimination based on ethnic origin in lower percentages (52%) than its
EU neighbours (62%), Irish people consider that such discrimination has become a more widespread phenomenon in the last 5 years (EC 2008b).

Migrants to Ireland fare less well than Irish nationals in the Irish labour market across a range of dimensions: in terms of unemployment levels, access to privileged occupations in the occupational structure, and of experiences of discrimination at work and in looking for work. Migrant workers’ ethnic minority background (particularly black) and English language skills play a pivotal role in creating barriers to the labour market and social exclusion from the mainstreaming Irish society.

Even during the economic boom where unemployment rates were very low, Travellers’ participation rates in the labour market remained low. As many studies have reported, this situation is due to the cumulative effect of discrimination in the education, training and the work environment. The situation of Travellers in the Irish labour market requires a culturally sensitive approach that considers Travellers cultural values as well the diversity within their members.

In this sense, while for some Traveller workers the most important aspect is that jobs do not restrain their needs for potential mobility, for other ‘settled Travellers’ it is important to develop innovative programmes that address their identity in the workplace. Private and public employers need to develop better channels of communication and strategies of targeting members of the Traveller community acknowledging their needs and the structural disadvantages that have historically excluded Travellers from the labour market and from Irish society.

References


Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) (2010c). *Racism and Migrant Workers in Ireland*. Dublin: MRCI.


TASC (2010). *The Solidarity Factor: Public Responses to Economic Inequality in Ireland*. Dublin: TASC.

Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) (2010). *Results of the Behaviour and Attitudes (B&A) Survey on Racism, Interculturalism, and Resources for Minority Ethnic Students*. Dublin: TUI.