

# SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE GARDA DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2026 - 2029

An Garda Síochána

February 2026

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## About Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre

Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre is Ireland's largest LGBTQ+ community support and advocacy organisation. We provide a safe and welcoming space where LGBTQ+ people can gather, connect, and access support in a society that does not always recognise or meet their needs. Our work centres on people who are marginalised, isolated, or at risk, and we engage daily with individuals experiencing poverty, housing insecurity, discrimination, hate, trauma, and social exclusion.

We deliver a wide range of supports, including mental health and wellbeing services, information and referral, community safety initiatives, cultural and social programmes, and access to safe, inclusive spaces. These services act as early intervention, reduce isolation, and support people to navigate complex systems that often fail to account for their lived realities.

Our work places us in daily contact with LGBTQ+ people navigating issues of safety, trust, discrimination, hate crime, and engagement with state services, including policing. This includes people who have chosen not to report harm to An Garda Síochána, as well as those whose engagement has been shaped by prior negative experiences. These perspectives are central to understanding both underreporting and mistrust.

Our work is grounded in the values of trust, respect, joy, inclusivity, and impact. Underpinning everything we do is a clear commitment to equity and intersectionality, recognising that inequality is shaped by overlapping factors.

Because Outhouse operates as an open-access community space, we hear directly from people at moments of vulnerability, crisis, and fear. This gives us real-time insight into how policing is experienced on the ground, not just in isolated incidents but as a pattern shaped by history, culture, and consistency of response. This submission draws on that lived experience and is intended to support the development of a Garda Diversity Strategy that delivers meaningful change rather than aspirational commitments. It is informed by our engagement with policing oversight bodies, community safety policy, and national inclusion strategies, and reflects both frontline experience and policy analysis.

## Policing and the LGBTQ+ Community in Ireland

Any Garda Diversity Strategy that seeks to build trust with LGBTQ+ communities must start from an honest assessment of history. For much of the twentieth century, LGBTQ+ people in Ireland were criminalised, surveilled, and policed as offenders. An Garda Síochána was the primary institution responsible for enforcing laws that criminalised consensual same-sex acts between men until 1993. This enforcement included surveillance, arrest, prosecution, and the creation of an environment in which LGBTQ+ people reasonably feared Garda interaction, even when they were victims of crime. This legacy is not abstract. It remains within living memory, particularly for older gay and bisexual men, and it continues to shape intergenerational attitudes towards policing.

The decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 marked a legal turning point, but it did not immediately undo decades of harm. The Irish State formally acknowledged this harm in June 2018, when the Government issued an apology to the LGBTQ+ community on the twenty-fifth anniversary of decriminalisation. That apology recognised the stigma, fear, and damage caused by criminalisation and acknowledged that it was wrong for the State to have prosecuted people for consensual acts. It also committed to exploring redress for those affected.

However, while the State apology was significant, it did not explicitly address the institutional role of policing in enforcing these laws. For many LGBTQ+ people, particularly older gay and bisexual men, Garda stations were not places of protection but sites of risk. This distinction matters when considering present-day expectations of trust. The Gardaí were not a distant arm of the State but the everyday face of criminalisation, harassment, oppression, and fear.

The consequences of this hostility were not only personal but operational. The failure to solve the 1982 murder of Charlie Self has since been linked by former Gardaí to homophobic attitudes within the force at the time, which undermined community cooperation and trust. This remains a stark example of how prejudice within policing can obstruct justice itself.

This history matters because trust is cumulative. It is shaped not only by current policy but by memory, storytelling, and experience passed from one generation to the next. A Garda Diversity Strategy that does not explicitly acknowledge this context risks misdiagnosing mistrust as a present-day perception problem rather than a rational response to historical and lived harm.

## Community Safety, Hate Crime, and Lived Experience

LGBTQ+ people in Ireland continue to experience high levels of harassment, violence, and threats. Recent national data<sup>1</sup> shows that 72% of LGBTQI+ people have experienced verbal abuse, one in four have been physically assaulted, and 16.5% have experienced sexual assault. More than half do not feel safe showing affection with their partner in public. These are not marginal figures. They describe a community navigating persistent risk in everyday life. They also explain why many LGBTQ+ people approach policing from a position of vigilance rather than confidence.

Hate crime has a particular impact because it targets people for who they are. Research shows that LGBTQ+ victims of hate crimes are significantly more likely to experience acute psychological distress than victims of non-bias crimes. This has implications for how people present when engaging with Gardaí. Anxiety, anger, fear, or withdrawal should be understood as trauma responses, not hostility.

Recorded Garda data shows anti-LGBTQI+ bias as one of the most common motivations for hate crime, yet reporting remains extremely low. Only a small minority of LGBTQ+ people who experience physical or sexual assault report to An Garda Síochána. This gap between lived experience and recorded data must be understood as a trust and systems issue, not a lack of harm. Addressing this gap is therefore a core policing challenge, not solely a community engagement issue. Failure to address this gap risks leaving Garda intelligence incomplete and perpetuating cycles of harm that escalate rather than resolve.

