



Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit

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Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit

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Introduction

Ensuring the inclusion of people with a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, experiences and qualities in employment has potential to advance creativity, innovation and productivity, as well as contributing to a more just society. Although legislation supports employment equality, Irish workplaces are still not as diverse or inclusive as they could be.

Commissioned by the Open Doors Initiative and Employers for Change, this Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit sets out to provide accessible, practical and clear information and guidelines for employers and managers who wish to implement inclusive practices.

The Toolkit draws on findings from research with people with a range of backgrounds who have experienced seeking employment in Ireland, to inform understanding of how recruitment processes could be improved. Findings from this work provide rich insights into a range of challenges experienced at each stage of the recruitment process, and present positive ways to address these issues. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to all participants who gave their time to speak with us, contributing their lived knowledge and ideas for moving towards inclusive workplaces. Overall, participants' responses indicate a vital need for organisations to start with a clear commitment to change, training in inclusive employment practices, formulation of clear Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies, ensuring physical and sensory accessibility and promotion of an inclusive workplace culture.

The scope of the Toolkit is broad, engaging with the experiences of people who have disabilities, neurodiverse people, people of colour, migrants, Travellers and Roma, LGBTQI+ people, both men and women, younger and older people. Links to resources which provide more specialised advice are provided.

The Open Doors Initiative provides pathways to employment and education for groups of people including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, people with disabilities and disadvantaged youth, Travellers, LGBTQI+ people and ex-offenders and any intersectionality therein.

Employers for Change works with employers, providing information and advice on employing and supporting staff with disabilities.

What is Diversity and Inclusion?

Diversity is a reality. Inclusion is a choice (Frost, 2014)

Attention to diversity brings recognition to the range of cultural, ethnic and gender identities that contribute to making our societies and workplaces what they are. Acknowledging diversity among staff teams and potential employees allows us to draw on their varied experiences and possibilities, which are linked to intersecting social locations such as age, dis/ability, neurodiversity, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, gender identity, migrant status and family status. Focus on diversity also considers differences in areas such as well as mental health, personality or working style.

Embedding inclusive values in recruitment practice ensures that the workplace has representation of people with a diverse range of backgrounds, perspectives, skills and communication styles. In an inclusive workplace, there is equitable treatment, so that each employee feels valued and supported, and can bring their full potential to the workplace.

Becoming an Inclusive Employer

Committing to becoming an inclusive employer makes great business sense, and contributes to a more just society.

Putting inclusive values into practice requires thinking through recruitment processes, and perhaps making changes. Small adjustments can make a world of difference to providing accessible and fair recruitment processes and developing diverse, respectful and happy workplaces.

This Toolkit highlights the voices of people from diverse backgrounds, living in both urban and rural areas of Ireland, who share their insights on seeking work, describing the challenges they have encountered, as well as sharing some suggestions for making recruitment more inclusive. Drawing on this evidence, the Toolkit provides some clear suggestions and guidelines for making recruitment practices inclusive and equitable. It also provides links to a wide range of excellent specialised resources, as well as information on organisations that advise and support employers and managers on the practicalities of promoting inclusion.

Methodology

Any change in practices is best informed by people who have lived experience of engaging with these practices. With this in mind, a small-scale piece of qualitative research was conducted to explore experiences of seeking employment, through the stages of responding to advertised vacancies, completing applications, attending interviews and starting work. Four focus groups and two individual interviews were conducted with a total of 19 people.

Participants' particular social locations gave them unique insights into processes of recruitment and employment, both in rural and urban contexts. Their experiences represented a range of intersecting positions with regard to gender, sexuality, age, migrant status, race, ethnicity, dis/ability and neurodiversity. Their age range was 20s to 60s. Some were seeking employment, while others were employed in a variety of sectors. Please see Appendices 1 to 3 for more information on the Focus Groups/ Interviews, and the format that we used. Data was recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

We have also reviewed a range of helpful literature and resources for the Toolkit, and include references and links throughout for your information. These provide, firstly, evidence on why inclusion and diversity is urgently needed in the Irish workplace; and secondly, practical information and support for implementing inclusive recruitment practices.

Purpose of this Toolkit

The aim of this Toolkit is to contribute to improving the experience of seeking and securing employment for all candidates, and particularly for people who have been historically disadvantaged in the Irish workforce due to disability, race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality, among other factors.

It aims to help employers:

- **Provide equitable, accessible and supportive employment opportunities**
- **Identify existing barriers to employment and accommodations needed in the workplace to support employees and potential employees**
- **Continue to promote an inclusive and respectful work environment**

To achieve this, the Toolkit draws on perspectives of a wide range of prospective employees, to provide clear guidance for employers, designed to improve their confidence to engage effectively with diverse applicants.

Becoming an inclusive workplace is a long-term and evolving project. It involves the whole organisation, not just managers or the HR Department. This Toolkit provides some tips for beginning this journey. There is more specialised advice elsewhere, and the Toolkit points you to some of these resources.

Why is this Toolkit Needed?

Research has shown that diverse workplaces are associated with profitability and stronger performance overall (Dixon Fyle et al 2020). More inclusive workplaces also tend to have engaged employees and customers, high levels of productivity, effective decision-making processes and better employee retention (Frost, 2014), as the diverse skills and potentials of a wide range of employees are operationalised. Increased job satisfaction and innovative practice is more likely when team members are respected and supported. In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015), inclusive employment is a key factor in reducing inequality.

