

## **Blog article by the Equality Commission's Advisory Services Team**

### **Blog: The need for LGBTQI+ and gender equality strategies**

The importance of comprehensive, resourced and human-rights compliant LGBTQI+ and Gender Equality Strategies remains clear.

A priority for Ministers and the Executive must be the development and delivery of evidence based and stakeholder informed social strategies, with stakeholder led oversight, monitoring and review to help shape effective Departmental implementation.

This LGBTQIA+ awareness week/ International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia we would encourage you to call for action to secure progress on these strategies.

In the last Assembly Mandate the Equality Commission welcomed the commitment and action, led by the Department for Communities, to develop a suite of new Social Inclusion Strategies – spanning Anti-Poverty, Disability, LGBTQI+ and Gender Equality. To inform the focus of the Strategies, Expert panels set out recommendations for each of the Strategies, including on [LGBTQI+ \(pdf\)](#) and [Gender Equality](#) issues (pdf).

However, the development of the Social Inclusion strategies remains incomplete and draft Strategies have not been produced and key sectoral representatives have not yet had the opportunity to respond to working drafts.

With regards to key priorities, taking account of key evidence and longstanding engagement with sectoral representatives, the Commissions continues to call for:

#### **Law reform**

Comprehensive single equality or dedicated legislation must bring anti-discrimination protections for individuals up to the latest international standards, and take account known weaknesses and UN bodies' Concluding Observations. We must also see the completion of wider areas of law reform such [hate crime](#) legislation to advance equality more broadly.

#### **Ensuring an Impact**

It is vital that all key policies and programmes are tracked to ensure that they are making a meaningful impact on people's lives. Currently, data gaps in many areas of public policy and service provision prevent an assessment of impact by equality category, including for LGBTQI+ people. For that reason we continue to call for all key measures, including in the Programme for Government, to also be

disaggregated and monitored across the full range of equality categories. If such data gaps are not addressed, a fundamental weakness will remain regarding the design, delivery, monitoring and review of public services.

### **Embedding Anti-Bullying**

Legislation seeking to tackle bullying in education took effect in 2021. The LGBTQI+ Strategy can be used to ensure that steps are now taken support education providers to embed change and to tackle homophobic, transphobic and other prejudice-based bullying.

### **Visible Leadership on Social Attitudes**

We recommend action to support role models; to promote positive attitudes; and to actively challenge negative behaviours and commentary relating to LGBTQI+ people.

Almost a decade ago, [we recommended](#) (*pdf*) that relevant Strategies should reflect the [Yogyakarta Principles](#), which outline the application of binding international human rights law to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. These principles set out in detail the rights of individuals of different sexual orientation and gender identities, as well as making clear the obligations on states in order to realise those rights. The Principles include rights to equality and non-discrimination, the right to work, the right to education without discrimination, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The Commission is continuing to push for a human rights-based approach to the Strategies through engagement with the Departments and our representation on the LGBTQI+ and Gender social strategy co-design groups.

The LGBTQI+, gender equality and wider social strategies, if effectively developed and implemented, have the potential to significantly improve equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland. We call upon decision-makers to ensure that comprehensive and resourced social strategies are delivered as a priority in this mandate – including the LGBTQI+ and Gender Equality Strategies – and via the [Programme for Government](#) (*pdf*).

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

**May 2022**