

TAKING RACISM SERIOUSLY

EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE TAXI INDUSTRY



Funded by the Equality Mainstreaming Unit which is jointly funded by the European Social Fund 2007-2013 and by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission



Ireland's EU Structural Funds
Programmes 2007 - 2013

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"Investing in Your Future"



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The Immigrant Council of Ireland was established by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001. It is an independent human rights organisation that advocates for the rights of migrants and their families and acts as a catalyst for public debate and policy change. The Immigrant Council of Ireland is also an Independent Law Centre.

The work of the Immigrant Council of Ireland is underpinned by the belief that immigration is a permanent and positive reality in Ireland and that individuals' human rights must be respected, protected and upheld.

Acknowledgments

Particular thanks go to the National Transport Authority and Hailo Cabs for their cooperation and support throughout the project. Appreciation is extended to Niall Crowley and Rachel Mullen for their invaluable input in the course of this Project. The Immigrant Council of Ireland would also like to acknowledge ENAR Ireland for their assistance and collaboration with key parts of this project

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FOREWORD

For several years the Immigrant Council of Ireland has been coordinating the work of an anti-racism partnership involving public transport companies, Dublin City Council and the National Transport Authority. This work has comprised research, training and provision of service to victims of racism and discrimination. The partnership also has developed a robust and proactive anti-racism annual campaign ‘There’s no Room on Board for Racism and Discrimination’ and the ‘Towards and Inclusive Public Transport Services in Ireland’ tool kit. The achievements of the project within the public transport industry encouraged the Immigrant Council of Ireland to run a pilot project with relevance to the private transport industry to mainstream equality and non-discrimination across the whole transport sector in Ireland.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland intends that this pilot project will lead to the development of further initiatives that will work towards reinforcing equality and anti-racism into policies, procedures and practices across the whole sector. We are looking forward to working with relevant stakeholders in the future to promote equality, non-discrimination and anti-racism in the transport industry and beyond.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland would like to take the opportunity to thank the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission for providing funding to run the pilot project and for their ongoing support during the course of this initiative. We would also like to thank ENAR Ireland for their crucial help in organising focus groups with taxi drivers.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland would like to commend the keen involvement of the National Transport Authority in supporting the project, and in making staff available for training sessions. We also want to thank and acknowledge Hailo Cabs for participating and supporting the project, and for making staff available for training. Thanks and acknowledgements also go to Rachel Mullen for helping develop the project and to Niall Crowley for providing his expertise and insight and for the delivering the training.

Last but not least, we would like to highlight the dedication and good will of the participants of the focus group who gave their time to share their experiences and discuss options for improvement of the current situation in the taxi industry. The Immigrant Council of Ireland would like to thank them for their bravery in sharing details of sensitive and upsetting events that took place in their lives. The Immigrant Council of Ireland would like to also applaud their ability to stay resilient in their everyday work despite the frequent difficulties that they experience due to their ethnic background or the colour of their skin.

I. Introduction

This initiative aimed at embedding equality in sectors that are notably hard to reach such as the taxi industry. We hope that this will be a starting point for a further collaboration that will lead to developing, along with the National Transport Authority an anti-discrimination protocol that could be promoted in the taxi industry and other small public transport providers.

The project included three main elements:

- Conducting focus groups of taxi drivers from an ethnic minority background to explore the issues and difficulties that are presenting to them in their daily work.
- Providing support and training in equality and non-discrimination to those involved in the regulation of the small public transport industry through the National Transport Authority. This training was facilitated and organised by the Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Customer service staff of Dublin based taxi company Hailo Cabs took part training in equality and non-discrimination. This training was facilitated and organised by the Immigrant Council of Ireland

Instances of apparent racism towards drivers of an ethnic minority background in the taxi industry have been noted, at least anecdotally, over recent years. Some instances have attracted media attention¹ and to date a small number of research reports² have been produced discussing this issue in greater detail. The overall aim of this report is to further contribute to this debate by exploring the patterns of racism and discrimination that some taxi drivers of ethnic minority backgrounds are experiencing in Ireland. This report also aims at opening a discussion on identifying the forms of action and support that the taxi drivers describe as being needed in the face of racism and discrimination.

