

# Submission on the National Strategy for Improving Community Safety

## Issue 1: Defining Community Safety

Community safety for LGBTQ+ people means being safe and feeling safe at home, in public, online, and in community spaces. For many LGBTQ+ people, especially trans people, queer people of colour, migrants, and sex workers, safety is shaped by past experiences of discrimination, harassment, and hostile behaviour.

Key points:

- People feel unsafe when hate incidents, harassment, or intimidation go unchallenged.
- Safety drops when people avoid services due to poor past experiences or fear of prejudice.
- Safety varies across Ireland. Urban centres see visible hostility from extremist groups. Rural settings present risks of isolation, stigma, and limited support.
- LGBTQ+ safety is shaped by both personal experiences and the stories shared across generations, including the legacy of criminalisation. This affects trust, confidence, and help-seeking behaviour.

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A national definition of community safety must recognise these lived experiences. It needs to name the specific risks faced by LGBTQ+ people, acknowledge the impact of extremism, and reflect the realities of people who feel unsafe even when objective crime statistics appear low.

You can only improve what you are willing to name.

## Issue 2: Community-Grounded Knowledge

Outhouse works with more than 48,000 visitors a year across social spaces, support services, and cultural activities. This gives us direct, real-time insight into changing community safety concerns.

Frontline observations:

- People often report fear of intimidation near queer venues or community hubs.
- Many incidents never reach formal reporting systems due to fear, distrust, or exhaustion.
- Community members share patterns of extremist activity that is not visible in official data.
- People rely heavily on peer networks, community centres, and informal supports for safety information and emotional reassurance.

Barriers to community-grounded knowledge:

- Low trust in institutions reduces reporting and participation.
- Some groups are under-represented in formal engagement processes due to language, fear of exposure, or past harm.
- Staff in state bodies sometimes lack cultural competence, which limits open dialogue—for example, the limitations placed on this consultation process.

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To build a strong strategy, the national approach needs:

- Direct engagement with civil society groups that hold this knowledge.
- Formal mechanisms for expert community input at local and national levels.
- Space for people to share concerns without fear of consequences.
- Trauma-informed practice is embedded in all engagement.

Community-grounded knowledge is strongest when people feel listened to and respected.

### **Issue 3: Collaboration**

Effective collaboration requires trust, shared purpose, and a clear understanding of roles. When collaboration works, organisations pool knowledge, resources, and relationships to improve safety for people who face real risks.

Examples from our experience:

- Cooperation with Garda Diversity Officers has helped individual LGBTQ+ people feel acknowledged.
- Local partnerships support safety planning around events, parades, and community gatherings.
- Multi-agency responses facilitate referrals for individuals in crisis, ensuring that wrap-around care and support are in place.

What helps collaboration:

- Clear channels for ongoing communication.
- Inclusive structures where marginalised voices are invited in, not overlooked.
- Skilled staff trained in trauma-informed and culturally competent practice.

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- A recognition that lived experience organisations offer expertise that state agencies cannot replicate.

What blocks collaboration:

- Power imbalances.
- A refusal to listen to the critical friend in the room.
- Inconsistent follow-through from some agencies.
- Lack of clarity on responsibilities.
- Engagement that happens only in moments of crisis.

The Strategy should:

- Create formal engagement pathways for LGBTQ+ organisations and other marginalised groups.
- Resource local participation so communities can contribute on an equal footing.
- Promote shared problem-solving rather than one-directional communication.
- Encourage agencies to foster long-term relationships, rather than just transactional interactions.

People need to see collaboration that feels real, responsive, and grounded in respect.

## Issue 4: Measurement

Traditional indicators of safety do not capture the lived reality of LGBTQ+ people. Low reporting rates and high levels of under-reported hostility mean the gap between felt safety and recorded data can be wide.

Important indicators:

- Levels of felt safety in public spaces.

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- Trust in institutions responsible for safety.
- Rates of reporting for hate crimes and hate incidents.
- Community confidence that incidents will be taken seriously.
- Visibility of extremist activity targeting minority groups.
- Access to safe spaces, support services, and culturally competent staff.

To measure what matters, the Strategy should:

- Combine objective and subjective indicators.
- Track felt safety using regular engagement with civil society groups.
- Disaggregate data across equality grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Include indicators on institutional responses, such as complaint handling, referral pathways, and follow-up.
- Produce annual public reporting that allows for scrutiny and learning.

What gets measured shapes what gets prioritised.

## Issue 5: Policy and Governance

Community safety needs a coordinated, whole-of-government approach grounded in human rights and equality. Policies across departments must reinforce each other rather than work at cross-purposes.

Supportive national and local policies include:

- Hate crime and incitement legislation.
- The Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty.
- Local Community Safety Partnerships.
- National mental health and wellbeing programmes.
- The National LGBTQI+ Inclusion Strategy II.

Policies that hinder safety usually do so through gaps rather than intent:

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- Weak coordination between agencies.
- Lack of cultural competence in frontline settings.
- Inconsistent responses to hate incidents.
- Under-resourced community participation structures.

For the Strategy to succeed, it must:

- Embed the Public Sector Duty as a core requirement and require agencies to show how their policies advance both safety and equality.
- Ensure that community safety planning includes LGBTQ+ people and other marginalised groups.
- Resource community voices so participation is accessible and meaningful.
- Establish clear national oversight and reporting to track progress across sectors.

## Other Observations

Emerging risks:

- Extremism and anti-LGBTQ+ hate are rising. People's perception of safety is shaped by what they see online as much as physical spaces.
- Economic pressures, homelessness, and social isolation increase vulnerability.

Future actions should:

- Recognise the changing nature of public threats.
- Invest in services that provide social connection, information, and support.
- Strengthen links with organisations that work directly with marginalised communities.
- Ensure that national structures remain connected to real-world, lived experiences.