



**NCBI**

**Working for People  
with Sight Loss**

**NCBI Submission to the Review of the Prohibition of  
Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 Public Consultation**

## **Introduction**

NCBI (National Council for the Blind of Ireland) is delighted to have this opportunity to make a submission to the consultation process to the Review of the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989. Below we have outlined some facts and figures in relation to sight loss and also some recommendations which focus on the needs of people who are blind and vision impaired.

## **About NCBI**

NCBI (National Council for the Blind of Ireland) is Ireland's national charity working for the rising number of people affected by sight loss. At NCBI, we are working every day with people of all ages, from young babies to those reaching their 100th birthday. The majority of people we work with actually have some remaining vision, while only a small percentage are completely blind. Census 2016 figures show that there are currently 54,810 people with sight loss in Ireland and this number is rising [1]. Last year, we offered support and services to approximately 8,000 people who are blind and vision impaired. Of this figure, 2,000 were new referrals to NCBI. As the population ages, the incidence of age-related sight loss escalates.

## **Safety and using a Mobility Aid**

Many people who are blind or vision impaired worry that using a white cane will make them more vulnerable as targets to crime in particular muggings. Some people with sight loss feel that a white cane can draw attention to their sight loss and they may feel more vulnerable to attack. Those using a white cane may avoid certain high-risk areas in their community and may try to appear more confident and assertive by walking quickly. However, some people may not be able to do this and may need to look down to see the ground to avoid tripping and stumbling on an uneven footpath.

In addition, there is a common misconception amongst the general public, that only the people who are totally blind can use a white cane. Others may think that those with low vision who use a white cane are only "pretending" that they have sight loss because they do not have total sight loss and that they do not need to use a white cane. The reality is that the majority of people with vision loss including those who use a white cane have some remaining useful vision. If members of the public,

think that people are pretending that they have sight loss, this can leave the person open to verbal abuse and attack.

## **Issue 1: Protected characteristics covered by the 1989 Act**

### **Question**

1. Are there other groups in society with shared identity characteristics, for example disability, gender identity, or others, who are vulnerable to having hatred stirred up against them and should be included in the list of protected characteristics?

NCBI is of the opinion that people who are blind and vision impaired be included in the list particularly those using a long cane or a guidedog because these types of mobility aids can make it more obvious to others that they have sight loss and this may make them more vulnerable targets to crimes.

## **Issue 2: Use of the term “hatred” in the Act**

### **Question**

2. Do you think the term “hatred” is the correct term to use in the Act? If not what should it be replaced with? Would there be implications for freedom of expression?

NCBI feels that the word hatred should not be used. Instead, the words and “targeting” and “hostility” could be used.

Those using a long cane or a guidedog can make it more obvious to others that a person has sight loss possibly making them more vulnerable to crime example.

In addition, members of public may also be hostile towards a person with low vision who is using a white cane because people may think that they are pretending to have a problem with their sight.

## **References**

[1] Census (2016) Census 2016 Results: Profile 3 – An Age Profile of Ireland. Available at [link removed]

**More information**

We would be more than happy to discuss this paper in more detail. If you have any further queries please contact:

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