

# SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

Fiosrú

August 2025



**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, Inclusivity, and Impact.

Underpinning our work are our commitments to equity and intersectionality.

## LGBTQ+ Rights in Ireland Today

Ireland has made significant progress on LGBTQ+ rights in recent decades, from decriminalisation and marriage equality to gender recognition, increased public visibility, and hate crime legislation. These are important milestones, but the legacy of criminalisation, and the lived experience of policing for many in our community, continues to shape our reality today.

The relationship between LGBTQ+ people and the criminal justice system in Ireland is complex. For much of our history, the Gardaí were part of a broader system of state-sanctioned oppression. Laws criminalising same-sex relationships and policing of queer spaces and people were actively enforced. This history is not abstract; it remains within living memory for many in our community, particularly our elders, and this history is passed down from one generation to the next.

Today, while the legal landscape has changed, the culture of policing has not always kept pace. LGBTQ+ people continue to be among the most frequently targeted groups for hate crimes and hate incidents in the state. The rise in extremism and anti-LGBTQ+ hostility in recent years has been visible, alarming, and deeply felt by our community.

Unfortunately, many LGBTQ+ people do not feel confident turning to the Gardaí for protection. Trust in An Garda Síochána remains low, particularly among trans people, queer people of colour, sex workers, and others who face multiple forms of marginalisation. Reports of extremist activity, intimidation, hate crimes and hate incidents have been met with responses that feel dismissive, inadequate, or retraumatising. In many cases, individuals have been discouraged from reporting further incidents altogether due to past negative experiences.

While this is not the experience of all LGBTQ+ people, it is the experience of far too many.

We want to acknowledge the vital and positive work of the Garda National Diversity and Integration Bureau (GNDIB). In many ways, the Bureau operates like a small NGO within the wider policing system, committed, responsive, and grounded in values of inclusion, trauma-informed practice, and community engagement. Their efforts matter and have made a difference.

But they do not represent the full experience of policing in Ireland.

Concerns persist about a culture within An Garda Síochána that is defensive, closed to feedback, and slow to recognise or address systemic issues. When civil society organisations raise concerns, they are too often met with silence or resistance, rather than openness and dialogue. This makes it harder to build the kind of policing service the public deserves, one that protects everyone, listens to those it serves, and improves when it falls short.

Improving the relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and policing in Ireland is not simply a matter of new policies or training. It requires a shift in power, culture, and accountability. That includes strong independent oversight, ensuring complaints are taken seriously, and creating space for systemic investigations where necessary.

Fiosrú has a critical role to play in that shift. And it begins by listening to those whose trust has not yet been earned.

## Strategic Priority 1

*To improve public understanding of Fiosrú's role*

We welcome this priority and Fiosrú's commitment to increasing visibility and public awareness, especially among marginalised groups.

### **Key concern:**

- Section 195 of the Act restricts the ability to submit complaints to individuals. Organisations are explicitly excluded, even where we hold extensive, credible evidence of community-level or systemic concerns.
- LGBTQ+ organisations like ours often hear of patterns of inappropriate conduct (e.g. deadnaming, misgendering, hostile or dismissive attitudes) which are not captured by individual complaints alone.

### **Recommendation:**

- Fiosrú should create a formal mechanism to engage with civil society organisations as part of its strategy to understand concerns and trends that may not surface through individual complaints.
- This could take the form of quarterly engagement forums, structured community submissions, or thematic focus groups.
- These engagements should be used as a basis to trigger public interest investigations under Section 205 where patterns emerge.

This approach would greatly enhance understanding of Fiosrú's role and build credibility within marginalised communities, including LGBTQ+ people who currently lack trust in policing.

## Strategic Priority 2

*To deal with complaints in a timely, efficient and effective manner, and in accordance with fair procedures.*

We strongly support the inclusion of trauma-informed principles, clear communication, and cultural sensitivity in this priority.