This narrative provides a snapshot of the experience of racism and discrimination faced by some drivers in the Irish taxi industry. Testimony provided in this report was gathered from the types of enquiries and issues raised by participants of 3 focus groups that were conducted in November and December 2015 in Dublin, Letterkenny and Waterford. Supportive testimony was extracted from the incidents that were reported to the Immigrant Council of Ireland in 2013-2015.

The focus groups were organised by the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR Ireland). In total 23 number of taxi drivers and community

¹ <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/i-get-daily-racist-abuse-for-being-a-coloured-taxi-driver-26808103.html>
<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/shocking-racism-towards-african-drivers-says-study-1.686315>

² V Jaichand (2010) Riding Along With Racism? Research on the Galway Taxi Industry: Employment Opportunities, Patterns of Public Use and User Perceptions. Galway: Irish Centre for Human Rights. <http://www.nuigalway.ie/media/intranet/Ridingalongracism.pdf>

L Michael (2015) Afrophobia in Ireland: Racism against people of African descent. Dublin: ENAR Ireland http://enarireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/afrophobia_mediumRes.pdf

workers took part in the 3 focus groups. Furthermore the Immigrant Council of Ireland recorded 54 of incidents in the period between January 2013 and November 2015. Racist and discrimination incidents affecting taxi drivers accounted for 11% of all incidents reported to the Immigrant Council of Ireland in that period. After analysing the content of the focus groups and the ICI's reports it emerged that there are 4 main areas of concern surrounding issues of racist harassment and discrimination in the taxi industry. The following part of this report will give a snapshot of the patterns of racist abuse and discrimination described by the participants of the 3 focus groups and clients of the Racist Incident Support and Referral Service of the Immigrant Council of Ireland³.

It should be noted that this project and focus group activity is not intended to represent a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of the issues of racism that have presented within the taxi industry, rather it is intended as a snapshot and initial assessment of the area and the issues emerging. All names of participants and location of the incidents used in the report below have been concealed to protect the identity of the participants.

³ The Immigrant Council of Ireland provides support, information and appropriate referrals to people who have experienced or witnessed racist incidents in Ireland. Clients can make a complaint by emailing stopracism@immigrantcouncil.ie

II. Patterns of racist harassment and discrimination in the taxi industry

A. Experiences from Passengers

Participants of the 3 focus groups described a shared experience where they perceive that many customers refuse to get into taxis driven by a driver who is perceived to be a member of an ethnic minority. This was also reported frequently to the Immigrant Council and similarly it was documented in the two reports mentioned above⁴.

Racism is very common in taxi industry mostly on the ranks. When I am on the rank in a queue and after long time I reached the top, people came and see that the driver is not Irish they skip [taxi] no 1. Then they see [taxi] no 2 also is not Irish so they skip it too, and then they see 4th taxi man is Irish so they jump in to that taxi. And we have to stay on rank and have to wait for long time for a good person... It happens many times a day in all ranks

We have many situations where people are coming to the rank, they bend over, they see my face, they would call me a 'nigger'... and then if a 3rd or 4th taxi driver is white, they will go there.

You can be out there for 4 hours on the rank and you won't make a dime. You can get angry but you'll discipline yourself 'well let me go home...' And there is only 7 days in a week in the calendar. I don't know what other calendar you can produce but there's only 7 days. So in those 7 days you probably take home only 3 days of working week.

This is understandably of massive concern for taxi drivers from ethnic minority backgrounds as it is not only emotionally disturbing but also directly affects their ability to earn a living for themselves and their families. Taxi drivers understand that the Taxi Rank Guidelines was designed to confirm the customer's right to choose, but stated that, from their perspective, the outcome of this is that some customers are using the guidelines to directly and deliberately discriminate against taxi drivers of ethnic minority background. In focus groups, this subject caused much discussion amongst the taxi drivers, who debated various options changing the system.

From anecdotal evidence provided by the participants of the three focus groups it transpires that there are rumours circulating in public that the ethnic minority drivers are artificially elevating fares.

I've heard through talking to young people that the [Irish] taxi drivers would say 'don't get to that taxi because they will turn on the meter and they will charge you extra. If you'll go with us it will be only such and such.' And they believe them.

