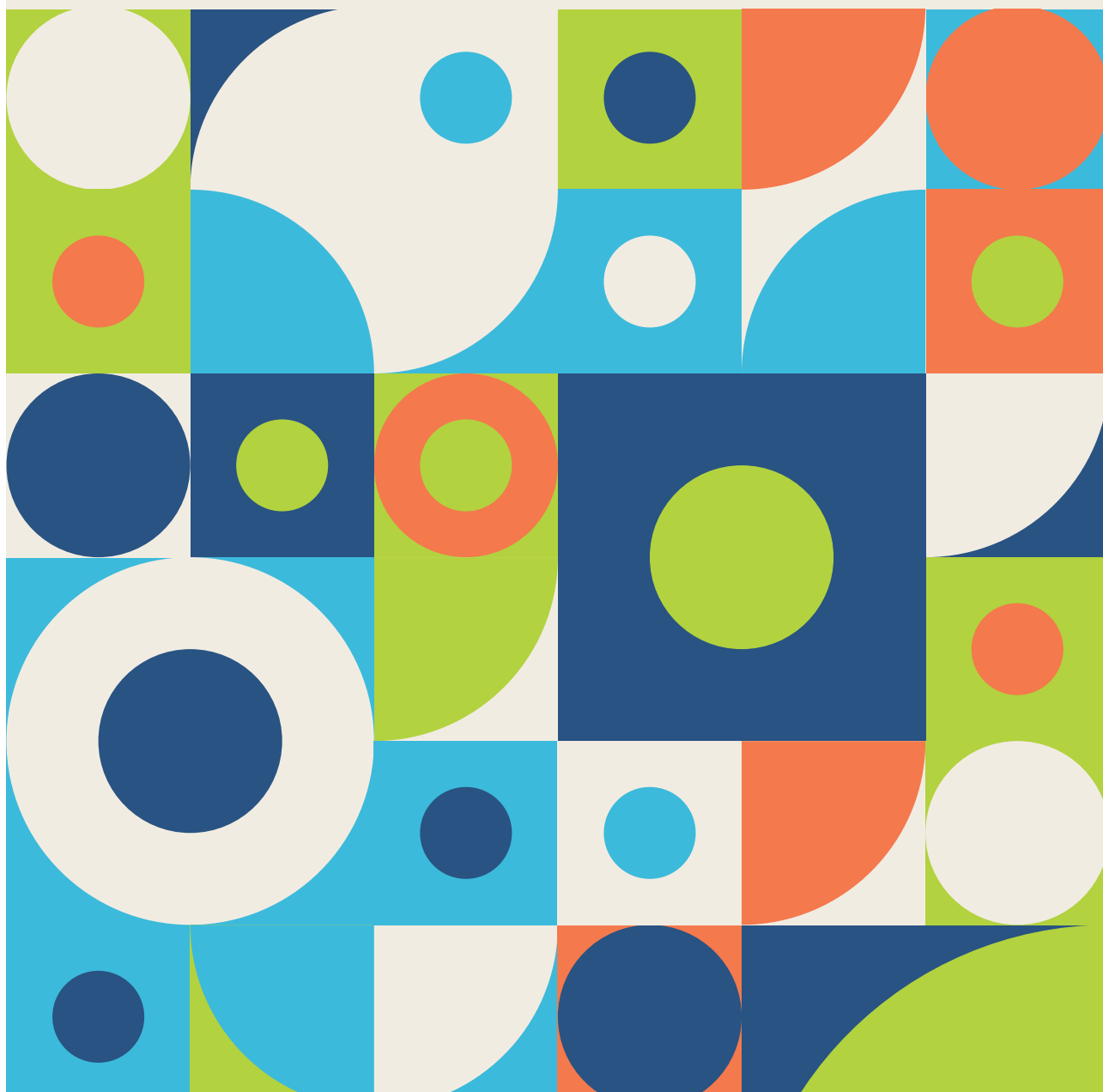


Equality Diversity & Inclusion in the ISACS Network

Analysis of ISACS Annual Membership Survey 2021 - 23



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1. Introduction

This report, funded by the Arts Council's Capacity Build support scheme, and based on work by independent consultant Noeleen Hartigan, seeks to capture a snapshot of the diversity within the ISACS membership over the period 2021- 2023.

In 2021 ISACS initiated a survey in order to better understand the profile and needs of its membership, identify communities that might be significantly underrepresented and reflect on how best to make the organisation, and indeed the artforms, more inclusive. The survey was also issued to staff and board.

The process was repeated in 2022. This report comprises the results of that survey. Trends between 2022 and 2021 should be viewed as indicative only, in that not all members who participate in one survey will participate in the next.

In 2023 the ISACS membership survey asked more generalized questions on inclusion as it was recognized that generating another detailed data set in the short term would not offer significantly new insights.

Finally, in 2023 the original survey was replicated with staff and board members of four of the other strategically funded organisations in the sector, namely Galway Community Circus, Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Macnas and Spraoi (these findings are in Appendix I).

2. Equality Data and Arts Council Awards

In August 2023 the Arts Council published its third annual report on EDI among its applicants. The headline findings are listed below, and observations specific to ISACS members are noted throughout the report.

Gender: There is a higher proportion of both applicants and recipients who identify as female¹ compared to the general population. On average individuals who identify as non-binary apply for and are granted the highest award value.

Disability: Individuals who identify as having a disability are under-represented amongst applicants and recipients compared to the general population. On average, individuals who answered 'Yes' to having a disability apply for and are granted the lowest award value.

Ethnicity: The majority of applicants and recipients identified as White Irish, which is in line with the census 2022 data. The success rate for awards is also highest among applicants from White or White Irish backgrounds. The rate of application and award is lowest among individuals who identify as Other or Mixed, Asian or Asian Irish, Black or Black Irish, or belonging to the Traveller Community.

Geography: Dublin was significantly over-represented in terms of proportion of applicants and recipients compared to the population. Cork, Galway, Wicklow, Clare and Sligo were also slightly over-represented in applications.²

¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/populationchanges/>

² <https://artscouncil.ie/developing-the-arts/resources-and-toolkits/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

3. Gender

Currently in Ireland there are 99.7 men per 100 women.

The CSO only offers the option of selecting male or female in its survey. In the ISACS survey we ask about gender in an open-ended question so that respondents could self-identify using terms with which they were comfortable.

In 2022 52% of respondents identified as female/ cis female, 34% as male / cis - male. A further 3% identified as non-binary, and 6% as 'other' (with all indicating an element of female identity). A further 5% of respondents preferred not to answer this question.

The proportion of respondents identifying as female is lower than the 2021 survey, and is coming closer to the national average. However, it is too early to say if this represents any significant trend. Including the option to self-identify is important, in 2021 8% of respondents identified in ways other than female or male, in 2022 this was 9%.

The latest EDI data from the Arts Council notes an interesting trend on gender and artforms:

Males are over-represented in applications in the areas of Architecture, Film, Literature (Irish), Music, **Spectacle and Street Arts**.

