



LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in Irish Football

Key findings



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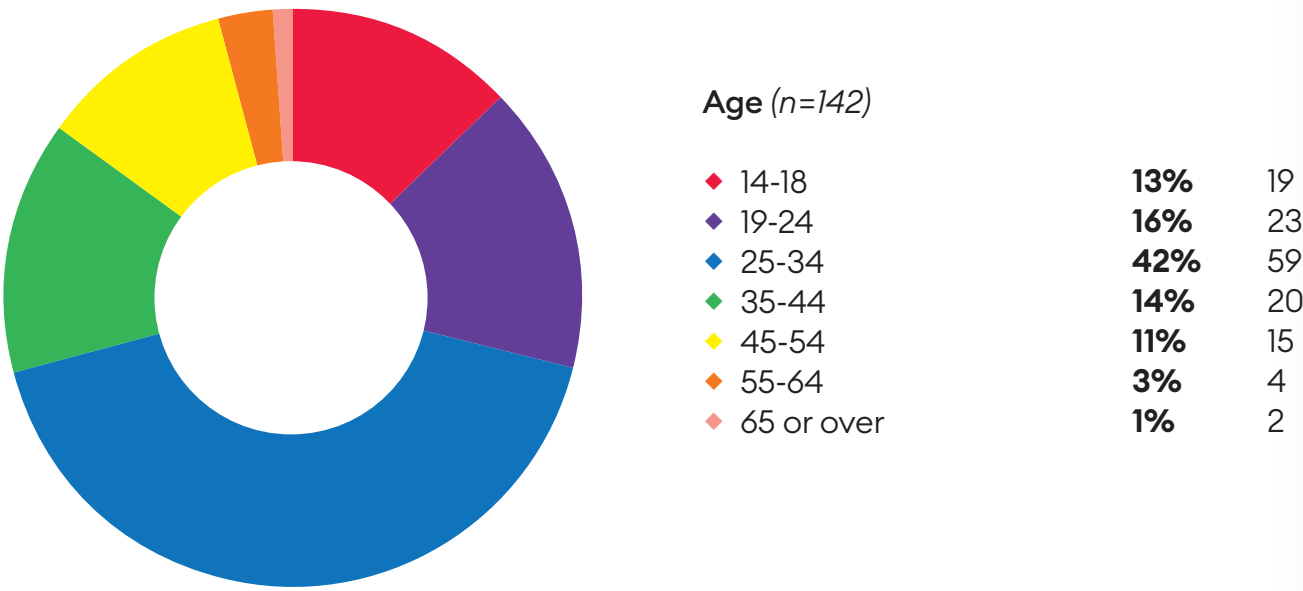
About the survey

The LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in Irish Football research was conducted by Dr Matt Kennedy with the support of Professor Agnes Higgins in collaboration with Bohemian Football Club. This is the first dedicated quantitative study regarding the climate of LGBTQI+ inclusivity in football settings in Ireland. Football settings in this research refer to soccer at all levels, including supporters, players (professional and non-professional), referees, volunteers, coaches, and staff. This research aimed to explore the specific experiences of LGBTQI+ people in relation to participation, openness, discrimination and harassment, barriers, and positive/protective factors in football settings. To obtain a broad sample of LGBTQI+ individuals aged 14+ in the Republic of Ireland, a number of exhaustive means were utilised in order to recruit participants for the survey. Specific to this research, local and national social, health, youth, and LGBTQI+ organisations, alongside football clubs and sporting organisations were also asked to share the survey link through their various social media (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). These football clubs and sporting organisations were contacted directly by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and Bohemian Football Club and sent information on the study. They were asked to post information about the study and link to the survey by email on their mailing lists and share the survey on social media. As well as publicising the study through the networks, websites, and online platforms of Trinity College Dublin and Bohemian Football Club, there were also paid social media adverts of the study on Instagram and Facebook; adverts in regional print and digital media; and interviews with Bohemian Football Club study spokespersons on regional and national radio stations. This multi-pronged approach exhausted all avenues to maximise the number of people that were informed of the study and thus afforded the opportunity to participate.

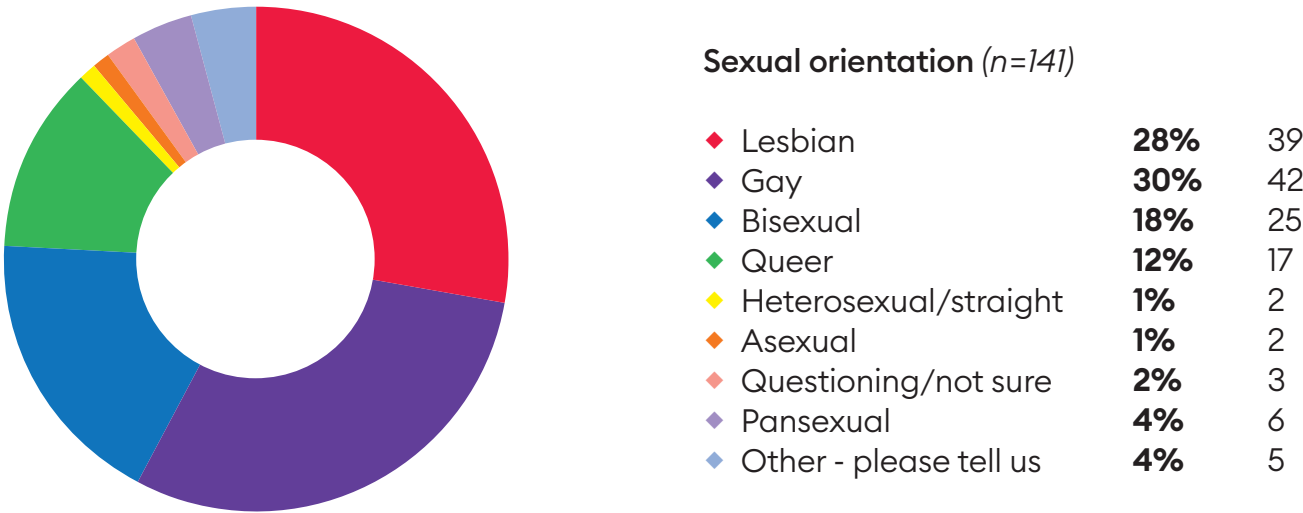
Who responded to the survey?

The final sample consisted of 142 participants.

