



**Belong To LGBTQ+**  
Youth Ireland

**Belong To Submission to the Central Statistics Office on the  
Census 2027 Public Consultation**

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**Contact:** Matt Kennedy ([matt@belongto.org](mailto:matt@belongto.org)), Moninne Griffith ([moninne@belongto.org](mailto:moninne@belongto.org))

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## **Introduction**

Belong To is the national youth LGBTQ+ organisation. Since 2003, the organisation has worked with lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) young people, between 14 and 23 years, to create a world where they are equal, safe, and thriving in the diversity of their identities and experiences. Belong To also advocates and campaigns on behalf of young LGBTQ+ people, and offers a specialised LGBTQ+ youth service with a focus on mental and sexual health, alongside drug and alcohol support.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Central Statistics Office's existing work on effectively accounting for LGBTQ+ populations within the census and wish to highlight the importance of including specific questions related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics within the 2027 census.

Collecting data regarding the LGBTQ+ population involves asking individuals about their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. LGBTQ+ population data reveals not only a more accurate number of LGBTQ+ individuals living in Ireland but works to demonstrate how their experiences compare to those of their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts.

Please see a short glossary of relevant terms to support this submission on page 9.

## Proposed New Question Inclusion

### *Question on Sexual Orientation*

Q1: What is your sexual orientation?

- Bisexual /Pansexual
- Heterosexual / Straight
- Mostly heterosexual
- Gay Man
- Gay Woman / Lesbian
- Asexual
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe [open text]

Terminology to describe sexual orientation can vary and the question should recognise that not everyone within the LGBTQ+ community identifies in the same way.

- **Bisexual / Pansexual:** The census should cross-reference this with the data on gender to examine differences between bisexual / pansexual men, bisexual / pansexual women and gender minorities.
- **Heterosexual / Straight:** Individuals who are not part of the LGBTQ+ community should have the opportunity to share their sexuality to garner a greater understanding of sexual orientation among the populace. In addition, capturing the sexual orientation of non-LGBTQ+ individuals will serve as a comparator.
- **Mostly heterosexual:** Recent research has demonstrated that a portion of the population when given this option will select it. Providing this option allows for a more accurate reflection regarding how individuals experience their sexuality.
- **Gay woman / Lesbian:** Some women refer to themselves as gay women so it's important to include this option alongside lesbian as a term.
- **Asexual:** Some people experience limited or no sexual attraction. This is a valid sexuality and their experiences should be captured in order to understand the potential impact of their sexuality on their lives.
- **Prefer not to say:** People should be given the option not to identify their sexual orientation. This is significant given that individuals may not have shared their identity with others at the time of the census and requiring an answer may pressure some to come out to those in their household.
- **Prefer to self-describe [open text]:** Providing a free-text space enables the person to express how they identify. Providing this space is important so that no individual feels excluded on the basis that their sexual orientation does not fit into a prefixed category.

### *Questions on Gender Identity*

Gender identity refers to a person's deeply held sense of their own gender. For trans people, their own sense of who they are does not match the sex that society assigns to them when they are born. Collecting data on individuals' gender identity must be done sensitively. It must be named that trans people may not feel comfortable disclosing this information because of concerns about data security or if they are not openly trans in their household given that trans individuals face increased discrimination, stigma and social rejection<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Higgins A. et al. (2016) *The LGBTIreland Report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN and BeLonG To Youth Services

The CSO should also be aware that some people who have transitioned (where someone has taken steps to live as the gender which they identify as) do not consider trans to be a part of their identity at all and would not use this word to describe themselves. For example, a person assigned female at birth and who transitions to male may identify as a man rather than as a trans man.

The following question set enables data collection on gender identity in an inclusive way.

Q1: What best describes your gender?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe [open text]

This first question about gender gives individuals the opportunity to describe their gender in their own words. This signals an understanding that gender is a wider spectrum than men and women. It also allows for the capturing of data on individuals that do not identify as trans but also do not identify as female or male.

Q2: What is your sex assigned at birth?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

By pairing these two questions together the census can capture the gender identity of the population in an inclusive way. By cross analysing the gender question (Q1) with (Q2) on sex assignment, the census can capture individuals who are cisgender (not trans), trans men, trans women and non-binary people as well as other gender minorities via the free-text option. In addition, this question acknowledges that gender is a wide spectrum with a vast lexicon which holds significant personal meaning for individuals. Similar to the open text box for the sexual orientation question it is important that individuals are given the opportunity to self-describe so they do not feel excluded within the broader context of the census.