## Barriers to Reporting and Engagement with An Garda Síochána

Outhouse consistently hears from LGBTQ+ people who choose not to report crimes or incidents. The reasons are well established. People fear not being believed, worry about escalation, or are concerned about being outed to family, employers, or communities. Trans and non-binary people frequently express anxiety about misgendering or being treated disrespectfully during the reporting process.

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<sup>1</sup> Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland Report, Trinity College Dublin, 2024

Past experiences matter deeply. When individuals encounter dismissive responses, poor communication, or a lack of follow-up, they are unlikely to report again. Over time, this leads to exhaustion and disengagement. The result is a significant underreporting of hate crimes, which in turn obscures the true scale of the problem and undermines intelligence-led policing.

Encouraging reporting without addressing these structural barriers risks placing responsibility on communities rather than on systems. This approach reinforces disengagement and deepens mistrust, particularly when prior engagement has not yielded visible or tangible outcomes.

## Garda Response, Consistency, and Victim Experience

Where LGBTQ+ people do engage with Gardaí, experiences vary significantly depending on geography, station culture, and individual Garda members. Some report respectful, professional treatment. Others describe interactions that felt minimising, poorly informed, or retraumatising. This inconsistency creates a perception of a postcode lottery in policing and undermines organisational confidence. It also undermines intelligence-led policing by producing uneven data and missed opportunities for early intervention. Inconsistent practice at the local level weakens the national strategy and frustrates efforts to build coherent, evidence-based responses to hate crime.

Victim-centred policing must extend beyond first contact. Many people report that once an initial statement is taken, communication becomes sporadic or ceases entirely. Victims are left uncertain about whether their report is being acted upon or what the next steps might be. For people already carrying trauma, this silence can be as damaging as an overtly negative response.

The Strategy should commit to clear standards around follow-up, communication, and victim engagement, recognising cumulative harm rather than treating incidents in isolation.

## Extremism, Intimidation, and Public Order Policing

The rise in extremism and organised intimidation targeting LGBTQ+ people has had a profound effect on perceptions of safety. Harassment, online abuse, and so-called “protests” outside LGBTQ+ spaces and events create a climate of fear

that extends far beyond individual incidents. Garda responses to these situations are closely scrutinised by affected communities and have a disproportionate and lasting impact on trust. Where LGBTQ+ communities perceive hesitation or inconsistency, this is often interpreted as uncertainty about Garda commitment to their individual and collective safety.

Where responses are perceived as hesitant or inconsistent, confidence in Garda protection declines not only in relation to public order policing but across all engagement with An Garda Síochána. The Diversity Strategy must explicitly recognise the cumulative impact of intimidation and harassment on minoritised communities, including the chilling effect on reporting, visibility, and participation in public life. It must commit to consistent, visible, and proactive responses that demonstrate a clear commitment to protecting targeted communities.

## Training, Organisational Capacity, and People Power

Training is often cited as the solution to diversity challenges, but it must be approached realistically. General cultural awareness training, especially eLearning, is not sufficient to equip Garda members to respond effectively to hate crimes or the specific needs of LGBTQ+ communities. Hate crime training must be mandatory, in-person, and ongoing, and it must address sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and intersectional vulnerability. Training should also address trauma-informed policing and the historical context that shapes LGBTQ+ engagement with law enforcement.

Training alone will not succeed without organisational capacity. People power pressures within An Garda Síochána are having a direct and negative impact on community policing. The routine redeployment of community-facing roles, including Garda Diversity Officers (GDOs), materially undermines trust-building and should be treated as a strategic risk rather than an operational convenience. This undermines continuity, disrupts relationships, and sends a message that community engagement is expendable under pressure. This risk should be explicitly acknowledged and mitigated within workforce planning and deployment decisions.

If trust-building is to be taken seriously, it must be resourced and protected as core policing work.

## Data, Recording, Transparency, and Accountability

Transparent data collection and reporting are essential for credibility. Communities need to understand how reports are assessed, how incidents are recorded on Garda systems, and how decisions are made. Without this clarity, reporting feels futile.

The Strategy should commit to improving the consistency and frequency of publication of hate crime data, including disaggregation by protected characteristic. It should also recognise that quantitative data alone is insufficient and commit to capturing qualitative information about victim experience and outcomes, in partnership with civil society.

What gets measured signals what matters. Without regular, transparent reporting on hate crime, outcomes, and engagement activity, communities are left without evidence that reporting leads to change. Transparency is therefore a trust-building measure, not a technical exercise. Without it, communities are asked to place trust in systems that they cannot see or assess.

## Partnership, Engagement, and the Role of Garda Diversity Officers

Garda Diversity Officers play a critical role in building trust and facilitating engagement with LGBTQ+ communities. Their role should be clearly defined within the Strategy, including minimum expectations around availability, continuity, training, and engagement, and protected from routine redeployment, with clear reporting lines and accountability at the Divisional and national levels. Evidence from community organisations shows that trust has improved where Garda Diversity Officers are visible, accessible, and supported. For many LGBTQ+ people, these officers are the only Garda members they feel comfortable engaging with.

