



Conradh na Gaeilge

**Submission for Universal
Periodic Review mechanism
of the UN Human Rights
Council**

21 March 2011

Irish

According to the Irish Constitution, the official language of Ireland is Irish and citizens have the right to do business with the state through Irish. This is confirmed in the Official Languages Act 2003, which describes the specific rights of citizens regarding services through Irish from public bodies.

It is the native language for a minority in Ireland, from Gaeltacht areas mostly. The language is under pressure, however, because of the state's actions, forcing English on native speakers of Irish. The rights to nationality and identity of native speakers of Irish is being breached.

Official Languages Act

Under the Official Languages Act 2003, public bodies are obliged to make 3-year schemes for the development and improvement of Irish language services during the lifetime of the schemes, but the Department of Gaeltacht Affairs must first notify the public body before the scheme is drafted. This means that public bodies are operating in the Gaeltacht areas or have customers from the Gaeltacht that are not obliged to provide services through Irish such as websites, application forms, etc.

Recommendations:

- a) Strengthening the rights of the Gaeltacht community to obtain services from the public sector through Irish in the Gaeltacht. They should not have to rely on these 3-year schemes only.
- b) That the Act be amended so that any agent or company which receives a contract to provide services for a public company or government department must comply to the same conditions of the Department or a state body.
- c) That any new or restructured state company be added to the list of state bodies falling under the Official Languages Act 2003 automatically
- d) That emphasis is placed on bilingual websites to be available as part of any 3 year scheme

Essential Services

There is a large deficit in the public system regarding the amount of people who can provide services through Irish. For example, in 2010 it was reported that only 1.5% of the Department for Education staff are competent to provide service in Irish. English should not be forced on the Irish and Gaeltacht community in their dealings with state bodies; if staff employed in various state departments are not competent in providing services through Irish, it makes a mockery of the Official Languages Act and disclaims language rights of Irish speakers in Gaeltacht and outside it.

There is no state policy about the provision of essential services through Irish in Gaeltacht areas. Conradh na Gaeilge's Gaeltacht subcommittee found from the feedback from 12 Gaeltacht areas that police, lawyers, judges, doctors, nurses and dentists with Irish are not readily available in most of these Gaeltacht areas. English services are being forced, therefore, on the community of the Gaeltacht areas and doing injustice to the rights of the public doing business through Irish with the state and other essential service providers.

See: Judgement on MacAodhain v Ireland & others

(http://courts.ie/Judgments.nsf/HTMLPages_GA/Leathanach%20Baile?OpenDocument&l=ga)

Recommendations:

That the state implements policy regarding the provision of essential services through Irish in Gaeltacht areas to allow easy access to these services through Irish for the Gaeltacht community; for example:

- recruitment balancing act in the public sector to ensure a sufficient number of persons competent in the language in the various State Departments.
- organizing the Gaeltacht areas as a district of the District Court in which Irish would be the language of work and procedure.
- organizing the Gaeltacht areas as a circuit of the Circuit Court in which Irish would be the language of work and procedure.

Education

There is no recognition given to native Irish speakers in the educational system. The Irish language curriculum in the Irish education system is based on learner needs, & it does not meet the needs of the native Irish speaker

Recommendations:

It is necessary to distinguish the different linguistic development needs of native Irish speakers and other competent speakers, and those with English as their first language, and develop appropriate curricula to meet these needs.