

The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004

This booklet sets out the main elements of the Equal Status Act, 2000. It has recently been amended by the Equality Act 2004. They are known together as **the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004**. Copies of the legislation are available from the Government Publications Office, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2, (01) 661 3111 or on www.oireachtas.ie. They are also available on www.equality.ie

In relation to the Equal Status Act 2000, the Equality Act 2004 seeks to implement the EU Race Directive.¹

This Directive prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin and takes precedence over Irish law. The provisions of the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 in relation to the ground of race and the Traveller community ground have to be read and interpreted in the light of this Directive.

This booklet is intended for information purposes only. It is not a legal document.

¹ (Council Directive 2000/43/EC of June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin).

Introduction

The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004:

- Promote Equality
- Prohibit certain kinds of discrimination (with some exemptions) across nine grounds
- Prohibit sexual harassment and harassment
- Prohibit victimisation
- Require reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities
- Allow a broad range of positive action measures.



Scope

The Acts apply to people who:

- Buy and sell a wide variety of **goods**
- Use or provide a wide range of **services**
- Obtain or dispose of **accommodation**
- Attend at or are in charge of **educational establishments**.

There are separate provisions on **discriminatory clubs**.

Licensed premises

Claims of discrimination in relation to licensed premises are now dealt with in the District Court. The main relevant provisions are contained in the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003.

Grounds

The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 prohibit discrimination on the following nine grounds:

The gender ground: A man, a woman or a transsexual² person;

The marital status ground: Single, married, separated, divorced or widowed;

The family status ground: Pregnant, a parent of a person under 18 years or the resident primary carer or parent of a person with a disability;

The sexual orientation ground: Gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual;

The religion ground: Different religious belief, background, outlook or none;

The age ground: This only applies to people over 18 except for the provision of car insurance to licensed drivers under that age;

The disability ground: This is broadly defined including people with physical, intellectual, learning, cognitive or emotional disabilities and a range of medical conditions.

The race ground: A particular race, skin colour, nationality or ethnic origin;

The Traveller community ground: People who are commonly called Travellers, who are identified both by Travellers and others as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, identified historically as a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.

²The Court of Justice in PVS held that discrimination against a transsexual constituted discrimination on the grounds of sex.

Exemptions

There are several significant exemptions in the Act. The broadest general exemption is that anything mandated by an Act of the Oireachtas or EU law is allowed. There are also exemptions on the ground of Nationality for public authorities in relation to certain non-nationals. These exemptions should be read restrictively and should not be allowed to unduly restrict the general prohibition on discrimination.

There are specific exemptions that apply to particular areas. These are set out below as they arise.

The broadest general exemption is that anything mandated by an Act of the Oireachtas or EU law is allowed.



Discrimination

Discrimination has a specific meaning in the Acts and there are different types of discrimination covered including indirect discrimination, discrimination by imputation and discrimination by association. It is defined as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person **is, has been or would be** treated in a *comparable* situation on any of the nine grounds which

- **Exists**
 - **Existed**
 - **May exist in the future, or**
 - **Is imputed to the person concerned.**
-
- **Indirect Discrimination** – happens where there is less favourable treatment by impact or effect. It occurs where people are, for example, refused a service not explicitly on account of a discriminatory reason but because of a provision, practice or requirement which they find hard to satisfy. If the provision, practice or requirement puts people who belong to one of the grounds covered by the Acts at a particular disadvantage, then the service provider will have indirectly discriminated, unless the provision is **objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.**

- **Discrimination by Association** – this happens where a person associated with another person (belonging to the discriminatory grounds) is treated less favourably because of that association.

Discrimination is defined as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds.



Disability – Reasonable Accommodation

A person selling goods or providing services, a person selling or letting accommodation or providing accommodation, educational institutions and clubs must do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability. This involves providing **special treatment or facilities** in circumstances where without these, it would be impossible or unduly difficult to avail of the goods, services, accommodation etc.

However, they are not obliged to provide special facilities or treatment when this costs more than what is called a nominal cost. What amounts to nominal cost will depend on the circumstances such as the size and resources of the body involved. If the State provides grants or aids for assisting in providing special treatment or facilities, there may be an onus on the service providers etc. to avail of these grants.

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Sexual Harassment and Harassment

Sexual harassment and harassment in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and educational establishments is prohibited.

A person (“the harasser”) shall not harass or sexually harass another person (“the victim” regardless of their gender) in the following circumstances:

- (i) the victim uses goods or services provided by the harasser (or seeks to);
- (ii) the victim obtains, or proposes to obtain, accommodation or related services from the harasser;
- (iii) the victim is a student at, or has applied for admission to, or seeks to avail of any services offered by an educational establishment at which the harasser is in a position of authority.

