



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

Submission to the Electoral Commission

Feedback on Democracy
Education and Public
Engagement Strategy 2027-
2029

Citizens Information Board
September 2026

Introduction

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on The Electoral Commission's draft strategy – '**Democracy Education and Public Engagement Strategy 2027-29**'. CIB is governed by the Comhairle Act 2000 (as amended) and includes a mandate to:

- Ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services
- Assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options
- Promote greater accessibility, coordination and public awareness of social services
- Support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services.

CIB provides funding to a range of Service Delivery Companies (SDCs), including 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. CIB also funds the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) and the Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI). In 2025, staff working in these services assisted almost 550,000 people to access their rights and entitlements by providing information, advice and advocacy services.

In addition, over 8.5 million users visited our citizensinformation.ie website, with more than 27 million pageviews. Our website includes a section on: [Elections and referendums](#), providing voter information, information on types of elections and referendums, as well as on running for office. Our website also covers topics of benefit to people seeking information on their rights, and entitlements and in accessing public services relating to social welfare, housing, health, and employment. In 2025, the majority of callers to CIS (63%) had queries on social welfare, local authority/social housing, homelessness, and medical cards/GP visit cards indicating a cohort who are more likely to be experiencing social disadvantage/deprivation. Another target group are people with disabilities and in the period from 2023 – 2025, Information Providers recorded almost 35,000 callers who had a specific need relating to a disability. In addition, there were almost 3,000 callers who reported transport/access difficulties in the period. Each of these cohorts have been identified by the Commission as target groups for improved voter experience and engagement.

In late 2025, CIB launched [AskCI - Citizens Information](#), an AI powered chatbot that helps people to find information on public services and entitlements in Ireland. It uses generative AI technology and content from citizensinformation.ie to respond to user questions.

CIB concurs with the Commission's strategy to understand through research why some people vote and some do not vote, in particular in relation to the integrity of electoral events, including research into online electoral interference, misinformation and disinformation. CIB through its information provision, and through its SDCs can support this overall goal of improved voter experience and engagement through acting as a source of trusted independent information, that is available online, and through high-quality person to person supports, where and when needed.

We have reviewed the Commission's draft Strategy and below we outline some of our considerations.

Overview of our data

With regard to clients of Citizens Information Services, from 2023 until 2025, there were 1,268 queries about Elections and Referenda from 1,132 clients. Where the client's age was recorded (n=743), most queries came from people in the 46 – 65 age range (38%); followed by people aged 66 and over (28%); and then people in the 26-45 age group (27%). Just 6% were from people aged 25 and under but across all queries (i.e. social welfare, housing, health, etc) the proportion of callers in this age cohort is in fact low, i.e. 3.5% of total callers. This corresponds with the lower turnout amongst younger people as noted in the Commission's draft strategy. Meanwhile, queries about Elections and Referenda from people aged 66 and over are increasing year-on-year. Other cohorts where there is low turnout are people with lower educational attainment, communities experiencing social deprivation and people facing practical barriers such as transport difficulties or distance from polling stations. The strategy aims to identify and address these barriers, with particular emphasis on communities experiencing the greatest disengagement.

Our data demonstrates the differences in the way that person to person and online services are being consumed by different age groups, of relevance to voter information and engagement. The data also shows that the majority of callers to CIS with queries about Elections and Referenda were from Ireland¹ (80%), with 13% being from a non-EU country and 6% from an EU country excluding Ireland. This compares to a breakdown for all queries as follows: Ireland (75%), non-EU (17%) and EU (8%)².

¹ Where Country of Origin was recorded for 69% of callers.

² Where country of origin is recorded for 62% of all callers.

Impact of AI on the public's access to information

The way that people are looking for information is changing as AI rapidly evolves and the use of AI-generated search summaries increases. In response to this, CIB has introduced AskCI, an AI chatbot using only **verified content** from the citizensinformation.ie website. It is the first public service chatbot of its kind in Ireland and there has been strong public demand for it since it was launched in December 2025. AskCI is now used by an average of 900 people every day, showing strong public demand for conversational access to reliable public service information. AskCI can respond in Irish and other languages when questions are asked in those languages.

With this in mind, we suggest that the Strategy should take the public's increasing use of AI-generated search summaries as its main source of information into account when looking at voter information and participation. AI may impact how voters engage with online resources as they become less likely to click into websites. This is particularly relevant to the development of a One-Stop Shop for Candidate Information under Output 1 during the lifetime of the strategy.

Importance of online access/digital literacy

In addition to the quantitative data, CIS also collects qualitative data on the service, policy and information issues clients have encountered. In relation to the topic of Elections and Referenda, most problems were administrative in nature linked to digital literacy and online access issues, examples include: a client not being able to register to vote because of a lack of digital skills; an elderly client's details not being updated on the register due to their not having an email address; a client not being able to access printed materials about referenda (2024).

Although the younger age group are more likely to use online services for information, digital literacy or online access issues are not only experienced by older clients. In 2025, over 16,000 clients presented to CIS with digital literacy or online access issues. Of these, nearly 65% were aged 65 and under and 24% were aged between 26-45 years. It's worth noting that online access problems also arise for people with digital skills, given the pace of change in digitalisation of public services, which points to the importance of user centred design across the board.