Despite this, some groups remain underrepresented in employment in Ireland, undermining their right to equal participation in society. Lack of employment has long term implications for the wellbeing of these people and their families, impacting, for example health outcomes (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) and poverty levels (Watson et al., 2012). Inequality and exclusion effect the social fabric as a whole, with reduced social cohesion, distrust in institutions and widening divisions between groups (De Vroome et al., 2014). In Ireland and internationally, barriers to accessing employment are experienced by black people and people of colour, by people from minoritised ethnic and religious backgrounds, by people with disabilities, by women, by lone parents and by older and younger people, among others (McGinnity et al 2017).

McGinnity et al (2018) reported that Black people, both Irish and non-Irish, are less likely to be employed than white Irish people, and are less likely to hold managerial /professional posts. Watson, Kenny and McGinnity (2017) found that only 11 per cent of Irish Travellers of working age were in employment in 2011, compared with 66 per cent employment in the general population. Travellers have also been found to be at far higher risk of experiencing discrimination in seeking work (McGinnity et al 2017). Data from the 2016 Census (CSO, 2017) indicated that the labour force participation rate for people with disabilities was just 30.2 per cent, at a time when the figure for the general population was 61.4 per cent (see also Banks et al 2018). According to TENI (2017), one in four transgender people are unemployed. Meanwhile, the gender pay gap between men and women is currently 11.3 per cent in Ireland (Eurostat, 2022).

Whenever we think about the disadvantages that people may face in seeking and starting employment, it's also important to consider the

intersectional nature of these experiences. Simply put, experiences of inequity are complex, and usually shaped by the interaction of more than one social location, within structures of power. So, for example it is helpful to understand that experiences of racism may be different when they intersect with experiences of sexism. Bringing an intersectional lens to employment policies and practices provides an approach that does not consider identity categories in isolation, which can be used to build alliances and work towards equity (see Crenshaw 1989, Hankivsky 2014).

Employment Equality Acts

Inclusive practice at work is built into legislation in Ireland. Discrimination in recruitment processes and in the workplace is prohibited under the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015, on grounds of:

- **Gender**
- **Marital status**
- **Family status**
- **Age**
- **Disability**
- **Sexual orientation**
- **Religion**
- **Race**
- **Traveller ethnicity**

This means that people should not be treated less favourably in various aspects of employment, including, for example, access, advertising, pay, terms and conditions and promotion. The Employment Equality Acts aim to promote workplace equality, and ensure suitable facilities are in place to allow equitable access to employment (IHREC 2020).

The Acts do not currently explicitly include transgender people, however they were successfully used in a landmark 2011 case regarding the employment rights of a transgender woman (TENI, 2017:10). Additionally, under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, public bodies have a statutory duty to protect all employees and users from discrimination, and to promote equality (IHREC 2019).

A number of recent government strategies seek to promote anti-racism and equality in Irish society, including in the labour market, for example The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017), and the independent Anti-Racism Committee set up in 2020 to work towards a new National Action Plan Against Racism (see Interim Report, 2021). Further strategies for addressing discrimination in the labour market are suggested by McGinnity et al (2021).

What are Reasonable Accommodations?

Under the Employment Equality Acts, employers have a responsibility to provide 'reasonable accommodation' for employees and prospective employees with disabilities, to minimise obstacles or disadvantages in the workplace. This requires making adjustments to the environment or to work practices, to allow employees who have disabilities to carry out their work effectively (see Government of Ireland 2015¹). For further advice, see the Equality Authority/Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Disability Resource Pack for Employers². Companies may also choose to liaise with organisations that specialise in supporting people with disabilities to enter employment.

Reasonable accommodations might include:

- **Providing assistive technologies**
- **Providing information in accessible formats such as large font, audio**
- **Providing appropriate furniture such as chairs, desks**
- **Providing suitable working environments with regard to lighting, noise levels etc**
- **Modifying work tasks**
- **Flexibility around start and finish times**
Allowing time to process large amounts of information

1 - Government of Ireland (2015) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities ([Online](#))

2 - Equality Authority and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Disability Resource Pack ([Online](#))

Audit: Where are we Now?

What can your organisation do? It might be useful to consider the following checklist and to think about areas such as policy, training, physical/sensory accessibility and workplace culture.

1. Does the organisation have an Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Policy?
2. Does the organisation have a Reasonable Accommodations Policy?
3. Have Senior Management, Human Resources Officers and all other staff had opportunities for training in inclusive employment practices?
4. Does the organisation currently employ people who have a range of backgrounds and abilities?
5. How accessible are the building/website/work practices?
6. Does the organisation have information about the specific requirements of diverse potential candidates?
7. Does the organisation monitor for equality and/or survey employees on their perceptions of the organisational culture?
8. A commitment to building an inclusive culture in the workplace requires openness to learning and changing. This involves engaging with topics such as anti-racism, disability awareness (including sensory disabilities and neurodiversity) and transgender awareness for example.

Tips and Takeaways

Physical accessibility including ramps, accessible doors, toilets, counters etc will be useful for many people using your services- for example for parents with prams or buggies, as well as for people who use wheelchairs or have other mobility needs. The National Disability Authority's Building for Everyone (2012)³ promotes a Universal Design approach, and provides detailed design guidance on building design and signage.

Support organisations for employers are listed at the end of this guide.

