

# Achieving Equality in Intercultural Workplaces

An Agenda For Action

work **against** racism

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## An Agenda For Action

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*The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Equality Authority, Congress, CIF, IBEC, SFA or Know Racism*



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## Preface

The publication of “Achieving Equality in Intercultural Workplaces” marks the fourth Anti-Racist Workplace Week. The organisation of this annual event seeks to provide a leadership to enterprises across the country in combating racism and promoting equality and to develop practical supports for enterprises already taking initiatives on these issues. This publication is one such practical support.

Anti-Racist Workplace Week reflects the concern of the various organisations involved at the growth and spread of racism in Irish society. It reflects a shared ambition to prevent the emergence of racism in the Irish workplace and to support the workplace to emerge as a positive influence in local communities for an intercultural society. It reflects a concern at the growth and severity of discrimination experienced by some migrant workers and at the difficulties experienced by the Traveller community in securing access to employment.

The organisations involved in Anti-Racist Workplace Week seek to promote a model of workplace equality where the workplace:

- Is free from discrimination and harassment.
- Is welcoming to Black and minority ethnic (including Traveller) employees and customers.
- Accommodates and values cultural diversity in the workplace.
- Takes practical steps to ensure equality.
- Communicates a message for greater equality within the wider community.

“Achieving Equality in Intercultural Workplaces” provides a broad ranging menu of initiatives from which to develop this workplace equality. It highlights approaches:

- To support minority ethnic employees to adapt to the workplace.
- To implement job accommodation measures that address the practical implications of cultural diversity.
- To stimulate attitudinal change among the majority population in the workforce.
- To support new behaviours in the workplace that are anti-racist and intercultural.

- To address any form of systemic discrimination.
- To implement positive action to achieve equality as allowed under equality legislation.

The ambition is to create a context where organisations move beyond coping with diversity to actually being diverse, investing in diversity and reaping the benefits from diversity. Central to this ambition is a mainstreaming of equality where an equality focus is integral to business processes, planning and decision making.

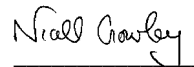
We are grateful to Patrick Taran of the International Labour Office (ILO) and August Gächter from the Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna for preparing this publication. Their expertise and the access they have given to a global body of practice in this area has ensured a publication of high quality.



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## I. Introduction

In the context of an increasingly diverse population and workforce, addressing discrimination at work becomes imperative. International and Irish law require it, ensuring social inclusion and social justice make it unavoidable, and it makes good business sense.

The Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 promote equality of opportunity and prohibit discrimination on nine specified grounds in employment, and vocational training and in the provision of goods and services, education and accommodation. The nine discriminatory grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

### Both Acts

- prohibit direct and indirect discrimination (and discrimination by association by service providers and educational establishments in the provision of their services).
- prohibit sexual harassment and harassment on the discriminatory grounds.
- require employers, training bodies, service providers and educational establishments to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities unless it imposes more than nominal cost.
- allow positive action measures

#### A. In relation to:

- the gender ground,
- people over fifty,
- people with a disability,
- members of the Traveller community and
- training or work experience (provided by or on behalf of the State) for any disadvantaged group (if the Minister certifies that it is unlikely that the group would otherwise receive similar training or work) under the Employment Equality Act 1998.

This list will expand with the incorporation of the EU 'Race' Directive and Framework Employment Directive.

B. In relation to disadvantaged groups or measures which cater for the special needs of persons under the Equal Status Act 2000.

- impose vicarious liability on employers and service providers in relation to discriminatory acts of employees and agents unless the employers and service providers took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the discrimination.
- contain a number of detailed exemptions.

Ireland has ratified the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (1958), committing its government to preventing discrimination, in particular in the workplace. Ireland is also under the obligation to transpose the European Union 'Race' Directive, the Framework Employment Directive and the Gender Equal Treatment Directive to national law.

Social inclusion and social peace can be threatened by hostility and attacks against those seen to be 'different' or 'outsiders where discrimination is not combated and prevented and where equality is not promoted'. Attacks are more likely – and more frequently occur – in situations where such hostility is perceived to be tolerated, or is not assertively combated. Discrimination can be bad for business. Workplace tensions and hostility between different groups demonstrably affect worker morale and productivity. Companies insensitive to diversity within their personnel, in their communities and in increasingly diverse marketplaces can lose a competitive edge in being able to anticipate and respond to diverse customer needs, whether in product design and presentation, services, or marketing.

This handbook presents an agenda for developing anti-discrimination practices and attitudes in businesses and trade unions. Its focus is ethnic diversity and achieving equality in intercultural workplaces. It is based on recognising that effective commitment and action is built on a learning process linked with activity. It identifies and analyses a spectrum of initiatives and insights which taken together provide a holistic approach to equality in intercultural workplaces.

This spectrum of initiatives and insights synthesises information and approaches essential to combat discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity effectively, and comprises an **agenda for action**. This agenda is applicable to business and personnel managers, trade union leaders, shop stewards, supervisors, workers, and, more broadly, communities in which businesses and trade unions function.

This booklet is divided into three parts. The first part outlines the issues at stake in addressing diversity in the workplace. The second part details an ethnic diversity learning and action agenda by which businesses, trade unions, and other organisations can evaluate their own position and identify what more they should do. The third part reinforces the case for equality and diversity by summarising the business case and other incentives to expand and deepen the commitment of companies, as well as trade unions and other groups, towards achieving equality in intercultural workplaces.

## II. Points of departure

The *agenda for action* presented in this handbook derives from a large and still-growing body of experience and knowledge across the industrialised countries of Western Europe and North America. It reflects approaches proven and verified in actual practice in situations some of which are comparable to Irish realities. The agenda for action is presented as a process built from a spectrum of initiatives and insights. This approach shows the opportunities and possible gains to businesses and other organisations in taking deliberate and planned steps appropriate to current conditions, building on previous experience and analysis, to upgrade equality and diversity policies and practices.

The focus of the *agenda for action* is on industrial relations within organisations. It deals with: equal access to jobs, be it from outside the organisation or in the form of advancement within it; retention in the job; equality of working conditions; equality of task assignments; and equal pay for equal work. This text also touches on some aspects of customer relations, shareholder relations, stakeholder relations in a wider sense, supplier relations and community relations.

This *agenda for action* is relevant to all the nine grounds of discrimination covered by Irish equality legislation. This handbook gives specific attention to issues concerning migrant and minority ethnic workers including Travellers in order to share new knowledge and recent experience particularly relevant to integrating these groups. Multiple identity issues are not directly discussed in this text. However it is important that the approaches set out do have a wider applicability given migrants are in many cases women, and some members of the Traveller or other minority ethnic communities may be disabled and so on.

### The Meaning of Equal Opportunities and Diversity

In 2001 the Equality Authority, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, the Construction Industry Federation and Congress published a resource pack in support of an anti-racist workplace. The starting point for this resource pack identifies an ambition to ensure a workplace that

- is free from discrimination;
- is welcoming to Black and minority ethnic people (including Travellers);
- accommodates cultural diversity and realises equality; and
- sends a message for greater equality across local communities and the wider society.



This ambition establishes the key elements for equality in the intercultural workplace.

There is a common misconception, often shared by employers, in relation to diversity that only certain persons or groups are included under its umbrella, when in fact the opposite is true. An Irish Development Partnership [under the EU EQUAL Programme] surveyed employers in an area of Dublin and found that, "there was an indication from some of the respondents that their understanding of a diverse workforce meant only the inclusion of women and non-nationals and possibly the physically disabled. There was relatively little reference to groups such as, for example, Travellers, ..." The positive comments that the Development Partnership made on diversity were that it involved:

- **The welcome challenge of new cultures entering the work arena;**
- **Treating all staff fairly;**
- **Being open to the possibility of difference and newness.**

However, they balanced these statements by saying that "diversity needed managing and could have the effect of pushing an employer outside his or her comfort zone. This is a very important point ..." (ETG1 2003:3).

## Barriers

Migrant and minority ethnic workers, including Travellers, face significant disadvantages to which decision makers need to be alerted. These include:

- Personal discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping;
- Systemic discrimination including the application of different, less favourable rules (over a lengthy period of time);
- Educational disadvantages partly due to unfavourable treatment by the education system and partly due to unfavourable living conditions;
- Small numbers and therefore less likelihood of there being enough people involved in the variety of networks of communication that assist access to jobs, goods and services;
- Social exclusion, which means that these networks of communication are not even accessible to minority ethnic people;
- Living geographically removed from (new) employment opportunities.

Discrimination is often so pervasive, historically reinforced and common that even those experiencing it may not be fully aware of how it operates. Recent research, including by the ILO (Zegers de Beijl 1999), "also demonstrated that without special investigations and research, the processes of discrimination are generally invisible, so that even the

victims are not aware of it" (Wrench 2002). Setting up of remedies, such as complaints bodies or court proceedings will be insufficient if those experiencing discrimination believe that what they experience is true for others in their communities. Challenging discrete or invisible mechanisms of discrimination in legal proceedings requires being able to demonstrate the discriminatory nature and operation of these mechanisms.

Protection against discrimination in employment can be difficult to implement effectively by people in precarious situations. Asylum seekers or unauthorised immigrants are often too insecure in any employment they find to assume any role in claiming protection against discrimination or mistreatment for fear of dismissal, loss of income, and possible deportation.

Discrimination and exclusion pose risks and economic costs. Working towards integration and inclusion also carries cost implications. Changing organisational procedures, putting in place training activities and changing internal practices do require allocations of resources. In other countries anti-discrimination and integration measures have varied but costs have had to be borne partly by enterprises and partly by the State. Trade unions and other organisations have also allocated resources to these endeavours. For enterprise it has always been important to learn to turn these costs into investments and to derive a business advantage from them.

## A Spectrum of Insights and Initiatives

The **agenda for action** described in the following section draws from a spectrum of insights and initiatives with nine main elements. This spectrum reflects common patterns of understandings of and responses to ethnic diversity in the workplace that have taken place – and continue to evolve – in local and national contexts across Western Europe, North America and elsewhere. The nine elements are:

### 0. Doing Nothing, Being Unaware

This element is a risky approach relying on ad hoc measures to respond to problems when they manifest themselves.

### 1. Adapting the Minority

This element raises the importance of orientation training in relation to the host society. However its limitations rest on the reality that no amount of adaptation will do away with external and visible characteristics which frequently serve as excuses or triggers for discrimination.

### 2. Making Cultural Allowances

This element rests on the importance of job accommodation measures that address the practical implications of cultural diversity.

### 3. Changing Majority Attitudes

The central concern of this element is attitude change among the majority population in the workforce.

#### 4. Changing Majority Behaviour

The key insight that shapes this element is that behaviour and attitudes are distinct from each other and it is the behaviour that places the barriers before minority ethnic workers and that needs to be changed.

#### 5. Changing Rules and Procedures

This element recognises systemic discrimination that goes beyond any particular individual's bias or actions.

#### 6. Active Recruiting and Promotion

This element establishes the importance of positive action in achieving equality in the intercultural workplace.

