

Sonas Domestic Violence Charity Pre-budget Submission 2019

August 2019

- 1 in 7 women in Ireland will experience serious physical violence from a partner
- Domestic abuse is child abuse and a leading risk to the welfare and protection of children
- Current housing crisis is undermining the safety of victims of abuse and putting them at further risk of abuse

Sonas Domestic Violence Charity is the largest provider of frontline support services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse in the Dublin region. We provide emergency refuge, Safe Homes, Outreach, Visiting Support and court accompaniment to victims of domestic abuse. Last year we supported over 1,300 women and children in the Dublin region.

Support Victims of Domestic Abuse: Invest in Frontline Support Services

Refuges and other services

Current investment in domestic violence support services is below the level needed to meet Ireland's commitments under the Istanbul Convention. It is estimated that we are nationally falling up to three times below the recommended refuge levels.

The Dublin region consists of approximately one third of the population with the greatest concentration of need in the country. Investment in support services for victims has not kept pace with these demographic changes. For example, the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) constituency in Dublin, with a combined population of Cork and Limerick cities, has no refuge making it unique among the four Dublin local authorities. Sonas provides Safe Homes, outreach, visiting support and court accompaniment in the area but we know that is not enough to fully support victims.

The approximate €20 million allocated by the State to support victims of domestic abuse in the context of the scale of the problem is not enough. According to the CSO there are approximately 2 million girls and women in Ireland over the age of 14; a significant number of women and girls are at risk of or will experience domestic abuse including sexual violence in the context of that abuse.

Support those Providing Supports: Invest in Frontline Support Organisations Staff

Victims of abuse are supported by qualified professional social care staff. Sonas is calling on the government to recognise the contribution of staff working in domestic violence support service organisations and increase funding to services in order to attract and retain professional qualified

staff. In real terms this means: cost of living increases and ensuring staff are benchmarked to similar public sector scales since support staff are doing similar work to public sector counterparts,

Support Victims of Domestic Abuse: Introduce Paid Leave for Victims of Domestic, Sexual Violence and Gender-based Violence

Resource the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to legislate and introduce 5 days minimum paid leave for survivors of domestic, sexual and other gender-based violence. The government has a precedent with the decision by New Zealand to introduce 10 days paid leave for victims of abuse.

Fully Resource and Invest in a Prevention, Detection and Risk Management Framework

Allocate funding for development of a national multi-agency domestic violence Prevention, Detection and Risk Management framework.

Allocate funding for establishment of Domestic Homicide Reviews as part of aforementioned framework.

Resource An Garda Siochana to include:

- Ring-fencing funding for the Garda Divisional Protective Services Units
- Invest in the development and roll-out of the risk assessment tool which can be shared between An Garda Siochana and agencies supporting victims of domestic abuse

Frontline support organisations understand the need for real time information in order to reduce risks to victims of abuse and optimise services being provided. In order to achieve these outcomes, there needs to be a funding stream underwriting significant investment in IT and data systems and staff with the understanding this capacity is necessary to fully support victims while allowing front lined organisations to fulfil governance and compliance requirements including GDPR; the understanding and funding for this necessity currently does not exist.

Increase Supply of Social and Affordable Housing to reduce risk to victims' safety

Domestic violence is a key cause of women, children and young people becoming homeless. The six months after a woman leaves a domestic abuse situation is when she is most at risk of fatal assault ie of being killed.

Due to the current homeless crisis, many victims have a real fear of homelessness which can influence their decision to seek support on behalf of themselves and their children. Victims experiencing homelessness risk being re-traumatised or returning to an abusive situation. Victims of abuse have many real and founded fears; fear of homelessness should not be among them.

While victims need specific accommodation-based supports such as refuges, increases in the general housing supply, particularly in affordable and social housing, will help victims escaping domestic abuse. Real housing options for victims of abuse mean reduction in the fear or risk of homelessness associated with leaving an abusive situation. It also reduces the risk of someone returning to an abusive situation because of their fear or actual experience of homelessness.