

Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI): inclusion in sport

Introduction:

The landscape of Ireland has changed significantly over the past two decades. Ireland is becoming increasingly diverse, with people of different ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions belonging to our community.

Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI) was established in 1997 to use sport as a means of combating racism and promoting inclusion. SARI proactively celebrates this diversity while also recognising that it can bring with it some unique challenges to wider society. Irish society is still transitioning from one where the older cohort of the population lived much of their lives in a closed, culturally homogenous place to a very different 21st century Ireland. SARI leverages sport through its existing programmes to offer a means by which conversations are opened and trust built, fostering relationships to promote and support active engagement in civic and social life. We must come together as a society to make Ireland a welcoming place for all, to promote a culture of respect that supports and builds on the skills of all its people regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or family status.

Relevant Factual Information (followed by recommendations)

While the Irish Sports Monitor 2022 Mid Year Report and its previous reports consider social gradients such as gender, social class and disability when reviewing sport participation rates, it does not consider ethnic minority representation. Sport Ireland launched its first Diversity and Inclusion Policy in May 2022, a commitment towards promoting diversity and inclusion in sport. SARI sits on its Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group offering advice and expertise in the area

of sport for all. This policy promotes the availability of programmes for diverse communities and calls for the improvement of research around participation of diverse communities at all levels in sport. Yet, there is no call for data collection for the evidencing of progress on ethnic minority participation in sport.

Women and girl's participation in school is impacted by gendered stereotypes such as social constructions of the ideal body image. For Muslim women, their experience of sport is subjected to racial and gendered stereotypes (Samie and Sehlkiloglu, 2015). Carr and Power (2019) highlight how SARI's Hijabs and Hat-Tricks programme and its subsequent Diverse City FC can uncover experiences of racism, cultural and religious barriers to participation for these women and how SARI has fostered inclusion 'in and through football'.

Through an analysis of the existing research, it appears that Muslim women in sport are often positioned as in 'need of saving', and sport institutions and sport programmes as enabling and empowering the otherwise oppressed Muslim. Considerations of individual experiences and modern representations of Muslim women can illuminate the repercussions of existing policies and regulations on the modern-day experience of sport. This is not only relevant to understanding sport participation patterns but also understanding the diversity of identity for Muslim women, and how stereotypes and bias can manifest in institutions and their policies. The Hijabs and Hat-Tricks programme was set up to encourage Muslim women to play football after FIFA lifted the ban on the wearing of the hijab in 2014. Integral to the programme was its co-design approach, from the design of the football kit to the selection of training times, the participants of the programme were offered an inclusive space to share challenges they'd faced to participate. Cultural and religious considerations such as the diverse interpretations of modesty for Muslim women meant that we were able to offer a kit that was inclusive for all. A recommendation for the inclusion of ethnic minority communities in sport, and one that considers intersectionality is to offer an aspect of co-design in the programme, following the commonly used saying in youth work 'Nothing about us, without us'.

It's been shown that by leveraging sport and its potential for trust and relationship-building, SARI does connect different community groups together. It has been seen to establish an inclusive space where people from marginalised communities can raise issues that are affecting them and overcome barriers to their active participation. Through community programmes such as the Hijabs and Hat-Tricks programme, the Soccernites programme, Football for Unity programme and the accessible nature of sport to transcend language barriers, SARI opens spaces for connection and communication in a way that is safe and inclusive for all.

Social inclusion and cohesion need to be incorporated in the curricula of educational institutions to promote a culture of respect and inclusion in local communities across the country. SARI supports primary and secondary schools by offering experiential learning opportunities for students that assists teachers and schools in teaching children and young people the values of respect, diversity and inclusion for all. Long-term engagement with schools through these programmes builds the capacity of schools to challenge discrimination in their institutions and promote an ethos of inclusion that celebrates and embraces difference and diversity. There's an urgent need to scale up this effort which will need core funding by the government through the Department of Education.

Executive Summary of Issues and Recommendations:

Ireland is more increasingly diverse and with this diversity comes a richness of perspectives, skills and opportunities. Yet it also brings challenges to wider society. While Sport Ireland and other institutions are making an effort towards inclusion of ethnic minority communities in sport, there is much work to be done. There is limited data and evidence of this progress. Yet, there is evidence of racism and discrimination faced by marginalised communities in Ireland such as Muslim women. Stereotypical representations of ethnic minority communities held by the public can infiltrate existing sport policies, regulations and institutions that can subsequently impact on their experience and access to sport.

There needs to be:

- Opportunities for members of marginalised communities to feed into the design and implementation of sport projects and programmes that are designed for them.
- Co-design integrated into sport programmes that can uncover existing barriers and challenges to active and engaged participation in sport.
- A greater insight and understanding of lived experiences which can reveal the diversity and difference that can often be neglected in sports strategies and programmes.
- Leveraging of sport to build new relationships and develop trust between communities, particularly when language is a barrier.
- The use of sport to integrate social inclusion into the Irish educational curriculum.
- Core funding from the government to roll out sports programmes in schools that complements the educational system and assists teachers in promoting values of respect, fairness and inclusion.

Carr, J. And Power, M.J (2019). More than a club, more than a game: the case of Diverse City. *Managing Sport and Leisure* (25,1-2). <https://www.sahjournal.com/article/id/6128/>

Samie S. F. and Sehlirkoglu, S. (2015) Strange, Incompetent and Out-Of-Place. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15:3, p. 363-381.

Irish Sports Monitor. (2022). Mid Year Report.