However, the routine redeployment of Garda Diversity Officers due to staffing pressures significantly undermines this work. Relationships stall, trust is set back, and communities feel deprioritised. The Strategy must explicitly protect these roles, ensure they are adequately resourced, and recognise community policing as an essential function rather than an optional add-on. Failure to do so risks repeating a cycle in which trust is built through individual effort, only to be eroded by organisational decisions.

## Apology, Restorative Justice, and Institutional Redress

Restorative justice begins with acknowledgement. While the State apology of 2018 was a vital step, trust-building with LGBTQ+ communities would be strengthened by an explicit apology from An Garda Síochána acknowledging its institutional role in enforcing criminalisation and the harm that it caused. Such an apology would distinguish between legislative wrongdoing acknowledged by the State and the operational harm experienced through policing practice.

Such an apology would not be symbolic. It would function as a foundation for restorative engagement, signal institutional learning, and provide a clear basis for renewed expectations of trust and cooperation. It would demonstrate accountability, learning, and institutional maturity. It would also align with restorative approaches that recognise the importance of naming harm as a foundation for repair. Without this acknowledgement, calls for trust are likely to be experienced as one-sided and premature.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to support the delivery of existing legal and policy commitments.

### Acknowledge Historical Harm and Issue an Institutional Apology

The Garda Diversity Strategy should explicitly acknowledge the historical role of An Garda Síochána in enforcing the criminalisation of consensual same-sex acts and the harm this caused to LGBTQ+ people. As part of a restorative justice approach, An Garda Síochána should issue a clear institutional apology, distinct from the 2018 State apology, recognising its role in that enforcement and its lasting impact on trust. This acknowledgement should be framed as a foundation for rebuilding legitimacy and engagement, not as a symbolic gesture.

### Treat Hate Crime Response as Core Policing Work

Hate crime response should be positioned as a core function of policing, not a specialist or marginal activity. The Strategy should recognise underreporting as

a systemic issue linked to trust, consistency, and victim experience. Garda responses must be trauma-informed, recognise cumulative harm, and be supported by clear standards for victim communication and follow-up, so that reporting leads to visible action and accountability.

## Protect and Resource Garda Diversity Officer Roles

Garda Diversity Officers should be formally recognised within the Strategy as essential to community policing and trust-building. Their roles should be clearly defined, adequately resourced, and protected from routine redeployment. Continuity of relationships with minoritised communities should be treated as operationally critical, with redeployment recognised as a strategic risk to trust and community safety.

## Deliver Mandatory, Ongoing LGBTQ+ and Hate Crime Training

Mandatory, in-person, and ongoing training on hate crime and LGBTQ+ inclusion should be delivered across all Garda ranks. This training should address sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, intersectional vulnerability, trauma-informed policing, and the historical context shaping LGBTQ+ engagement with law enforcement. Training should be developed and delivered in partnership with LGBTQ+ organisations, the Garda College, and the National Diversity Unit and grounded in lived experience.

## Strengthen Data, Recording, and Transparency

The Strategy should commit to improving the accuracy, consistency, and transparency of hate crime recording and reporting. This should include regular publication of disaggregated data by protected characteristic and the development of mechanisms to capture qualitative information on victim experience and outcomes. Transparent reporting should be treated as a trust-building measure and a core accountability function.

## Respond Consistently to Extremism and Intimidation

The Strategy should explicitly address the impact of extremism, organised intimidation, and harassment targeting LGBTQ+ people and other minoritised communities. Garda responses to such activity should be consistent, visible, and

proactive, recognising the wider chilling effect these incidents have on community safety, trust, and confidence in policing. Public order responses should clearly demonstrate a commitment to protecting targeted communities.

## Embed Partnership as a Core Delivery Mechanism

Structured, ongoing partnership with LGBTQ+ organisations and civil society should be embedded as a core delivery mechanism of the Strategy.

Engagement should be regular, resourced, and linked to decision-making, rather than ad hoc or consultative. Community organisations should be recognised as expert partners in shaping, monitoring, and evaluating Garda practice.

## Conclusion

The Garda Diversity Strategy 2026–2029 presents a critical opportunity to rebuild trust, strengthen community safety, and embed a consistent, rights-based approach to policing. For LGBTQ+ communities, success will be measured not by language but by lived change: safer public spaces, consistent responses, protected engagement roles, meaningful accountability, and an honest reckoning with history.

The central question remains whether LGBTQ+ people will feel safer, more respected, and more confident engaging with An Garda Síochána at the end of this Strategy than they do today. The answer to that question will depend on whether commitments in this Strategy are protected, resourced, and delivered consistently across the organisation.

Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre stands ready to engage as a constructive partner in achieving that outcome. Consistency, resourcing, and accountability will determine whether this Strategy builds trust or reinforces existing gaps.



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