



Invitation for Submissions - Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Strategy Statement 2022-24 Consultation

Introduction

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC/Commission) would like to invite you to make a written contribution to the consultation process for its new Strategy Statement 2022-2024.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 sets out the Commission role in relation to promoting and protecting human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in Ireland. The Act will provide the framework for the Commission's next Strategy Statement 2022-24.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014

Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (the Act), the overall functions of the Commission are:

- (a) To protect and promote human rights and equality;
- (b) To encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State;
- (c) To promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights and equality in the State;
- (d) To encourage good practice in intercultural relations, to promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity in the State and respect for the freedom and dignity of each person; and
- (e) To work towards the elimination of human rights abuses, discrimination and prohibited conduct.

Section 42 of the Act sets out the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, which places a statutory obligation on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of those to whom they provide services and staff when carrying out their daily work. The Commission gives guidance to public bodies in developing policies and good practice based on human rights and equality standards.¹

¹ <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

Consultation with Individuals and Stakeholders

The Commission is inviting submissions from people (rights-holders) and groups working to eliminate discrimination, and promote and protect human rights and equality. Your contributions will put a spotlight on the issues that you believe should be taken into account when the Commission is developing its' strategic priorities for the next three years.

Submission details

The closing date for submissions is **16 August 2021**.

Format

This submission document is set out in three sections:

- The context for the coming three years
- The performance of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Achieving change

Background

Please select one of the below options:

- Individual
- Civil Society Organisation
- Other body (please specify) _____

If an individual, what group(s) do you self-identify with or wish to highlight here?

If a representative of a group or an organisation, which of the following groups does your organisation's human rights and equality work relate to?

Please select one or more of the following options:

- Age
- Disability
- Civil status
- Family status (including lone parents and carers)
- Gender (including a transgender person or a person who is transitioning to another gender)
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Traveller community
- Housing Assistance

- People at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- Other (please specify) _____

What is the name of your group or organisation? (Optional but helpful if you include)

BeLonG To Youth Services

Section 1: Context for the Commission’s work over the next three years

We would like to understand your experience so that it informs the context in which the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will work over the next three years.

What is going well for you (and your community / constituency)? (Max 200 words)

In the last 3 years, there have been many meaningful actions taken at national and local levels to ensure the equality and safety of LGBTI+ young people. These actions are reflected most succinctly within the:

- [Report of the Steering Committee on the Development of HSE Transgender Identity Services](#)
- [National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021](#)
- [LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020](#)
- [Review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015.](#)

These policy documents have been instrumental in Belong To’s ability to empower young people’s voices and advocate for change. These documents are reflective of the needs of the community broadly.

In addition, the review of the relationship and sexuality education curriculum carried out by the NCCA resulting in a report dedicated to revising the curriculum at primary and post-primary level is incredibly significant as this [report](#) insists on the inclusion of LGBTI+ young people and their experiences within RSE.

The ongoing work towards hate crime legislation and the banning of conversion therapies are two incredibly meaningful endeavours to ensure the safety and protection of LGBTI+ young people.

While LGBTI+ youth continue to face bullying and harassment in schools we have seen an increase in the number of post-primary staff trained and schools participating in Stand Up Awareness week, our national anti-LGBTI+ bullying campaign.

What are the challenges and barriers that you (and your community / constituency) face, including intersectional challenges, please be specific? (Max 300 words)

Despite significant achievements within the past number of years regarding LGBTI+ equality and inclusion, there is still so much more to do as we witness a rise in hate speech and hate crime directed at LGBTI+ young people, a complete lack of gender-affirming healthcare for trans people and an increase in the vulnerability of LGBTI+ young people’s mental health and wellbeing as a result of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns.

Our service in Belong To and the national network of youth groups we support have been critically responding to the needs of LGBTI+ young people in Ireland, through our work and research we have found that:

- [The majority of LGBTI+ young people experience bullying and harassment in school.](#)
- [The majority of LGBTI+ young people have experienced a decline in their mental health and wellbeing as a result of COVID-19.](#)

- Gender affirming healthcare in Ireland no longer provides a service for those under 17 and wait times for adults referred to the national gender service is a minimum of 2 years.
- Many LGBTI+ young people in our service and our national network of youth groups have reported experiencing hate speech and hate crime and have advocated for the implementation of hate crime legislation.
- We have actively supported individuals who have been subjected to conversion therapies in Ireland as a result of their gender identity, expression and/or sexuality, we urgently need to implement a ban on conversion therapies in Ireland.
- [LGBTI+ homelessness is a prevalent issue among the homeless youth community, this research demonstrates the complexities in support LGBTI+ homeless youth and the need for dedicated LGBTI+ homeless supports and services.](#)

Barriers to supporting LGBTI+ youth in a variety of settings be that education, employment, sport, healthcare etc can largely be attributed to:

- Discrimination
- Lack of training
- Lack of awareness regarding the specific needs of the LGBTI+ youth community
- Lack of resourcing to meet the LGBTI+ youth community's needs
- Lack of acknowledgement of the intersectionality within the LGBTI+ youth community

What do you (and your community/ constituency) need to thrive – to have your human rights and equality protected? (Max 200 words)

- The LGBTI+ Youth Strategy and the LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy need to be implemented in full.
- The recommendations of the Steering Committee on the Development of HSE Transgender Identity Services need to be implemented in full.
- Further training, resourcing and research need to be provided to homelessness services to support them in providing services specific to LGBTI+ people.
- Gender identity and sexual orientation need to be captured as demographics within the census to reflect the presence and experiences of LGBTI+ people living in Ireland.
- Schools need to be fully supported and funded to implement LGBTI+ inclusive relationships and sexuality education.
- Hate speech legislation needs to be reviewed and updated to ensure it is fit for purpose and uses up-to-date terminology.
- Hate crime legislation needs to be introduced to protect LGBTI+ people and other marginalized communities.
- Legislation to ban conversion therapies needs to be introduced, the legislation needs to be informed by the experiences of those affected via research and consultation.
- Action needs to be taken to address the health inequalities faced by LGBTI+ people by requiring and resourcing all national and local health and social care

organisations to ensure their services are safe and supportive for the LGBTI+ community.

- Sustained financial investment needs to be directed towards LGBTI+ specific youth work to ensure it is safe and supportive of the needs of LGBTI+ young people.
- LGBTI+ led non-governmental organisations need to continue to be resourced to support and provide services to LGBTI+ communities around Ireland.
- The Gender Recognition Act review report needs to be implemented, to provide legal gender recognition to non-binary people, intersex people and extend the act to include legal gender recognition for trans young people under 18.
- A review and update of the National Action Plan on bullying (2013) needs to be carried out in order to provide specific prevention initiatives for LGBTI+ identity-based bullying in schools.
- Schools need further resourcing and support in order to be safe supportive spaces for LGBTI+ students free from anti-LGBTI+ bullying, we advocate for achieving this by implementing the recommendations from the School Climate Report 2019.

Section 2: Performance of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

We would like to understand how you perceive the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's performance over the past three years.

Strategic Statement 2019-2022 – Priorities

1. Protect the rights of individual persons who face the greatest barriers to justice;
2. Influence legislation, policy and practice;
3. Engage with key organisations to address discrimination and human rights abuses; and
4. Raise the quality and broaden the extent of the dialogue on human rights and equality issues.

Thematic Priorities that crosscut the Strategic Priorities:

1. Promoting access to justice;
2. Advancing social and economic rights;
3. Combatting racism and promoting intercultural understanding; and
4. Progressing the rights of people with disabilities

What are your views on the issues we have addressed and our impact over the past three years? Were there gaps?

Where possible, please refer to a specific aspect of our work – i.e. our legal work; research; legislative and policy submissions; international reporting; civil society engagement, grants programme, public awareness campaigns; public communication; promotion of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty etc. **(Max. 400 words)**

Over the past three years BeLonG To has found the IHREC to be a meaningful allied organisation to our mission and to the needs of the LGBTI+ community. The ways in which this has been most salient for our organisation and the community we work with and support is within the following work carried out by the IHREC:

- Providing information to individuals on their rights.
- The specific work of the commission regarding Human Rights, Equality and Covid-19 particularly the impact of Covid-19 on people in direct provision.
- The IHREC policy statements and submissions on key issues affecting the LGBTI+ community and BeLonG To as an organisation namely within the context of the Electoral Acts, Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women, the review of the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, the UN Universal Periodic Review and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, the 2020 program for Government.

- The Commission's national awareness campaign on disability rights 'Because we're all human. Means we're all equal'
- The commission's consultation directly with young people 'Be Heard on CERD: Ending Racial Discrimination in Ireland'.
- We have also found the IHREC to be an invaluable link to international networks namely the ENNHRI, Equinet and the EU commission.
- The 'Know Discrimination' campaign.

We felt that public communication from the IHREC has been strong via consultation, social media and print communication as well as civil society engagement. While BeLong To did not apply for any of the grant programmes, we were made aware of these opportunities in a timely fashion and endeavour to potentially submit in the future as we feel these are meaningful resources for civil society organisations.

We would always encourage greater inclusion and representation from young people where possible in consultation and supports and services provided by the commission with an eye to ensuring the young people present represent the diversity of experiences among young people in Ireland.

The key issues BeLong To feel are potentially less addressed within the work of the IHREC in the last three years are:

- The healthcare needs of trans, intersex and non-binary people in Ireland and the healthcare inequalities broadly of the LGBTI+ community.
- The needs of intersex people as these needs have been largely unmet in an Irish context and there is additional work needed to support and advocate for the rights of intersex people in consult with intersex communities in Ireland.
- The parental and reproductive rights of the LGBTI+ community have gone unaddressed.
- LGBTI+ awareness training among professionals throughout Ireland to transform educational settings, workplaces and healthcare settings requires additional advocacy.
- The ending of transphobia, biphobia and homophobia in Ireland needs considerable attention across awareness-raising campaigns, education, policy and legislation more so than has taken place in the last 3 years.

