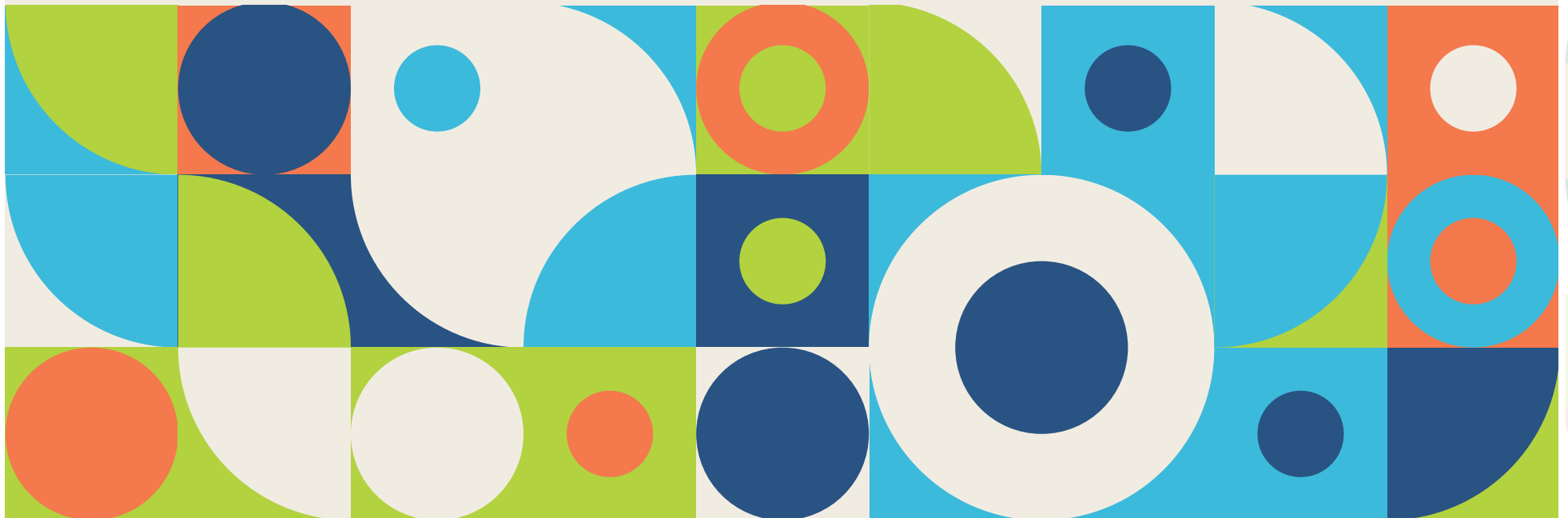


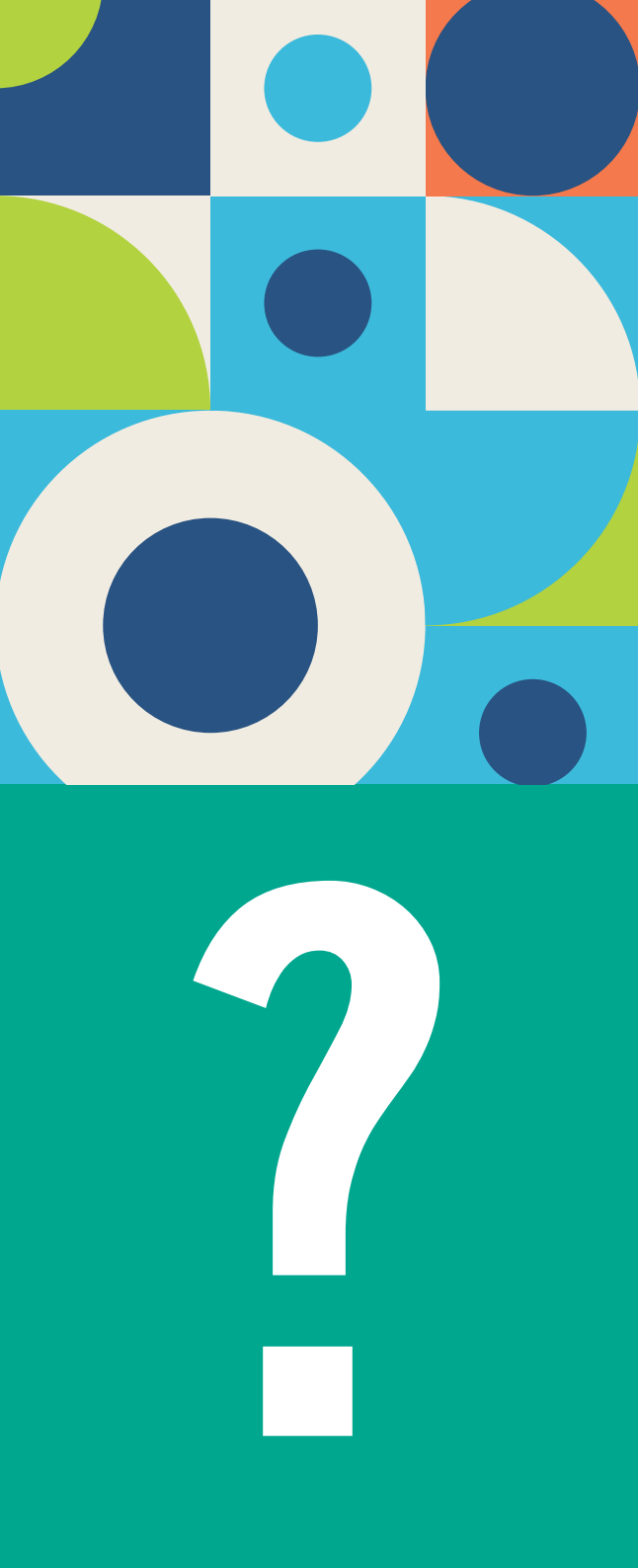
The road towards a more diverse and thriving sector



ISACS

Irish Street Arts, Circus
and Spectacle Network





**Who gets to make
(street, circus & spectacle)
ART in Ireland?**



Contents

Who we are:

- **Our work through the lens of diversity**
- **Bringing the sector leaders together**
- **Some of the questions that informed our process**
- **How we improved our understanding**
- **Consultant's reflections**
- **A brief note on data**

Who we are

ISACS is the voice for the street arts, circus and spectacle sector in Ireland.

Set up by volunteer committee in 2010, we have grown into a thriving network of individuals and organisations.

Most members live on the island of Ireland but some live in France, the Netherlands, Croatia, Spain, Palestine, Portugal, USA, the UK & more. Our identities reach across five continents.

We are part of regional and international networks of artists interested in supporting our members to present work internationally.



Who we are

Our main funder is the Arts Council and we have 3.4 staff based in Wexford Town.

A teal-colored arrow pointing downwards, indicating a flow from the first statement to the second.

Our formal work on Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) began in 2021 with information and discussion workshops for our members.

A teal-colored arrow pointing downwards, indicating a flow from the second statement to the third.

This is the story of what we have done since then, what we've learned and where we hope to go.

Our work through the lens of diversity

Our members work is often in public spaces and free, low cost or for a voluntary contribution.

We reach very large audiences, (sometimes in the tens of thousands), relative to other artforms.

Most of our artists communicate mainly with their bodies or their creations, and do not rely on spoken or written language.

Among our members at least 15 languages are spoken other than English or Irish.



Our work through the lens of diversity

In our membership surveys we have more people who identify as 'White, but not Irish' than the national average, but so far, very few people from other ethnic backgrounds.



Among individual artists who apply to the Arts Council for funding: males are over represented in street arts and spectacle, and females are over represented in circus.



Compared to national surveys, our members are more likely to identify as LGBTQI+, as carers and as living with mental or psychological issues.



Our work through the lens of diversity

While we don't have many members under the age of 24, our membership includes organisations who work in the field of youth and social circus, as well as aerial training for young people.

There are only a few people in our membership or in our artistic community over the age of 65... perhaps because the artforms are still relatively 'new' in Ireland.

Our members generally have at a minimum a primary degree, and almost half earn less than 20K a year.

For an explanation on how we gathered data and some graphics to illustrate what we've learned see Appendix 1.



Bringing the sector leaders together



In 2024 ISACS brought Galway Community Circus, the Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Macnas and Spraoi together as the key strategically funded organisations identifying as CSAS* in a special project on EDI funded through the CBSS* programme within the Arts Council.



Over the course of 4 workshops board members, artists, teachers and staff met to share examples of their current work, reflect on gaps in our knowledge and receive expert input.

*CSAS: Circus, street art & spectacle

*CBSS: Capacity Building Support Scheme

Some of the questions that informed our discussions...

Whose **stories** are we telling?

What is it like to **work in our world?**

What do we **value?**

Who is not here and why?

What would 'success' look like?

How does real change happen, and last?



How we improved our understanding:

As part of the project, every organisation:

- Undertook a self audit of their progress on EDI to date.
- Undertook an anonymous diversity survey of staff & board members, in order to better understand how to support the people who are involved and reach out to those who are not.
- Reflected with their peers on the issues identified in:
 - **Open Up:** addressing the barriers facing Black and Black-Irish artists access to funding and opportunities, from the Arts Council
<https://artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/A-Guide-to-Open-Up-Report.pdf>
 - **Speak Out:** a pan European project project that aims to prevent all types of discrimination and sexist and gender violence in the circus and street arts sector
<https://www.fedec.eu/en/speak-out/toolbox>
and
 - **Amplify** research on the lived experiences of disabled, LGBTQIA+, and ethnically diverse artists and arts workers in Ireland.
www.safetocreate.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ITIS2C_Amplify_2024_Report_INSIDE_With_Appendix_WEB.pdf

How we improved our understanding:

- Participated in a focused workshop on disability with **Claire Teesdale** and **Alan James Burns**.

*The process was facilitated by Arts and Human Rights consultant **Noeleen Hartigan**.*

Additionally, Brady Hughes of Hughes Wellness Solutions undertook six semi structured anonymous interviews with artists associated with the companies in the project who are from a wide range of ethnic and and cultural backgrounds. The resulting report will inform the new strategic plan of ISACS to be created in 2025.

Reflections

- For change to be meaningful it needs to ***shift power and resources*** so that organisations can support artists and emerging artists from underrepresented communities to make new work of relevance to more people.
- ‘Strategically funded’ organisations in street art spectacle and circus display significant willingness to become even more diverse. But given the low levels in their core funding and the impact of inflation, they are ***working in a deficit***. Authentic meaningful work takes time and cannot be delivered without increased human resources.
- Many artists in this sector have an innate sense of what it means to be ‘outsiders’, and have lived with ***poor working conditions, poor pay and stigma***. This reality needs to be acknowledged and made part of the sector’s collective reflection on diversity and inclusion.



Reflections

- ISACS has an opportunity to ***learn specifically from ethnically minoritised artists*** to understand better the current lack of ethnic diversity in their membership.
- Specifically, the ISACS network would benefit significantly from the appointment of a ***dedicated role*** to build relationships with underserved communities, enhance the current practice of members and continue to strive for improved practices.

