

#NoMoreExcuses2020

Safe Ireland – Election 2020

Manifesto for a Safe Ireland for All



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Five Critical Life Lines Make them your Red Lines

Daring to imagine we can rear a generation without violence

A significant root cause of violence in our society is the knock-on effect of the extensive violence that happens in the home. In their lifetime at least 1 in 3 women in Ireland will experience abuse by a male partner. In 2018, over 1,600 children lived in a refuge with their mothers, who had to flee a violent male partner. In the same year there were 3,256 unmet requests for refuge because the services were full.

Domestic Violence services answer 50,000 calls annually. Gardaí respond to 30,000 domestic abuse calls every year. Domestic homicides have outpaced gangland murders by almost two to one in the last three years¹.

Abuse and coercive control has a profound and disproportionate effect on the health and well-being of women and children.

All political parties have committed to addressing the distressing social problems affecting our society, from homelessness to our health crisis to violence in the streets and in homes. This can begin to become a reality if you recognise and address domestic abuse and coercive control.

This short manifesto outlines five ways in which the lives of women and children living with the toxic and sinister scourge of coercive control and domestic abuse can be transformed from Election 2020.

This can only happen if you and your party chooses to prioritise a concerted, comprehensive and adequately-resourced strategic response to coercive control and domestic abuse in the Programme for Government - to hear, acknowledge and act on what women and children tell us they really need.

- 1. Prevent Homelessness**
- 2. Reform our Justice System**
- 3. Prioritise A National Prevention Strategy**
- 4. Strengthen the Infrastructure that Women and Children rely on**
- 5. Prioritise Investment, Leadership and Oversight**

Make your party's response to domestic abuse a defining issue in the new Programme for Government.

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¹ Speech by Commissioner Drew Harris. December 6th 2019.

1 Prevent Homelessness

Implement and resource a comprehensive national action plan to provide immediate and long term, safe and stable housing for women experiencing domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Housing instability is four times more likely for women who have experienced coercive control and domestic abuse compared with women who have not been victimised. Approximately one in four homeless women cite partner violence as a major contributor to their homelessness.

In 2018², 1,138 women and 1,667 children were provided with safe emergency housing in Safe Ireland member refuges in Ireland. At the same time, there were 3,256 unmet requests for refuge because the services were full.

We desperately need a national action plan to respond to the integral relationship between domestic abuse and homelessness for women and children. using innovative, cost-effective and well tested solutions that ensure safety and short and long-term housing stability.

Ireland's provision of emergency accommodation remains stubbornly less than one-third of that recommended by the Council of Europe. Spiralling rents and the complete lack of social housing stock and rental properties mean that women cannot find places to live with their children. Significant numbers of women are choosing to return to their abusive partners. Many others are making the decision to stay in abusive relationships because they predict that they will be faced with accommodation problems³.

2 Reform our Justice System

Establish a fair, consistent and high-quality Justice System for survivors of domestic abuse by transforming culture, capacity and accountability.

This means

- Establishing independent monitoring mechanisms in family law courts to support public confidence in the administration of justice.
- Implementing a legislative programme to address any legal impediments to access to justice and protection.
- Establishing and resourcing an effective domestic homicide review mechanism.
- Investment 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.

Since 2015 Safe Ireland has published a series of research reports documenting women's experiences of seeking legal remedies to domestic violence and abuse in the Irish legal system. They show that the Irish legal system – at every level – is not working for women and children living with coercive control and domestic abuse.

There have been many welcome developments and improvements since then, with ground-breaking legislative advances, culminating in the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. We also particularly welcome developments and initial reforms that have begun to take place within An Garda Síochána.

We have the laws. Yet, our justice system is still not working adequately for survivors and their children. The response remains fragmented; there is a lack of consistency and continuity in the application of the law in our courts. There is a lack of knowledge and understanding about the complexity and the pattern of controlling behaviour that is coercive control and domestic abuse.

Most worryingly, there is continued gender and racial bias, along with a lack of understanding about how a perpetrator can use children to further abuse, groom professionals, and present the victim as unstable and erratic, often feeding into establishment culture gender norms and stereotypes.

“Housing instability is four times more likely for women who have experienced coercive control and domestic abuse compared with women who have not been victimised.”

² Safe Ireland National Domestic Violence Service Statistics 2018. https://www.safeireland.ie/policy-publications/#dfliip-df_5095/1/

³ No Place to Call Home: Safe Ireland's Consultation on Homelessness and Domestic Violence 2016. https://www.safeireland.ie/policy-publications/#dfliip-df_5100/1/

3 Prioritise a National Prevention Strategy

Tackle gender inequality and intergenerational trauma by investing in evidence-based programmes aimed at identifying and addressing the cultural and root causes of violence against women, as a proven way to prevent coercive control and domestic abuse occurring.

Intervening after the violence has occurred, although critical, can only limit the health, social and economic consequences of violence against women. To eliminate them, there is a need to prevent new cases of violence against women. This involves complementary response strategies with those designed to prevent violence by identifying and addressing its root causes; that is, the broader social conditions understood to increase the risk of gender-based violence.

Safe Ireland carried out preliminary research⁴ on attitudes towards gender equality and domestic abuse in 2019, which indicates that a significant number of people hold traditional gender-based views of the roles and responsibilities of men and women, with some of the most traditionalist views being expressed by younger people. Lad culture is alive and well in Ireland. If it is not addressed, gender-based violence will continue.

4 Strengthen the Infrastructure that Women and Children Rely On

The Istanbul Convention, the EU Victims Directive and Tusla's statutory duty set out clearly that we must ensure that there are sustainable and thriving professional specialist services to protect adults and children affected by domestic abuse. What we have, in reality, is a grossly under-funded, fragile and creaking network of specialist support services.

The only reason this network of domestic abuse services continues to provide the expert service it does is because it is staffed by dedicated and extraordinary professionals who are hard-wired to help. However, women and children are presenting to services with increasingly complex cases, and heightened levels of intergenerational trauma.

Hard-wired to help, and an antiquated reliance on charitable donations, is no longer enough. Domestic abuse services are now facing huge challenges in retaining existing professionals and recruiting new staff because of the lack of pay parity and the increasingly stressful demands.

Women and children also rely on many other first responders, including our health services, social workers, GP's, nurses, teachers, housing staff, Gardaí etc. We urgently need investment for multi-agency and multi-disciplinary training in coercive control and complex trauma. In addition, we need dedicated recovery programmes. Ireland is one of the only countries in Europe where they do not exist.

5 Prioritise Leadership, Investment and Oversight

There have been significant developments in the response to survivors of coercive control and domestic abuse in legislation and policy. But we can do so much more. We need Government leadership, investment and responsibility at cabinet level to make Ireland the safest country in the world.

The only way this can happen is to commit to a multi annual interdepartmental financial package to address domestic abuse, and to appoint a Minister and Department to spearhead a determined, whole of government response to the complexity of coercive control and domestic abuse, from health to education and from social protection to justice. We also need the establishment of a dedicated and long-term Cabinet Sub-committee on Coercive Control and Domestic Abuse and the reform of interdepartmental policy structures to ensure cohesion and oversight in the national response. As part of the new Government, we urge you to work with Safe Ireland as the agency with the national reach, research, policies and expert analysis needed to help shape this new, safe future for women and children.

*“Lad culture is alive and well in Ireland.
If it is not addressed, gender-based violence will continue.”*

For Once and For All

Safe Ireland has a comprehensive strategy to transform the response to coercive control and domestic abuse – to make Ireland the safest country for women and children.

The priorities we have outlined in this manifesto are critical starting points.

If you and your party commit to these five lifelines, you will be sending a powerful message to thousands of women and children across the country. A message that they have been waiting for, from successive governments, who have never fully grasped the seriousness and complexity of gender-based violence.

You will be telling them that, finally, their government is acknowledging that there can be no more excuses. That they have been heard.

Get the facts

Safe Ireland's national annual statistics for 2018 tell us that:

- 10,782 Individual women received support from DV support services.
- 2,572 individual children received support from DV support services.
- 53,627 helpline calls were answered by DV support services.
- 3,256 unmet requests for refuge because the services were full.
- 9,971 individual women received a wide range of face-to-face supports.
- 1,138 were accommodated and receive a range of supports in refuge.
- 1,667 individual children stayed in refuge.
- 1,385 children received non-accommodation supports.
- 948 children were under the age of 5.



Safe Ireland

A nationwide movement to end domestic abuse and coercive control – and to make Ireland the safest country in the world for women and children.

We are the national social change agency working to end coercive control and domestic abuse. We collaborate in our work with 38 specialist frontline services throughout Ireland, who are 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.

We want to transform the culture in Ireland so that coercive control and domestic abuse is no longer tolerated in our communities, in our mindsets, in our systems and in our structures.

There can be no more excuses for the gender inequality and gender biases that too often continue to prevail in our attitudes and behaviours, and in our institutions and societal structures, including our communities and our homes.

What you can do:

- 1. Sign up to #NoMoreExcuses2020.**
- 2. Ensure your party prioritises strategies to respond to coercive control and domestic abuse in the new Programme for Government.**
- 3. Support your local domestic abuse service.**

See www.safeireland.ie for more details or contact your local service to see what's happening in your area.

For more information on how your party can change lives and futures contact:

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