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ACCEPT
PLURALISM



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NEW KNOWLEDGE about Ireland

This briefing note highlights NEW KNOWLEDGE about Ireland.
We present here new knowledge and key messages for policy makers and civil society.

On-going project

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ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN IRELAND

Ireland, an emigration state par excellence, was the last country in Western Europe to become an important destination for migrants. In the period from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, Ireland transformed itself from one of the poorest EU countries with high levels of unemployment and emigration to a centre for high-tech industry and impressive growth rates. In the 1990s the country began receiving a significant number of immigrants for the first time in its history, and by 1996 immigration exceeded emigration. By the time of the 2011 Census, non-Irish nationals represented 12% (or 544,360) of the population and included 196 different nationalities.

Toleration was historically not central to Irish discourse, although some institutional accommodation of long-standing religious diversity (mainly among Protestants and Catholics) has been in place since the state was founded. Thus, the discourse of toleration was late to come in Ireland. Its recent development in the Republic of Ireland owes much to two contexts and drivers: the evolution of the peace process in Northern Ireland, and changing norms in the area of sexual morality, from the increasing acceptance of unmarried mothers, to the admission of divorce and the tolerance of lesbian and gay sexuality, up to the recognition of civil partnerships in 2011.

For some years in the 2000s, toleration in its most basic form appeared to be superseded by more substantial forms of respect and recognition in *interculturalism* - defined as policies and attitudes promoting interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures and ethnic groups. This emphasis on interculturalism as a strategy for integration and social cohesion distinguishes Ireland from most other EU countries whose focus has been on either assimilation or multiculturalism.

In the ACCEPT PLURALISM project, we investigated how ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is accommodated in two very important areas: education and political life. We examined:

- **Cuts in special funding for Protestant secondary schools;**
- **Pupils wearing the hijab in schools; and**
- **The Sikh turban in the Garda (police) reserve**

Evaluation of discourses and practices in our case studies:

	Institutional and legal framework	Practical situation	Issues in debates
Funding for Protestant secondary schools	Moving from substantial recognition to lower level of recognition	Tolerance and financial support for these schools but no recognition of their special needs as 'minority' schools	Minority right or ethnic privilege? Protestant secondary schools as a space for wider diversity
The hijab in schools	Tolerance in principle but without official guidelines	Predominantly tolerance, but with some uncertainty, as each school can determine its practices	Gender rights to wear/not wear the hijab Muslim integration The status of religion in schools
The Sikh turban in the Garda (police) reserve	Intolerance	Certain institutions in effect are closed to certain minorities	The meaning of an official uniform Perception of (religious) discrimination the definition of Irishness, and limits to accommodating diversity

SPECIAL FUNDING FOR PROTESTANT SCHOOLS

Education has long been organised on a largely denominational basis, while primarily funded by the state. This constitutes a level of recognition for both majority and minority religious groups in education.

In 2008, however, a debate arose from the government decision to remove some special funding, namely the ancillary grants, previously provided to Protestant secondary schools. This provision was seen as an official acknowledgment that these schools serve the special purpose of allowing the geographically dispersed Protestant population to have affordable education which is in accordance with their religious ethos. Despite claims of discrimination raised in the debate, the decision was not reversed.

The shift this highlighted may be seen as moving from a rather high level of special recognition to a lower level of recognition (as these schools are still funded). It may alternatively be seen as a move towards basic toleration, as the state, **while authorising Protestant schools, is not recognising their needs as special needs of 'minority' schools**. The debate on the issue included discussions whether this funding should be seen as **a minority right or an elite privilege**, as well as broader reflections on the **accommodation of minorities** in Ireland, and the role of Protestant secondary schools as providing **a space of tolerance for those of other religions or none**.

WEARING THE HIJAB IN SCHOOLS

While a debate arose over pupils wearing headscarves in secondary schools in 2008, this did not lead to a decision to restrict this practice. At the same time it was made clear that the *niqab* or fuller face covering would not be accepted, **highlighting both a level of tolerance and an implicit limit to that tolerance**.

The debate on the headscarf revolved around issues of gender rights (rights either to wear or not to wear the headscarf); the integration of the Muslim community, and the status of religion in schools and beyond. Unlike France or Turkey where the state has consciously been constructed as secular, the constitution and the state in Ireland have always taken account of religion, most notably the Catholic Church, and this special history resulted in rather particular arguments both for and against the hijab in Irish schools.

