



# **Submission to a Statement of Strategy for the Department of Justice and Equality to cover the period 2016 – 2019**

**Dublin, 2016**

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This submission has been prepared by Dialogue & Diversity, which is a non for profit organisation which works towards elimination of any discrimination based on gender, age, disability, ethnic background, nationality, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or financial status. It aims to create an environment where diversity is valued and celebrated.

The submission has focused on migration and integration.

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## 1. Integration Policy

Modern Ireland is a diverse republic with a significant presence of migrants. According to the last census there are over 544,000 people from different countries living in Ireland. All together, we have representatives of over 199 nationalities living in the Republic of Ireland. Their presence makes us richer. Together we can exchange different experiences, bring differing points of view and work on solutions for problems from multiple perspectives. Diversity is a value which could benefit the nation.

To use the full potential and realise opportunities which diversity brings, we must focus on the integration. We should remember that integration is a process which we constantly need to work on. It has to be actively managed and it will not just happen itself. The responsibility for successful integration lies jointly with migrants, local communities and the state.

The growing diversity of people living in Ireland has a range of economic and social implications including impact on the labour market, various public services as well as impact on the neighbourhoods and communities.

**In a long term, the Irish government must create a cohesive integration policy. Such policy should be created with a close consultation and cooperation with migrants organisations.**

## 2. Hate Crime Legislation

We would like to see an Ireland where racism and discrimination does not exist. These two factors are the main obstacles for integration. It is a responsibility of each and every one of us to react and report any aspects of racism and discrimination.

In light of the discriminative and racially driven assaults experienced by many migrants, **there is an urgent need for the enactment of the Hate Crime Legislation.**

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### 3. Cultural competency training for Garda Síochána

Issues of racism and discrimination are primarily dealt with by Garda Síochána, in order to make their work more efficient and effective we recommend that each **Garda should undertake a compulsory cultural competency training**. Also recruitment of Gardai with migrant background would help tackle racism.

### 4. Equal access to rights and to workplace integration

The State should support and promote best practice in employing migrant workers, **providing equal access to rights and to workplace integration**. It is in the State's interest to integrate communities so that people can support each other and overcome any barriers, discriminations, inequality and racism. The workplace is one of the best places to implement strategies to improve integration, especially in light of the fact that many workplaces have employees of various nationalities.

Many foreign qualifications held by migrants are not recognised by Irish system or the process of recognition is slow, bureaucratic and often very costly. Migrants who were professionals in their home country cannot continue their practise in Ireland.

### 5. Migrants' participation in Politics

Political participation and civic engagement are an essential part of integration. There are many talented and skilled leaders within our communities which could successfully compete in democratic elections and bring a fresh perspective to the Irish politics. The experience with local and general election so far has shown that there is very little interest within the main political parties to actively engage with migrants. It is essential that political parties, as organisations that hold legislative power take responsibility for incorporating diversity.

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**Establishment of Migrant Advisory Board** which would have an advisory role and represent voices of diverse migrant communities in Ireland. The Irish Government, Departments and the state agencies should consult with the board on policies and legislation which may impact migrant communities.

Local authorities should commit to consulting with migrant communities on issues that may affect them. The consultation board should be linked to the community development committees and the clear framework for their operation should be established at a national level.

A solution for increasing the visibility of migrants in politics would be the **appointment of candidates representing migrants to Seanad Éireann**. This is possible under current legislation as the Taoiseach has the authority to nominate 11 senators. The Seanad is in its concept a chamber of advice and reflection, and it should represent the complexity and diversity of modern Irish society. Seanad is the ideal forum for voices of minorities, which otherwise would not be heard and would not be taken in consideration during the legislative processes.

## **6. Participation in civic structures**

It is important that public services reflect the diversity of the society that they serve, including diversity among staff. This will not only help to provide a better and efficient service, but it would greatly promote integration.

Often it appears that Garda Síochána is unable to effectively deal with instances of racism and discrimination due to language and cultural barriers. As a result, migrants tend not to report incidents where they have been the victim of a crime. This in turn fuels the lack of trust between both parties.

Frequently, schools do not have the capacity, knowledge and training to deal with increasingly more diverse classrooms. This is whether they deal with language barrier or cultural differences. In addition, many teachers and parents struggle with maintaining their children's multilingualism, which is a valued and important asset. The need for adequate training of skills and linguistics has

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not been addressed by the Irish educational system and are vital to built up capacity of primary schools.

**In order to increase migrants presence in public services, the government should consider mechanism of so called 'positive discrimination',** which is the process of giving preferential treatment, especially in employment, to minority groups of society.

Focus should be placed on increasing the number of migrants serving in An Garda Síochána. This would help to build a mutual trust between migrants communities and Garda. It would also bring much needed knowledge on cultural diversity to Garda.

The language and cultural barriers that exists between the parent and the teacher can be eroded by introducing intercultural training of teachers and education staff. Introducing an increase in the numbers of teachers of migrant background in schools is highly recommended because of the positive impact it could have on society, in particular the display of a public support for integration and creating the role models for children with migrant background. Additionally, foreign language tuition that reflect diverse school population should be introduced.

## **7. Immigration Laws**

Many migrants are trapped in the situation where they have been living in Ireland for years and have no legal status due to illegality and bureaucracy.

Direct Provision is a form of institutional living that still persists in Ireland, with migrants living in hostels for an average of over five years. **The direct provisions centres are not suitable for long term residence and there is a need for urgent reform of this system.**

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The administrative procedures of immigration laws have serious implication for migrants in terms of functioning in a society. The most pressing issues are:

- Irish citizenship by naturalisation is one of the most expensive in Europe
- No appointment facility exists for visa renewals, which results in people queuing for hours (often overnight) outside the Garda National Immigration Bureau
- There are severe discrepancies between role of Au Pair and Student Visa

**Undocumented migrants should be given an opportunity to regulate their situation.** The administrative process of the Irish immigration law needs to be improved in order to enable speedy visa renewals.

**Au Pairs should be protected by employment laws.** The lack of governance has led to widespread abuse by their host families. It is highly recommended that a legal policy be put in place to govern the hosting of Au Pairs in Ireland.

## **8. Support for migrants organisations**

The continuous functioning of the varying migrant organisation is dependent on the generosity of their members. Such generosity can be limited, especially if the organisation is relatively small. The need for financial support for events organised by migrants' organisation are essential for displaying the multicultural society of Ireland.

As migrants' organisations are often the first point of contact for migrants living in Ireland, they should be equipped with knowledge how to help or where to refer the individuals looking for information. Public institutions and agencies that are dealing with migrant on a day-to-day basis should provide a necessary training to migrants' organisations staff.

**There should be a financial support available, via grants systems, dedicated directly to migrants' organisations, with view to promote diversity, integration and social inclusion.**

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## Conclusion

All recommendations made in this document were made based on our experience as migrants living in Ireland. Their implementation would help to create a more inclusive society, a society which we are part of.

Ireland has the opportunity to be a pioneer in creating a model for developing cohesive, successful and comprehensive integration policy. In order to do so we need a close cooperation of migrants' organisations, local communities, local authorities and the government.