Additionally:

- The ***Design Principles for Government in Ireland***, which emphasize designing services around people's lived experience, being comfortable with emerging ideas and having permission to openly learn from mistakes ***could helpfully be adopted by statutory and non statutory donors who are committed to deep reform on EDI.***

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/designing-our-public-services.pdf>



ISACS EDI actions

- Led EDI upskilling programme for strategically funded organisations, increased diversity on board and championed Safe to Create and Artists' Pay internally and with members.
- Leading an All-island programme on social circus which includes young people from marginalised backgrounds.
- Prioritising artists from minoritised/disadvantaged communities in training, mentoring and bursary programmes.
- Delivering a research project together with the Showmen Community.
- Develop an EDI statement, policy and action plan which highlights our goals and core purpose, vision and mission of arts for all.



Macnas EDI priorities

In the longer term Macnas aims that our audiences and participants are reflective of the communities that we work in. In the shorter term, over 2025 the steps we are prioritising towards achieving this are;

- Continuing to present work in public space that is free to attend.
- Seeking funding towards developing and delivering a project aimed at diversity and inclusion in Galway.
- Engaging and working with local authorities and stakeholder organisations to promote participation in our programmes.
- Providing a Relaxed Space at our signature Halloween Parade, which supports the needs of neurodivergent audience members.
- Providing audio description of the parade and a recording of the back-story.
- Working with Bram Stoker Festival and NEIC to ensure the audiences for our work in Dublin reflect the community.
- Continuing to aid artists overcome financial barriers by providing free training workshops.

IACC EDI priorities

- We are bringing Lindsey Butcher (Gravity & Levity, UK) to train our teachers in how to teach for complex needs. We will bring the Midwest School for the Deaf for a free workshop to put this into practice.
- Create Access Pack for our website - including videos of how to get here, how to get in, maps, what to expect when you arrive in order to widen access.
- In 2025 we will ringfence one of our 'Unlocked Residencies' to be for people with complex needs. We will pilot this to ensure that the centre is ready.
- We will get the centre ready to host people who are visually impaired, with the hopes of inviting a visually impaired artist to Creative Intensive.
- Hire a part-time engagement officer who will help us implement our EDI plan, reaching out to groups, and creating new connections.
- Secure funding to install a lift to all floors.
- Assess the lighting, sound etc for black box in terms of accessibility / access - hearing loop, projecting subtitles.

GCC EDI Priorities

- EDI Audit completed, led by Peter Duncan from Circus Eruption - UK's 1st inclusive youth circus.
- Website audit completed (93% compliance) & action plan for further improvements created.
- Staff training with Extraordinary Bodies, start of an intended long-term relationship, including EB performances & workshop for Mayhem festival in 2025.
- 2025 plan to work with Deaf communities through partnership with Chime.
- Inclusion training for staff has led to a renewed drive to engage more disabled young people in GCC programmes.
- Among GCC staff and board, there is significant diversity in terms of age range, additionally the team has higher than average numbers of people who identify as living with a disability and lgbtqi+.



Spraoi EDI priorities

As part of Spraoi Festival 2024, Spraoi presented 'The Air Between Us' featuring two dancers, one able bodied and one a wheelchair user. Both dancers facilitated a mixed abilities dance workshop at Spraoi Studios. This workshop included beginners, professional dance instructors, carers and wheelchair users. It was supported by Active Cities and Waterford Sports Partnership. It embraced dance, movement, artistic expression and possibility. Inclusive activities of this nature are integrated elements of Spraoi's values and ongoing practice.

In 2024 Spraoi investigated ISL interpretation for some of the more text heavy street shows and will continue this work into 2025, (in the main Spraoi presents shows that are not overly reliant on the spoken word). Spraoi continues to work creatively and sensitively with specialist community groups. In late 2024 it initiated dialogue with Autism Support Dungarvan and will co-deliver a project with them in early 2025.

In 2024 Spraoi undertook an anonymous survey of its festival volunteers. The results of this survey will inform our volunteer programme going forward, to improve it for all. We plan to continue this survey model into 2025 and beyond. This continuing work will provide us with real data on our volunteer cohort and its profile.

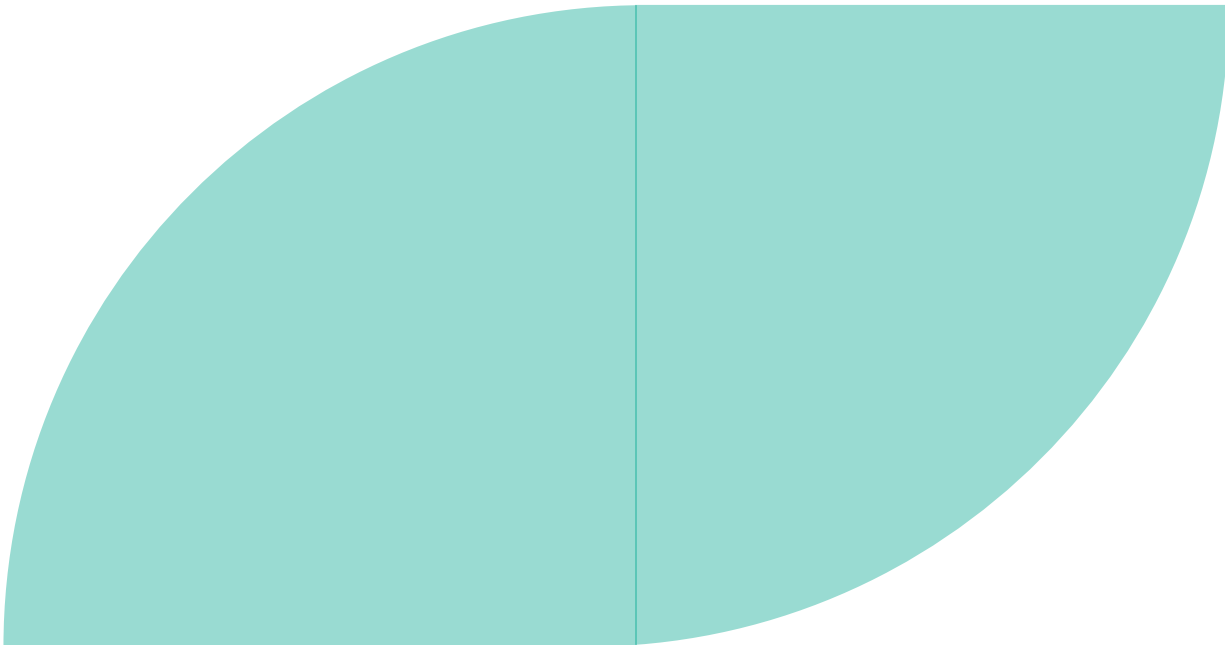
In 2025 Spraoi will undertake a review and upgrade of its website. Accessibility, clarity and ease of use will be a major consideration in this redesign.

A brief note on data

In 2021 and 2022 ISACS added an anonymous EDI survey to its annual membership survey, the detailed results of which have been shared with the Arts Council.

Questions were asked on gender, sexual orientation, civil or family status, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community (that is, the nine protected characteristics under the Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2018) and the ground of socio-economic background noted in Arts Council policy. The survey questions replicate those of the national census where possible, and are compared to the data from the 2022 Census as appropriate.