What is harassment and sexual harassment?

Harassment is any form of **unwanted conduct** related to any of the **discriminatory grounds**.

Sexual harassment is any form of **unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature**.

In both cases it is conduct which has **the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person**.

In both cases the **unwanted conduct** may include **acts, requests, spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material.**

A person's rejection of, or submission to, sexual or other harassment may not be used by any other person as a basis for a decision affecting that person.

Responsible person – Liable for sexual harassment/harassment

A person who is responsible for the operation of any place that is an educational institution or where goods, facilities or services are offered to the public or a person who provides accommodation must ensure that any person who has a right to be there, is not sexually harassed or harassed. The 'responsible person' will be liable for the sexual harassment or harassment unless he or she took reasonably practicable steps to prevent it.

Positive Action

The Acts allow preferential treatment or the taking of positive measures which are bona fida intended to:

- (i) **promote equality of opportunity** for disadvantaged persons;
- (ii) **cater for the special needs** of persons, or a category of persons who because of their circumstances, may require facilities, arrangements, services or assistance.



Victimisation

Victimisation is prohibited.

Victimisation occurs where adverse treatment by a provider of goods and services, of accommodation, or by an educational establishment or club is made as a reaction to:

- A complaint of discrimination having been made to the Equality Tribunal;
- A person having been witness in any proceedings under the Equal Status Act, 2000 to 2004;
- A person having opposed by lawful means an act which is unlawful under the Act.

Vicarious Liability

Employers are liable for discriminatory acts of an employee in the course of his or her employment, unless they can prove that they took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the conduct.



Advertising

A person shall not publish or display, or cause to be published or displayed, an advertisement which indicates an intention to discriminate, harass, sexually harass, or might reasonably be understood as indicating such an intention.



Goods and Services

What is prohibited?

People cannot discriminate (subject to certain exemptions):

- When they are providing goods and services to the public (or a section of the public);
- Whether these are **free** or where the goods and services are sold, hired or rented or exchanged;
- **Access** to and the **use** of services is covered.

What is a service?

It is a facility or service (of any nature) including facilities for:

- Banking, insurance, grants, loans, credit or financing;
- Entertainment, recreation or refreshment;
- Cultural activities;
- Transport or travel;
- A service or facility provided by a club (which is available to the public or a section of the public);
- A professional trade or service.

This list is not exhaustive. A broad view of what constitutes a service is taken by the Act.

Services provided by the State (health boards, local authorities etc.) are covered (subject to exemptions). The main exemption is that anything required by Statute, or EU law is exempted. This exemption would not cover circumstances where there is an element of choice or discretion as to how the services are provided. There are

specific exemptions on the nationality ground in relation to the treatment by public authorities of certain non-nationals.

Services provided by the State (health boards, local authorities etc.) are covered (subject to exemptions).

The Acts allow that:

People can be treated differently in certain circumstances:

1. Exemptions on the ground of gender

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the gender ground in relation to:

a) *Cosmetic services*

Covering cosmetic, aesthetic or similar services which involve physical contact (e.g. hairdressing);

b) *Privacy/Embarrassment*

Where embarrassment or breach of privacy could reasonably be expected to happen on account of the presence of a person of another gender.

2. Exemption on the ground of religion

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the religion ground in relation to:

a) **Religious goods and services**

Where the goods and services are provided for religious purposes.

3. Exemption on the ground of age

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the age ground in relation to:

a) **Adoption/Fostering**

Where age requirements are applied for a person to be an adoptive or foster parent where this is reasonable having regard to the needs of the child.

4. Exemptions on the grounds of gender, age, disability and/or race/nationality

a) **Sporting events**

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the basis of their gender, age, disability or nationality in relation to providing or organising sporting facilities or events but only if the differences are reasonably necessary and are relevant;

b) **Drama and Entertainment**

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the gender, age, disability or race ground in connection with a dramatic performance or other entertainment but only if the differences are reasonably required for reasons of authenticity, aesthetics, tradition or custom.

5. Exemptions on all grounds

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on any of the grounds in relation to:

- a) **Insurance**
Covering annuities, pensions, insurance policies and other matters relating to risk assessments but only if the differences are based on actuarial or statistical data or other relevant underwriting or commercial factors and are reasonable having regard to the data or other relevant factors;
- b) **Wills/Gifts**
Where goods are disposed of by will or by gift;
- c) **Promotion of special interests**
Where services are provided for the principal purpose of promoting for a bona fide purpose and in a bona fide manner, the special interests of persons in a particular category, but only to the extent that the different treatment is reasonably necessary;
- d) **Special Needs**
Where goods and services are provided which can reasonably be regarded as being suitable only to the needs of certain persons.