3 - <https://universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Building-for-Everyone/>

Learning from Experiences

The next section of this guide incorporates a small-scale piece of qualitative research, which provides a snapshot of the experiences of people seeking and securing employment in Ireland. Participants in the research had a rich variety of experiences of seeking and succeeding or otherwise in employment.

In each sub-section, we highlight some lived experiences of each stage of the recruitment process, through direct quotes from research participants. In many cases, these descriptions illustrate encounters with employment processes that were challenging, exclusionary and discriminatory. Alongside these findings, we list some key 'tips and takeaways' to inform approaches to inclusive workplaces.

We begin with some of our participants' key recommendations for employers who are committed to developing their organisations' capacities as welcoming and inclusive workplaces:

What does Inclusive Recruitment look like?

1 - Authentic and fair selection processes



"To say that we are actively looking to recruit for diversity, that would be really wonderful."



"The one thing I've noticed is... We should try and make our recruitment selection processes as authentic as possible to what the workplace is actually going to be... Can you do the job that you're being hired to do?"



"Looking for employment should be a level playing field with the advert being physically accessible, for example, in places where wheelchair access is and phrased to appeal to everyone regardless of their status. Interviews should just be fair and starting a job should ease some of your problems instead of making them worse. They encourage people with disabilities to get jobs but don't want to take the steps to remove barriers."

2 - Visibility of diversity in the staff team and interview panels



“I’ve been part of a change in my company... So, the first thing, we make sure that the Talent Acquisition Team would wear a rainbow lanyard or have a coffee mug with a rainbow... If you see in [multinational companies] they have their email with pronouns... so this is certainly consistent and visible for a new person.”

3 - Legislation and Policy that is followed through and assessed, ethnic identifiers and inclusive culture



I think that private and public employers should have an ethnic identifier. This is the collecting and analysing of ethnicity to ensure that access to employment is equal. This separate data could be a tool for employers to see how many Travellers have applied to their organisation and how many have been employed. Ethnic identifiers could be used to ... take action to ensure any inequalities experienced by the community.



A strong practice and policy on inclusion. This doesn’t mean just working there but being a part of the team. Feeling comfortable.



I think it should be welcoming. You are smiling, but if you hide who you are then you’re not happy. Policies for equality should be implemented in practice.



My experience is that [in multinational companies based in Ireland] there are consequences for discrimination, prejudice and racism... Whereas [in other companies] their approach is very much superficial.



[Employment should be] accessible, enjoyable and free from racism. I think there also should be a top-down approach: Legislation, research and reports should be used to inform an inclusive way of recruiting Travellers. We have loads on paper but it is never used. I think the ideal workplace would also have a clear policy for reporting racism and discrimination. Travellers need safe spaces in settled environments.



The one thing that I think I would actually do, that public sector is doing, is having a requirement to make sure that they are trying to diversify teams with specific quotas. They’re looking for every kind of different type of diversity and inclusion which is supported by great HR policies

4 - Training for diversity and inclusion



I think that all organisations and recruiters should do anti-racism training.



I think that anybody that's in the position of interviewing people, they should all have basic compulsory disability awareness training. This is so they know how you communicate with a person with disability and even people with ADHD or on the spectrum. This training would make interviewers aware of their biases and realise that peoples' disabilities isn't actually going to affect how they perform.

5 - Reasonable Accommodation



You know there are different accommodations. Employers should respect that..... When I ask for support [it is not that] I am incompetent, rather that I need reasonable accommodation.

6 - Aligned with values



I know I definitely wouldn't be working where I'm working now if it didn't align with what I'm trying to achieve in my life and providing pathways into employment for people with disabilities and difference.

Advertising

We asked research participants about experiences of accessing and responding to job advertisements, and about their perceptions of the role of advertising practices in promoting equal access to employment. In speaking about their experiences of responding to job advertisements, the people we consulted mentioned that phrasing of advertisements was a key indicator of inclusivity in the organisation. Explicit statements about the company's vision on inclusion, and accessibility offered, were particularly valued:



I suppose the.... thing is that there is no mention of inclusivity or diversity or anything like that within job descriptions, and I actually think that will be a really big bonus. And to say that we are actively looking to recruit for diversity, that would be really wonderful.



They should say that they are disability friendly or appropriate support can be put in place for people with physical disabilities on adverts.



I think that in job descriptions employers should put that they want Traveller participants. You know how in some jobs they say "in particular or especially welcome" This would give Travellers and others more confidence in applying.

It was, however, pointed out that potential applicants preferred approaches to inclusive advertising that were authentic and embedded in practice:



I would say that using Google images in advertisements of people with physical disabilities is a no-no as it comes across as tokenistic. If they are using images, use images of their employees to tell if they are committed to inclusion and diversity.

The locations in which advertisements were placed was very important to some participants, as a means of signalling commitment to diversity and being more accessible:



They (adverts) are placed in shops/bars/restaurants where Travellers face discrimination. I think that job advertisements need to be placed in local Traveller organisations.

Participants felt strongly that job descriptions should be very specific regarding the essential skills and competences required for the job advertised. Some of them had encountered advertisements that dissuaded them from applying by the use of 'default' terms and attributes that were not actually central to fulfilling the tasks required for the position:



Today, when I look at an advert, I understand it was written for someone who does not have a disability. A majority of people do not look at me and think that I am 'energetic' and can 'work in a fast-paced environment'.



As someone with [neurodiversity]in a previous iteration of who I was, I would look at that and say, 'Well that counts me out because I, I don't get on well with people I'm not a good team player' and you know that's even for jobs that don't require that.



