

**SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION  
ON THE SUCCESSOR STRATEGY TO THE  
NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS**

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and  
Youth

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**Outhouse**  
LGBTQ+ CENTRE

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## About Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre

Outhouse is the cornerstone of support for the LGBTQ+ community. We provide a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQ+ individuals to gather, connect, and find solace in a world that doesn't always understand or embrace them. We are the heartbeat of the queer community, offering vital services, including social spaces, mental health support, cultural events, and much more.

We are dedicated to supporting the people, spaces, and issues important to the LGBTQ+ communities. Our vision is a future where LGBTQ+ individuals are safe, seen, and celebrated.

Our mission is to improve the quality of life for LGBTQ+ people by providing a safe space to find:

- **Connection** - discovering themselves, their people, place, and passions.
- **Community Support** - accessing information, programmes, and services.
- **Culture** - experiencing creativity, heritage, discovery, and fun.
- **Campaigns** - being part of a strong, credible, and trusted voice for LGBTQ+ communities.

We live by the values of Trust, Respect, Joy, Inclusion, and Impact. Our commitments to equity and intersectionality underpin our work. Outhouse is a feminist organisation.

## LGBTQ+ Rights in Ireland Today

While Ireland has made notable progress in advancing equality for LGBTQ+ individuals through progressive legislation and public policies, significant challenges remain for LGBTQ+ women. Discrimination, harassment, and socio-economic inequalities still shape the daily experiences of many LGBTQ+ women, despite legislative strides. Mental health issues remain prevalent, and the weight of isolation can be crushing. Additionally, poverty, homelessness, and substance misuse disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ individuals, significantly impacting their day-to-day lives.

LGBTQ+ women face disproportionate levels of poverty, financial instability, and housing insecurity. Studies show that a significant portion of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially Trans women, struggle to make ends meet, with many overrepresented in the high-cost rental market. Housing precarity, combined

with the fear of discrimination in emergency accommodations, exacerbates the already vulnerable position of LGBTQ+ women in Irish society.

While recent national LGBTQ+ inclusion strategies have been promising, they have not sufficiently addressed the specific needs of LGBTQ+ women. Government funding for LGBTQ+ organisations remains sporadic and insufficient to meet the community's demand for services or the scale of resources needed to foster societal transformation. The lack of consistent financial support and infrastructure investments significantly hinders LGBTQ+ support and advocacy organisations' ability to provide essential services and support to LGBTQ+ communities, ultimately slowing progress for the most vulnerable and marginalised.

To address these intersecting challenges, the successor strategy must adopt an intersectional lens, with targeted measures to support LGBTQ+ women in areas including healthcare, economic equality, housing security, and leadership development.

## Introduction

This submission to the public consultation for the successor strategy for women and girls in Ireland emphasises the unique challenges and needs of LGBTQ+ women. The recommendations outlined herein have emerged from our ongoing consultations with LGBTQ+ women as part of our regular operations, as well as dedicated discussions held with female patrons of Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre throughout September 2024.

## Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, & Queer Women and Girls

The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 aimed to advance gender equality and empower women and girls across various sectors of Irish society. However, a critical evaluation reveals significant gaps in inclusivity, particularly regarding LGBTQ+ women and girls. While the strategy sought to address socio-economic inequalities and promote visibility, it inadequately acknowledged the unique experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals.

LGBTQ+ women and girls, representing approximately 195,000 individuals or 7.5% of the total female population in Ireland, encounter compounded discrimination both from wider society and within the LGBTQ+ community itself.

This marginalisation often results in barriers to accessing essential services, economic opportunities, and healthcare, thus amplifying existing gender inequalities.

Furthermore, the absence of specific measures targeting LGBTQ+ women and girls in the previous strategy underscores the necessity for tailored approaches that address their distinct needs. To foster true equity, it is imperative that future strategies incorporate intersectional perspectives, recognising the diverse identities and experiences within the female population. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive framework that empowers all women and girls, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights upheld.

## Trans Women are Women

As Ireland continues to make strides in promoting women's rights, the successor strategy for women and girls must reflect a deep commitment to inclusion and equality for all women—trans women included. There will undoubtedly be submissions to the consultation process aimed at excluding trans women and girls, rooted in transphobia and disinformation, but we must remain clear: trans women are women. The argument to exclude them from this strategy is not grounded in concern for women's rights but rather in fearmongering and an unwillingness to accept the diversity of womanhood.

When we ask, "What is a woman?" the answer must encompass all women, regardless of whether they are cisgender or transgender. For many, gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth, but for a small number of people, this is not the case. Being trans means that the gender they were assigned doesn't reflect who they truly are. And just as no one would question the womanhood of someone who has had a hysterectomy or lost their breasts due to cancer, a trans woman's body parts have nothing to do with her identity as a woman.

A woman is someone who knows, in her heart and mind, that she is a woman. Trans women are asking for the same respect and recognition that we afford all women. Their inclusion in the category of "woman" is not a rejection of biology—it's an acknowledgement that our understanding of gender goes beyond mere physical traits. Denying this is to misunderstand not only trans identities but also the nature of language and human dignity itself.