#### 7. Relying on Diversity

This element highlights a shift from coping with diversity to being consciously diverse.

#### 8. Mainstreaming Equality

This element establishes equality as being an integral part of all decision making in the enterprise.

These nine elements can be grouped into three general sets: stages one and two can go under a heading '*noticing minorities*', three to five under '*making room for minorities*', and six to eight under '*equality for minorities*'.

This agenda is focused on employer-employee relations. However, other areas, such as customer relations, could be addressed using the same framework.

## III. An Action Agenda

The following is a brief description of the character of each of these nine elements, and the corresponding actions. While the order and inclusion of certain actions in each element are not fixed, experience has demonstrated that some measures included in later elements build on and can be more effectively pursued when based on the experience and awareness generated by actions in previous elements. In other words, the elements are **interconnected**, and none of them should or can be seen in isolation. A holistic approach will draw learning and initiatives from all elements of the spectrum.

### 0. Doing Nothing, Being Unaware

This is a risky approach. All too frequently, organisations do not recognise the need to establish equal opportunities or integration policies and practices to manage ethnic diversity effectively. Small and medium-sized businesses often do not address potential issues until concrete problems crop up. This can be due to small staffs and few resources for personnel issues. Small businesses often seek to resolve what may be perceived as minor difficulties through informal and ad hoc measures, given that the institution of a formal and planned approach may be more complex and time consuming (McNally/Hegarty 2003). There appears to be a lack of awareness of the risks involved. To wait until a problem of inter group relations manifests itself means having to take instant ad hoc measures when it does. There will then not be time to approach issues of equality in the comprehensive and strategic way that would benefit the organisation most. Furthermore, without proper preparation, successful resolution of conflict by ad hoc measures relies on luck, and inappropriate measures may only make things worse. A well run organisation needs a planned and systematic approach to issues of discrimination and equality.

### 1. Adapting the Minority

**Measures aiming to adapt the minority to the mainstream are often the first response of companies and trade unions seeking to improve internal ethnic relations.**

This can take the form of prohibitions imposed by organisations, for example on certain items of clothing or on the display of religious or ethnic symbols. In a more positive vein it may involve training providing orientation on the host society, and better skills in the main language spoken locally.

Within an enterprise, action focusing on appearance and pre-occupational skills may be developed when problems of co-operation in production or service delivery arise. There are many examples of companies setting up language training for those employees not sufficiently in command of the language of production.

Actions chosen within this element are frequently based on the fact that, although a supervisor or manager may not hold any hostility or prejudice, he or she anticipates negative reactions from others – customers or co-workers resenting minority ethnic employees, or trade unionists or fellow entrepreneurs remarking unfavourably on their employment. Initial responses in this context often include neglecting the issue of intercultural conflict or trying to avoid it by keeping minority ethnic employees away from customers or co-workers. Supervisors, managers and owners could instead use the opportunity to develop their organisation from a workforce reflecting a past that was not multicultural to one that is solidly grounded in the present ethnic diversity. In meeting this and other challenges companies and other organisations are advised to seek advice from competent bodies on what to do.

In a number of countries, governments at both national and local levels have taken pre-employment measures aimed at ‘adapting minorities’ to employer needs. “Formal training is provided for the immigrants to improve their education and skills, and to help them learn the language, culture and customs of the new society, and the appropriate ways of behaving, as well as how to operate in the labour market” (Wrench 2002). In a number of countries, government initiatives such as subsidised training programmes have considerably benefited business and other organisations in helping migrants and minority ethnic workers adapt their skills and abilities to local needs and conditions.

The problem with this element of the spectrum is that no amount of adaptation can do away with external and visible characteristics that all too frequently serve as excuses or triggers for discrimination.

## 2. Making Cultural Allowances

Situations exist in many enterprises where “a lack of sympathy to cultural differences by colleagues or superiors can be expressed in ways which have the effect of denying opportunities which are available to the majority workforce” (Wrench 2002). The second element of this *agenda for action* is focused on **establishing measures which recognise cultural differences** – and the importance these may have on workplace relations and productivity – which allows for practices that were not adequately permitted by existing mainstream norms and practices.

Job accommodation measures, as they are sometimes called, are widespread. They may include (Faundez 1994:44; Taran forthcoming; Wrench 2002):

- **allowances for specific religious or cultural needs of minority ethnic groups within the organisation, such as (but not only)**
  - dietary requirements,
  - flexible hours to allow for the observance of religious traditions,
  - dress codes accommodating cultural and religious imperatives of minority ethnic groups,

- **flexible holidays and unpaid leave to allow for longer visits to countries of origin,**
- **use of languages of migrant employees in management and union communications,**
- **staff training in cultural awareness or in managing multi-ethnic teams.**

Businesses and other types of organisations have found that workplace relations, morale and productivity can be enhanced when management is perceived to be openly and proactively taking measures to improve employees' well-being. Job accommodation measures for migrant and minority ethnic workers include use of languages of employee groups on signs and in staff communications, dialogue or communications addressed to the ethnic community groups of these employees, and providing space for or even hosting activities marking annual festivities and celebrations important to these groups.

Complementary measures by social partner organisations include preparing guidelines and sharing models on good practices for businesses and for trade unions. It also includes **production of trade union material in relevant minority ethnic languages.**

Some job accommodation measures are more than "cultural" allowances. Companies employing foreign workers have found that accommodating needs for longer, and sometimes sudden, visits by employees to countries of origin, contributes to retaining qualified staff and avoiding psychological distress arising from extended separation from families. National employees can attend to serious family illnesses, family deaths, marriages and childrens' needs nearby; foreign workers may often have to travel for two days or more just to get home for a family emergency or significant life event.