I know by looking at job descriptions that they don't want a 60-year old Traveller woman applying. If you read job descriptions you see the words 'energetic' and all. These are words associated with being a young one.

For some participants, focus on educational qualifications in job advertisements immediately excluded them:



Given that the Traveller community has faced intergenerational educational disadvantage, there is no compromise with the needed qualifications. This is an instant barrier. The educational requirement often defeats Travellers' work experience, which many have. I think they have to consider Travellers' work experience and be flexible on the educational requirements. Without this flexibility, we don't even meet the criteria to apply.

One participant suggested that inclusive selection processes should foreground relevant experience, and recognise 'non-traditional' CVs:



I think employers should be encouraged to take the same format the educational system has which is the recognition of prior learning (RPL) ... I think that we need to look and see, when you're looking at a CV, what they've done, what transferable skills ... Rather than just looking at have they ... ticked all the boxes, like have they gone to college? Have they got the right internship? Have they got blah blah blah. They've got that because they started life with a silver spoon in their mouth.

Positive, inclusive workplace experiences were appreciated, and a number of suggestions were offered towards ensuring a diverse range of applicants at the advertising stage:



I used to work for a companyI always was very impressed with how they could make people feel included and they were inclusive in their work environment. And their job advertisements were pretty much the starting point of the journey of employee in contact with their business. And they value authenticity, they value people for what they are.



I think every employer should have a quota. Society knows the unemployment rate among the Traveller community but there is not enough positive action being taken by employers.

Responses from research participants indicated that they utilised word-of-mouth 'reputation' and employee feedback on online portals to assess whether potential employers would be welcoming of applicants from diverse backgrounds:



People access different forums and [they] research jobs. If somebody is LGBTQ, they have their own mechanisms to find out how a company is. So it is a double-sided thing. Bad practice in the workplace comes back to employers.

Some participants stated that their experiences of intersecting discriminations in particular spaces had entirely ruled out such environments as potential workplaces:



I would not apply for some jobs because I am a woman. You just would not have heard tell of Traveller women applying for jobs for example in a pub. I think it's because of the space you are in - I have to be very aware of who is around me, especially men. You face sexist remarks as a woman, but then people are also very racist because I am a Traveller, so a pub could be a dangerous space.

Tips and Takeaways

- Make it clear in advertising that the organisation has an ethos that supports inclusion and diversity, by explicitly stating this.
Promote inclusivity as part of workplace culture.
- Clearly advertise that your services are accessible, and provide details.
- Do not use generic images of people from a range of backgrounds for literature/ website, as this may appear tokenistic.
- Think about whether the 'essential' and 'desirable' qualifications and competences specified in job advertisements align with the skills actually required to do the job effectively.
- Take care that language used does not inadvertently exclude some applicants.
- Ensure that gender-neutral language is used in job advertisements and descriptions.
- Consider how your organisation could benefit by employing International Protection Applicants⁴, and specify in advertising how they will be supported.

Application and Shortlisting

Next, participants spoke about their experiences of applying for positions. They identified a number of challenges at this stage, as well as suggesting effective alternative processes. Many of the research participants had experienced challenges in applying for positions. In some cases, they had difficulties related to the technicalities of making an application. For others, application forms presented a barrier due to the language, literacy or digital literacy levels they required:



I find that online is generally the way to apply, but I struggle with this as I don't have a great phone or sometimes enough money for internet credit. I like physical applications, I think it would be good if they could post them out. Once I was asked to print and return an application, but I didn't have a printer.



The online application was so difficult..... it took me a long time to get my head around it. For most of the applications, I just gave up.



The language used is difficult to understand. A lot of applications are now online. So if you have poor literacy and digital literacy then you are facing double disadvantage.



English is not my first language. So when applying for jobs, the language used is too complicated.

Based on their own experiences and those of friends, several participants were discouraged at application stage, anticipating prejudice towards their applications before they could even reach interview:



I think that when you put in any extra requirements needed for the interview [physical disability], they don't invite you for interview.



...when your address is a halting site, group housing or areas which have been labelled 'Traveller only', then you're automatically at a disadvantage. This prejudice is even more impacted by a surname. If you have a Traveller surname then you're going to face double prejudice.



I know that when I declare my Stamp 3 residency status, then employers won't even consider my application as they do not want that sort of hassle. I often get 'you don't fit the criteria'. Even though I have the qualifications and experience.

Some spoke of strategies and solutions to avoid discrimination at application stage:



I have a friend who did his PhD in DCU... He applied for jobs using his traditional African name. He got no response. But like many Africans he had a middle name that was more acceptable in Irish culture. He used this name and applied for a number of positions. He was called to interview five times, and was successful in three. Having a non-'Irish' name is a huge barrier in an application. We know that we are not getting a call-back due to our name.



My grandson uses a different address when applying for jobs [Traveller].



I feel that names shouldn't be put on applications. This would increase the likelihood of interviews as implicit bias would be decreased. Use reference numbers. An NGO I used to work with did this.

Additionally, many participants had experienced selection processes that lacked transparency, and would have valued clear communication and feedback regarding their application:



I don't think it is all about qualifications. I have completed my fitness instructor course level 6 and I have applied for jobs with no acknowledgement of my application..... I think that there [are] two things that need to happen. The first is that the employer acknowledges your application by sending a text or email. If you don't pass this stage, then you should be informed why.

One participant suggested the provision of supported alternative routes into employment might be helpful for some, giving examples of systems he had experienced:



We run multiple outreach volunteering opportunities, so we run you know career clinics, we run speed networking events, mock interviews we run a referral system, our recruitment system you know we're taking people off the live register and you know getting them work into [company]. And plus the fact that we started opening up apprenticeships into [company] as well. And the role I got was through Ahead which is the Willing, Able and Mentoring, which provides you know, provides mentorship for, for graduates with disabilities.

Tips and Takeaways

- Provide choices for submission of applications - for example physical application forms as well as online applications.
- Review online application systems for accessibility.
- Make sure that application forms are clearly phrased with minimal jargon.
- Ensure that requests for gender identification on application forms are inclusive of transgender and non-binary people.
- Ensure that all staff involved in screening applications are trained in inclusive practices, and avoid stereotypical assumptions based, for example on the applicant's name or address.
- Consider anonymising applications.
- Consider how to assess non-EU qualifications.
- In shortlisting applicants, specify the adaptations you can offer for interviewees.
- Respond promptly to all applicants, and offer constructive feedback to those who are unsuccessful.

Interview

The interview stage was discussed next by the research participants. From their experiences as interviewees and as managers, they contributed a wealth of advice on ensuring that the process is inclusive and productive at this point. Focus groups were unanimous about the importance of diversity on interviewing panels in conveying a message of commitment to inclusion of people from a wide range of backgrounds in the company:



In interviews, the panel is usually white men. That's the first issue I feel. We can't see diversity in the organization at interview stage..... so we are already set for failure.



Why are older cis men all we see on every single interview board? Like, I hear directors talk about diversity on boards and then.... only one female sits on the board. That's diversity for some employers.



[As] a person of colour and LGBT...they told me that this company I now work for [was] offering a six-month internship, and I should apply. I just told the college hiring person that I do not want to face another panel of fully white straight and Irish men in an interview as it is just too heartbreaking.[.....] Then that interview went really well because there was an Irish person, but he was gay, openly gay and then I was like 'wow. This is a good sign'.

Related to this for many applicants was a concern that interview panels would tend to favour candidates who fit the 'normative' profile (white, settled, cis, heterosexual, able-bodied), and that other candidates will face disadvantages:



You know as a member of an ethnic group that the panel is too privileged to understand the obstacles that you have overcome to attend the interview. The worst part is the panel don't even have to say anything directly to you. You can feel the temperature in the room..... We as Travellers have learned to identify when people are being biased.

This extended to concerns around aspects of candidates' self-presentation that might draw attention to cultural 'difference':



The way I dress is a huge barrier. I wear a head scarf or hijab. When I walk into the interview room, I can sense that people are uncomfortable. One time on my feedback form, there was a comment that I didn't comply with the standard of dressing. Was this because of my hijab? I asked and received no response.



I think that a huge barrier is policing the way you dress. I removed all my gold or symbolic things when I went for interviews. [Traveller woman]



My fear in interviews is how the panel view my identity. I constantly have to question myself on the day. The way I present myself, the way I speak and some of the words I use - if I use any slang or Cant.



One time I corrected an interviewer eight times on my name. She continued to say it wrong. So, respect people and listen carefully.

Similarly to views expressed about advertising for positions, participants felt strongly that interviews are most productive and equitable when they focus on the skills required for the position, and when there is consideration of competences developed beyond the traditional focus on educational qualifications:



The one thing I've noticed is like you know we should try and make our recruitment selection processes as authentic to what the workplace is actually going to be. If it's important, like if you're going for a graphic design role you'd have your portfolio. Can you do the job that you're being hired to do?



They asked me questions that had nothing to do with the job. It was a youth worker for a minority ethnic group. They did not care about the lived experience. That is important for interviews to recognise lived experience.

A significant number of research participants reported questions and statements at interviews or later in selection processes that clearly contravened the Equality Acts:



I would not apply for some jobs because I am a woman. You just would not have heard tell of Traveller women applying for jobs for example in a pub. I think it's because of the space you are in - I have to be very aware of who is around me, especially men. You face sexist remarks as a woman, but then people are also very racist because I am a Traveller, so a pub could be a dangerous space.



I have attended interviews where I have been asked was I someone's brother, uncle or cousin based on my surname. It is not that they are trying to make small talk, they are trying to figure out what family you belong to. Then they usually ask if you're a settled Traveller, which is asking are you a bit more acceptable than the rest.



Interviews have been terrible for me over the past few years. The terms, language, and tone that people use towards me are really demeaning. The focus of the interview sometimes becomes about my disability without the people interviewing me being even aware. I recall one time a woman praised me for being able to get to the interview as I used public transport. It was patronising without her realising it.



I was 99% assured I got the job and the hiring manager told me that you are a completely suitable candidate, but the only part is you will work with a team who are not open-minded, and if you choose to be out gay at the workplace, it will not be good for your career and your mental health. I still have those words with me.



They asked me a number of questions of where I was from. I said Ireland. They said 'where are you really from?' I said Ireland. They seemed not to believe me. The next day before starting I had to give photo ID. I have a Romanian passport. They asked me was I Romanian and I said 'No, I am Roma'. That was that and a few days passed. [Agency] rang me and told me my placement fell through. I was so upset.



I got a scenario question once about conflict- they used the example of my disability and co-workers being discriminatory and what would I do? Why would they ask this question? Why could it not be about my performance? The question in itself was just inappropriate.



When they ask about reasonable accommodations in the job, I know that I am not going to get it. Once I went for a receptionist interview in a hotel and one of the men on the panel said how could the height of tall reception desk be changed to help me communicate with customers? They don't want the hassle..... of me swanning about in a wheelchair.

Tips and Takeaways

- Make sure that interview panels are diverse, welcoming and reflective of the workforce you wish to attract.
- Members of the interview panel should have a good understanding of the Equality Acts, and should have opportunities for training in inclusive and anti-bias practices with regard to gender, transgender, sexuality, race, Traveller/Roma ethnicity, religion, marital /family status, disability and age.
- Consider competency-based interviews that focus on the actual abilities/attributes required for the position, and value transferable skills and work experiences.
- Remember that disabilities and mental health difficulties may be invisible.
- Blind and visually impaired candidates: Speak to person when you approach or move away. Ask how you can help.
- Clearly indicate position of steps, seating etc. Provide written communication in the person's preferred format (electronic, audio, large print etc). Candidates may be accompanied by a guide dog - remember that this is a working dog and not a pet.
- For online meetings, use appropriate assistive technologies.
- **Candidates who are deaf:** There are many degrees of hearing impairment, and a range of ways in which people may communicate. Always ask how you can best help. If a person works with a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the candidate, not the interpreter. To facilitate candidates who lip read, make sure that you are standing in their line of vision, that your face is clearly lit and visible, and that your pace is moderate.

Keep background noise to a minimum, and consider technologies that may help people who use hearing aids. For online meetings, use appropriate assistive technologies.

- **Candidates who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids:** Consider physical accessibility
- **Autistic people:** Provide specific information on what to expect in advance of the interview, and stick to this. Use visuals. Be aware that candidates may approach social interactions in different ways. Be mindful of the sensory environment. Instead of a traditional interview, consider using a 'work sample' to test skills specific to the job⁵.
- **Transgender and Non-binary applicants:** It is good practice to state pronouns in all communications and introductions. Avoid making assumptions based on voice or appearance. Be mindful that a candidate's identification may not align with some of their legal documentation. Ensure that sensitive information including disclosure of gender history is stored securely and in line with GDPR.^{6, 7, 8}

5 - As I Am/ irishjobs.ie: The Same Chance Toolkit: A step by step guide to becoming an autism friendly employer ([Online](#))

6 - Northern Trust/ Global Butterflies 2021 Trans and Non-binary Inclusive Recruitment Practice

7 - LGBT Great(2021) Turning the Corner: Shining a light on trans and nonbinary diversity, equity and inclusion ([Online](#))

8 - TENI (2017) Supporting Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: Guidelines for Employers and Employees ([Online](#))

Starting a New Job

Many people we spoke to continued to experience difficulties as they moved into employment. Some had experienced a lack of belonging or a sense of isolation in starting a new job:



The attitude of a new team is worrying to me as people are generally kind but think that because you have a physical disability, [they think that] you are also mentally disabled, which is not the case.



.... I worked in a small charity shop and avoided socialising at lunch because the café down the street didn't have wheelchair access. I just didn't want to be seen as a hassle so avoided socialising at break.



People isolating you. People were avoidant of me in my work experience [migrant].

A number of participants reported concealing aspects of their identities because they were not confident that the workplace culture would be supportive:



When I joined the public sector, I didn't come out for the first six months. I joined in June, and it was only at the Christmas party I came out. I decided to tell them, sober, I was a lesbian as I had time to ascertain whether it was a safe space or not. I needed to be able to see other diverse people. I have one trans colleague, but I had to be able to see her walking around and I had to be able to see it on the ground before I was safe there and I really had to believe that the culture was ok.



So many Travellers won't identify in [area] as Travellers if they have a job. Not saying their identity is like a form of protection from discrimination. But then this has a huge impact on their mental health. Having to deny who you are every day to protect yourself from racism. It is not fair, employers have a role to ensure that there is diversity in their teams and that racism, discrimination and exclusion won't be tolerated.

As indicated by comments in other sections, some participants with disabilities were hesitant to request reasonable accommodations in a new post:



...you know for my previous role, asking for those accommodations, resulted in my dismissal. That particular situation I won't disclose, but someone actively used my disability against me and made my job requirements so onerous, playing to my weaknesses, that they were forcing me out of the company.

Medical expenses were also a worry for people with disabilities starting a new job:



For me I worry about my medical card as I cannot get health insurance. I couldn't afford to pay for my medical expenses as the wages wouldn't cover the cost.

Some women reported that they felt that they were less likely to be supported in their career aspirations if they planned to have children:



I suppose the really big elephant in the room for me, particularly at my age- I'm in my 30s and a woman- is marriage and pregnancy. The fact that it is seen as a threat... if somebody is engaged, she will take off her ring... I've had companies, even when I got into the company trying to suss me out or 'what is your plan? Are you going to be here long term?'



I had colleagues who had children... they certainly felt that this was going to be a really big disadvantage. They were put in the stereotypical female roles when they got the job.

Accessing childcare was also problematic for some:



When I was working in my 20s, it was difficult to organise childcare as you needed to also organise transport and so on. I... think as a Traveller woman there was little understanding from your employer about your mothering commitments and the way we mother our children.

