# **UN Questionnaire on Cultural diversity**

The report welcomes information on efforts undertaken at the national, regional and international levels regarding the recognition and importance of cultural diversity among all peoples and nations in the world.

Input is sought on the following national measures:

* that promote respect for cultural diversity while upholding and advancing universal human rights and rejecting all forms of exclusion.
* that reflect the multicultural diversity within society, including for example in the media, in public spaces, in the substance and staffing of cultural, social, and educational institutions.
* that ensure that political and legal systems reflect the multicultural diversity within societies and improve democratic institutions, so that they are more fully participatory and avoid marginalization and exclusion of, and discrimination against, any sectors of society.

# **Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**

* The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth provided funding in 2022 to *Women for Election* for activities to address barriers to women engaging in politics, particularly marginalised women such as Traveller and Roma women and women from migrant backgrounds. *Women for Election* is a not-for-profit organisation that works to inspire, support and equip women to enter and succeed in politics while also advocating solutions for systemic changes to make politics more accessible to a diversity of women, politics.
* The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth established two funding initiatives under the Migrant Integration Strategy to support integration at national and local levels. These funds have a key role in promoting respect for cultural diversity in Ireland. The National Integration Fund promotes the effective integration of migrants and Irish citizens with a migrant background into wider communities with measures targeting areas such as increasing mutual understanding between host communities and migrants; combating racism and xenophobia; and providing training to public and private sector organisations on equality and integration. Over €4m has been committed to the programme since 2017. The Community Integration Fund celebrates the rich cultural diversity within local communities and helps mobilise communities to promote integration through local-led initiatives. Projects take an inclusive approach aiming to bring migrants and host communities together and focus on key themes such as intercultural awareness, combating racism and xenophobia, and migrant women. Since its inception in 2017, the Communities Integration Fund has supported over 710 projects with grant funding totalling €3.32m.

# **Department of Rural and Community Development**

1. **information on efforts undertaken at the national, regional and international levels regarding the recognition and importance of cultural diversity among all peoples and nations in the world that promote respect for cultural diversity while upholding and advancing universal human rights and rejecting all forms of exclusion.**

**PEACE**

The Department of Rural and Community Development is an Accountable Department for a number of thematic areas under PEACE IV. Promotion of equality is evidenced through all themes under PEACE IV and in particular in the Local Authority PEACE IV Action Plans in each of the 17 Local Authority areas with funding of €81m and the Building Positive Relations strategic objective area which has provided support to twenty one projects, with funding of €30m, supporting projects that promote positive relations characterised by respect, where cultural diversity is celebrated and people can live, learn and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

The PEACE Plus Programme 2021 - 2027 with an indicative budget of over €1.1 billion will continue to build on the work already undertaken under previous peace programmes, the programme includes the need for thematic concentration on core EU objectives such as policy objective 4 “A more social Europe” in particular as it aims to reduce divisions between divided communities and enhance good community relations.  Measures designed to promote social inclusion  and equality of opportunity will be supported over the coming years through all investment areas and in particular under Theme 1 – Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities investment areas such as the Co-designed Local Community PEACE Action Plans supporting building respect for all cultural identities, Empowering Communities, Building Positive Relations and Reimaging Communities.

**CSP**

The Department of Rural and Community Developments Community Services Programme (CSP) supports over 2,000 positions in 420 community organisations, providing a contribution towards the cost of staff in CSP organisations.

The CSP addresses the issue of equality through the promotion of social enterprise, as an approach to alleviating disadvantage, addressing local needs and creating sustainable jobs for those more distant from the labour market and from specific target groups.

The CSP includes a horizontal principle to promote social inclusion and equality, which is reported on an annual basis by all supported organisations. A minimum of 70% of CSP supported staff must come from specified target groups, employing people distant from the labour market.

**Community Policy**

With support from the Dormant Accounts Fund and assistance from Pobal, DRCD are undertaking a project seeks to build capacity, as well as providing resources and toolkits to support the engagement of marginalised and diverse communities in consultation and decision-making processes at a local level.

There are a number of elements to this project:

* + Two national events targeted at Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), Local Authority staff and other relevant local decision-makers and stakeholders, aiming to build capacity and share information on principles of good consultation and meaningful engagement;
	+ Four pilot projects selected to develop and test engagement strategies as part of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) process (which is currently underway in all local authority areas), to inform the development of adaptable toolkits/resource packs that can be scaled up and used in a variety of consultation and engagement processes undertaken by local and central government;
	+ Potential for follow on actions informed by the findings and emerging issues (training for example)

The first national event was held on 4th May 2022 - Speakers included Galway City Traveller Movement, Independent Living Movement Ireland, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, Pavee Point, LGBT Ireland, Community Work Ireland, the ILDN and Local Authorities themselves.

A Plain-English resource guide, entitled ‘A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making’ was launched on 02 February 2023 in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Centre, Dublin. The guide will be reviewed and revised later this year, building on lessons learned through the pilots and any feedback received.

Inclusive Engagement training workshops based on the guide are currently being delivered. 15 in-person workshops are being held across the country in the coming weeks.

Associated training in the areas of Public Sector Duty, Intercultural Awareness and Engagement Strategies has also commenced.

**SSNO**

The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) is a key element of the Department's support for the role of the C&V sector in contributing to the development of a strong and vibrant civil society and in improving outcomes for those most disadvantaged.

