

#WITHREFUGEES #STANDUP2RACISM

**STRONGER
TOGETHER**

**Findings from
ICTU's Anti-Racist
Trade Unions and Workplaces
Research Project.**



STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

**BETTER
IN A TRADE
UNION**



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

This Project is supported by the Ireland Against Racism fund

Stronger Together

Findings from ICTU's Anti-Racist Trade Unions and Workplaces Research Project

Report authored by Gordon Ogutu, Lucy Michael, David Carroll, and Daniel
Reynolds

December 2024

Executive Summary

This research, commissioned by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), investigates the prevalence and nature of workplace racism and the responses of trade unions across Ireland. This report of findings highlights the experiences of racism in workplaces and the union representation of workers from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It examines key aspects such as the challenges of making or supporting complaints about racial discrimination or harassment, the experiences of advocating for non-discrimination in the workplace, and the role of trade unions in addressing racial discrimination in the future.

The findings reveal that union members from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds in Ireland and Northern Ireland frequently experience both direct and indirect racial discrimination, ranging from overt racism and racial slurs to subtle microaggressions and exclusionary practices. Reporting such discrimination is often checked by the precarious nature of many jobs, the sensitive nature of incidents, ineffective complaints processes, and fear of victimization, including demotion, social isolation, or job loss.

While trade unions have made efforts to support these workers, their effectiveness is often limited by insufficient expertise on racial discrimination, insufficient resources, poor reporting mechanisms, and limited diversity within union leadership. Furthermore, the 15-year gap since the last National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) has allowed persistent exploitation and systemic barriers to flourish, highlighting the need for both union and governmental action.

The study underscores the urgent need for unions to prioritize anti-racism initiatives, improve diversity and inclusion, and adopt a comprehensive approach that includes awareness training, policy enforcement, and a commitment to fostering workplace inclusivity. Government and public bodies must address weaknesses in legal protections, fully implement the National Action Plan Against Racism 2023, and rigorously apply the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty to protect workers and service users alike.

Report authors: Gordon Ogutu, Lucy Michael, David Carroll, Daniel Reynolds

Introduction

This research, commissioned by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), investigates the prevalence and nature of workplace racism and the responses of trade unions across Ireland. It situates these findings within the broader context of increasing diversity in the workforce and rising anti-immigrant sentiment.

The "Stronger Together: Anti-Racism Workplaces and Trade Unions" project, which includes this research, highlights the critical role unions play in fostering inclusive workplaces amidst these challenges. It also incorporates training on anti-racism actions, capacity building for migrant and minority ethnic trade union members and a toolkit to support anti-racism action. The project aims to ensure that anti-racism policies and practices are a core collective bargaining tool for unions and was supported by the Ireland Against Racism Fund. The research has benefited from the contribution of members of trade unions across the island in a wide variety of sectors through a series of training and outreach activities during 2024.

Ethnic minority and migrant workers are disproportionately affected by workplace discrimination, harassment, and exclusion, with systemic barriers often limiting their access to justice and equitable treatment. Reporting mechanisms are often ineffective, constrained by precarious employment conditions, fear of victimisation, and limited union resources. Moreover, trade unions themselves face internal challenges, such as a lack of diversity in leadership and inconsistent engagement with anti-racism initiatives.

As trade unions work to uphold workers' rights, they face significant challenges in addressing entrenched racism and inequality in workplaces, exacerbated by structural issues such as precarious employment and inadequate legal protections. The research also comes at a critical juncture as a new National Action Plan Against Racism 2023-2027 is implemented, following a 15-year gap since the last National Action Plan. Despite legislative frameworks, enforcement has frequently fallen short, leaving many workers in precarious roles vulnerable to systemic discrimination and abuse. The lack of robust protections has allowed exploitative practices to flourish, underscoring the urgent need for renewed and comprehensive anti-racism strategies at both organisational and governmental levels.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with union members and representatives from diverse sectors, this study sheds light on both the immediate needs and long-term strategies required to address racism in workplaces. It pinpoints the pressing need for unions to adopt comprehensive strategies that not only support affected workers but also drive systemic change within their own structures and the broader labour market.

Research approach

The research aimed to explore current practice in trade unions in responding to racial discrimination and advocating for anti-discrimination measures and to assess their effectiveness. Trade union members and representatives were asked about their experiences of complaints on racial discrimination and advocating for policies and procedures to reduce interpersonal and institutional racism and support inclusive workplaces. Migrant and minority ethnic members (including some officials) described their experiences of making complaints, the consequences of doing so, the support available from trade unions during complaints and their experiences of advocating for themselves and others in addressing racial discrimination in the workplace. Trade union representatives described the nature of union resources and support for racial discrimination complaints, activity towards proactive inclusion and anti-discrimination in workplaces, and challenges in supporting complaints. Both groups discussed the changes or improvements that could be made to the process of addressing racial discrimination or harassment complaints in the workplace, the current effectiveness of trade unions in proactively preventing racial discrimination, addressing cases of discrimination that have already happened, and areas of priority actions for unions.

Data collection methods included semi structured narrative interviews with 22 participants drawn from trade union leadership positions as well as members of the unions. Interviews were conducted between April and July 2024. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom and in English. Participants' identities have been anonymised. A snowballing approach was used to recruit participants. Participants came from a variety of sectors, including media, education, healthcare, security and public services. There were 10 male and 12 female participants whose national backgrounds were Irish, French, Nigerian, Indian, South African, Brazilian, American and Kenyan. Data collection and analysis was conducted in line with the Code of Ethics of the British Sociological Association (as adopted by the Sociological Association of Ireland). The interviews were conducted by Dr. Lucy Michael, Gordon Ogutu and Dr. David Carroll.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity and the labour market in Ireland

Ireland has one of the most diverse labour markets in Europe, with a significant number of foreign-born workers.¹ According to the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI), there were approximately 700,000 non-nationals living in Ireland in April 2023². In terms of employment, NERI estimates that there were about 531,800 non-nationals in employment in the country by the third quarter of 2023. By ethnicity, over 502,000 were classified as Any Other White background, primarily from other European Union (EU) countries³. Additionally, 94,434 individuals identified as being of an Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi background, 20,115 of an Arab background, 16,059 as Roma, 26,828 as Asian or Asian Irish, and 67,546 as Black or Black Irish. 33,000 identified as White-Irish Travellers.

According to the Central Statistics Office's Labour Force Survey (LFS) reported union membership stood at 516,000 in mid-2021⁴, representing 22 percent of the workforce⁵. Despite Ireland's growing diversity, there is a lack of specific data regarding minority ethnic or migrant representation within Irish trade unions.

Despite this diversity, discrimination in recruitment and workplace practices remains prevalent. Immigrants frequently face disadvantages in employment, with skin colour emerging as a significant barrier in addition to factors like education and language skills⁶. Migrants from outside the EU experience notably lower employment rates compared to EU-born individuals, with Muslim and Black respondents facing particularly high levels of unemployment⁷. Although the unemployment rate hit a 10-year low in 2019, economic improvements largely benefited Ireland's white population, leaving migrants, who are more likely to hold third-level qualifications than Irish-born individuals, struggling to secure graduate-level positions.

¹ Central Statistics Office (2023) [Census of Population 2022](#)

² Smart, C. (2023) [Migrant Worker Estimate](#). Dublin: NERI.

³ Central Statistics Office: Census of Population 2022, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/migrationanddiversity/>.

⁴ Central Statistics office (n.d.) [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) Time Series](#).

⁵ Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2024) [Opening statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment](#), January 2024.

⁶ Joseph, E. (2018) 'Whiteness and Racism: Examining the Racial Order in Ireland'. *Irish Journal of Sociology* 26(1): 46–70.

⁷ McGinnity, F., E. Quinn, E. McCullough, S. Enright, and S. Curran (2021a) Measures to Combat Racial Discrimination and Promote Diversity in the Labour Market: A Review of Evidence. Dublin: ESRI.

The lack of recognition for foreign qualifications and experience impacts the recruitment and career progression of migrant groups⁸. Stereotypes and perceptions of a 'migrant deficit' further aggravate these issues⁹. For instance, an experiment showed that Black African men were less likely to receive responses to job applications compared to individuals with White or Polish-sounding names¹⁰.

Discrimination in the workplace is frequently reported to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission¹¹ and the Irish Network Against Racism¹², with at least one in five ethnic minority workers experiencing workplace discrimination¹³. Racial abuse at work can lead to fears of job loss and negatively impact employees' mental health and job turnover¹⁴. Black Non-Irish and Black Irish individuals are much less likely to hold managerial or professional roles compared to White Irish or White Other groups, though the gap for White Other groups is tapering. Asian Irish individuals are more likely to be employed in professional or managerial occupations, possibly due to immigration policies that restrict non-EU nationals to high-skilled jobs.

Black Irish individuals are twice as likely to face employment discrimination compared to White Irish individuals, while Black non-Irish individuals experience discrimination at five times the rate of their White counterparts¹⁵. Even when employed, Black Irish and Black non-Irish workers are significantly less likely to occupy senior roles compared to White Irish and White non-Irish individuals. Efforts to improve access to employment for these groups have often been subsumed under broader diversity agendas, leading to insufficient progress¹⁶. Research highlights that this disparity in discrimination persists even after controlling for factors such as

⁸ Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (2015) [All Work and Low Pay: The Experience of Migrants Working in Ireland](#). Dublin: MRCl.

⁹ Joseph, 2018.

¹⁰ McGinnity, F., and P. D. Lunn (2011) 'Measuring Discrimination Facing Ethnic Minority Job Applicants: An Irish Experiment'. *Work, Employment and Society* 25, no. 4: 693–708.

¹¹ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2024) Annual Report 2023. Dublin: IHREC.

¹² Michael, L., D. Reynolds, and N. Omid (2023) 'Reports of Racism in Ireland: Data from iReport.ie - Annual Report 2022'. Dublin: Irish Network Against Racism.

¹³ McGinnity et al., 2021a.

¹⁴ Michael, L. (2015) *Afrophobia in Ireland*. Dublin: ENAR Ireland.; Triana, M. D. C., García, M. F., & Colella, A. (2010). Managing diversity: How organizational efforts to support diversity moderate the effects of perceived racial discrimination on affective commitment. *Personnel Psychology*, 63(4): 817-843. ; Paradies, Y., Ben, J., Denson, N., et al. (2015). Racism as a determinant of health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PloS one*, 10(9), e0138511.; Esses, V. M. (2021). Prejudice and discrimination toward immigrants. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72: 503-531.

¹⁵ McGinnity, F., R. Grotti, S. Groarke, and S. Coughlan (2018) 'Ethnicity and Nationality in the Irish Labour Market'. Dublin: ESRI.

¹⁶ Joseph, 2018.

qualifications, age, gender, family type, region, language skills, and immigration status¹⁷.

While Asian and White non-Irish groups do not report higher levels of recruitment discrimination compared to White Irish individuals, some level of discrimination still occurs. Discrimination has been documented among non-Irish ethnic groups, including Asians, White non-Irish, and EU nationals. Despite some of these groups achieving high occupational attainment, Irish Travellers face the lowest employment rates and the highest discrimination in recruitment¹⁸. Alongside direct discrimination is employment rates amongst Irish Travellers are also hampered by lack of knowledge about job openings, limited networks, and unfamiliarity with application processes¹⁹.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's labour market has become increasingly diverse, with approximately 125,000 people from minority ethnic communities residing in the region. This includes established Chinese and Indian communities, as well as a growing number of people of African descent. Despite this diversity, minority ethnic groups often encounter significant challenges in employment. For instance, Irish Travellers are less likely to be in employment and more likely to be economically inactive compared to other ethnic groups. Traveller women face additional barriers, including prejudice and discrimination, which curb their participation in the workforce²⁰.

Migrant workers, especially those from Eastern European countries, are frequently over-represented in low-paid, low-status jobs, such as 'Process, Plant and Machine Operatives' and 'Elementary' occupations. They are also concentrated in low-paid industry sectors like 'Manufacturing' and 'Distribution, Hotels and Restaurants'. Migrant workers and refugees face numerous barriers to participating in and sustaining employment in Northern Ireland. Recognition of qualifications is an issue for migrant workers and refugees qualifying for and progressing in employment. Inadequate language proficiency is an additional barrier, particularly where professions set a high standard of English proficiency. Despite this, in Northern Ireland, migrants overall are more likely to be employed than non-migrants although the skills profile of migrants is generally higher in Ireland than in Northern Ireland. East European migrants are a distinctive group in Northern Ireland, tending to have lower educational qualifications than

¹⁷ McGinnity, F., I. Privalko, É. Fahey, S. Enright, and D. O'Brien (2020) 'Origin and Integration: A Study of Migrants in the 2016 Irish Census'. Dublin: ESRI and Department of Justice and Equality.

¹⁸ McGinnity et al., 2018.

¹⁹ McGinnity, F., H. Russell, I. Privalko, and S. Enright (2021b) 'Monitoring Decent Work in Ireland'. Dublin: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

²⁰ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Employment](#), May 2018. Belfast: ECNI.

native-born and other migrant groups, and more likely to be living in rural areas.²¹

Additionally, a significant proportion of minority ethnic individuals report experiencing racial discrimination or harassment in the workplace, which adversely affects their employment opportunities and overall well-being. These employment disparities are further compounded by systemic issues, including limited recognition of foreign qualifications, lack of access to professional networks, and unfamiliarity with local recruitment processes. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that promote equality, enhance support for minority ethnic workers, and foster inclusive workplace environments across Northern Ireland.²²

Race, Migration and Workers Rights

As a member of the EU, Ireland is obligated to comply with The Race Directive (2000/43/EC)²³, which aims to protect individuals from discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin. This directive includes protections for third-country nationals but excludes discrimination based on nationality. This exception is due to immigration policy considerations and the desire of member states to retain control over their immigration policies. Nevertheless, the Race Directive provides extensive protection against racial discrimination across various sectors, including employment.

Irish law prohibiting discrimination in employment is contained in the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015, and outlines nine protected grounds against discrimination: Gender, Religion, Age, Disability, Race, Membership of the Traveller Community, Sexual Orientation, Civil Status, and Family Status. Under these Acts, racial discrimination is defined as treating someone less favourably due to their race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins. The Employment Equality Acts prohibit discrimination in numerous employment-related areas such as recruitment, training, promotion, terms and conditions, and dismissal. These laws also address harassment and victimisation in the workplace, particularly where adverse treatment follows a complaint by an employee.

In Northern Ireland, employment anti-discrimination protections on race and ethnicity are contained in the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 as amended by the Race Relations Order 1997 (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2012.

²¹ McGinnity, F., Laurence, J., & Cunliffe, E. (2023). Comparing migrant integration in Ireland and Northern Ireland (No. 158). Research Series. Dublin: ESRI.

²² Michael, L., Reynolds, D., Kemny, M., et al. (2022) [Inequalities Experienced by Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Traveller people residing in Belfast](#). Belfast: Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency Northern Ireland.

²³ Council of Europe, [Directive 2000/43/EC](#), 29 June 2000.

Despite these protections, migrant workers in Ireland face hierarchical challenges within the labour market. Barriers such as the historic lack of recognition of foreign qualifications and experience contribute to issues like deskilling, underemployment, and unemployment among ethnic minority groups²⁴. Refugees experience additional difficulties, particularly due to historical restrictions on their right to work, which create gaps in employment history. Although the Supreme Court's 2017 ruling allowed asylum seekers to work under certain conditions, many still face significant hurdles, despite the establishment of work rights under an EU Directive.²⁵

Importantly discrimination is often intersectional with race, gender, religion, age, disability, socio-economic class, and geographic area all impacting on employment. The combination of several specific characteristics can lead to distinct forms of discrimination or disadvantage²⁶. Gender is one of the key factors that affect the different patterns of employment between ethnic groups²⁷. To overcome this discrimination ethnic minority women often must demonstrate higher educational qualifications²⁸. Lack of qualifications, failure to gain recognition for existing qualifications, and language proficiency are significant barriers to ethnic minority women participating in the labour market²⁹. These circumstantial barriers along with the structural barriers discussed previously affect women's participation, make it harder for ethnic minority women to join the labour market and integrate in the workplace³⁰. The ESRI notes in Ireland that the combination of an individual's characteristics and experiences mean that "the effectiveness of interventions to support individuals might differ for minority men and women, or for ethnic minority lone parents compared to married/cohabiting parents, or minority young people compared to older people"³¹.

Refugees in the labour market

Employment is a key factor supporting integration, being simultaneously a means of connection, stability, and a marker of integration. Economic independence is also important to self-determination for migrants, particularly refugees, and work can provide important social roles and

²⁴ Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, 2015.

²⁵ Fanning, B., & Veale, A. (2004) Child poverty as public policy: Direct provision and asylum seeker children in the Republic of Ireland. *Child Care in Practice*, 10(3): 241-251.; Thornton, L. (2018). [We're only paying lip service to asylum seekers' right to work](#). The Irish Times, 25 January 2018.

²⁶ McGinnity et al, 2021a.

²⁷ Zwysen, W., V. Di Stasio, and A. Heath.(2021) 'Ethnic Penalties and Hiring Discrimination: Comparing Results from Observational Studies with Field Experiments in the UK'. *Sociology* 55(2): 263–82.

²⁸ Miaari, S., N. Khattab, and R. Johnston (2019) 'Religion and Ethnicity at Work: A Study of British Muslim Women's Labour Market Performance'. *Quality & Quantity* 53(1): 19–47.

²⁹ Turkman, H. (2019) 'Tripled Glazed Ceiling- Barriers to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Women Participating in the Economy'. Cardiff: Chwarae Teg.

³⁰ Finney, N., D. Kapadia, and S. Peters (2015) 'How Are Poverty, Ethnicity and Social Networks Related?' York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

³¹ McGinnity et al, 2021a.

relationships that support long-term integration. Employment is also strongly positively correlated with stability, both resulting from and supporting sustainable engagement with wider society and its institutions. On average it can take more than five years for refugees to secure employment after arrival in Europe³². This is because of the time it takes to develop English, gain qualifications, and adjust to other changes.

Being part of the working population makes a significant difference to the life of refugees and their partners and families, increasing recognition in their social networks and the host society, helping support family members abroad, and allowing them to be independent of welfare provisions. Refugees tend to join labour markets later than labour migrants, which as a result may cause them to experience loss or devaluation of their human capital and credentials during asylum procedures³³. Rapid entry into the labour market prevents long-term detrimental effects of exclusion and isolation experienced by migrants and refugees.

In Ireland, International Protection Applicants (IPA) may be granted permission access to the labour market work under strict conditions after six months or more of waiting for a decision on their international protection application³⁴. International protection applicants, however, tend to find jobs characterised by lower quality work, resulting in lower wages and poorer working conditions. The most common job titles reported by protection applicants were general operatives (e.g. warehouse work), healthcare assistants, kitchen porters, and cleaners³⁵.

Trade Unions & Anti-Racism Mobilisation

Trade unions play a vital role in promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. By working towards creating diverse and inclusive work environments, trade unions contribute to the overall well-being and success of society. Weakening migrant workers' rights leads to all workers' conditions being reduced as it makes it easier for employers to use migrants to undercut other workers³⁶.

Trade unions can support minority ethnic and migrant workers in the workplace in a variety of ways. Trade unions also benefit from these workers becoming members and participating in the unions' activities. Diverse union membership addresses issues of exploitation and downward wage pressure.

³² European Commission (2016) [How Are Refugees Faring on the Labour Market in Europe?](#) OECD Secretariat and European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

³³ Brell, C., Dustmann, C., & Preston, I. (2020). The labour market integration of refugee migrants in high-income countries. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(1): 94-121.

³⁴ Department of Justice (n.d.) [Labour Market Access Permission](#). Webpage. Government of Ireland.

³⁵ Polakowski, M., & Cunniffe, E. (2023). *Labour market integration of international protection applicants in Ireland* (No. 160). Research Series. Dublin: ESRI.

³⁶ TUC (2024) [Standing for migrant workers everywhere](#). Webpage.

Through diversity unions benefit from collective organising and mobilisation, networking and establishing links with migrants, and broader awareness across the labour market of key protections for workers³⁷. Challenges faced by trade unions include: a hostile policy environment towards migrants in the labour market, lack of experience in organising with and recruiting migrant members, and discrimination within the union membership³⁸.

Engaging in anti-racist mobilisations is essential for unions because it not only promotes fairness and equity but also strengthens the overall labour movement. By advocating for fair labour standards and equitable treatment for all workers, including migrants and refugees, unions help ensure that these workers can meaningfully contribute to the economy and support the government's efforts to address critical labour shortages. Furthermore, such mobilisation demonstrates the unions' commitment to social justice and inclusivity, reinforcing their role as defenders of all workers' rights and helping to build a more cohesive and equitable society. In Ireland, public demonstrations by over 100,000 people in 2005 against the exploitation of migrant workers and the displacement of jobs by Irish Ferries showed the ability of trade unions and workers to act for the protection of all worker groups³⁹.

Looking abroad, the evidence suggests that prevailing political narratives do not necessarily determine how trade unions respond to migrant worker exploitation or racism in the workplace. In Finland, a key strategy for Finnish trade unions is to ensure that migrants' working conditions align with those of native workers, preventing wage suppression and exploitation. The Service Union United (SUU) plays a crucial role in this effort by providing information to migrants about Finnish collective agreements and trade union membership in the most common migrant languages. This information-sharing and advocacy are vital because they empower migrants to understand and assert their rights, which helps prevent the undercutting of labour conditions. Conducting awareness campaigns is equally important, as it ensures that migrants are informed about their rights and the benefits of union membership, fostering a more inclusive and equitable labour market. These efforts not only protect migrant workers but also strengthen the overall labour movement by promoting solidarity and preventing the erosion of labour standards.

³⁷ Alberti, G., Holgate, J., & Tapia, M. (2013). Organising migrants as workers or as migrant workers? Intersectionality, trade unions and precarious work. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(22), 4132-4148.; Marino, S., Connolly, H., & Lucio, M. M. (2024). Trade unions and migrant workers: the challenges of inclusion. In G. Meardi (ed.) *Research Handbook on Migration and Employment*, 152-166. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

³⁸ Turner, T., Cross, C., & O'Sullivan, M. (2014). Does union membership benefit immigrant workers in 'hard times'? *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 56(5): 611-630.; Marino et al, 2024.

³⁹ RTE (2005) [Thousands take part in Irish Ferries protests](#). Mon 12 December 2005.

Advocating for humane working conditions is crucial for trade unions, because it directly impacts the health, safety, and dignity of their members, especially the minority ethnic and migrant workers who might be vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) highlighted the unacceptable conditions faced by drivers during Covid-19 pandemic, in a sector where migrants are a significant proportion of the workforce, by collecting evidence from the members and engaging the media for coverage. Truck drivers faced high levels of stress and the increased risk of human trafficking. By pushing for better conditions, unions not only protect their members but also challenge the systemic issues that allow such exploitation to persist. Coordinated, long-term strategies and robust collective action are necessary to ensure that vulnerable workers are treated with the respect and care they deserve, reinforcing the union's role as a vital defender of workers' rights.

In Ireland and the UK, trade unions have been pivotal in championing the rights of workers from new EU member states, pushing for stronger labour protections and better enforcement of laws. Their proactive efforts in recruiting, organising, and supporting migrant workers highlight the crucial role unions play in fostering more inclusive and equitable workplaces. Over the past decade, unions have had to balance their advocacy for anti-discrimination legislation with the growing need to counteract rising xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments⁴⁰.

Unions can create a more inclusive environment where all members feel valued and protected through initiatives like ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses, which help migrant workers improve their English language skills, understand safety directives, and avoid workplace injuries. Offering these courses not only enhances workplace safety but also empowers migrant workers by increasing their knowledge of employment rights. By extending these training programs to community centres, unions can further strengthen their ties to local communities and broaden their influence. These challenge the systemic barriers that migrant workers face, ultimately leading to more equitable and just workplaces⁴¹.

Trade unions like IG Metall in Germany actively support government initiatives such as the recognition of prior learning and qualifications and the provision of language courses to support early integration of migrants and refugees into the workforce⁴². In the United Kingdom, trade unions have actively sought to build connections with migrant workers, recognizing the

⁴⁰ Heyes, J., & Hyland, M. (2016). Supporting, recruiting and organising migrant workers in Ireland and the United Kingdom: A review of trade union practices. In B. Galgóczi and J. Leschke (eds.) *EU Labour Migration in Troubled Times*, 211-234. London: Routledge.

⁴¹ Perrett, R., Lucio, M. M., McBride, J., & Craig, S. (2012). Trade union learning strategies and migrant workers: Policies and practice in a new-liberal environment. *Urban Studies*, 49(3), 649-667.

⁴² Bergfeld, M. (2017) 'Germany's Willkommenskultur: Trade Unions, Refugees and Labour Market Integration', *Global Labour Journal*, 8.

importance of addressing their unique needs and challenges. One key strategy has been to develop organising approaches tailored to specific migrant communities, such as Polish migrants, by offering services like English language learning and hiring Polish-speaking officials. These efforts have included establishing special branches that cater to the linguistic and cultural needs of migrant workers, which has led to an increase in membership among these groups. The success of these initiatives highlights the value of providing services that resonate with migrant workers and meet their specific needs, making unions more accessible and relevant to these communities.

Unions have adopted and combined different strategies to address the challenges associated with downward wage pressure, including immigration control, collective bargaining, and the organisation of migrant workers. In Sweden, for example, unions with a large membership base have successfully pursued an equalisation strategy, promoting openness to new membership while ensuring wage parity through strong collective bargaining. German unions, with lower membership but greater political influence, have combined efforts to secure minimum wage laws with calls for immigration controls to protect wage standards. British unions, facing different constraints, have focused on organising migrant workers directly to build solidarity and resist wage suppression.

Supporting anti-racism in workplaces is essential for unions as part of these broader strategies to protect workers' rights and promote equality. Unions that adopt a universalistic approach, treating all workers the same regardless of their specific experiences, often overlook the unique challenges faced by migrant workers, including racism and discrimination. By integrating both universalistic and particularistic approaches, unions can better address the intersecting forms of oppression that minority ethnic and migrant workers face, ensuring their full participation and representation. In doing so, unions not only safeguard wage standards but also foster inclusive workplaces where all workers, regardless of race or ethnicity, are treated with dignity and respect.

By actively working against racism, unions strengthen their ability to advocate effectively for all workers but also promotes participatory democracy within the organisation, as seen in unions in Italy and the Netherlands, where inclusive, bottom-up strategies have led to greater organisational cohesion and effectiveness. Unions can revitalise their position among minority ethnic workers and renew their effectiveness in a changing labour market, strengthening solidarity across diverse groups of workers and ensuring that their strategies are both equitable and comprehensive.

Discrimination against minority ethnic and migrant workers

Discrimination has long posed a significant challenge to trade unions, particularly in the UK, where issues of racism and discrimination within both

employment and the trade union movement itself were prominent through the late 1990s and early 2000s. Despite efforts to address these issues, much of the progress made by unions has been limited and fragmented, lacking the broader coordinated action and long-term strategies necessary for sustained impact. Without greater collective regulation and support from the state, many of the progressive steps taken by trade unions remain on precarious foundations, limiting their effectiveness⁴³.

In the Nordic countries, the challenge of discrimination within unions is accentuated by the significant labour immigration since the EU enlargement in 2004.⁴⁴ While recruiting workers from ethnic minorities has been a major focus for Nordic trade unions, less attention has been given to integrating these members within the unions themselves. For example, having ethnic minority workers serve as trade union representatives at various levels within companies and unions is crucial for true integration. However, a glance at the top positions within Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian trade unions reveals an almost entirely white leadership. This imbalance between the number of ethnic minority union members and their representation within union leadership is a significant challenge⁴⁵.

To tackle these challenges, there are a number of recognised and well-established strategies that are effective.⁴⁶ Unions should prioritise educating workers and members about the pervasive nature of racism, which extends beyond verbal abuse or political preferences. Understanding racism as an insidious process that systematically treats those outside the dominant racial or ethnic group in a subordinate manner is crucial for addressing discrimination effectively. Additionally, unions at the national level should ensure that their membership and leadership accurately reflect the diversity of ethnic minority workers within their sectors and occupations.

Furthermore, unions can actively promote and implement anti-discrimination policies in the workplace, ensuring that these measures are supported by both management and unions. Integrating race equality considerations into all collective agreements is essential for preventing discrimination. Trade union education plays a critical role in challenging discriminatory attitudes and practices, making it important for anti-racist

⁴³ Connolly, H., & Sellers, B. (2017). Trade unions and migrant workers in the UK: Organising in a cold climate. In S. Marino, J. Roosblad, and R. Penninx (eds.) *Trade Unions and Migrant Workers*, 224-243 Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁴⁴ Norway is not an EU member but it does belong to the EEA which grants freedom of movement.

⁴⁵ Hagen, I.M., and R.S. Jensen (2018) 'Trade Union Representatives from Ethnic Minorities. Representation Revisited'. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 25: 437–50.

⁴⁶ Davis, M. (2007) 'Working against Racism: How European Trade Unions Can Combat Racism at Work'. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 13, no. 3: 463–75.

education to be incorporated into all union training programs to empower activists to combat racism effectively.

Finally, unions can engage in public campaigning as part of their broader commitment to anti-racism. By advocating for issues such as ethnic minority access to training, skills improvement, and changes in the law, unions can lend significant support to anti-racist organisations and push for stronger legal frameworks. This involvement not only strengthens campaigns against racism but also reinforces the union's responsibility to lobby governments and create a firmer foundation for addressing discrimination in the workplace.

Challenges For Organisation

Attitudes towards immigration is a significant challenge to trade unions in organising and supporting migrant and minority workers⁴⁷. This is particularly so when union membership is associated with defence of workers from the alleged threat of migrants to wages and working conditions. Conflicting policies within trade unions, as seen in the Finnish Construction Trade Union (FCTU) and the SUU, can create significant challenges for organisation and internal solidarity⁴⁸. While these unions aim to include migrants and defend their labour rights, they simultaneously advocate for restricting labour immigration from non-EU/EEA countries, citing concerns over high unemployment and poor working conditions for migrants. This dual approach—promoting inclusion on one hand while supporting restrictive immigration policies on the other—undermines the unions' efforts to fully address the unique challenges faced by migrant workers.

An influx of migrants to Germany during the 1970s and 1980s, initially viewed as a threat to the national workforce, posed significant challenges to local trade unions. However, as migrants became part of the labour force, their interests were gradually incorporated into the trade union agenda. This integration not only led to the representation of migrant workers' interests but also brought about organisational changes within the unions, notably through the creation of specialist committees⁴⁹. Internal union dynamics, such as union identity and structures, are instrumental for a sustainable organisation of migrant members. In Switzerland and the UK, an important

⁴⁷ Gorodzeisky, A. and Richards, A. (2016) 'Union members' attitudes towards immigrant workers: A 14-country study', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 22(1): 23–38.

⁴⁸ Alho, R. (2015) [Inclusion or exclusion?: trade union strategies and labour migration](#). Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti.

⁴⁹ Carstensen, A.L. (2021) 'Challenging the trade union agenda: migrants' interest representation and German trade unions in Hamburg in the 1970s and 1980s', *Labour History*, 62(1): 23–40.

factor for successful organising of Polish workers was the recognition of their collective agency and their contribution to union revitalisation⁵⁰.

In Sweden, where unions had strong resources and influence, they focused on equalising working conditions for migrant workers without advocating for labour market closure⁵¹. In contrast, German unions, with lower membership but greater political influence, favoured strategies that involved both labour market closure and state intervention to achieve equalisation. However, in the UK, where unions lacked both membership density and political power, they were neither able to push for labour market closure nor effectively advocate for equalisation. Instead, they had to concentrate on organising migrant workers, a strategy driven more by necessity than by strength. In Italy, trade unions adopted two primary strategies: "individual protection" and "collective representation" but these efforts have achieved little success in improving the representation of migrants in union leadership, due in part to a lack of migrant members with the necessary skills. In Britain, even with measures like proportionality and reserved seats that have allowed some progress for white women in union hierarchies, other underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ members, continue to face significant barriers⁵².

In the Netherlands, Italy and the UK, the degree of union institutionalisation and the prevailing dynamics have shaped how migrant workers are integrated into union activities⁵³. In the Netherlands, unions have traditionally relied on a high degree of consensus, cooperation, and coordination between social partners and the state. This led Dutch unions to adopt a "diversity policy" aimed at better integrating migrant and ethnic minority workers. However, these initiatives often failed to take root, largely due to weak implementation of ethnic minority policies, and an increasingly hostile social climate that worsened conflicts between native/nationals and migrant workers. Economic and organisational difficulties further handicapped the union's ability to focus on innovative strategies for minority inclusion, as they were forced to prioritise other pressing issues. More recently, for the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) in France, addressing racism and xenophobia within the union's framework was essential in ensuring that union members were less

⁵⁰ Rogalewski, A. (2022) 'Trade unions challenges in organising Polish workers: A comparative case study of British and Swiss trade union strategies', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28: 385–404.

⁵¹ Afonso, A., Negash, S.M. and Wolff, E.A. (2020) 'Closure, equality or organisation: Trade union responses to EU labour migration', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 30: 528–542.

⁵² Guillaume, C. and Pochic, S. (2009). When Voluntarist Integration Policies Are Not Sufficient: Lessons From British Trade Unionism. *Cahiers du Genre*, No 47(2), 145-168.

⁵³ Marino, S. (2012) 'Trade union inclusion of migrant and ethnic minority workers: Comparing Italy and the Netherlands', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 18:20–5.

receptive to ideological influences originating from outside⁵⁴. To overcome these contradictions, a more consistent and broader commitment to anti-racism and migrant inclusion is essential.

What Have Trade Unions in Ireland Done to Tackle Racism?

Looking back across the last two decades, there is much evidence that racism and the treatment of migrant workers has been a concern for trade unions in Ireland. In this short review, we focus on the actions and advocacy of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) rather than its 44 affiliate trade unions which implement and drive ICTU's actions and policy positions. Through its affiliate trade unions, ICTU represents over 800,000 workers.

From 2000 to 2008, ICTU laid the foundation for its anti-racism and migrant worker advocacy amidst Ireland's economic boom. This period saw a significant influx of migrant workers, filling labour shortages across sectors like construction, agriculture, and hospitality. ICTU focused on raising awareness through initiatives like Anti-Racist Workplace Week and training union representatives on diversity and equality. The establishment of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) provided a policy framework to combat discrimination, and ICTU's advocacy for stronger workplace protections emphasised the need for decent work and anti-discrimination practices. Despite these advances, the rapid economic growth masked underlying structural inequalities, leaving many migrant workers in low-wage, precarious roles without robust protections against exploitation⁵⁵.

Between 2009 and 2014, Ireland faced the fallout of the global financial crisis, which severely impacted the economy and disproportionately affected minority workers and migrants. With job losses mounting and public services under strain due to austerity measures, migrant workers faced heightened vulnerability to exploitation and unemployment. ICTU responded by advocating for systemic reforms, such as sectoral wage agreements and targeted employment initiatives, and called for a "forced labour permit" to regularise the immigration status of workers subjected to forced labour and ensure their protection as victims of crime rather than as irregular migrants. In 2010, ICTU published *Towards a Strategy for the Inclusion of Migrant Workers in Trade Unions*.

⁵⁴ Bataille, P. (2018) 'The French Trade Union Movement and the Struggle Against Racism in the Workplace', in: J. Wets (ed.) *Cultural Diversity in Trade Unions: A Challenge to Class Identity?* London: Routledge.

⁵⁵ Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2001) *Anti-Racism Draft Programme*.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2001) *Anti-Racism Week Pack*.; National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) (2005) *Planning for Diversity: The National Action Plan Against Racism 2005–2008*. Dublin: Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) (2006) *Guidelines for Combating Racism and Planning for Diversity*. Dublin: ICTU.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2009) *Congress Actions for Integrated Workplaces Strategy*. Internal publication.

During this period, ICTU highlighted the systemic discrimination faced by groups like Travellers and African nationals, pushing for inclusive national strategies and enhanced legal protections. However, rising xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment presented significant barriers to progress, complicating the precarious position of minority workers. Advocacy focused on creating pathways for undocumented migrant workers to regularize their status and protecting them under employment law, particularly in light of cases like *Younis v. Hussein*, where legal loopholes denied workers justice. It also emphasised the integration of asylum seekers into the workforce, despite restrictive policies linked to the Direct Provision system.

By the end of this period, the lingering effects of the recession continued to affect migrant workers disproportionately with many migrants overrepresented in low-paid, precarious jobs with limited access to social protection and progression opportunities, and a high rate of non-compliance with employment laws. Reports indicated increasing racism and ethnic profiling, particularly in public and workplace settings, highlighting the need for robust anti-racism strategies and legal protections⁵⁶.

From 2015 to 2023, ICTU's advocacy evolved in response to the growing complexities of globalisation, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The political landscape was marked by rising nationalism across Europe, creating challenges for migrant and minority workers. ICTU intensified its focus on combatting far-right ideologies and disinformation, advocating for stronger workplace protections and inclusive policies. ICTU collaborated with other organisations to establish referral systems, clinics, and multilingual resources, enhancing support for migrant workers across Ireland and Northern Ireland. The introduction of the Employment Permits (Amendment) Bill in 2014, which ICTU supported, provided some new protections for undocumented workers. A SIPTU-organised Migrant Activist Conference in Dublin in 2015 created the SIPTU International and Migrant Workers Support Network, and the organisation reported a significant increase in migrant members. There was also the reestablishment of Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) to provide wage-setting mechanisms in low-paid sectors such as hospitality and agriculture, which disproportionately employed migrants. ICTU pointed to a "failure" of employers to engage in the JLCs. ICTU offered the Irish government the use of its training network to assist with the refugee program amid the global refugee crisis. Initiatives

⁵⁶ Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2009) Congress Actions for an Integrated Workplaces Strategy.; ICTU (2010) Workplace Diversity Initiative Summary.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2010) Survey on Migrant Worker Membership.; Technical, Engineering, and Electrical Union (TEEU) (2012) Equality and Diversity Guide for Workplace Representatives.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2012) Towards a Strategy of Integration of Migrant Workers into Trade Unions.; ICTU (2012) Congress Report on Integrated Workplaces.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2013) Submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence, and Equality.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2014) Submission to the Cross-Departmental Group on Integration.

like the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) UnionMigrantNet project and the 2020 Charter to Protect Migrant Workers from Exploitation and to Build Inclusive Workplaces, developed in partnership with the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) and other stakeholders, enhanced ICTU's commitment to fostering equality and supporting marginalised groups⁵⁷.

The pandemic further exposed the vulnerabilities of migrant workers, particularly in sectors like meat processing and healthcare. ICTU responded with calls for improved health and safety regulations, regularization schemes for undocumented workers, and expanded access to work for asylum seekers. It likewise worked to secure access to Covid19 Enhanced Illness benefit by non-national workers and those in Direct Provision centres and access to the special Pandemic Unemployment Payment in the event of temporary lay-off. International solidarity work called government attention to the importance of international cooperation to ensure equitable access to healthcare, vaccines, and economic support for those most affected by the crisis. Partnership with Belfast City of Sanctuary included training on employment issues and rights. Despite these efforts, systemic barriers, such as limited access to rights and persistent discrimination, continued to challenge the progress toward equity and inclusion.⁵⁸ In March 2023, ICTU and Irish Business and Employers Confederation (Ibec) marked the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination with a commitment to stand against racism and to promote inclusive workplaces. The joint statement of ICTU and Ibec highlighted the importance of education and awareness-raising activities to combat prejudice and foster understanding among workers and employers and urged government to prioritize anti-racism strategies, including effective policies and practices at national and workplace levels, and to use stronger legal frameworks to address racial discrimination and inequality in employment.⁵⁹ In April 2024, ICTU hosted a two-day event, organized as part of the 'Trade Unions against Discrimination' project, bringing together union representatives from Ireland and Europe to discuss strategies for addressing racism and other forms of bigotry in the workplace. The conference addressed EU policies

⁵⁷ Phillips, S. (2010) [Towards a Strategy for the Inclusion of Migrant Workers in Trade Unions](#). Dublin: ICTU.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2015) UnionMigrantNet Report. Internal publication.; National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (2022) An Opportunity to Review and Reframe Collective Bargaining and the Industrial Relations Regime. Secretariat Paper No.31 October 2022; ICTU and MRCI (2020) [Charter to Protect Migrant Workers from Exploitation and to Build Inclusive Workplaces](#), 18 December 2020.;

⁵⁸ Polakowski, M. and E. Quinn. (2022) [Responses to irregularly staying migrants in Ireland](#). Dublin: ESRI.; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2020) [ICTU welcomes extension of Covid payments to residents of direct provision centres](#), 9 August 2020; Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2020) [COVID-19 and the Need for Global Solidarity with Those Who Are Vulnerable](#), 27 March 2020.;

⁵⁹ Dugal, M. (2023) [Unions and employers call for elimination of racial discrimination](#), *Fórsa Trade Union*, 24 March.

promoting migrant workers' rights and strategies to counter the rise of the far-right, workplace racism, the intersection of racism and gender, and challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals⁶⁰. In November 2023, following riots on in Dublin, ICTU called on city centre workers to assemble at the GPO to show their solidarity and to denounce the violence.⁶¹ ICTU's Action Plan on Combatting the Far Right, building on training developed by Unite the Union and Communities Against Racism was also published in 2023.⁶²

⁶⁰ RTÉ News (2024) '[ICTU to host conference on tackling racism](#)', *RTÉ News*, 22 April.

⁶¹ Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2023) [ICTU statement on violent events in Dublin](#), 24 November.

⁶² Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2023) [Action plan to tackle the far right](#), 1 May 2023.

Research questions

The review above highlights the necessity to explore the various forms of racial discrimination that ethnic minority and migrant workers face in the Irish labour market. This includes both direct discrimination, such as bias in recruitment and workplace practices, and indirect or structural discrimination, like the lack of recognition for foreign qualifications and language barriers. Understanding how these forms of discrimination vary by ethnicity, nationality, and intersecting identities such as gender and socio-economic class will provide a clearer picture of the challenges these workers encounter.

Another critical area of focus is the role of trade unions in addressing these challenges. While unions have made efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, their successes have been limited by internal dynamics and broader policy environments. Investigating the effectiveness of union strategies—such as collective bargaining, awareness campaigns, and advocacy for equitable working conditions—will shed light on how well unions support ethnic minority and migrant workers in combating racial discrimination. We also explore how internal union dynamics and broader policy environments influence their effectiveness. By comparing how different countries within the EU address racial discrimination within unions and the labour market, we have identified some potential approaches to strengthen union support for ethnic minority and migrant workers in Ireland, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable workplace environment. In the next section, union members and officials share their perspectives on viable and timely responses to racial discrimination by trade unions in Ireland.

Research Findings

Four key themes emerged from the research interviews, which we explore in depth below. Firstly, we explore the common experiences of ethnic minorities and migrants in the workplace. Secondly, the experiences of union representation and support by victims of racial discrimination are described. The third section narrates the factors that contribute to discouraging or deterring reporting of experiences or racism. Finally, we examine the strategies proposed by trade union members and officials for more effective support and advocacy.

Experiences of Racism at Work

In this section, we explore the common experiences of ethnic minorities and migrants employed in Ireland as described in the research interviews. These ordeals include bullying and harassment, direct and indirect discrimination, the challenges with being believed, the process of victimisation that often follows, and the inadequate support provided to workers to address language barriers.

Bullying & Harassment

According to the Employment Acts, bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour that undermines the employee's right to dignity at work. An isolated incident is not considered to be bullying; it usually takes place over a sustained period, can be done by one or more people and can be aimed at an individual or a group. Bullying can happen through the following ways: social exclusion and isolation, verbal abuse and insults, being treated less favourably than colleagues in similar roles, and Intimidation and aggressive interactions. Harassment is "unwanted conduct" relating to any of the 9 grounds of discrimination. Harassment at work violates the dignity of the employee and creates an intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Examples of harassment include verbal harassment, such as making jokes or derogatory comments, written harassment, physical harassment, and intimidating behaviour. The law prohibits bullying and harassment at work and employers must prevent such behaviours.

Despite these legal protections, participants said they regularly experienced bullying and harassment for standing up for their rights. For example, Edward, a union member of minority ethnic background, was intimidated by his manager for demanding to be paid wages owed to him.

"I remember that I complained to my manager like I wanted to get paid. And my colleagues want to get paid because we have, we have obligations. We have to buy food, we have to pay rent, we have to survive like everyone else, and because I was pushing her to get paid. She threatened to send the Garda, because she said I was harassing her. And I remember at that time I was so scared because I never had

to deal with the police in my country, or here and this, you know, like the Garda here, they, they always have a side."

In another incident, Sam, a union member of minority ethnic background suffered harassment at his workplace when he raised issues about the discrimination he was subjected to at work.

"It wasn't that I was told to shush or to be quiet. They tried to assassinate my character. They said I was crazy. And that was the thing that made me first think of this as racial discrimination. I had one of my colleagues yell at me and was quite angry."

Damilola, a union member of a minority ethnic background was racially abused at work, told he didn't belong to that place and called the N-word for challenging his colleagues to respect the rights of their service users.

"When I went out to join them. That was when they just verbally attacked me like, you don't belong here. You shouldn't come here to tell us what to do. You're just a black and use the N word. So I did write down, went to the home manager and complained, but it was my word against theirs, I didn't have any evidence or anybody to support my claim. So it was never investigated. And that continued until I decided to quit the agency."

Adanna, a Ghanaian woman was undergoing adaptation training as a foreign trained nurse on a hospital ward. As she was still training, she was under supervision and restricted from administering intravenous (IV) medication to patients. The participant carried out their duties under supervision for the morning and took their break at noon. When they returned from their break their supervisor publicly scolded Adanna for not reminding them that she cannot administer IV medication and that patients were now at risk of complications. Adanna apologised but stated the supervisor had not told them this, they had no memory of this conversation. Adanna was supposed to have a meeting that day to review their training but their supervisor told them they would postpone the meeting so Adanna could learn from their mistake. Two weeks later Adanna had that meeting with their supervisor and the only thing the supervisor wrote on their review was this incident.

"The only thing she wrote on my intermediate meeting was the scenario. That one single scenario that happened two weeks ago that has been rectified for days. That was the only thing she wrote down."

Adanna highlighted they experience general different treatment as the only black member of staff on the ward, feeling lonely and treated harshly, with the staff focused on highlighting any mistakes. Adanna described how other staff will try to make out that she is refusing to do their work, when that isn't that case. She feels that she must be very careful with everything they do to protect themselves from consequences while feeling everyone is against them. Adanna believes that their contribution to the team is needed and therefore they should be treated better.

"They make us feel we are not wanted. That shouldn't be there. If you have to take any nurses from another country at all. You should have the confidence and the courage to accept them and be happy with them."

Sean, a union representative, dealt with cases where subtle forms of racial harassment went unchecked, with some employees feeling constant scrutiny about their background. The union advised them to address the behaviour informally, but the underlying issue of bullying persisted.

"Some of it I suppose is inquisitiveness from work colleagues... but it's where it goes beyond that point like around you know constant questioning around where you're from and stuff like that."

An Indian national working in the security sector discussed facing consistent racial discrimination and victimisation throughout his career. After raising concerns about racial discrimination in 2018, they experienced ongoing harassment from senior management, which was not adequately addressed by HR or his union until much later.

"I won that investigation because I had backed-up proof. But it has been lingering on from that time till 2022 end of the year".

Edward, a union member of minority ethnic background, was working for cleaning company that employs many migrants which was not paying him or other staff for many weeks. Edward confronted their manager on this issue and the manager threatened to call the Garda and have them reported for harassment. Edward was scared, believing the Garda may side against them, but stood firm and told the manager to call the Garda so they can sort this out. The manager never called the Garda.

"I just told her. I said, okay, so call the Garda. I want you to call the Garda, because we can solve this problem once and for all. And you. Can go ahead with your harassment accusation and you, and also, I can ask them to force you to pay me. And she never called the Garda, or she was not expecting I would confront her. She was thinking that since I am an immigrant, she would take advantage of me, and I would put my head down and don't do anything".

Edward discussed trying to discuss with their manager their experience of unfair treatment, but the manager was dismissive of their complaints.

"I try to tell my manager, look, you are treating me like this, but my colleagues, you are treating me differently. And I raised, I raised with her the discrimination issues she just, she was just discrediting me, you know, like she even didn't want to listen to me. She just kind of turns around and leaves me and doesn't listen to me or tell me. Like delusional kind of things, you know."

Marie, a union official, mentioned the issue of migrant workers speaking foreign languages at work. Marie stated that they have become involved with multiple situations where staff were being harassed over speaking in foreign languages with each other for private conversations and has had to explain to multiple employers this is unacceptable workplace harassment.

“So, things like this, it would have been more or around language, you know, like the whole issue about not speaking your own language even during your breaks. I mean, that's completely not on, like not speaking your own language in front of patients and residents, of course, but if you're on your break, you're on your break, and you're allowed to speak whatever language you want. So yeah, there would have been discussions with the employers.[...]Like people would have reported it back to me that they've been or people with disciplinary issues like being pulled for speaking their own language, or members telling me that there's a sign in the kitchen saying "don't speak your own language.”

Sky, a union member of minority ethnic background, was working in education when they experienced verbal assault from a colleague in a public place. This incident was reported to management who refused to acknowledge the incident had happened or the racial aspect of the encounter. Sky was approached by other staff and told their attitude about the incident was ‘inappropriate’ and causing ‘drama’. Management dismissed the incident as a misunderstanding, and when Sky suggested that all staff should have inclusion and diversity training, management instead sided with the perpetrator and blamed Sky for the situation.

Direct and Indirect Discrimination

The Employment Equality Acts prohibit discrimination at work, including against existing employees who are applying for better contract types or promotion. Generally, discrimination is treating someone less favourably than another person in a similar situation based on the nine protected grounds. According to Mike, a union official, minority ethnic and migrant workers under agency sponsorships are rarely considered for permanent positions despite sometimes working for longer hours and under strenuous conditions.

“You would find that minority ethnic workers who were agency workers inside the workplace were the last to be placed in permanent positions. It was only once they exhausted all the locals, that they offered ethnic minority workers permanent positions. They had all the difficult jobs, they worked weekends, they worked long hours, it was always the minority ethnic workers who were getting the worst end of the employment relationship.”

Edward, a union member of minority ethnic background, also said that his manager denied him a promotion opportunity because of his involvement in advocating for the rights of other colleagues.

"I mentioned to her that I applied for a higher position, and she told me I would not get it. She said, 'while you work for this company, you'll never go up because managers don't like you. Because I was fighting for my rights and fighting for my colleagues.'"

Language requirements for some jobs such as teaching were also seen as discriminatory and preventing other minority ethnic and migrant workers from keeping their jobs. Ade, a union representative of minority ethnic background said that his job as a teacher was at risk since he did not have an Irish language qualification.

"If any other qualified teacher without the condition of the Irish language requirements were to come up, and also pass the interview, I would have to lose my position to that teacher. So, in other words, what they meant was your employment is conditional, if someone else comes and has the Irish language, we are mandated by the Department of Education to give the job to that person over you."

Sky, a union member of minority ethnic background, described experiencing a notable difference between how management would speak to minority staff compared to their white counterparts. However, due to the nature of these interactions it was difficult to challenge as discrimination.

"I worked at this place, and every time the manager spoke to me or to other people of colour, there was always more hostility. Whereas when they spoke to, you know, one of the few colleagues in the team that was white. It was a different tone that they would use."

A union official in Northern Ireland described how migrant workers experience covert discrimination, as employers have learned to conceal discrimination through certain practices.

"In Northern Ireland, after years of sectarianism and legislation for employment employers know not to be overtly racist, because they have had experience of not being overtly sectarian. This has led to indirect discriminatory practices. Minority ethnic workers who are agency workers may be the last to be placed in permanent positions, they have more difficult jobs, working weekends, long hours."

Being Doubted

Being believed when they report experiences of discrimination is a critical aspect of supporting victims of racial discrimination. It also encourages those who might encounter similar experiences to make reports, thus contributing to the fight against racial discrimination at workplaces. However, when

victims of racism are doubted and attempts are made to persuade them that their experiences are not racially motivated, they become demoralised and might lose trust in the institutions and systems put in place to address racism. Based on the interviews, some participants reported that they were not believed, treated with suspicion, or discouraged from perceiving their experiences as racially motivated.

According to Sam, a union member of minority ethnic background, efforts to report discrimination and advocate for non-discrimination policies were met with scepticism and denial. Despite presenting valid concerns, his experiences were dismissed as cultural differences or not taken seriously by his colleagues and superiors.

“And he told me it's probably just a cultural difference. Like it wasn't really yell. Like, you say it's yelling. You say it was hostile. You say it was bullying, which is what I had said. But it was probably a cultural difference. And I was like, I'd like to talk it out with the three of us. And he wouldn't let me. He said because of the cultural difference it's probably not appropriate for you to talk to her directly or even with someone else. I'll just be the interim intermediary”.

Sam was further told that the perpetrator was not a bad person and could be trusted.

“After I called HR, they called my manager. And then it went back and forth. And I asked this to be confidential when I talked to HR. And they said ‘Well, there's no assumption of confidentiality when you call HR even if you ask for it’. So, everything I had said to them about making a complaint, basically I was saying I'm concerned, I want to make a complaint about how I feel like there's bullying happening. I've tried to express this to my manager, but I don't think he's understanding, again I wasn't going against him at this stage. I just wanted HR's help. They went to him and said that, and he got mad. And they got mad because they're like, the manager is the only one that can do this (report the matter). And they also told me he's a good guy, you can trust him”.

Tony, a union official, discussed a striking example of how difficult it can be for marginalised individuals, in this case from the Traveller community, to have their experiences validated. Despite presenting clear evidence of discrimination, their grievances were met with suspicion and dismissiveness until an independent investigation confirmed their claims.

“The issues that had been highlighted and the claims made by the two members were all true”.

Ahmed, another union official, stated that minority workers frequently doubt whether their grievances will be taken seriously, leading to underreporting of discrimination cases. This lack of belief in the system is a significant barrier to seeking justice.

"They don't think they've been listened to by the employers or the courts... It lowers down their confidence".

When Abdul, a migrant worker, reported instances of racial discrimination, the response was dismissive, treating his claims as a matter of conflicting opinions rather than taking decisive action. The dismissive attitude of both HR and union representatives towards racial discrimination complaints deterred them from pursuing justice initially, as he felt his concerns would not be taken seriously.

"...they have said your words against her words, her words against your words that's all it was".

Adanna, a union member and nurse, highlighted the importance of ethnic minority and migrant workers knowing their rights. They feel that workers should report discrimination, but when doing so should be sure they are in the right, as in their view reporting issues can be turned back on the person reporting.

"They must be sure of their rights because it's tricky having a conversation with an Irish person or any other person around him. Because he can turn the table around for you. You have to be sure you're right."

Victimisation

Victimisation is when an employee is penalised by an employer because they have submitted a complaint. Victimisation is illegal and is covered under the Employment Equality Acts and Equal Status Acts. Some of the grounds covered by the law under victimisation include: being penalised for being involved in any discrimination proceedings, helping a colleague to make a claim, being penalised as a result of an unfair comparison with a colleague known as a 'comparator', acting as a witness in legal discrimination proceedings, taking a discrimination claim to court under the Acts, or informing an employer that they intend to do any of the above.

According to some of the participants of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds who participated in the research, experiences of victimisation included being suspended or fired from work, being transferred, and being labelled as a troublemaker. Damilola, a union member of minority ethnic background narrated how one of his colleagues was fired for complaining about her manager who was harassing and physically assaulting her while at work.

"She went to the manager and said, 'I need to complain about this. This is violence. I'm violently attacked here'. And they told her no way, she should go on suspension. She was suspended immediately because she was challenging the manager. So it was within that period that she got a letter that she was fired. So, she was deemed to be a troublemaker, just because she stands up for herself".

Sky, who is of minority ethnic background, was labelled a troublemaker by colleagues for reporting being racially harassed at work.

They said to me during a break that my attitude was disproportionate to what had happened, that essentially, there was no need for all that drama”.

Another participant, Thandie, who is a union member of minority ethnic background, was transferred to another location after she raised a complaint regarding the company promotion policy.

“I knew every policy of the company. I was training staff and even the trainee staff that were coming in to train as managers. So, I was able and capable of doing it. Instead, I was moved to a different store which was not struggling as much. So, I thought that was kind of a bit of a punishment because it was more driving for me”.

Investigations by union representatives have also revealed how minority ethnic workers who are being disciplined are in fact victims of discrimination. For example, Lesedi, a union representative of minority ethnic background shared an experience of representing a union member of minority ethnic background whom they established was a victim of harassment after gathering all the information regarding the case.

“A black worker from Nigeria, if I remember, was being disciplined but when we went down and represented him at the disciplinary hearing, we'd got all the information from them and realized he was the victim. It had been, he was accused of assaulting one of the patients in the care home, and the family had made a complaint against him. But when we dug into it and spoke to other ethnic minority workers within that care home, we found out that, you know, there had been a number of incidents with this individual patient”

Sam, an academic union member, faced significant victimization at an Irish university, where his complaints of discrimination were not taken seriously. He reported being dismissed, his character was assassinated, and his work was diminished. Despite being an accomplished academic, he was portrayed as "lazy and incompetent" due to his advocacy against discrimination.

“I was told they assassinate my character. They said I was crazy... I was being used in all different ways for my funding. That wasn't appropriate.”

Tony, a union official, described a case involving members from the Traveller community working at a support group, the members faced victimisation after raising issues related to unequal treatment. They were suspended multiple times without proper procedure, highlighting a pattern of punitive actions whenever they raised legitimate concerns. Despite their attempts to follow the grievance procedure, management consistently ignored or mishandled their complaints, exacerbating their victimisation.

"Every time they went to the board for a complaint, they were suspended. There was no disciplinary procedure, there were no hearings, there was nothing; they were suspended straight away".

Sean, a union official, outlined a situation where an employee faced backlash after raising a complaint about racial discrimination. Although the union provided guidance, the individual hesitated to pursue formal action due to fear of being singled out, illustrating the challenge of victimisation in such scenarios.

"There can be a reluctance to pursue matters in some cases".

Sean went on to discuss how fear of repercussions or being labelled as troublemakers deterred employees from formally reporting discrimination or harassment, despite the union's encouragement to handle issues at the local level. Sean believes this is why reports do not come from victims directly.

"What I would say in a lot of cases we've given guidance to people... but generally it would be reps who would contact us in relation to members who have experienced it."

Ahmed, a union official of ethnic minority background, stated they believe migrant workers often face victimization in the workplace, where their ethnic background becomes a focal point of discrimination. This victimisation is compounded by their vulnerable position as outsiders in a foreign country which limits their awareness of their rights, laws, and systems for support.

"A lot of migrant workers are experiencing discrimination and it's underreported... They don't have confidence in the law or the judicial process... They might report to their employers, but they don't see much action happening"

Ahmed described harassment and bullying of minority ethnic workers as pervasive, yet it often goes unreported due to fears of retaliation and a lack of faith in the justice system. This creates a hostile environment where workers suffer in silence.

"They don't pursue a case because... they don't want to lose their job, and they could be penalized... There are so many hindrances around them that make them not pursue a case".

Edward, a union member, described poor treatment of migrant workers by their manager for a cleaning company who would regularly shout at staff and generally communicate poorly. Edward grew increasingly frustrated with the manager's unfair treatment of staff and confronted the manager but was suspended as a result.

"I remember specifically this day, we had 20 new workers, and they were standing because it was their first day. The organisation has a huge compound, and they didn't know what to do. They were waiting for some guidance. And she just came to them, to the group, and started shouting. And said, 'What are you looking at me? Just move on and do something else'. They didn't even know what to do when she was yelling, like, move on and do something else. And I remember at that time, my blood started kind of boiling. And I said, 'You are such a horrible manager. These people are here for the very first time. They don't even know what they have to do. If you didn't plan to have this big group in at once, this is your problem. It's bad management. But you cannot throw at them your frustration and everything. You are horrible'. And I remember that we started to have this argument in front of others, and I said, 'Give me the list of what you want us to do, and I'm going to show them around what they have to do'. And I went with the group and showed them what to do. But this cost me suspension. I got suspended."

Marie, a union official, discussed the issues facing migrant workers that are hired and brought over to Ireland for care roles, their isolation, lack of support, and, at times, poor treatment by their employer. Marie stated these people are vulnerable due to their circumstances and when seeking to challenge their treatment are often not supported in filing a case due to lack of evidence or comparators.

"I mean, I could say some of the quotes of, like, people working in care homes on sponsorship visas were really being treated less like slaves, being, you know, we feel we belong to them. We're property of the care home. I mean, like through the media work as well. We got quite a lot of quotes from people just because it is modern slavery. It's really, especially when they're isolated in the countryside, and there's not much support around that's an issue with migrant workers in general that you feel, especially, especially with African migrant workers, like the sense that you're given the worst shifts, that you're getting the worst you know residents, and that it's systemic racism. But when it comes to actually challenging it, it's very difficult, because it's always like, people come to you once they've got an issue and there's a case and there's an incident, and then you go to the solicitors, and the solicitors are like, Yeah, but what's what? You know, we have to lead with the incident, not you know, it's always them, and it's always like, you need comparators."

Inadequate Language Support

Language barriers can prevent victims from effectively communicating their experiences and getting proper support from their organisation or any investigative agency. For example, Edward, a union member of minority

ethnic background stated that his manager took advantage of his poor English skills to build a case against him at work.

I had this argument with my manager...in the summertime. Later on, I got suspended because she accused me of raising my voice with her in front of others and she felt kind of humiliated. And also, she said I should respect her, because she was my manager, and, you know, because at that time, my English was not so good, like today, she also took advantage of my language barrier and she just built a case against me. And I got suspended for three days”.

Language skills also impact the ability of the victims of discrimination to voice their concerns and rights during tribunals. Mike, a union official, highlighted the difficulty of accessing employment tribunals before considering issues such as language barriers.

“In tribunals, employment tribunals, because you know, it's a key issue. For vulnerable workers, it's very very difficult to exercise their rights through an employment tribunal. But imagine if you're from another country, your grasp of English is not very good. It is a very daunting process. So, we supported a number of very successful cases through the tribunals.”

Experiences of Union Representation

In this section, we discuss the experiences of trade union members and union representatives with regards to the union representation of victims of racial discrimination. The experiences include aspects such as victims being deterred from making reports, receiving weak support throughout the process and the lack of awareness of anti-discrimination laws among some union members and officials.

Being Deterred from Reporting

Besides being believed when they submit experiences of racism at work, it is important that the union representatives and officials take note of the victims’ reports and assure them of full investigation and support from the outset. However, some of the participants suggested victims’ reports of racial discrimination are sometimes dismissed and discredited by union officials and representatives.

For example, Edward, a union member of minority ethnic background, said he was mistreated by a union official who attempted to discredit his report with the aim of making him drop the racial discrimination aspect.

“I went to the head office. I talked with one lawyer over there. I think he's the kind of person to check the situation if you have a case or not. I didn't like him at all. He was very aggressive. He was undermining. He was discrediting me. He was telling everything and

at the end he told me the bar to prove the racial discrimination is very high. And he said my case and would not succeed”.

Sky, a union member of minority ethnic background, stated the importance of unions fully investigating cases to find the truth of the situation and work with the members reporting incidents. They describe situations where people have been discouraged from filing a case, or had their experience disregarded based on the account of someone else.

“Trade unions should always side with its members no matter what, but they should always aim at getting to the bottom of a dispute before disregarding it. You see that a lot when there are disputes between union members, where, say, one person has a higher grade than the other, they tend to kind of, you know, just disregard and kind of talk people out of even pursuing a case in these cases. And I think they should just try and, you know, figure out what actually happened, and what do both parties expect from this, before just saying, ‘Sorry, there's no case here because this is racial and we can't, we can't prove that this happened’.”

It's not only the union members who are deterred from reporting issues related to racial discrimination. Ingrid, a union official, was discouraged from conducting a survey at a particular workplace to establish how serious the issues of racial discrimination were at that organisation. Sean, another union official, felt that the union's approach emphasized informal resolution to the exclusion of legal action or other forms of resolution, which sometimes left employees unsure if their experiences were validated.

“I went to our division here and I said, I wanted to have a meeting to discuss this. And I was told that that wasn't really a classical issue. Our members there (that company) wouldn't really be bothered with that kind of stuff”- Ingrid, Trade Union Official.

“What I would say in a lot of cases, we've given guidance to people. There can be a reluctance to pursue matters in some cases, and in my experiences, it has been guidance on how to deal with it”- Sean, Trade Union Official.

Ineffective Support in Cases of Racial Discrimination

Strong union support is essential in dealing with all forms of racial discrimination faced by union members. Solidarity with victims of racism is one of the ways through which unions can cultivate feelings of trust among its members. Moreover, this can motivate other members to join trade unions. When union support for its members is weak, it may lead to serious consequences for the victims as some may get penalised unfairly by their organisations or lose cases that they should have won.

Thandie, a union member of minority ethnic background, described a lack of active involvement by their union in addressing on-going issues of workplace accidents and injuries.

"I've gotten sick leave; I was involved in an accident at work. Something like this would have been taken by the union. And it could have been prevented. Because every day in my workplace, I worked for a very big private company in Ireland and I'm telling you right now, there could be somebody getting injured as I'm talking to you, and nobody cares. And especially when that person is of the minority group."

Sam, an academic union member of minority ethnic background, discussed how during a third-party investigation, he observed a stark difference in how he was represented compared to his colleagues. He felt his union representative was passive, while the others' representatives were active and protective. No official was involved in his case.

"My union representative didn't talk. Their union representative... spoke for at least an hour and a half. So, he was directly answering the questions for them [a colleague]."

Tony, a union official, explained that while a union can provide support to the members facing discrimination, the process can be slow and frustrating due to the overwhelming demand on union resources. This highlights the limitations of union support in addressing individual cases, especially when the issues are complex and require significant time investment.

"Trade unions really are better on collective issues...the one or two can take more time than getting 100 people over the line on something else".

Edward, a union member, described the poor service they received from the union when they were unfairly fired from their job. Initially staff were dismissive of his case and then there was a wait for the legal team.

"So, when I told my union representative that I was discriminated against, she said, 'Oh, this is out of my scope. I don't have the knowledge to deal with this. I'm going to pass your case to the union legal team'. So, she passed the case, and I think it took three weeks for them to call me..."

Lack of Awareness of Anti-Discrimination Legislation

Awareness and knowledge of anti-discrimination legislation and policies among union officials and representatives is a key aspect of dealing with racism in the workplace and ensuring effective handling of racism reports. Union officials who understand racism and how it manifests in the workplace are in a better position to support victims as they can easily identify

instances of racism thus leading to effective responses such as defending the victims during trials or investigations. Based on participants' accounts, it was established that some union officials and representatives lack adequate knowledge of racism and, hence, could not offer effective support to the victims.

Sean, a union official, discussed how the unions have played a key role in raising awareness about anti-discrimination laws, but there have been gaps in understanding among both employees and reps, particularly in newer or more diverse workplaces.

"We've had those conversations with the department... even stuff like signage and whatever about you know that any kind of discrimination won't be tolerated".

Moreover, due to this lack of understanding of racism, one participant expressed disappointment in his union's lack of proactive support, particularly before a different union rep became his representative. The union's prior representative failed to properly communicate and advocate on his behalf, which prolonged his struggle for justice. It wasn't until a more knowledgeable and determined representative took over that he saw any meaningful support.

"No proper communication... I have a case that you know is long... He [the prior representative] comes 10 minutes before the meeting and just says within five minutes this is okay let's go for the meeting."

Mike, a union official, discussed how while presenting myth busting content on migrant workers, they encountered racist views held among some union members, including union representatives. These views appeared to be superficial but created difficulties in addressing this issue, both due to a lack of experience within the union and the lack of engagement by union staff with the training provided to counter these views. Mike discussed the delicate nature of addressing the issue and compared it to their experience of addressing sectarian views and how things can quickly escalate.

"Some of the attitudes held by our union reps, you know, they were just absorbing what they were hearing in the media and just parroting it back at us, you know, so it showed that the type of training that we needed to give was a lot deeper and a lot longer, which we tried to do then after that, but unfortunately, and we were sort of in the dark a little bit, we weren't sure how to approach it."

Factors that hinder victims of racism from reporting their experiences

This section explores the factors that contribute to discouraging or deterring reporting of experiences or racism. The key issues discussed in this section include the over representation of ethnic minority and migrant workers in

precarious work conditions, the effects of trauma on reporting, insecure visa status, and workers not seeing diversity within their union.

Precarious Work Conditions

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) a precarious job is employment that offers compensation, hours, or security inferior to a “regular” job. These include agency work, temporary work, contracting out, casual work, seasonal work, and part time work. Under precarious job conditions, workers are forced to bear the risk of any downturn in the employer's business because they can be dismissed without notice. This makes it hard for the workers to plan their lives or support their families.

From the interviews, due to the nature of the working conditions, some workers from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds may not be willing to report experiences of discrimination as that might lead to the loss of jobs which may then jeopardise their immigration status. Mike, a union official, discussed how migrant workers often experience indirect discrimination in the workplace. Even when faced with direct racism or a pattern of discrimination, workers are hesitant to report it fearing the impact on their prospects.

“When somebody was courageous enough to raise it, because we know from experience that a lot of ethnic minority workers still to this day tolerate racism, tolerate racist comments, and they don't, they don't want to rock the boat in case it damages their employment prospects”.

Mike's views are also supported by another union official, Ahmed, who highlighted that the precarious nature of employment for many migrant workers dulls their propensity to report discrimination. Their jobs are often their sole means of survival, making the risk of job loss too great to challenge unfair treatment.

“They fear they might lose their jobs which is very precious to them. They left their country and a lot of them don't have support networks here”.

According to Marie, a union official, minority ethnic and migrant workers who are employed in sectors such as healthcare under agency sponsorships also fear reporting racial discrimination due to their precarious work conditions. This type of employment can also make the workers vulnerable to exploitation by the employers.

“It's people who are on sponsorship visas, and they're completely vulnerable, and then employers feel that they can just totally exploit them, and they have no recourse. They have nowhere to go because they're on sponsorship, so they're almost like they belong to the employer”.

Sensitivity of Discrimination Cases Might Prevent People From Seeking Support.

Experiencing racial discrimination affects the victims differently. For example, the victims can suffer trauma or stress after being discriminated against. Due to the feelings of self-doubt and confusion that victims often suffer, some might not be willing to report their experiences to their union representatives or HR officials where they work. Based on the interviews, some participants stated that recounting experiences of discrimination can force victims to relive traumatic events, which can be emotionally draining thereby discouraging them from taking any action.

“These cases of discrimination, they're usually very sensitive stuff that people are dealing with, and dealing with it, as you would with any other bureaucratic matter. I don't think that's the answer either. And I think that can discourage people from seeking support”- Sky, union member of minority ethnic background.

Another participant added that the sensitivity of discrimination can lead to self-doubt, where victims question if the incident was severe enough to report or feel guilty about potentially causing trouble.

“And now, I don't know what it would take for me to make an official complaint if something were to happen, because I know for a fact that if something were to happen, if someone were to call me a slur, I would have those exact same emotions, those exact same thoughts where I'd be like, is it bad enough? And this is why I say you need to back up before you make a complaint. Because I know that I would be picking up the phone and calling people and saying, What do you think I should do? And I know that the person on the other line would be screaming and saying, make a complaint, you know, go and talk to your boss, tell them...but I'll just be wracked with self-guilt... like confusion, you know, not really trusting myself”.- Mariam, union member of minority ethnic background.

Migrant Worker Status & Precarity

The type of visas possessed by minority ethnic and migrant workers can significantly affect willingness to report discrimination. For example, workers on sponsorship visas are often directly tied to their employer for their legal status in the host country, hence some of them feel that reporting discrimination could jeopardise their employment, leading to the loss of their visa status and potential deportation. Combined with other social, economic, and legal factors, minority ethnic and migrant workers experience lack of motivation to report discrimination, leaving them vulnerable to continued mistreatment. Mariam, a union official, narrated how a victim of

discrimination working in a care home did not report her experiences due to the fear of losing her job and only did when she was leaving the organisation.

“What happens is that they're like recruiting them from Africa on sponsorship visas and then plugging them in as staff. And they're expected to work every hour where they need somebody, regardless of the hour. Just fill in the gaps wherever they are needed. And then there's this complete sense that, you know, we paid a lot of money to get you over. You belong to the organization. And she got to the point where she didn't get in touch when she was going through this. She got in touch when she was already leaving, but she just could not take it anymore. She was completely like facing depression and suicidal and they just stopped paying her so when she said she wanted to go”.

Another participant suffered severe consequences of having his visa revoked due to his advocacy against discrimination he experienced at the hands of his colleagues at work. This demonstrates the devastating impact that speaking up can have on one's immigration status when on a work visa sponsored by the employer.

I also understand that people have their reasons for being quiet. Could be family, could be other things, could be their own reasons that they just want, I mean, there's a myriad of reasons. But also, I want them to feel empowered to speak up. The issue there is I'm also a case point. A case study on what happens to you if you do speak up has devastating impacts. I lost my visa”. - Sam, a union member of minority ethnic background.

Low Diversity in Union Leadership

The lack of diversity within trade union leadership can create a significant barrier for victims of discrimination, particularly for those from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds. When union leadership including the union representatives do not reflect the diverse backgrounds of their members, minority ethnic and migrant workers who experience discrimination may feel alienated or believe that their unique experiences and concerns will not be understood or taken seriously. This lack of representation can lead to a perception that the union is not fully equipped or willing to advocate on their behalf, discouraging them from coming forward with complaints. Consequently, victims of discrimination might choose to remain silent, fearing that their voices will be ignored or that their issues will be marginalised within the broader agenda of the union. This dynamic undermines the union's role as a protector of workers' rights and perpetuates the very inequalities that the union is meant to combat.

Sean, a union official, explored how locations with a diverse workforce and/or union reps who were themselves from minority backgrounds played a crucial role in representing and understanding the unique challenges faced by those communities. Having minorities in key roles promoted understanding of diverse experiences.

In this region... the chair, the Secretary, and the treasurer all were born in Africa... it may come through the reps because they'd be more conscious of it".

Edward, a union member of minority ethnic background felt that people who are not minorities or migrants cannot understand their experiences fully and gave the example of their sister who has darker skin being treated worse than him. While he can see the difference, he stated he knows he will never fully understand.

I will never fully understand what's to be treated as a potential threat because I don't have a dark colour. I know the impact that it had on my sister and even so, we are from the same father and mother. So, I'm telling you this because it's the same with Irish people, the trade unions, their representatives are Irish people. They will never understand what is being discriminated against because you are an immigrant, because you are a black person, because you are LGBT, because of anything, they will never understand that, never. And because we don't have black people, immigrants, in the trade union, the problem will persist for a long, long time".

He expanded on this, describing how when they reported their ongoing experiences of discrimination in the workplace, the union staff were dismissive and diminished his poor treatment to cultural differences.

"When I told the union representative that I was discriminated against and I was telling her everything, she always was not passing the buck. Sometimes people passing the buck, they say they don't have the knowledge to deal with that. They cannot help you with that. But this girl didn't pass the buck, but she was telling me, 'Oh, this is the way that we do things. Maybe this is not a kind of discrimination. It is because we are from different cultures', things like that, you know"?.

Marie, a union official, emphasized the need to diversify the union to make other groups feel comfortable in sharing their issues with the unions.

"If all your trade union activists are from the white majority, then it is a problem. It is a problem in terms of people don't feel that they can raise the issue, and they will be understood".

Strategies To Address Workplace Discrimination

In this final section, we examine the recommendations made by interview participants for future action. Participants identified a range of good practices already in use in trade unions and highlighted key gaps in support and areas for future action. Firstly, the importance of empathy is explored, as this was an important topic for participants in speaking about their experiences both of reporting and supporting complaints of racism. Secondly, participants described why proactive trade union engagement with members from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds is vital in promoting inclusivity and ensuring that the voices of all members are heard and represented. Full and thorough investigation of racial discrimination is advocated for by participants, and finally, we explore participants' views on increasing representation from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds.

Recommendation 1: A Culture of Empathy

Creating a culture of empathy among union representatives and officials is essential to effectively address and combat racism in the workplace. When victims of discrimination are listened to and their experiences validated, it fosters an environment where all members feel supported and respected. Empathy allows union leaders and members to understand the profound effects of racism on individuals' lives, going beyond mere policy enforcement to addressing the emotional and psychological toll of discrimination. By actively listening to those affected by racism, trade unions can better advocate for meaningful change, ensuring that their actions and policies reflect the real needs and concerns of their diverse membership. This culture of empathy not only empowers those who have been marginalised but also strengthens the union, making it a more inclusive and effective force for justice and equality.

According to Sky, a union member of minority ethnic background, besides giving the victims of discrimination a platform to be heard, there is also a need for strategies and policies to support the same.

“So I think victims need to be heard and strategies have to be put in place to address these issues in particular and that people have to be heard, people who are being impacted, they have to be heard, and their word has to be taken into account, as opposed to just giving this kind of blanket treatment for any kind of conflict in the workplace”.

Adanna, a union member of minority ethnic background, also suggested that unions through their representatives can keep on checking on their members and reassuring them of their presence and support so as to assist victims who might not be willing to report their discrimination experiences.

“Not everybody that has the guts to come down and complain. But before they will come down and complain to you, the damage will be done already. It has become so bad that they don't even know how to go about it. Don't wait for them to come, check on them. Check on them, always let them know that you're here to listen, and you want to hear. And don't make them feel that you just want to hear then go and fight. Listen, and hear it together and find a solution. How do we go about it? How do you handle it? If she can't handle it again, then you can go ahead and represent”.

Recommendation 2: More Union Engagement with Minority Ethnic & Migrant Workers/Members

Trade union engagement with members from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds is vital in promoting inclusivity and ensuring that the voices of all members are heard and represented. By actively reaching out to these workers, unions can better understand their unique challenges, such as discrimination, exploitation, or barriers to advancement. This engagement can take many forms, such as targeted outreach programs and language support services. By doing this, the unions strengthen their advocacy for fair and equitable treatment and build trust and solidarity across diverse groups. Such proactive engagement helps unions remain relevant and responsive in increasingly multicultural workplaces, enhancing their ability to protect the rights of all workers, regardless of their background.

Based on the interviews, some participants suggested the strengthening of union links with members of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds. For example, Thandie, a union member, discussed how through their experiences of discrimination by their employer they did not know where to find support outside of the workplace. Although they acknowledge the value of Google and similar modern means of finding information, they still emphasised the importance of visibility of support.

“I think when you don't have that kind of support outside your workplace, who do you talk to? You can talk to your colleagues and try to do things yourself. And I think at the time Google was not as big as it is now with all this information out there[...]So we need representatives, or they need to go into the workplaces to inform the staff this is what is happening. If you meet this sign, do this. If you find yourself in this corner, do this. I think all workers, they all need guidance”.

“The unions should be known that they are there, which union is for what field. They should not just generalise and think that everybody knows where they are. They should be very visible and be transparent to the minorities because many minorities don't know what to do, where to go, who is who, and the workplaces don't include that information in our induction packages. It's not it's not there. There's

many things that are not in the induction packaging. They have to be visible in all aspects of work trade unions."

In addition, Thandie suggested that unions would benefit from greater transparency through events that raised awareness of the unions, the unions applicable to different sectors, and to make the staff seem more approachable.

"I think they should have open days where they can welcome minorities in their own facilities/offices. That way, we can even see that they are there and address us like any other working-class person, yeah. How else are we going to acknowledge them or see them where they are or know of them"?

Ahmed, a union official, also felt that for many minority ethnic workers, the visibility of unions and their commitment to anti-racism efforts can be lacking. Increased visibility and proactive engagement are needed to assure these workers that they are supported.

"My suggestion to my organisation... a migrant network committee that will be manned by staff and their role would be offering support".

Sean, a union official, agrees with Ahmed and suggests that having a minorities committee will help in addressing discrimination faced by union members of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds.

"Apart from the reserve seats, if they set up a kind of a minorities committee, because there's a disability committee, there's a women's committee, which would very much give a focus as well. And where that minorities committee is reporting into the divisional executives. It's reporting to the national executive that it becomes an item that may not be a standing item, but certainly an item that's discussed a lot more. So, I think if you put that kind of structure in place, I think that will help as well. And I suppose if the different unions start doing that, then there's a possibility that there will be demand that ICTU will put something like that in place as well. So now again, that's something that certainly we're looking at. I know there's the difference between mainstreaming, and you don't want to marginalize or segregate as well. But I do think for a period of time it's good to have a certain kind of positive discrimination".

Sky, union member of minority ethnic background, also suggested having a space or creating opportunity for the members to come together to share knowledge and experiences.

"I think providing a space or a group an opportunity to get together more often for union members that are people of colour. I think that will be important just so a network can hopefully be formed from that. As it is at the moment, I find that the union is this entity that is

very difficult to access. You have certain channels, but I don't know many union members”.

Another union official suggested that there should be a targeted communication strategy for the members of minority and ethnic backgrounds.

“I send e-bulletins to all the black and migrant workers in our union, which is like about 4,000 people. So, it's quite a big mail out. And then I would put those examples back into the E-bulletin. So, for example, if you're being told you're not allowed to speak your own language in the staff room, that is not acceptable, please get in touch with us. Please report it. You can raise it with your manager, but you can please make us aware this is happening in your care home or your ward or whatever. And then this would be then fed back into the steward training as well” -Marie, union official.

Recommendation 3: Thorough Investigation of Racism

Trade unions have a critical responsibility to investigate all reported issues thoroughly and conclusively, ensuring that every concern from the victims of discrimination is taken seriously. When unions dismiss or inadequately address reports, it undermines the trust and confidence that the members have in them, particularly among those who are vulnerable or have faced discrimination. A robust investigative process not only upholds the union's commitment to fairness and justice but also deters potential abuses by signalling that all grievances will be scrutinised without bias. By addressing issues comprehensively, unions can identify systemic problems, advocate for necessary changes, and provide meaningful support to their members. This approach strengthens the union's credibility and reinforces its role as a protector of workers' rights, fostering a culture of accountability and trust within the organisation.

In this regard, Sky, a union member of minority ethnic background, suggested that the unions should aim at fully understanding the issues reported to them by victims instead of dismissing them.

“They should always aim at getting to the bottom of a dispute before disregarding it. You see that a lot when there are disputes between union members, where, say, one person has a higher grade than the other, they tend to kind of just disregard and talk people out of even pursuing a case in these cases. And I think they should just try and figure out what actually happened, and what do both parties expect from this, before just saying, "Sorry, there's no case here because this is racial and we can't, we can't prove that this happened”.

Another participant suggested the need for unions to have dedicated representatives or committees to properly handle discrimination cases from minority ethnic workers. This could include having a migrant network committee.

“If we could replicate something like that to people of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds who are members of trade unions, they would feel that there is some sort of a committee in their union that would be able to deal with their specific needs”-

Recommendation 4: Increasing Representation of Workers From Minority Ethnic and Migrant Backgrounds

Co-opting or hiring some union officials from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds is a powerful strategy for trade unions to more effectively address discrimination and promote inclusivity. By bringing in officials who reflect the diversity of the workforce, unions can better understand and respond to the specific needs and challenges faced by minority and migrant workers. These officials can provide valuable perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked, ensuring that the union’s policies and actions are truly representative of its entire membership. Additionally, having diverse leadership can build trust among minority and migrant workers, encouraging them to engage more actively with the union and to report issues of discrimination without fear of being ignored or misunderstood. This strategy not only helps combat discrimination but also strengthens the union’s overall ability to advocate for fair treatment and equal opportunities for all workers.

Mike, a union official, discussed how previously when their organisation had greater funding, they had a dedicated ethnic minority worker aimed at supporting issues affecting migrant workers. Funding was later cut.

“We recruited a Polish woman, who spent a lot of time going around trade unions as well, and talking about the issues affecting migrant workers and what unions needed to do, to reach out to them and organise them, to work with them, and support them. So it was, she was at all sorts of conferences. And I remember, at that time, it was an issue that everybody was interested in. You know, so there was a lot of good work done”.

Tony, a union official, acknowledged the limited diversity of representation among union staff. While there has been an improvement in representation beyond white Irish straight men, he does see room for further improvement and considered that the lack of representation may be a barrier to issues being brought to the union’s attention.

“I would also say that the representation that we have in our various branches, division executives, and workplace representatives is almost exclusively white Irish people. I know, in the past there would have been generally straight white men, straight white Irish men. Historically that has changed in a lot of ways, in terms of where we have a lot more female representation than we would have had historically. And more representatives from the LGBT community. But we are still predominantly across the union White Irish...So I do feel

like there are likely areas and issues that are arising in our workplaces that just may not be reaching us, which is a worry”.

Ahmed, another union official, agreed with Tony’s view. While unions are designed to represent all workers, there is a call for more targeted representation of minority ethnic workers to ensure their unique challenges are addressed adequately.

“It should be now on the forefront of their agenda... the aspect of migrant workers in the country and the challenges they are facing in terms of race discrimination in work”.

A union member stated that they would like more diverse union representation so they feel the person understands their experience, and to reduce the time it would take for them to feel comfortable sharing their experiences of discrimination.

“I think I should have someone of my colour who understands me that will be checking up on me. And they ask me how I'm faring. I may not be able to tell you what I'm going through.” -Adanna, a union member of minority ethnic background.

Recommendation 5: Coordinated Action

Addressing workplace discrimination requires a coordinated effort from unions, employers, and the state. Simplifying reporting mechanisms is a critical first step. Participants in this study emphasised that existing systems are overly complex and inaccessible, discouraging workers from reporting incidents of discrimination. Simplified and transparent processes, supported by independent complaint bodies and clear escalation procedures, are essential to ensure that workers feel safe and empowered to come forward without fear of reprisal.

Strengthening legal protections and enhancing enforcement are also vital. Participants highlighted that current laws fail to address the nuanced and systemic nature of racial discrimination, particularly covert forms such as microaggressions and exclusionary practices. Legislative reforms must explicitly address these issues, alongside more overt discrimination. To ensure compliance, stricter oversight mechanisms, including regular workplace audits and penalties for non-compliance, were recommended. These measures would demonstrate a commitment to tackling workplace racism at its roots.

Additionally, participants called for greater state-funded support for marginalised workers and proactive diversity initiatives within public institutions. This includes providing legal advice, mental health resources, and financial assistance for workers navigating discrimination complaints. Setting and enforcing diversity targets in public institutions can also serve as a model for the private sector, promoting transparency and accountability.

Expanding state-sponsored awareness campaigns to highlight the impacts of workplace racism and educate workers on their rights was also seen as a vital strategy.

CONCLUSION

This research finds that union members of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds in Ireland and Northern Ireland frequently encounter both direct and indirect racial discrimination in the workplace, ranging from overt racism and racial slurs to more subtle microaggressions and exclusionary practices.

The experiences of racism in the workplace are pervasive, ranging from direct harassment and bullying to more subtle forms of discrimination and exclusion. The narratives illustrate how minority ethnic and migrant workers frequently encounter hostility and unfair treatment, which often goes unaddressed by management. This lack of adequate response not only intensifies the sense of isolation and victimisation among these workers but also perpetuates a culture of impunity where discriminatory behaviours are allowed to persist. For instance, participants recounted being subjected to racial slurs, being denied promotions, or having their competence unfairly scrutinised, all of which significantly impact their mental health and job satisfaction.

Direct discrimination involves explicit acts of racism such as being called the N-word or hostility towards workers of colour while indirect discrimination can manifest in policies or practices that, although seemingly neutral, disproportionately disadvantage certain groups such as having language requirements for certain jobs like teaching and being overlooked when promotion opportunities arise.

Several factors discourage workers from reporting incidents of racial discrimination. The precarious nature of their employment, often tied to visa conditions, makes ethnic minority and migrant workers particularly vulnerable. Fear of retaliation, job loss, and jeopardising their immigration status create significant barriers to reporting. Additionally, the traumatic nature of discrimination experiences can lead to self-doubt and a reluctance to relive these events, further discouraging workers from seeking support. The absence of visible and diverse representation within unions also contributes to a lack of trust, making workers feel that their issues may not be fully understood or addressed.

Victimisation is another significant challenge for union members of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds who choose to report discrimination. Many victims of discrimination fear the backlash from colleagues who might see them as troublemakers or employers who might take decisions which could jeopardise their jobs. Based on the views of the participants, victimisation can take the form of being demoted from their role, social isolation by colleagues, or even being dismissed. Moreover, the fear of victimisation is

compounded by a lack of trust and confidence in the complaints system and process, with many victims of discrimination saying their complaints are not taken seriously or are inadequately investigated.

Despite a long commitment in trade union movements to equality, the effectiveness of trade unions in supporting victims of racial discrimination in practice is brought into question by the data from these interviews with union members and officials. Trade unions have made progress in supporting members of minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds through representation in complaints processes and advocacy for policy changes. Equally their effectiveness is frequently compromised by a lack of proper understanding of discrimination, inadequate resources, poor reporting mechanisms which omit racial discrimination aspects, lack of representation of diverse groups within the union ranks, poor engagement strategies with ethnic minority groups, and lack of initiative to effectively advocate for victims of discrimination.

The ability of trade unions in Ireland to effectively support victims of racial discrimination and advance anti-racism initiatives is impeded by structural barriers in the labour market. While unions have historically played a vital role in advocating for workers' rights, the changing dynamics of Ireland's labour market present unique challenges. Precarious employment, especially in sectors heavily reliant on migrant and ethnic minority workers, such as hospitality, agriculture, and care, creates an environment where racial discrimination often goes unreported. Workers in these roles are frequently fearful of retaliation, job loss, or visa-related repercussions, making them hesitant to engage with unions. Additionally, many employers resist union involvement in workplace disputes, and weak enforcement of Ireland's anti-discrimination laws exacerbates these challenges, leaving victims without effective recourse.

Within unions themselves, structural and cultural barriers further undermine efforts to address racial discrimination. Irish trade unions have traditionally focused on economic issues, such as wage increases and job security, with less emphasis on intersectional issues like race. A lack of representation of ethnic minorities in leadership roles has contributed to a limited understanding of racial justice issues, and inconsistent training means many union representatives are ill-equipped to handle discrimination cases sensitively or effectively. Reporting mechanisms within many of the unions mentioned by research participants do not adequately capture or prioritise racial discrimination cases, further limiting their ability to address systemic issues.

Resource constraints also obstruct union effectiveness in tackling racism. Many unions operate on tight budgets, restricting their ability to dedicate resources to anti-racism initiatives or provide tailored support for victims. Representatives are often overburdened with caseloads, leaving them little capacity to engage in the sustained advocacy required to challenge discrimination meaningfully. Moreover, unions in Ireland struggle to build

trust with ethnic minority workers, many of whom view unions as unwelcoming or ineffective, stemming from historical neglect or mishandling of discrimination complaints.

This gap underlines the need for unions to prioritise anti-racism initiatives, increase diversity and inclusion within their ranks, and empower representatives to challenge discrimination effectively. A proactive, multi-pronged approach that includes awareness and training, rigorous policy change and enforcement, and a genuine commitment to promoting a culture of inclusivity is essential for unions to truly support minority ethnic workers and combat racism in the workplace. Strengthening awareness and training for union representatives and advocating for systemic reforms to enforce anti-discrimination laws will be critical in ensuring unions can effectively combat racism and support workers from all backgrounds in Ireland's increasingly diverse labour market.

The findings of this research paint a stark picture of the pervasive racism faced by ethnic minority and migrant workers across various sectors in Ireland. From bullying and harassment to systemic barriers in career progression, the experiences documented reveal significant gaps in workplace inclusivity and union support mechanisms. While unions have made strides in addressing these issues, this study highlights the need for more consistent and proactive efforts.

Key recommendations include:

- **Enhancing Training:** Unions must deliver comprehensive anti-racism training to their members and representatives, ensuring a deeper understanding of the structural and interpersonal dimensions of racism.
- **Strengthening Reporting Mechanisms:** Clearer, more accessible processes for reporting discrimination are essential, coupled with robust protections against victimisation.
- **Diversifying Leadership:** Increasing diversity within union leadership can foster a more inclusive culture and improve advocacy for marginalized workers.
- **Promoting Systemic Change:** Unions should integrate anti-racism into their collective bargaining strategies and collaborate with employers to create more equitable workplace policies.

The Irish government has a critical role in addressing racial discrimination in the workplace by strengthening protections, ensuring accountability, and fostering inclusivity across the labour market. This might include strengthening the legal framework, such as bolstering the Employment Equality Acts to address systemic racism explicitly and streamlining the Workplace Relations Commission's processes to make them more accessible to workers, including those with language barriers or precarious immigration statuses. Stronger penalties for non-compliance are essential to deter

employers from neglecting anti-discrimination obligations. In addition, the government could mandate annual reporting on racial discrimination cases and equality initiatives from employers and public bodies. The success of these efforts will hinge on the full implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism 2023-2027 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Beyond legal protections, the government must foster awareness and inclusivity through national campaigns and collaborative efforts. Public education initiatives should inform workers of their rights and highlight the benefits of diversity and inclusion for workplaces and society. Further incentivising equality initiatives for businesses that demonstrate effective anti-racism practices and increase access to decent work for marginalised groups would reinforce a culture of inclusion. To promote greater engagement, the government could resource trade unions and civil society organisations to provide cultural competency training and resources to employers and unions. These measures will help create a labour market where all workers, regardless of background, can thrive and contribute meaningfully.

The state must:

1. **Strengthen Employment Equality Legislation:** Update existing laws to close loopholes and ensure robust protections against all forms of racial discrimination.
2. **Ensure Accountability in Public Bodies:** Mandate regular reviews of compliance with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, with transparent reporting mechanisms.
3. **Support Workplace Inclusivity:** Provide funding and resources for training and capacity-building initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive workplaces.
4. **Enhance Access to Justice:** Simplify and streamline processes for lodging and addressing complaints of racial discrimination, ensuring that they are accessible to all workers, regardless of status.

By implementing these strategies, unions and the state can work together to build a labour market that not only promotes equity but also reflects Ireland's commitment to human rights and social justice. This research serves as a call to action for all stakeholders to address the immediate challenges of racism and lead the charge in reshaping workplace cultures across Ireland.

Appendix

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Timeline of Actions to Address Racism and Support Migrant Workers

Advocacy and Policy Development

2001: ICTU organized a North-South Anti-Racism Conference in Armagh to create a two-year action plan for anti-racism and build alliances with NGOs and community groups.

2002: ICTU supported Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on Migrant Rights and contributed to the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR).

2003: ICTU opposed changes to the Equal Status Act that would transfer cases to district courts, emphasizing their inaccessibility and non-compliance with EU directives.

2005: Advocated for stronger integration measures and called for the reestablishment of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI).

2006: ICTU collaborated with SIPTU to publish anti-racism guidelines and emphasized workplace equality.

2009: ICTU addressed the disproportionate impact of the recession on migrant workers, advocating for decent work and workplace integration.

2012: ICTU reviewed Ireland's Migrant Integration Strategy, calling for stronger commitments to workplace diversity and inclusion.

2013: Submitted recommendations to the CERD highlighting employment disparities and systemic racism.

2014: ICTU pushed for sectoral wage agreements and advocated for asylum seekers' rights to work.

2015: ICTU lobbied for reforms to Ireland's work permit system to reduce exploitation risks and pushed for refugee support during the European migrant crisis.

2020: Submitted recommendations to the Oireachtas Committee on the meat processing industry, highlighting poor conditions for migrant workers exacerbated by COVID-19.

2021: ICTU contributed to the development of NAPAR, calling for strengthened legal frameworks to address systemic racism.

2013–2014: ICTU addressed anti-Traveller discrimination, advocating for targeted employment initiatives and inclusion in national plans.

2020–2023: ICTU's charter protected migrant workers, promoted inclusive workplaces, and supported international solidarity for policy changes.

Education and Awareness Campaigns

2001–2006: ICTU launched Anti-Racist Workplace Week annually, disseminating materials and promoting intercultural policies.

2006: Published "Guidelines for Combating Racism and Planning for Diversity," providing tools for addressing racism in workplaces.

2015–2023: ICTU emphasized the importance of anti-racism training for union representatives and highlighted migrant contributions to the Irish economy.

Support for Migrant Workers

2005: ICTU organized seminars on employment rights and societal integration for non-Irish workers, highlighting the importance of fair treatment.

2006: ICTU emphasized addressing exploitation through union engagement, particularly in low-paid sectors.

2010: ICTU's Diversity Challenge Fund supported union-led initiatives promoting migrant worker inclusion.

2018: ICTU's review of the Migrant Integration Strategy highlighted the overrepresentation of migrants in low-wage sectors and advocated for inclusive policies.

2020: ICTU's UnionMigrantNet connected unions across Europe to support migrants, focusing on labour rights and combating exploitation.

2022: ICTU supported the regularization of undocumented workers and advocated for fair employment policies for migrants.

Combating Racism and Promoting Inclusion

2009–2014: ICTU actively supported reform of the Direct Provision system, emphasizing humane treatment of asylum seekers.

2013–2014: ICTU addressed anti-Traveller discrimination, advocating for targeted employment initiatives and inclusion in national plans.

2020–2023: ICTU launched campaigns and training programs to counteract far-right influence in workplaces and communities, emphasizing digital disinformation strategies.

2020: Published a charter to protect migrant workers and promote inclusive workplaces across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

2024: ICTU's initiatives include enhanced monitoring of workplace equality and strengthened policies against racial discrimination.

Combating the Far Right

2020–2023: ICTU launched campaigns and training programs to counteract far-right influence in workplaces and communities, emphasizing digital disinformation strategies. The Action Plan to Combat the Far-Right was published.

2024: ICTU continues to advocate for systemic reforms to promote workplace diversity, inclusion, and protections for vulnerable workers.

Traveller Rights and Protections

2009–2014: ICTU made several submissions addressing systemic discrimination against Travellers, including targeted employment initiatives and support for Traveller inclusion in national policies.

2013: ICTU highlighted the 80.2% unemployment rate among Travellers in its submission to the Seanad Public Consultation, advocating for tailored training and job opportunities.

2014: ICTU pushed for renewed national anti-racism plans to address systemic discrimination against Travellers and improve their socio-economic inclusion.

2019: ICTU's CERD shadow report emphasized the need for specific actions to reduce employment barriers for Travellers, improve their access to education, and combat workplace discrimination.

2022: ICTU supported reports and campaigns addressing workplace inequality experienced by Travellers, including actions to combat racism and discrimination.

2024: ICTU continues to advocate for policies addressing the employment, housing, and educational disparities faced by the Traveller community, emphasizing their inclusion in broader equality frameworks.



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

This Project is supported by the Ireland Against Racism fund

31/32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
Ireland
Tel: +353 1 8897777
Fax: +353 1 8872012
Email: congress@ictu.ie

STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