### 3. Changing Majority Attitudes

In this third element **the spotlight moves from the discriminated to the potential discriminators.** Adapting the minority does not remove the disadvantage they experience and cultural allowances do not necessarily engender the desired workplace harmony. **Attitude change among the majority population and workforce becomes the central concern in this element.** Individuals are encouraged and supported to examine their attitudes and to undergo training aimed at changing these attitudes as necessary.

"This stage comes with the realisation that a simple 'multi cultural' approach does not take account of the issues of racism and discrimination in society, and that measures are needed to tackle these. The first assumption is that the problem lies in people's attitudes, and so educational campaigns or training courses to change people's prejudices are introduced" (Wrench 2002).

Work on attitudes is often not seen as an important component in equal opportunities policies and practices. It is, however, a key step in raising the awareness of existing inequality and discrimination within an organisation. It is where a committed owner, manager or shop steward has to make the key contribution to motivate others in the

organisation to work to overcome the prejudice underlying discrimination and racism. Generating agreement to confront prejudicial attitudes assists a commitment across a workforce to take action on issues of racism and discrimination. The expected outcome is not necessarily that personal attitudes might actually be changed, but that a commitment to changing (some) behaviour may result from awareness of workplace disruptions resulting from prejudice and negative stereotypes.

Measures that contribute to overcoming prejudice and negative stereotypes can include

- **facilitation of personal contacts between majority and minority ethnic members in a non-work setting,**
- **folklore and heritage shows at company functions,**
- **talks and discussions aimed at overcoming negative stereotypes,**
- **information provision on origin country lifestyles and current living conditions,**
- **training to eliminate negative stereotyping.**

#### 4. Changing Majority Behaviour

The fourth element is characterised by an important further insight. **Attitudes are hard to change permanently, behaviour and attitude are distinct from each other. It is the behaviour that places the barriers** before minority ethnic employees and it is the behaviour that needs to be changed.

Initiatives characterising this fourth element try to modify behaviour by training individuals. Addressing discriminatory behaviour with the following measures is important in creating a 'level playing field' by removing unfair or arbitrary barriers to opportunity (Wrench 2002).

Measures taken by organisations include:

- **anti-discrimination training for labour market gatekeepers** (those responsible for interviewing, selection and hiring, or for promotion, or for task allocation),
- **the provision of anti-discrimination training to co-workers,**
- **training for management on how to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and relevant collective agreements,**
- **equal opportunities policies and training on these,**
- **anti-harassment policies and training,**

- **procedures to deal with allegations of discrimination or discriminatory harassment in the workplace,**
- **introduction of disciplinary measures against racism and discrimination within the organisation,**
- **handbooks for employees setting out equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies, procedures and action plans.**

Anti-discrimination training can take various forms. It can be targeted at all employees. It is often targeted at specific personnel such as supervisors or management or those involved in recruiting and selecting employees or those involved in dealing with allegations of discrimination. Such training is generally aimed at eradicating discriminatory practices by changing individual behaviour. It is often provided by an external consultant, but can also take the form of in-house training. A consultant may find it easier, though, to mediate any conflicts on the issues that may arise in the course of training.

When targeting discriminatory behaviour, it is important to anticipate that some people may be unaware of the impact or consequences of certain behaviour. Discriminatory behaviour may not be deliberately intended as such, but may reflect unquestioned organisational or national cultural patterns.

Intensive training contributes to changing behaviour. However, equality policies and action plans need to be in place to support changing behaviour after training courses are conducted. Individuals need supports and an appropriate context to ensure training is reflected in new practice.

Employer associations and trade unions can complement enterprise level activities by:

- emphasising the need for **enterprise level action on racism and anti-racism**,
- **establishing internal rules** within their organisation condemning discrimination and racism,
- **promoting implementation of the Equality Authority Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment in the Workplace,**
- **advertising to their migrant and minority ethnic members their willingness to pursue grievance procedures** and tribunal claims in cases of discrimination and harassment, and
- **establishing training for full-time officers** dealing with discrimination cases.

Trade unions have provided important support to their members who seek to make a claim under the equality legislation. This trade union advocacy is important in improving the chances of success for the claimant.



## 5. Changing Rules and Procedures

A critical stage of addressing exclusion and promoting equality and integration in intercultural workplaces is recognising systemic discrimination, i.e. discrimination that cannot be reduced to any particular individual's bias or actions. "This is where apparently 'neutral' recruitment practices or work routines in practice discriminate against members of an ethnic group, e.g. recruiting employees through their family connections to the (predominantly white) current workforce" (Wrench 2002). This particular form of systemic discrimination is most visible in the outcomes achieved by particular minority ethnic groups in the workplace.

In this element systems come into view. This focus on systems does not remove the focus from individuals but it identifies their potential position within rules, procedures, traditions, and commitments. Attention is given to adapting the rules and procedures so as to actually open up the opportunity for minority ethnic workers to contribute and to achieve within the workplace. It also creates a situation where individuals do not discriminate.

Measures that contribute to addressing systemic discrimination include:

- **elimination of testing requirements not necessary for the job,**
- **review of interviewing practices that may be (culturally) biased,**
- **fair recognition of (foreign) credentials, prior learning, and work experience,**
- **review of recruitment procedures to ensure non-discriminatory treatment,**
- **review of promotion procedures to ensure non-discriminatory treatment,**
- **training on how to operate revised recruitment and selection and promotion procedures,**
- **inclusion of minority ethnic members on selection boards,**
- **workplace notices and other documentation provided in languages spoken by staff members.**

While the task in this element is to review and change as necessary how the organisation itself functions, ongoing training of individuals is still required. The individuals in the organisation need to be able to envisage the changes and to implement them in their various responsibilities and interactions.

A particular facet – already applicable in Ireland and successful in Britain – is anti-discrimination training for minority ethnic employees in managerial positions to strengthen the group's own ability to remove barriers to advancement (Taylor et al. 1997:52, 57).

The social partners can contribute considerably to changing organisational procedures and behaviour by including language expressing common concern with discrimination in employment in **collective labour agreements**. Inclusion of specific language on anti-discrimination and promotion of equal opportunity for all has become increasingly common in industrial relations agreements across Western Europe. A common approach is to include 'equal opportunity' clauses in such agreements. The inclusion of a reference to the necessity for **appropriate personnel procedures** for recruitment and promotion is a necessary and commonplace complement to equal opportunity clauses.

The inclusion of equal opportunity clauses is not enough on its own for collective bargaining to promote workplace equality. It is key that adequately prepared representatives of minority groups participate in the collective bargaining process and, particularly, in negotiation. This is one of the main lessons derived from collective bargaining to achieve gender equality.<sup>1</sup>

Trade unions and employer organisations can complement enterprise level activity combating systemic discrimination. In some countries they are **setting up counselling networks**, often composed of minority ethnic members so that minority ethnic members have a representative to turn to. They could also emphasise the need to **remove barriers which prevent migrant and minority ethnic (including Traveller) workers from reaching trade union positions of authority** and minority ethnic (including Traveller) entrepreneurs reaching positions of authority in employer organisations;

In a number of countries, particular trade unions or the labour movement in general have given renewed **attention to recruiting among migrant, and minority ethnic including Traveller communities** to assure better protection against discrimination. This has also arisen in response to the increased relative significance of migrant and minority ethnic workers.

## 6. Active Recruiting and Promotion

An employer wishing to see results from an equality policy will be likely to find there is an issue of **remedying the legacies of past disadvantage and discrimination**. This is the realm of positive action.

Positive action is allowed on the gender ground under the Employment Equality Act 1998 to promote equal opportunity for men and women in particular by removing existing inequalities which affect women's opportunities in the areas of access to employment, vocational training, promotion and working conditions. It is allowed in relation to older workers over fifty, Travellers and people with disabilities to facilitate integration into employment. A commitment has been made by the Irish Government to allow positive action across all nine grounds when the EU Equality Directives are transposed into Irish equality legislation.

A wide range of active recruiting and promotion measures are included under the notion of positive action: (Faundez 1994:44; Perchinig 2002; Taran forthcoming; Wrench 2002). These include:

- **Equality action plans** can be drawn up to implement equality policy statements. Equality action plans allocate responsibilities to ensure that all managers and employees are familiar with what is expected of them with regard to an equal opportunities programme. They usually identify specific objectives and targets as well as deadlines for when these should be reached. Plans can also specify in what way and by whom the progress of each part of the action plan will be measured and assessed. An important element of an equality action plan is an equality target or benchmark by which results can be assessed.
- **Monitoring statistical data on the current composition of the workforce** is a necessary element to determining challenges and progress in achieving equality of opportunity. An ethnic profile of the workforce shows where minority ethnic staff are employed in the organisation and provides a baseline against which progress can be measured. A profile of the organisation's staff can be compared with that of the population of the area or labour market where company facilities are located. Following an initial audit, it is important to continue ethnic monitoring of the workforce and of the decisions made at recruitment, selection and promotion and redundancy processes. Such ongoing data gathering can reveal unintentional discriminatory outcomes and allow employers to deal with problem areas by reviewing standard practices, by providing specific training to increase awareness and by introducing new techniques as necessary.
- An **equality target** consists of a percentage of minority ethnic employees that an employer may aim to reach by a specific date, through both positive action and through measures to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination. Targets may be defined in relation to the percentage of a minority ethnic population in the relevant area or labour market. Targets are not quotas. Such equality targets relate to numbers or proportions of under-represented groups in, or recruited to, particular jobs or grades. They often cover jobs that require higher-grade skills, carry additional responsibility or provide essential experience for long-term career development, and can be expressed, where appropriate, in terms of the composition of the workforce as a whole.

Setting targets based on **proportional representation** of different groups has often been a difficult exercise, due to imprecise local data. Targets can be more precisely defined where census data allows for calculating the ethnic group composition of the population within an area and also the ethnic composition of the age groups and occupations from which labour is being recruited. Such data can be used as a relatively accurate benchmark against which to compare the ethnic group composition of an organisation's employees (Wrench/Modood 2001:55). Such data is currently not available in Ireland.

- **Encouraging more minority ethnic applications** for jobs can be important. “The argument is that businesses which operate in Europe’s metropolitan areas stand to lose out from the social consequences stemming from increasingly marginalised ethnic communities. Such programmes could be said to be addressing side-effect discrimination<sup>2</sup>” (Wrench 2002). Such initiatives could include:
  - a) **a clear indication in job advertisements that minority ethnic applicants are welcome,**
  - b) **use of equal opportunity statements in job advertisements,**
  - c) **job advertising in designated community media, job fairs and in relevant housing areas,**
  - d) **translating job advertisements into minority ethnic languages,**
  - e) **use of minority ethnic images in publicity material,**
  - f) **non-traditional outreach programmes targeting schools and universities with a large number of minority ethnic students,**
  - g) **networking initiatives** targeting migrant, and minority ethnic (including Traveller) community groups.
  