Others recounted experiences of discriminatory treatment in employment that resulted in lack of promotion, precarity, or being marginalised to the extent of leaving the job:



I hear a lot of Travellers leaving jobs because of the way their colleagues speak about the community. It is not a healthy space to be in if people talk negatively about your community.



My husband is a doctor. He works in the hospital. We are here ten years and he has still no permanent contract. So poor employment conditions happen all the time. When you raise the issue of contracts, they let you go [migrant].



I went to the best college in South America.....but it means nothing here and that had a big impact. You know you move to another country you don't speak the language, it is another continent, it is in another hemisphere, and your make your way, you work so hard and it's still... .. I'm two years and I'm still fighting for a pay increase



I had a job in a hotel when I left school. At the start, they did not know I was a Traveller. I had good hours, got to upskill and had good relationships with my colleagues. When a new person started in the same role, they knew I was a Traveller. They told my manager and the team. I then slowly began to get fewer hours and was given duties that no one else would do. I eventually left because I was isolated.

A well-structured and supported mentoring or 'buddy' system with appropriate training was mentioned as an effective means for assisting employees to integrate into a new workplace:



I had a mentor and you know there was a structure put in place..... What I found very useful with the mentor was around culture, you know, questions that you probably shouldn't be asking your manager because you want to maintain a certain relationship, but you still want to know what the hell is going on?..... I think that would be a lovely support to have in place for you know either neurodiverse [people] or [people with] disability. I think there's so little knowledge within the HR and recruitment area around reasonable accommodation..... 'How did you get what you needed? How did you get Dragondictate?'

Tips and Takeaways

- Build an inclusive and equitable workplace culture- ensure that employees feel safe to bring their 'whole selves' to work⁹.
- A well-structured mentoring system can be a great way for new employees to settle in.
- Make sure all employees are aware of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies in place.
- Develop a database to identify how well policies are working to attract and retain a diverse workforce.
- Provide the accommodations and supports that employees need to work effectively and happily.
- Allow flexibility for employees who have caring responsibilities.
- Ensure that everyone has opportunities for promotion and job security.

Where to Next?

We hope that the experiences and solutions highlighted in this Toolkit have inspired you to take one action that will continue your organisation's journey toward becoming a more diverse and equitable workplace. Please consult the support organisations listed below, or read their resources for more information.

Useful Resources

Organisations

Open Doors Initiative - www.opendoorsinitiative.ie

Employers for Change: Employer Disability Information Service - www.employersforchange.ie

Ahead: Creating inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities - www.ahead.ie

AsIAm - www.asiam.ie

Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre - www.paveepoint.ie

Donegal Travellers Project - www.donegaltravellersproject.ie

Transgender Equality Network Ireland - www.teni.ie

Publications

Inclusivity Employment Toolkit ([Online](#))

Employers for Change Toolkit ([Online](#))

Employers for Change and The Open Doors Initiative: The Future of Work and Disability - A Remote Opportunity ([Online](#))

De-mystifying Disability in the Workplace: Practical guidelines for managers and supervisors ([Online](#))

The Same Chance Toolkit: A step by step guide to becoming an autism-friendly employer ([Online](#))

Supporting Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: Guidelines for Employers and Employees ([Online](#))

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Appendix 1: Focus Group / Interview Information

Ethical Approval was granted via IT Sligo Institute Research Ethics Committee (Open Doors Inclusive Recruitment Research Project Ref: 2021004)

Focus Group 1: Participants: Travellers - two men, six women (in person)

Focus Group 2: Participants: Migrant people/Roma - three women (in person)

Focus Group 3: Participants: Neurodiverse/ Migrant- two women, one man (MS Teams)

Focus Group 4: Participants: LGBTQI+/ Migrant- one woman, two men (MS Teams)

Interview 1: Person with physical disability - woman (MS Teams)

Interview 2: Person with physical disability - woman (MS Teams)

Appendix 2: Focus Group / Interview Outline

Facilitator Introduction (Two mins)

Purpose of the discussion: (Two mins)

This focus group is part of a piece of research for Open Doors Initiative, aimed at making recruitment practices more inclusive. The people involved in the research from IT Sligo are..... We would like to learn about any areas of concern you have noticed around recruitment and employment; and about how you think things could be improved. We will be bringing together these observations and recommendations in a set of guidelines for employers.

Reminder- this session will be recorded, and what is said will be transcribed by the researchers and used to help us write a report. No names will be used in the report. If you change your mind about participation during the focus group, or afterwards- any time before the report is finished- just let us know, and your information will not be used

Ground rules (Five mins)

As part of the consent process, the researchers have guaranteed that focus group participants will not be identified in the report, and anything discussed will be confidential. Can we also ask for everyone's agreement within the focus group that what is discussed here is not shared with others?

Ask the group are there any other ground rules they would like to suggest? (e.g. turn off phones, listen respectfully, make sure everyone has a chance to speak)

Check in (Five mins)

(See Appendix 2 below.)

Large Group discussion (30 minutes)

This section asks you to think about difficulties that might be experienced by people you know, in applying for a job, and what solutions you think should be put in place:

1. What are some of the main difficulties that people you know might experience at advertising stage of recruitment? What are some solutions to this?

2. What are some of the main difficulties that people you know might experience at application stage of recruitment? What are some solutions to this?
3. What are some of the main difficulties that people you know might experience at interview stage of recruitment? What are some solutions to this?
4. What are some of the main difficulties that people you know might experience when starting a new job? What are some solutions to this?