This guy jumped in my taxi and straight away he said 'don't rip me off' I said 'why would I rip you off?'

⁴ V Jaichand (2010) Riding Along With Racism? & L Michael (2015) Afrophobia in Ireland

According to the V Jaichand (2010) 16% of drivers of ethnic minority background believe that they are losing customers due to racial discrimination and a further 38% believes that this can be attributed to rumours that are spread by other drivers, as well as in the media and by public representatives.

'The reasons why I don't blame the customers that much is because of what they've been told by our fellow taxi men.'

Violent behaviour of customers, including threats,, property damage, physical violence and aggravated violence is also a common experience described by focus groups of taxi drivers from an ethnic minority background. Of particular concern are repeated reports that physical abuse very often happens while the taxi is in motion, which puts the driver, the passengers and other road users in a great danger. One driver from Dublin recalled an incident when a female passenger sitting at the back seat accused him of causing her to be late, she demanded him to perform an illegal and dangerous manoeuvre, but when he refused she started repeatedly slapping him in his head. The attack finished when he asked her to leave the taxi if she wouldn't stop slapping him. The most severe incident reported to the Immigrant Council of Ireland involved a driver of an African origin being stabbed in his neck and cheek by customers who refused to pay for the fare. The driver has been hospitalised for many weeks and he has been left with visible facial scarring for life. The perpetrators were never found. In both cases, the drivers believed that the treatment they received was influenced by the fact that they were from an ethnic minority background.

Some instances of racism towards ethnic minority taxi drivers can be described as subtle or indirect, while other instances are overt and display direct targeting of drivers of different backgrounds.

On Saturday early morning while I was in taxi rank waiting two men approached me started [verbally] abusing me. When I close the window and not listen to them one of the men tried to remove the roof sign of my car so I have to open the window and stop him doing the damage. That moment he put his hand inside the car and took my keys of the car and walked away. So I got out of the car and followed him and try to get my key back. So the two men beaten me up and I had broken nose, lips damaged cheek bone and slight cut on eye brows.

I took three boys and they told me to go xxx. But then they said turn right, turn left, turn right... and suddenly you don't know where you are going. And you don't know what is in their minds, so you just keep on going and praying 'please God, help me' until you get to the destination. And if they leave in peace you run!

On Wednesday night I was working and a customer rang me and told me he was in front of a shop. There were a lot, a lot of students dancing, and one of them jumped

on top of car. He destroyed my car. And Gardaí, I presume they saw it from the station from the CCTV, they alerted a patrol car. Two Gardaí come. In their presence while I was talking to them a fellow ran and jump on my car and smashed the windscreen. Then what I could do was to hold they guy because I didn't want him to run away. I did not kick him and did not assault him, I just held him 'no no no, you can't do that' they've said to me, the Gards. I said 'what you mean? Look at my car!' So I did let him go. Eventually he was arrested with the other fella.

A number of incidents described by the participants of the focus groups and clients of the Immigrant Council of Ireland included verbal abuse and inappropriate comments. Taxi drivers reported being called a variety of racist names, many experienced being told to 'go back to their own country' or were accused of 'stealing' jobs from Irish people, regardless of the fact that many of the drivers from an ethnic minority background are themselves Irish citizens.. Many drivers described receiving the verbal harassment from passengers while driving the taxi, which is a particularly distressing for the drivers as on many occasion they are stuck with the abuser in the car until they reach the destination.

Participants of the focus groups also discussed instances of implicit racism and discrimination. While participants acknowledged that in certain situations no overt racist vocabulary or behaviour was present, the overall experience was upsetting due to the tone, subject matter of conversation or inappropriate behaviour.

They don't want to be direct but they try to insult by talking about something else, for example that my car is dirty. I wash my car twice a week, it is not dirty

One driver described a situation when a young male who was sitting in the back seat suddenly covered the driver's eyes with his hands. The passenger found his behaviour extremely funny and seemed to be pleased that he got the driver reacting in a panicky way. He continued to laugh and told the driver to 'chill, I'm only messing with you'. The driver felt that the overall undertone of the situation was very disrespectful, he also believes that this situation would not have happened if he was not from an ethnic minority background.