Female applicants **are over-represented** in the areas of Arts Participation, **Circus**, Dance, Literature (English), Visual Arts and YPCE.³

³ ibid

4. Sexual Orientation

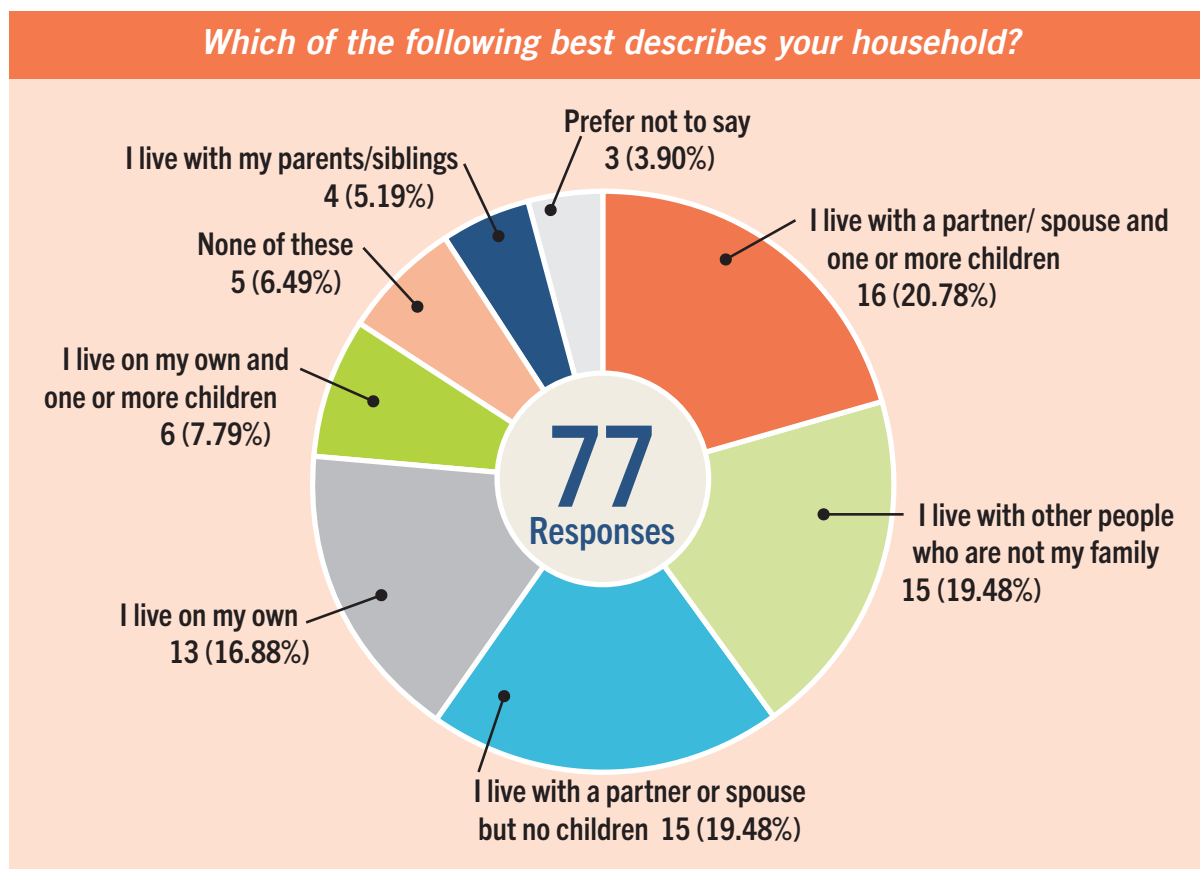
21% of members, staff and board respondents self-identified as a LGBTQIA+, with 10% of members stating that they would prefer not to answer the question. This response rate echoes that of the 2021 survey (24%).

There is no official estimate of the LGBT+ population in Ireland. Estimates based on surveys from other OECD countries and compiled by the Oireachtas Library and Research service⁴ put the LGBT+ population at between 71K and 405K people or between 1.9% and 10.8% of the population.

⁴ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2019/2019-06-28_l-rs-infographic-lgbt-community-in-ireland-a-statistical-profile_en.pdf

5. Civil or Family Status

Civil or Family Status is a protected category in Equality Legislation which predates the Marriage Equality Referendum. Thus, rather than ask marital or civil status, replicating questions in the 2022 Census the survey asked respondents to describe their household⁵ and whether they had caring duties.



7.79% (10%) of respondents headed up a one parent household, a further 20.78% (15%) of respondents identified that they were living in a household with a partner and children. Almost 1 in 5 members live with people who are not their family, (this was 23% in 2021). These figures are echoed in the staff/board make up.

18.18% (23%) of survey respondents have a caring role saying yes in response to the question: Do you provide regular unpaid personal help for a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability including those due to old age? (Among staff and board this figure was unchanged from the previous survey at 20%).

⁵ We added an additional category of living with siblings/parents

6. Religion

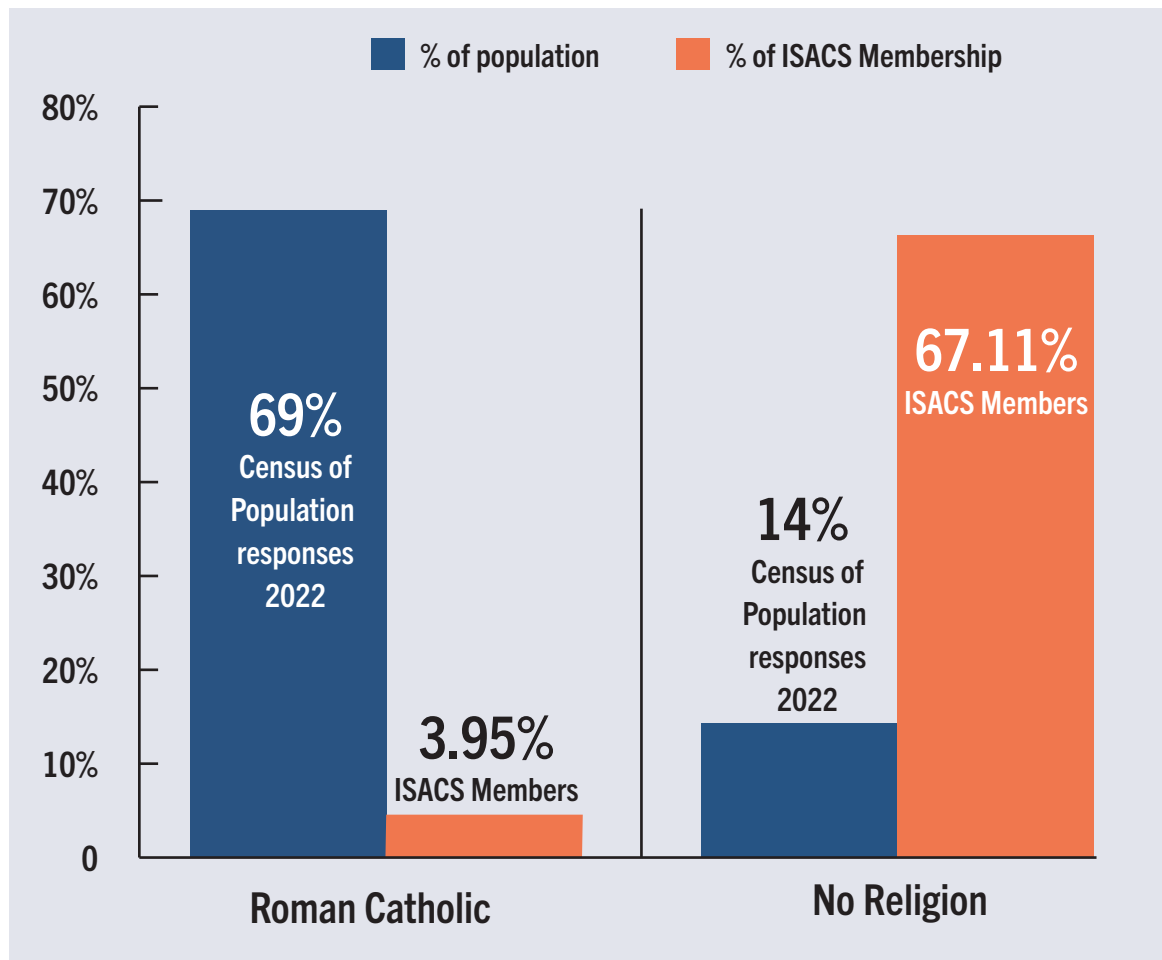
In the 2022 census⁶ the two most significant trends in religious affiliation noted by the CSO are the decline in the Roman Catholic population to a current low of 69% (78.3%)⁷ and the growth in the proportion of the population who identify as ‘No religion, atheist or agnostic’ from 9.8% to 14% in the last four years. This is the largest grouping after Roman Catholics.

