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[Blog article](#) by Kathryn Barr, Senior Policy Officer, Equality Commission NI

The wait for equality strategies in Northern Ireland

In 2021, the [Northern Ireland Executive was due to launch LGBTQI+* and gender equality strategies](#). These were part of four promised, including anti-poverty and disability. But we are yet to see any of these strategies.

Northern Ireland has never had a sexual orientation or LGBTQI+ strategy. We did have a Gender Equality Strategy, but it ended in 2016. The work is being led by the Department for Communities and [the Communities Minister recently said he is considering next steps](#).

It is vital work on these strategies is prioritised to advance equality for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Strategies are needed to promote equality for LGBTQIA+ people

All four strategies are needed, to provide a roadmap for Government and others to work towards to promote equality, including for LGBTQIA+ people. While we wait, inequality, discrimination and hate crime continue.

For instance, between January 2023 and December 2023, the [PSNI recorded](#):

- 243 hate crimes because of sexual orientation
- 41 hate crimes because of transgender identity

We know there were probably many more hate crime and incidents against LGBTQIA+ people which weren't reported to the PSNI.

What should be in a LGBTQIA+ strategy?

The strategies should help improve equality of opportunity for LGBTQIA+ people by:

Strengthening the law: we want to see [single equality legislation](#). This should reflect the best international standards to protect against discrimination. We also want to see [stronger hate crime legislation](#), that protects more LGBTQIA+ people.

Ensuring an impact: There are many equality data gaps, including for LGBTQIA+ people. This can make it harder to know what inequalities people might be facing. For instance, we have highlighted a lack of equality data on gender identity and sexual orientation in relation to [housing](#).

Tackling bullying: Action is needed to tackle homophobic and transphobic [bullying in schools](#). Bullying can cause significant pain to young people. It can affect their attendance at school and have life-long impacts.

Leading on social attitudes: The Strategy should promote positive attitudes, acceptance and respect. It should actively challenge prejudicial stereotypes, behaviours and commentary relating to LGBTQIA+ people.

Involving the LGBTQIA+ community

The LGBTQIA+ community and their representatives should be involved in designing and delivering the strategies. Government should work with these groups again to get their help to design them. It should then consult on them with the wider public.

The capacity of organisations representing the LGBTQIA+ community should be strengthened. This will help them be part of delivering the strategies, working with others to improve equality. It will also help organisations monitor the strategies, to make sure they are a success.

What next?

The LGBTQIA+ and gender equality social inclusion strategies, alongside the promised anti-poverty and disability strategies, could significantly improve equality of opportunity. However, they need to be resourced, with clear action plans. They also need to involve the LGBTQIA+ community, from design to delivery and monitoring.

Join us in calling on decision makers to prioritise delivery of all four strategies.

You can read more about the Commission's recommendations relating to [Sexual Orientation](#) and [Gender Equality](#).

*This had been due to be a Sexual Orientation Strategy. The Commission understands that following a recommendation from an Expert Panel, the Department for Communities had been working on a LGBTQI+ Strategy.