



ATD European People's University – Wednesday 6th February
European Parliament – Brussels

Irish Delegation – The Unity in the Community Youth Group

Draft document - 5th February 2019

The impact of socio-economic discrimination on our families and our family life.

1. Who we are:

The Unity in the Community Youth Group (UCYG) was created in the summer of 2017 after an ATD European Youth Exchange in the Netherlands. We are a group of 8 young adults who are social activists and leaders in our own communities.

In 2018, inspired by Martin Luther King's famous speech, we run the "Ireland, I have a Dream" project. We created a space for young people in Dublin to find their voice as leaders and to explore the inequalities of poverty in the context of their own lives.

Today, in Brussels, we want to become active citizens at the European level, and explore how not having a recognised socio-economic ground of discrimination in Irish law has a negative impact on people.



2. What do we do?

We have now started a project looking at the issue of Discrimination. At present, within the Irish Equal Status Act, there are 9 recognised grounds of discrimination, but we are working to try to inform our Deputies so that they'll decide to add a tenth ground, one based on a person's socio-economic status.

We are looking at how people suffer socio-economic discrimination when dealing with Irish public services or private individuals and companies. We are working to collect personal stories from people, where they can tell us about a time where they experienced this type of unequal treatment, when dealing with any public service; be it the police, hospitals, schools, housing services, public transports, etc.

As part of this campaign we want to try and convince our national but also our European representatives of the importance of working to ensure this protection is written into Equality legislation in Ireland and European Directives at EU level, so that all citizens of Europe might be better protected from discrimination before the law.

3. How discrimination on socio-economic grounds impacts our family life:

In preparing to attend and take part in this European People's University, we started looking at the issue of discrimination, as we had already been exploring it, with relation to family life, and the particular impacts of discrimination on family life.

- The first thought that came to mind around this was the fact that, oftentimes, we, and others we know, can act to try and avoid facing discrimination by asking for help. We met with people who described how they:
 1. Ask friends or family to come with them to meet people in positions of authority, so that they feel supported when dealing with different administrations.
 - Quote: *"The fact that I went over and really spoke, and had all the documentation, and I knew what I was talking about... it goes to show that they do know who they're discriminating against, and they know who is vulnerable, compared to somebody who isn't."*
 2. People can also ask someone they know who has a better 'telephone voice', to deal with different services over the phone for them.
 3. When applying for jobs, seeking support or assistance, people often give the address of a family member who lives in a 'better area'.
 - Quote: *"Not getting a job because of where you come from."*
 - Quote: *"When I was living in Santry, there were people who were living in Ballymun, and when they were going for jobs they used to say that they were living in Santry, rather than say Ballymun, because if you say you were from Ballymun, 9 times out of 10 they wouldn't give you the job."*

- We know some adults are stressed when they enter shops, when they meet people who have “a file” about them, and this in turn puts an additional stress on people and has an impact on family life.
 - *“They say on the walkies ‘do you see it?’... and you’re ID’d the minute you walk in.”*

- A lot of people spoke about discrimination which they faced during their time in school, and the effect which this had on the entire family. Some of the issues discussed included how:
 1. Some children faced ‘special treatment’ from teachers and staff in school because their parents find it hard to pay for their fees, to pay for meals, etc.
 - Quote: *“Belittled... some people can make you feel very small, so you can just say ‘that’s how tall I am, so just stand up’... to belittle someone is to really put them down.”*
 2. As well as this, the large fees associated with education in general can put immense stress and pressure on families who want to provide their children with the best, but may find it very difficult to meet these demands.
 - some participants mentioned how they were asked to leave class because they were not wearing the ‘right’ shoes and how they felt belittled and embarrassed by the attitude of teachers. This leads to lack of confidence that is often carried out through adult life as well.
 3. But at the same time, it is worth mentioning that some people we spoke to also believed strongly that education presents an important way to try and combat discrimination and encourage people to learn from these people who they are discriminating against.

- More generally, when speaking about income, many people we spoke to identified that a family’s income, as well as the area which they come from, can result in some people or organisations discriminating against them:
 - Quote: *“The Police kept pulling us over saying take them hoods off”* – this happened in Ballymun – an area in Dublin which might be considered to be ‘disadvantaged’.

- In recent times in Ireland, the government has been offering a specific type of rent/housing supplement to people which is known as ‘HAP’ – Housing Assistance Payment. The problem with this, however, is that many landlords are reluctant to rent to people who are supported by HAP. As Ireland is currently in the middle of a housing crisis, where more families are experiencing homelessness than any other time in recent history, this type of discrimination is a huge problem for families as they try to secure accommodation.

- Some people who we have spoken to about discrimination spoke very strongly about the shortcomings within the foster care system in Ireland. There is a lot of stigma and

discrimination directed towards both parents and children who are engaging with this system.