Taxi drivers of ethnic minority background also described feeling that they are being targeted by customers who do not intend to pay for the fare. The frequency of this type of incidents amongst fellow taxi drivers of ethnic minority background makes them believe that their perception of this type of incidents is true. Customers refusing to pay for the taxi at the destination also engaged in threatening behaviour to intimidate drivers, which the drivers described as an attempt to stop them from reporting this situation to the Gardaí. The drivers say that based on what customers who refuse to pay are saying they get that impression that the perpetrators feel they do not have to pay 'foreign drivers' because they 'owe Irish people anyway for letting them in to the country'.

B. Other taxi drivers

Instances of tensions between non ethnic minority taxi drivers and drivers of ethnic minority background is well documented in the report by V Jaichand (2010). Participants of the focus groups carried out as part of this project confirmed that this tension has led to a situation where some ranks are perceived as being reserved only for ‘white’ drivers, with other ranks open to any other taxi drivers. This perception exists despite the fact that the taxi legislation clearly states that any taxi rank should be available and open to any taxi driver. Notwithstanding this fact, there is a common perception amongst the drivers attending focus groups that such division exists.

You cannot say you have not had [heard] what is happening in this Taxi rank, even the Gardaí are aware of it, what they say is that you are been advise to go and make your money else were, I was a victim of racist attack on this rank in several occasions, it was been reported to the Gardas, what they say [there]was no prove [for the racist attack]

Do you know that there are some taxi ranks that we can't use? If a foreign taxi driver would stay there, he would regret that till the rest of his life

Testimony of this unofficial division was given by the participants of all three focus groups and clients of Immigrant Council of Ireland. This division seems to be well established and set to the point that it described as having become a ‘norm’ and common knowledge among drivers. Those of the drivers who decided to ignore this unofficial rule and join the queue on the ‘restricted’ ranks report being subjected to verbal harassment and intimidation at the rank, with customers being discouraged from hiring their taxi by being told stories about the alleged inappropriate conduct and dishonesty of ethnic minority drivers. . In some instances ethnic minority drivers reported that the perceived ‘non Irish’ drivers were blocked from reaching the top of the line by other drivers.

A female passenger from Dublin gave a testimony of the harassment that happens on a taxi rank in Dublin that she witnessed.

I went to the taxi rank [Dublin] to take a taxi with my four year old son and nine year old nephew. The first driver in the rank was an Africa driver. As I went to get into the car (an Irish taxi driver standing nearby talking to other drivers beside their cars) came over. He seemed very agitated and started telling me not to get into the car as the driver did not have the correct registration. I looked at the car I was about to get into and saw that the driver had the usual things most taxis have such as roof sign and registration card with photo, name and number of the driver. The driver in the car seemed very surprised by this allegation and told me he was properly registered. I have experienced racism among Irish taxi drivers on this rank previously (comments made, conversations overheard using racist language etc.) so I decided this was what was behind this approach and I got into the car with the children. Before I could close the

door another Irish driver came over shouting at me not to get into the car and telling me that the driver did not have the right insurance. The taxi driver whose car I was in said this was not true and as I believed him I closed the door and we drove off.

This testimony supports the reports of false accusations or ‘rumours’ against ethnic minority drivers mentioned in the previous section. It was reported by drivers in focus groups that rumours and false accusations are being used by some non- ethnic minority drivers deliberately as a means of control within the industry. Rumours of this nature can, of course, contribute to the spreading of false representations of certain categories of people, creating mistrust, fear, hostility, and anger.

The tensions on the taxi ranks are also demonstrated by instances of verbal harassment and intimidation, threatening behaviour, damage to the car, and physical violence.