#### *Question on Sex Characteristics*

Variations of sex characteristics refers to people born with innate genetic, hormonal, or physical sex characteristics that do not conform to medical norms for female or male bodies. It refers to a wide spectrum of variations to hormones, chromosomes, genitals and/or reproductive organs. Other terms used to describe being born with variations of sex characteristics are intersex person, a person with an intersex variation, or Differences of Sex Development (DSD). Some people may identify as intersex, while others may see their intersex variation more as part of their medical history rather than their identity.

As such in order to capture data relating to variations of sex characteristics, we recommend the question be asked as such:

Q1: Were you born with a variation of sex characteristics (sometimes called 'intersex' or 'DSD')?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

## Rationale

The census is a key opportunity to understand the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in Ireland. LGBTQ+ people have traditionally not featured in national systems for collecting data on society. This reflects the specific histories of inequality and oppression related to these characteristics. Although there is no comprehensive national data on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics research indicates that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience discrimination, bullying<sup>2</sup> and social rejection and are significantly more at risk of suicide, self-harm and mental health impacts as a result<sup>3</sup>. Yet without the necessary data to steer service delivery, the government cannot ensure the LGBTQ+ community have access to required services, ensuring that human rights are enjoyed without discrimination.

The historical absence of data relating to LGBTQ+ populations and the continued exclusion of comprehensive questions relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics results in service and policy gaps that with accurate census data could be mitigated. By including a specific question on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics we will have access to more accurate data on the number of LGBTQ+ in Ireland and their experiences. This will generate significant data to support policy-makers, employers and service providers to develop targeted interventions for this marginalised community and communities at the intersections of marginality.

Accurate population data on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics allows organisations to develop services and initiatives which are targeted to the needs of their LGBTQ+ employees and/or service-users and local communities, and in doing so meet their requirements under the Equality Acts (2000-2018) to eliminate unlawful discrimination against, and promote equality of opportunity for LGBTQ+ people. In addition, accurate data would significantly impact policy development at a national level, equipping government bodies and regulators with the knowledge they need to develop programmes of work which positively impact LGBTQ+ people.

Recently Ireland has witnessed a dramatic evolution in the legal and policy framework shaping society for LGBTQ+ people. Currently, Ireland has legislation which protects individuals from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and legislated for marriage equality between same-sex couples. In addition, Ireland has case law demonstrating the prohibition of discrimination against trans individuals and has introduced legislation to allow for the legal recognition of trans individuals. Government policy also directly addresses the specific needs of the LGBTQ+ community within the context of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020 and the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021 both of which make explicit reference to the inclusion of questions relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics within the census as dedicated actions to advancing the rights, equality and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people in Ireland. Furthermore, as an EU member state, Ireland is party to legal measures which ensure the protection for LGBTQ+ people such as the Amsterdam Treaty<sup>4</sup> (1997), the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>5</sup> (2000) and anti-discrimination directives.

Based on Ireland's existing policy and legislative landscape as it pertains to LGBTQ+ populations it is evident that there is a precedent which acknowledges LGBTQ+ identities as protected characteristics. Census data on age, ethnicity, and a range of other protected characteristics have been key to evidencing a need for action related to the rights, equality and wellbeing of these populations and we believe the same is true when tackling the barriers

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<sup>2</sup> Pizmony-Levy, O. (2022). *The 2022 Irish National School Climate Survey Report. Research Report. Global Observatory of LGBTQ+ Education and Advocacy*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

<sup>3</sup> Higgins A. et al. (2016) *The LGBTIreland Report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN and BeLonG To Youth Services

<sup>4</sup> European Union (1997) 'The Treaty of Amsterdam Amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties Establishing the European Communities and Certain Related Acts'. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C(340).

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament (2000) *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

and social exclusion that LGBTQ+ people often face. In order for the Irish Government to progress the growing social, political and economic equality for LGBTQ+ populations as well meeting the requirements of existing strategies, we believe it essential that more accurate data on LGBTQ+ populations is acquired through the census.

Beyond this, including questions in the census that adequately capture the diversity in sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics is an important act of recognition of LGBTQ+ people and their lives and furthers Ireland's position as a country leading in LGBTQ+ equality, diversity and inclusion.

