



Citizens **Information** Board
information · advice · advocacy

Submission to the National Office for Community Safety

Citizens Information Board
28 November 2025

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Introduction

The Citizen's Information Board (CIB) welcomes the invitation to make a submission on the **National Strategy for Improving Community Safety** and endorses its aim of providing a whole of government, whole of society approach to community safety.

CIB funded services - the Citizens Information Services (CIS), the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS), the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and the National Advocacy Service (NAS) for people with disabilities – play a key role in empowering all citizens through the provision of impartial information, advice, assistance and advocacy enabling them to access their rights and entitlements.

CIB-funded services often function as a first point of enquiry for members of the public who are seeking information and support. While these services, in most cases, can offer immediate and direct assistance to clients, they also refer clients, where appropriate, to other service providers. Access to justice and related legal services continues to be an element of the work of CIB-funded services. CIB funds the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) to offer a specialist support service to CIS information providers. Information providers are also able to make appointments for the FLAC phone clinics for CIS clients in need of free legal advice: [Free Legal Advice Centres \(FLAC\)](#). CIB also funds the Immigrant Council of Ireland to provide a specialist service to CIS to support immigrants including a helpline, and technical advice and expertise.

CIB receives feedback (both quantitative and qualitative) from our funded services. This provides insights on the issues that people are experiencing in accessing their rights and entitlements and asserting their human and legal rights. We relay this to policy makers, largely in the form of policy submissions, responses to consultations and commissioned research reports. This submission addresses issues 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the Issues Paper provided for this consultation.

Issue 1: Defining Community Safety

Inhabiting and accessing space is a right in and of itself: all citizens, including those from different ethnic backgrounds, those who have a disability, older, and younger people should have a right to access, and feel safe in spaces and places in the same ways as everyone else.¹

¹ [TowardsSafer\(r\)Space\(summary\).pdf](#)

Ireland is now a culturally diverse nation. In the 2022 Census, 631,785 residents had non-Irish citizenship, representing 12% of the population. This was an 18% increase since Census 2016.

In the period from 2023 – 2024, 25% of callers to CIS had a country of origin outside Ireland.² These callers had a range of queries relating to social welfare, moving country, housing, health and justice. There were almost 5,000 queries from this group relating to justice issues, including legal aid and advice, garda vetting, courts system, and law and rights. CIS information providers also recorded specific needs for EU/non-EU clients/callers: including English language barriers - impacting over 32,000 callers – and distress – recorded as being experienced by almost 6,000 callers.

Issues around safety arose in the qualitative social policy data provided by CIS in the context of housing, homelessness, living in emergency accommodation, domestic violence, elder abuse, discrimination and racism.

People from different cultural backgrounds and different immigration status may experience discrimination and racism affecting their sense of safety in their communities. There were examples in the qualitative data provided of intimidation experienced by non-Irish callers in local communities, e.g. threats and intimidation of a non-Irish single mother, who had just moved into social housing in an area of Dublin.

People may also have a different understanding of community safety, and of the various public services they can avail of that can support them to feel safer. Some may be unaware of laws and services that protect their rights, for example in policing, housing, employment, justice, and consumer protection. Some communities are more likely than others to have a negative perception of the justice system because of their experience of engaging directly with it: people fleeing harsh regimes, for example, or because of patterns of over-representation in the criminal justice system, for example, Travellers may have less trust in the system than settled communities.³

CIS and NAS provide information, advice and assistance to clients/callers with disabilities and their families: over 22,300 specific client needs relating to disability were recorded by CIS in 2023 and 2024. Issues of un/safety and fear impact people with disabilities in similar ways to those who do not have a disability, but also in additional ways that may relate to their disability. For example, physical access and communication issues, or the ability to distinguish between threatening and trusted persons, can contribute to feeling safe or

² While country of origin is a non-mandatory field on CIB's database used by Citizens Information Services, country of origin was recorded for 62% of all callers to CIS in this period.

³ [Travellers significantly over-represented in Irish prisons, UN committee told – The Irish Times](#)

unsafe. The need for greater awareness and discussion of issues of un/safety facing people with disabilities, particularly at a national scale, has been identified.⁴ Qualitative data from CIS provided an example of safety issues for a woman with multiple disabilities parenting her autistic son who was assaulting her. The woman reported inadequate service responses from the Gardaí, hospital, disability services and respite services, leaving her in an unsafe and vulnerable situation.

A key question is whether different cultures and communities of interest are adequately represented within local and national public services' infrastructure, e.g. local community partnerships, fora and structures.

A key strategic area that CIB has identified is the growth in misinformation and disinformation, with a matching need for trusted sources of information. The role of CIB and other organisations in communicating trustworthy information has been recognised in the National Counter Disinformation Strategy.⁵ Feelings of un/safety can manifest in different spaces: one's physical environment – one's neighbourhood, village, town, or city – but also in the virtual or online spaces we inhabit. CIB notes the growth in disinformation and misinformation in the context of immigration, and how this can contribute to fear and feelings of insecurity amongst the immigrant population. Violent incidents (e.g. the Dublin riots of 2023) highlight the risks of disinformation and misinformation to fundamental rights, including the security of the person.

Through its funded services and through its website, www.citizensinformation.ie, CIB responds to the information, and advice needs of migrant communities through impartial, trusted information provision which can foster social inclusion and promote healthy democracies. CIB will continue to provide reliable, user-focused information in different formats, by expanding our content base and by increasing the speed at which we update content. Specific examples of service developments to support migrants include:

- Collaboration with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) in the development of information resources for newly arrived international protection applicants. The research and development phase of the project started in September 2024 and the portal will be available in 2025. It will provide information on the international protection process in a range of languages and aims to support integration into local communities with information on living in Ireland.