SDCs are increasingly seeing the impact of digital exclusion amongst callers, as Government departments and agencies move towards the target of 100% of key public services being available online by 2030 (Digital Public Services Plan, DPER, 2025). Supporting people who are experiencing barriers in accessing digital public services strongly features in the day-to-day work of Information Officers in the 90 Citizens Information Centres

throughout the country. A dedicated Citizens Information **Digital Help Service** is being rolled out in CICs nationwide. This service supports clients to access and complete online applications for public services using touchscreen devices, prompting the clients to work through online applications themselves, building confidence and improving their digital literacy. This service will be of benefit to callers who do not have digital skills or access to digital devices and want to register to vote online.

Inclusion of marginalised groups

We welcome the research referenced in the Strategy on page 13 which intends to explore advance and postal voting, and consideration of reforms to increase electoral participation. We also welcome the overall ambition to target both current eligible voters and future potential voters. One cohort of the population that may benefit from increased focus in this regard is prisoners. The legislative basis for prisoners to participate in elections via postal vote is mandated by the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2006 and is a strength in the Irish democratic system.

In 2025, there were a total of 7,354 people in Irish prisons³ which is a considerable number in terms of its potential impact on election outcomes. We note the Commission's work with the Irish Prison Service on an information and awareness raising campaign about prisoners registering to vote in 2024⁴ and from the Commission's Annual Report 2025, the reference to updating resources disseminated through Irish prisons, encouraging prisoners to register, check their eligibility and vote.⁵ CIS provides support to eleven prisons, where information providers can assist prisoners with registering to vote and completing a postal vote if they wish. This work can improve our understanding of how to engage more prisoners in registering to vote and exercising their right to vote.

We also highlight the importance of including the views of prisoners and other marginalised groups, as well as drawing out insights from the views of people from lower socio-economic groups in the Commission's research, i.e. the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) and Post Electoral Event Reviews (PEER) referenced in the Strategy. Such insights may bolster Support for Political Engagement and Trust Building (p.14) and address feelings of disconnection and mistrust amongst prisoners, and other groups. The Irish Penal Reform Trust has also highlighted school in prison as being a potentially useful source of information

³ [PERSONS-COMMITTED-by-Age-and-Gender-Year-2007-to-2025.pdf](#)

⁴ [Opinion: Allowing prisoners to vote is a symbolic indication that they remain citizens](#) .

⁵ [An Coimisiún Toghcháin Annual Report 2025](#)

about prisoners' right to vote.⁶ This could be considered as part of Community, Adult and Voluntary Sector Education (p.18).

In terms of other underrepresented groups in the electoral process, we note that the draft Strategy does not contain specific mention of the Traveller community. [The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028](#) includes a strategic outcome to promote participation by Travellers and Roma within electoral processes under Theme 9: Participation, Empowerment, Cooperation and Accountability. This includes the objective to increase the engagement of Travellers and Roma in the democratic process. We therefore suggest that the Strategy specifically takes account of the low participation of the Traveller community in the democratic process and elections. The Irish Traveller Movement, in their submission to the Commission on their draft Research programme, recommended a specific focus on a voter engagement plan for Travellers. Furthermore, they note the issue of non-registration to vote among Irish Travellers, and the need to address digital and literacy issues in this regard.⁷

Finally, CIB recognises the specific barriers experienced by people with disabilities in voter information and participation. We note the focus on improving polling station accessibility, enhancing the voter environment and catering for voters with specific needs in the Strategy, highlighted by the Electoral Commission in the [Joint Committee on Disability Matters debate - Wednesday, 16 Jul 2025](#). We encourage a continued focus on accessibility and inclusion as it relates to different types of disability.

Coordination with Government Departments and Agencies

CIB overall welcomes the Electoral Commission's draft strategy, and in particular, its approach to engagement and collaboration with departments and agencies.

The ways people access services and engage with information is changing. While digital channels continue to expand, the value of trusted, person-to-person support remains essential, particularly for people in vulnerable situations. CIB and the SDCs play an instrumental role as part of Ireland's democratic infrastructure ensuring that people can access clear, reliable information and supports that enable informed decisions and meaningful participation in society.

CIB in its next strategy is prioritising a number of objectives, one of which is trusted information, which includes working collaboratively with partners to counter misinformation,

⁶ [Letter to Governors: Voting in prison | Irish Penal Reform Trust](#)

⁷ Irish Traveller Movement (2024) ITM Submission Electoral Commission Draft Research Programme. [ITM submissions - Irish Traveller Movement](#)

disinformation and malinformation. In this regard, we note the Commission's goal of wanting people to be able to distinguish facts from malinformation, misinformation and disinformation - a skill important to democracy but of value in all aspects of our lives in a technological age.

Finally, we suggest coordination and collaboration with the Commission in respect of digital literacy and online access; in countering misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation; and in supporting marginalised and 'hard to reach' groups.