Accommodation

What is prohibited?

The general rule is that there can be no discrimination on the specified grounds in relation to:

- Disposing of any estate
- Terminating a tenancy
- Providing accommodation or any accommodation related services or amenities
- Ceasing to provide accommodation.

The premises or accommodation must be available to the public generally or a section of the public.

The Acts allow different treatment in certain circumstances:

1. Exemptions on all grounds

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on any of the discriminatory grounds in relation to:

- a) **Wills/Gifts**
Where property is disposed of by will or by gift;
- b) **A person's home**
Where the provision of accommodation by a person is in a part (other than a separate and self-contained part) of the person's home, where the provision of the accommodation affects the person's private or family life or that of any other person residing in the home;

c) Use by persons in a particular category

Where premises/accommodation are reserved for:

- Religious purposes
- Refuge
- Nursing home
- Retirement home
- Home for persons with a disability
- Hostel for homeless persons/or for a similar purpose.

2. Exemption on the ground of gender

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the gender ground in relation to:

a) Privacy or Embarrassment

Where embarrassment or infringement of privacy can reasonably be expected to result.

3. Exemptions in relation to a number of specified groups

The Acts allow Housing Authorities to provide different treatment in relation to housing accommodation based on:

- Family size
- Family status
- Marital status
- Disability
- Age
- Membership of the Traveller community.

The Minister may provide different treatment on these grounds and also on the gender and nationality ground.

Educational Establishments

This covers pre-school service, primary or post-primary schools, adult, continuing or further education, university or other third level or high level institution. It includes public and private educational establishments.

What is prohibited?

An educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to:

- a) the **admission** or the terms or conditions of admission
- b) the **access** of any student to any course, facility or benefit
- c) any other **term or condition** of participation
- d) the **expulsion** of a student or other sanction.

The Acts allow different treatment in certain circumstances:

1. Exemptions on the ground of gender

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the gender ground in:

a) **Single Sex Schools**

Where primary and secondary schools may be for one gender only.

2. Exemption on the grounds of religion and gender

The Acts allow people to be treated differently on the gender and religion grounds in relation to:

a) Religious Training

Where institutions established for providing training to ministers of a particular religion, may admit students of only one gender or religious belief.

3. Other exemptions

a) Ethos of the School

The Acts allow primary and post primary schools which have the objective of providing education in an environment which promotes certain religious values, to admit persons of a particular religious denomination in preference to others and to refuse to admit a student who is not of that denomination if it is proved that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.

b) Mature students

The Acts allow universities or other third level or adult education institutions to provide different treatment in the allocation of places to mature students.

c) Scholarships

The Acts allow universities or other third level or adult education institutions to offer assistance to particular categories of persons by way of sponsorships, scholarships, bursaries or other awards but only if these are justified by historical or traditional considerations.

d) Student exchange

The Acts allow universities or other third level or adult education institutions to allocate places for exchange students.

e) Grants, fees, allocation of places

The Acts allow institutions providing adult, continuing or further education or universities or other third level institutions to treat nationals of an EU member state differently to those who are not, in relation to fees for admission or attendance and the allocation of places.

- The Acts allow the Minister for Education and Science to require grants to be restricted to nationals of an EU member state or to require such nationals to be treated differently in relation to making grants.

f) Sporting facilities and events

The Acts allow educational establishments to provide different treatment on the gender, age or disability grounds in relation to the provision or organisation of sporting events or facilities but only to the extent that the differences are necessary having regard to the nature of the facilities or events.

g) Disability – presumption of mainstreaming

The Acts allow educational establishments to treat students with disabilities differently (apart from making reasonable accommodation subject to nominal cost exemption) only if the disability is making the provisions of educational services *impossible* to other students or having a *seriously detrimental effect* on that provision.

Discriminating Clubs

The specific provisions relating to clubs refer to bodies that have applied for or hold a certificate of registration under the Registration of Clubs Act, 1904 – 1999. This registration allows clubs to sell alcohol to members and certain visitors. Unlike the provisions in relation to goods and services, the Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004 do not ban discrimination outright.

What is a discriminating club?

In general, a club will be treated to be a discriminating club if:

- 1) It has a rule, policy or practice which discriminates against a member or applicant or
- 2) A person involved in its management discriminates against a member or applicant in relation to the affairs of the club.

This includes issues of admission, terms and conditions of membership, terminating membership and making reasonable accommodation for members with disabilities (subject to nominal cost exemption).

What is allowed?