The SSNO programme provides multi-annual funding towards the core costs of national community and voluntary organisations in Ireland that focus on providing supports centring on social exclusion, addressing poverty or promoting equality.

Among the successful recipients of the current scheme, running from 1st July 2022 to mid-2025, are organisations whose work plays an important role in in helping to strengthen integration and equality of access within our society.

This includes the *Free Legal Aid Centres* (FLAC), the *Mercy Law Resource Centre* and *Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre* respectively, who promote equal access to justice for disadvantaged members of our communities, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

*Inclusion Ireland* are also funded under the SSNO, a national organisation whose mission is to champion the rights of people with an intellectual disability in Ireland, through securing full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

Other examples include the *LGBT Support and Advocacy Network* and *BeLong To Youth Services* respectively, both national organisations supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) members of the community, working to ensure they feel equal, safe, and valued in the diversity of their identities and experiences.

**Charities (Amendment) Bill**

The Charities (Amendment) Bill is an important Bill that aims to strengthen the charities sector, by ensuring greater transparency, clarity and fairness, which will serve to enhance public confidence in the sector.

The proposals contained in the General Scheme, published in April 2022, seek to enhance and consolidate the existing legal framework for the Charities Regulator to conduct its statutory functions, ensuring more proportionate regulation for the sector.

There is currently no charitable purpose for ‘the advancement of human rights’ under which such civil society organisations can seek to register. Organisations operating in the field of human rights advancement in Ireland can apply to register as a charity under a number of other charitable purposes as defined under the Charities Act 2009 e.g. the advancement of education.

Among the amendments contained in the approved General Scheme, is the proposed addition of ‘the advancement of human rights’ as a charitable purpose.

**Seniors Alert Scheme**

In delivering on its mission, the Department of Rural and Community Development provides a wide range of strategic interventions, funding programmes and policies to support communities. Addressing the issue of individual isolation in communities became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme, which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind.

Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of a personal alarm or pendant.

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Among the successful recipients of the current scheme, running from 1st July 2022 to mid-2025, are seven organisations whose work directly with migrant communities and who work to foster migrant integration within our communities. These are:

* AkiDwA (Akina Dada wa Africa);
* Immigrant Council of Ireland;
* Irish Refugee Council;
* Migrant Information Centre;
* Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre;
* New Communities Partnership (NCP);
* Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative.

The SSNO also provides funding for other Organisations whose remit is not specifically focussed on migrant communities, but whose activities nevertheless, play an important role in helping to strengthen integration and equality of access within our society.

For example, the SSNO provides funding to the Irish branch of the *European Network Against Racism* (*ENAR*). This Pan-European Network works to end structural racism and discrimination. Its member organisations includes both local and national organisations.

The SSNO also supports the *Free Legal Aid Centres* (FLAC) and the *Mercy Law Resource Centre* respectively, who promote equal access to justice for disadvantaged members of our communities, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

**Public Participation Networks (PPNs)**

A Public Participation Network (PPN) is a structure that provides representation for the community sector in Local Authority policymaking structures, giving local volunteers a greater say in local government decisions which affect their own communities. Where community representation is required on local authority committees, such as Strategic Policy Committees or Local Community Development Committees etc., it must be sourced through the PPN.

The PPN is the main link through which the local authority connects with the local community sector within its area. PPNs were established following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

There is a PPN in each of the 31 local authority areas. Membership of a PPN is open to all volunteer-led/not-for-profit groups in a local authority area, and over 18,000 groups nationwide are currently members of a PPN.

As part of their ethos, PPNs are inclusive, valuing the diversity in their communities and encouraging the active participation of all groups to decide on PPN policy positions. The PPNs have three ‘colleges’ representing subsets of the registered groups. The Social Inclusion college represents community groups focused on people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream society. This includes groups which support, advocate or provide services for seldom-heard demographic groups.

A structural review of PPNs was completed and published on the DRCD website in 2022. One of its areas of focus was how the current PPN structures affect the participation, engagement and inclusion of all community groups, including groups concerned with migrants’ rights and similar issues.

To establish the level of diversity in representation within PPNs in practice, DRCD is preparing to commission a research project to

* explore the demographic characteristics of groups and individuals involved in PPNs,
* investigate the diversity involved,
* establish an evidence base on the area, and
* make recommendations on increasing the participation of under-represented groups in PPNs.

It is envisaged that the research will involve extensive consultation with members of demographic groups that are seldom-heard, and which may be currently under-represented on PPNs.

**National Volunteering Strategy, 2021-2025**

The National Volunteering Strategy was approved by Government is a whole of government framework to support the voluntary sector. The purpose of the Strategy is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution volunteers make to Irish society.

Implementing the Strategy will support the Programme for Government commitment to publish a strategy to support volunteering, including the development of a comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice. It is a five-year strategy (2021-2025) and comprises a suite of policy and strategic initiatives led by the Department to support not-for-profit organisations in community development, local development, social enterprise, and community and voluntary sectors.

Under strategic objective one, The Strategy seeks to improve awareness of and increase participation in volunteering activities, particularly among those sections of our society that are currently under-represented. It is hoped that in five years’ time the diversity in our communities and of people of different backgrounds and circumstances are reflected more proportionately with the volunteering community.

The National Volunteering Strategy’s vision of “a society where volunteering is promoted, valued, facilitated and supported so that people can contribute to developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities” inspires and drives the department to provide supports both in terms of funding and policy provision.

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*Human Rights Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs*

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*Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth*