



# **Mental Health Reform**

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

## **Opening Statement for Sub-Committee on Mental Health**

**Tuesday, 7th November 2023, 10am**

### **Introduction**

Thank you Chair for inviting Mental Health Reform here today for this important meeting on ethnic minorities and mental health. My name is Fiona Coyle and I am the CEO of Mental Health Reform.

Mental Health Reform (MHR) is Ireland's leading national coalition on mental health with over 80-member organisations working for progressive reform of mental health services and supports in Ireland. Many of our member organizations are actively involved in supporting and delivering services to ethnic minority communities, and they have actively contributed to this statement. To provide a deeper insight into the lived realities of some of these communities, I am honoured to be joined by:

- Emilia Marchelewska, Project Coordinator, Cairde
- Patrick Reilly, Coordinator Mental Health Initiative, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
- Salome Mbugua, CEO of AkiDwa

### **Diversity of Ethnic Minorities in Ireland**

Ethnic minority communities have been integral to Ireland for centuries, and today, they constitute a growing part of the population.<sup>1</sup> The term 'ethnic minority' encapsulates a broad spectrum, including a wide range of people with diverse nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, and legal statuses in Ireland. The term also includes the Irish Traveller community, which was officially recognized as a distinct ethnic community by the government in March 2017.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp5/census2022profile5-diversitymigrationethnicityirishtravellersreligion/keyfindings/>

It is important to note that ethnic minority communities are not homogenous. In relation to Mental health the barriers for these diverse communities may be very different from one community to the next and from individual to individual.

## **Mental Health Disparities**

Research, including an important new report launched by the WHO, shows that there is a higher incidence of mental health challenges amongst people from ethnic minority communities. The reasons for this disparity are multifaceted and include racism, disparities in health access, inadequate support structures, and in some cultures, a profound stigma associated with mental health issues.<sup>2</sup> Our colleagues from Dóras will speak more to the policy considerations from this report and also examine the specific mental health needs of those seeking international protection whose Mental Health needs can be complex and multifaceted.

It is broadly acknowledged that in Ireland, services are designed and developed in a way that reflects the majority culture. There are a number of barriers for individuals from ethnic minority communities in accessing mental health services in Ireland, resulting in inequalities of access and outcome.<sup>3</sup>

Our Mental health policy sharing the Vision stresses the importance of providing culturally appropriate health care to meet the needs of service users from diverse cultural and ethnic minority communities. Recommendation 61 of Sharing the Vision, specifically recommends that: *“The HSE should maximize the delivery of diverse and culturally competent mental health supports throughout all services”*.

There are also three recommendations that specifically mention migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.<sup>4</sup> It is important to acknowledge that this policy was written in 2020, and since then, we've witnessed evolving circumstances, including the war in Ukraine.

## **Way forward**

Ireland is in urgent need of a mental health service that can truly serve the entire population, with a particular focus on those identified as being at a higher risk, including ethnic minority communities. Mental Health Reform, along with our members, calls upon the government to ensure mental health services that respect the diverse beliefs and

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240081840>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthreform.ie/cultural-competency/>

<sup>4</sup> Recommendation 61, 63 (regarding appropriate mental health support for people seeking IP and Program refugees), and 64 (interpretation)- <https://assets.gov.ie/219435/7a8c78e1-98ad-4542-9a61-a13195a727d6.pdf>

values of people from ethnic minority communities, and deliver care and treatment in a manner that takes account of such beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Here are our recommendations:

### ***1. Accessible and Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Supports and Services<sup>6</sup>***

- Provide all staff working with people with mental health difficulties with training in the area of anti-racism, cultural competency and unconscious bias. This training should be developed in consultation with ethnic minority service users
- Provide assurances that disrespect or discrimination of any kind by staff, should not be tolerated. Specific measures for reducing discrimination in mental health services should be implemented. This could include actions such as employing individuals from ethnic minority communities and educating local communities to target stigma and discrimination
- Mental health services should undertake systematic evaluation and self-assessment, to ensure that the mental health needs of people from ethnic minority communities are being adequately met.
- Enhance data quality by instituting ethnic equality monitoring, which includes the incorporation of a standardized ethnic identifier in line with the national census. This identifier should be integrated into all routine data administrative systems within mental health services, including the National Self-Harm Registry Ireland, to facilitate the monitoring of access, participation, and outcomes in suicide prevention and mental health services for priority groups such as Travellers, Roma, and other ethnic minority communities. It is crucial that the implementation of an ethnic identifier is carried out within a human rights framework.

### ***2. Mental Health needs of those seeking international protection and Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection***

- Act upon Recommendation 63 of Sharing the Vision, ensuring that persons in Direct Provision services and refugees arriving under the Irish refugee protection program have access to appropriate tiered mental health services through primary care and specialist mental health services.
- Scale up and promote community-based interventions and peer support initiatives.
- Provide family-centred support and child-specific interventions.
- Mental Health and other services being provided must be Trauma-Informed in their approach.

---

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2021-12/mhr\\_revised\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2021-12/mhr_revised_guidelines.pdf)

### 3. Meeting the Mental health needs of the Traveller and Roma communities

- Implement the commitment in the Programme for Government and the committee's recommendations to develop a National Traveller and Roma Mental Health Action Plan. This plan would be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Traveller community and Roma Communities, under the guidance of a national Steering Group to ensure effective oversight during its development and implementation.
- The need for sustainable and ring-fenced budget to be allocated specifically for Traveller and Roma Mental health to ensure the successful implementation of a National Traveller and Roma Mental Health Strategy.
- Ensure that evidence based and culturally appropriate resources and supports are prioritised for the Traveller community due to the level of the mental health crisis
- Implement a cross-departmental approach through the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to rectify inequities and inequalities experienced by the Traveller community, especially in areas like early school leaving, low educational attainment, unemployment, poverty, and inadequate accommodation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing mental health disparities among ethnic minority communities in Ireland is a multifaceted endeavour that necessitates a cross-government and cross agency approach. By responding to the needs of these communities, we can pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive society, where every individual's mental health is treated with the care and respect they deserve, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background.

Go raibh maith agaibh.

*For more information on any of the above content please contact Fiona Coyle, CEO at  
fcoyle@mentalhealthreform.ie*

***The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) is funded by the Government of Ireland  
through the Department of Rural and Community Development***

*Mental Health Reform, Coleraine House, Coleraine Street, Dublin 7, D07 E8XF.*

*Registered Charity Number: 20078737. CHY Number: 19958. Company Registration Number: 506850*

---