Religion	% of population	% of ISACS Membership
Roman Catholic	69.14	3.95
No religion	14.48	67.11
Not stated	6.68	10
Church of Ireland, England, Anglican, Episcopalian	2.45	1.32
Orthodox (Greek, Coptic, Russian)	1.97	0
Islam	1.61	1.32
Christian (Not Specified)	0.73	0
Hindu	0.65	0

Among ISACS membership the number of respondents who identified as Roman Catholic dropped from 7.8% to 3.95% from 2021 to 2022. The number who identified as ‘No Religion’ increased from 60.94% to 67.11%. A further 15% identified as ‘other religion or born into a religion that you no longer practice’ and 10% preferred not to answer the question. Among staff and board, the numbers of those identifying as Roman Catholic are higher than among membership, but still significantly lower than the national average.

⁶ The CSO 2022 Census offered 23 options under religion, the ISACS survey offered eight, but the broad categorizations are comparable.

⁷ Down from 78.3% in 2016. The highest was 94% of the population in 1961.



Observations:

- The proportion of survey respondents identifying as having 'No Religion' is very high compared with the 2022 census and the proportion of survey respondents identifying as 'Roman Catholic' is very low compared to the 2022 Census figures.
- There was just one survey respondent from membership/staff or board identifying as Muslim and one as 'Church of Ireland'.
- There were no respondents identifying as Presbyterian or Orthodox, and among those who identified 'Other' there were no other minority faiths mentioned other than 'Pagan'.

7. Age

Ireland has an aging population. In Census 2022, 39.8% were aged 45 and over, compared with 37.2% in 2016 and 34.4% in 2011.⁸

This is echoed in the board/staff profile of ISACS, with 40% being over the age of 45, and 90% being over 35. By contrast, among members 65% are under the age of 45. There were no members under the age of 25.

The figures for both board/staff and members are largely unchanged from the previous year.

Age category	% of Member Respondents	% of Board and Staff
18-24	0	0
25-34	35	10
35-45	30	50
45-54	22	20
55-64	8	20
65+	4	0

Note: 1.30% (3%) of members declined to comment on age

⁸ See: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016profile3-anageprofileofireland/>

8. Disability

In the 2021 Census the CSO reframed the questions on disability to allow people to self-identify challenges that they face and also the extent to which these impact on their life. This was replicated in both the 2021 and 2022 ISACS surveys.

In the 2022 Census 22% of the population, over 1M people, self-identified as living with a disability.

Of the member survey respondents 38% of ISACS self-identified with a disability (in 2021 it was 39%). This is significantly above the national average, and, as can be seen below, the most frequent answer was in relation to a 'psychological or emotional condition or mental health issue'.

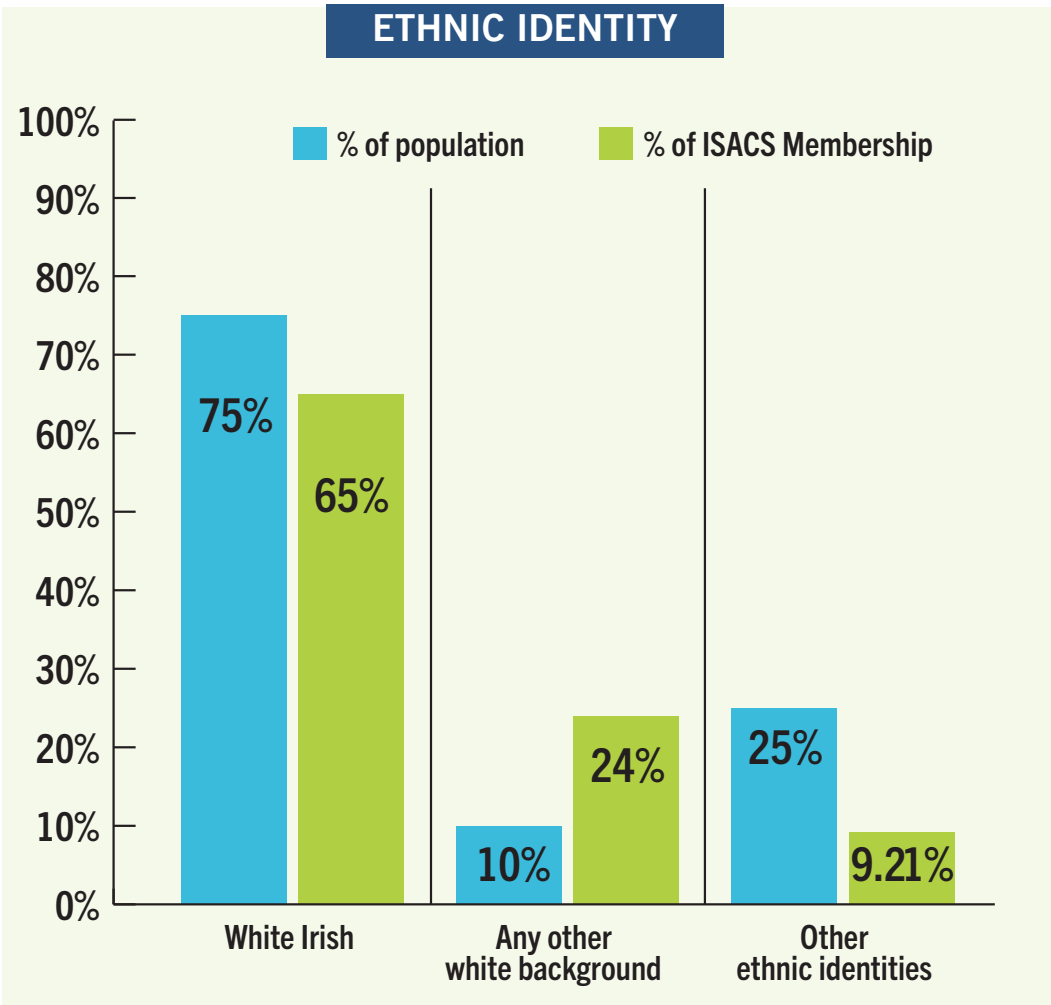
One in ten respondents stated that they lived with two or more conditions. Five respondents noted that they experienced deafness or a hearing impairment.

Long-lasting conditions or difficulties	No of member respondents 2022	No of member respondents 2021
A psychological or emotional condition or mental health issue	15	16
A difficulty with pain, breathing or any other chronic illness or condition	8	11
A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating	8	11
Blindness or a vision impairment	6	4
An Intellectual Disability	4	3
A difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying	2	2
Deafness or a hearing impairment	5	0
No. of respondents who noted two or more conditions/ difficulties	8	14

9. Ethnicity and Language Diversity

As of the 2022 Census 75% of the population identify as ‘White Irish’, with 25% identifying in other ways, including 10% as ‘any other white background’. The proportion of those identifying as ‘White Irish’ nationally, has decreased from 82.2% in Census 2016.

The broad profile of ISACS members, staff and board did not change over the course of 2021 and 2022, with 65% (64.5% in 2021) identifying as ‘White Irish’ and 24% (unchanged) as ‘any other white background’. The number of people identifying as Asian among members increased and one member identified as an Irish Traveller. No respondents identified as Black or Black Irish.



In order to get further insight into the identities and experiences of members, the survey asked the country of birth of respondents, what languages in addition to English are spoken at home and about the use and proficiency in the Irish language.

- Member respondents were born in 9 different countries, with the largest group born outside of Ireland being from the UK at 19%. (In the 2021 survey members were from 13 different countries).
- 21% (20%) of members, and 30% (20%) of staff/board speak a language other than English or Irish at home, which is above the 2016 national average of 13%.⁹
- Among members, staff and board 12 (11) languages were listed in addition to English and Irish - British Sign Language, Bikolnon, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Moldovan, Russian, Tagalog, Spanish and Swedish.
- 21.05%% (27%) of member respondents said they could speak Irish, with 16.67% (17%) of that number (4 people) stating that they speak Irish daily outside of the education system. Nationally 40% of people report speaking Irish, but this figure declines with age. Just 12% of people report speaking Irish daily both within and outside the education system, and by this standard there is parity of representation among ISACS members.
- In 2022, 751,507 people or 14.6% of the population usually resident in Ireland spoke a language other than English or Irish at home, with the fastest growing language spoken was Ukrainian (up 165%), followed by Hindi (154%) and Croatian (137%).¹⁰

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/migrationanddiversity/>

Population trends:¹¹

The CSO offers the following insights based on the 2022 Census, which show some interesting trends in the population. Indian, Romanian, and Brazilian citizens were the groups which increased by the largest numbers. The number of Polish people declined by 34% and the number of people with UK and Lithuanian citizenship also declined.