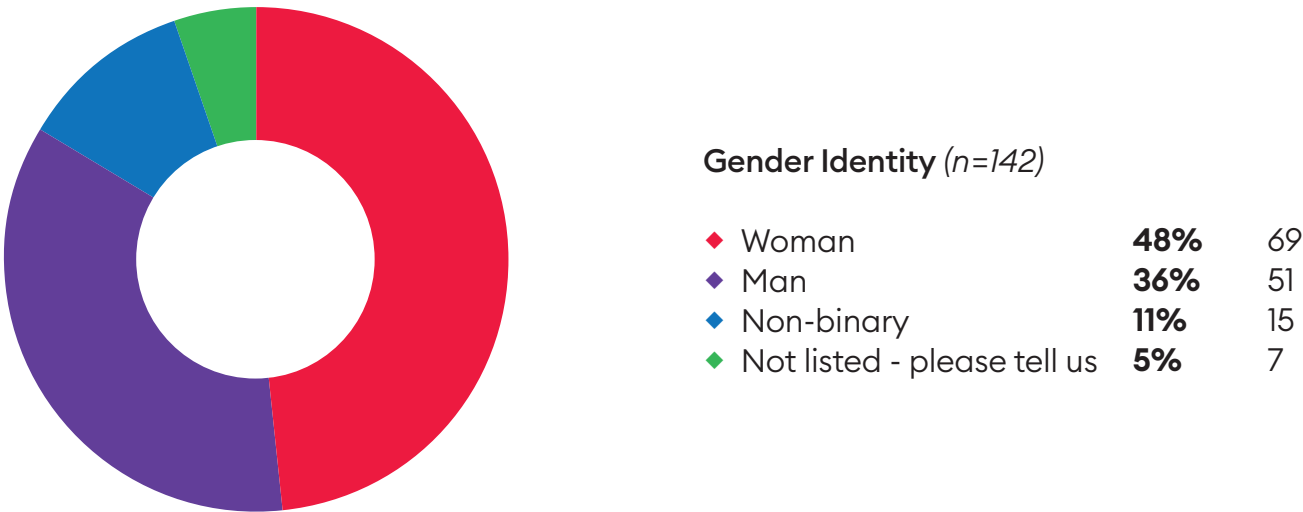
Age



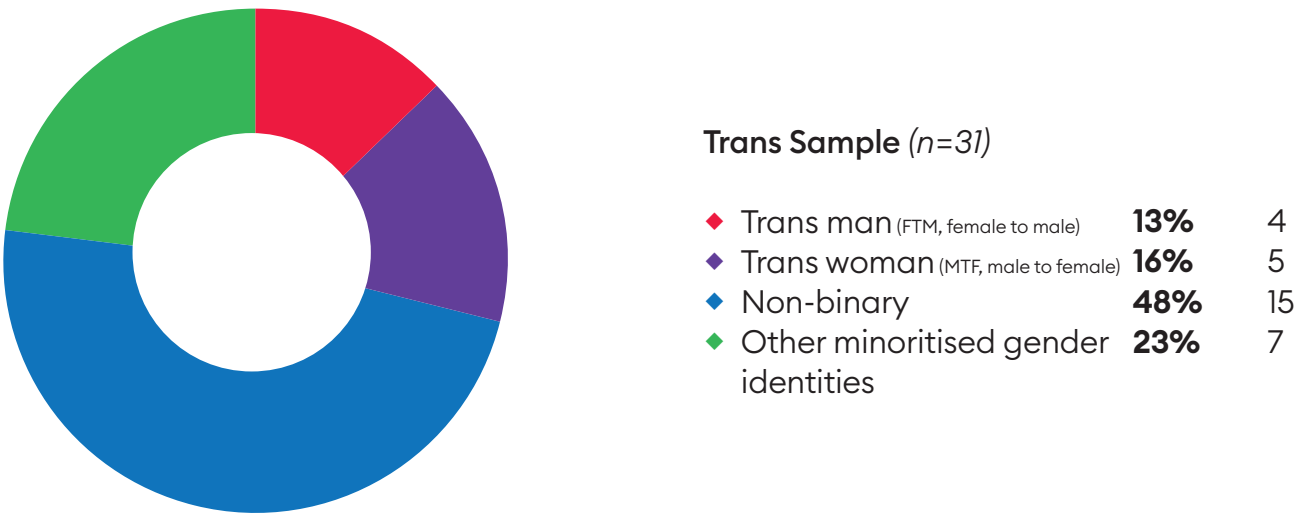
Sexual Orientation



Gender Identity



Trans Sample



Key Findings



8 out of 10

participants (87%) were out to at least one person in football settings regarding their sexuality, with over half sharing that they were out to everyone (53%).



1 in 4

trans participants were not out to anyone in football settings regarding their gender identity (25%).

The top 3 factors that support coming out in football settings as identified by participants are:



playing on an LGBTQI+ team



having friends on a team that they were already out to



participating in a club that is accepting of diversity

Over half of participants (54%) felt they belonged completely at their club as an LGBTQI+ person. 42% of cisgender gay men felt they belonged completely in their club, alongside 60% of cisgender lesbian women and 53% of trans people.



43% of cisgender lesbian women felt the football community is very accepting, while 48% of cisgender gay men feeling that the football community is not very accepting.

40%

of participants felt that football settings are generally not a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQI+ people.

Over half (55%)

of participants felt that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia is more common in football settings than in general society.



39%

of participants heard homophobic, biphobic or transphobic remarks in the last 12 months with 26% hearing them frequently.

60%

of participants said football staff have never intervened when hearing homophobic, biphobic or transphobic remarks, and 69% said that fellow players have never intervened.



1 in 5

(20%) of participants experienced homophobic, biphobic or transphobic remarks being directed at them personally in the last 12 months.



81%

of participants felt that “National football organisations adopting and promoting clear anti-discrimination and LGBTQI+ inclusion policies for professional and grassroots/ recreational players” would increase the climate of inclusivity in the sport.



62%

of participants felt there is a need for LGBTQI+ specific football clubs.



81%

of participants felt that LGBTQI+ education in secondary school (and 70% felt that this education at a primary level) would increase the climate of inclusivity in the sport.



77%

of participants felt that “Stadium and sporting officials adopting a zero-tolerance policy for anti-LGBTQI+ humour, chants and slurs” would improve LGBTQI+ participation, welcoming and belonging in football.



67%

of participants felt that coaches, volunteers and players should receive anti-discrimination and LGBTQI+ inclusion training across the country.



LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in Irish Football

Within the LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in Irish Football research, the vast majority of respondents who identified as LGBTQI+ people playing football in Ireland are playing on LGBTQI+ specific teams. LGBTQI+ clubs provide participants with a safe space where their identities feel seen, respected, and understood; they facilitate their reengagement with football; they foster camaraderie and belonging, and meaningfully demonstrate the inclusion and acceptance of trans players. The findings of this research show that while there is an increasing climate of inclusivity, this is often being championed by specific clubs, and additional work is needed to bolster inclusivity across football settings in Ireland. Homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic remarks are a consistent issue in football spaces and are a significant barrier to LGBTQI+ participation in football. Significantly, participants who experienced harassment in football settings said these experiences were a significant influencing factor in their decision to disengage from football. Participants shared that such instances of harassment made them stop participating in football; made them less likely to come out in football settings and caused damage to their mental health, their confidence, and their self-image. However, participants consistently identified positive and protective factors and facilitators to their participation in football, namely LGBTQI+ inclusion policies; training and education initiatives, and awareness campaigns. Meaningfully, participants felt that increased LGBTQI+ inclusivity in football would lead to player retention, wider participation, a more diverse cohort of players, and further opportunities for improvement and progression amongst players. They also named that fostering LGBTQI+ inclusivity would increase revenue across football settings in Ireland through the growth of football fanbases. Additionally, participants acknowledged that increased LGBTQI+ inclusivity would lead to positive mental health outcomes for LGBTQI+ community members, create positive representation of diversity in football in Ireland, and foster a safer environment for many marginalised communities.

Recommendations

The LGBTQI+ Inclusivity in Irish Football study indicates that many LGBTQI+ people in football settings in Ireland feel welcome, accepted, and included in football clubs largely due to their participation in LGBTQI+ specific clubs. However, many members of the LGBTQI+ community continue to face barriers to participation, which, as demonstrated from the findings of this research, is stratified by both sexual orientation and gender identity. Based on the study's findings, participants' feedback and key stakeholder input, the following recommendations are made to government departments, bodies under their aegis, and state agencies with a view to advancing LGBTQI+ people's participation, acceptance, and inclusion in football settings in Ireland.

Policy

In line with the commitments of the organisation's *Social and Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2024)*¹, the FAI should develop an LGBTQI+ Inclusion and Participation Policy through a community co-production approach, including key stakeholders at all levels of engagement in football settings in Ireland, with the ambition of achieving a minimum representation and participation rate reflective of the LGBTQI+ community in Ireland.

In line with the commitments of the organisation's *Social and Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2024)*², the FAI should implement a zero-tolerance approach to anti-LGBTQI+

language and discrimination embedded with robust and rigorous reporting mechanisms – such as the *Kick It Out platform*³ - and models of redress for anti-LGBTQI+ language and discrimination across football settings.

Participation

In line with the commitments of the *National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028*⁴, the Department of Sport and Sport Ireland should work to capture the size, composition and diversity of LGBTQI+ communities participating in sport in Ireland through the annual Irish Sports Monitor and commit to ensuring representative participation and engagement from the LGBTQI+ population in Ireland in the lifecycle of the next National Sports Policy.

In line with the commitments of the *National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027*⁵, the Department of Sport, in collaboration with the Department of Rural and Community Development, should increase funding to LGBTQI+ specific sports clubs, including football clubs, across the country.

Training

In line with the commitments of the organisation's *Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport (2022)*⁶, Sport Ireland and NGBs should build capacity amongst players, coaches, referees, and volunteers through standardised training in the area of LGBTQI+ inclusive and affirmative approaches to sport participation.

Education

In line with the commitments of the organisation's *Social and Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2024)*⁷, the FAI should roll out a national awareness campaign, developed through a community co-production approach, to address the use of anti-LGBTQI+ language in football settings.

Research

In line with the commitments of the *National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028*⁸, the Department of Sport and Sport Ireland should dedicate funding to follow-up qualitative and quantitative research projects that explore LGBTQI+ participation in sport specifically in relation to the impact of intersecting forms of marginalisation on participation and a comparison between LGBTQI+ people's participation in LGBTQI+ specific sports clubs and participation in mainstream clubs.

1 FAI. (2024). *Social and Environmental Sustainability Strategy*. Ireland: Football Association of Ireland.
2 FAI. (2024). *Social and Environmental Sustainability Strategy*. Ireland: Football Association of Ireland.
3 See www.kickitout.org for further information.
4 Government of Ireland (2024). *National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 (NLIS II)*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
5 Government of Ireland. (2018). *National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
6 Sport Ireland (2022). *Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport*. Dublin: Sport Ireland.
7 FAI. (2024). *Social and Environmental Sustainability Strategy*. Ireland: Football Association of Ireland.
8 Government of Ireland (2024). *National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 (NLIS II)*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.



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