Efforts to erase or exclude trans women from this strategy are attempts to pit women against each other, relying on fear of so-called 'woke culture' or claims

that inclusive language somehow diminishes the rights of cisgender women. This is false. Ireland has embraced more inclusive language in many contexts without erasing anyone. Referring to families or partners in more diverse terms doesn't eradicate traditional family structures or roles; it simply ensures that everyone feels recognised and included. Similarly, expanding language in medical contexts to include 'women and people with a cervix' does not erase women—it ensures that no one, especially those most marginalised, is left behind.

We cannot allow baseless stories and misinformation, such as the persistent internet hoaxes about people identifying as animals, to shape serious conversations about trans inclusion. These narratives do a disservice to the real issues at hand and to the lived experiences of trans people. In this strategy, the focus must remain on fostering a society that protects and uplifts all women, including those who have fought so hard to have their identities recognised and respected.

Ireland has made significant progress in becoming a more inclusive country. Inclusion of trans women in this strategy is not just about recognising their identity—it's about affirming our collective values of equality, dignity, and compassion for all women, with no exceptions.

## Healthcare

The healthcare needs of LGBTQ+ women and girls are frequently overlooked, leaving this group vulnerable to inadequate and discriminatory care. Studies indicate that LGBTQ+ women often report poorer health outcomes than their cisgender heterosexual peers, facing heightened risks of mental health issues, self-harm, and suicidal behaviour. Insights from the Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland report reveal that discrimination, societal stigma, and a lack of access to inclusive healthcare contribute to these disparities.

During consultations at Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre, several key themes emerged, highlighting critical gaps in Ireland's healthcare system. These include the urgent need for equitable access to essential healthcare products and services, such as free period products and contraception; the development of inclusive, research-informed care models for menopause; and the pervasive issue of medical dismissal, particularly regarding pain management.

LBTQ+ women have emphasised the necessity of comprehensive training for healthcare professionals to combat bias, ensure LBTQ+ inclusion, and improve access to timely, person-centred trans healthcare. This section outlines these themes and offers recommendations to create a healthcare system that respects and effectively meets the needs of LBTQ+ women and girls.

## Free Period Products for All

Access to period products is a fundamental health necessity. We call for the provision of free period products for all women and girls, including trans men and non-binary individuals who menstruate. This provision should extend to include more sustainable options, such as period pants, mooncups, and other environmentally friendly menstrual products. The current cost burden perpetuates gender and economic inequality, disproportionately impacting marginalised groups, including those in the LBTQ+ community. Free, accessible period products, including sustainable alternatives, should be available in public spaces, schools, healthcare settings, and community centres.

## Free Contraception Access for All

Access to contraception is not only essential for sexual health but also crucial for managing reproductive health conditions such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), which affect many LBTQ+ women. Despite the importance of contraceptive access, LBTQ+ women frequently encounter significant barriers to obtaining reproductive health services. These barriers include institutional discrimination, which can manifest as a lack of inclusive information, inadequate provider training, and assumptions about sexual orientation that overlook the needs of LBTQ+ individuals.

Currently, the rollout of free contraception in Ireland is limited to certain age groups, excluding many LBTQ+ women who require comprehensive access to all forms of contraception. To address these disparities, we call for an expansion of the current programme to cover all ages and all methods of contraception.

## Free HRT for All

Access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is essential for the health and well-being of many LBTQ+ individuals, particularly those undergoing gender transition. To promote equitable healthcare and support the diverse needs of



the community, we advocate for the availability of free HRT, including oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone, for all individuals who require it.

Additionally, we call for the availability of vaginal oestrogen over the counter without a prescription. This measure would not only enhance accessibility but also empower individuals to manage their health needs without unnecessary barriers.

## Research-Informed Models of Care for Menopause

There is an urgent need for research-informed, inclusive healthcare models specifically designed for LGBTQ+ women and girls as they age, particularly concerning perimenopause and menopause. Currently, menopause care is insufficiently addressed for all women; however, LGBTQ+ women often experience additional layers of invisibility within this context. This gap in research and care leaves LGBTQ+ women without the necessary support to navigate the physical and emotional changes associated with menopause.

To effectively meet the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing perimenopause and menopause, it is crucial to include diverse experiences in research initiatives. Comprehensive, person-centred care models must be developed that encompass hormone therapy, mental health support, and specific guidance tailored to LGBTQ+ women's unique experiences.

It is also essential for general practitioners (GPs) and other female health specialists to update their knowledge of perimenopause, menopause, and the importance of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in addressing symptoms. Misinformation regarding menopause, HRT, and breast cancer must be corrected, as many doctors advocate for more accurate, evidence-based information.

More often than not, women experiencing perimenopause are strongly recommended or prescribed mental health therapy or depression medication when bioidentical HRT could effectively address most, if not all, of their symptoms. By prioritising inclusive research and creating evidence-based models of care, we can ensure that all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, receive the appropriate support and care during this significant life transition.

## Training for Healthcare Professionals

To ensure that all women receive competent and respectful care, healthcare providers must undergo mandatory, ongoing training focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion. Many LGBTQ+ women report feeling misunderstood, dismissed, or invisible in healthcare settings, which leads to substandard care and avoidance of essential services. Therefore, it is crucial to implement comprehensive training programs that address biases and promote cultural competence among healthcare professionals.