## **Additional Considerations and Recommendations**

When the census is ready to collect sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics data, a robust communication and education plan needs to be implemented to explain the process to census staff and the general public. It is vital that the Government take several steps to make LGBTQ+ people feel comfortable and safe answering sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics questions and to communicate the rationale for the inclusion to the public.

The Government should make sure that census staff involved in the data collection know how the data is collected, stored, reported on and used. Communication regarding this can appear in a variety of ways, such as training or communication packs. Census staff involved in data collection need a comprehensive understanding of the process so they can carry out their part effectively ensuring they can answer questions that may arise from the public during data collection.

As mentioned previously LGBTQ+ individuals may be concerned about disclosing their sexual orientation, gender identity or/and sex characteristics. This can be the case for several reasons, including the fear of having their sexual orientation, gender identity or/and sex characteristics disclosed among household members or a misunderstanding of how census data is used, stored and shared. In addition, non-LGBTQ+ individuals may also be hesitant to disclose such information if they do not understand the purpose of the question or the language in the question. A lack of communication can therefore lead to low declaration rates or false positive/negatives that can prevent the Government from using the data effectively.

It is recommended to craft a comprehensive communications and education plan including information on the following specifically related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics data:

- Why the Government is collecting data on sexual orientation, gender identity or/and sex characteristics and how this exercise links to the Government's goals and requirements to ensure the needs of LGBTQ+ populations are met.
- How the safety of the data is secured.
- Where the data is stored.
- Who will have access to the data.
- How the data will be used.
- How the data is stored and handled anonymously and confidentially.

In addition, we recommend that the census undertake additional research and consultation regarding how the data gleaned from these new questions will be analysed and the findings disseminated. Other jurisdictions have carried out similar review processes prior to the inclusion of these questions alongside public consultation which has led to meaningful outcomes with clear frameworks for analysis and dissemination.

Finally, if comprehensive questions related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics are omitted in the 2027 census, clear procedure needs to be implemented to account for and facilitate the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in the rest of the census. This is particularly significant as individuals are required to declare their sex/gender to census workers at the point of receiving the census documentation. Some individuals do not identify as male or female and would as a result be placed in a situation where their data is captured incorrectly and the act of participation in the census would constitute a misrecognition of their identity.



To conclude our recommendations are as such;

1. Census 2027 includes new questions on gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics.
2. The final wording of these questions is based on broad consultation with members of the LGBTQ+ community in advance of the publication of the 2027 Census.
3. A robust communication and education plan is required in order to ensure the successful inclusion of these new questions.
4. All CSO staff with specific attention to census workers collecting data and researchers will require specific training related to new questions on gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics.
5. Extensive research and consultation is carried out prior to the 2027 Census in order to plan appropriately for the collection, analysis and dissemination of the new data that will be gleaned from the inclusion of these questions.

### **Further Support and Information**

Belong To welcomes the opportunity to provide any additional support in this consultation process on the 2027 census and once again commends the existing work of the CSO in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics data collection.

Should you require any further information or support in relation to any of the above please contact Matt Kennedy, Belong To policy and research officer at [matt@belongto.org](mailto:matt@belongto.org).

## **Glossary of Relevant Terms**

**LGBTQ+:** This stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer people. The plus sign includes people with other minority sexual orientations and gender identities.

**Sexual Orientation:** This is a term used to describe someone's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to other people.

**Gay:** Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is attracted to other women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

**Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to more than one gender e.g. both men and women.

**Pansexual:** Someone whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex assignment, gender identity or gender expression.

**Asexual:** Someone who experiences limited or no sexual attraction.

**Heterosexual/Straight:** Someone who is mainly attracted to people of a gender different to their own.

**Gender Identity:** Gender identity is the personal sense of one's own gender.

**Sex Assigned at Birth:** The designation of a person at birth as male or female based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones).

**Transgender or Trans:** A term describing a person's gender identity that does not match their assigned sex at birth. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe some groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression.

**Non-Binary:** People whose gender identity is neither exclusively woman or man or is in between or beyond the gender binary.

**Intersex:** This is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations that do not fit typical binary notions of male and female bodies. In some cases, intersex traits are visible at birth, while in others they are not apparent until puberty or later in life. Some intersex variations may not be physically apparent at all.

**Cisgender:** Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.