



**Men's
Development
Network**



**White Ribbon
Ireland**
Men Ending Gender-Based Violence

**Opening Statement by Men's Development Network to the Oireachtas Joint Justice Committee
in relation to the General Scheme of the Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill**

April 18th, 2023.

Good afternoon Cathaoirleach and Members of the Joint Justice Committee,

On behalf of the Board of Men's Development Network, our staff, clients, participants, and volunteers, we wish to express our gratitude to the Joint Committee on Justice for the invitation to provide testimony before you today. It is, as always, an honour to appear before an Oireachtas Committee and in particular to be here with our colleagues from Safe Ireland, Rape Crisis Network Ireland, National Women's Council, AkiDwa, Transgender Equality Network Ireland and the Department of Justice.

My name is Seán Cooke, CEO of Men's Development Network and I am joined by our Head of Programmes & Advocacy, Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan. We would like to begin our statement by commending the significant work conducted by this Committee, with the Department of Justice, on the General Scheme of the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill. Our presentation today seeks to complement your important work to date and provide support and refinement in presenting a comprehensive Bill later this year.

As an organisation that engages men and boys through gender transformative approaches, we are part of a growing movement nationally and internationally of men speaking out about Gender-Based Violence, including Violence against Women. In the field of Gender-Based Violence prevention, we are indebted to the leadership of women and in particular, women of intersectional backgrounds and representative organisations, for the leadership role that they have played and continue to play in this area. Organisationally, we believe it is vital for us, especially as men, to thank and acknowledge their leadership in the creation of a society free from violence.

The design, development, and implementation of a robust coordinating agency for all aspects of the 'Zero Tolerance' 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence is a state obligation under Articles 7 and 10 of the Istanbul Convention. However, Ireland's journey towards the establishment of dedicated DSGBV agency also starts with the role of women's leadership. National Women's Council of Ireland, in their June 2021 submission on the new DSGBV strategy called directly for a dedicated agency to coordinate policies and service delivery.¹ Other organisations such as Ruhama,

¹ 'NWC Submission on the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender- Based Violence' (June 2021) <https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC-_3rd_National_Strategy_DSGBV_Submission_JUNE_2021.pdf> at page 9.

Safe Ireland, Women's Aid, among others, also called for policy and service coordination and accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, the work of Minister Helen McEntee in leading the Department of Justice was vital in the development of the '*Zero Tolerance*' Third National Strategy deserves huge credit. These are just some of many examples of women's leadership roles and these actions have brought us all here today.

Men's Development Network through our own policy submissions as part of the drafting of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence² and through our engagements with the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality³ have supported the development of the proposed DSGBV agency.

Our written submission to this Committee on the General Scheme of the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill centred on:

- Head 14 – Functions of the Proposed Agency
- Head 18 – Membership of the Board

Under Head 14, we have proposed:

- (1) To amend Head 14(1)(e)(i) to include specific reference to engaging men and boys as allies in primary violence prevention, which aims at addressing underlying causes of GBV, to align with the Third National Strategy Implementation Plan and Article 12(4) of the Istanbul Convention.
- (2) Including perpetrator programmes within the remit of the agency.
- (3) To provide for both monitoring, enforcement, and reinforcement when it comes to adherence of standards by service providers.

Under Head 18, we have proposed:

- (1) The amendment of Head 18(2)(a) to ensure membership of the Board is inclusive and reflects the expertise of persons with experience in DSGBV service delivery.

We look forward to receiving any questions which Committee Members may have and once again, thank you for this opportunity to be present today in what we believe is a significant step towards '*Zero Tolerance*' of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Irish society.

² Policy and Response Paper of Men's Development Network and White Ribbon Ireland to the draft Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence <<https://mensnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/MDN-WRI-DSGBV.pdf>> at Section II.

³ Men's Development Network Submission on Gender Equality with Reference to the Recommendations of the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality <<https://mensnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/Written-Submission-by-Mens-Development-Network-to-the-Joint-Oireachtas-Committee-on-Gender-Equality.pdf>> at pages 13-14.