A club will not be considered to be a discriminating club if:

1. The principal purpose of the club is to cater only for the needs of persons of a particular gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief or none, age, disability, nationality or ethnic or national origin or members of the Traveller community.
2. It confines benefits or privileges to particular categories of age or gender where it is not practicable for those outside the category to enjoy the benefit or privilege at the same time as members within the category. The clubs must make arrangements to offer the same or a reasonably equivalent benefit or privilege to those members outside the category.
3. It has different types of membership, access to which is not based on any discriminatory ground.
4. It seeks to eliminate past discrimination by offering particular fee rates or membership arrangement to persons of a particular gender, by reserving places on the management board etc. or takes other steps for the principal purpose of obtaining a more equal involvement in club matters of persons who are members of a particular category.
5. It provides reasonably necessary different treatment to members of a particular gender, age, disability, nationality or national origin as regards sporting facilities or events.

Enforcement – Discriminatory Clubs

Any person, including the Equality Authority, can apply to the District Court for a declaration that a club is a discriminating club. If it is found to be a discriminating club and it is the first such order made against the club, the District Court can suspend a club's certificate to sell alcohol for a period of up to 30 days. The effect of the suspension is that the club cannot sell alcoholic drinks. While a second or subsequent determination that a club is a discriminating club remains in effect, no certificate of registration shall be granted or renewed. Employees of the club should not be disadvantaged by this order.

The Act provides for an appeal to the Circuit Court and a club can apply to the District Court for a declaration as to whether it remains a discriminating club.

Any person, including the Equality Authority, can apply to the District Court for a declaration that a club is a discriminating club.

General Exemptions

There are several significant exemptions in the Act. These exemptions should be read restrictively and should not be allowed to unduly restrict the general prohibition on discrimination.

1) Statutory exemption

A general exemption provides that nothing in the Act shall prohibit the taking of any action that is required under:

- (a) Statutory provision, court order
- (b) Any act done or measure adopted by the EU or
- (c) Any international treaty which imposes an obligation on the State.

Only actions that are mandatory are covered. Where the measure leaves some discretion the anti-discrimination provisions do apply.

2) Certain Non-Nationals

Public authorities can treat certain non-nationals differently, on the basis of their nationality, who are outside the State or unlawfully present in it (for the purposes of the Immigration Act 2004) or in accordance with any provision or condition made by or under any enactment and arising from his or her *entry to or residence* in the State.

3) Risk of criminal or disorderly conduct

A provider of good/services, or a person providing accommodation or related services, can refuse service/accommodation to a person if a reasonable

individual, having the knowledge and experience of the provider, would form the belief that the provision of service/accommodation to the customer would produce a substantial risk of criminal or disorderly conduct or behaviour, or damage to property in or around the area where the service is provided.

4) Other exemptions

- a) The different treatment of a person does not constitute discrimination where the person is treated solely in the exercise of a clinical judgement in connection with a diagnosis of illness or his/her medical treatment.
- b) Treating a person differently does not constitute discrimination if the person:
 - is incapable of entering into an enforceable contract or
 - is incapable of giving informed consent and for that reason the treatment is reasonable.
- c) Providers of goods and services, providers of accommodation and clubs are allowed to impose and maintain a *reasonable preferential fee, charge or rate in respect of anything offered to persons together with their children, married couples, persons in a specific age group and persons with a disability.*

Making a Claim

The Equality Tribunal, District Court and Circuit Court have roles in relation to claims under the Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004. All claims (except for claims in relation to discriminating clubs) under the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 are brought to the Equality Tribunal which is the quasi judicial body established to investigate, hear and decide claims under the Equal Status Acts.

Step 1: Written notification

Anybody wishing to make a claim of discrimination must notify the person against whom the claim is being made, in writing, within two months of the date of the most recent occurrence of the discrimination.

This written notification can be done by acquiring and filling out form ODEI 5 (available from the Equality Tribunal, 3 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2. Telephone: (01) 477 4100 or www.equalitytribunal.ie). This notice must identify the nature of the claim and the intent to seek redress. The complainant who wishes to obtain information must do so in the written notification. If this written notification is not sent, a claim cannot be pursued.

People with intellectual or psychological difficulties.

A parent, guardian or other person acting in place of a parent can be the complainant where a person is unable by reason of an intellectual or psychological disability to pursue a claim effectively.

Step 2: Making a claim

If there is no reply or if the reply is unsatisfactory the complaint should be referred to the Equality Tribunal within six months of the discrimination. This written notification can be done by acquiring and filling out form ODEI 2 (available from the Equality Tribunal, 3 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2. Telephone: (01) 477 4100 or www.equalitytribunal.ie).

