



DRCC

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

2023 Pre-Budget Submission

1. Context

In June 2022, the Taoiseach, the Minister for Justice & the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth launched an ambitious multi-strand strategy and implementation plan to eliminate any tolerance of domestic, sexual or gender-based violence in Ireland. The development of the Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy and Implementation Plan¹ for Zero Tolerance of such violence (the DSGBV Strategy) emerged over many months and consultations and is the best chance that this country has to significantly reduce what the programme for government calls an ‘epidemic’ of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

It is based on a recognition that to be effective it requires: -

- ▶ A whole of government approach;
- ▶ Co-ordinated action overseen by government and led by a single department;
- ▶ Co-design and co-implementation with a range of agencies, some statutory and many non-governmental, such as Dublin Rape Crisis Centre.

The DSGBV strategy and implementation plan was accompanied by a budget. That budget commitment was welcome, providing for much needed capital funding immediately and also designed to be spent over the five years of the strategy. It did not however take into account the full cost to non-governmental agencies of providing the required services. We provide services on an outsourced basis that the State has committed to furnishing. The State has recognised that many non-governmental organisations have the expertise and experience that is needed to fund essential services in health, justice and education.

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre is one of those agencies. We are also a member of the Rape Crisis Centre Forum² and four of our colleague organisations from that Forum, Athlone Midland Rape Crisis Centre, KASA Kilkenny, Tullamore Rape Crisis Centre and Wexford Rape Crisis, which are similar agencies to us, join with us in making this submission.

2. Call to Government

We call on government, and in particular on the Ministers for Public Expenditure and Reform and of Finance to ensure that Budget 2023 contains adequate, sustainable funding of the government’s own recently-published strategy to end tolerance of gender-based violence.

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a43a9-third-national-strategy-on-domestic-sexual-and-gender-based-violence/>

² The Rape Crisis Centre Forum is an informal grouping of nine of Ireland’s Rape Crisis Centres, namely Athlone Midland Rape Crisis Centre, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Galway Rape Crisis Centre, KASA Kilkenny, Sexual Violence Cork, Sligo Rape Crisis Centre, Tipperary Rape Crisis Centre, Tullamore Rape Crisis Centre, and Wexford Rape Crisis.

2.1 Funding of NGOs

As part of ensuring that the DSGBV strategy can succeed and lead to a healthier, safer Ireland, government must adequately resource Rape Crisis Centres and other non-governmental services on whom government depends to part-deliver its strategy.

The absence of sufficient, sustainable, multi-annual funding is impacting our ability to recruit and retain staff and runs a risk that we will be unable to meet the vital counselling and therapeutic needs of victims of rape and other sexual abuse in a timely way. It also puts a significant and unwarranted strain on our resources – a large part of which is our people.

2.1.1 Rape Crisis Centres Health Services.

- ▶ Rape Crisis Centre health services are underfunded and are at an unfair disadvantage because of the failure to reverse austerity cuts.
- ▶ Like many other organisations now funded by Tusla via the department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, our Rape Crisis Centres suffered drastic cuts to its funding of essential therapeutic and counselling services, including the National 24-Hour Helpline, as part of State austerity measures during the financial recession. While other public services similarly cut during austerity have seen their staff pay and conditions restored, our Tusla-funded services have not.
- ▶ Emergency funding was provided during the pandemic in order to ensure that the National 24-Hour Helpline, counselling and therapeutic assistance could stay open as part of the Government's #StillHere initiative, which aimed to stay in touch with people more at risk of violence than ever. This was however, once-off funding to get the equipment and systems we needed to sustain the services remotely. A 4% increase to most Tusla-funded services in 2022 specifically excluded organisations working to end sexual, domestic and gender-based violence.
- ▶ As a result, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and the other Centres mentioned above find themselves competing with the public health sector hire expert therapists and counsellors, but unequally on remuneration. Our committed, expert staff come and work with us out of conviction and dedication to the needs of survivors of sexual violence, but we must highlight how unfair it is to have them disadvantaged as a result.

2.1.2 Services of accompaniment and justice support & Prevention supports

- ▶ We welcome the approach adopted by the Department of Justice in identifying the need for much greater resources to build structures where every victim of crime that needs it can have support as they attend a Sexual Assault Treatment Unit or as they seek justice and accountability for the harm done to them. Like others, we aim to build this capacity. While the commitment from the Department of Justice to multi-annual funding is necessarily one of principle, we understand that save in exceptional circumstances, this funding is reliable into the future and will allow us to engage in proper workforce planning.

- ▶ We would welcome a commitment that the new DSGBV Agency will take this approach and provide multi-annual funding commitments also to the funding responsibilities to be transferred from Tusla.

2.1.3 Sustainable infrastructure

- ▶ The scale of the problems caused by sexual abuse and harassment has only become apparent in recent years. Fortunately, those who experience that harmful, often criminal behaviour are coming to understand that they are not to blame for being abused, harassed and harmed, and further, that they are entitled to access health and justice systems. Further, our society, and the recently launched strategy appear to be clear that prevention and awareness are part of the longer-term solution.
- ▶ This puts pressure on the tiny support systems that have grown organically, in poverty and quietly over the last 4 decades in rape crisis centres. In order to scale up to meet the need of survivors in a timely way, services need to have access to supports equivalent to those available to businesses in the private sector. Excellent initiatives for umbrella organisations like The Wheel in training need to be matched by access to supports such as those of Enterprise Ireland. According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,³ there are over 170 different government supports available to Irish SMEs and start-ups. Charities such as ours are not included. Where government outsources essential services to non-governmental organisations, it should ensure that those it asks to undertake this crucial and delicate, value-driven work are at least as well-resourced as for-profit companies.

3. Budget 2023 must be equality-proofed – including gender-proofed

- ▶ We welcome government's recognition of the need to advance equality budgeting, including gender budgeting. A recent Citizen's Assembly⁴ has identified that Ireland will never achieve gender equality without addressing and dealing with gender-based violence. The upcoming budget needs to maintain an equality and gender lens throughout all its deliberations to ensure the full implementation of the Strategy. The budget must ensure that those made vulnerable through the harm and crime of gender-based violence are able to access the supports and services they need.
- ▶ Any failure to factor in these strategic budgeting criteria will not just further harm victims of sexual violence, but will also increase costs to the state such as the loss of economic activity, criminal activity, increased health care costs and social inclusion.

³ <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/Which-support-is-for-you/>

⁴ <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/previous-assemblies/2020-2021-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality/about-the-citizens-assembly/meetings/voting-results-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality/open-letter-to-the-oireachtas-english.pdf>

4. About us

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre is a non-governmental organisation which aims to prevent the harm and heal the trauma of sexual violence in Ireland. DRCC is the largest and oldest of the 16 Rape Crisis Centres in the country. We run the National 24-Hour Helpline which takes on average more than 270 contacts each week from victim/survivors of sexual violence, their supporters and others impacted by sexual violence.⁵ DRCC provides face-to-face therapy for nearly 600 people a year. We also provide training for about 2,000 people, including those working on the frontline with victims/survivors of sexual violence and those working with children and young people. Each year, DRCC personnel accompany and support over 200 victim/survivors attending the Rotunda Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU), Garda Stations and court. We advocate on behalf of victims/survivors and seek public engagement to prevent sexual violence and to highlight the vital role of sexual consent and activities based on respect and equality. We provide information and resources to those affected by sexual violence and the wider public. We are a member of the Rape Crisis Centres Forum, of The Wheel, the National Women's Council and its Observatory on Violence against Women, and of the Children's Rights Alliance.

For further information, contact
Shirley Scott, Policy Manager at drccpolicy@rcc.ie | 01-661 4911

National 24-Hour Helpline: 1800 77 88 88

70 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2

www.drcc.ie

⁵ <https://www.drcc.ie/news-resources/resources/statistical-supplement-2020/>