Training should encompass several key areas, including:

1. **Understanding Diverse Sexualities and Gender Identities:** Healthcare professionals should be equipped with the knowledge to recognise and respect the varied identities within the LGBTQ+ community. This includes addressing misconceptions and stereotypes that can lead to biased treatment.
2. **Effective Communication Skills:** Training should emphasise the importance of using inclusive language and appropriate pronouns, ensuring that LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe and respected when seeking care.
3. **Recognising and Mitigating Implicit Bias:** Programs should include strategies to identify and reduce implicit biases that may affect the quality of care provided to LGBTQ+ women.
4. **Culturally Competent Care Practices:** Healthcare providers should be trained in culturally sensitive care practices that acknowledge and accommodate the unique healthcare needs of LGBTQ+ individuals

## Medical Dismissal and Gender Bias

LGBTQ+ women often experience both misogyny and heteronormative biases in healthcare settings, particularly concerning pain management and other medical concerns. Medical dismissal—where a patient's symptoms are minimised or dismissed—remains a pervasive issue, disproportionately affecting LGBTQ+ individuals. Many report feeling unheard and invalidated, which is compounded by the intersection of gender and sexual orientation biases.

Research indicates that healthcare providers frequently operate under assumptions rooted in heterosexism, leading to the misconception that LGBTQ+

women are less likely to experience certain health issues. This bias results in inadequate care and a lack of appropriate screening and treatment. For example, LGBTQ+ women may be overlooked for necessary examinations or interventions due to stereotypes that render their experiences invisible.

To address these critical issues, we call for a nationwide initiative to train healthcare professionals to recognise and confront medical dismissal and gender bias. This initiative should promote awareness of how heterosexism and gender bias can adversely affect patient experiences, leading to inadequate care.

## Trans Healthcare

Trans individuals require timely, safe, and person-centred healthcare that aligns with international best practices. However, current trans healthcare services in Ireland are severely under-resourced, leaving many individuals without the necessary support for their health and well-being. Statistics reveal that trans individuals experience significant barriers to accessing gender-affirming care, with wait times for initial assessments often exceeding several years.

Many Trans individuals have reported experiencing significant dissatisfaction with their healthcare experiences, primarily due to a lack of informed consent processes and inadequate training among healthcare providers. Additionally, some of trans individuals delay or avoid seeking medical care due to fear of discrimination or disrespect from healthcare professionals.

This situation underscores the urgent need for the expansion of gender-affirming services, including hormone therapy and surgeries, as well as robust mental health and sexual health support services that respect the autonomy and dignity of trans individuals. Eliminating delays in care and outdated assessment processes is critical to ensuring that trans individuals receive the comprehensive, affirming care they deserve.

## Reproductive and Sexual Health Services

Reproductive healthcare services in Ireland remain overwhelmingly heteronormative, leaving LGBTQ+ women underserved and without adequate support. This lack of inclusivity manifests in several critical areas:

1. **Fertility Treatments:** Many LGBTQ+ women face barriers when seeking fertility services, as providers often operate under assumptions based on

traditional family structures. As a result, LGBTQ+ individuals may encounter discrimination or inadequate information about their options for assisted reproductive technology.

2. **Cervical Screening:** Research indicates that LGBTQ+ women are less likely to be invited for cervical screening due to incorrect assumptions about their sexual orientation and risk factors. This oversight places them at greater risk for cervical cancer, as they may not receive timely screenings or necessary follow-up care.
3. **Sexual Health Services:** Access to sexual health services that are sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ+ women is limited. Many clinics are unprepared to provide care that acknowledges diverse relationships, leading to inadequate prevention strategies for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other health concerns.
4. **Maternity Care:** LGBTQ+ women often report experiences of bias or insensitivity in maternity care settings, which can deter them from seeking necessary care. Inclusive training for healthcare providers is essential to ensure that all individuals feel safe and respected during their maternity journeys.
5. **Access to PrEP and Other Prevention Strategies:** Current sexual health initiatives predominantly target men who have sex with men (MSM), neglecting the need for broader access to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and other HIV prevention strategies for all individuals, including LGBTQ+ women.

To address these significant gaps, we advocate for the development of inclusive reproductive and sexual health services that consider the unique needs of LGBTQ+ women. This includes targeted outreach, education, and training for healthcare providers to create an affirming and equitable healthcare landscape for all.

## Comprehensive Sexual Education

Comprehensive sexual education in schools must be inclusive and reflective of the diverse experiences of LGBTQ+ women and girls. Currently, sexual education curricula tend to focus predominantly on heteronormative relationships, leaving many LGBTQ+ individuals without the knowledge and skills necessary for joyful, fulfilling, and safe sexual lives.

The report highlights a significant lack of sexual health education that encompasses LGBTQ+ experiences, contributing to various negative health

outcomes. Students from LGBTQ+ backgrounds often report feeling isolated and unsupported in discussions about consent, healthy relationships, and sexual health. This education gap not only perpetuates stigma and discrimination but also results in lower rates of understanding regarding sexually transmitted infections (STIs), consent, and safe sex practices.

Furthermore, the absence of inclusive sexual education can lead to increased mental health challenges among LGBTQ+ youth, who may struggle with feelings of invisibility and a lack of understanding of their own identities. Research shows that comprehensive, inclusive sexual education can significantly improve health outcomes by equipping young people with the necessary tools to make informed decisions about their bodies and relationships, ultimately fostering a culture of joy, safety, and respect in their sexual lives.

We advocate for the implementation of inclusive sexual education that celebrates diverse identities and experiences, addressing same-sex relationships, consent, and sexual health for all genders and sexualities. This education should be designed collaboratively with LGBTQ+ communities to ensure that it meets the specific needs of these individuals and contributes to a more informed, respectful, and healthy society.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

LBTQ+ women and girls in Ireland face significant mental health challenges, including elevated levels of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidality, particularly among younger and transgender populations. These issues are exacerbated by societal discrimination, family rejection, and the impacts of homophobia and transphobia.

To address these challenges, we recommend the following actions:

1. **Targeted Mental Health Services:** Develop and fund mental health services tailored for LGBTQ+ women and girls, ensuring accessibility and cultural competence.
2. **Training for Professionals:** Implement training for mental health professionals to enhance their understanding of LGBTQ+ issues and create supportive environments.
3. **Crisis Support Programs:** Establish crisis intervention programs inclusive of LGBTQ+ women and girls, focusing on suicide prevention and self-harm reduction.

4. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch campaigns to raise awareness of the mental health challenges faced by LGBTQ+ women and girls, reducing stigma and promoting community support.
5. **Ongoing Research:** Prioritise research into the mental health of LGBTQ+ women and girls to inform policy and service provision.

## Intersex Healthcare

Intersex individuals face significant human rights violations, particularly regarding medical procedures performed on them without their consent. Intersex genital mutilation (IGM), which includes a range of invasive surgeries and treatments aimed at 'normalising' intersex bodies, has been widely criticised for violating bodily autonomy and integrity. These interventions often occur in infancy or childhood, denying intersex individuals the opportunity to make informed choices about their bodies and lives.

A ban on IGM must be introduced in Ireland, recognising that such practices are akin to torture and a violation of fundamental human rights. This position aligns with recommendations from international human rights bodies, which have called for the prohibition of unnecessary medical or surgical treatment during infancy or childhood.

Additionally, we call for the following actions:

1. **Legislation to Protect Intersex Rights:** Introduce clear legal frameworks that specifically outlaw IGM and protect the bodily autonomy and right to equality and dignity of intersex individuals. This includes defining intersex variations in legal terms to ensure that individuals are not subjected to medical interventions without their informed consent and amending the Equality Acts and Equal Status Acts to ensure non-discrimination protections apply to intersex individuals.
2. **Multidisciplinary Care Teams:** Establish specialised, multidisciplinary healthcare teams to support intersex individuals throughout their lives. These teams should include medical professionals, psychologists, and social workers trained to provide appropriate care without resorting to harmful practices.
3. **Education and Training:** Implement comprehensive training for healthcare providers on intersex issues to eliminate stigma and discrimination within the healthcare system. This training should

emphasise the importance of informed consent and respect for bodily autonomy.

4. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate the public about intersex variations and the rights of intersex individuals. These efforts should aim to combat societal stigma and promote understanding.

## Socio-Economic Equality

While progress has been made in some areas, LGBTQ+ women and girls continue to face significant barriers to socio-economic equality. These recommendations are essential to ensuring that the National Strategy for Women and Girls addresses the specific needs and challenges of LGBTQ+ women and girls.

### Affordable Childcare

Access to affordable childcare is critical for women's full participation in the workforce, yet many women, especially LGBTQ+ women, are disproportionately affected by high childcare costs. We recommend the introduction of publicly funded childcare with a cap of no more than €150.00 per child per month for parents. This measure would ease the financial burden on women, many of whom already face barriers due to discrimination in employment and unequal access to family rights and recognition.

### Eliminate the Gender Pay Gap

While introducing the Gender Pay Gap Information Act (2021) was a positive step, the strategy must go further to ensure full gender pay equality. The expansion of the reporting requirement to employers with more than 50 employees by 2025 is welcome, but we call for the following additional measures:

- Stronger enforcement and penalties for non-compliance with gender pay gap reporting.
- Comprehensive support for women in smaller workplaces where discrimination and pay disparities may be harder to address due to reduced visibility and a lack of resources.
- A targeted strategy for LGBTQ+ women who are more likely to be employed in precarious, part-time, or low-wage jobs, sectors particularly affected by pay inequality.

## Addressing Poverty Among LGBTQ+ Women and Girls

Women in Ireland face a higher risk of poverty than men, and the situation is even more precarious for LGBTQ+ women. In particular, lone parents – of whom 86% are women<sup>1</sup> – experience high levels of deprivation. For LGBTQ+ women, who may face additional discrimination and exclusion, poverty can be compounded by societal stigma and lack of family support.

We recommend introducing a Gender Equality Impact Statement alongside the Budget annually to ensure transparency and gender equality in all budgetary measures. All future budgets should be gender-proofed to prevent policies that disproportionately disadvantage women and other marginalised groups. The equality impact statement should disaggregate its findings and take account of the impact of budgetary measures on those facing multiple marginalisation.

## Guaranteed Minimum Income for Unpaid Care Work

Like many women in Ireland, LGBTQ+ women often bear the brunt of unpaid care work, whether in the home, caring for children, elderly relatives, or others in need. This labour must be recognised and valued. We call for the establishment of a minimum guaranteed income for those carrying out unpaid care work, which would provide financial support and recognition to those who are often excluded from the traditional workforce.

## Contributory Pension Credits for Care Work

Women's unpaid contributions should be recognised throughout their working lives, whether through child-rearing or caring for relatives. Contributory pension credits should be available to cover periods when women are out of the traditionally paid workforce due to caregiving responsibilities. This would ensure that women do not face financial penalties in retirement for fulfilling these crucial roles in our communities and society.

