

Hi,

Find attached my suggestions and comments on policing reform in Ireland.

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The diversity agenda in An Garda Síochána : 21st century policing

Since in the 1990s, Ireland has evolved from a mono-cultural and monotheistic society. Apart from race and ethnicity that traditionally define diversity, the concept has broadened in recent time to include non-visible elements like, gay, lesbianism, people of bi-sexual orientation, etc. in its definition. Given our contemporary demographic composition, diversity has remained a reality we no longer can wish away.

In reaction to the new multicultural Ireland, the government quite reasonably, put in place the Equality Act of 2004 which encompasses the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 . The law was enacted to underpin our unity in diversity which cuts across race, gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, disability and membership of the Traveller community lines.

However, laws in itself would only be tantamount to “window dressing” until they are supported by policies and processes that would make it work. In the light of this assertion, there is a need for a review of the guiding principles of An Garda Síochána demonstrated through a multitude of policy statements and documents that take into account the contemporary multicultural society and that practically de-robe Irish police from the garb of Catholicism . This current period is a veritable moment of renaissance in the annals of An Garda Síochána in its quest to rebound from the low level of public trust and legitimacy precipitated by a number of scandals in the past. The An Garda Síochána as an organisation too will benefit “societal acceptance” from such culturally diverse and inclusive workforce to build and consolidate on its trust and legitimacy and improve police-community relations among all sections of our society. This would help to deepen a regime of “participative policing” in the modern Ireland.

Given the transient commencement of diverse workforce in the organisation and its potential concomitant challenges the new order would pose to new minority entrants, there is a need for an Anti-Discrimination Code of Practice designed to provide guidelines on procedures in the area of recruitment, promotion and progression to address concerns of discrimination in the process. This will protect new recruits from minority communities and help deepen the process of recruitment, retention and progression of minority members of the agency. A police department’s inclusion and promotion of ethnic and racial minorities within its ranks has internal and external implications in terms of whether it is perceived either unfavourably or favourably by citizens, police officers, and key stakeholders alike with respect to the department’s treatment of minorities. This initiative needs to

be spearheaded by management of An Garda Síochána to signpost their unequivocal commitment to reforms.

To drive this reform, the management of An Garda Síochána need to create a unit within the service to deal with complaints from officers, especially those with concerns on diversity issues. The unit would function as a resource organ to address oversight issues from aggrieved member and to self-regulate and monitor contours of its diversity agenda vis-à-vis its performance. As noted by a researcher, if a force does not have a formal, standard definition of ethnicity to classify its applicants it is obviously not possible for ethnic monitoring to be accurate and effective. With this initiative, it would help the police organisation drive its diverse workforce beyond mere rhetoric of minority recruitment to the realm of progression, retention and promotion.

For those who want to participate into in the Garda Reserve, there is a need to broaden support mechanism for minority ethnic communities that enlist into the Reserve. In line with ethos and philosophy of community policing and on ground of current reality that policing activities has transcended the frontier of state police organisation in the prevention of crime and criminality, this initiative would serve as a window to test plural policing and willingness or otherwise of potential minority recruits into state police. Policing is the most visible part of the criminal justice system, so any reforms that entrench diversity in the sector could have propensity to resonate across all fabric of our life as nation. Plural policing now represents a contemporary style by which policing is now configured.

Finally, a recruitment programme overseen by an appointed proactive Recruitment Officer need to be put in place to target recruitment from within local minority ethnic communities. Such officer(s) should be charged with reform initiatives that can enhance police-minority relations. The officer(s) should also serve as a bridge with minority communities to drive recruitment initiatives among members of ethnic communities and a frontline representation of the law enforcement agency in the area of advocacy and sensitization.. Of the current of around 10,500 members, there is not a single person of African or Caribbean origin in the force, a situation that irked the concerns of the editorial in the Garda Review, the GRA's official journal, suggesting that the issue remains one of the top areas the new Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland need to examine.