### **Key concern:**

- Many complaints from LGBTQ+ people are likely to be deemed admissible but “suitable for resolution by An Garda Síochána” under Section 199(1)(a).
- These complaints often relate to interpersonal harm rather than criminal misconduct, yet the harm is real and recurring.
- For LGBTQ+ individuals, especially trans and gender non-conforming people, referral back to An Garda Síochána can feel like a breach of trust, given past negative experiences and low institutional confidence.

### **Recommendations:**

- Fiosrú must ensure it sets expectations carefully and compassionately, especially when referring complaints back to the Gardaí.
- Staff handling LGBTQ+ cases should be trained in trauma-informed practice and queer cultural competence to ensure the process is not retraumatising.
- Fiosrú should also explore how it can support complainants through advocacy partners, including LGBTQ+ organisations.

We welcome the reference to wraparound supports such as transport and translation services, and encourage Fiosrú to include access to community-based support workers (e.g. LGBTQ+ advocates) in this model.

## Strategic Priority 3

*To promote confidence in the process for resolving complaints and in investigations*

Building trust with LGBTQ+ communities requires meaningful accountability, not just procedural fairness.

### **Key concern:**

- The inability of organisations to submit complaints, combined with likely redirection of many complaints to An Garda Síochána, risks undermining trust in the system before it is even built.
- Fiosrú's Section 205 powers allow for proactive, public interest investigations, even without an admissible complaint.

### **Recommendations:**

- Fiosrú should commit in its final strategy to actively using Section 205 powers in response to concerns raised by marginalised groups, including LGBTQ+ people.
- "Public interest" must be interpreted broadly, to include the interest of marginalised communities, not only the general public.
- When complaints reveal repeat themes (e.g. systemic misgendering or abuse of discretion), Fiosrú must act to address systemic failings and promote trust and confidence using its public interest powers.

By embedding these commitments, Fiosrú can begin to close the credibility gap and build confidence in its role as an independent body that protects everyone, not just those who feel comfortable engaging with formal systems.

## Other Observations and Inputs

### Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty

Under Section 42(1) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, all public bodies, including Fiosrú, are legally required to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment
- Protect the human rights of staff and service users

This duty must be reflected explicitly in the development of policies, procedures, and strategic plans. It is disappointing that the draft Statement of Strategy does not reference the Public Sector Duty at all.

While we welcome the language in the strategy around human rights, dignity, fairness, and trauma-informed practice, the absence of any explicit reference to Section 42 obligations is a missed opportunity.

Fiosrú is not responsible for operational policing, but it does play a critical role in the independent oversight of how state power is exercised and how marginalised and vulnerable people experience that power. That work must be grounded in a rights-based approach, not only in tone but in law.

We urge Fiosrú to:

- Acknowledge the Public Sector Duty in its final Statement of Strategy as a core guiding framework.
- Set out how it will meet this duty in practice, particularly in relation to vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Include actions to monitor the experience of minority communities interacting with the complaints process.
- Commit to transparent reporting on progress towards implementation of its public sector duty and outcomes by equality ground, including sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and disability.

This duty is not optional. It is a statutory obligation and must be visibly embedded in the organisation's strategy and approach to oversight.



## Tangible Indicators and Accountability in Strategy Delivery

A crucial element for the success of Fiosrú's strategy is the inclusion of tangible indicators and clear accountability mechanisms to track progress and ensure delivery.

Without measurable outcomes, it will be difficult to assess whether the commitments in the strategy are being implemented or making a difference, particularly for marginalised communities like LGBTQ+ people, whose trust in oversight is not yet established.

We urge Fiosrú to:

- Include specific, measurable indicators tied to each strategic priority
- Build in regular, public reporting on progress and outcomes
- Engage civil society in reviewing performance and identifying gaps
- Ensure that indicators reflect both process (e.g. engagement, access) and impact (e.g. improved experience, resolution, trust)

A strategy without mechanisms for measurement and accountability risks falling short of its intent, leaving communities underserved and vulnerable, despite positive language.

## 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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