⁴ [TowardsSafer\(r\)Space\(summary\).pdf](#)

⁵ [National Counter Disinformation Strategy Working Group](#)

- Facilitating a line of direct communication and cooperation between Citizens Information Services and the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration's Immigration Service Delivery section, for the ultimate benefit of CIS clients who are struggling to navigate the immigration system.

Issue 2: Community-Grounded Knowledge

There are eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS) providing face-to-face services to the public. The CIS currently operate from 90 Citizens Information Centres and 26 outreach locations. In 2024, the CISs dealt with 395,017 callers and 767,168 queries. In-person callers accounted for 66.5% of contacts (262,851 callers) and of these 93% were drop-in. Citizens Information Services provide a valuable in-person service at the local level and are seen as an independent, impartial source of information and assistance. CIS have strong linkages with their local communities and work together with local community partners to help address the concerns of callers/clients.

With the move towards online delivery of public services, the **availability of a face-to-face service**, responding to the diverse needs within the community, is vital in enabling people to feel safe and supported. As an example, in 2024 the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration changed the renewal or registration process for Irish Residence Permits (IRPs) from an in-person service based in Garda stations around the country to an online service (with an in-person service available only in Dublin city centre). This development resulted in a large increase in the number of clients presenting in-person to their local CIC with queries on renewing or registering for IRPs and requiring support to navigate the online portal. In the first quarter of 2025, the number of 'Moving Country' queries to local CIS increased by 9% compared to Q1, 2024. Within this, there was an increase of 135% in 'Irish Residence Permit Applications and Renewals' queries and a 76% rise in queries categorised as 'Immigration Office'. The role of the CIC in providing a safe space within the community is critical for people who may be in vulnerable situations, who may experience language as well as digital literacy barriers and who require urgent support from an in-person service.

Since CIB first published a research report on digital exclusion in 2021,⁶ it has repeatedly identified digital exclusion as a significant issue for clients/callers to our funded services in the context of public services increasingly being delivered online. Digital exclusion is likely to disproportionately impact people who are older, have specific language or literacy needs, are disabled and/or experience poverty, all of which can undermine digital literacy and access to digital equipment and therefore to essential services. In response, a **CIS Digital Help**

⁶ [CIB Digital Exclusion](#)

Service, funded and supported by CIB, was established as a pilot in 2024 and is now in the process of national roll out, with some 35 CIS locations nationwide offering this service (as of November 2025). This is a labour-intensive but vital service, enabling CIS information providers to help and guide clients through what are often complex online pathways to public services and welfare payments.

The eight regional MABS services also have a strong local presence, with 58 MABS offices across the country supporting people with money advice, budgeting and problem debt. Like CIS, MABS collaborates with other community-based organisations, participating for example in local events where information on budgeting and debt is offered and where people are signposted to their nearest MABS service.

CIB is proud to support local in-person services, recognising how vital such services are to safety and wellbeing on both an individual and community level.

Issue 3: Collaboration: insights into experiences of collaboration and identifying the key elements needed for it to be effective

Prison Support Services

For over two decades, the Citizens Information Service (CIS) in Portlaoise have provided a free and confidential in-reach information and assistance service to members of the prison community.⁷ The longstanding relationship, founded on mutual respect, goodwill and trust between the CIS and the Irish Prison Service, has supported the expansion of the service. Citizens Information now provide in-reach information services in seven prisons: Arbour Hill, Cork Prison, Cloverhill Prison, Portlaoise Prison, Midlands Prison, Limerick Prison and Castlerea Prison. In addition, three pre-release groups and three Parent Groups were supported in Wheatfield Prison in 2024 via the Education Unit in the prison. The Parent Groups consist of fathers in prison and aim to create an awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

Other developments in this regard include the collaboration by the CIS Prison In-reach Team with the Irish Prison Service and Department of Housing in the production of a video to promote changes made to the application process for social housing for people in prison.

⁷ See [SLCIS report 2022.pdf](#) for research on 'Equality of Access to Information and Services Enhances Personal Power: Exploring the subjective experience of prisoners in accessing information and assistance from outside state services and other vital services'.

The changes permit applications for social housing from a person in prison and should also ensure that removal of a person from the social housing list does not occur solely on the grounds of that person being in prison.

These initiatives support members of the prison community **to access their rights to information and assistance** in the same way that individuals who are not in prison can. This can help to promote **equity in access to vital public services** (e.g. social housing), a sense of connectedness to one's community, and ultimately supports the reintegration of the person into society upon release.

Issue 5: Policy and Governance: ensuring that the broader policy landscape actively supports the improvement of community safety at a local level

CIB agrees with the need for policies that support cross-agency collaboration. Consideration of broader policies and legislation of relevance to community safety interventions is necessary and could include, for example:

- The National Counter Disinformation Strategy – envisages countering disinformation through a cooperative, collaborative, and coordinated approach
- The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 – providing the framework to tackle harmful online content
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 – legislation around safeguarding.
- Role of local authorities in planning, accessibility and the built environment
- Public Sector Duty: section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 – gives public services funded by government a “positive duty” to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and to promote the human rights of both service users and staff. This positive duty must involve the systematic integration of an equality and human rights perspective into the everyday work of public services, which may necessitate changes to organisational cultures and working practices so that such a perspective is an integral part of the provision of services.

CIB notes that while legislation compels behavioural change, its impact on discriminatory or paternalistic attitudes is not immediate. In the short-term individuals' behaviour may be more influenced by prevailing attitudes, culture and beliefs than by new legislation.⁸

⁸ [literature-review-of-international-evidence-on-attitudes-to-disability-2007.pdf](#)