- **Improving the employability of job applicants** is another important area of activity. Initiatives could include:
  - **special training schemes** for migrant and minority ethnic (including Traveller) young people,
  - **supporting school programmes** including cultural programmes in areas where these communities live,
  - **internships, traineeships, scholarships, pre-employment or job preparation training** and similar activities to qualify minority ethnic people for employment in the organisation.

In countries such as the UK where sustained attention has been given to discrimination and integration, many employers have instituted targeted programmes to improve qualifications of migrant and minority ethnic trainees and/or employees. The proportion of positive action trainees progressing into employment in these initiatives is high. Many employers surveyed report that most of their trainees subsequently gain employment.

- Monitoring and supporting the promotion of minority ethnic employees where they are under-represented in better paid positions is also important. Initiatives could include:
  - a) making sure that **task allocation does not sideline workers of the designated groups** within the organisation,
  - b) **management and leadership training,**
  - c) **setting up an internal database of workers** from the designated group who are interested in and ready for advancement,
  - d) **mentoring minority ethnic workers.**

Social partner organisations can complement enterprise level activity in this area. Trade union structures, for example, can support an articulation of minority ethnic and migrant concerns through establishing minority ethnic workers committees with representatives from branches and regions, and facilitating special conferences, equal opportunities newsletters and group mailings for their minority ethnic membership.

## 7. Relying on Diversity

This element and the next one represent primarily a deepening and a broadening of the achievements of the other six elements. They reflect more a change in stance than any innovation in measures. They are about moving **from coping with diversity to being diverse**. This element is characterised more by a fundamental change in attitudes than by certain specific actions.

There is indeed a conceptual step to be taken from *coping with diversity* to being consciously diverse. The challenge in this is threefold:

1. To abandon the focus on certain target groups and the interaction with them in favour of focusing on each and every group of (potential) employees, their skills, their abilities, and their potential. Organisations will be striving for completeness in the set of talents they employ. The diversity arising from equal opportunities policies and practices can help them to achieve this objective.
2. To make the move from diversity as a challenge to diversity as an asset. Common goals and mutual benefits hold a company together rather than a uniform culture. What contributes to a company being successful is its openness to ideas and initiatives from all its staff. This amounts to a reliance on diversity.
3. The benefits of diversity can only be reaped if the diverse voices can also be heard. Diversity turns out to be not as much a matter of centralised management as of employee participation.

*Relying on diversity* requires establishing or consolidating an approach of partnership among the workplace stakeholders. It is unlikely to be implemented or to work successfully in a strictly hierarchical operation. The very nature of rigid hierarchical structures tends to isolate those at the top from the base and from surrounding communities. An organisation relying on diversity needs a more participative approach.

The organisation that relies on diversity must also communicate about what is being done to achieve intercultural respect and equal opportunities. What is achievable from relying on diversity can only be obtained when all employees clearly perceive that the organisation is making a meaningful and consistent effort to be consciously diverse.

## 8. Mainstreaming Equality

Mainstreaming means moving equality from being an item on the board's agenda once a year to making it an integral part of all board decisions. A growing number of companies in Western Europe and North America have come to portray equality measures as 'standard good management' and as a normal part of quality control. Some companies have adopted a slogan that *there is no quality without equality*. Mainstreaming as such is about having clear equality objectives, ensuring all decisions, policies and practices contribute to these objectives and monitoring progress towards these objectives.

Mainstreaming is a process by which practices hitherto regarded as exceptional become normal or habitual and expected. Frequently, this involves a spreading of practices specific to one policy area to all others (Harvey 2003:17) or geographically from a few areas – usually urban – to all others, and in terms of size from one size-group of organisations to all others. More mundanely it means:

- sharing one department's or one branch's experiences with the others,
- applying equality policies not merely to some but to all decisions, not only at peak periods of the year but all the time,
- moving equality from one-off training measures to the general training curriculum.

Mainstreaming of equal opportunities in other countries also comes through companies demanding equal opportunity commitments from their suppliers and from personnel recruitment agencies. For instance, agencies used to locate specialised personnel and/or management candidates are requested to ensure that minority ethnic people are given equal consideration. An organisation can perform regular audits of its suppliers and can insist that supplier companies have an equality policy as a condition of establishing a supplier contract.

## IV. Reinforcing the case for diversity

Discrimination at work has to be addressed for three reasons: the law requires it, a sense of fairness makes it unavoidable, and it makes good business sense. In this section we reinforce these three reasons.

### Public Obligations and Incentives

Legislation that prohibits discrimination in the workplace is the key foundation for achieving equality in an intercultural workplace. Casework under the legislation has been an important stimulus for change.

Placing legal obligations on owners and managers of workplaces can also be a useful way of facilitating an initial learning process that might otherwise not take place. Publicising of the legal obligations can also help a stakeholder in an organisation wishing to institute the required equal opportunities policy and practice to convince other stakeholders.

There are financial incentives made available by Government to facilitate the recruitment of disadvantaged people. "However, it is often the case that companies are not aware of such grants or schemes. ... large companies, usually with their own HR departments, are generally up to date in their knowledge of the equality legislation and financial incentives and it is the SMEs that require most help in these respects. Conversely, in relation to their size, some SMEs are often much more adventurous in terms of employing people from different groupings" (ETG1 2003:5).

Public procurement regulations can play an important role in getting companies to consider equal opportunities. One seventh of the European Union's GDP derives directly from public procurement. EU legislation, as the Commission made clear (COM(2001)566), places no obstacle in the way of including certain non-price concerns in public tenders. In particular, this applies to anti-discrimination measures. Called 'contract compliance', the U.S. Federal Government has been doing so since 1965 in all its procurement (Executive Order 11246 as amended, <http://www.dol.gov/esa/ofccp/>), but it has not been very strict about the obligations. In practice, it has been requiring merely goodwill and reasonable effort.