## Increase in Paid Parental Leave

Equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities is critical to gender equality. The successor strategy should include increasing the level of paid parental leave to allow co-parents to share caring responsibilities equally. This would benefit all

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Census 2016



women, including LGBTQ+ women, by reducing the gendered burden of caregiving and supporting women's full participation in society.

## Climate Change

The UN has emphasised that the climate crisis is not “gender neutral.” Women and girls, particularly those from marginalised communities, experience the greatest impacts of climate change, which amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety. LGBTQ+ women, facing multiple layers of marginalisation, encounter added complexities that heighten their vulnerability in the face of environmental challenges.

Globally, women represent the majority of the world's poor, making them particularly susceptible to climate-related impacts. For LGBTQ+ women, the intersection of gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status further exacerbates their challenges, often leaving them without access to essential resources and support systems necessary for adaptation and resilience.

To address these inequities, we advocate for the following actions:

1. **Inclusive Climate Policies:** Develop and implement climate policies that specifically consider the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ women and girls, ensuring their voices are integral to decision-making processes.
2. **Access to Resources:** Enhance access to financial resources, educational opportunities, and sustainable practices for LGBTQ+ women and girls, empowering them to build resilience against climate impacts.
3. **Community Engagement:** Foster community engagement initiatives that empower LGBTQ+ women and girls to actively participate in climate action, promoting their agency and leadership in environmental advocacy.
4. **Data Collection and Research:** Prioritise research focused on the impacts of climate change on LGBTQ+ women and girls, ensuring that their specific vulnerabilities and strengths are documented and addressed in climate strategies.

## Parental Rights

The passage of the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Act 2024 represents a significant step forward for LGBTQ+ families in Ireland. However, many of the challenges faced by lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, as well as other members of the LGBTQ+ community, remain unresolved. While the Act is a milestone, it falls short of delivering full equality for all families, and further legislative action is required to close the gaps and rectify inconsistencies that persist.

Key advances brought by the AHR Act include retrospective recognition of parents of donor-conceived children conceived outside clinics before May 2020 and recognition for those who used a known donor before that date. This long-awaited development is a significant victory for many lesbian and bisexual women whose parental rights were previously in a legal grey area. However, while some families are finally being recognised, many remain excluded from the Act's protections.

A major concern is the failure to provide full family rights for donor-conceived children conceived or born abroad. This issue has left many families, including those led by LGBTQ+ women, in a state of legal uncertainty, and it is disappointing that the Government did not take this opportunity to address the problem comprehensively. The exclusion of these families continues to perpetuate inequality and a sense of marginalisation.

The introduction of a framework for surrogacy, including retrospective recognition for Irish children born through surrogacy, is another positive development. However, financial and logistical barriers will make it difficult for some families to benefit from these new legal frameworks. In particular, the restrictive regulations surrounding international surrogacy agreements raise concerns that pursuing ethical surrogacy in countries like the United States may become unfeasible for Irish families. These concerns are exacerbated by the criminal sanctions outlined in the legislation for those who fall outside its narrow parameters, further complicating the path to family formation for LGBTQ+ women and others seeking surrogacy abroad.

The lack of access to free intrauterine insemination (IUI), in vitro fertilisation (IVF), or intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) for those who cannot use their own eggs or sperm, as well as for same-sex couples and single women, highlights a significant inequality in reproductive healthcare. This disparity

further disadvantages LGBTQ+ women, limiting their options for starting a family. Addressing this gap in access to assisted reproductive services is essential to ensuring that all women, regardless of sexual orientation or relationship status, can pursue parenthood on an equal footing.

While the AHR Act marks progress, many families have been left behind. While some families celebrate newfound recognition under the Act, others remain in legal limbo, and for many, the dream of family formation is still distant. This legislation, while an important step, cannot be the final word on LGBTQ+ family rights.

The AHR Act 2024, though a positive development, highlights the need for further action to secure full and equal rights for LGBTQ+ families. In any successor strategy for women and girls in Ireland, the legal status of parents to their children must be addressed comprehensively, ensuring that all families—regardless of the sex or gender of the parents or the circumstances of conception and birth—are afforded the same rights and recognition. The Government must commit to ongoing reviews of the legislation and ensure that the child's best interests remain central to policymaking in this area.

## Representation and Leadership

Women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles across all sectors, including politics, business, public service, and civil society. This lack of representation perpetuates systemic inequalities, diminishes the visibility of women's voices and living experiences, and limits access to decision-making platforms that are crucial for driving social and policy change.

For Ireland to achieve true gender equality, the specific barriers women face must be addressed through targeted measures designed to elevate their voices and support their participation in leadership roles. The following recommendations outline key strategies that can be implemented to foster leadership among women.

## Leadership Development Programmes

To increase the presence of women in leadership positions, it is essential to provide dedicated support and resources that empower individuals to take on these roles. The following measures should be included in the strategy:

- **Leadership Training:** Design and fund leadership development programmes specifically aimed at women. These programmes should focus on building skills in public speaking, negotiation, networking, and management. Tailored mentorship opportunities should be included, providing LGBTQ+ women with role models and guidance from leaders in various sectors.
- **Scholarships and Fellowships:** Introduce scholarships and fellowships for women to participate in executive education, leadership programmes, and advanced studies. This will provide opportunities for personal and professional growth, helping to break down the financial barriers that often prevent marginalised women from accessing these opportunities.
- **Sponsorship of Entrepreneurs:** Support women entrepreneurs through business incubators, accelerator programmes, and grants. By providing capital, training, and mentorship to aspiring women entrepreneurs, we can ensure greater representation in business leadership and foster economic independence.

## Inclusion in Decision-Making Processes

Women should be actively encouraged to participate in decision-making processes across all sectors. Their unique perspectives and experiences bring essential diversity to policy discussions and leadership contexts. This can be achieved through the following actions:

- **Mandatory Quotas:** Implement mandatory quotas to ensure the representation of women on boards of directors, advisory committees, and in public service appointments. This diversity measure would guarantee that women's voices are included at decision-making levels.
- **Public Sector Recruitment:** Establish specific recruitment targets within the public sector to increase the number of women in leadership roles. Public sector bodies should be required to report on their progress in diversifying leadership, including data on women's participation.
- **Political Engagement Initiatives:** Create targeted initiatives to support women's entry into politics, such as political training academies, campaign support funds, and peer networks. A programme should be resourced to actively support women candidates for local and national elections who encounter hate speech, violence, harassment, and discrimination.

## Addressing Structural Barriers to Leadership

LBTQ+ women face specific structural barriers that must be dismantled to facilitate their rise to leadership. These include discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, as well as broader societal issues such as homophobia, transphobia, and workplace inequality. The strategy should prioritise the following actions:

- **Anti-Discrimination Measures:** Strengthen anti-discrimination laws and policies to better protect LBTQ+ women in the workplace. This includes expanding the Employment Equality Acts by adding gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics to the protected grounds to ensure comprehensive protections for LBTQ+ individuals and creating mechanisms to monitor and address workplace discrimination.
- **Inclusive Workplace Policies:** Encourage employers to adopt inclusive workplace policies that promote the wellbeing of LBTQ+ employees. This includes implementing diversity training, creating inclusive HR policies, and establishing employee resource groups for LBTQ+ staff.
- **Support for Trans Women:** Trans women face heightened levels of discrimination, both within and outside the workplace. The strategy should include specific provisions for supporting trans women in leadership, including legal protections, access to healthcare, and dedicated mentorship and leadership development opportunities.

## Discrimination and Hate Crime

The experiences of LBTQ+ women and girls in Ireland are marked by profound and pervasive discrimination, exacerbated by gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity biases. As highlighted in the EU LGBTIQ Survey III, 38% of lesbian women reported facing LBTQ+ discrimination within 12 months of the survey, a figure that rises dramatically to 69% among trans women and 59% for non-binary and gender-diverse respondents. These stark statistics reflect a lived reality in which LBTQ+ women are often subjected to multiple forms of discrimination—misogyny from patriarchal systems and bias against sexual orientation or gender identity—making intersectionality central to understanding and addressing their experiences.

Discrimination in this context is not just a personal affront but a public issue extending to physical and sexual violence. Nearly half of respondents to the

survey reported being physically or sexually attacked due to their LGBTQ+ identity in the past five years. Yet, a staggering 73% did not report their most recent experience, with reasons ranging from believing the incident was too minor (43%) to not trusting an Garda Síochána (50%). This lack of faith in the authorities, coupled with fears of reprisals, shame, or emotional distress, paints a troubling picture of a system ill-equipped to support LGBTQ+ women. It is also critical to note that 19% feared homophobic or transphobic reactions from Gardaí, indicating that the very institutions tasked with protection are sometimes perceived as part of the problem.

The impacts of these hate-motivated incidents are wide-ranging. Many LGBTQ+ women face profound psychological consequences, with 48% reporting issues such as depression and anxiety. A fifth of respondents said they were afraid to go out and visit places after such an incident, and 28% experienced other negative effects. These figures illustrate the ripple effect of hate crime, which not only harms the individual but spreads fear and trauma throughout the broader LGBTQ+ community. This phenomenon underscores the reality that *hate crime hurts us all*.

## Legal Protections and Trust-building with an Garda Síochána

The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 presents a vital opportunity to establish Ireland's first law on hate crimes and strengthen existing legislation on incitement to hatred. However, legislation alone will not suffice. We recommend:

- The inclusion of specific provisions in the bill addressing the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ women, such as the intersectional impacts of gender-based violence, misogyny, and homophobia or transphobia.
- Comprehensive training for Gardaí, ensuring they are well-versed in the complexities of LGBTQ+ identities and are seen as allies rather than threats by the community. This should include anti-bias training.
- A national awareness campaign alongside the implementation of the hate crime law to educate both the public and key stakeholders in the criminal justice system on the importance of intersectionality in discrimination cases.

## Enhanced Reporting and Victim Support Systems

With 62% of respondents believing the authorities would do nothing about their complaints and 50% distrusting an Garda Síochána, underreporting of hate crimes remains a critical issue. Public policy must focus on:

- Resourcing and promoting third-party reporting mechanisms that are independent of law enforcement, offering safe spaces for LGBTQ+ women to report hate crimes and incidents.
- Allocating funding for wraparound victim support services, including psychological, legal, and medical care tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ women.
- Encouraging collaboration between community organisations and statutory services to ensure that these women have access to comprehensive support from the moment they report a crime through to their recovery.

