

For Inclusion
For Equality
For Everyone



Nov 2020

Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the Statement of Strategy 2021-2023.

LGBT Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the content, direction and priorities addressed in its Statement of Strategy 2021-2023.

LGBT Ireland is a national charitable organisation working to improve the visibility, inclusion and rights of LGBT+ people living in Ireland. Through our helpline, online and face to face services, we provide confidential support and information to thousands of LGBTI+ people and their family members each year.

Informed by the issues and experiences raised through our frontline services, we also work extensively in the area of policy and legislative reform to ensure that LGBTI+ people's voices are heard in the policy and practice developments that affects their lives.

LGBTI+ Youth and Inclusion Strategies

LGBT Ireland recognises the progress made during the previous Government term with the development of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018 to 2020¹ (now extended to 2021) and the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019 to 2021².

It is essential that the two existing plans, the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy 2018 to 2020 (2021) and the LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019 to 2021, are fully resourced and implemented, with all target outcomes achieved by the end of the period. Subsequently, a strategic approach to LGBTI+ equality must be sustained through the development of further strategies that build on these inaugural plans.

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a6f110-lgbti-national-youth-strategy-2018-2020/>

² http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/LGBTI+Inclusion_Strategy_2019-2021.pdf/Files/LGBTI+Inclusion_Strategy_2019-2021.pdf

On looking to build successive strategies, the overarching intention of approach must be twofold:

- **A society that respects and supports all LGBTI+ people**

There are many within the LGBTI+ community who are additionally marginalised and face multiple discrimination including LGBTI+ people who are Travellers or Roma, have disabilities, are migrants, are seeking international protection, are homeless, or are young or older people.

To achieve this, targeted measures that support intersectional needs, are required to improve the lives of those within the LGBTI+ community who experience the greatest barriers to feeling safe, respected and included.

- **A public that understands why LGBTI+ rights matter**

While Ireland is often projected as a world leader on LGBTI+ rights, it is imperative that we stay vigilant and guard against right wing populism that is fuelling anti-LGBTI+ sentiment and a regression in rights in many countries across Europe, and the world.

According to the European Commissions' LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025³ there is a worrying trend in parts of the EU of increasing anti-LGBTI+ incidents such as attacks on LGBTI+ public events including Pride marches, so-called declarations of 'LGBTI+ ideology-free zone', and homophobic intimidation at carnival festivities. Civil society organisations protecting and advancing the rights of LGBTI+ people increasingly report that they face hostility, coinciding with the rise of the anti-gender, and anti-LGBTI+ movement.

Recommendations:

- Achieve all target outcomes relating to the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy 2018-2020 (2021) and the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021.
- Develop subsequent strategies to build on achieved outcomes.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf

LGBTI+ Family Recognition

In 2020 LGBTI+ headed families remain unequal, with many families facing another decade without hope of legal rights or recognition.

Law reform in this area needs to ensure that every child can establish a legal relationship with the parents who love and care for them and that those parents have all the legal tools necessary to care for their child as per LGBT Ireland's 2019 briefing document *Pathway to Parenting, Proposals for Reform*⁴.

To achieve this, a strategic objective to progress comprehensive legislation that reflects the reality of Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) in the 21st century is required. LGBT Ireland looks forward to the publication of Dr Conor O'Mahony, special rapporteur on child protection, report due at the end of 2020 and the Department must act to implement the recommendations contained therein.

Recommendation:

- Enhance cross-departmental collaboration to deliver comprehensive legislation that includes and recognises the right of all children to a legal relationship with their parents.

LGBTI+ Refugees & Asylum Seekers living in Direct Provision

LGBT Ireland welcomes the commitment to end Direct Provision and replace it with a not for profit model as contained in the current Programme for Government⁵.

LGBT Ireland facilitates a monthly peer support group called *Is Rainbow Muid* which specifically focuses on supporting LGBTI+ asylum seekers living in Direct Provision. LGBT Ireland is concerned by the level of mental distress we encounter during the peer support we offer. There are wide-ranging, intersectional discrimination issues impacting LGBTI+ asylum seekers, and this must be recognised as a priority in activities and outputs contained within the departmental strategy.

There must be a clear strategy to implement the recommendations of the Day Advisory Group Report on Direct Provision⁶.

⁴ <https://lgbt.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LGBT-Pathways-to-Parenthood-Proposals-for-Reform-1-1.pdf>

⁵ https://www.greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ProgrammeforGovernment_June2020_Final_accessible.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/634ad-report-of-the-advisory-group-on-the-provision-of-support-including-accommodation-to-persons-in-the-international-protection-process/>

Recommendations:

- Recognise the impact of intersectional discrimination on LGBTI+ Asylum Seekers and actively seek to address this.
 - Implement the interim measures as recommended by the Day Report.
 - Prioritise introducing a not-for-profit model of international protection accommodation with appropriate wraparound supports.
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Hate Speech and Hate Crime

The Programme for Government commits to delivery of Hate Crime Legislation within 12 months of Government formation. This promised legislation is crucial to the safety of the LGBTI+ community. Delivering legislative proposals to ensure that incitement to hatred and hate crimes against LGBTI+ people are adequately addressed in our laws must be a priority.

Recommendation:

- Hate Crime Legislation must be delivered as a priority.
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Covid-19 Implications

The Covid-19 Pandemic has caused incredible hurt, damage and loss across all aspects of society around the world. No single person or community is untouched by this dreadful disease. The LGBTI+ Community already endures the injustice of discrimination and inequality, and recent research conducted by LGBT Ireland, National LGBT Federation and Gay Community News, the report of which is due out at the end of this month will show that the effects of this pandemic have hit the LGBTI+ community much harder than the population at large. Isolation, loneliness, and loss are words we hear from callers to our LGBT Helpline all the time, even before the pandemic hit, and now we see these words repeated in our research at an even greater level.

During the life of the Department's next strategy period, consideration must be given as to how to support organisations in responding to the new challenges that lie ahead.

Recommendation:

- Prioritise supporting civil society and community sector to respond to challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.
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Finally, it must be recognised that many of the issues which prevent LGBTI+ people from achieving their full potential are structural in nature and require a whole of Government approach to devising solutions. Therefore, a commitment to a strengthened and enhanced inter-agency, cross-departmental approach is crucial. The Department itself, must lead from the front to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is a core feature of organisational and HR strategy. The Department must also commit to ensuring that all policy/decision making bodies with responsibility for Equality have representation from the LGBTI+ community.

Recommendations:

- Implement a whole of Government approach to devising solutions to structural issues affecting the LGBTI+ community by enhancing and strengthening inter-agency, cross-department collaboration.
- Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is at the heart of the Departments organisational strategy.
- Implement continuous assessment of all policy/decision making bodies with responsibility for Equality to ensure appropriate level of representation from the LGBTI+ community.

Ends.

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