

Disability, LGBT+, Traveller, and Migrant Communities join up to demand new hate crime laws

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 Thursday 23 March 2017: As part of a National Week of Action Against Hate Crime, a newly formed group of 18 organisations representing marginalised communities in Ireland has called on the Government to urgently legislate against hate crime.

The **National Steering Group Against Hate Crime** includes organisations representing minority ethnic communities, Traveller communities, LGBT+ communities, older persons, disabled communities and other groups come together for the first time ever to campaign for legislation on this issue.

The University of Limerick's Hate and Hostility Research Group, also a member of the Steering Group, has been invited by Fiona O'Loughlin TD, Fianna Fáil's Junior Spokesperson on Equality, Immigration and Integration to present evidence to parliamentarians this week on the need for, and form of, hate crime legislation.

Unprecedented Support

The unprecedented support from across community groups comes in the wake of the significant increase in racist hate crime in Ireland and the rise of the right in the US, the UK and beyond. The group is asking supporters to post to social media using **#DontHateLegislate** to show their support for hate crime legislation. The hashtag began trending in Ireland on Tuesday 21 March.

The presentation will take place in the Oireachtas on Thursday 23rd March and speakers include Dr Amanda Haynes, Jennifer Schweppe, Shane O'Curry, ENAR Ireland, Dr. Mark Walters, Abdul-Rahman Ahmadzai and Vickey Curtis. Media are invited to interview case studies and spokespeople immediately after the Oireachtas event at approx 12 noon.

Dr. Amanda Haynes, Hate and Hostility Research Group, University of Limerick said:

"A hate crime is committed when an offender subjects someone to a criminal act – often assault, harassment or criminal damage - because of their prejudices against that person's identity. Ethnic minorities, LGBT+ persons, people with disabilities and others who are subjected to hate crime are doubly victimised – first by the criminal act itself and secondly by the harm inflicted in the targeting of their identity. That targeting – often aggressively verbalised in the course of an assault, or indelibly marked on a home in spray paint – sends a message of rejection and a warning of the ongoing risk of repeat victimisation. Victims experience emotional and psychological distress as well as behavioural changes that can damage integration. As a society, we need to establish effective responses to both the collective problem of hate crime and the individual's experience of hate motivated

victimisation if we are to interrupt the its message of rejection and replace it with one of solidarity.”

Jennifer Schweppe, Hate and Hostility Research Group, University of Limerick said:

“When we legislate against hate crime, we are sending the message to society that we will not stand for this type of violent exclusion. We are also sending a message to victims and their communities that they are valued and that we consider this behaviour reprehensible. As a society, Ireland needs to take a stand against hate crime, making it clear that we will not tolerate this violent manifestation of prejudice. As one of the few EU or common law countries without hate crime legislation, we have an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions and introduce legislation which is both a leading international example as well as being fit for purposes in an Irish context.”

Dr Mark Walters, University of Sussex, said:

“Hate crime laws provide an essential mechanism from which the police and other statutory agencies can begin to more effectively tackle bias-motivated offending. These laws help to ensure that the police specifically record and investigate bias-motivated offences as “hate crimes”, that prosecutors adduce at trial evidence of an offender’s demonstration of hate or bias, and that judges publically acknowledge when sentencing the devastating impacts that these crimes can have on individuals and the communities to which they belong.”

What is a hate crime?

If someone commits a crime against a person, because of their hatred towards or prejudice against the personal characteristics of the victim, that is a hate crime. So, for example, if someone assaults a person because they are gay, or disabled, the crime (an assault) is a hate crime.

As the EU Fundamental Rights Agency states, it is not simply the case that what happens to victims of hate crime is an unlucky occurrence – that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time – “instead, they are forced to accept that their social identity was targeted and they remain at risk of repeat victimisation.” Victims carry with them the fear of repeat targeting, thus hate crime impacts on the way they live their lives, changing the way they participate in society, with victims often reporting limiting their use of public space, seeking to hide or moderate the identity for which they were targeted, and/or even moving home.

Given that victims are targeted because of personal characteristics which are shared by others, hate crime has a ‘ripple effect’ out into the community. Each hate crime creates both direct and indirect victims, sending a warning to all those who share the targeted characteristic, and contributing to feelings of unsafety.

Members

The National Steering Group Against Hate Crime includes the following organisations; the European Network Against Racism Ireland, the National LGBT Federation, Inclusion Ireland, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Transgender Equality Network Ireland, Pavee Point, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, the Hate and Hostility Research Group from the University of Limerick, the National Youth Council Ireland, Sport Against Racism Ireland, the GLEN - the LGBTI Equality Network, NASC, the Irish Traveller Movement, Age Action, Action Against Racism, Doras Luimní, LoveNotHate, UCD LGBTI Staff Network.

Case Studies (available for interview):

1. **Abdul Rahman Ahmadzai** is a 15 year old from Rathfarnham. His family moved to Ireland from a part of Afghanistan where there is heavy conflict. In May of last year, Abdul Rahman and his two uncles Naqeeb, 18 and Fazal Rahman, 20, were targeted in a vicious racist attack as they cycled home through a park near their home. The attackers shouted “Why are you here? Go back to your country”, caused grievous injuries to the three, and threatened to kill them the next time. Abdul Rahman and his uncles were treated in hospital. One of his uncles is still receiving treatment for his injuries. The perpetrators have targeted the family since, even coming to the family home. Abdul Rahman, who plays cricket for Leinster, doesn't go to Saturday and Sunday cricket any more, for fear of being attacked. He doesn't walk to school either. The family are trying to find a house in a different neighbourhood, and his uncle Naqeeb, after changing school, has given up and has decided to go back to Afghanistan.
2. **Vickey Curtis**: On March 8 last year – International Women's Day – Dubliner Victoria Curtis posted a photograph of her recently bruised face on Facebook following a homophobic, and wrote: “This is what misogyny looks like. This is what being a faggot looks like. This is what happens women on Saturday nights walking home with their friends. This is what a man did to me after I told him it wasn't cool for him to tell us to take off our trousers, pull down our knickers and show him our arses ...This is Ireland 2016”. Curtis' post went viral, grabbing the attention of national radio, momentarily re-opening the much needed national conversation about hate crime. The discussion provided a sober reminder, after marriage equality, that in spite of formal equality before the law Ireland in 2016 wasn't yet an equally safe place for all who live here.
3. **Nokuthula Malete** is a mother who, with her children, was subjected to a pattern of harassment and racist abuse by some residents of her estate, culminating in criminal damage to her house and car. Since Gardaí were unable to intervene, and the harassment was ongoing, Nokuthula was forced to move her young family out of the estate. Nokuthula speaks eloquently about the impact that racist abuse has had on her and her family.

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Notes to Editors:

- **For interviews, photography, filming opportunities or any further information please contact niallcowley@wethepeoplecomms.ie 083 835 4976**
- The National Steering Group Against Hate Crime (formerly the Working Group on Hate Crime) is a coalition set up to promote meaningful reform of law, policy and practice as it relates to hate crime in Ireland including, but not limited to, hate crime legislation; reporting and recording of hate crime and hate incidents; education; training and awareness raising activities; hate speech; and cyber hate crime.
- The Group commissioned the Hate and Hostility Research Group from the University of Limerick to investigate the need for, and form of, hate crime legislation in Ireland. This resulted in the publication of the Heads of the Criminal Law (Hate Crime) Bill. This Bill is supported by nearly 70 civil society organisations as part of the #LoveNotHate campaign.