Section 3: Achieving Change

We would like to understand how we could work effectively to fulfil our mandate and achieve change.

What issues should the IHREC continue to address and build upon in our new Strategy Statement

2022-24 and programme of work as a priority? (Max. 300 words)

We commend the work of the commission over the past three years and maintain the suitability of the four strategic priorities to address inequality and meet the needs of individuals in Ireland. Of the strategic priorities and their subsequent objectives and outcomes, we feel the following, in particular, should be maintained and captured in some capacity in the next strategic statement.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Protect the rights of individual persons who face the greatest barriers to justice

Objectives:

- Ensure through public information campaigns and digital engagement that the rights and equality of individuals and the means to vindicate them are widely understood.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Influence legislation, policy and practice

Objectives:

- Hold government, public bodies, agencies and businesses to account.
- Continue to develop evidence-based decision-making through an active and ongoing research programme.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: Engage with key organisations to address discrimination and human rights abuses

Objectives:

- Increase community engagement in the work of the Commission.
- Strengthen relationships with civil society and foster an enabling environment for human rights development, including through formal advisory committee structures.
- Engage with any organisation relevant to advancing our mandate and strategic priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: Raise the quality and broaden the extent of the dialogue on human rights and equality issues

Objectives:

- Facilitate a strong and shared culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding including through education, particularly of young people.

What emerging or other issues should the IHREC begin to address in our new Strategy Statement

2022-24 and programme of work as a priority? (Max. 300 words)

BeLong To wishes to draw the commissions attention to the following issues which are matters of specific importance to the LGBTI+ community in Ireland and require intervention in the coming years. BeLong To feel it imperative that the commission make dedicated actions and commitments to addressing these issues in the short and long term.

- There is an urgent need for increased education and public awareness of LGBTI+ equality and inclusion in order to address LGBTI+ bullying, harassment and victimisation.
- Hate crime legislation needs to be implemented to address the increased hate-related crimes involving LGBTI+ people and other marginalised communities.
- A ban on conversion therapies needs to be introduced in order to protect the LGBTI+ community in Ireland against human rights violations in this context.
- The health disparities of the LGBTI+ community need to be addressed with specific attention given to gender-affirming related care, sexual, mental and reproductive healthcare.
- The parental and reproductive rights and needs of the LGBTI+ community in Ireland need to be given dedicated attention in conversion with community members affected.
- The experiences of intersex individuals need to be heard and their specific needs across wellbeing, healthcare, protection and inclusion need to be addressed in dialogue with the intersex community in Ireland.
- The intersectional needs of the LGBTI+ community need to be addressed with specific consideration given to the needs of LGBTI+ people with disabilities, LGBTI+ people in direct provision and members of the LGBTI+ community who are also members of racial and ethnic minorities or marginalised communities specifically the Black, Roma and Traveller communities in Ireland.

How best can the IHREC work with and support the further development of civil society as key actors in addressing discrimination and human rights infringements? (Max. 200 words)

The commission has a strong existing relationship with many civil society organisations and actors and works diligently to foster trust, support and collaboration between these actors and the commission. To further this work and to make the most effective use of the existing relationships we at BeLong To feel it imperative that the commission:

- Continue to raise awareness regarding the work of the various civil society organisations as we strive towards improving the lives of minoritised and marginalised communities in Ireland.
- Continue to facilitate consultations with affected communities and craft considered, evidence-informed submissions to the government and other state and international key players in human rights and equality.
- Continue to work closely with civil society organisations to ensure the voices of affected communities are heard particularly in consultations, statements and submissions.
- Continue to ensure that civil society organisations have input in relation to IHREC actions and planning such as this submission on the commission's strategic statement.

- Continue to increase engagement with young people by providing support and services for the specific needs of young people.
- Continue to provide and advocate for funding for civil society organisations for our vital work to continue and prosper.
- Continue to create space for collaboration between civil society organisations on large and small scales.

What impact would you like to have seen from the IHREC by 2024? (Max. 200 words)

By 2024 it would be an immense achievement from the commission in collaboration with civil society organisations to witness:

- Increased public awareness of the rights and experiences of the LGBTI+ community fostering better understanding, equality and inclusion of LGBTI+ people in Ireland.
- A rapid decline in the number of hate crimes and hate-related incidences involving LGBTI+ people in Ireland and other marginalised communities.
- The fulfilment of the national LGBTI+ youth strategy, inclusion strategy, the recommendations of the review to the Gender Recognition Act 2015 and the recommendations of the Steering Committee on the Development of HSE Transgender Identity Services.
- An increase in research conducted in collaboration with affect communities particularly related to gender-affirming care, the experiences of trans and gender-variant youth, the experiences of intersex people and conversion therapies.
- A decrease in LGBTI+ related bullying in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland.
- An increase in training among practitioners and professionals in education, healthcare and service settings to facilitate the safety and inclusion of LGBTI+ people throughout Ireland.
- Increased collaboration among civil society organisations and the commission.
- A shift in Irish society broadly which demonstrates public inclusion, acceptance and celebration of diversity.

Thank you for making this submission! Consultation@ihrec.ie