Contract compliance should not be introduced in a short time-frame, and never without offering adequate services to companies enabling them to meet the stipulated criteria within a reasonable period of time.

## Social Inclusion

Experience in many countries demonstrates that social inclusion and harmony degenerate in a context of discrimination. Physical and verbal abuse of Black and minority ethnic people, violence that is racially motivated and anti-immigrant organisations are the socially detrimental outcomes that can accompany discrimination. With increasing numbers of non-nationals and minority ethnic people living permanently and legally in migrant-receiving countries such as Ireland, failure to establish or to implement effective anti-discrimination measures, indifference to discrimination and discriminatory practices in the workplace and inertia in taking collective action towards achieving equality may all contribute to societal tensions.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an approach that recognises the role of businesses as powerful actors in shaping social dynamics, in particular in contributing –or not– to social cohesion. As articulated by business networks such as CSR Europe, this approach encourages and supports companies to “conduct business responsibly by contributing to the economic health and sustainable development of the communities in which we operate,” and to offer employees “healthy and safe working conditions, ensure fair compensation, good communication as well as equal opportunity for employment and development.”<sup>4</sup>

The concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility follow from recognition that business activities of whatever scale have significant economic, social and environmental impacts and that well managed business can contribute to social inclusion and good governance.

## The Business Case

The business case for diversity has many dimensions. Return on investment is one consideration. As previous work has shown (McNally/Hegarty 2003), in many instances there are also “fears” of waking sleeping dogs or unsettling existing balances of power in an organisation. Such apprehensions cannot be overcome by holding out the business case. Rather they will require a proven offer of support.

A number of economic arguments against discrimination and in favour of equality can be given as follows:

1. Firstly, by discriminating in recruitment, employers may be passing over some of the best qualified candidates for the job, on irrelevant grounds such as nationality or ethnicity. If they recruited only on the basis of capacity where there is no place for discrimination, there need not be any sacrifice of potential productivity.
2. Similarly, it has also been shown that where discrimination occurs in the workplace, a more frequent disruption of teamwork tends to occur, together with higher absenteeism, and reduced morale and commitment (Wrench 1997:vi, 36). Bad publicity, where discrimination is alleged, may also harm a firm’s reputation and consumer loyalty.



3. On the positive side, particularly with regard to globalisation of trade and investments, migrants may offer privileged insight into markets abroad and may speak the language of these markets. "For example, a number of INTEGRA projects have demonstrated how immigrants have helped enterprises in the European Union to open up new markets and to identify new sources of goods or products on other continents" (ETG1 2003:4).
4. Migrants and minority ethnic people are also consumers and often make up significant communities.<sup>5</sup> "In cases where there is a great deal of customer contact, either face-to-face or on the telephone, the number of customers and sales can increase dramatically when the customers can see that people serving them understand their unique needs, language, or culture. For example, a major American bank found that by increasing the diversity of its counter staff it attracted a more diverse range of customers, as well as increasing its overall sales at the branches that more closely 'mirrored' the population of the neighbourhoods in which they were located" (ETG1 2003:4).
5. The employer of a multi-ethnic workforce is more likely to attract custom, talented job applicants and investors, than the employer who practices discrimination.
6. Diverse workforces add value to business activities through increased creativity and better problem solving capacities.

### Two Business Examples

These two profiles show how businesses are able to turn equal opportunities policies into investments with tangible returns. They are drawn from a collection of profiles compiled by the ILO. Both concern British enterprises – subsidiaries of a food producer and a bank.

At the food company, “the improvements in race equality are likely to have contributed

- to the decline in staff turnover, from 120 per cent to around 25 per cent, and
- to higher morale in the company,
- in addition, some leavers return, because they prefer the way they are treated at the company,
- the reduction in turnover has had beneficial effects on quality, with customers commenting on the improvement.
- the General Manager also feels that the company has benefited in terms of productivity and easier recruitment despite problems with low wages.”

Further:

- “Targeted recruitment has expanded the recruitment pool and allowed the company to move away from recruiting students. This has given the company a wider choice of temps who wish to move to permanent jobs and has increased the quality of permanent recruits.
- In the course of race equality activities with schools, managers became more informed about the activities within local schools that are useful for general recruitment and for the management of young recruits.
- A number of employees commented on how the change in promotion procedures has brought about more just treatment and reduced nepotism.”

And:

- “Three years after the company had started monitoring harassment, there had been a decline in the number of informal cases, but the number of cases taken up formally had not changed. The company believed this to indicate a decline in harassment and that this was due to (a) the Harassment Policy – people are prevented by the consequences, and (b) organisational change – smaller teams means people working better together. In the view of employees, management took harassment seriously, and there was the feeling that reported harassment cases would be dealt with appropriately. Several employees commented that things had improved in the last few years and several others reported that a number of years ago they would not have (or had not) reported harassment, but now would do so.”

