



Safe Ireland Summary Priorities
Programme for Government
2020 - *Tackling Domestic
Violence and Coercive
Control*

May 2020

2020 Programme for Government Priorities: *Tackling Domestic Violence and Coercive Control*

Introduction

[Safe Ireland](#) is the national social change agency working to end domestic abuse and coercive control in Ireland. We collaborate in our work with 38 specialist frontline domestic violence (DV) services throughout Ireland - all members of Safe Ireland. Together, we support the development and provision of critical lifelines to an average of 13,500 women and children every year. In 2018, 3,256 requests for accommodation were unable to be met, while 53,627 calls were answered to helplines across the country, clearly demonstrating the high levels of violence in Irish homes. The full *Domestic Abuse National Service Statistics 2018* can be accessed [here](#). Safe Ireland's Election Manifesto [#NoMoreExcuses2020 – Manifesto for a Safe Ireland for All](#) sets out our 5 key priorities for inclusion in the next programme for Government.

Lessons from Covid-19 National Emergency

Domestic Violence has been identified as a top priority in this national emergency –

- √ Dept. of Justice & Equality (*Still Here Campaign*)
- √ An Garda Síochána (*Operation Faoisimh*)
- √ Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs/Tusla – National Office for Domestic Sexual & Gender Based Violence (DSGBV).

While we welcome this strongly, we note that had an appropriate DSGBV sectoral infrastructure been established prior to this global pandemic there would have been no need for this prioritisation.

Covid-19 has exposed the hidden and complex nature of DSGBV.

The shifting patterns of contact and abeyance in this sector during the Covid Crisis demonstrates two things very clearly:

- √ Violence and coercive control against women and children is visible only in extremis.
- √ The long-standing structural habit of making domestic violence shameful, secret and silent continues. Safe Ireland, and its members, respond to crisis presentation, but our work is to prevent it.
- √ The activation of 'Community' under this crisis has demonstrated its power and efficacy. Community level responses, supported nationally by a dedicated DSGBV infrastructure, and individually through specialist DSGBV professionals, are crucial to eradicating violence against women and children. Safe Ireland's '[Safe Mayo](#)' project offers a prototype of this work.

Safe Ireland's very early work on Covid-19 contingency planning at clinical, staffing and infrastructural level has ensured that relatively low levels of the virus have been recorded in our refuges, nine of which are communal. This was achieved as direct result of the work of frontline workers' efforts and with very little resources.

The Covid-19 Lesson Learned

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Safe Ireland has been holding Covid Crisis zoom meetings with our members twice weekly for the last eight weeks and has engaged fully with both their practical and representational concerns. Our members, drawing from their expertise and experience, have asked that we present to all bodies holding portfolios on DSGBV, that the scattered and localised nature of attention to this area directly prevents integrated, effective responses to DSGBV, and certainly subverts prevention measures.

Again and again there is a call from our members, from their contacts, for an integrated response to the DSGBV in Ireland. Time and again we meet a lack of understanding about the individual journey any woman, and her children, will have to make in order to escape abuse and control and the need for a flexible integrated response at each stage in this journey.

The DSGBV sector is met with dissipating responses which hide behind the idea that services and supports are so 'niche' that they can only be responded to individually at 'service-provider' level. This is incorrect and damaging. While each individual needs to be met in this way, through a range of specialist supports, the necessary umbrella DSGBV infrastructure required is easily identified. We set these out below.

Safe Ireland – Programme for Government - 3 Critical Priorities

Dedicated DSGBV Infrastructure - Department, Strategy, Expert Professionals

Establish a transparent, accountable and accessible Irish DSGBV infrastructure through:
Recommended options for tackling DSGBV in our next Government:

- √ Option 1 - Appoint a Minister with responsibility for GBV within a re-configured Department (e.g. *Community, Equality & Gender Based Violence*) to spearhead a whole-of-government response. Covid 19 has demonstrated the power of community in Ireland, where innovative responses to DSGBV can be enabled.
- √ Option 2 - Appoint a dedicated Minister for Gender Based Violence located within the Department of Justice as the Lead Minister for a fully resourced whole-of-government response. New Zealand offers such a model. There are others.
- √ Option 3 - A Cabinet Sub-committee on Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control.

With this political and administrative infrastructure in place:

Resource a *National DSGBV Strategy* led by Safe Ireland which includes:

- √ Full pay parity and a restoration of pay and conditions for DV Services staff in line with 2007 HSE agreed pay and conditions.
- √ Secure sustainability for DV services through additional investment of €30 million over the lifetime of the next government.
- √ €1 million of investment in a National Prevention Campaign led by Safe Ireland.

Housing

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in Ireland. One in four homeless women cite partner violence as the major contributor to their homelessness.

We urgently need a national action plan to respond to the integral relationship between domestic abuse and homelessness for women and children. Models from other jurisdictions, such as the UK and Australia offer effective "Whole Housing Approach" to DSGBV.

- √ Access to the *Emergency Rent Supplement Scheme* for women and children in need of immediate relocation as a result of domestic violence for the duration of Covid-19. This is a short-term response which has a limited cohort and established mechanism within the Dept. of Employment Affairs & Social Protection (DEASP) which can be implemented quickly. See *Safe Ireland Covid-19 Emergency Rent Supplement Proposal* submitted to DEASP [here](#).

Immediate Covid-19 Need

- √ Prioritise women and children in DV refuges and other temporary housing for social housing places.
- √ Make DV a priority need status for access to social/local authority housing.

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- √ Development and resourcing of an interdepartmental *Domestic Abuse Whole Housing National Strategy* to:
- √ Improve access to stable housing across all housing tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership) for women and children victims of DV.
- √ Examine move-on options from refuges, supported accommodation and any other type of temporary accommodation and;
- √ Ensure access to a range of housing options tailored for domestic abuse to give choice for people experiencing domestic abuse to relocate or remain in their existing accommodation.
- √ Ringfence a dedicated supply of short and long-term social housing for victims of domestic violence – Existing Housing Vote.

Judicial Response to Domestic Violence

Safe Ireland has been working productively with the Courts Service and an Garda Síochána for many years – this work has intensified during the Covid-19 crisis.

Immediate Covid-19 Need

- √ Include DSGBV in online/remote access to courts.

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- √ Attend to inconsistent issuing of DSGBV-related barring orders, access, custody, maintenance and physical access (childcare and transport), across the country.

Safe Ireland reiterates that in this crisis, the guiding principle in these matters must be the safety, health and wellbeing of children, rather than parental contestation.

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- √ Establish an independent monitoring mechanism in family law courts to support public confidence in the administration of justice.
- √ Implement a legislative programme to address any legal impediments to access to justice and protection.
- √ Establish and resource an effective domestic homicide review mechanism.
- √ Invest in comprehensive training in coercive control, trauma informed practice and implicit bias for all relevant professionals including Gardaí, Judges, Court Clerks, Social Workers, Probation Officers, Solicitors and Barristers.
- √ Reform of child custody, access and maintenance system to address current serious failures to protect and support victims.
- √ Expedite the development of Hammond Lane Family Law Court and upgrade court facilities to be suitable to respond effectively to victims' needs.

Conclusion

The Istanbul Convention, the EU Victims Directive and Tusla's statutory duty set out clearly that we must ensure that there are sustainable and progressive professional specialist services to protect adults and children affected by domestic abuse and coercive control.

If you and your party commit to addressing the immediate and urgent needs of women and children in the context of the Covid-19 National Emergency and the longer-term priorities set out above, you will be sending a powerful message that DSGBV can be eliminated from Irish Society.



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