



# ESRI Research Bulletin

## *Discrimination in the Labour Market: Nationality, Ethnicity and the Recession*

---

Gillian Kingston, Frances McGinnity, Philip  
O'Connell

The *Research Bulletin* provides short summaries of work published by ESRI staff and overviews of thematic areas covered by ESRI programmes of research. Bulletins are designed to be easily accessible to a wide readership.

This Bulletin summarises the findings from: Kingston, Gillian; McGinnity, Frances; O'Connell, Philip J (2015) "Discrimination in the Labour Market: Nationality, Ethnicity and the Recession", *Work, Employment and Society*, 29 (2), pp 213-232.

# Discrimination in the Labour Market: Nationality, Ethnicity and the Recession <sup>1\*</sup>

---

Gillian Kingston, Frances McGinnity <sup>2</sup> and Philip O’Connell <sup>3</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research shows that immigrants suffer multiple disadvantages in the Irish labour market, with lower employment, higher unemployment and lower wages than Irish nationals. But what effect did Ireland’s economic crisis have on discrimination? We investigated whether non-Irish nationals were more likely to report experience of discrimination in the labour market after the crisis hit.

The Great Recession led to a dramatic deterioration in the Irish economy after 2008. In general, immigrants are more exposed to the consequences of economic downturns, and this was also the experience in Ireland. Against this backdrop of disadvantage experienced by immigrant groups, we investigated how reported discrimination differed by nationality and ethnicity; and whether the incidence of discrimination increased in the adverse labour market conditions of the recession. To our knowledge, this is the first research to examine the impact of economic crisis on the experience of self-reported discrimination in the labour market.

## THE DATA

The research was based on analysis of responses from a module on Equality (2010) from the Central Statistics Office’s (CSO) Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), which is a nationally representative survey of over 16,000 households in Ireland. We compared the responses with the previous 2004 Equality Module to see how self-reported discrimination among non-Irish nationals changed from boom to recession. The research focused on the experience of discrimination when looking for work and in the workplace.

---

<sup>1</sup> This Bulletin summarises the findings from: Kingston, Gillian; McGinnity, Frances; O’Connell, Philip J (2015) “Discrimination in the Labour Market: Nationality, Ethnicity and the Recession”, *Work, Employment and Society*. 29 (2), pp 213-232.

<sup>2</sup> Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.

<sup>3</sup> UCD Geary Institute, Dublin.

\* gillian.kingston@esri.ie; fran.mcginnity@esri.ie; Philip.oconnell@ucd.ie.

## RESULTS

We found that, overall, in both boom and recession, non-Irish nationals reported higher rates of discrimination both in looking for work and in the workplace than Irish nationals. There was substantial variation in discrimination across national-ethnic groups. In looking for work, ethnicity was particularly important, and we found that Black Africans and EU nationals of minority ethnicity were particularly likely to report experience of discrimination when looking for a job. In the workplace, we found that most national-ethnic groups, apart from White UK and White EU-13 groups, were more likely than White Irish to experience discrimination in 2004. In 2010 the Black African, White New Member States and White non-EU groups reported experience of more discrimination at work than White Irish nationals.

We did not find that discrimination increased significantly in the context of recession and a growing immigrant population. In looking for work, the gap in reported discrimination between non-Irish nationals and White Irish actually fell between 2004 and 2010. In the workplace, the gap between non-Irish nationals and White Irish remained relatively stable.

Why did reports of discrimination in recruitment among non-Irish nationals fall on average? In 2004 Ireland was a relatively new country of immigration, and employers may not have had experience with immigrant groups. By 2010 this would have changed. However, this was not true of all groups: visibly different ethnic groups, in particular Black African and non-White EU groups reported very high rates of discrimination when looking for work, and their experience of discrimination did not decrease over time. This is consistent with discrimination based on racial prejudice, and a preference for White immigrants. This finding, combined with high rates of unemployment and low rates of employment among these groups, suggests they are particularly vulnerable in the Irish labour market.