One taxi driver told the story about being physically pushed out of the queue by a female taxi driver. Every time the woman would park behind him she would bump in to his car and she would start spinning her wheels to push him out of the line. The driver said that *‘this woman thought that I shouldn’t be before her. The first time it happened I rang Gardaí but when they have come they said to me to use another rank, so now I don’t use that rank any more’*

I was picked up by a lady but this other driver must have thought that I stole this customer from him, so he jumped out of his car, picked up an iron bar from his boot and hit my car twice

Another taxi driver reported an instance of a physical attack that he experienced from a non-ethnic minority driver on a taxi rank. He recalls that he was at the top of the line in a taxi rank when another driver parked his car in front of him blocking his way out. He blew the horn on his car but the other driver didn’t move so he blew the car horn again. The other taxi driver got out of his car and approached his car, opened the door, pulled him out and physically assaulted. Three taxi drivers, (all of ethnic minority background) come to his rescue. At this point the attacker got back to his car and the victim rang Gardaí. When the attacker heard him ringing the Gardaí he verbally abused him shouting at him *‘You black bastard I’ll buy your life’*.

Instances of implicit racism and discrimination against ethnic minority taxi drivers was reported during the focus groups. Other participants of the focus groups reported that when a customer chooses to go with an ‘Irish’ driver who is behind them, the other driver will laugh ostentatiously expressing satisfaction that they have got the fare first.

Discrimination and overt or indirect racist attitudes such as those detailed above were reported throughout the focus groups by drivers from an ethnic minority background on the receiving end of this behaviour. Some drivers reported that they feel they may quit

their job due to the persistent harassment from other taxi drivers and members of the public.

I'm not that hurt by what the passengers do, but what other [taxi drivers] do that really hurts me

C. National Transport Authority

The National Transport Authority is the regulating body for services within the small public service vehicle transport sector, i.e. mechanically propelled vehicles with a seating capacity for up to eight passengers only. The principal function of the National Transport Authority is to develop, operate and maintain a regulatory framework for the licensing and regulation of the standards to be applied to small public service vehicles (over 21,000 licences) and their drivers (over 27,600 licences) together with the provision of the services involving small public service vehicles, such as dispatch operators and booking services. Amongst other matters, it provides regulations for fares control and vehicle standards. An Garda Síochána remains the licencing authority for drivers and vets each applicant for an SPSV driver licence.

The relationship between the taxi drivers and the National Transport Authority was reported by some drivers as being problematic due to the perceived detrimental impact of some aspects of industry regulation. The system that is currently in operation, although designed with the intention of regulating the industry with the principles of freedom of choice and equal and fair competitiveness, can unintentionally produce outcomes that are perceived by ethnic minority drivers as being discriminatory and exclusionary. Drivers of ethnic minority background report that they feel they are denied equal opportunities and rights as a result from the normal operations of the industry where the customers have the freedom to hire a taxi ignoring the order in the line on the taxi rank. While these impacts may be completely unintentional on the part of the National Transport Authority, they are perceived by some ethnic minority drivers as being an example of racism towards them. A number of the drivers who took part in focus groups speak about the existing regulation as 'biased' 'unfair' and they perceive the system as involuntarily 'supporting racism' by permitting customers to discriminate amongst the drivers based on their ethnicity. Drivers report that they feel let down and unprotected and that they feel resentful towards the National Transport Authority.

There are a lot of regulations going on in the taxi industry. This country refuse to accept the fact that people of different nationalities are coming to the area. There should be changes. The law should be repealed to reflect the diversity of the people who are now in the industry. That's what they have failed to understand.

Some instances described by participants of focus groups describe negative interactions

with officials.

While these incidents may be limited in terms of their occurrence, perceived discriminatory behaviour on behalf of the individuals employed by the National Transport Authority was reported as instilling a general lack of trust amongst the drivers represented in focus groups. The National Transport Authority is seen by some ethnic minority drivers as being an agency whose main *'interest is to satisfy the needs of customers'*

Some of the drivers interviewed for this project stated that they did not feel protected by the legislation and voiced their belief in the need for the establishment of an independent body that would deal with their complaints and especially with concerns in relation to racism and discrimination. However, despite any issues perceived within the relationship between the taxi drivers and the National Transport Authority, participants of the focus group were keen for an opportunity to engage with the regulating body to open a discussion about the prevalence of racism and discrimination in the taxi industry. Some drivers stated that they would welcome an independent platform that would offer them a safe environment for discussion on this pressing issue and for this reason they welcomed the opportunity to take part in the focus groups.