(For each of these stages facilitator may ask further regarding intersectional experiences- eg what about gender, would this be different for....?)

Small group discussion and feedback to large group (10 minutes)

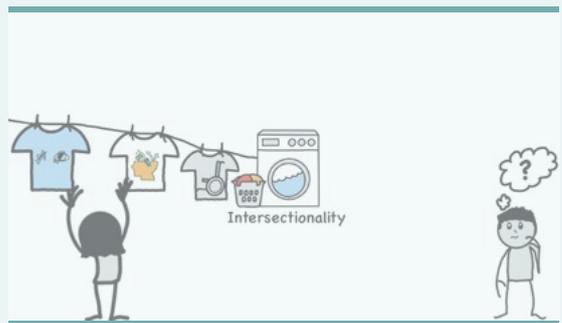
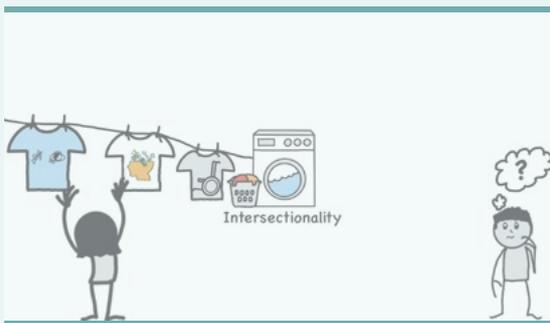
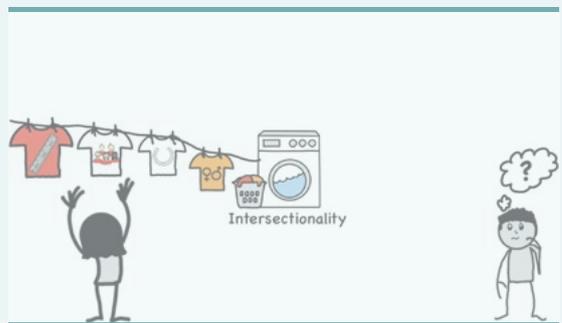
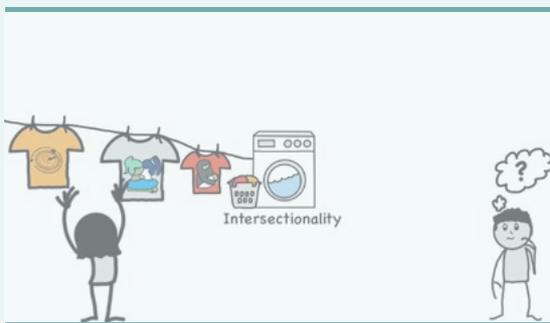
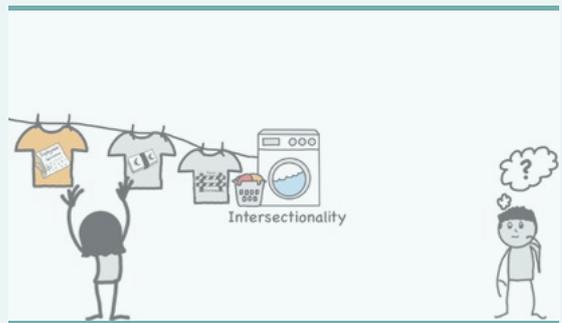
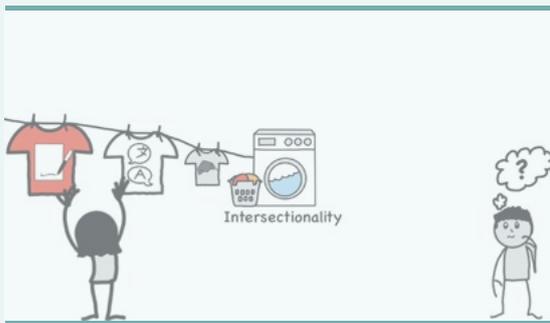
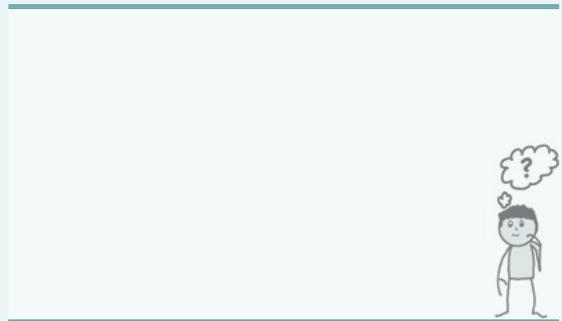
Ideal world scenario: In an ideal world, what would the process of seeking and starting employment look like?

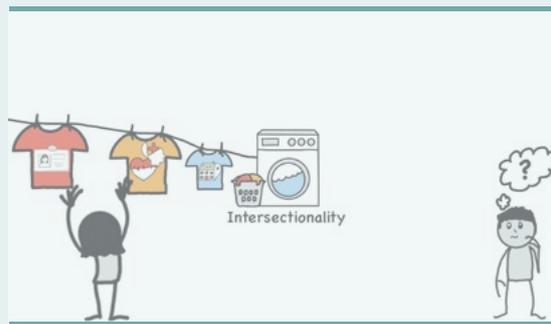
Final comments (five minutes)

Conclusion - Wrap up and questions (10 minutes)

Appendix 3: Introducing Intersectionality 2 Minute Presentation

Screengrabs of Presentation







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An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
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