1. Introduction

Women’s Aid is a leading national organisation that has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women and children since 1974. In this time, the organisation has built up a huge body of experience and expertise on the issue, enabling us to best support women and share this knowledge with other agencies responding to women experiencing domestic violence.

Women’s Aid welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the public consultation on the new National Women’s Strategy 2017-2020.

The following comments are informed by the experiences of women accessing our services and by the policy and research work of the organisation. Many of our comments are valid for violence against women in all its forms, however, given our remit, some observations and recommendations are specific to domestic violence.

2. About Women’s Aid

In addition to providing direct services to women experiencing domestic violence Women’s Aid is a campaigning and lobbying organisation, and provides training to statutory and voluntary groups on the issue of violence against women in intimate relationships. Our work includes:

- National Freephone Helpline

Our National Freephone Helpline (1800 341 900) operates 24/7, every day of the year and provides support and information to callers experiencing abuse from intimate partners and their family, friends and professionals. It is the only free, national, domestic violence Helpline with specialised trained staff and volunteers, accredited by The Helplines Partnership and with a Telephone Interpretation Service facility covering 170 languages for callers and professionals needing interpreting services.

- One to one support visits and Court Accompaniment

We provide face to face support visits and Court Accompaniment in the greater Dublin area. Court Accompaniment is a specific service providing support to the particular needs of women seeking legal redress in the Courts regarding violence by a current or former husband or partner.
WOMEN’S AID

- **Dolphin House Family Law Support and Referral Service**
Women’s Aid also operates the Dolphin House Family Law Support and Referral Service, in partnership with the Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service and Inchicore Outreach Centre. This is a free and confidential drop-in service for women who are experiencing abuse in a relationship, located in the Dublin District Family Law Court.

- **Training and Development**
Women’s Aid is a centre of excellence in training to statutory, voluntary and community organisations as they develop and maintain organizational responses to women and their children experiencing domestic violence. Training participants include health and social care professionals, staff from community groups throughout Ireland and Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline volunteers.

- **Policy and Communications work**
The sum of the above contacts with women experiencing domestic violence and their supporters enable us to have a good picture of the issues that need addressing to improve systemic responses and we use that information in our policy and communication work. We provide relevant information and recommendations to government and other relevant agencies on the nature and prevalence of domestic violence, the barriers faced by women experiencing domestic violence and the gaps in existing legislation/systems.

3. **Data on Domestic Violence and other Forms of Violence against Women in Ireland.**

**Violence against Women: An EU Wide Survey (2014)**

The FRA study found that in Ireland since age 15:

- 14% of women have experienced physical violence by a partner.
- 6% of women have experienced sexual violence by a partner.
- 31% of women have experienced psychological violence by a partner.
- 26% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence (by a partner and/or a non-partner).
- 5% have experienced sexual violence by a non-partner.
- 12% of women have experienced stalking.
- 48% of women have undergone some form of sexual harassment.
- Moreover 27% have childhood experiences of physical, sexual or psychological violence at the hands of an adult.

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Women’s Aid Statistics

- In 2015 there were 12,041 contacts made with the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline and Dublin based One to One Services.
- In 2015, the national domestic abuse service noted 16,375 disclosures of domestic abuse against women and 5,966 disclosures of child abuse (22,341 in total).

Femicide

Women’s Aid also keeps a femicide media watch, monitoring female homicide figures in Ireland.

- Since the beginning of 1996, 209 women have died violently in the Republic of Ireland. Where the cases have been resolved, 89 women (54%) were murdered by a current or former male intimate partner. 54 women (33%) were killed by a male relative or acquaintance and 21 women were murdered by a stranger.

4. Priorities, Objectives and Obstacles of the National Women’s Strategy

Women’s Aid welcomes the proposed Vision of the strategy:

“an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life” (emphasis added)

and the commitment to fully implement the Istanbul Convention and the 2nd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence.

We also understand that the Women’s Strategy should not simply replicate actions already included in other strategies. However, Women’s Aid is concerned that eliminating violence against women is not one of the suggested priorities for the new Women’s Strategy.

Recommendation 1: Women’s Aid recommends that eliminating Violence against Women is included as an overarching aim/priority of the National Women’s Strategy 2017-2020

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2 Women’s Aid Impact Report 2015

3 Women’s Aid (2016) Behind closed doors 20 years of the Women’s Aid Femicide Monitoring Project 1996 - 2016
Rationale

1. Violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of women's inequality and an obstacle to gender equality\(^4\). In order to combat violence against women, it is necessary to address the economic and socio-cultural factors that foster and support it, including challenging social norms, improving women economic independence and employment rights among others.\(^5\)

Domestic abuse occurs in a context of social, economic and cultural norms which reflect and reinforce inequalities between men and women and it is not possible to properly understand and address it without locating it in the reality of male privilege and female inequality.\(^6\)

Given the links between violence and inequality, it is clear that a strategy to promote women's equality with men needs to acknowledge and address violence against women, linking up with more specific strategies as necessary.

2. It is vital and appropriate that violence against women, which is a gendered issue, is included in the National Women's Strategy. In recent years there has been a trend to dismiss the gender analysis of domestic violence, which is a very common form of violence against women.\(^7\)

The lack of a gender analysis misses the important connection between domestic violence and gender inequality and therefore impedes both effective responses and long terms prevention.

Some relevant statistics on the gendered nature of domestic violence, highlighting important differences in lethality, prevalence, frequency and impact of domestic violence are included. See box 1.

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\(^4\) UN, 2000, The world's women report, emphasis added
\(^5\) World Health Organization, 2013, Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence
\(^6\) Scotland Executive, 2007, The case for a gendered analysis of violence against women
Box 1: Statistics on the Gendered Nature of Domestic Violence

- A World Health Organisation (WHO) study found that more than 38% of all murders of women globally are committed by an intimate partner. In comparison, the same study estimates that about 6% of all murders of men are committed by an intimate partner. In the WHO high income region, to which Ireland belongs, the median prevalence of intimate partner homicide among all murdered women is 41%.

- Recent UK statistics show that in a 3 year period from April 2012 to March 2015, women were 80% and men were 20% of all victims of intimate partner homicide. Of the 60 male victims of intimate partner homicide, 27 (45%) were killed by men, 33 (55%) were killed by women. Of the 243 female victims of intimate partner homicide, 2 (1%) were killed by women, 241 (99%) were killed by man. This means that women are more than 7 times more likely to be killed by a man, than men are by a woman in the context of intimate partner homicide.

- In the majority of the EU Member States, the proportion of women victims in relation to all victims (both women and men) of intimate partner violence or family violence registered in crime statistics stands at 80–90%.

- 1 in 6 Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence and 1 in 4 had experienced emotional abuse from a current or former partner, compared to respectively 1 in 19 men and 1 in 7 men.

- A UK study of 96 cases of domestic abuse recorded by the police found that men are significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators and significantly more likely than women to use physical violence, threats, and harassment. In a six year tracking period the majority of recorded male perpetrators (83%) had at least two incidents of recorded abuse, with many having a lot more than two and one man having 52 repeat incidents. Whereas in cases where women were recorded as the perpetrator the majority (62%) had only one incident of abuse recorded and the highest number of repeat incidents for any female perpetrator was eight. The study also found that men’s violence tended to create a context of fear and control; which

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8 World Health Organization, 2013, Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence
9 Karen Ingala Smith. 2016, Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence Homicides*: Sex Differences April 2012 – March 2015 (3 years)
was not the case when women were perpetrators.  

- A recent review of statistics on violent crime in the UK found that the way data is collected masks the extent of violent crimes against women because it misses out on repeat victimisation. It also found that 79% of the incidents of domestic violence that are severe enough to cross the criminal threshold are perpetrated against women.

- Globally 42% of women who have been physically and/or sexually abused by a partner have experienced injuries as a result of that violence.

- A recent UK report looking at victims of partner abuse who received medical attention as a result of the abuse found that 73% were female and 27% were male.

- In Canada females who reported spousal violence were about three times more likely than males (34% versus 10%) to report that they had been sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or knife by their partner or ex-partner in the previous 5 years.

- Research has consistently found huge differences in consequences of intimate partner violence for women and men. Women involved in IPA are more likely than their male counterparts to suffer from injuries, require medical treatment, lose time from work, and experience bedridden days than are men.

- In Ireland, the 2005 National Crime Council research into the domestic abuse of women and men found that one in seven women in Ireland, compared to one in 17 men, experience severe domestic violence. Women are over twice as likely as men to have experienced severe physical abuse, seven times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse, and are more likely

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13 Note that “Domestic” in this instance includes intimate partners and other family members such as children, in laws and other relatives  
15 World Health Organization, 2013, Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence  
16 ONS, 2016, Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences : Year ending March 2015, page 95  
3. For women to enjoy a safe and fulfilling life, violence against women in its many forms needs to be tackled. Women are more at risk from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, than other types of violence. The previously mentioned FRA data demonstrate the extent and commonality of various forms of violence against women in Ireland, including domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking and violence in childhood.

4. The 2nd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence does not address certain new forms of Violence against women, such as image based sexual assault and online harassment. These important issues are mentioned in the NWS Public Consultation paper, and need to be included in the National Women's Strategy under the overarching aim of eliminating VAW.

5. Violence against women impact on women's employment, financial status, psychological and physical health and ability to participate in society. Therefore it is essential to make the connections between attaining some of the high level objectives of the proposed National Women's strategy and supporting women who have experienced domestic violence. For example:

   a. socio-economic goals need to acknowledge and address the link between domestic violence and women’s poverty / homelessness.

   b. Research has shown the economic impact of domestic violence on women and their children both during separation from an abuser and long term\(^ {20} \). It is vital that these impacts are taken into consideration when policies to address women's poverty are developed.

   c. Improving women's and girls' physical and mental health also needs to acknowledge the huge impact of domestic violence and other forms of VAW on women's health, both physical and mental\(^ {21} \). The need for long term, free counselling/therapy is a case in point, as is the need for routine screening in relevant health settings.

We note that the previous Women's Strategy appropriately included combating violence against women as one of its main objectives (12) under Theme 2.

**Services for Women**

Women's Aid supports the Women's Strategy Aim to:

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\(^{19}\) National Crime Council, 2005, Domestic Abuse of women and men in Ireland

\(^{20}\) ANROWS, 2016, Horizons Report - Domestic violence and women’s economic security: Building Australia’s capacity for prevention and redress: Final report

\(^{21}\) World Health Organization, 2013, Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence
“change attitudes and practices preventing women’s and girls’ full participation in education, employment and public life, at all levels, and to improve services for women and girls, with priority given to the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes.”

We contend that violence against women prevents women’s full participation in education, employment and public life. We also believe that the needs of women experiencing domestic violence or other forms of Violence against Women need to be prioritised.

In particular, given the prevalence and effects of violence against women, it is imperative that survivors have access to appropriate services to assist in their protection and recovery. This support is a condition for survivors being able to engage in public and civic life.

Recommendation 2: Women’s Aid recommends that providing adequate funding for Violence against Women specialised services is included in the National Women’s Strategy. Specifically:

a) Provide funding for the extension of the National Freephone Helpline to a 24/7 service.

b) Provide adequate funding to Women’s Aid One to one support service to meet increasing demand.

c) Provide adequate funding to specialist domestic violence services so they can meet demand and increase refuge provision to meet international standards.

d) Increase funding for Legal Aid and for District Courts so as to ameliorate waiting times and exempt domestic violence clients from application fees.

e) Provide for free long term counselling to victims of violence against women.

f) Provide safe contact centres and therapeutic services for children affected by domestic violence.

Rationale

The recent recession has greatly impacted on services and agencies assisting women and children who experience domestic violence, and this negative impact has not been ameliorated by the beginning of economic recovery. Not only has funding to specialist services been cut, other services and systems that are vital to keep women safe and are necessary to rebuild their lives have also received less funding and therefore had to reduce services.

1. Since the start of the recession, funding to Women's Aid has been slashed by 31% while demand on services has increased. Nonetheless, in 2016 Women’s Aid extended the availability of the National Freephone Helpline to 24 hours (from 12 hours previously), in line with the Istanbul Convention and EU Victims’ Directive. Since then we have answered 4,163 calls in the “night shift”, which proves
how much this so far unfunded extension is needed\(^\text{22}\).

2. Women’s Aid One to One support service, which provides much needed one to one support visits and court accompaniment to women, is not adequately funded by government and has relied on donations to make up for the short fall. In the last few years the level of donations has greatly reduced so that we have lost one support worker position at a time of great demand. At the same time, we expect that the demand will increase dramatically as the Victim Directive and the Istanbul Convention come into force, as they both include articles on the victim’s right to support in and outside of court.

3. Many domestic violence refuges and support services have received substantial funding cuts\(^\text{23}\), leading to reduced hours, programmes and services for vulnerable women and children, while demand has increased. This has created huge unmet demand. In 2014, domestic violence services were unable to meet 4,831 requests for safe accommodation because their refuge was full\(^\text{24}\).

This situation is still critical, for example the Galway refuge alone last year had to turn away 288 women with their 405 children fleeing domestic violence as they were full. They also had to accommodate 37 families on a couch bed as all the regular rooms were taken up\(^\text{25}\).

Ireland has a total of 21 women’s shelters with 141 family places, which represent only \textit{31}\% of the places needed according to the Recommendation of the Council of Europe\(^\text{26}\). This does not meet the requirement of the Istanbul Convention that states provide “shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims”\(^\text{27}\).

4. Resource constraints and increase in demand have caused long waiting times for Legal Aid and in the District Court (which deals with applications for orders under the Domestic Violence Act as well as Family law matters such as custody and access). Moreover, since September 2013, there has been a 160\% increase in the application fee for civil Legal Aid (from €50 to €130). This is money many women experiencing domestic violence simply do not have.

5. There are insufficient services to assist women in recovering from violence, in particular there is a

\(\text{Calls answered from 4th January to 30th November 2016 in the ‘out of hours’ service of 8pm to 8am.} \)
\(\text{Safe Ireland (2014) Safety in a time of crisis: Priorities for protecting women and children impacted by domestic violence, Dublin.} \)
\(\text{Safe Ireland National Domestic Violence Service Statistics Report 2014} \)
\(\text{Connacht tribune 19 November 2016} \)
\(\text{Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Country Report 2014 Vienna} \)
\(\text{Istanbul Convention Article 23} \)
lack of free or affordable long term counselling, which impact on women’s mental health.

6. There are insufficient services for children who have experienced (directly or by being witnesses) domestic violence, including therapeutic services and safe child contact centres\(^28\). Funding for the very successful Barnardos/One Family Pilot Child Contact Centre was terminated in 2013 after 2 and a half years, notwithstanding the final evaluation finding that such service was essential. The lack of specialised services impacts not only on the children themselves, but also on their mothers. Women often describe to us ongoing abuse during access visits. In 2015 women disclosed to us in 82 contacts that children were being abused during access arrangements and on another 325 occasions mothers disclosed that they themselves had been directly abused during access visits\(^29\).

In conclusion, the provision of adequate services for women experiencing domestic violence and their children is a prerequisite to their participation in society and therefore needs to be included in the new National Women’s Strategy.

Ends.

\(^{28}\) Barnardos, 2016, What’s the harm? A child-centred response to domestic abuse

\(^{29}\) Women’s Aid Impact Report 2015