Many of my colleagues didn't want to come [to the focus group] because they feel that they cannot change the situation so what is the point?" But in a platform like this I feel more comfortable to narrate my story and to explain the situation. So if a platform like this takes the matter up, then we can back it up

D. An Garda Síochána

Discrimination and racist behaviour against taxi drivers of ethnic minority background is also described as being an issue in interactions with An Garda Síochána. Many of the incidents described were clearly influenced by negative anti-ethnic minority driver ‘rumours’ that have been discussed in the previous part of this report. Drivers of ethnic minority background reported instances of being singled out by Gardaí from a taxi rank for an inspection of all relevant documents and the technical state of their cars. Other drivers reported situations where they have been stopped for no reason and were subjected to an extensive search and interrogation by Gardaí. One driver described a situation where, when a member of An Garda Síochána could not find any fault with the drivers conduct on the road, with their papers or with the technical state of his car he was fined for a unclean registration plate that had a dirty spot no bigger than a 10 cents coin.

I was back on the rank. I was at the end of the rank. And this Garda told me I should move. I've said 'why?' He said that they need that space for something. I moved. But then a white guy parked on that spot straight away. He [the Garda] didn't tell him to move. I was right there on the other side. [I asked the Garda] 'why did you ask me to move?' He said that if I don't want to move I should give him my licence and he'll take me to court. I said 'very good I want this case to go to the court'. I said 'I understand what you are asking me for, but why it is not applicable to everyone?' He said 'because I can't talk to everybody'. I said 'but he is over there and you are not doing anything right now! You were not doing anything 2 seconds ago when an Irish guy was parking there!' So in the end of the day he said 'sure, we'll leave it like that'

Perceptions of discriminatory and disproportionate policing, coupled with perceived disinterest and lack of action in response to reports of racism coming from taxi drivers of ethnic minority background can have a very negative impact on the relationship between the Gardaí and the drivers. Instances of low level of support being offered to ethnic minority drivers can create a culture of mistrust towards the An Garda Síochána and separate the community from accessing effective and just policing services.

I picked up a guy, he was drunk. He wouldn't give me the address, I had the meter going and all. So eventually I said 'I can't drive you anymore. It's either you get out or I'll drive you to the Garda barracks'. 'So drive me there' he said. I decided to drive down there. He got out of the car and stood in front of the car, he wouldn't let me move or anything. He left the door open. He started smashing up the car. I got out trying to lock up the other door, he wouldn't let me. He kept chasing me, trying to hit me. I thought 'OK, the Gardaí are probably watching' I phoned them and spoke to a lady. She said 'I've seen him chasing you around your car but he hasn't hit you'. I said 'Did you see him smashing my car?' 'No the camera doesn't go that close. I've seen him throwing punches but he hasn't hit you' I hung up and went in to the station. I spoke to another person there, I got very upset and he was saying 'calm down, calm down'.

He went outside to see my car and he took my details. He said that I'll get my money for the car. I haven't hear from them since, it was three years ago.

I picked up a young girl, she was drunk and she soiled my car. The soiled car fee is €140 she refused to pay so I drove to the Garda station. The girl said to let her go because her dad is a Gardaí. So the guy [Gardaí officer on duty] asked me if I can take €50? I said 'I am not making the rules, the soiled car fee is €150. Go and have a look at my car, it will cost me a lot to have it cleaned'. He went and saw my car and said that he'll ring me when the money is ready. A couple of days later he rang me and said that the money is waiting for me at the station. When I went there but he wasn't there, and the female Gardaí said that I have to wait for the money. I rang couple of time to get my money, but she kept making excuses for not giving me the money. So eventually I complained at her and the next day I got my money. That was delay of justice.

I was on the ground, the three guys were kicking me. The Gardas come and waited until the guys finished kicking me, and then they all left. For them the boys were only having a craic.

The poor responses described by ethnic minority drivers has the impact of stopping the drivers from reporting even serious incidents to the Gardaí because they believe that their 'voice goes nowhere' and they would 'talk to a deaf ear'. The driver whose car was smashed with an iron bar described earlier did not report this incident to the Gardaí while another driver stated that he doesn't report anything anymore because he feels it doesn't change anything and can in fact have a negative impact on him. The level of mistrust described above can also translate to mistrust towards other authorities.