- There were 18,566 people present in the State on Census Night who indicated that their country of citizenship was Ukraine. Many of these people indicated that their country of usual residence was not Ireland, so they are not included in the figures published here on country of citizenship which are based on people who were usually resident in Ireland at the time of the census.
- The fastest growing ethnic group is “Other incl. mixed background”.
- The number of persons with a dual Irish nationality increased by 63%. Person’s may identify as having a dual nationality based on what citizenship they hold, where they were born, where they live or where their parents are from.
- Of the new ethnic groups added for Census 2022, 94,434 people identified as Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi.
- A further 20,115 identified as Arab and 16,059 as Roma.
- The number of usually resident Irish Travellers increased by 6% to 32,949.
- The number of people identifying as Chinese increased to 26,828.
- The biggest increases were recorded in the number of people born in India (up 35,673), Brazil (23,760) and Romania (13,758).

10. Socio-economic background

While this area of discrimination is not within the current legislation it is a priority area for the Arts Council. This can be viewed both as an issue of lack of access to arts participation by people from lower socio-economic backgrounds¹² and also from the perspective of low pay within the arts sector and how that impacts on career choices in the arts and increases the risk of poverty for artists.

For the purpose of this survey two Census questions were asked to determine socio economic status - highest educational attainment and current economic status.

- 76% (71%) of respondents had at least an ordinary bachelor's degree or national diploma, with 40% (28%) having a NFQ level 8 qualification and 24% (35%) having a NFQ Level 9, i.e. postgraduate diploma or master's degree.
- Among board and staff, 80% (80%) had an NFQ level 8 or 9.
- 86.67% (86%) of respondents described themselves as 'working for payment or profit', with small numbers identifying as either short or long term unemployed.

Observations:

- The number of people with an ordinary or higher-level university degree in Ireland is increasing, with 34% of the population now having this level of education¹³. ISACS members are over double the national average in this regard.

¹² The latest Behaviour and Attitudes survey for the Arts Council shows that:

- In the 12 months prior to November 2022 80% of higher income groups (ABC1) had attended an arts event. However, this figure falls for lower income groups (C2DE), only 63% of whom had attended an arts event in the previous 12 months.
- 28% of higher income groups (ABC1) had engaged in a day out or visit to places of interest e.g., museums or historic sites. However, this figure falls for lower income groups (C2DE), only 22% of whom had undertaken a day out or visit to places of interest e.g., museums or historic sites in the previous 12 months.

¹³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/educationandirishlanguage/>

The membership survey undertaken in conjunction with the diversity survey offers the following insight into the financial pressures faced by members.

- Almost half, 45% of ISACS member respondents in 2022 earned less than €20K per annum, and a further 32% earned less than €40K. This compares with an average income in Ireland of €52K with €58K for men and €45K for women. See Table 1 below. The majority of ISACS members are earning less than 'the average for the arts, entertainment and recreation sector of €26,318.' as cited in a 2021 Words Ireland survey.¹⁴
- Almost half 44% (compared to two thirds in 2021) of survey respondents make less than 60% of their income from the practice of Street Art, Spectacle or Circus.
- Over half 56.4% (47.7%) are not happy with the level of income they are earning from Street Art, Spectacle or Circus.
- While earnings may be marginally up on the previous membership survey, it is likely that the cost-of-living increases are putting individuals under increased strain.

Table 1, CSO analysis of average/median income in Ireland 2019 - 2023

		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
		€	€	€	€	€
All Employments	Mean	45,375	50,076	51,068	52,053	53,995
	Median	37,001	40,579	41,222	41,823	43,221
Male	Mean	51,630	56,171	57,348	58,612	60,816
	Median	40,517	44,105	44,892	45,537	47,187
Female	Mean	38,862	43,693	44,433	45,151	46,915
	Median	33,056	37,462	37,894	37,782	39,039

Source: CSO Ireland, Earnings Analysis using Administrative
<https://data.cso.ie/table/DDA10>

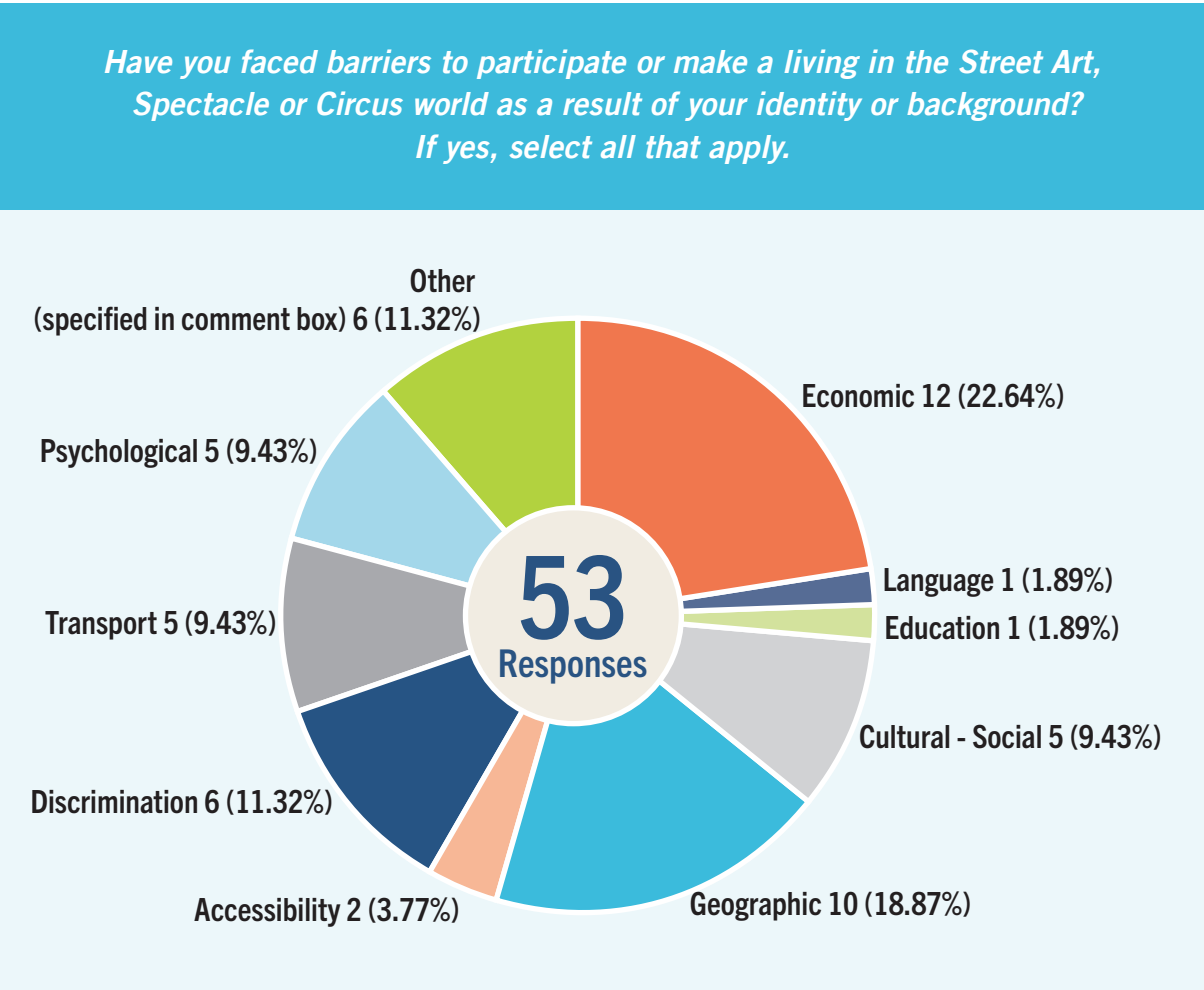
Median annual earnings: Half of the employees earn more than this amount and half earn less.

¹⁴ See Words Ireland Presentation of Research findings workshop <https://youtu.be/nWDFUOM-xeA>

11. Addressing Barriers

Members were first asked if they faced barriers to participating in or making a living in the artforms. In total almost 40% of survey respondents answered yes to this question.

Many respondents identified multiple barriers. The most commonly cited barrier was ‘economic’, followed by ‘psychological’.



Respondents' suggestions for ISACS

Members were then asked what role ISACS could play in removing some of these barriers and were also asked what role ISACS could play in helping individuals and organisations to become more inclusive in their practice.

Advocacy and training were high on the list of members' suggestions for how ISACS can support the removal of barriers. The connection between individuals' lived experience, fair pay and being safe and valued were also highlighted:

- *Mental health support (i.e. workshops), resources and promoting awareness.*
- *Resources for women and non binary in performing arts about challenges faced or how to deal with difficult situations (could be assault, people posting or speaking in ways that are misogynistic or transphobic etc.) It is helpful to continue educating performers about stressful or sub-par working conditions - which are UNACCEPTABLE. Demand better treatment. Stay strong.*
- *Raise the cultural respect, which in line would raise profile and pay*
- *Encourage individuals to be empowered, to inform themselves, and be their own best resource, and be good to each other without the need for an organisation or rules telling them what to do. Hold the space, rather than dictate.*
- *Means tested funding:*
 - *Funding for youth who are only starting their career who come from less economically stable backgrounds.*
 - *For funding guidelines to have more consideration of what is considered to be meaningful engagement. e.g. Will there be more of an impact on 10 youth participating in 10 workshops over a period of time or 100 youth watching one performance?*

■ *...On one hand they [The Arts Council] preach fair pay for artists and then on the other, they ignore you if you actually manage to achieve some level of reasonable remuneration for your work. I believe the toughest performing environment is for corporate audiences as they are so judgmental and demand very high standards. It's time the Arts Council stopped talking about Artists being fairly paid and supporting them in their ventures to create commercially viable performances.*

In terms of some specific proposals for action by ISACS in addition to training and advocacy the following were noted:

- *There were no questions in the health section about neurodiversity. It would be nice to see ASD and Sensory conditions included.*
- *If ISACS supports the recruitment of under-represented populations to emerging artist development opportunities, then the pool of talent from which we can hire will be much more diverse - I think a lot of the homogeneity in aerial work comes from the fact that potential students at the beginning of their journey can't 'see themselves' in teacher/performer roles in Ireland, because the people performing are so overwhelmingly white women. Maybe educational organisations can try to book a wider variety of visiting workshop leaders/guest instructors.*
- *Making a resource available on best practices and practical advice on how to implement practices, outlining common blind spots and how to address them.*
- *Consider a partnership programme of Trainee Apprenticeships aimed at people less represented in the sector.*
- *Info session / hearing from other members and organisations who succeed in inclusivity. Sometimes I just don't know how to approach it without seeming like I'm simply checking a box to have my 'EDI token'.*

Finally, the benefits of ISACS membership and ISACS positive culture were noted by many:

- *There's no stopping ISACS. Because it is being grown naturally and with openness and honesty. I would like to see more confidence and positive language in its work. E.g.: Instead of saying "Irish Circus is far behind other countries" try something like... Other countries have proven the benefits of the work we propose, we stand on the shoulders of giants, and our job is made easier by the other countries which tried first and failed first. Circus and Spectacle WILL grow in Ireland, it's inevitable, so encourage people to get on board with this positive thing, rather than fight against a negative thing. It's more empowering that way maybe?*
- *ISACS inspires me endlessly. Being welcomed by your organisation is very affirming as an artist and attending your in-person events gives a huge buzz. Our sector is important and growing and being able to meet our peers in a professional context that isn't stressful is such a gift.*

Appendix I

In 2024 Galway Community Circus, Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Macnas and Spraoi worked together with ISACS on a capacity building project on EDI. As part of this, the four organisations undertook anonymous diversity surveys of their staff and boards using the same basic questions as had been used in the ISACS survey.

A report was generated for each organisation in order to inform decision-making on future EDI plans.

In addition to reflecting on the diversity of board and staff members, each organisation should also find appropriate mechanisms to gather insights on the diversity of their participants, including artists, tutors and students / participants, on their volunteer network and on their audiences.

By way of summary of the findings of the report:

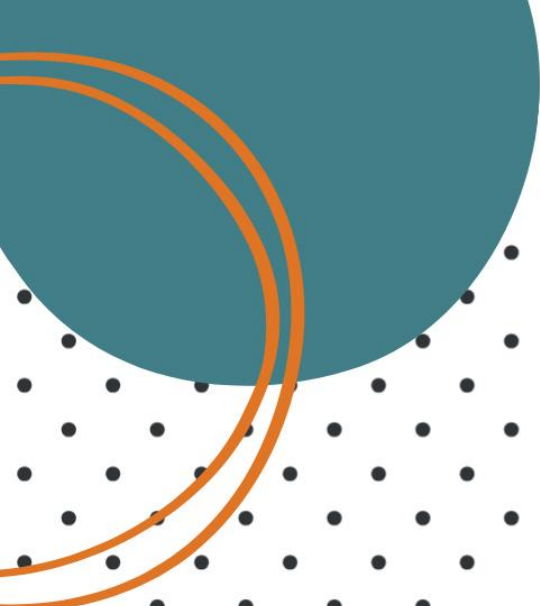
- The board membership of the four strategically funded organisations are predominantly made up of people who identify as White Irish and are over the age of 45.
- While among staff and contractors, there is a little more ethnic diversity, in total only 2 respondents of 43 identified as something other than of a white background.
- No survey respondent across the four organisations identified as Asian/Asian Irish or Black/Black Irish.
- The organisation with the most diversity in age range also had the most diversity in languages spoken, the highest levels of people who identify as 'any other White background', as LGBTQI+ and identifying as living with a disability.
- Both board and staff across all organisations reflected the general trend seen in ISACS membership of:
 - The number of people identifying as having 'no religion' was significantly higher than the national average
 - 15% - 37.5% (depending on the organisation) of respondents identified as LGBTQI+
 - Higher than national averages of people identifying with a disability, with psychological, emotional or mental health difficulty being the most frequently cited.
 - The vast majority of respondents had at least a primary level degree.
 - A higher than national average of carers.

Appendix 2

The Road Artists Perspectives Report:

This report explores insights gathered from interviews with six artists connected to Ireland's Street Arts, Circus, and Spectacle (ISACS) Network.

It was developed to address this gap in the conversation and gain insight into the inclusion of culturally and ethnically underrepresented communities in the Circus, Street Arts, and Spectacle (CSAS) sector.



REPORT

The Road Towards a More Diverse and Thriving Sector: Artists Perspectives

Report Created for:



Report Created by:

Brady Hughes

November 30, 2024

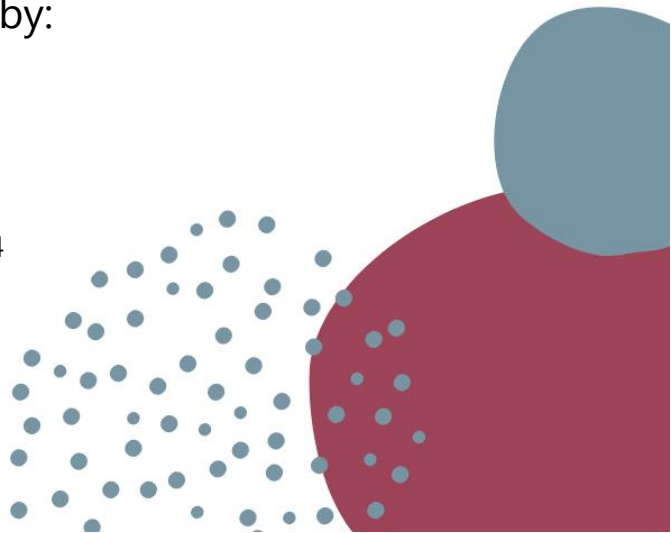


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INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past year, the Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle Network (ISACS) has been leading on an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) capacity building project for the sector, funded by the Arts Council of Ireland, with the other four strategically funded organisations in this artform:



Capacity building workshops hosted a variety of individuals from these organisations which included board members, management, artists, and administrative staff. As the timeline progressed, discussions deepened with much focus being concentrated on inclusive practices for people experiencing physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities. However, discussions on inclusive practices for ethnically diverse and underrepresented communities only achieved surface level speculation. This topic was identified as an area of improvement from the analysis of the results of the EDI self-audits that each project partner completed. The desire to attract more ethnically diverse members, students, and audiences was expressed. However, without representation in the room during the workshops, conversation on this topic was not progressing. This section of the project was developed to address this gap in the conversation and gain insight into the inclusion of culturally and ethnically underrepresented communities in the Circus, Street Arts, and Spectacle (CSAS) sector.

This report explores insights gathered from interviews with six artists connected to Ireland's Street Arts, Circus, and Spectacle (ISACS) Network. The findings reveal an overarching theme of **"Building Inclusive and Sustainable Artistic Ecosystems"** supported by six sub-themes that provide depth and actionable insights.

This report will be shared with the Board of ISACS and the project partners from the capacity building project, with a view to informing the new strategic plan of ISACS and the ongoing EDI specific action plans of all five organisations.

Note from Author

Previously, the author was involved in this project as a representative of Galway Community Circus as their EDI Coordinator. After relocating to Germany over the summer, the author was asked to return to the project as an external consultant to support the implementation of the interviews and this report. The author has a background in Recreation Therapy, has over 10 years of experience supporting diverse populations, and is familiar with the CSAS sector in Ireland. Though a queer, neurodiverse immigrant themselves, the author acknowledges the privileges afforded to them as a white, male presenting, English speaking Westerner, and that their experiences differ greatly from those they interviewed.

This report is designed in a format that includes the reduction of text heavy pages and the use of tables, pictures, charts, and point form notes where possible.

An interesting note that some of the artists expressed discomfort with their participation in this project as they do not identify as an ethnic minority, did not want to be a voice for all given their self-acknowledged privilege, or were wary of tokenism. In response to this feedback, the author has shifted the terminology focus to "underrepresented communities", which does align better with the goal of this project. Emphasis was given that this is just the beginning of these conversations and that more artists and members of underrepresented communities will need to be engaged in these discussions over the coming years.

PROCESS

Step	Detail	Delegation	Result	Note
Participant Recruitment	Identify 1-2 artists from ethnically minoritized groups that are connected to your organisation.	All 5 Partners	6 participants were identified.	Not all participants identified as a member of an ethnic minority in Ireland.
Invitation to Participate	An outline of the project's purpose, interview format, artist compensation and payment schedule, and interview questions were sent to the participants in advance.	ISACS	All 6 artists agreed to participate.	Appendix A
Interview Disclosure & Privacy Statement	Was created and sent to each participant in an effort to quickly build rapport and trust with the interviewer.	Interviewer	Sent to participants with the appointment booking link.	Appendix B
Interviews	• 1 hour • Semi-Structured • Recorded & Transcribed	Interviewer	Interviews were hosted and recorded on Microsoft Teams. Transcription and interview summaries were created through www.rev.com .	

Anonymized Profile of Artists

All are artists in the sector, either established or emerging.

Different geographic regions of Ireland represented.

Artforms

Represented:

Street Dance, Aerials/Circus Aerials, Chinese Pole, Hip Hop, Rap, Acrobatics, Spoken Word, Graffiti, MCing, DJing, Acrobatics, Festival, Outreach, Workshops, Parade

All were identified by a project partner as a member of a community underrepresented in the sector.

Heritages
Represented:
Black/Black Irish, Irish Traveller, Brazilian, Asian/Asian Irish, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European

All have a connection with ISACS and/or an ISACS organisation member.

All participate in their art form as paid work, either full-time or part-time.

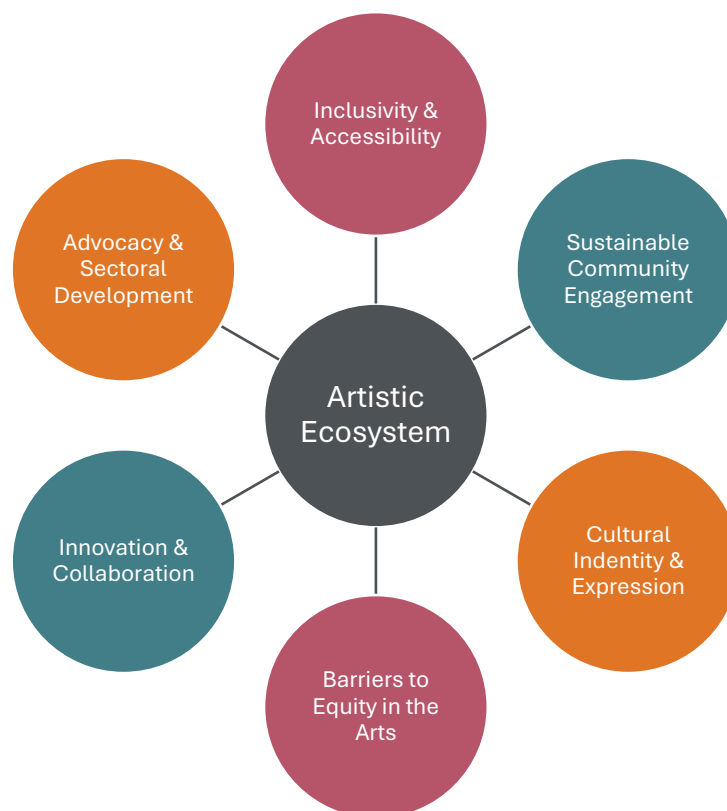
Most engage in multiple artforms and have alternative work to support the cost of living.

KEY THEMES

Building Inclusive & Sustainable Artistic Ecosystems

*"We need an **active** change. We need **active** work around things to improve. Things don't improve from just waiting and seeing [if] things change." – (Artist E, 2024)*

The overarching theme from the interviews reflects a collective yearning to create a vibrant arts ecosystem in Ireland that is inclusive, accessible, and socially and economically sustainable. In order to pursue this vision, artists are petitioning the CSAS sector and ISACS network to find ways to address systemic barriers, foster more meaningful community engagement, celebrate diverse cultural expressions, and encourage innovation. Six sub-themes have emerged that identify challenges and opportunities in achieving the goal of building an inclusive and sustainable artistic ecosystem on the island of Ireland.



*"If you don't **see yourself in** the art, how would you ever **see yourself participating** in the art?" – (Artist D, 2024)*

Inclusivity and accessibility are essential for creating equity in the arts community. Artists highlighted challenges like language barriers and financial constraints. There has been a noticeable improvement with accommodations for people with disabilities that is starting to be seen but requires continued commitment. There is also a need for a general understanding about what is fair pricing for an artist to charge for their services in Ireland, regardless of where they come from. It is also important to note that communication and proactive measures will likely always come up as areas of improvement until organisations are sufficiently resourced, enabling them to do so.

*"Using **simple language** would be the key word. It's less complicated for someone whose background is not an English speaker." – (Artist F, 2024)*

- Language Barriers – Adopting a standardized practice of simplified language and defining sector jargon could result in an increased understanding for more people. Many underrepresented groups are likely to be non-native Irish or English speakers while others, due to systemic issues in education, have lower literacy rates. It was suggested that having a note about language accessibility of events and training would help people to decide if an opportunity is right for them. QR codes that direct to auditory and visual descriptions were also suggested to possibly be beneficial to reducing language barriers.
- Financial Constraints – There was much appreciation among the interviewees for the bursaries already offered by ISACS to attend training events and festivals. It is still an important topic to highlight given the evidence from ISACS membership surveys show that almost half of their members earn less than the minimum wage.
- Fair Pricing – Multiple artists noted the need for support from ISACS and member organisations with establishing and publicly communicating fair pricing guidelines for CSAS work. From the lived experience of some of the

artists and other artists they know, there is a phenomenon of eager agreeability that happens when an artist relocates to Ireland from another country that has lower wages and cost of living than Ireland. Contract pricing and opportunities are perceived as exciting and very gracious when the Euro value is directly compared with the currency exchange to their country of origin. Additionally, these feelings seem to be more amplified for those whose quality of life would have been significantly improved with these rates of pay had they stayed in their country of origin. However, the artists reported that when compared to the minimum wage and cost of living in Ireland, the contract pricing does not cover living expenses in Ireland.

Sustainable Community Engagement

*"... Half bread is better than none. But then, **if the bread is moldy**, does that still count? My first response is to say it's not good enough. But then, when you read into it, [when you have none], **having that one [slice of moldy bread] is still welcomed.**" – (Artist A, 2024)*

As evidenced in other artforms and sectors, sustainable engagement is only achieved by building lasting relationships with communities rather than relying on short-term projects. Artists emphasized the importance of ongoing outreach, especially in marginalized areas. However, they strongly urged that projects need to be approached in ways that foster trust, respect, and continuity to ensure meaningful inclusion and participation. They noted that short-term projects can have an impact and positive outcomes on individuals and communities. But the artists cautioned that if people are unable to see themselves continuing the activities in their own communities and homes, then the outcomes risk being reversed at a faster rate. The above quoted metaphor drove further conversation during the interview between the artist and the author around the idea of a *Mouldy Bread Theory*. Their theory suggests that in their current perception of the state of the world, people that are in dire need of bread will make do with a slice of moldy bread rather than to go without bread entirely and starve. They highlighted their belief that art is an essential component to both human development and cultural enrichment. The artist's metaphor suggests that once-off and short-term projects are the moldy bread; short-term, temporary solutions that "fill a gap" of alternative income sources and "check a box" on grant applications and

reporting. The artist, and author reflected together on their own experience that life-long impact depends on long-term, socially and economically sustainable projects that not only provide bread that is rich with nutrients but also provides the support and education needed for communities to source the ingredients and bake the bread themselves.

*"I would love to see maybe **more mobile workshops** rolled out so that people **in the communities** wouldn't have to come too far out of their comfort zones to partake." – (Artist C, 2024)*

- Artists highlighted the need for engagement that builds trust over time rather than transactional interactions. Going to communities, rather than having them come to you, is an easier way to build said trust as you are meeting people in their own space.
- Artists suggested that for projects to be more socially and economically sustainable, especially if it is once-off or short-term, that the content could focus more on activities that can easily and affordably be sourced in communities. It was observed by artists that the artforms that focused more on body movement and the use of voice were more likely to be continued by project participants outside of project session time. Artforms that require larger and/or more expensive equipment and safety measures were rarely engaged again if the organisation did not return to the community regularly. Home-made prop making sessions and YouTube video links were offered as possible low-cost and accessible-from-home solutions for once-off and short-term projects. That is, until local individuals could be trained to support more complex activities safely and mobile equipment that stays in the community could be sourced.

Cultural Identity & Expression

*"Growing up in a very white culture has kind of **skewed my view of identity.**" – (Artist B, 2024)*

Based on the interviews and previous work experience, the author believes that the exploration of cultural identities in CSAS could deeply influence artistic expression and participation. Several artists reflected on how their backgrounds shaped their

practices and how supporting diverse cultural identities requires embracing their unique contributions and addressing systemic barriers that discourage participation. Some of the artists felt that CSAS spaces that operated more institutionally (i.e., government agencies like the Arts Council and local Arts Offices, academic institutions, and strategically funded organisations) were also more likely to be predominantly white spaces. Whereas the artists felt that freelancers operated more often at a “grass roots level on the fringes of society”, achieving higher instances of cultural diversity engagement with their projects. As a former employee of an organisation considered by the artists to be more institutional, the author believes there to be a curious disconnect between the institutions, freelance artists, and underrepresented communities that could be explored further. The author notes that during their time coordinating outreach projects, despite being part of a strategically funded organisation, they struggled to develop more meaningful connections with local agencies that supported or were organised by underrepresented communities. Meanwhile, during the interviews, the author discovered that some freelance artists achieved not only more meaningful connections, but, in some instances, managed to have their projects become deeply entrenched in underrepresented communities. A point was made to the author that some of the freelance artists come from countries or cultures where some CSAS artforms originate from and are highly valued as expressions of their culture. The author hypothesizes that if there was more cultural diversity within staff and leadership of strategically funded organisations, they would have more credibility, access points, and connections with underrepresented communities in Ireland.

*“I come from a community that has faced racism, discrimination, and social exclusion, yet we’ve always found ways to express our creativity – **it’s in our blood.**” – (Artist C, 2024)*

- Some artists feel a personal responsibility to represent their communities and drive the art forms forward. They use their art as a platform to address systemic barriers, social exclusion, discrimination, and poor education.
- One of the artists urged the need for organisations, programmers, and facilitators from across sectors to approach programming with more gentleness and understanding when involving those experiencing cultural displacement. They indicated that it is important for people to acknowledge what they

don't understand and to approach with curiosity, and the author agrees. From the author's experience, people experiencing cultural displacement, or any other lived experiences named throughout this report, are subjected to further harm when programmers make assumptions about what they believe is in their best interest. The artist and author suggest a little self-education about the lived experiences of the people being served goes a long way with helping them to be comfortable. And if there is further uncertainty, simply asking the person is the best way to discover what they need.

Barriers to Equity in the Arts

*"How did they do this with no funding, with no big [support] ... **imagine how powerful these groups would be** if they had resources."*
– (Artist A, 2024)

Many of the artists spoke about how systemic barriers continue to hinder equity in the arts, including financial instability, perceptions of elitism, and limited opportunities for marginalized artists. It seems that these challenges are deeply rooted and often intertwined with broader societal inequities, as highlighted in the AMPLIFY report¹, which identifies persistent discrimination, microaggressions, and exclusionary practices across the arts and creative sectors. To address these challenges, the artists spoke about equitable resource distribution, fair wages, and transparent decision-making processes. The artists also noted that, while these systemic issues extend beyond what ISACS or the CSAS sector can resolve alone, this presents an opportunity for ISACS to adopt a leadership role in fostering conversations and unifying voices to contribute to sector-wide solutions.

*"There are people who **want** to participate, but because of lack of resources, they **can't**."* – (Artist E, 2024)

- Financial constraints were mentioned as a major obstacle by multiple artists.

¹ AMPLIFY report link: <https://www.safetocreate.ie/news/amplify-a-call-for-transformation-action-research-report-launches/>

- It has been noted by a couple artists that there are perceptions of elitism and gatekeeping within organisations that are restricting access to opportunities. Some services have been identified as accessible only if you know someone connected to the organisation. There was uncertainty that in some cases elitism and gatekeeping was the intention due to acknowledgement of resource scarcity, but from the outside looking in this is what it looks like. Artists suggested that organisations work to improve their communications around these instances and be transparent around the reasoning.

Innovation & Collaboration

*"The art form doesn't have to stay within its **preconceived ideas**—it's still dance." – (Artist A, 2024)*

Artists shared personal stories about cross-disciplinary collaboration and openness to experimentation, and how these experiences were innovative and influenced feelings of thriving with their art. Artists highlighted the potential of blending art forms, such as aerial dance and hip hop, to expand creative possibilities. They suggested that ISACS, and similar organisations, can play a key role in fostering this environment by placing a higher value on openness and embracing failure on all levels.

*"The **commitment** obviously **needs to be resourced**, but we were committed to it." – (Artist A, 2024)*

- Some artists have had the opportunity to integrate their art form with another and the result was the creation of inspirational and dynamic performances. The artists felt welcomed and connected in these moments and urged organisations to continue to embrace this practice and commit to being open to these new ideas despite any potential failings. It is suggested that organisations that do so will be seen as more inclusive of underrepresented communities and will more likely be sought out by them. Embracing failure is seen as a way to prove to underrepresented communities that they are not just a condition to be fulfilled for reporting and funding.

- Artists also advocated for cross-border exchanges to foster creative collaboration, not just across the island of Ireland, but also European wide and beyond. As an island nation, despite its international presence, artists felt that Ireland can still feel quite isolating. Street art, circus, and spectacle have a lot to offer the art forms internationally, but also have a lot they can learn from looking outside of the island “bubble”.

Advocacy & Sectoral Development

“We need everyone [in the sector] working [together] for change.

Rights don’t come from nowhere—they come from fighting.”

– (Artist E, 2024)

Artists felt that advocacy is essential to driving systemic change and supporting the long-term growth of the arts sector. Artists noted an improvement over the past few years in this area and hope that there will be continued representation in policy making. They also called for consistent sectoral advocacy for better working conditions to ensure the arts remain a viable profession for all.

“Less words, more action.” – (Artist F, 2024)

- Artists stressed the importance of having street arts, circus, and spectacle represented in the Arts Council, arts offices, and policy discussions and appreciated the direction the sector has been going.
- Artists called for fair wages, professional development, and continued work on building recognition of CSAS artforms. They cited how awesome it was that the Arts Council created a separate category to recognize circus, and hope that these types of decisions and actions continue to gain momentum.
- Artists highlighted the need for organisations to actively support underrepresented artists. They asked that when choosing to highlight the inclusion of these artists, then there is a need to commit to that inclusion fully so as not to be performative. It was emphasised how critical it was for organisations to use their voice, positions of power and influence, and their public platforms to

demonstrate displays of support for these artists, especially during times of crisis and hardship. It was felt that these actions are essential for communicating to these artists that an organisation is still a safe space for creating art with dignity and humanity. Some artists highlighted that some of the organisations have yet to provide statements regarding international conflicts, such as the humanitarian crisis occurring in Gaza that is having an impact on the Palestinian people, that directly impacts the artists and the communities that they support. An artist further elaborated that silence and avoidance are easy ways to lose trust and feelings of safety and inclusion.

- Several participants emphasized that the over-emphasised need for impact measures and outcomes is hindering the delivery of impact and outcomes to all communities. From the artists point of view, many of the art forms represented by ISACS have been proven many times across the world to deliver the positive changes that they claim to do. They felt strongly that resources dedicated to such intense application and reporting procedures could be reallocated to project time in the communities.

CONCLUSION

The insights gathered from these interviews highlight a shared vision of **inclusive and sustainable artistic ecosystems**. While challenges persist, there is immense potential for growth, collaboration, and transformation within Ireland's street arts, circus, and spectacle sectors.

Potential Actions by all CSAC strategically funded organisations:

1. Improve Accessibility

- Use plain language in communications and include tools like sign language interpretation or QR codes for accessibility.
- Expand bursaries and fair pricing guidance to reduce financial barriers for underrepresented artists.

2. Foster Long-Term Community Engagement

- Develop sustainable outreach programs that build trust and continuity in underrepresented communities.
- Focus on accessible and affordable art forms while training local individuals to sustain projects.

3. Celebrate Cultural Diversity

- Create programs that highlight diverse cultural expressions and authentically amplify underrepresented voices.
- Support artists experiencing cultural displacement with opportunities to share their unique perspectives.

4. Address Systemic Barriers

- Advocate for equitable funding distribution and increased transparency in decision-making processes.
- Develop unified strategies to address systemic issues like arts funding cuts and perceptions of elitism.

5. Encourage Innovation

- Promote cross-disciplinary and cross-border collaborations to foster creativity and inclusivity.
- Embrace failure as a learning opportunity to demonstrate openness in partnerships and projects.

6. Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

- Ensure representation of street arts, circus, and spectacle in policymaking and arts bodies.
- Use the network to actively support artists and reduce administrative burdens for funding applications.

REFERENCES

Artist A. (2024, November). Freelance Artist. (B. Hughes, Interviewer)
Artist B. (2024, November). Freelance Artist. (B. Hughes, Interviewer)
Artist C. (2024, November). Freelance Artist. (B. Hughes, Interviewer)
Artist D. (2024, November). Freelance Artist. (B. Hughes, Interviewer)
Artist E. (2024, November). Freelance Artist. (B. Hughes, Interviewer)
Artist F. (2024, November). Freelance Artist. (B. Hughes, Interviewer)

APPENDICES

- A. Invitation to Participate
- B. Interview Disclosure & Privacy Statement



Invitation to participate in anonymous interview on Street Art, Spectacle and Circus

ISACS is the voice for the street arts, circus and spectacle sector in Ireland. The organisation has grown from a voluntary base 14 years ago, to a thriving movement with members across Ireland and internationally.

There is significant diversity among the current community of artists in terms of linguistic diversity, gender identity and non-physical disability. But there are few artists from ethnically minoritised groups actively making work.

ISACS is currently working on a specific Equity Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, and will next year begin working on a new Strategic Plan.

We are reaching out to six artists with a connection to our family of organisations, as part of our process to increase our understanding of the lived experience of artists from ethnically minoritised groups and to inform our action plan and new strategy.

Process

We are asking you to participate in a one hour online semi-structured interview, with [Brady Hughes](#). The interviews will be recorded for transcription processes and completely anonymised. Following the interviews Brady will create a brief report of recommendations, including using direct quotes / examples from the interviews. The report will be shared with you before it is finalised, and you will have the opportunity to comment on it.

Payment¹

Based on a daily rate of €450 per day, we are offering 1 day fee for your participation. Our expectation of your engagement is that you would:

- Reflect in advance on the prompt questions below.
- Read [this slide deck](#) which describes ISACS current EDI work
- Participate in a one-hour online interview
- Allocate a further hour to reviewing the report to ensure you are happy with how your anonymised input has been represented.

Prompt Questions:

- What are your personal perceptions of the artforms represented by ISACS?
- From your direct experience of working with ISACS or one of our member organisations, in what way can we improve our practice?
- In what way might the leadership of our organisations make our artforms more relevant to and supportive of artists from ethnic minority groups in the future?

Irish Street Arts, Circus & Spectacle Network info@isacs.ie
c/o Block A, Spawell Centre, Spawell Road, Wexford, Y35 E2FK

www.isacs.ie
087 0541812



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Interview Disclosure & Privacy Statement

Topic:	Anonymous interview on Street Art, Spectacle and Circus in the Republic of Ireland
Subject:	ISACS EDI Action Plan – Increase sector understanding of lived experience of artists from ethnically minoritized groups
Format:	Semi-structured ○ A few fixed questions with room for the conversation to go in the direction that the interviewee wants to take it. 1-hour, Online
Report Beneficiaries:	ISACS, The Arts Council of Ireland, ISACS membership Project Partners: Galway Community Circus, Macnas, the Irish Aerial Creation Centre & Spraoi
Consultant(s):	Noeleen Hartigan – Project Lead noeleen.hartigan@gmail.com Brady Hughes – Interviewer brady@hughesws.com

Privacy

Recording & Transcription

- The purpose of the recording and transcription is to allow the interviewer to be fully present and actively listening to the artist during this interview.
- It will allow the interviewer to accurately recall the details of the conversation for writing the official report.
- The recordings and transcriptions will be deleted once the final version of the report has been approved and submitted to ISACS.
- Though anonymized, quotes, context, and ideas will be used for the report with your consent. The recording and transcription files will never be shared with the Report Beneficiaries.
- The recordings and transcriptions may be shared with the project lead for the purpose of supporting the drafting of the report. However, the files will only ever exist on the secure drive that belongs to the interviewer.

Anonymity

- Interviewees will be de-identified in the report.
- Interviewees will have the opportunity to review drafts of the report to feedback on accuracy, de-identification, and content.
- The intention of anonymity is to encourage interviewees to be as open and honest, as they are comfortable, without fear of a negative impact on their livelihood and art.



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Your Rights

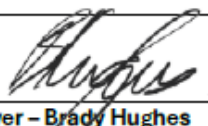
If you have any questions or concerns, please direct them immediately to the project consultant(s) listed above to be addressed.

GDPR

If you feel your concerns have not been addressed and your rights have been violated, please escalate your complaint to your EU representative office:

- Ireland – [Data Protection Commission](#)
 - Location of artists, report beneficiaries, and project lead.
- Germany – [BfDI \(Die Bundesbeauftragte für Datenschutz und die Informationsfreiheit\)](#)
 - Location of the interviewer.

Signature

	31/10/2024
Interviewer – Brady Hughes	Date