

Ireland is leading the way in adopting policies and strategies to address the rights and inclusion of LGBTI+ young people

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Ireland over the last two years has adopted a series of measures to underpin the rights of and services to LGBTI+ young people. These centre upon the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy 2018-2020, which sets out clear goals and a suite of actions to improve their rights and well-being in regard to health, education, criminal justice, equality and other domains. The Strategy and its actions are closely aligned with other strategies for young people as well as with population-wide LGBTI+ strategies. The new government which took up office on 27 June 2020 is committed to taking forward the Strategy, which will require addressing various complexities.

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Description

LGBTI+ young people comprise those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and those who are born intersex. There is an estimated 29,000 such young people in Ireland. Evidence from surveys and other sources suggests that they experience widespread bullying and even violence with over 70% reporting that they feel unsafe in school. For policy purposes, the protection of this group of young people raises issues of eliminating homophobic and transphobic bullying and protecting their rights not to be discriminated against especially on grounds of gender identity and sexual orientation (rights included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

One of the most important initiatives was the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy 2018-2020. This is the first LGBTI+ youth strategy in the world. It adopts a cross-governmental approach to supporting and enhancing the lives of LGBTI+ young people. Its three over-arching goals are: to create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people; to improve their physical, mental and sexual health; and to develop the research and data environment to better understand their lives. The Strategy contains some 15 objectives and 59 actions that range across policy fields including health, education, policing, employment and training, communication, housing and equality.

The measures it has led to include an annual Implementation Forum and an

annual Youth Forum, both established in 2019 to enable active participation and debate by LGBTI+ young people. In addition, a national mapping exercise on provision of LGBTI+ youth services was conducted in 2019 by the Education and Training Boards Ireland, and €100,000 were allocated from government funding for additional hours to youth services for these young people. Furthermore, there is ongoing investment in capacity building in service provision for the target group, with some €170,000 already awarded to 25 organisations (including youth services, family resource centres, sexual health centres, Traveller organisations, art therapy, and other organisations with LGBTI+ specific expertise and knowledge) for development.



Outlook and commentary

The Strategy has some notable strengths. First, it is aligned with the overarching National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 and feeds into that framework's implementation structures. Actions in the Strategy are also aligned with a number of other policies and programmes including the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 and the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021. An underpinning principle is to ensure alignment and integration while at the same time focusing on the young age group. Second, it adopts a participatory approach, based on the principle of consultation in both compiling and monitoring the Strategy.

With participation and “voice” to the fore, the Strategy is aligned with one of the three pillars of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in Children. A third strength is the cross-governmental approach in terms of both viewing the issues involved as intersectional and also recognising that cross-departmental actions are required.

An implementation report on the Strategy was published after its first year. At that stage, 47 of the 59 Strategy actions had been initiated and plans were in place for initiating a further nine.

The Strategy and associated measures should be seen as part of a general push in Ireland to develop protections for LGBTI+ and other minority groups of young people (e.g., those with a disability). Legal changes are planned, particularly for gender recognition on the basis of self-declaration for transgender young people aged 16 and 17 years old (with parental consent). Currently, 16 and 17 year olds require

medical certification and a court order to secure recognition. The new government which took up office on 27 June 2020 has also committed to these measures.

There are various complexities involved though. One is the appropriate age cut-off. Some – especially the NGOs representing the sector (e.g., BeLonG To) - have been critical of the cut-off of 16 years of age for the purposes of legislating for gender recognition. A second matter is how broad recognition should be. In this regard, the fact that the Strategy does not plan to give a legal status for non-binary young people has been subject to criticism. A third issue that requires greater attention is bullying: research consistently indicates bullying as a widespread experience of LGBTI+ young people in Ireland but the action plan on bullying is out of date and needs to be informed by recent LGBTI+ youth policy. Fourthly, changes in the curriculum to reflect policies and developments in knowledge and public opinion are also overdue.

Further reading

[BeLonG To LGBTI+ Young People Need More Than Token Gestures – Strategic Plan 2019-2021](#)

[Children’s Rights Alliance \(2020\), Report Card 2020](#)

Department of Children and Youth Affairs:

- [National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy 2018-2020: LGBTI+ Young People: Visible, Valued and Included](#)
- [Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children & Young People 2014-2020](#)
- [First Annual Report on the Implementation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Intersex \(LGBTI+\) National Youth Strategy 2018-2020](#)

[Pizmony-Levy, O. and BeLonG To Youth Services \(2019\), The 2019 School Climate Survey Report: The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people in Ireland’s schools](#)

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