Before the Taxi Regulator kicked in we got our licence from the Garda. We were complaining to them about these issues but they were not responding or paying attention. Why should go to the Regulator? I don't believe it will go anywhere.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

We cannot analyse the patterns of racist abuse and discrimination in taxi industry without looking at a wider context of racism and discrimination in Irish society. It has been reported by many civil society⁵ organisations and researchers⁶ that the lack of appropriate legislation in the area of hate crime is a major factor influencing the existence of racism in society, as well as the lack of appropriate and satisfactory responses from those who report incidents. The lack of appropriate and effective legal measures to address racist abuse and violence creates a vacuum in which perpetrators are not held fully responsible for their actions and the victims cannot access justice. In addition, dismissive attitudes or the lack of official policies or guidelines to inform the responses of front line staff in various settings towards reports of racism result in underreporting and therefore in an inaccurate picture of the true extent of the issue as official data cannot in turn reflect the overall level of instances.

In response to the stated recognition by the National Transport Authority of the challenges faced within the industry and the commitment to provide a high standard of appropriate responses and supports to drivers interacting with the regulator, the Immigrant Council of Ireland acknowledges the cooperation and willingness to engage displayed by the National Transport Authority towards training and upskilling their employees about issues of racism and discrimination. Nearly 30 staff members from the Taxi Compliance and Licencing departments were released from their daily duties to take part in equality and non-discrimination workshops. It is crucial that this good will and commitment on all sides within the industry is now capitalised on and developed into a momentum that improves conditions within the industry for those who experience racism, and that in all mainstream institutions and companies, it become an integral part of the training for all staff. The opportunity now exists for anti-racism and diversity policies and procedures to be introduced to ensure that equality and non-discrimination is mainstreamed in the sector.

Likewise, the Immigrant Council of Ireland acknowledges the commitment displayed by Hailo Cabs towards embedding equality within their workplace and in interaction with their diverse customers. 3 staff members from their Customer Service and Business Support units took part in equality and non-discrimination workshops.

Based on the results of this pilot focus group and training based project it is evident that there is a need for a systematic approach from the authorities to introduce policies, procedures, and training that would effectively challenge instances of racism and discrimination. There is a need for a cross departmental action that would work on initiatives aiming at confronting instances of racism and discrimination in the taxi industry.

⁵ <http://immigrantcouncil.ie/pages/articles/2014/110>

⁶ Schweppe, J., Haynes, A. and Carr, J. (2014) 'A Life Free From Fear' Legislating for Hate Crime in Ireland: An NGO Perspective, Limerick: HHRG/CUES.

General recommendations:

1. At a State level, introduction of hate crime legislation that would offer appropriate and up to date legislative protection from verbal and physical abuse based on ethnic, religious and cultural background.
2. Introduction of an independent, State led reporting facility, which would allow for a safe and neutral environment for reporting instances of racism and discrimination.

Recommendations for An Garda Síochána:

3. Modules on issues of racism and discrimination should be incorporated in the core training to all members of An Garda Síochána
4. Initiating actions to foster a culture of understanding and trust between taxi drivers of ethnic minority background and An Garda Síochána

Recommendations for the National Transport Authority:

5. Extending training on issues pertaining to racism and discrimination to all staff of the NTA, and incorporating these courses into the training of the incoming staff.
6. Amending regulation with provision that would protect taxi drivers of ethnic minority background from discrimination.
7. Reinforcing regulation to ensure that rules and guidelines are transparent and predictable, and that customers and taxi drivers are not confused.
8. Introducing policies and procedures that would effectively tackle racist and discriminatory conduct of other taxi drivers.
9. Initiating activities that would challenge rumours and false allegations about drivers of ethnic minority background.
10. Engage in an open dialogue and a consultation process with taxi drivers of ethnic minority background through an independent and safe platform.

Recommendations for Taxi Companies:

11. Delivery of diversity and anti-discrimination training to all staff and taxi drivers employed or subcontracted by the company
12. Developing an anti-discrimination protocol including policies and procedures dealing with complaints from drivers and customers.
13. Introducing policies and procedures that would effectively tackle occurring racist and discriminatory conduct of passengers, employees and other taxi drivers.

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