## Addressing Discrimination at its Roots

We must tackle the roots of hate through education and awareness-raising, beginning at an early age. In schools, curricula should include comprehensive LGBTQ+ education that dismantles discriminatory beliefs and behaviours, particularly targeting young boys and men to counteract patriarchal attitudes and dismantle toxic masculinity. Public awareness campaigns should go beyond the criminal justice system and permeate social structures, challenging ingrained prejudices against women, LGBTQ+ individuals, gender-diverse people, and all vulnerable and marginalised people.

## Intersectionality as the Foundation of Policy

Any approach to combating discrimination must recognise the intersections of identity. LGBTQ+ women of colour, those with disabilities, or those from lower-income backgrounds often face compounded forms of discrimination. Policies need to acknowledge this complexity by:

- Ensuring that data collection on hate crimes includes multiple identity markers (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) to capture the full scope of discrimination.
- Developing intersectional health, housing, and social services that account for the unique needs of marginalised LGBTQ+ women.



## Wraparound Support for Survivors

Discrimination and hate crimes have deep psychological, social, and economic impacts on LGBTQ+ women. Wraparound services should be embedded into public policy to provide holistic support, including:

- Mental health services specifically trained to address the trauma related to hate crimes and discrimination.
- Social and economic supports, such as housing and employment assistance, particularly for those whose lives are disrupted by hate incidents.

## Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence

The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026 outlines an ambitious approach to achieving zero tolerance for DSGBV in Irish society. The strategy's recognition of intersectionality, particularly in acknowledging the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, is a vital step towards creating an inclusive framework that leaves no one behind.

However, adequate resourcing is crucial for the strategy itself and the frontline NGOs working with the diverse and vulnerable population groups identified in the strategy to ensure the successful realisation of this strategy. Meeting the intersectional needs of different communities—such as LGBTQ+ individuals, migrants, Travellers, people with disabilities, and others—requires a comprehensive understanding of the specific barriers each group faces. These organisations, which already play a critical role in addressing domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence, will need significant support to expand their capacity, knowledge, and services to meet these unique needs.

The strategy recognises that intersectionality—the overlapping and compounding nature of discrimination—creates additional risks for certain groups. As such, it calls for a more nuanced, tailored approach to supporting survivors from marginalised communities. For these efforts to be truly effective, frontline NGOs must be equipped with both financial and training resources to build their expertise, foster collaboration, and deliver culturally competent services. Without adequately resourced organisations, the ambitions of the strategy—particularly its goal of ensuring zero tolerance and equitable access to services for all—will be difficult to achieve.



We strongly advocate for robust investment, not only in the implementation of the strategy but in the grassroots organisations that serve the most marginalised, ensuring they have the tools and support required to help vulnerable populations navigate the specific challenges they face in seeking safety and justice.

## Sex Work

The successor strategy to the National Strategy for Women and Girls in Ireland must ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of LGBTQ+ sex workers, especially women and trans women. The current legal framework, including the 2017 Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, has failed to provide protection for sex workers and instead exacerbated risks, particularly for those in marginalised communities.

## Decriminalisation and Public Health

The experiences of sex workers under the 2017 law highlight an urgent need for a harm-reduction approach rather than criminalisation. The introduction of criminal penalties for clients and increased brothel-keeping fines have driven sex work underground, reducing access to essential services and health interventions and increasing the risks of violence and exploitation. Ireland must adopt a rights-based approach that prioritises the health and well-being of sex workers.

To further public health objectives and the safety of both sex workers and consumers, we call for the immediate cessation of using harm-reducing items, such as condoms, lube, and dental dams, as evidence of brothel-keeping in criminal charges. Penalising the possession of such items not only endangers workers but also the wider public by discouraging safer sex practices, potentially exacerbating the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.

## End to Brothel-Keeping Criminalisation

Brothel-keeping laws disproportionately affect vulnerable sex workers, particularly migrant and LGBTQ+ individuals, forcing them to work in isolation to avoid legal penalties. This isolation heightens their exposure to violence and exploitation. For LGBTQ+ sex workers, including trans women, who often face

greater marginalisation, the risk is even higher. The current law criminalises those who work together for safety, pushing them into precarious and dangerous situations.

We advocate for the decriminalisation of consensual adult sex work, particularly the removal of penalties for working with others. This would allow workers to collaborate, enhancing their security and reducing the risk of violent attacks, which have escalated since the introduction of the current law. According to research, violent crimes against sex workers have increased by 92% following the 2017 legislation.

## Stigma and Its Consequences

The stigma surrounding sex work remains a key driver of violence and exploitation against sex workers. LGBTQ+ sex workers, already marginalised due to their gender and sexual identities, face compounded discrimination. The experiences of sex workers suggest that stigma is not only pervasive in society but is institutionalised within the Gardaí and broader law enforcement, contributing to mistrust and reluctance to report crimes.

Efforts must be made to address societal and institutional stigma by reframing sex work as legitimate work. The law must be reformed to support, not penalise, sex workers in Ireland. Training and sensitisation programmes for law enforcement and service providers must be introduced, particularly regarding the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ and migrant sex workers.

## Addressing Structural Inequality

LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly trans women, enter sex work due to systemic barriers such as discrimination in employment, housing insecurity, and lack of access to healthcare. These issues, rather than being addressed by the criminal justice system, are exacerbated by it. Therefore, policies that provide housing security and equal access to healthcare and employment must be prioritised.