WEARING THE SIKH TURBAN IN THE GARDA POLICE RESERVE

Toleration was, however, less readily forthcoming for a Sikh who had been training for the police (Garda) reserve in 2007. In this case, in contrast to the police forces in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, **no accommodation of the turban within the uniform was allowed**. The debate on this revolved around the nature of an official uniform, perceived (religious) discrimination, the limits within which diversity must to be accommodated, and the definition of Irishness. The ban on the turban represents another facet of the limits of recognition or accommodation of diversity in Ireland, **in not adjusting a policy which creates an obstacle to full participation of a minority in public (and especially emblematic) institutions**.

Non-citizens are in principle not excluded from the public service or other occupations. Anyone resident for a minimum of six months may vote and stand in local elections; this is one of the most inclusive voting systems in the EU. Some minority candidates have run for office, and a small number have been elected, with considerable, mainly positive, media coverage.

Political parties have been slow to take an interest in migrants as potential candidates or voters, and to recognize that migrants may have naturalised and now be citizens. Migrants have also been relatively slow to mobilise conventionally and to register to vote, but have, however, developed a variety of community structures and networks.

Ireland has not seen the emergence of any anti-immigrant party, or any significant campaign against immigrants. At the same time there is evidence of a significant underlying level of racial discrimination and intolerant and racist discourses, including among political and media figures, and of some level of racist violence.

Political elites tend to disengage from minority issues, as demonstrated by the lack of debate about immigration and integration issues during the 2011 General Election campaign. This was confirmed by an Integration Centre survey (2012) which revealed that, although TDs (MPs) were aware of racist attitudes, few were familiar with anti-racism and diversity strategies existing in their own constituencies, and more than a third felt that speaking up on behalf of migrants would damage their electoral support.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our research provides some indication of the kind of diversity Ireland is prepared to deal with and the areas in which such diversity can be accommodated. It also reveals the existence of **scales of tolerance** depending on who or what is at issue, in what sphere of society issues arise, and why certain kinds of diversity are tolerated; and it reveals that **acceptance can be quite selective and conditional**.

We note subtle shifts in government policy, moving from an initial focus on interculturalism to a stronger emphasis on integration and, more recently, on naturalisation of the 'new Irish', supported by a strong message that becoming citizens represents the main path to integration and therefore to full participation in Irish society.

The closure of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) in 2008, the cuts to the budget of the Equality Authority soon after, and in 2011, the replacement of the Office of the Minister for Integration by a coordinating office in the Department of Justice and Equality also raise questions as to successive governments' commitment and approach to diversity.

In a short period of time, Ireland has had to develop policies for a population that has become increasingly diverse, and the debate on how best to respond to this change is still in the early stages - many issues of toleration have yet to arise as challenges, especially issues pertaining to the second generation.

Based on our findings, we therefore consider that:

Teachers should be better equipped to deal with religious and cultural diversity within schools. While some training has been made available, **there is a clear need for more compulsory training for teachers in this area.**

Minority groups should be facilitated in interacting with institutions and government, by the **introduction of mediating bodies** that fill the role previously performed by the NCCRI - similar to, for example, the Garda Racial Intercultural and Diversity Office (GRIDO).

Political rights at local level are a catalyst for integration; but political rights in national institutions would allow greater accountability and more responsiveness to the needs of an increasingly diverse society.

Minorities could make a greater mark in Irish politics if they used the **existing opportunities to participate**; the political elite could encourage that participation to foster more fruitful interaction between policy makers and their changing constituencies.

More **formal public consultative forums** at national or local levels (as defined by the Council of Europe) could provide an avenue for the equal participation and representation of migrants and minorities.

Stronger national **political leadership** could promote positive initiatives at every level across the country. Government intervention can mitigate barriers to political integration and acceptance, as it has, for example, in the speeding up of naturalisation procedures.

These debates display considerable support for policies of **interculturalism**, and suggest that this language and policy could usefully be maintained by government, rather than adopting a more assimilatory language of, and approach to, integration.

FURTHER READINGS

To read more on the research findings presented here, see:

Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Ireland. Concepts and Practices

By Iseult Honohan and Nathalie Rougier (University College Dublin)

Download your copy from:

<http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23258>

Other relevant publications include:

2012/02.2. Handbook on Tolerance and Diversity in Europe

Anna Triandafyllidou (EUI)

Download your copy from:

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx>

PROJECT IDENTITY

Acronym	ACCEPT PLURALISM
Title	Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe
Short Description	<p>ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.</p> <p>Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.</p> <p>In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.</p> <p>The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.</p>
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Scientific Coordinator	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission