



RESIST

Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics

The RESIST Project Report

Effects of, and Resistances to 'Anti-Gender' Mobilisations Across Europe: A Report on Ireland



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Ireland

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Executive Summary

Ireland has made significant strides in legal and social changes regarding LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Asexual, plus) and gender equalities. In the past decade, two referendums were passed, with over two-thirds of the population voting for same sex marriage and abortion rights. To explore the effects and resistances of 'anti-gender' mobilisations in Ireland, the Irish case study spoke with 40 participants, who took part in 6 focus groups and 12 interviews.

This LGBTQIA+ 'trajectory of progress' is seen to be coming to a halt by participants who identified attacks on themselves and organisations on the basis of their genders/sexualities. A quiet institutional anti-sex work agenda was also observed, through intra-community anti-sex work policies and attacks, amongst other strategies. These factors were seen as increasing in the previous five years and as being driven by those who were presented in the media as having "reasonable" concerns and/or being "respectable people". Ongoing anti-sex work government legislation and stances within feminist organisations; racist attacks within queer communities; and classed differences have prevented some from experiencing positive change as a result of such strides..

The reported effects of these attacks are significant: on physical and mental health, employment, families and relationships. Those working in organisations found that resources were redirected away from supporting marginalised people towards dealing with the attacks. There was a subsequent loss of funding from donors and others, who were also targeted and contacted about their engagements with these organisations, leading to a fear for the survival of key organisations.

Resistances to these attacks included visible protests, and being visible and vocal in everyday spaces, in the media and on social media. Friendships, solidarity, and coalition building created and enabled resistances, and supported and empowered those who were subject to attack.

The Irish state, politicians, and institutions were seen as supportive of those who had been attacked; politicians did not widely adopt anti-trans, anti-LGBTQIA+ or anti-abortion policies or rhetoric, according to research participants. This was not true for sex work. Irish culture was also seen as enabling resistance to attacks by people being known to each other and a distance that offers for some a "respect" for people's space. Personal relationships made a difference: a key act of resistance seen as improving lives was "having the chats": conversations that enabled genuine concerns to be aired, questions to be asked, and mistakes—particularly in terms of terminology—to be made.

The case study on Ireland established that organised, ongoing, and recently exacerbated targeting and attacks of LGBTQIA+ people—especially trans people—and organisations is commonplace. Sex workers were noted as being institutionally excluded through state policies and some feminist organisations' positions on sex work. These experiences had significant effects on individuals and support groups. Resistances ranged from protest to having open, at times difficult, "chats" with friends, family, and strangers, as well as conversations between organisations and with those who sought to genuinely engage.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+; anti-sex work; attacks; dialogue; resistance

Introduction

This case study report explores the lived experience of encountering ‘anti-gender’ politics—including discourses and movements—and analyses everyday resistances in Ireland.

It outlines how 40 academics, activists, public intellectuals and members of the general public experience, negotiate, and resist attacks related to their identities, lives, politics, and work in the arena of sexualities and genders.

The report is written from the findings of 6 focus groups—with 28 participants, in groups of between 3 and 7—and 12 individual interviews with people based in Ireland, mainly LGBTQIA+ people. The sample consisted of LGBTQIA+ people and allies, LGBTQIA+ organisations and those who work with sex workers¹. They responded to the invitation to participate in focus groups or interviews because they experienced some form of ‘anti-gender effects’. The sample was recruited via targeted emails and calls to individuals and groups that may be affected; for details, see [Table 1: Respondent profiles Ireland](#). Following a synopsis of the national context, including the terminology used in this Irish report, we outline the key findings which bring together the main points that crossed focus groups and interviews.

Context

Ireland has changed significantly in relation to genders and sexualities since the end of the 20th century.

The Republic of Ireland is a postcolonial context, with six counties remaining within the UK as Northern Ireland. Following a war of Independence it became independent in 1922, after which there was a civil war. It is governed by a parliamentary, representative democracy. It is a ‘neutral’ country in terms of international warfare, with a history of conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 20th century. It joined the European Economic Community in 1973. Its economy has moved from farming and tourism, towards a high tech economy with low tax for corporations. In 2008, Ireland was heavily affected by the global financial crash, receiving economic bailouts. This has had ongoing reverberations not least in relation to housing.² Healthcare in Ireland is delivered through both a public and a private system, with ongoing issues regarding public access to healthcare and long waiting lists for services.³ Since the founding of the state, Ireland was a country of predominantly emigration out of the country, but is of late experiencing increasing inward migration⁴ both from within the EU and more broadly. This in-migration was for the first time a focus of

¹ Ethical approval was not granted for payment of participants and therefore sex workers will be directly included in the next phase of the research.

² Kitchen, R., Hearne, R. and O’Callaghan, C. (2015) ‘Housing in Ireland: From crisis to crisis’, *NIRSA Working Paper Series*, 77. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2566297>. (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

³ *Ireland Health System Information* (no date) *World Health Organization*. Available at: <https://euro.who.int/countries/ireland> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

⁴ Gilmartin, M. (2015) *Ireland and migration in the twenty-first century*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

significant electoral attention in 2024⁵, though direct provision—the system for housing asylum seekers—has been critiqued for some time.⁶

Throughout the 20th century, Ireland was regarded as a ‘Catholic’ country with the Catholic church and the government exerting significant control over lives and politics around sexualities, genders, and reproduction.⁷ This included the criminalisation of homosexuality, the incarceration of unmarried pregnant women, the banning of abortion, hetero-patriarchal access and limitations to medical and health care, control of education, state recognition of—and associated financial benefits for—married couples, restrictions on women working, and a constitutional assertion around a woman’s “life within the home,” which remains from the first constitution in 1937.⁸ A referendum in 2024 around the removal of this clause to replace it with language around care was defeated by 74% with public opposition from feminist and disability groups as well as those who were opposed to the removal of “woman” from the constitution.

Ireland’s membership in the European Union, alongside economic transformation based on a low tax regime and multinational corporations setting their EU bases in Ireland, has significantly changed, and been changed by, the sexual and gendered landscapes of what can be termed a ‘New Ireland’. This change has been both as a result of LGBTQIA+ and feminist activism, including winning legal cases at EU level, as well as a push from organisations who sought liberal tax and social regimes for their profits and the attraction of employees. Since the 1990s, changes have included the decriminalisation of homosexuality (1995), the establishment of employment rights, and anti-discrimination legislation based on legally termed ‘protected characteristics’. This followed a number of court cases, activism and significant contestation by governments and institutions. The passing of the 2015 referendum introducing marriage equality, and the 2018 referendum removing the constitutional ban on abortion, fundamentally shifted the Irish context in terms of sexualities and genders.⁹ These were accompanied by the passing of the Gender Recognition Act in 2015, which allows self-declaration of gender identity without a certificate from a medical practitioner; this put Ireland ‘ahead’ of other countries in terms of legislative change concerning gender recognition.¹⁰

⁵ Cox, J. (2024) Politics watch: Migration challenge dominates debate, June elections in spotlight, BreakingNews.ie. Available at: <https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/politics-watch-migration-challenge-dominates-debate-june-elections-in-spotlight-1624648.html> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

⁶ O’Rourke, M., Quilty, A., Barron, M., BeLonG To, Conrad, K., Walshe, É., and Sullivan, M. (2013) ‘Roundtable: Are We Queer Yet?’ *Irish University Review*, 43(1), 12–54. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24576810> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

⁷ McAuliffe, M and Kennedy, S (2017) ‘Defending Catholic Ireland’ in Kuhar, R and Paternotte, D (eds.) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilising against Equality*. Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 133–151.

⁸ O’Donnell, K., O’Rourke, M. and Smith, J.M. (2020) ‘Editors’ introduction: Toward transitional justice in Ireland? addressing legacies of harm’, *Éire-Ireland*, 55(1), pp. 9–16. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/eir.2020.0000> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

⁹ Neary, A. (2016) ‘Civil Partnership and marriage: LGBT-Q political pragmatism and the normalization imperative’, *Sexualities*, 19(7), pp. 757–779. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715616943> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

Browne, K. and Calkin, S. (eds.) (2020) *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics*. London, England: Zed Books

Tiernan, S. (2020) *The History of Marriage Equality in Ireland: A social revolution begins*. Manchester University Press.

¹⁰ Dunne, P. (2021) ‘The Law Concerning Trans Persons in Ireland’, in I.C. Jaramillo and L. Carlson (eds.) *Trans Rights and Wrongs: A Comparative Study of Legal Reform Concerning Trans Persons*. Springer Cham, pp.491–512.

Despite this ‘progress’ and significant changes in the past decades, Ireland’s education system remains predominantly within Catholic patronage (89% of primary schools¹¹ and 48% secondary schools¹²); a significant number of hospitals are also under Catholic patronage (12 of the 18 private hospitals;¹³ seven public hospitals are under Catholic Church ownership, with a faith-based element in the governance of additional hospitals¹⁴); healthcare for trans people is the lowest ranked in Europe,¹⁵ with a three to three-and-a-half year waitlist for a first appointment with the National Gender Service—the only gender identity clinic in the country¹⁶—which, however, does not offer gender affirming surgery. Ingrained anti-sex work positions are a key feature of feminist organising and national politics. The campaigns to win both of the aforementioned referendums have been noted as appealing to certain—white, middle class, gender normative—groupings in Ireland, colloquially known as the ‘million in the middle’, to the exclusion of others, such as those who do not fit the ‘good’ same-sex couple image (including trans people) or who seek the ‘wrong kind’ of abortion. There are also ongoing limitations to abortion legislation and associated access to reproductive healthcare.¹⁷

Sex workers are seen as ‘victims’ legislatively and socially, with norms positioning people in this profession as in need of protection. The current legislation criminalises the purchasing of sex and paternalistically seeks to ‘help’ sex workers. This is seen as part of the ‘New Ireland’ that supposedly ‘protects’ women.¹⁸

As well as the limitations of ‘progress’ in terms of LGBTQIA+ inclusions, more public reactionary contestations are becoming apparent. The contestations of a ‘New Ireland’ that are discussed in this report also encompass protests at libraries for LGBTQIA+ inclusive books, anti-trans actions and mobilisations, and anti-LGBTQIA+ actions. There have also been increasing anti-immigrant mobilisations, through protests, media coverage, political agitation and government responses. In November 2023, a violent anti-immigrant riot took place in Dublin, involving a series of acts of arson, assaults, and vandalism by crowds in the city

¹¹ Kennedy, D. (2023) *Can a diversity of patronage be achieved in Irish schools?*, RTE.ie. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2023/0426/1378983-ireland-school-patronage-education-citizens-assembly/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹² McGuire, P. (2019) *Patron bodies: Who really controls your child's school?*, *The Irish Times*. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/patron-bodies-who-really-controls-your-child-s-school-1.3871501> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³ Boylan, P. (2022) *Catholic Church role in health and schools can no longer be funded by State*, *The Irish Times*. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2022/11/22/church-ethos-and-role-in-healthcare-or-education-can-no-longer-be-funded-by-state/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹⁴ O’Sullivan, T. (2019) ‘The contribution of religion to Irish Healthcare’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 108(431), pp. 288–297. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/stu.2019.0047> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

¹⁵ *Trans Health Map 2022: The State of Trans Healthcare in the EU - TGEU - Transgender Europe* (2022) TGEU. Available at: <https://tgeu.org/trans-health-map-2022/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹⁶ *Waiting times* (no date) *National Gender Service Ireland*. Available at: <https://nationalgenderserviceireland.com/waiting-times-3/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹⁷ de Londras, F. (2020) ‘“A Hope Raised and then Defeated”? the Continuing Harms of Irish Abortion Law’, *Feminist Review*, 124(1), pp. 33–50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0141778919897582> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

McCartan, A. (2022) ‘Geographies of LGBTQ+ Activisms: Ireland After Marriage Equality’, doctoral thesis, University College Dublin. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/13245> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹⁸ Murphy, D. (2022) ‘SWAGS: Sex Workers and An Garda Síochána—Reimagining Sex Work Policing in Ireland’, in T. Sanders, K. McGarry, and P. Ryan (eds.) *Sex Work, Labour and Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 121–147.

centre. These contestations occur alongside the ongoing issues with Ireland's asylum provision—direct provision—and the experiences of LGBTQIA+ migrants in this system¹⁹.

Terminology used

Throughout the case study report on Ireland, we refer to attacks and targeting around genders and sexualities, mostly LGBTQIA+ people, and do not use the term 'anti-gender'.

This report works across gender and sexualities to explore the effects of attacks that mainly target **LGBTQIA+** people and allies as well as the treatment of sex workers. LGBTQIA+ is used to represent the broad Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (plus) communities, recognising that this term does not encompass all identities or lives. It is the term recognised as inclusive in Ireland.

Whilst we used the term '**anti-gender**' in the recruitment for this research, we qualified this by using terms such as 'anti-feminist', 'anti-LGBTQIA+', and 'anti-trans' to make the research relevant to those in Ireland. When asked about the term 'anti-gender' in the research, **it was clear that it had mixed meanings and little significance for people, and was not widely used.** Some Irish academics use the term 'anti-gender', whilst others do not. It does not have a shared meaning (or use outside of academia); further, 'anti-gender' was seen as inaccurate by participants and as not grasping their experiences. It is not used for or related to the attacks people experienced. Some, however, did like it, finding it to be a useful term that allows for solidarity and global connections. Therefore, throughout the report we do not use the term 'anti-gender'; but rather, we refer to attacks and targeting around genders and sexualities, predominantly LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers. This focuses on the organised mobilisations that seek to contest the supposed inclusions of 'New Ireland'.

When we are referring to 'effects' and 'resistances' in this case study report, we are referring to those who are variously subject to anti-trans, anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-sex work, and anti-abortion mobilisations, which can often be simultaneously racist, anti-immigration, classed, patriarchal, and homophobic. The report's focus on 'mobilisations' is key: this distinguishes between individual attitudes and acts of discrimination and aggression—although these can be emboldened through these mobilisations—and **attacks that are organised, targeted, and intentional around sexualities and genders.**

Findings

1. In Ireland, there are targeted attacks and threats against LGBTQIA+ people

Attacks on individuals ranged from direct physical attacks through to social media 'pile ons'. Key to the mobilisation of these attacks was the media, often presenting anti-trans and broader anti-LGBTQIA+ positions as being from "respectable people" who have "reasonable" concerns.

LGBTQIA+ people in this study spoke of being **physically attacked** and receiving threats of physical harm, as they left events or were on their way to work. IRLFG1.1:

There's not very many people that can understand the experience of walking towards work and turning a corner and seeing a group [of anti-LGBTQIA+ protesters] [...] holding banners [...] about you [...] I had a bad run in with them, where it got physical.

¹⁹ There is important work being done on Ireland's system of direct provision and its effects on LGBTQIA+ lives (see for example <https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/entities/publication/8be6bffc-b3a4-410b-9b60-c1088b81f665/details>; and https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10894160.2023.2230108?casa_token=MIqLySgmRDwAAAAA%3Awomvxdlc43oEGKOWtDLMzX2mcB0jpx3ZufibXkSTOWCdWPGnWkixdmxi8oW1b43CfdATbqYwiaUO_A

People who care for those who are attacked, said that these attacks are regular: they occur frequently, or as Julian said, not “as infrequently as I would like”. These attacks are felt by people beyond those who directly experience them; they are attacks “on all of us”.

Participants who are public figures, including those who lead prominent NGOs, particularly trans people in feminist organisations, were often subject to **ongoing targeting**, such as threatening counter-protests and violence at events. Some received warnings from the Garda Síochána (Irish police) about safety, which made them fearful, as these attacks were being taken seriously by the state. They experienced direct threats to their homes and families, including death threats delivered to home addresses, and partners being named in letters to their work to indicate knowledge of personal circumstances.

Media stories targeted organisations and individuals, and amplified anti-trans and more broadly LGBTQIA+ narratives. This created a lack of safety for those who participated in this research, increasing the possibilities of an attack on them. These media representations also fuelled the everyday harassment people experience. “If trans stuff is in the news it's not good news”, IRLFG1.1 said, such that queer people are “scapegoated” and “positioned” as “not what it means to be Irish” (IRLFG1.3).

Complaints from ‘the public’ and work colleagues were cited by participants as a regular feature of daily life for LGBTQIA+ people and allies whose identities/positions are well known. The threat to employment or professional standing through these work-based complaints was heightened for participants by the antagonisation of people through anti-trans or anti-LGBTQIA+ comments at work events and meetings.

Social media attacks were experienced as prolific, regular, and consistent, creating a negative everyday experience for those who use social media. This was particularly the case for those who are trans/LGBTQIA+ or allies who posted supportive content on sex work, feminist, pro-choice, or LGBTQIA+ issues. The attacks used similar phrases with specific social media accounts employed to regularly attack individuals, revealing them to be organised and targeted. These attacks were linked to and exacerbated by media stories against participants or groups with whom they identified, and at times escalated offline in the form of hate mail, including death threats, resulting in the cancellation of events or moving them online due to safety concerns. Even where people carefully curated their social media feeds or avoided being directly targeted, colleagues and others would mention the content in conversation with them, such that they could not avoid it. For one participant, her physical encounter with library protestors was posted on the protestors’ Facebook group and despite reporting it, it was not removed (IRLFG1.1). This means that the attacks can be sustained through social media and morph into new forms of attack in online and offline spaces.

What were termed **“reasonable” concerns by seemingly “respectable” people** were said to be fueled by the media, named as being key to convincing those who may not be aware of, or involved in, these issues to adopt anti-trans, anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-immigrant, and anti-sex work positions. There was a difference recognised between those who lack understanding and awareness and those who act in intentional ways using what are framed as “reasonable” concerns that are difficult to identify and name. Those acting intentionally were seen as being more easily believed by the wider public and creating a panic around trans people that, as Leighton said, infects:

very kind and reasonable people with, like, nonsense [...] She [their mother] [...] was giving me all these concerns that just weren't real [...] and I'm like, “you're a nice person, and you're not negative, and you're smart”, like, this is insanity.

This panic infects people’s “good intentions” (Paula). This is a particular concern in Ireland where the 2015/2018 referendums were read as being won on the basis of shared stories, empathy, and wanting to

be kind. “Respectable people” with “reasonable” concerns are therefore key to societal acceptance and inclusion, not least in media content.

2. Participants spoke of organisational targeting and intra-community attacks

LGBTQIA+ organisations spoke of being subject to sporadic and distressing attacks. Those who worked with sex workers saw embedded anti-sex work positions in state institutions and women’s organisations. Those who perpetrated anti-trans, racist, and anti-immigrant attacks were also to be found within LGBTQIA+ communities.

LGBTQIA+ and trans-specific organisations as well as civil society groups who work on LGBTQIA+ issues experienced significant and orchestrated attacks, which for some are constant. This happened in the media, on social media, by email and over the phone, and physical threats were sent to workplaces; threats to staff; raising complaints with regulators; raising child safety concerns around trans children; and targeted harassment online. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to the organisations and funders of the organisations were cited by participants as taking significant time, and as “exhausting”; FOI requests were addressed not only to the organisations themselves, but also to their funders. Media requests to organisations were fraught with danger: journalists were seen to be trying to catch out representatives by manipulating stories with the aim of creating a controversy, and/or framing individuals and organisations in negative ways. Those who work for organisations could not avoid these attacks, as they became part of their work life.

In regard to schools, participants who worked in youth services told us of orchestrated letter-writing campaigns and leaflet drops outside supermarkets, schools, and churches aimed at dissuading schools from running anti-bullying/equality campaigns or to challenge the Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. These campaigns directly named LGBTQIA+ organisations and said that they “turn” children trans. This increased the level of harassment of those organisations and it was recognised that this sought to prevent their work in schools. Pride flags have also been ripped down and homophobic and transphobic slogans graffitied on school grounds.

Within healthcare settings, trans participants spoke of their limited access to services that support them. Those who worked in the sector spoke of professionals reiterating anti-trans talking points and a “reluctance to engage in anything that might be gender diverse or embracing of gender” (John).

Anti-sex work policies and practices are embedded in the Irish state and its structure. Participants who work in the area noted that sex workers are not supported by those Irish women’s organisations who are supportive of trans people. It was noted that this position fails to account for trans sex workers and that these organisations operate within an understanding of sex work as violence against women and as inherently exploitative. Paying for sex is criminalised by law, leading to issues well established in the international literature, and more recently in Irish studies. This includes targeting sex workers with ‘welfare checks’, interactions with Gardaí and a lack of support services.²⁰ For academics and support organisations who work with sex workers, this is exacerbated by a lack of visibility. Those who spoke publicly about sex workers’ rights said they were subject to attack in the media and on social media, experienced career challenges, and limited or no access to funding. Anti-sex work activism was for some in our study put on a back burner to return to, and is seen as an unfinished and important area for Irish feminists to address.

“Even” with those who were presumed to be allies and within “leftwing” groups, participants felt that “you are never far” from anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-sex work attitudes (Sorcha). For example, for some academics,

²⁰ Murphy, D. (2022) ‘SWAGS: Sex Workers and An Garda Síochána—Reimagining Sex Work Policing in Ireland’, in T. Sanders, K. McGarry, and P. Ryan (eds.) *Sex Work, Labour and Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 121–147. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04605-6_6 (Accessed 24 July 2024).

the attacks on LGBTQIA+ people were seen as being conceded to, through the sanitisation and desexualisation of queer spaces. Similarly RC felt that 'anti-gender' discourses were leading LGBTQIA+ people and allies to make "concessions", becoming more reticent to strongly defend trans access to healthcare: "they are pushing us more to the centre, or more away from what they see as radical, and I think that that is a really dangerous space to be in."

Trans people and their allies have **encountered anti-trans groups** advocating for cis women's rights. LGB discussions and spaces can be anti-trans, although participants said it was more common for LGBTQIA+ services and spaces to be trans-inclusive.

Within **LGBTQIA+ communities, racism and classism were identified and seen as "more troubling" than in the broader society**, because of the expectations participants had of these communities being inclusive of marginalised groups (John). Pradeep described being the queer brown face of a visibility campaign, with the result that he was then subject to racist and anti-immigrant attacks and isolation from queer communities. These attacks meant spaces to explore identities, desires and sexual possibilities were closed off from him.

3. For those who are racialised, classed and gendered in Ireland, intersectional attacks and multiple marginalisations shaped their experiences

Racialised participants and participants with migration backgrounds experience attacks on intersecting levels. Working class communities are particularly targeted for anti-immigrant and anti-trans mobilisations. Lesbians and lesbian organisations were assumed to be anti-trans and were targeted by individuals and organisations—mainly outside of LGBTQIA+ communities—who sought their support. Conversely, those who hold intersecting positions of privilege can feel insulated from attacks.

Racialised people and migrants in Ireland and multiply marginalised participants experience attacks and threats in multiple forms. Their experiences of attacks throughout recent decades, including those outlined in this section, challenge the assumptions that equality had been achieved in Ireland or that there was a 'golden age' around the 2015 and 2018 referendums.

Participants spoke of a "swing" between anti-immigrant and anti-trans attacks, with sudden moves from one to the other in the media. For trans people with migration backgrounds, this means the attacks have been constant. These attacks are a "new weight" (Pradeep) for those who had moved to Ireland and were racialised, and had also experienced attacks in their countries of origin. The idea of Ireland as a 'safe place' contrasted with their experiences of racist, anti-migrant, anti-LGBTQIA+ attacks.

Racialised people who were the target of attacks said that they feel at risk of more negative reactions; as Helen said: "I don't want to get, like, a lot of racist abuse as well, on top of the anti-woman abuse." Where attacks are personalised and where migrant status or racialisation is targeted, it is felt that families can be more at risk. Seeking a low profile and avoiding visibility were strategies participants used in an effort to protect not only themselves, but also their families. Their self-protection mechanisms included avoiding protest marches or not performing other acts of solidarity or resistance due to feelings of vulnerability because of their racialisation, migration status, and age.

LGBTQIA+ organisations, which were under attack by anti-LGBTQIA+ actors and organisations, were also experienced as white-dominated. Recognising that these organisations were under attack, participants of colour also noted that the attacks and targeting can be exacerbated where intersectional experiences are not accounted for. Where brown and black people are not represented in leadership positions, on boards and elsewhere, white perspectives, needs and priorities were seen to dominate.

Participants in **working class communities** experience the effects of these attacks on their entire communities and families. These communities are increasingly targeted by anti-immigrant groups and also anti-trans rhetoric, including during electoral campaigns, meaning that those attacks were felt more acutely in these communities, as various discourses circulated amongst family and friends. Whilst not unique to working class communities, participants said that their community leaders were not equipped to offer the solidarities particularly around trans issues. They said that community leaders had brought communities together during the 2015 and 2018 referendums on same-sex marriage and abortion, but that this was not being seen in regards to anti-immigration and anti-trans mobilisations.

Lesbians and lesbian organisations were falsely presumed to be allies for gender critical groups.

They were approached by people seeking to propagate anti-trans rhetoric and to develop anti-trans organisations in Ireland. Those who approached them were often perceived by participants as not being part of LGBTQIA+ communities. Participants were approached and seen by others as “the haters”, “the anti-trans people” (IRLFG3.4). Presuming lesbians to be anti-trans, which was inaccurate in this case study, is an effect of the mobilisations against trans rights. Namely, it assumes lesbians are allied with those who are anti-trans, including straight women and men. By assuming that their lesbian and feminist activism is anti-trans, their trans inclusive organisation and allyship that extended for decades was overlooked and negated. In response, participants and their respective organisations were public about their trans inclusive positions, which then led to anti-trans attacks and targeting.

In contrast to those who identified race, class, age, and gender as having an effect on their experiences of attacks and targeting regarding gender and sexualities, were **those who understood themselves as privileged by these intersections**. These were men, women, cis and trans people who variously saw their whiteness, gender, age, physical profile (height and build), able-bodiedness, current class status, secure employment, work colleagues and environment, and support from social networks as protecting them from the intense impacts that others experienced. These participants felt that they could use these privileged positions and influence to speak out against and resist the mobilisations and attacks.

4. These attacks have been on the increase since the turn of the decade

Personal and organisational attacks experienced by participants have increased significantly and have become targeted at individuals recently. This was unexpected for some; for others it was a continuation of older forms of discrimination. Participants expected that these attacks would continue to increase in the future.

Participants identified the **increase in attacks** as an effect of organised mobilisations against sexual and gendered equalities. They identified an “acceleration of a very specific and very violent kind of anti-trans and anti-queer sort of organising”, and that “that voice has become much louder” (Anne), having significantly intensified since 2018. Anti-trans mobilising was noted as having a significant uptick. This, it was noted, did not coincide with the passing of gender self-recognition five years earlier, in 2015. Participants said the attacks were often not seen as a problem, and that this was especially the case where they are presented as “reasonable” concerns by “respectable people”. In the current Irish context, this increase in attacks demonstrated to participants that people who hold anti-LGBTQIA+ views are now “more emboldened” (Paula). The effects of the spread of discourses and ideas were apparent where they “have talking points now where they didn’t have before” (Gordon).

For participants, attacks have **increased in quantity and frequency**. Those in the research noted that where attacks on social media used to be “occasional” for those who are public figures and/or post on social media regarding topics such as gender, sexuality, feminism, migration and sex work, they are now daily. The attacks have also **increased in personalisation**: whereas once, as Sara said, they targeted communities as a whole—such as trans or LGBTQIA+ communities—they are now trained on individuals.

Participants who are academics spoke of increases in students who take issue with university lectures particularly when they involve trans guest speakers or the discussion of trans issues.

Nevertheless, the level of attacks are **not understood by participants to be on the same scale of the UK, USA, or Eastern Europe**. Yet participants worried about the complacency of locating anti-trans mobilisations 'over there' (rather than 'here' in Ireland), or seeing Ireland as exceptional in terms of 'far-right' and anti-immigration political parties. This was particularly concerning for those who increasingly feel the direct effects and see this as growing and intensifying substantially.

There was **surprise** amongst those in the research **when they directly or indirectly encountered attacks, targeting and mobilisations**. There was a recognition that the "easy" narrative of marriage equality (IRLFG6.1) was very different from the hostile culture around trans lives, genders, and bodies, which drives anti-trans attacks. People knew those who didn't agree with LGBTQIA+/trans lives existed, and didn't believe they had 'gone away'. Nonetheless they were surprised when it happened to them, or to those they knew. They read this as being because of the emboldening and intensification of anti-LGBTQIA+ groups and discourses.

For some of those who recently directly experienced attacks, they thought "those days were over" (Moninne) in Ireland. Ireland is a context where "it's become much easier to be a queer or a trans person [...], like undoubtedly to what it was even ten years ago" (Anne). The emergence of organised attacks were felt as upending this expectation of lives becoming "easier". This was experienced as an unexpected jolt and a direct effect of mobilisations against LGBTQIA+ communities, particularly trans people. For those such as Sean who had "fought the battles" of the 2015 and 2018 referendums there was a feeling that:

[marriage equality in Ireland] for many of us, it represented a new Ireland [...] There was a lot of excitement in the sense of a new world. I'm far less hopeful now [...] there has been [moves] to suddenly cast the trans community as being highly problematic [...] We thought that battle had been won. But I don't know if those battles can ever be won.

Those who had lived through these experiences saw continuities between then and now such that patriarchy, homo/bi/trans-phobia "have always been here" (Katherine). However, some participants who had more recently migrated to Ireland recognised the problems with the assumptions of "post-homophobia", "post-everything" (Julio), where people do not recognise the ongoing effects of discrimination or the organised attacks people and organisations are experiencing.

The attacks around gender and sexuality were expected by many in the research to increase into the future because "the foundation's already been built" (Kevin). They felt that Ireland was being readied for an increase in anti-trans mobilisations and there was significant fear that the progress achieved across LGBTQIA+ equalities was not secure.

5. There are ongoing residual effects of being targeted and attacked

People who are targeted suffer because of the ongoing and residual effects of these attacks on their lives. These include fear, physical and mental health effects, problems at work, and family and relationship pressures.

Kevin: The spectacle event scares me, but it's always the residual event afterwards, the one that gets quieter, that kind of festers there, waiting for its next time to kind of pounce, that's what scares me a lot more.

A key residual effect of attacks was fear. Participants found that the atmosphere that is being created means that random attacks by emboldened individuals are more possible alongside those that are

organised. Most of them take various measures to reduce the likelihood of being attacked and targeted. This included office security, only going to work if someone was there to walk them to and from their workplace, avoiding certain places at certain times, and isolation for those who are scared to leave their homes. This fear played a significant role in how people use and move about in spaces. There was a worry about walking along certain roads in case of violence, cat-calling, and other attacks. Abusive letters and online attacks including death threats meant people were fearful of something more happening to them or their families. They spoke of an underlying feeling of being 'on edge'—that for some was never felt before—when walking in public, entering workspaces, lecture theatres, and other public arenas. Fears of complaints were apparent in professional roles as a result of being targeted and being visible.

Mental and physical health was damaged by the cycle of attack/fear which “takes a massive toll” (Han). Being subject to “relentless” attacks was “physically very, very, very tiring” (Michelle); “upsetting and difficult” (Martina); and “a challenge everyday” (Martina). Participants identified an acute level of stress in being subject to these attacks as they required significant emotional investment as well as time in order to deal with them. The **activists that had been targeted, despite significant experience of working in this arena and recognising the continuities between battles ‘then and now’, spoke of themselves as struggling with physical and mental health in ways that they had not previously during the decades of their work.**

Work, employment, and activism is also scaled back to avoid both physical attack and draining effects on emotional health and resources of being targeted; as Sara said, “I need my life back”. In academia, “contentious research” around sex work can be purposefully limited due to funding and to protect employment and standing. Those who are under attack through their work role find this affects their professional standing and their ability to undertake and retain their job. People who have been attacked can consider leaving roles and employment for safety and health reasons; as a result, highly qualified and extensively experienced people can no longer use their skills to support marginalised and vulnerable communities. There is a fear of loss of employment due to the attacks resulting in the person being “considered a problem, and then, do I become unemployed as a result eventually?” (Conor). There is significant pressure involved in staying in roles where there were direct calls for participants to be fired, which “can't not impact upon you, even though I tried to laugh it off” (Sean). Where employees were under pressure to ensure they provided the “right answer” (IRLFG5.4), they felt a responsibility to their colleagues, and even to “the existence of organisation” (Michelle).

Most participants **moderated or limited their social media and media interactions**. People feared being set up for ‘a debate’ in which their words could be twisted; they felt that they would be pressured to speak on areas they were not equipped to address. This left a void that meant anti-trans rhetoric, in particular, was left unchallenged. For those still on social media, although some immunity can be created for these attacks, the effects persist. Media and social media attacks can be harder to deal with as more people leave these platforms, resulting in fewer allies.

Due to the targeting of **homes and families**, some are newly cautious in ways they were not before, regarding who is allowed into their private spheres. This runs alongside dealing with attacks throughout evenings and weekends. There is a significant effect on relationships and family life when subject to these attacks. For those who worked in the sector, this **lack of boundaries between work, social and home lives** meant they avoided certain topics, so they did not have to be ‘on’ all the time; but this also meant a lack of support and isolation. This was exacerbated by those who told us that they became **spokespeople for LGBTQIA+ rights within their families**. They were relied on for answers and they had upsetting things said to them. Their contact details were shared by family members and friends with others, including people they didn't know, so that they could be questioned about the latest media stories and events. Where anti-LGBTQIA+/anti-trans talking points come up at family events and occasions, in social spaces, and with

others, they can pull away from family and friends, including vital support networks during the times when these might be most needed, because the person, or where they work, is being attacked. Participants avoided revealing their employer to new friends or revealing the extent of the impacts of the attacks in case their family worried about them. Friends were also not relied on to be a source of escape, to keep their attention away from organisations or incidents that were already receiving enough publicity. This meant **participants often felt unsupported outside of the work environment, even when they were subject to attack for doing their work supporting LGBTQIA+ people.**

6. Organisations and their work are detrimentally affected by targeting and attacks

Organisations subject to attack were significantly impacted in terms of their capacity to provide their services to those who need them, and in the effects on staff. Organisational funding has been impacted as funders are targeted and the area they are working in becomes 'controversial'. There is a fear for the organisations' survival.

Attacks on organisations had significant effects on their capacity as well as on employees where “you spend so much time [...] just trying to backpedal against it and probably not making any gains” (IRLFG6.1). When under attack, and because of the residual effects of these attacks, organisations said they have to focus their resources on dealing with them, including staff time, staff counselling, policy reviews, updates for physical safety, board meetings, preparing responses, engaging with Gardaí, and dealing with partners and funders. This was now something they dealt with on an ongoing basis as they anticipated the next wave of attacks and waited for “something more sinister” (Paula).

They reported that, being drained of resource capacity in countering ongoing attacks in these ways, there were also **fewer resources to focus on supporting vulnerable people** in their services who need them. This was made worse because the people they are supporting are also experiencing these attacks and require additional help to deal with them. Participants such as Moninne spoke of the effects on staff and those they support:

The target community that we're working with are affected by the rise in populism and [...] attitudes and behaviour that's homophobic and biphobic and transphobic and racist and sexist and all that kind of thing. It's had quite a big impact naturally on the people that we're working with [...It is] very upsetting to see how much they're [those within and outside the organisation] struggling and how much they're suffering.

The vitriolic responses and safety threats that participants' organisations received were not only dangerous in nature but harrowing for staff and service users, as well as for those who potentially needed their services. **Support groups became less visible** to keep people safe. Participants reported removing their organisations from social media, not advertising meetings or support groups. These would once have been on webpages and open for those who need them to find them. They placed fewer or no paid online adverts to support raising awareness for those who need the service, and to advertise fundraising initiatives. Those who needed support had to get in touch directly with the organisation to find details of venues, times and groups, rather than this information being publicly available for drop-ins. It also means choosing venues without visibility to public streets as the spread of media stories and “talking points” make random attacks more of a risk. **Overall, participants told us that support and services are harder to access for those who need them.**

When organising events, organisers in the research told us that they were very aware of the **risks to attendees** and took measures to mitigate those risks, such as using private launches with specific attendance lists. This limits attendees to those who are known and the overall reach and awareness of activities that organisers would want to be very public and vocal about. Organising events regarding gender

and sexualities can now involve liaising with the Garda Síochána, having a policing plan in place, and hiring security. Participants who organised events recognised that this can mean individuals or communities who have had negative encounters with security personnel or Gardaí, including in racialised or classed ways, may feel less welcome.

Individual staff and service users whose stories are key for social change were featured increasingly less often in public-facing materials. Yet, participants who work with vulnerable people recognise that their stories are the most effective when portraying the need for services and creating necessary societal change. Trans spokespeople were mentioned as being specifically targeted. For cisgender people who worked in LGBTQIA+ organisations, they recognised a tension between seeking to protect trans individuals and also not speaking for trans people.

Participants restricted, and were wary of, engagement with the media. Participants both wanted to challenge “false narratives” and put across expert views based on working with vulnerable and marginalised people. However, individual and organisational visibility came with heightened and increased risks. They outlined their dilemma: “do we respond and have a voice in that space, and give context to things, or do we risk that being taken out of context, or misrepresented in what we say?” (Michelle)

These limitations to events, media and public facing materials, and attacks on organisations and funders, meant that **they found their organisations and work were less attractive to potential funders.** The increase in the attacks meant that some corporate sponsors were seen as “getting scared” after the “honeymoon” period following the marriage equality referendum and the passing of the gender recognition act (Paula). This was leading to a decline in their resources and a reduction in opportunities to grow. Although it had yet to happen, those working in organisations saw these attacks as a threat to their existence and the work they do.

7. Resistances to organised attacks were apparent through visible and public actions that challenged anti-LGBTQIA+ attacks

Resistances to attacks included visible and public challenges; being present, “not going away”, and speaking to the media. Making space for joy was seen as critical to countering attacks.

Resistances to attacks take various forms and are built on and sustained through hope, to be ready to “deal with” what was seen to be coming (IRLFG3.4).

Protesting and counter-protesting were seen as a key way of publicly challenging the rise of organised attacks. These included counter-protests at libraries and appearances by anti-trans speakers from the UK, as well as at LGBTQIA+ protests and celebrations of Pride and Alternative Pride. Protest marches allowed participants to feel “part of something” (John), to feel safe, and to have a shared sense of purpose in “campaigning for the same thing” (IRLINT03). It was uplifting for participants who felt under attack when, for example, a large number of trans communities and their allies were seen to come out into the streets. Activists and organisations in Ireland also used boycotts of media outlets to address damaging media reporting.

People resisted in everyday spaces. This included turning up to work, being vocal in meetings, and making clear statements in everyday interactions regarding LGBTQIA+ rights, sex worker rights, and anti-racism. **Being present, being seen, and being a defiant presence** meant participants stayed in difficult and contentious situations for those who needed support. In workplaces, Katherine spoke of being “polite and brave” and the importance of “not going away”. Amongst those who stayed on social media despite regular and consistent abuse were participants making strong statements on LGBTQIA+, and

particularly trans, inclusions. For academics, being visible and speaking on trans rights and sex work in the Irish context was a “little act of resistance” (IRLINT01). One academic we spoke with sought the “normalisation” of sex work in response to “the taboo and the stigma” that she found in her work with sex workers (IRLINT01). Resistances to attacks also included: *not* making complaints that would give more airtime to those who perpetrated abuse; applying for funding to study key areas including ‘anti-gender’; and publicly discussing work that could be targeted in public talks, academic spaces, or in the media. **“Not going away” and instead continuing as much activism and activity as possible weighed against the mental and physical effects and safety threats that participants experienced because they stayed.**

Countering attacks through media appearances and social media involved participants making counter statements, and promoting positive representations of trans and broader LGBTQIA+ communities and people, and sex workers. Activists deliberately engaged with gender critical/anti-trans actors to dilute their influence by “distracting” them from “spending time on someone who might have more vulnerabilities” as well as influencing those who might be reading or listening (John). However, some individuals, including participants who ran organisations, grappled with the safety risks. Most did not feel comfortable appearing publicly themselves or nominating others to do so, in ways that were possible before. This was also noted for sex workers. Countering the institutional narratives of the necessary harm of sex work, and of supposedly “protecting” sex workers in actuality meant that they were “under threat” in media and governmental spaces (Paul).

Making “space for collective joy” (El), including parties, creative outlets, support networks, alongside organising, building, and countering attacks, can mitigate the heaviness of organisational work, attack and the fear of attack (El). This included the LGBTQIA+ groups that were seen as effective and as offering community in tough times, creating visions of “what it should be like” (Kevin). Julian used community organisation as a way to resist and empower, by organising trans only events to “create a different world, a safer world, by changing people’s relationships with the world that actually exists”. Countering the suffering and sadness, Pradeep supported himself and others by creating a support group for people of colour to speak to others who had faced racism in queer Irish spaces, and homo-, bi- and transphobia.

8. Alliances, solidarities and friendships are key to resistances and to the support needed to survive

Intra-community alliances are important and mean that anti-trans mobilisations have not taken hold in key organisations in Ireland. Solidarity from other organisations and individuals provided vital support, with friendships giving critical, at times lifesaving, support.

Allies were found in multiple places, including with other queer groups and individuals, feminist and anti gendered violence organisations, library staff, and neurodivergent representative groups. **Intra-community alliances** were seen as key, as organisations worked across a variety of LGBTQIA+ groups, at times having to compete for funding. **Participants told us that the relationships developed between feminists and LGBTQIA+ people during the 2015 and 2018 referendums offered “strong foundations” (IRLINT03) for ongoing solidarities and shared actions.** These alliances contested anti-trans mobilising because of those who were involved in these campaigns. Participants reported that the organisational structures developed through fighting the referendums had created relationships of trust across LGB, trans and feminist communities. This meant that Irish feminist organisations were playing a key role in *not* facilitating anti-trans attacks and threats. Trans people’s presence in feminist organisations also lent itself to a continued support of trans rights. Similarly those who worked in Irish LGBTQIA+ media ensured that it was actively trans inclusive by not giving more attention to anti-trans activists or narratives.

Solidarity marches and support from NGOs, political parties and others outside of trans, LGBTQIA+, and sex worker organisations were identified and valued by those who were being attacked, or who feared this. Solidarity included support in numbers at events and protests, and everyday assistance. **Mainstream organisations were seen to have more weight** with the wider public than issue-specific organisations, in their public support of groups such as trans people and sex workers. Solidarity could be felt on marches and actions, though not directly related to sexualities and genders, but that referenced them. One example was Marches for Palestine that demonstrated pro-trans inclusions not only through flags and signs, but also through including trans people in the event. Participants valued venues that were provided for organisation; LGBTQIA+ book clubs and other events were organised even when libraries were under attack. **Library staff were commended for countering the restriction of library services and LGBTQIA+ books on behalf of LGBTQIA+ people.**

Coalition building was identified in the establishment of alliances for societal level changes. Organising across groups was seen as central to resisting anti-trans rhetorics and actions, and the growth of attacks and threats in these arenas. Coalitions were seen to be built on recent successful relationships in the referendums. The ideal for some participants would be to build coalitions to work against a broader threat of 'the far-right' including gender and sexualities.

Friendship provided care and support; for participants who had experienced attacks, it was often essential while they were taking place and in the aftermath, including caring for people physically and offering emotional support, and practical help such as walking people to or from work after an attack. Friendship affirmed participants' lives and identities in ways that they said would have otherwise been overwhelmed by their experiences. Friendships offered participants community and belonging. Faye, for example, described how her friends had embraced her trans identity when she came out to them. This was part of a general sense that she has "felt affirmed" in her identity far more often than she has felt "misgendered or not affirmed". Friendships also enable, bolster, and maintain resistances, such as through solidarity and the embracing of enjoyment and celebration.

9. Conversations and dialogues—"having the chats"—are crucial to creating better worlds for marginalised people in Ireland

Everyday conversations—"having the chats"—were core to resistance in Ireland, based on a 'gentle approach' that sought to invite genuine questions and concerns. They were not without costs to those who engaged in them. Naming abuse and those perpetuating it, and providing vocal support was valued alongside dialogue.

"Having the chats" was seen as a part of Irish culture predicated on Ireland's small population. Participants said that everyday conversations at work, home or social events were key to resistance. The personalisation of these conversations was understood as critical to limit the potential for attack within communities and to support those who had experienced them. One participant felt that the personalisation enabled by these conversations meant that "when you actually do know somebody, you can relate to them" (IRLFG3.4). For many participants this prevents othering and dehumanisation. By sharing personal stories and linking the conversations to known friends and family, participants generated empathy for those affected by the attacks.

Central to having conversations that can counter attacks and targeting was a "gentle" approach "that's not going to alienate them by then making them double down" (Tom). Participants met those who have so-called "reasonable" concerns where they are, in order to "bring them to where I am". (Kelsey). They avoided lecturing, being 'pushy' or being perceived as difficult. Participants saw danger in positioning trans people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and anyone who is 'woke' as easily offended and defensive. They recognised that these approaches might push people with genuine questions away. Using a gentle

approach sought to move friends, families, work colleagues and acquaintances away from antagonistic media and social media content, which was “telling them how needy and annoying and demanding and controversial LGBT people are” (IRLFG1.3). Catching people at critical moments meant that open discussions were possible before they became more strident and decided on their views.

Participants wanted to allow for the expression of doubt or curiosity. In the absence of this, there was “a real danger” (IRLFG3.2) of the attacks, discourses and attitudes taking further hold. Irish organisations had worked together to create specific, quiet spaces for other groups and organisations to ask questions, present doubts and learn in a way that was focused on dialogue. “Equipping our allies” (Moninne) was seen as avoiding fear, and developing understanding. It was perceived as central to developing the support needed to survive and thrive in the face of attacks. These conversations are contrasted with those who seek to ask questions for nefarious reasons: to waste time, or to gather information to be used against individuals and organisations, or waste resources.

Engaging in dialogue meant participants allowed space for conversations, for getting things ‘wrong’ and/or causing offence. Those who worked and ran organisations saw dialogue and open conversations as central to their role and the coalition building that enabled them to resist the attacks and targeting they experienced. This meant engaging in “really, really tough conversations”, including with those in feminist organisations to “find common ground” and avoid “cancelling” others (Moninne). These dialogues are seen as central to the capacity of organisations to collectively resist. In this context, participants recognised that “if we won’t talk to them, [name of agitator who is globally recognised] will” (Helen).

There are costs to this approach. People find these conversations difficult and challenging as they can encroach on their everyday lives as well as being part of some participants’ work pressures. Participants reported the increase in attacks, media reports and targeting as leading to them being asked questions by family, friends and in other social spaces, creating difficult moments in spaces that were, or should have been, supportive. Marie spoke about the “heavy” impact of the responsibility to have these conversations to support trans people and others. Certain trans and other organisations **did not want to engage in a dialogue based approach. Participants valued a “calling out” approach which was more vocal, although none saw these preventing “having the chats”.**

10. Irish state support and contemporary Irish culture allows for a more inclusive country that has not embraced attacks around genders and sexualities, but this is limited, as the Dublin riots highlighted

Irish state support and civil society groups, including feminist organisations, are seen as supportive of LGBTQIA+ lives but not of sex workers. Ideas of Ireland as exceptional, with anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-migrant views coming from elsewhere were starkly challenged by the anti-immigrant riots in Dublin in 2024.

The state and its institutions in Ireland are seen to be supportive of LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equalities more broadly. Ireland was reported to be an inclusive state, if not for sex workers, because of: changes in legislation; wins in the 2015 and 2018 referendums; a mixed race “gay Taoiseach” (Irish head of government, IRLFG3.4); and the advent of self-identification. Access to abortion is seen as a “settled” question and only being politically contested in regard to legislation to further enable access and the restricting of protest actions around clinics. The presence of existing laws and policies, then, offer flawed but important safeguards (Alexander) and “psychological safety” for some (IRLFG3.2). This is coupled with institutional recognition and protections in state and private organisations for some LGBTQIA+ people. LGBTQIA+ organisations also told us that they had experienced support from state and other institutions, even when spurious complaints were made. Support from trusted organisations such as the Ombudsman for Children publicly supporting trans people, advice on safety from the Garda Síochána (Irish police), and

government representatives being open to discuss the impacts of sex work legislation on sex workers were valued by participants. This access was directly related to a small Irish population, as compared to other jurisdictions, which allows for a political system that is “a more participatory democracy” with accessible public representatives (Katherine).

Participants noted that **Irish mainstream public representatives had not engaged with or perpetuated anti-trans rhetoric** and had not sought to create a political atmosphere that aimed to attack trans or LGBTQIA+ people. This was linked to the referendums, the successes of which enabled access to politicians and policy makers :they were available and open to be spoken to “plainly” about the dangers of these attacks and how to “inoculate” against them (IRLFG6.1).

Irish culture was understood as welcoming and open, particularly for LGBTQIA+ people. This was seen as different to other places, particularly the UK and the USA; it was connected to Ireland’s history and place in international peacekeeping. Attacks are seen as infiltrating from outside of Ireland and attributed to the influence and direct participation of actors particularly from England and the USA. Participants noted that in Ireland people can “hold differing opinions around stuff that are sometimes conflictual” (Moninne) and find “common ground” (John). This was linked to a refusal of a “domineering nationalist kind of view” because “we don’t believe we’re perfect” (Katherine). Participants felt part of the community in a country that is perceived as doing well within the “European context” (Michelle) with no “populist anti-trans political movement as of yet” (IRLFG5.5). Irish culture was seen as being composed of a small population, meaning people are likely to know those who might come under attack. This offers a quiet resistance to attacks through “innate decency” (Tom), people being “pretty sound” (‘sound’ being the Hiberno-English term for ‘decent’) because “average people” are allies (IRLFG5.5). Some participants felt a respect for people’s space, which means that the attacks do not spread, even though, as noted above, “respectable” and “reasonable” narratives are powerful. This is augmented by a widespread rejection of protests in residential areas, which are seen as an unacceptable invasion of space. This limits direct organised attacks on homes for some.

This view of Irish culture was challenged by the Dublin riots (November 2023), which opposed immigration. They act as a stark reminder of the ways in which quietness cannot be seen as only indicating acceptance. They also show that anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-immigrant views are not outside of Irish culture but remain a present feature:

John: We pretend all the time [that Ireland is exceptional] [...] of course there are loads of bigots and horrible people, and violent people in Ireland, and then it [Dublin riot] happened [...] and it was that kind of real, so I had a shock where I shouldn't have had a shock.

Julian: I was like, “fuck, I knew it, but now I know it”.

Conclusion

This report has shown that Ireland’s ‘trajectory of progress’ around sexualities and genders in the 21st century is seen to be coming to an end. This was directly linked to increased, personalised, and vitriolic attacks on the basis of gender and sexualities on individuals and organisations who worked in these arenas.

Attacks on individuals ranged from direct physical attacks through to social media “pile ons”. Key to the mobilisation of these attacks were the media and the creation of controversies such that “respectable people” voiced and could have “reasonable” concerns. Organisations were attacked through the media, phone calls, and social media. There were local protests at schools, as well as challenges to trans healthcare. This research supports others who have found that the positioning of sex work in a model of patriarchal violence and paternalistic care is embedded in the state and women’s and feminist

organisations. This meant there had not been a significant change for those who work in sex worker organisations.

Those who perpetuated anti-trans, racist and anti-immigrant attacks were also within LGBTQIA+ communities. The attacks and their implications were shown to be exacerbated by social differences. Racialised people and migrants experience the attacks on intersecting levels. Those in working class communities felt that these communities are targeted for anti-immigrant, anti-trans mobilisations. Participants experienced a lack of leadership in this area that contrasted with solidarities shown around same sex marriage and reproductive rights. Lesbians have been targeted on the presumption that they are anti-trans. Those who hold various privileged positions can feel insulated from the effects of these attacks and their repercussions.

The increase in attacks was unexpected for some, whilst for others it represented a continuation of their experiences from the end of the 20th century. For all, attacks were seen as getting worse, with the prospect for the future that they would increase.

Individual people suffer because of these attacks in ways that mean they have ongoing and residual effects on their lives. These include fear, physical and mental health effects, problems at work, and family and relationship pressures. Organisations were significantly impacted in terms of their capacity to provide their services to those who need them and the effects on staff. Organisations' funding have been impacted as funders are targeted and the area becomes "controversial". There is a fear for ongoing survival of such organisations if attacks persist.

Resistances to attacks were varied and multiple, demonstrating resilience, solidarity and the desire to engage meaningfully. Resistances included visible and public challenges in protests, everyday public resistances at work, on social media and in the media, as well as "not going away" in professional settings. Making space for joy was seen as critical to counter attacks, mitigating their effects and creating support and resistance. Friendships provided critical, at times lifesaving, support to participants.

Intra-community alliances have developed from recent work around same sex marriage and abortion referendums, bringing LGBTQIA+ and feminist communities together, and providing a solid basis for ongoing work. These have meant anti-trans mobilising has been prevented from taking hold in key organisations. Solidarity from organisations and individuals who are not directly involved in LGBTQIA+ and/or sex work communities can be vital. These solidarities are made possible through coalition building built on dialogue and conversations within and outside of professional settings. Dialogue and conversations were based on a "gentle" approach that sought to invite genuine questions and concerns. They were not without costs to those who engaged in them, and calling out and vocal support was valued alongside "having the chats".

The Irish state is seen as supportive of LGBTQIA+ lives, with civil society organisations, including feminist organisations, being trans-inclusive. Irish culture is also seen as allowing people to live their lives because of a small population that knows each other. However, ideas of Ireland as exceptional, and anti-immigration, anti-trans views as only coming from elsewhere were starkly challenged by the anti-immigrant riots in Dublin in 2024.

There is more work to be done to develop these Irish findings and a lot more stories to be told and heard. This includes areas that are not covered by this case study, and those who should be a part of these conversations; we hope these will be part of future work in RESIST and beyond. To name but a few areas of work that can build on this case study in Ireland: there is significant work to be done on developing research on the targeted effects that focuses on sex workers; those who are affected by anti-abortion

protests, including outside of clinics and more broadly 'anti-feminist' actions. More research is urgently needed to explore anti-racism/anti-immigration/anti-traveller and the classed aspects of these gendered/sexualised/queer politics as they continue to emerge across Ireland. There is further work needed on the effects of the Gardaí, immigration services and other state enforcement, particularly from those directly affected by this system. The focus of this report is on the Republic of Ireland and how these processes operate within Northern Ireland is also an important consideration.

Respondent Profiles

These details are taken from 35 demographic forms. The numbers are not mutually exclusive so people can identify in multiple ways, for example as 'lesbian' and 'queer', and they are counted in all areas that they identified.

Table 1: Respondent profiles Ireland

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample outline
Age groups	34	25-34 years: 15 35-49 years: 8 50-64 years: 11
Gender	35	There were 19 people in the sample who used some variation of female/woman. This included cisgender, trans and unspecified. Eight said that they were male/man, and seven said that they were non-binary or trans non-binary. Note these categories are not mutually exclusive and people can identify across them.
Sexual orientation / identity	35	12 identified as lesbian, ten as queer, eight as gay and five as bisexual.
Origin	35	Most people (27) said that they came from Ireland, eight said that they had moved to Ireland from other places.
Country of residence / legal status	35	All participants lived in Ireland and/or had legal residency in the state.
Ethnic / racial identity	35	Almost all the participants (32) said that they were white/caucasian/Irish/white Irish. Three said that they had another identity.
National identity	35	Most of the participants (31) said that they were Irish, with four having another national identity.
Education level	34	Almost all (33) said that they had a third level education.
Religion	34	Most (26) participants said that they had none/'N/A' /atheist/agnostic. Four said they were lapsed/ex-Catholic or raised Catholic.

Social class	33	22 of the participants identified as middle class, with five saying that they had a working class background. Seven said that they were working class/low income.
Dis/ability	34	Six identified as having a disability.
Settlement type	34	Most (28) participants said that they lived in a big town.
Anything else	8	When asked if there was anything else important to who they were, participants included notes on being: autistic, neurodivergent, a nurse, a scholar, a killjoy, married, poly, a foster-carer, a vegetarian, a volunteer, a parent of LGBTQ young person, feminist, a visual artist, a writer, an activist; and having BPD, having anxiety.