Sex workers reported that regularised immigration status, secure housing, financial security, and alternative employment opportunities are critical supports needed to transition out of sex work. Any future strategy for women and girls must include policies to dismantle these structural barriers, providing a safety net for those in sex work.

## Public Realm and Urban Design

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ women and girls involves not only functioning healthcare, robust policing, and legal protections but also thoughtful urban design and community infrastructure. Good urban design plays a vital role in ensuring safety and fostering inclusivity. Well-designed public spaces and community facilities specifically tailored for LGBTQ+ individuals contribute significantly to their sense of security and belonging. These spaces not only provide safe environments but also encourage community cohesion and support networks.

Research has highlighted the significance of public spaces that are inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals. Public spaces are not merely physical locations; they are social arenas where people interact, express themselves, and experience a sense of belonging. For LGBTQ+ individuals, these spaces can be vital in affirming identity, fostering community connections, and promoting social integration.

However, research has also underscored that LGBTQ+ people often face exclusion, invisibility, or even hostility in public spaces. The lack of inclusive planning can lead to environments that do not cater to our needs, thereby perpetuating marginalisation. To address this, the National Strategy for Women and Girls must seek to incorporate the principles of queer public space into the National Planning Framework, ensuring that public spaces are designed to be welcoming, safe, and affirming for LGBTQ+ women and girls.

## The Principles of Queer Public Space

### **Visibility and Representation:**

- Queer public spaces ensure that LGBTQ+ identities and cultures are visible and represented within the public realm. This visibility challenges heteronormative assumptions and fosters a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ individuals.

### **Safety and Inclusivity:**

- These spaces are designed to be safe, welcoming, and inclusive for all, particularly LGBTQ+ people who often face discrimination or exclusion in traditional public spaces. Safety includes both physical security and a sense of psychological comfort.

**Accessibility and Usability:**

- Queer public spaces are accessible to all members of the LGBTQ+ community, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, or socioeconomic status. This principle emphasises the need for universal design and removing barriers that may prevent access.

**Flexibility and Fluidity:**

- These spaces are flexible and adaptable to the diverse and evolving needs of the LGBTQ+ community. They support a variety of activities and uses, from social gatherings to political activism, reflecting the fluid and dynamic nature of queer identities.

**Community and Connection:**

- Queer public spaces facilitate community-building and social connections among LGBTQ+ individuals. They provide places where people can meet, interact, and form supportive networks, which are crucial for the well-being and resilience of the community.

**Cultural Expression and Celebration:**

- These spaces offer platforms for the cultural expression and celebration of LGBTQ+ identities, histories, and achievements. They are often sites for events, performances, and other activities that celebrate queer culture and foster a sense of pride.

**Resistance and Empowerment:**

- Queer public spaces often serve as sites of resistance against discrimination and oppression, empowering LGBTQ+ individuals to assert their rights and identities. They play a critical role in advocating for social change and advancing equality.

## Other Observations and Inputs

### Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty

Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth, like all public bodies, must assess the human rights and equality issues relevant to its functions as part of its strategic planning and outline actions to address these issues meaningfully and measurably.

The previous National Strategy for Women and Girls made limited references to LGBTQ+ women and girls, often redirecting focus to work underway in the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy and the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy. While these efforts were valuable, the successor strategy presents an opportunity to meaningfully integrate the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ women and girls within its scope rather than relegating these to separate frameworks. The unique challenges faced by queer women and girls—particularly those who are gender non-conforming, transgender, or belong to other marginalised intersectional identities—must be fully addressed within the main strategy itself.

Failure to explicitly include the needs of LGBTQ+ women and girls in the next iteration risks perpetuating invisibility and reinforcing barriers to their full inclusion in Irish society. For the Department to genuinely fulfil its obligations under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, it must ensure that the new strategy forthrightly addresses the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, particularly with respect to sapphic (lesbian, bisexual, queer) identities.

Best practice in national policy would integrate these intersections holistically, acknowledging that LGBTQ+ women and girls face distinct, multifaceted challenges in areas such as healthcare, employment, education, and violence prevention. By embedding the specific needs of LGBTQ+ women and girls in the core of the successor strategy, the Department can lead with a more inclusive approach, ensuring it fulfils its public sector duty and promotes a genuinely equal and equitable society.

This inclusive approach is not only a legal obligation but is crucial to achieving the broader gender equality goals, as outlined in the National Strategy for Women and Girls. Explicitly addressing these needs will contribute to the

creation of a more comprehensive, intersectional strategy that promotes human rights and equality for all women and girls in Ireland, including those from LBTQ+ communities.

## **Tangible Indicators and Accountability in Strategy Delivery**

A crucial element for the strategy's success is the establishment of tangible indicators and robust accountability mechanisms to ensure the delivery of commitments. Without these, the strategy risks falling short of its goals, leaving women and girls underserved and vulnerable.

## **Costing and Budget Assignment for Strategy Implementation**

For the Strategy to be effective, all proposed actions must be thoroughly costed, and a dedicated budget is assigned for the strategy's entire duration. Clear and transparent financial planning ensures that each initiative has the necessary resources for successful execution. Without allocated funding, even the most well-intentioned actions risk being under-resourced and failing to achieve their desired impact. A well-defined budget not only demonstrates a genuine commitment from the government but also allows for better planning, monitoring, and accountability.

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