At the bank, one of the driving forces behind its approach had been the realisation that minority ethnic customers were receiving poorer service than white customers, due to cultural misunderstanding and stereotyping. Training and increasing the percentage of minority ethnic staff was intended to counter this. As a result:

- “Branch staff in North East London reported that the availability of staff who could speak the customer’s first language contributed to improved customer service and increased business. This is particularly important where difficulties with the English language have in the past inhibited potential customers because of failures to be understood.
- Productivity also improved because customers could be served more efficiently. The bank capitalised on this by issuing staff with name badges which include their main ethnic minority language. Posters listing (in the appropriate languages) the languages spoken are now displayed in some branches.
- Branch staff also reported that customers relate better to staff who share the same cultural background. This might be through staff behaving appropriately or just a general preference and greater trust.
- The Head of Equal Opportunities stressed that the benefit was not just through having ethnic minority staff to relate to ethnic minority customers but that with a multicultural staff, they can educate each other and are thus able to provide the same level of service to all customers.
- The changes in recruitment policies also led to the recruitment of local staff rather than commuters which has the benefits of reduced absenteeism, easier deployment across branches (local people could more easily reach all the branches) and higher retention (especially post maternity).”

## V. Conclusion

The *Agenda for Action*, and the 'case for diversity' laid out above are intended to serve as a brief for action by businesses, trade unions and other organisations in Ireland to develop their own work and plans of action to achieve equality in an intercultural workplace.

The real business case, for equality and diversity is in not leaving the organisation's internal and external relations to chance and luck. Good business will always mean looking ahead and taking appropriate measures before a disruption or a financial liability occurs. Entrepreneurs may also see the value of using the opportunity to learn how to manage change and how to engage in calculated risks to business performance.

"Working through diversity issues is an excellent preparation for learning how to change and innovate. Lessons learned in managing diversity can help managers and employees work through complex problems" (ETG1 2003:4).

The International Labour Office and other international organisations can be of help. For example, ILO is publishing a compendium of profiles of innovative anti-discrimination practices and initiatives by local and national businesses, trade unions, government and non-governmental groups across Europe.

Finally, new research in Australia and the UK shows that equal opportunities policies and practices are widespread in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as large firms in those countries, and that, by and large, they affect enterprise performance positively. Indeed, equal opportunities policies were associated with **higher** productivity in larger companies in both Australia and the UK and in SMEs in Australia as well. (Pérotin 2003)

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Pérotin, Virginie./Robinson, Andrew/ Loundes, Joanne. (2003) Equal Opportunities Practices and Enterprise Performance. Geneva. ILO Declaration Working Paper 14.

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*New research on the equality and diversity activities of 500 companies operating in the UK. Ethnic and gender-related activities and experiences are presented side by*

*side. Contains much material on tangible and intangible business benefits. Costly to buy. See Alison Maitland's review in the Financial Times, 23 July 2003.*

Rayner, Charlotte/ Hoel, Helge/ Cooper, Cary L. (2002) Workplace Bullying: What Do We Know, Who Is to Blame, and What Can We Do? London: Taylor & Francis

*Comprehensive introductory text synthesising more than a decade of research on bullying. Shows, for instance, that managers are much more likely than colleagues to be perceived as bullies. There are many causes but personal shortcomings are not prominent among them. Useful reading for anybody in a position to do anything about bullying but also for the victims and the bullies themselves.*

Taran, Patrick (forthcoming) Challenging Discrimination in Employment: A Summary of Research and a Typology of Measures; International Migration Paper; Geneva: ILO

*A comprehensive overview of the ILO's views, positions, experiences and instruments in addressing workplace discrimination against migrant and ethnic minority workers. Designed to be a programmatic statement to guide and motivate further activity inside and outside the ILO.*

Taylor, Paul/ Powell, Diana/ Wrench, John (1997) The Evaluation of Anti-Discrimination Training Activities in the United Kingdom; International Migration Papers 21; Geneva: ILO [www.ilo.org/migrant](http://www.ilo.org/migrant)

*Describes the wide variety and constant evolution of training approaches to anti-discrimination activities in the UK and evaluates them. Illustrates participants' motivations for and gains from training and their criticism. Profiles the results from a survey of 60 training providers and condenses them into 21 case studies.*

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*Now a classic of European searches for good practice and of attempts to try and define what 'good' might mean. Contains one or two examples from each of the 15 member countries regardless of their actual quality. Shows in this way the wide disparities between north and south, older and more recent countries of immigration.*

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*Provides, on 128 pages of text and 11 pages of bibliography, an up-to-date overview of diversity management in the US and in Europe, the debates surrounding it, its place in the quest for equality and its costs and benefits. Highly recommended.*

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*A highly readable and well-pondered evaluation of decades of employment equality practice in the UK, with a focus on the 1990s. Reviews the outcomes, discusses the definition and recognition of discrimination, describes legal, administrative and voluntary measures in some detail, and also features trade union debates. Closes by weighing voluntarism and compulsion and by highlighting the need for enforceable minimum legal standards on working conditions as a necessary base for anti-discrimination activities. Accessible free on the web.*

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*A succinct summary of the ILO's application of discrimination testing in eight local labour markets in four European countries (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Spain). Worthwhile reading for those interested in the results as much as for those wishing to know how it is done. The basic finding is that the difference between a native and an identically qualified non-native of being offered a job is 35 percentage points or more across these countries.*



## Footnotes

1. See the ILO Global Report on Discrimination, Time for Equality at Work. Geneva 2003. pp 104-107
2. "This is when discrimination in one social sphere will generate inequality in another social sphere, even when there is no discrimination in the second sphere. For example, discrimination in housing or education can produce inequality in the sphere of employment" (Wrench 2002).
3. On the issue of corporate responsibility in relation to migrant and minority ethnic workers, see Lindburg (1998), p. 5.
4. See website of CSR Europe: [www.csreurope.org/](http://www.csreurope.org/)
5. This strategy known as 'micro marketing' is described by Anholt who says "marketing people [in the US and Australia] long ago discovered that if you speak to people in their own language – and, a more complex and more subtle point, in their own culture – they tend to prefer you to companies that can't or won't" (Anholt 1997).

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