

How to tackle the epidemic of Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV)?

1. Appoint a Minister with direct responsibility and resources for DSGBV

The separation of Policy, Planning and Service Provision across Govt Depts/Agencies is crippling this work.

2. Establish a National DSGBV Services Development Plan

Ensure access to specialist DSGBV supports, regardless of where you live.

3. Develop a strong Prevention Plan to stop DSGBV at source.

Create a culture which is intolerant of DSGBV

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Creating safety for women and children

CITIZEN'S ASSEMBLY INPUT

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Good day to all - Our thanks to the Assembly for this invitation

[Safe Ireland](#) is a national research, policy and advocacy agency for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). We collaborate with 39 independent member organisations around the country who are service providers, advocates and experts providing crucial pathways out of what we now call the Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence.

Two historic realities are helping us respond to DV in deeper, more effective ways.

1 - The first is the outbreak of Covid - a curse and a blessing. In one fell swoop, Covid has vastly *increased* incidents of dv with both greater demand and costs to services. At the same time, it has *decreased* capacity in providing safe space, staffing and supporting contact. We are pressed on all sides.

But Covid has also provided a moment of genuine insight into what entrapment feels like. Communities across the country have responded generously, creatively and with open hearts to victims of abuse, because we all now have a sense of what it's like to be contained in Lockdown. This empathy offers us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to radically transform our response to DV.

2 – The second is the crime of Coercive Control which offers even more insight. We now understand what Coercion is – it is control, manipulation, micro-management, gas-lighting, stalking – actual and virtual, against young or old. In particular, the increased use, control and abuse of children, especially through the Courts, is coming to light with searing clarity.

Safe Ireland can see one thing very clearly - domestic violence is a large-scale social problem. It affects thousands of homes and their immediate communities. It stunts personal life, as we know, but it also stunts economic and social life, and political and cultural engagement. It destroys mental health. Domestic Violence is not a personal flaw or the result of poor choice – we learn it. It is systematic, pervasive and toxic. But, importantly, we also know how to stop it.

Out of this double pandemic - Safe Ireland has one clear message:

You do not have to live in an oppressive household.

The bitter fatalism of older traditions which enforced staying in abusive relationships is no longer valid. Our mental, emotional and physical health depend on respectful, healthy relationships.

In understanding this epidemic, tough issues have to be faced. Safe Ireland's research and experience demonstrates that sex/gender roles drive much of this problem – for everyone. Regardless of how you identify in terms of your sex, gender or sexuality - gender roles, expectations and entitlements, push and pull much of this violent social reality on a large-scale basis.

Nevertheless, at the everyday and immediate level of scale and degree, women and children (boys and girls) remain primary victims and systemically disadvantaged. To be clear, there is no argument here that women are not capable of violence, or are morally superior – but adult women living in Ireland remain in second-class status, as a group, in relation to pay and conditions, public representation, parenting, and care work and are disproportionately exposed to control and violence. This dv pandemic needs tailored gender-sensitive responses on every front.

Finally, since the outbreak of Covid and the global rise of domestic violence, all political parties, public servants and the public have engaged with a desire to 'do something'. Safe Ireland's '*Safe Home, Safe Communities*' programme distributed donations of over €500,000 through our *Emergency Fund* directly to women and children, meeting immediate escape-to-safety needs. So we know we can act when we see a way forward.

Ireland has developed a culture of hope, courage and capacity for social change in these last years. We can be a leader in stopping domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and build democratic pathways out for anyone who is in an abusive situation.

Today we ask the Citizen's Assembly to keep a focus on Domestic Violence as a national emergency and to call for strong DV infrastructure for victims and perpetrators. When we escape Covid, this other pandemic of violence, abuse and control must not be allowed to return to the shadows where it thrives. It will cost us all dearly if we do. Thank you.

POWERPOINT:

How tackle the epidemic of Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV)?

Safe Ireland repeats our call for 3 things:

1. A Minister with direct responsibility and resources for DSGBV

The separation of Policy, Planning and Service Provision across Govt Depts/Agencies is crippling this work.

2. An integrated National DSGBV Services Development and Delivery Plan

Ensure access to specialist DSGBV supports, regardless of where you live.

3. Ireland needs a strong Prevention Plan to stop DSGBV at source.