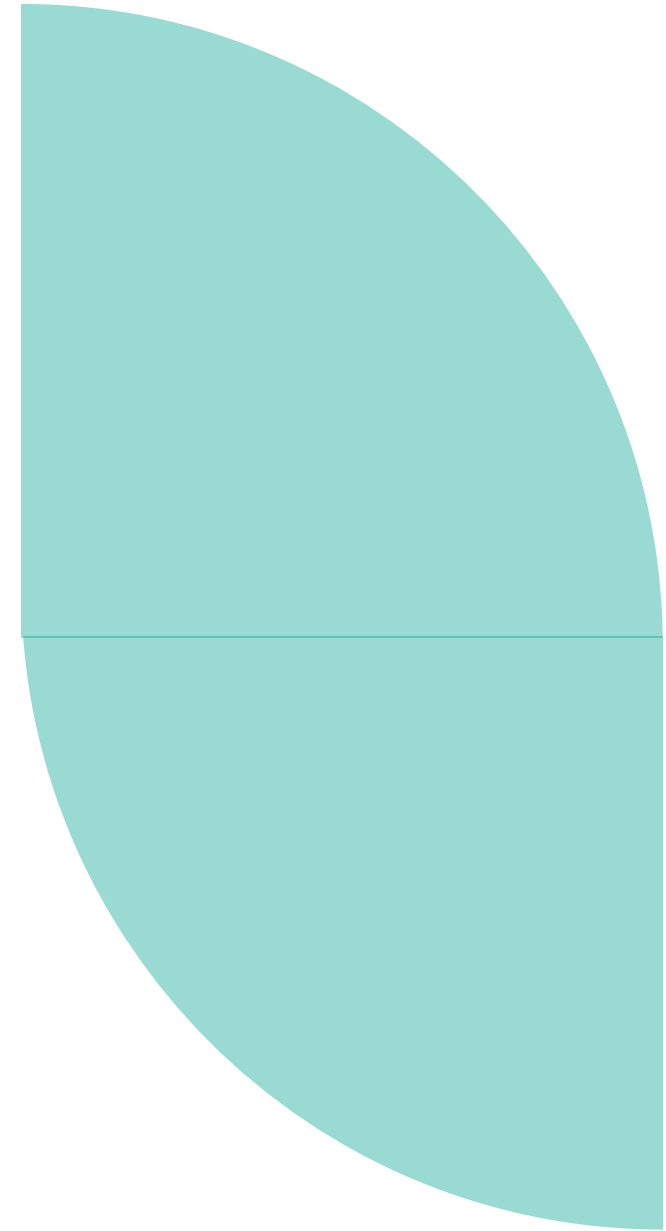
In 2023 the ISACS membership survey included open ended questions on lived experiences and barriers to participation which will be used to inform ISACS priorities. ISACS will do another full scale diversity survey in 2 - 3 years time.



A brief note on data

Data is extremely useful for broad insights, but is limited for a number of reasons -

- The surveys are anonymous and people opt into completing the survey and thus fluctuations year on year can only be interpreted as broad trends.
- Some people find surveys extremely difficult to engage in, and resources do not currently exist to have more accessible formats
- Survey respondents who were replying on behalf of a whole organisation were limited to their own personal response on the diversity questions, which was part of our motivation to run the survey again with individual organisations staff and boards.
- Some people who are operating in the sector do not identify themselves as 'artists' and have not joined ISACS, so are unlikely to have completed the survey.



ISACS Membership 2022*

Languages spoken in
our network:

British Sign Language,
Bikolnon, Croatian,
Dutch, French, German,
Italian, Moldovan,
Russian, Tagalog,
Spanish, Portuguese
and Swedish.