The Director of the Equality Tribunal for reasonable cause can

- 1) extend the period of written notification from two to four months,
- 2) extend the 6 month time limit to 12 months.

(In exceptional circumstances the Director may waive some or all of the written notification requirements).

Step 3: At the Equality Tribunal

Mediation

The Director of the Equality Tribunal can at any stage with the consent of both parties, appoint a mediation officer. If the mediation reaches a settlement between both parties then the terms are legally enforceable.

Investigation

If the case is not dealt with by mediation or the mediation fails, the claim then proceeds to be investigated and the Director of the Equality Tribunal appoints an **Equality Officer**

to investigate, hear and decide the claim. Investigations are held in private. The Equality officer will issue a determination.

Representation and costs

A complainant may represent themselves or be represented by a lawyer, trade union, community group or other representative. In general, costs are not awarded. Costs in respect of travelling and other expenses (except expenses of representative) can be awarded where a person obstructs or impedes the investigation or appeal.

Remedies

If there is a finding in favour of the person making a complaint, compensation of up to €6,350 in total can be ordered. The Equality Officer can also order persons to take specified courses of action.

Strike out of claim

The Director of the Equality Tribunal can dismiss a claim if she/he is of the opinion that it has been made in bad faith, or is frivolous, vexatious or misconceived or relates to a trivial matter or after a year it appears that the complainant has not pursued the claim.

Appeals

All decisions (including decisions on time limits and striking out of the claim) may be appealed to the Circuit Court not later than 42 days from the date of the decision. There is no further right of appeal except to the High Court on a point of law.

Enforcement

A decision of the Director or a mediation settlement which has not been complied with, may be enforced through the Circuit Court.

Equality Authority

The Equality Authority has a broad mandate under the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 to

- a) combat discrimination in the areas covered by the Acts
- b) promote equality of opportunity in the areas covered by the Acts
- c) provide information on the Acts to the general public
- d) keep the operation of the Acts under review and make recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform as appropriate.

The Equality Authority provides information to the public on the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004. It has a series of published supports available to potential complainants, including guides to the Acts and training videos. The Equality Authority provides additional information through www.equality.ie and an automated telephone voice message service which also refers the caller directly to a Communications Officer who may provide more detailed information on your enquiry.

The Equality Authority may at its discretion, where the case has strategic importance, provide legal assistance to people who wish to bring claims, subject to the criteria set out by the Board of the Equality Authority. If the Equality Authority does not grant/or is unable to offer legal assistance, this does not disqualify the person from taking a case on their own behalf, directly to the Equality Tribunal. A complainant may represent themselves or be represented by a lawyer, trade union or other representative.

Further information, publications and training videos on aspects of the legislation are available from:

**The Equality Authority
2 Clonmel Street
Dublin 2
Ireland**

Monday to Thursday	9.15 – 5.30
Friday	9.15 – 5.15
Lo-Call:	1890 245545
Telephone:	+ 353 1 417 3333
Facsimile:	+ 353 1 417 3331
Email:	info@equality.ie
Website:	www.equality.ie

Other booklets available in this series include:

About the Adoptive Leave Act 1995

About the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004

About the Parental Leave Act 1998

The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2004

Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004



Useful Addresses

Equality Tribunal

3 Clonmel Street

Dublin 2

Telephone: 01-477 4100

Fax: 01-477 4141

LoCall: 1890 344 424

Website: www.equalitytribunal.ie

Email: info@equality.ie

The Health and Safety Authority

10 Hogan Place

Dublin 2

Telephone: 01 – 614 7000

Fax: 01 – 614 7020

Website: www.hsa.ie

Maternity Benefit Section

Department of Social and Family Affairs

Social Welfare Services Office

Oliver Plunkett Road

Letterkenny

Co. Donegal

LoCall: 1890 690 690

E-mail: maternityben@welfare.ie

Employment Rights Information Unit
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Davitt House
65a Adelaide Road
Dublin 2
Telephone: 01-631 3131
LoCall: 1890 220 222
Website: www.entemp.ie

Rights Commissioners
Tom Johnson House
Haddington Road
Dublin 4
Telephone: 01-613 6700
Fax: 01-613 6701
LoCall: 1890 220 227
Website: www.irc.ie

Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
74 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2
Telephone: 01-602 8202
LoCall: 1890 221 227
Website: www.justice.ie

The Equality Authority

2 Clonmel Street
Dublin 2

Public Information Centre
Lo Call: 1890 245 545

Tel: (01) 417 3333
Business queries: (01) 417 3336
Text phone: (01) 417 3385
Fax: (01) 417 3331
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