- Quote: *“They say people in foster care are forgotten but they are not... I think most social workers out there...base you on the profile that they’re given... before they even talk to you... ‘that’s that person on the piece of paper’.”*
 - Some of us would really like to go and do some research on this, to talk to other people about their experiences of this system and see if there are any similarities or differences between different people’s experiences.
- Many of the different issues which we have already mentioned here impact, not only the family as a whole, but parents in particular, as they feel responsible for their children and the family at large. This can result in particularly low self-esteem amongst the adults within families, which can ultimately lead to the development of mental health issues.
- In conclusion, when looking back through all the different discussions that were had with different groups around this issue, we think one participant summed it up best when they said:
- *“I think the discrimination that we’re looking for is the one that is going to restrict people from getting what they truly desire.”*

This section will be completed with the learnings from the discussions in Brussels on 5th and 6th February and an updated document will be drafted and sent out to all Irish MEPs before the end of February 2019.

4 - What do we expect from MEPs, from the future candidates to the EU 2019 elections and from the new team in charge of leading the European Commission?

According to a 2015 Eurobarometer survey, around 12% of people in Europe consider themselves at risk of discrimination. In fact, any person in Europe could potentially fall victim to this injustice.

More than ten years ago – on 2 July 2008 – the European Commission proposed a new anti-discrimination directive known as the **Equal Treatment Directive or Horizontal Directive**. This Draft Directive has not yet been adopted by the Council of the European Union, composed of EU member states.

On 22 June 2018, ten years later, the EU Commission only “recommended” a set of measures for Member States to ensure that the equality bodies effectively protect citizens and fight discrimination.

At this occasion, first Vice-President Frans Timmermans said: “Equality is one of the fundamental values upon which the European Union is built, but it is not a given. We need

good laws and strong and independent equality bodies to defend our core principles and values so that victims of discrimination can right the wrongs they face."

European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra Jourová added: "Discrimination has no place in the EU. Victims or witnesses of discrimination should know where to turn and equality bodies are there to help them in these situations. We must ensure that national equality bodies are independent, with sufficient resources to carry out their task. They play a key role in ensuring all citizens are given equal rights and equal opportunities."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker had also said "discrimination must have no place in our Union, whether on the basis of nationality, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, or with regard to people belonging to a minority."

The recommendation from 22 June 2018 suggest to expand protection throughout the European Union against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation, to the areas of social protection, healthcare, education, housing and access to goods and services. At present, these four grounds are only covered when it comes to employment and vocational training.

As far as the European Parliament is concerned, the resolution (2015/2116(INI)) on the application of the Council 'Employment Equality Directive' 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation doesn't extend the list of discrimination grounds.

The ground of poverty or social precariousness is not yet covered by EU anti discrimination legislation. This preserves a hierarchy of discrimination grounds – a notion that some forms of discrimination are more acceptable than others. This is both deeply unfair in practical terms to those groups who would benefit the most from the added protection, but also damaging in symbolic terms: European citizens feel their experiences and sufferings are not recognised. So they feel they don't count and the EU doesn't care. It is legal to discriminate the most vulnerable on socio-economic grounds.

As long as the socio-economic ground of discrimination remains unrecognised, the EU's legal framework will remain incomplete. And as long as an Equal Treatment Directive including all discrimination grounds is not adopted, the European Union will be limited in its ability to support victims of discrimination and hold perpetrators to account.

An initiative to forbid discrimination on the ground of poverty or social precariousness at EU level would give a boost to all new national initiatives as it is now the case in Ireland and is in line with the above mentioned commitments taken by some member states.

This is why we would like to ask the MEP attending the 2019 European People's University, as well all other stakeholders representing the EU institutions to share with their colleagues our proposals:

Proposal A. The European Parliament and all the EU institutions should support the adoption of an Equal Treatment Directive which will among other prohibit discrimination on the ground of social and economic circumstances

This means: a socially identifiable status of social or economic disadvantage resulting from poverty, level or source of income, need for state support provided for in legislation, health situation, level of education or qualification, homelessness, place of residence or family background, physical appearance, social status, property or wealth, previous convictions, or other real or presumed personal characteristics. It should provide among others protection with respect to employment, access to employment, access to housing on the private market and the provision of services (such as education, health, housing, security, privacy, culture...)

Proposal B. The European Parliament and all the EU institutions should invite the EU Commission to fund awareness raising campaigns about discrimination against the European citizens living on very low income or on state benefits. These campaigns should target the general public and relevant professions (civil servants, police officers, social workers, bailiffs, teachers, etc.). Information and education are indispensable tools to promote policies designed to eradicate discrimination, eliminate stereotypical attitudes, preconceptions and judgmental behaviour. Public authorities should look at measures in all areas.

Proposal C. The European Parliament and all the EU institutions should should promote public policies that improve the conditions of people living in persistant poverty.

To protect from discrimination is not enough. The European Union must make sure the public authorities take measures to strengthen the policy for the eradication of extreme poverty and exclusion in order to improve the conditions of individuals or groups who are denied access to equal opportunities, because of their fragile and vulnerable social-economic situation. These measures should encourage these people to claim their rights.