Majority Aged
25-54

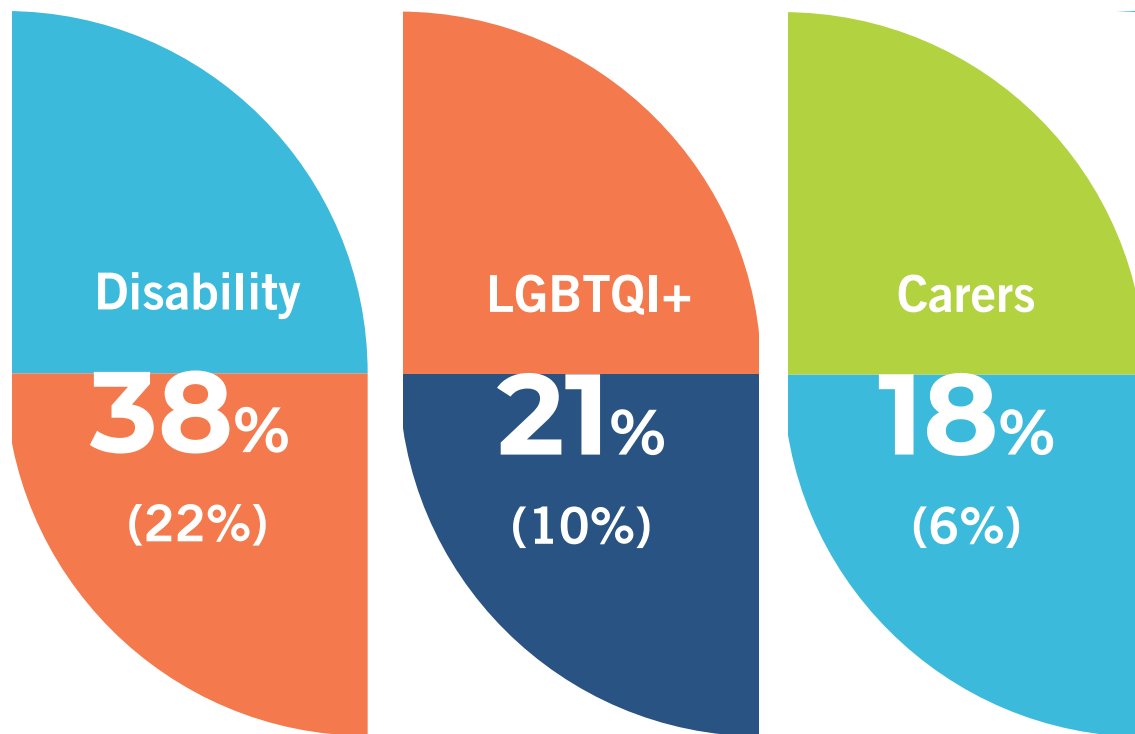
65% (75%) White Irish
24% (10%) Other White identity
11% (15%) Other ethnic identity

9
Countries
of birth

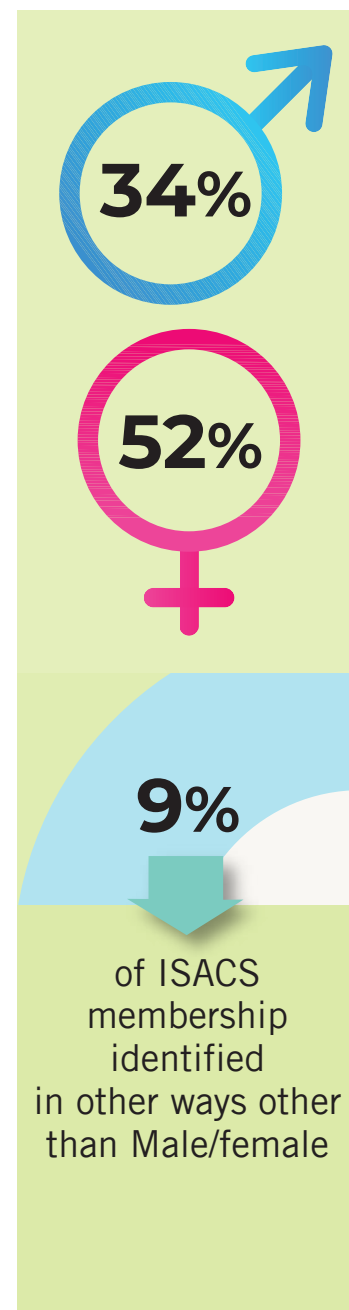
67%
(14.47%)
No Religion

(National Averages in Brackets)

APPENDIX 1



(National Averages in Brackets)



of ISACS
membership
identified
in other ways other
than Male/female



76%
BA+



45% <
€20K

ISACS gathered this data over 2021 - 2023 in partnership with Noeleen Hartigan and supported by the Capacity Building Support Scheme through the Arts Council of Ireland.

