

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

## AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOMHIONANNAS INSCNE

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON GENDER EQUALITY

---

*Déardaoin, 7 Aibreán 2022*

*Thursday, 7 April 2022*

---

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

---

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Ciarán Cannon,	Lisa Chambers,
Jennifer Carroll MacNeill,	Eileen Flynn,*
Sorca Clarke,	Pauline O'Reilly,
Paul McAuliffe,	Fintan Warfield.
Niamh Smyth.	

\* In éagmais / In the absence of Senator Alice-Mary Higgins.

Teachta / Deputy Ivana Bacik sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** Apologies have been received Senator Higgins. Before we begin, I note that members have the option of being physically present in the committee room or join the meeting via Microsoft Teams from the Leinster House offices, as some are this morning. Members may not participate from outside the parliamentary precincts. If joining on Teams, I ask members to mute their microphones when not speaking and use the raise-hand function to indicate. To limit the risk of spreading Covid-19, we encourage members, visitors and witnesses to continue to wear face masks when moving around the campus and when they are in close proximity to one another and to be respectful of public health guidelines.

### **Recommendations of Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality: Discussion (Resumed)**

**Chairman:** Today's meeting will be in two sessions. For the first, we have an engagement in public with representatives of AkiDwA, the Men's Development Network and Safe Ireland to discuss the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality regarding domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. When that session has concluded, we will go into private session to deal with committee business.

I warmly welcome our stakeholders who are here with us this morning. I thank them all for coming in and I thank those who are joining on Teams also. First, I welcome from AkiDwA Ms Uruemu Adejinmi, chair; Dr. Salome Mbugua, CEO, who I have known very well for many years; and Dr. Caroline Munyi, migrant women's health co-ordinator. From the Men's Development Network I welcome Mr. Seán Cooke, CEO; Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan, head of programmes and advocacy; and Mr. Kenny Doyle, project development officer. From Safe Ireland I welcome Ms Mary McDermott, CEO, and Ms Lisa Marmion, national services manager, who is joining us via Teams. I welcome all of our witnesses and thank them for their time and engagement with us.

Before we begin, I will read an important notice on parliamentary privilege. Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Participants in the committee meeting who are in locations outside the parliamentary precincts are asked to note that the constitutional protections afforded to those participating from within the parliamentary precincts do not extend to them. No clear guidance can be given on whether or the extent to which participation is covered by the absolute privilege with statutory nature.

Having given those formalities, I will now call on each group to make its opening statement. I ask them to keep their opening remarks inside of ten minutes and as concise as possible, if they can, to allow more time for questions and answers. After a representative from each group has given their statements, we will then open the floor to members for questions and answers. Again, we are very grateful to the witnesses for giving their time.

I call Dr. Mbugua to make the opening statement on behalf of AkiDwA.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** AkiDwA welcomes the opportunity to present to the committee today. This morning I am joined by AkiDwA representatives Ms Uruemu Adejinmi, chairperson, and Dr. Caroline Munyi, co-ordinator of migrant women's health. Our organisation welcomes the establishment of this Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality and views it as an opportunity to advance gender equality in Ireland.

Akina Dada wa Africa, or AkiDwA, which is Swahili for sisterhood, is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Established in 2001, AkiDwA's mission is to promote equality and justice for migrant women, with a vision for a just society where there is equal opportunity and access to resources in all aspects of society: social; cultural; economic; civic; and political.

For AkiDwA, the term "migrant women" includes not only recent immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, but also migrant workers, spouses of Irish and EU citizens, students, trafficked and undocumented women. It also includes those who have acquired Irish citizenship but who still consider themselves to be outside the mainstream society in terms of their linguistic, racial or cultural backgrounds and who therefore still define themselves as migrants.

Today our presentation is focused on recommendations 37 to 41, inclusive, made by the Citizens' Assembly and mainly on how AkiDwA believes they can be advanced.

Domestic violence happens in families in all regions and from all social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, regardless of age or disability. However, some members of society face additional barriers in accessing services and getting to safety. Migrant women indeed have certain vulnerabilities which need to be taken into account, which characterise the abuse that they suffer and their pathways to safety. Ireland's response to domestic violence needs to be aware of these vulnerabilities and build cultural sensitivity into this framework.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, rates of domestic violence have increased substantially in Ireland. In AkiDwA between 2020 and 2021, we dealt with 123 cases and our office remained open to support women. As noted by the Immigrant Council of Ireland, the number of domestic violence cases experienced by migrant women increased to 12% in 2021 compared to the previous year. According to Women's Aid's 2020 report, 941 women who called its helpline said that they were members of a minority group. Some 93% of these were migrant women.

AkiDwA asserts that domestic abuse of migrant women in Ireland is an expression of power and control, which can further be aggravated by issues of culture, tradition and immigration. It can be made worse for migrant women living in Ireland because they are far away from their home countries. Most have no extended family support, due sometimes to family reunification barriers. Some face difficult residency status situations that could be contingent on a husband's residency, cultural or religious factors, isolation from support networks and discrimination, and others may have language barriers affecting their access to services.

Recommendation 37 states that all Government action to prevent and counter domestic, sexual and gender-based violence should be co-ordinated by a Cabinet Minister with direct responsibility for immediate implementation of the national strategy. AkiDwA supports this recommendation and additionally highlights the importance of including all forms of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, DSGBV, including female genital mutilation, FGM, early and forced marriages and trafficking in the national strategy to reflect diversity and lived experi-

ences of women living in Ireland today.

According to AkiDwA's research and reports, there are 5,975 women who have been subjected to FGM living in Ireland. Some 6,000 girls under 15 years old who are born or are living in Ireland but who originate from FGM-affected countries are at risk of female genital mutilation. AkiDwA and those who have been following the news know that Ireland witnessed the first FGM prosecution in January 2020. This case reaffirms the need to address this issue fully to ensure children from affected communities are fully protected. I will return to this issue later.

While the issue of early and forced marriage is under-researched in Ireland, it has been happening. According to a report by *thejournal.ie* in October 2016, over 400 minors were married in Ireland between 2004 and 2015. The report pointed out that the Garda National Immigration Bureau was investigating several cases of forced marriage involving migrant children as young as 12 years old where the girls were typically trafficked into the country and coerced into marrying older men. In 2019, the *Irish Examiner* reported a case of a father who supported his 16-year-old daughter's marriage to a 29-year-old man against her wishes.

Trafficking of women for sexual exploitation and prostitution remains a major issue globally and in Ireland. According to a Ruhama report on its provision of support in 2018, out of the 251 women supported by the organisation, 201 were migrant women. We recommend that the national strategy include all forms of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, including FGM, early and forced marriages and trafficking, to reflect diversity and the lived experiences of women living in Ireland today. FGM as a form of gender-based violence should be included in all the goals of the national strategy on DSGBV and should be highlighted in awareness-raising, training and education. The Ministry or agency working towards the implementation of the national strategy with the Minister should have advisory members with representation from diverse backgrounds.

With regard to recommendation 38, time and again we hear from migrant women, particularly women applying for international protection, that they hesitate to report domestic violence out of fear that involving the authorities would make them be seen as troublemakers and that it would negatively affect their application for international protection or citizenship. It is therefore imperative that a positive initiative is taken to educate migrant and refugee women on their rights in targeted information campaigns on recognising the signs of domestic violence and assurances that protection from domestic violence is available to all and will not affect immigration status. Article 13 of the Istanbul Convention provides that states shall promote or conduct, on a regular basis and at all levels, awareness-raising campaigns or programmes, including in co-operation with national human rights institutions and equality bodies, civil society and non-governmental organisations, especially women's organisations where appropriate, to increase awareness and understanding among the public of the different manifestations of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the convention. Under Article 19, states are to take necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims receive adequate and timely information on available support services and legal measures in a language they understand.

The impacts and harms caused by domestic violence are many for those involved, including the children. For example, in the area of female genital mutilation, survivors are left with psychological, physical, social and sexual consequences. Current supports available to victims and survivors of FGM are not sufficient, as there is currently only one clinic targeting this cohort of migrants. Supports can be considered in the following areas. Regarding physical supports, the impact of FGM on women range from being unable to do or enjoy intimate activities with their significant others to difficult labour and childbirth, among others. In terms of psychological

supports, one of the adverse impacts of FGM is on women's psychological health. This group needs culturally appropriate services to help them cope with the trauma caused by the mutilation. We also need wrap-around supports. The need for these supports is essential and long overdue. We would be failing if we say that women suffering from FGM are not victims of other forms of violence such as domestic violence. Due to the difficulty to engage in intimacy, women who have undergone FGM suffer domestic violence in their homes and many times they have no one to whom they can disclose what they are going through. I can offer an example of a woman who has gone through that. However, due to time I will move to recommendation 39, to support justice for victims and survivors.

While other women have a choice of whether to avail of the safety and protections in place, migrant women often find themselves trapped by laws, policies and administrative decisions. Immigration legislation impacts greatly on the lives and choices of migrant women, increasing their physical vulnerability and distress in situations of domestic violence and severely curtailing their options, particularly when social welfare restrictions apply. Although the introduction of independent residence permissions was and still remains a welcome feature and a positive development in the work of combating domestic violence among the migrant community, there still remain gaps in the protection of migrant women. Neither the domestic violence guidelines nor the policy document on non-EEA family reunification has a legislative footing. Instead, access to independent status is based on ministerial discretion. A more forward-looking approach is contained in Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention. That article introduces the possibility of granting migrant women an autonomous residence permit if they are trapped in an abusive relationship because their residency status depends on that of their abusive spouse or partner.

There remain administrative barriers that hinder victims to fully exercise their rights and to avail of the current avenues in place, given that the domestic violence guidelines set out that the immigration status granted under the arrangements would be "at the same level as that which was previously held as a dependant", normally stamp 3 holders. This would not enable women to become economically self-sufficient and could act as a disincentive to women seeking independent status. While it is known to service providers that it can be possible to obtain a stamp 4 with permission to work, this information is not stated in the policy. Second, in cases of non-EEA migrant women, they are required to register or re-register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau. Following a successful application for the independent status, a fee of €300 has to be settled before one can be issued with a certificate of registration. This registration fee may prove prohibitive for women in situations where they are highly financially dependent on the perpetrator and not in receipt of any other payment.

Ireland should opt-in to the EU directive on family reunification and introduce implementing legislation which provides for autonomous residence permits. In addition to this, the protection of undocumented women from domestic violence should also be regarded as a priority in immigration reform. We must place the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, INIS, guidelines on victims of domestic violence on a statutory footing, removing ministerial discretion and replacing it with a clear legal framework and a process. We must clarify the position on stamp 3 permission to work, with clear guidelines for holders and employers. Where granting independent status to a recognised victim of domestic violence, consider granting full access to the labour market to allow her to work to support herself and her family.

I will go to reviewing and reforming the courts system. AkiDwA welcomes this recommendation because it is badly needed. Front-line services and other service providers need to take up training, in particular on cultural competence, which AkiDwA has produced, to empower



professionals and front-line staff who are working in this area. AkiDwA agrees with introducing tougher sentences and with providing specialised, confidential healthcare. AkiDwA emphasises the importance of language support, translation and access to legal support, which have been major barriers. Most women do not understand the system in Ireland at all. Ireland only has one clinic specialising in FGM, as I mentioned earlier. There is a lack of specialised domestic violence refuges and support services for migrant victims of intimate partner violence. Women's Aid has an interpretation service available for women presenting at its services. However, in most services, especially in rural communities, there is a lack of resourcing for the general population, which has a knock-on effect on migrant women. AkiDwA also agrees with recommendation 39(e).

I will proceed to recommendation 40. Although the immigration guideline is a welcome feature that enables victims to apply for independent immigration status — I mentioned this area — migrant women may experience additional barriers to accessing support and safety in circumstances of domestic violence, especially where their immigration status is a problem. I deal with this in my submission where I refer to the habitual residence condition.

The habitual residence condition is a qualifying condition for social welfare payments that was introduced in 2004. Women who leave their partner because of violence and who do not satisfy the habitual residence condition may find themselves and their children destitute. Even if they check into a refuge, given that its service is temporary and that those availing of it are not entitled to any payment while there, the chance of them or their children, or all of them, remaining there is quite slim. In most cases, victims find their way back home to the perpetrator. We ask that the habitual residency policy be examined, along with its impact on the lives of women.

Recommendation 41 relates to the area in which AkiDwA specialises: female genital mutilation, FGM. FGM is a form of gender-based violence that affects women and girls in Ireland today. Almost 6,000 women living in Ireland have undergone FGM, although the actual number may be higher because we did not get statistics from the CSO on some of the relevant countries. AkiDwA produced the statistics from UNICEF 2016 and World Health Organization guidelines. We have repeatedly called on the Government to establish an interdepartmental working group to co-ordinate the response to FGM to prevent it from happening to young girls and to provide adequate support to survivors. In 2020 we saw Ireland's first case concerning this human rights abuse. This sends a strong message that FGM will not be tolerated in Ireland, but we need to take steps to prevent girls from being cut. We have outlined key policy steps that the Government should take to prevent such a crime from happening again. These include the establishment of an intergovernmental working group that includes the relevant Departments, civil society, front-line services and representatives from affected communities; the development of a national action plan on FGM outlining and co-ordinating the response of Government agencies, with funding to support anti-FGM programmes and key targets and indicators to measure progress on elimination; and the establishment of funding for a network of community health ambassadors who would work with affected communities, including youth, religious groups and men, to change attitudes to FGM at a grassroots level.

AkiDwA welcomes recommendation 41 wholeheartedly. AkiDwA has called for FGM to be recognised as a ground for asylum many times. It has made attempts that include undertaking research into the gender component of asylum claims made by women in Ireland, particularly in relation to claims of gender-based violence, though without success due to a lack of data. In 2011 and 2012, AkiDwA held meetings with the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, ORAC, on this matter. We have been advocating for gender asylum guidelines,

which I will now explain.

The threat of FGM provides strong grounds for claiming asylum, yet many women are not granted protection. According to the 2013 UNHCR report, 29 female applicants in Ireland between the ages of 14 and 64 are likely to be affected by FGM. This is 44.6% of the total number of female applicants from FGM-practising countries of origin. The figure is from 2013, so it may now be higher.

The primary responsibility for protecting women and girls from FGM lies with each country. However, if a woman or girl in genuine fear of being subjected to FGM flees a country where such protection is not provided by the state and arrives in Ireland, it is vital that Ireland fulfils its legal obligations and provides adequate protection. Gender asylum guidelines allow decision-makers to examine women's asylum claims in a way that contextualises their experience and recognises the influence of gender inequality on perceptions of persecution.

In 2009, the UNHCR established guidelines on how to treat claims for refugee status relating specifically to FGM. These state that a girl or woman seeking asylum because she has been compelled to undergo, or is likely to be subjected to, FGM can qualify for refugee status under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Women and girls applying for international protection in the State should be interviewed in a gender-sensitive manner to ensure they have an adequate opportunity to identify the types of harm they fear as relevant to the protection process. The 2013 UNHCR report *Beyond Proof: Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems*, also known as the CREDO report, notes this. Hence, gender-sensitive interviewing is essential to ensure the facts of a claim are brought to light and can be appropriately assessed by the decision-maker.

**Chairman:** I realise that Dr. Mbugua has very little left but I ask her to conclude shortly.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** We recommend gathering data on asylum cases granted on the grounds of FGM, as is greatly needed in Ireland. We ask that ORAC publishes domestic gender guidelines — it has told us it has — in the interest of transparency and to ensure decision-makers are aware of these at all stages. The domestic gender guidelines should recognise FGM as a human rights violation. We also recommend induction and in-service training to promote greater awareness of the circumstances of women in refugee-producing countries. Gender-sensitive techniques in interviewing should be utilised and gender-sensitive interview conditions should be provided to women seeking international protection regardless of whether a gender-related claim is provided in the first instance.

**Chairman:** Apologies for rushing Dr. Mbugua. We all have the opening statements and want to ensure the maximum time for questions and answers and the discussion. We are very grateful to Dr. Mbugua for providing us with such insight into the intersectional nature of the discrimination affecting women experiencing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. It is particularly helpful to hear how immigration laws interact with our laws and frameworks on such violence and the criminal law.

We will now move to the Men's Development Network, MDN. I invite Mr. Cooke to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** Good morning to the Chair and the other members of the committee. I congratulate the Chair on her recent elevation. It is amazing what 25 years of hard work does for overnight success.

On behalf of the board of MDN, its staff, clients, participants and volunteers, I wish to express our gratitude on being offered the opportunity to contribute to the deliberations on gender equality, specifically domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. As a follow-up to our contributions to the Citizen's Assembly, we see it as both a privilege and necessity for men to be part of this discussion.

Having had that sense of privilege coming here today, I must not understate my network's sense of privilege, as a men's development organisation, in being part of this discussion. To be in this room not only with our colleagues from Safe Ireland and AkiDwA but also with the members is a true privilege and a significant moment for a developmental organisation like ours.

I am the chief executive officer of MDN. My aim today is to set out its stall and outline what it does. With me is our head of programmes, Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan, who will reflect on the recommendations and what we feel should be done. Also attending with me is our newest recruit, Mr. Kenny Doyle, our project development officer for research policy and advocacy. He started on Monday and we trust him here today.

I offer apologies on behalf of one of our colleagues, Mr. John Doyle, our director of services, who intended to be here today but could not make it owing to a prior engagement with our facilitators and partner support organisations on our domestic violence intervention programme, MEND.

Before we share our reflections, it would be useful to give a brief introduction to MDN, its work and its methodologies. The network celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. It was established in 1997 in the south east of Ireland by a group of men who were supporting each other to be the best fathers and partners possible. This group was developing greater awareness of how the system of patriarchy impacted negatively upon them, their partners and their families. The men also readily acknowledge their own sense of privilege.

We have our headquarters in the sunny south east of Waterford, but we also have offices in counties Carlow, Tipperary, Dublin and Wexford. We have 17 core staff and a further 22 sub-contracted staff working on various programmes. We run four national programmes: MEND, the domestic violence intervention programme; Engage, the national mental health training initiative; our male advice line, a national freephone service for male victims of domestic abuse; and the all-Ireland White Ribbon campaign, which is men ending violence against women. It is worth noting that in we are the only organisation which has dedicated programme to address victims and survivors of domestic abuse as well as perpetrators.

Over the initial years of the network, we ran a number of projects working with men who were at risk of or experienced marginalisation in the most marginalised communities. During this time, the network developed its own methodology of engaging men that has influenced the development of all its programmes and practices. These engagements with men also played a significant role in informing the first men's health policy with a strong emphasis on a social determinants model of men's health. Ireland was the first country in the world to have such a policy.

As an organisation, we have five core values that when, adhered to, create the conditions for individuals to thrive and grow and for societies to adapt and change for the betterment of all. These values of equality, being non-judgmental, partnership, professionalism and love underpin all our work and ensure that the principles of tolerance, respect and dignity are the cornerstones



of our non-adversarial approach.

We see our work within a transformative framework that aims to create positive environments for reflection and analysis, leading eventually to action, whether this is as a society or as individuals. Our approach as an organisation is similar to the process happening here today where we are reflecting on the work of the citizens' assembly at the second stage of a process of transformation. That will eventually lead to a third stage where action will be taken in the form of agreed proposals for legislation or the holding of referendums.

Our work is about transforming masculinities by providing opportunities to engage men and boys on issues such as their health and well-being, gender equality and ending gender-based violence, not only in our national programmes mentioned earlier but also in programmes such as our parent support programme, walk the talk, FarmConnect, MenConnect, men's leadership, counselling services and our summer school, to name just a few.

Over the past 25 years we have worked hard to develop partnerships and collaborations with the women's movement and acknowledge the leadership shown by women in creating the more equal society we have today. I hope as a men's development organisation we are viewed as strong allies and supporters of the quest to end inequality and the elimination of violence against women. Although many strides have been taken to address inequality, there is much to be done.

The policy and legal frameworks are generally in place. The next step, we feel, is the transformation of hearts and minds. The rationale and evidence is now in place to positively engage men and boys in becoming catalysts and agents for change. This is only one piece of the puzzle, but a significant piece nonetheless, in creating the cultural shifts that engage the silent majority of men and boys in becoming their most authentic selves and standing together with women in the ongoing process of creating a society of equality, respect and non-violence. I hope this gives the committee a context for our contributions and reflections on the various recommendations today and that our mission statement, Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All, is seen in the context of what I outlined earlier and that we are here today with an open mind, a tender heart and willingness to engage.

Before my colleague, Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan, takes over and continues our opening statement on the specific recommendations of domestic sexual and gender-based violence, I also wish to offer the committee, in light of the breadth of our engagement on all aspects of gender equality, our willingness to further engage with committee in the other seven areas of recommendations, especially those on the Constitution, care, leadership, norms and stereotypes.

**Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan:** I thank the committee for the invitation to appear here today. I am the head of programmes and advocacy with the Men's Development Network and White Ribbon Ireland campaign. As an international human rights lawyer, it is a privilege to be here as a witness and I want to thank the committee for its work and wish members well over the next eight months of their journey.

I also wish to express our thanks for the work of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. Its members showed diligence, leadership and public service in the good work they have done. I would also like to note that it is an honour to be here today with our friends from AkiDWA and Safe Ireland. They are wonderful allies for human rights, gender equality and an all-around better society for all. It is an honour to share this day with all of them.

In the remaining time available, I will briefly outline the Men's Development Network position on recommendations 37 to 41, inclusive, of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality report, focused on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. I would like to start by saying that we welcome the recommendations provided by the assembly. We have a submission on this that I hope has been circulated to all members of the committee. I encourage members to read it in conjunction with our recent submission to the Department of Justice on the draft national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

In March 2022, Men's Development Network submitted a paper to the Department on the third draft national strategy. In a sense, these recommendations align with recommendations 37 to 41, inclusive. We outlined some recommendations I would advise regarding making Ireland a more gender equal society and addressing the issue of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. These include providing a clear outline of the available resources to implement the national strategy and action plans and ensuring prevention and awareness raising efforts target the public rather than specific sectors of society, in accordance with Articles 13 (1) and (2) of the Istanbul Convention and Article 35B of CEDAW general recommendation 35.

We also wanted to ensure that awareness raising programmes address the root causes of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, in accordance with international law. As part of that, we wished to ensure that engagements with men and boys are based on international and national best practices in the most appropriate ways from a strength-based, non-judgmental and non-adversarial approach, and that there is a positive call to action for men and boys that instills support to build capacity and safety in the prevention of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. It should be the case that men and boys can be allies for gender equality and ending gender-based violence.

The development and funding of campaigns and similar initiatives such as the White Ribbon Ireland campaign to engage with men and boys as allies for gender equality in ending gender-based violence is vital. This is a key piece in the Istanbul prevention pillar. We also recommend the expansion of the proposed content of awareness raising activities and training programmes beyond the aspect of consent, but also to include themes mentioned in Article 41 of the Istanbul Convention, such as gender equality, respect, non-violent conflict resolution, interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence and integrity. It needs to be quite holistic.

**Chairman:** Has Mr. Kelly Ryan specific points on the recommendations?

**Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan:** We can turn specifically to the recommendations of the citizens' assembly, and from there follow up with some questions on the submissions. On recommendation 37 under the third national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, there is a commitment from Government to create a new statutory body that will be co-ordinated by the Minister for Justice, which will have direct responsibility for implementation of the strategy. This aligns quite well with what is proposed by the citizens' assembly in recommendation 37 in section 1 of the draft national strategy. It was supplemented by our submission on section 2 to the Department.

Regarding recommendation 38, we believe that the recommendation needs to be extended beyond current expression. The training should be based on the prevention of the Istanbul Convention. It should also include the role of men and boys in engaging them in the most appropriate ways as allies for gender equality and ending gender-based violence. At this stage in Ireland, that has yet to take place. It would be very innovative in terms of promoting a gender equal society.

In regard to recommendation 39 on supporting victims and survivors, Men's Development Ireland acknowledges and welcomes sub-recommendations A to E, as recommended by the citizens' assembly. We note the overlaps with the objections of the third national strategy. I refer to advancing justice for the victims and survivors of domestic, gender-based and sexual violence not only in their engagement with the institutions of justice but also ensuring long-term sustainable justice for victims and survivors. We would also recommend the inclusion of an option for the development of restorative justice or practice processes, where appropriate.

Furthermore, MDN supports recommendation 40 as presented. We would encourage that such a provision be as inclusive as possible to all genders and to their children, with due regard to the fact that the majority of victims and survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are women. It is important to note that the Istanbul Convention recommends one shelter space to every 10,000 people in Ireland, and that Ireland currently does not have that number. There has been much work done, but much is still to be done.

I take guidance on recommendation 41 from our friends from AkiDwA. I welcome what they have stated here this morning. I would like to note that various UNHCR publications, such as the Too Much Pain document from 2014, indicate that FGM is a ground for seeking asylum. This is supported by a wide range of jurisprudence in case law from common law countries and countries in Europe, such as France, as cited in our submission. I note that in the wording of the recommendation, there is some concern in relation to FGM as a ground for seeking asylum. We know that asylum is a fundamental human right. It is a fundamental human right to seek asylum. I urge that we would state here that FGM is actually a ground for refugee status, rather than a ground for seeking asylum. This is because it is fundamental human right.

I thank the committee and I look forward to questions from members.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Kelly Ryan. I apologise for moving the conversation on. We all have the opening statements. Our work is very much focused on how we implement the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly. As Mr. Kelly Ryan said, all of us are very grateful to the Citizens' Assembly for providing us with such a clear blueprint to achieve gender equality. It is a great pleasure to call Ms Mary McDermott, who is the CEO of Safe Ireland. I thank her again for being here.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** I am the CEO of Safe Ireland. I am joined virtually by my good colleague, Ms Lisa Marmion, who is our national services development manager. We thank the committee for the invitation to speak today on the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly. We give our very great thanks, even more importantly, to our fellow citizens for their recognition that domestic, sexual and gender-based violence creates and maintains conditions of gender inequality in Ireland. It must, therefore, be central to all considerations of the equality and freedom of all.

We frame our presentation today not only in the context of meeting the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, but also in the context of the publication of the report of the Citizens' Assembly, the national audit of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence infrastructures, the Tusla audit of domestic violence accommodation, the current draft of the third national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and, crucially, the Taoiseach's very welcome decision to create a new statutory agency for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

The overriding frame for Safe Ireland, however, retains the effects and the insights of Covid-19 on our society in relation to domestic violence, the strong reassertion of the importance

and capacity of local communities and the effectiveness of co-ordinated Government and civil society engagement. The importance of locally accessible domestic violence services cannot be overstated. Equally, the redrawing of the relations between work and home, the private and the public and the use of IT, all of which are embodied here today, are directly pertinent to responding to domestic violence in a progressive, 21st century manner.

I do not need to rehearse here the public reaction to the murders of Urantsetseg Tserendorj and Ashling Murphy. In particular, Ashling's death removed every possible victim-blaming variable that we usually use to distract ourselves from the scale of violence against women in our society. We remember them here and we work on behalf of all women who are deprived of their lives and their freedom. As such, we are done with endlessly describing this problem. We welcome this moment in our history when we can actually accept that domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is a large-scale social problem. We can name it accurately and we can act to address it. We have encountered focused, persistent and positive engagement from all sectors over the last two years. The question now is about how we proceed. It is a welcome starting place for us.

On the point of naming, language and the conceptualisation of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, Safe Ireland's core position, which is bolstered by decades of robust feminist and queer scholarship, is that this form of violence is a large-scale social problem. It may not be reduced to poor personal choice. We concur with Mr. Kelly Ryan's observations on the need to broaden that issue. It is a cornerstone social problem. We believe that if it is addressed centrally and systematically, many ancillary and problematic personal, social, political and administrative culs-de-sac in areas like mental health, addictions, homelessness, persistent criminality, child protection, education and employment and alienation of all kinds can be worked through. All of these factors bring significant evidenced costs to our State, our communities and our personal lives. All of them would be seriously repositioned if domestic, sexual and gender-based violence was placed centrally in our social policy. I might add that the Think-tank for Action on Social Change, TASC, and Safe Ireland are working on a project to that end.

Our colleagues in Women's Aid, the Rape Crisis Network of Ireland and Dublin Rape Crisis Centre have presented substantively on recommendations 37 to 41, inclusive, of the Citizens' Assembly, which relate to awareness, justice and FGM. We will not input heavily into these areas today. We are happy to engage on these matters, but we will not repeat the previous inputs. We defer significantly to our colleague in AkiDWA on the matter of FGM, as already addressed this morning.

I will make a brief input on social protection and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence supports. Our submission covers this aspect of the matter under the heading of "pathways to freedom and the importance of social protection". A woman's journey out of coercion and, in particular, financial control, often requires her to be supported by the State to regain her independence and her agency. Over the last two years, Safe Ireland has worked positively with the Department of Social Protection to develop such dedicated pathways. We commend the work of Deputies and Senators on this, particularly their cross-party support in 2020 for the domestic violence rent supplement. This important pilot, which has now been mainstreamed, demonstrates some of the important gaps which continuously exist for women who are exiting abuse. As a follow-on, we are now calling for a similar protocol for the exceptional needs payment to assist women who have other practical emergency outlays and are experiencing domestic violence.

In 2020 and 2021, Safe Ireland administered a charitable Covid-19 emergency fund through

our member services to support women on their exit from abusive homes to purchase essential items, including nappies, bread and milk, to pay bills and to travel to and from school and work. The outlays funded here are fully documented and they provide a solid base of evidence for mainstream support through our Government for the exceptional needs payment. We will be pushing for this campaign in 2022.

We are aware of a structural barrier that confronts qualified adults who are seeking to access dental, optical and audiology services through the treatment benefit scheme. Practitioners are required to solicit the consent of the perpetrator in order for an injured woman to be treated. We will be seeking support from the Minister for Justice, Deputy McEntee, and the data protection commissioner to remedy this anomaly.

Recommendations 37 and 40 address the appropriate political and administrative structures which plan, design, provide and resource domestic violence preventions and interventions in Ireland, including the equitable provision of refuge across the country. It is very important for us in this forum that we decided to keep services and structures together in our considerations. This is because they are, in our opinion, completely interdependent. On recommendation 37, which involves domestic, sexual and gender-based violence structures, we welcome the significant progress that has been made with the integration of services and policy into a single Ministry with oversight within the Department of the Taoiseach. This is an important element for us. The proposed establishment of a new agency is also very welcome. It provides great opportunity for cutting-edge responses. However, Safe Ireland strongly cautions that we ensure this new structure does not repeat the difficulties of previous iterations. There is an absolute necessity for a dedicated domestic, sexual and gender-based violence infrastructure in Ireland. We cannot stress this enough. Mixed models or the shoehorning of domestic violence into existing structures will, in our opinion, simply repeat the problems all these changes seek to avoid.

The importance of robust and fully integrated national, regional and local community co-ordinated responses to domestic violence cannot be overstated. Regional and community level implementation of the third national strategy arising from this new agency should be driven, managed, and co-designed by the existing cross-disciplinary expertise in the front-line services sector, which already exists, alongside the significant DSGBV specialisms that exist in allied public service professions including policing, healthcare, social services and academia.

The task of the Citizens' Assembly was to examine gender equality through a rights-based lens. It follows, therefore, that women and all victims must be visible at the forefront of structural response. In this matter, we ask for an open and public process with appropriate terms of reference to guide all these processes. We note with concern that the current proposal in the draft of the third national strategy for regional co-ordination does not support such a model. The organisation chart on page 18 of the draft proposes to charge the existing children and young people's services committees, CYPSC, with responsibility for regional implementation of domestic violence for women and girls. We strongly suggest this is inappropriate. It is not a structure that Safe Ireland can support. Such positioning simultaneously reinforces sexist stereotypes, repeats previous difficulties in the structural positioning of domestic violence and erases and infantilises the status of women and the violence they experience. We deserve structures in our own right. It is not a fit structure for the significant challenges ahead. We call again for the development of a coherent national services development plan.

I will briefly move on to services. Again, keeping the provision of services and the structures within which they operate in view, we welcome the development of 21st century refuge, quality front-line services and competent communities across the country. Here, again, we stress that



crisis accommodation through refuge is not of itself a solution to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence generally, nor is it even, indeed, to the full accommodation and support needs of women in their journey to freedom. Whilst refuge can provide protective respite for a number of weeks, the journey to safety for a woman can take up to two years. We must ensure the ongoing availability of refuge spaces for women in crisis but they must be fully supported pathways to transitional and permanent housing accommodation. These must be in place.

As we know, national housing policy does not even recognise women in domestic violence circumstances as homeless. This is an outrage. Therefore, they fall substantially outside the net of current interventions and priorities. Other jurisdictions, and my colleague, Ms Marmion, will speak to this in detail if required by the committee, have successfully addressed these issues in the round. The whole housing approach, for example, offers such a model, which addresses the housing and safety needs of victims and survivors in the UK. This framework consolidates all the main housing tenure types, housing options and support initiatives that are needed to help women fleeing domestic abuse to either maintain or access safe and stable housing. The framework could be adapted and for the most part provides a tailored plug-in to existing housing policy to address the current deficit. On the matter of women staying at home and needing safe at-home shelter, we also support this process. We note that while the first option is that the perpetrator be removed from her home, however, there are also instances where due to the cultural pressure of family, friends or, indeed, the community as a whole, a woman must flee her home. We will, therefore, always need these mobile flexible accommodation responses.

With regard to the development of refuge across the country which, of course, pertains to the publication of the Tusla accommodation review and the identified areas in our country that have no refuge provision and do not meet the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, again, we urge careful planning to maximise the opportunity to create a 21st century response to domestic violence at local level. This is a moment in history that we do not wish to squander.

By way of proposing possible future-proofed models for refuge, in 2020, Safe Ireland drew up what we called then the Sovereignty Project, noting that freedom is the absolute twin of safety. The core concept here is that future refuge would be built on three principles, the first of which is safe spaces. All refuge spaces would be accessible and trauma-informed, with contemporary design principles that are fully integrated with wraparound services and, vitally, a community interface. The second is that best practice would specify good quality standards for front-line services and practitioners based on local expertise and-or international best practice. Third, an additional prong to this development, which we suggest in the Sovereignty Project, is domestic violence-centred community development and engagement. This novel element would specify a model to lead the development of competent, safe communities that can prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, giving them confidence and clarity in how to handle this problem at a personal, familial, local and community level. The project is under way and we will launch it in October 2022. We will deliver at that time a safe spaces toolkit including these three elements for communities and services, which we offer as a guide and support for refuge development locally, either as a new-build or with the help of retrofit. We must thank our donors, the Community Foundation for Ireland, for funding this important piece of work. Its patience while we awaited the accommodation review's publication and its confidence in Safe Ireland's expertise is really appreciated. Indeed, Tusla also recently supported our work here, which is also welcome.

Safe Ireland's recommendations to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality on its considerations of the report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality are quite simple:

create a dedicated domestic, sexual and gender-based violence infrastructure at every level; develop existing expertise and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence structures; develop a coherent accommodation response in order to support a functioning refuge capacity using, for example, a whole housing approach; and create a well-planned and well-designed model of community domestic violence refuge and support services across the country, which can transform our communities' responses and enable and empower them to deal with this large-scale social problem. We welcome the committee's questions. If we are unable to respond we will, of course, provide members with what they wish. I thank the committee very much.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms McDermott very much. She has set out in no uncertain terms the task ahead. She mentioned that we had engagement last week with Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Rape Crisis Network Ireland and Women's Aid on these recommendations. Our next meeting on 28 April will be a public engagement with the Minister for Justice on the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. I will invite colleagues in turn to indicate if they wish to contribute. We have a time limit of eight minutes on each member's exchange to maximise participation by as many of our colleagues as possible. If I need to allow perhaps one or two members in on each round of questioning, that will be fine; we hope to get to a second round. Deputy Clarke indicated first.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I thank the Chairman. I will keep my questions concise because we want to hear the witnesses' responses. I thank them all for their time this morning and for the expertise they bring to this room. It is vitally important in our work to ensure that the recommendations of the Citizen's Assembly actually deliver that real change that is so desperately needed.

I will start with AkiDwA. I want to focus on female genital mutilation, FGM, for a moment. The picture Dr. Mbugua painted for victims and survivors of FGM is very bleak in our cities. In our more rural communities and outside those major urban areas, however, the challenges people face in terms of accessing support must be much more profound, particularly around that psychological and wraparound support of which Dr. Mbugua spoke. In Dr. Mbugua's opinion, what does this look like? What does the model that meets the need look like? She is correct to speak of those pathways to protections and supports in relation to our immigration system. I fail to see the logic in telling somebody they can have an independent stamp 3 visa while at the same time refusing them access to employment in order to support themselves and build a life outside of the abusive relationship they are in. This is something we see repeated across various Departments. Steps are taken but they are not completed. That lack of completion means that women are forced to return to an abusive environment because they cannot develop their own independent life outside of it.

I have a very specific question. Tusla has highlighted the urgent and established need for 60 additional safe units. The witnesses spoke the need for culturally appropriate supports. What does that look like to them? What are they looking for with these additional units, which need to be delivered rather quickly?

What engagement has AkiDwa had with the Department of Justice on the development of national action plan on female genital mutilation? Do the witnesses believe the 2012 Act is effective, or does it need to be reviewed and updated?

**Chairman:** I believe those questions were all for AkiDwa.

**Dr. Caroline Munyi:** The Deputy asked how the model should look. That is a very good

question. First and foremost is the national action plan, which AkiDwa is agitating for and which we want to be Government-led. The national action plan will ensure FGM services in Ireland are streamlined. Streamlining means a woman can walk into any hospital in Ireland. Let us say this woman is living in Clonakilty in Cork. She can go to Cork University Hospital and be triaged, taken to the relevant department and seen by a doctor. She does not have to go to Dublin for this or that. If that could be streamlined, that would be very good. It would also reduce the stigma, which we know is an issue. When women have to go to Dublin, it is very stigmatising. Most of these women are very poor. They do not have a lot of resources at their disposal, especially those who are living in direct provision centres. They have children to look after. Again I will use the example of someone living in Clonakilty. Those barriers could be halved. There is also the cost of childcare. This woman could just go into a hospital and be seen and have everything tackled there without stigma. This will require training for our doctors to take care of FGM-related needs, both physical and psychological, as well as cultural appropriateness. That will also come as part of the wraparound nature of the supports. As Dr. Mbugua said, AkiDwa is leading in training professionals in the sector on healthcare, cultural appropriateness and cultural competence. The national action plan will streamline services for women, both psychological and physical, because women who have gone through FGM face very serious and severe mental health consequences. That can only be tackled through that streamlining of services.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** I would add to some of that, in particular on the development of the national action plan. We have met with many Ministers on the development of the plan. Our chair has worked quite a lot with us on the development of where we are now. She helped in the development of the 2012 Act and making that law a reality. We are saying that now needs to be reviewed. As members can see, it was established in 2012. It must be reviewed to ensure there are not gaps. We need to check where we are now, in an Ireland of 2022, compared to 2012 when it was implemented.

On the national action plan, we met with a Minister of State in the Department of Health in 2018 when the first case of FGM happened in the country. She had been asked by the Tánaiste at the time to meet with groups to check what needed to happen. We came up with the recommendations that we keep putting out there but unfortunately, that went out of discussion. We keep calling for the development of this national action plan to ensure that no child is subjected to female genital mutilation. We are very unfortunate because it seems nobody is actually helping us to make this happen or to develop that national action plan. It is very important that we do it. We have been moved around different Departments. First we were told it was the role of the HSE and then we were moved to Cosc and so on. We need commitment in this area to ensure it happens.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** How confident are the witnesses that the engagements they have had to date and the proposals they have put forward will be incorporated into the third national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence?

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** FGM is not included in the third national strategy as we speak. Although we have spoken to the Minister, there is only mention of the 2012 Act. The draft we have seen did not even have the statistics-----

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** And that Act is ten years old.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** Yes. We are hoping that whatever we have submitted on the strategy will be included, and we added additional information there. That is why we are putting these

recommendations before the committee today, to ensure they are in the national strategy. At the moment, based on what we have seen, the national strategy does not incorporate these issues.

The Deputy also asked about refuges. We want them to be culturally appropriate. They have to take into account the diversity of the lived experiences of women in Ireland today, particularly the religious aspect of that. If there are Muslim women going into these refuges, for example, they have to be culturally appropriate. They may need kitchens that are halal or they may need to be provided with prayer rooms and so on. The refuge has to be culturally appropriate. People also have to understand where the women are coming from in terms of linguistics, languages, culture and all those kinds of things. When these refuges are being developed, it would be good if organisations like ours were consulted.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I thank the witnesses. I think we are over time.

**Chairman:** We can come back for a second round if needs be. I call Deputy Cannon.

**Deputy Ciarán Cannon:** I thank each of the witnesses for their powerful and informative contributions, which will most certainly aid us in our work on this newly established committee. I will go back to AkiDwa, if the witnesses do not mind. I am sorry to be focusing the spotlight on them. In my previous role working with Irish Aid, I was very fortunate to meet a wonderful lady, Ifrah Ahmed, who has done a lot of great work in this area. We were lucky to be able to assist her in developing some really helpful programmes in her home country of Somalia. Until I met her and had some lengthy conversations with her, I was not aware of the significant risk posed to young women and girls here in Ireland. I thank AkiDwa for the work it is doing in highlighting that. We have had legislation in place for almost ten years now. It is a decade on. It is most unfortunate that we do not have the national action plan in place to match that. I hope it will be helpful to the witnesses and their work if this committee focuses on getting some action on that as part of the work we are doing.

I have two questions, which are at different ends of the spectrum with regard to how we are going to address the challenge of FGM here in Ireland. On the first issue, Dr. Munyi outlined very eloquently the pathway for somebody living somewhere like Clonakilty or Galway, where I come from, if they are a victim of FGM. Both she and Dr. Mbugua also spoke about things being culturally appropriate. How important is it right now to have a programme of education within our school system, at primary level and perhaps more important, at post-primary level, that could somehow effect a cultural change so the practice of FGM would no longer be tolerated anywhere within Irish society? The green schools programme from An Taisce, which is very powerful, has successfully effected a major cultural shift within Irish young people around sustainability and environmental protection. Do the witnesses have any ambitions around engaging with the educational system?

**Chairman:** That question is for the representatives of AkiDwa.

**Dr. Caroline Munyi:** As we speak, AkiDwa is in the process of reviewing our handbook on FGM for healthcare professionals. We have tried to engage with education professionals, but with varying levels of success. At times it has very good and other times it has not been so good, because of the age of victims and the topic that is being discussed. As members can imagine, FGM is a very hidden problem because of the part of the anatomy that it affects. We are in the process of producing the handbook. We hope to engage with teachers or those high up in the educational sector with a view to undertaking a survey and getting the views of teachers on the issue and how they want to engage. With the help of teachers and through consultation

with them, we hope that from there we will make some progress so that we can make inroads into the educational sector and see how far we can get. We know that teachers interact with students and parents from practising communities. We know how important it is. Perhaps Dr. Mbugua can add to that.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** Education, whether it is at primary, secondary or third level, is key to the whole area of DSGBV, not only FGM. We think that even from the early learning years, for example, when students are in crèche, there should be some way of introducing these kind of situations. There was a tragic case involving a 16-year-old girl who kept saying that she was engaged to her fiancé. She told her friends in school, but they could not understand how a 16-year-old girl would have a fiancé. Two years later, she left and was married somewhere in Dubai. Her friends later came to understand that she had been forced into an arranged marriage. She was living in Cork. The children did not know. It is important that children understand these issues so that they can talk to the teachers. In the case to which I referred, it was a kind of a secret that the girls could not tell. We have also tried to approach schools to see if there is a way we can include FGM as part of sex education. It has to be done in a very sensitive way, because we do not want to traumatise the students. FGM is very traumatising. We have tried to engage on this issue at the educational level. To be honest, it is a very foreign issue and we welcome the fact that Ireland is open to even discuss it. Engaging with schools has been very challenging. However, we are trying to create discussions with teachers in the hope that they can then move it forward.

**Deputy Ciarán Cannon:** I have one follow-up question. We are obviously anxious to put in place a programme that supports and deals with the victims of FGM. At the other end of the challenge, in terms of beginning to eliminate the practice, what do the witnesses feel are the most powerful levers or mechanisms available to us right now?

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** It is about engaging with the community. It has to be done at the community level. That is why we recommend the training of community ambassadors, including people who are from the affected community, coming from that perspective and helping with that. Perhaps Ms Adejinmi can add to that.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** Another important intervention we can make is to diversify our educators as well. Taking the example Dr. Mbugua gave of the 16-year-old, if there was a migrant educator in that system, they would have picked up that information. They would have suspected what was going on and intervened at the time to ensure that the unfortunate outcome that was experienced was prevented. It is very important to diversify our educators, even as we are upscaling current educators. There are a lot of cultural activities that we can pick up straight away when we are observing these children as they interact. That is a very important piece of work that we can look at.

**Chairman:** I will go next to Deputy Niamh Smyth, followed by Deputy Carroll MacNeill.

**Deputy Niamh Smyth:** I thank the witnesses for coming in. Apologies, but I was coming from another meeting that ran on. I ask Dr. Mbugua to expand on her comments on the challenges in getting into schools and the education system. I ask her to give us some idea of what the actual challenges are. Are obstacles being put in the organisation's way? If so, where are they? How can those obstacles be overcome in a practical sense? Perhaps we can come from the top down if necessary to get into and infiltrate our school systems.

I am very interested in the idea of refuges. I come from a constituency, which as Ms Mc-



Dermott is aware, that is very bleak in terms of the supports, practical supports and wraparound services that are provided for women and men. Mr. Ryan referred to the Istanbul Convention and the ideas contained within it. He stated that the convention recommends one shelter space for every 10,000 people in Ireland. How many refuges do we have for men around the country? Where are the gaps?

I have had a lot of dealings with Ms McDermott over the last few months. In her opening statement, she referred to “Mixed models or the ‘shoe-horning’ of DSGBV into existing structures” as something that Safe Ireland does not want to see repeated. I ask Ms McDermott to be more explicit on the types of models that she was referring to there. I know what Safe Ireland wants. It wants a holistic approach to be taken. It wants to see wraparound services and appropriate accommodation provided. I ask Ms McDermott to outline explicitly what Safe Ireland does not want to see, so that we do not make mistakes when we are at the infancy stage of trying to create the right system. I do not want to see those mistakes happen in Cavan-Monaghan anyway.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** We have had a few discussions on services in Monaghan and Cavan. The first thing that Safe Ireland is saying is that this is a historical opportunity. We do not want to squander resources. Second, it is a very simple, old-school and deeply-imbedded insight within domestic violence work generally that refuge is not the answer to domestic violence. That is the simple starting point. However, making that point is like saying that field hospitals are not needed in a war. We need refuges and we will probably always need them. Noeline Blackwell observed last week that if there are better and stronger responses to domestic and sexual violence in the country, we will see a rise and then a fall in numbers.

To answer the Deputy’s question on mixed models, what we want to see and what we do not want to see, from our perspective, we want to see a skills-led community response. We want to see refuges and spaces as places that not only provide refuge and high-end skills that are there all around in our own network of 38 organisations. We have talked about, and Dr. Munyi mentioned, the capacity for front-line triage, including risk and safety assessment. The disciplines that almost automatically have to kick in when a woman presents at a refuge include: legal supports; accompaniment; advice; housing and accommodation outside the immediate needs of refuge; social welfare; education, training and employment; and crucially, the full therapeutic supports that are needed. We also welcome the news that for the first time, one of our members in County Donegal that solely provides therapeutically based services has received funding. That is fantastic.

In our presentation, we were really trying to say that the structures that we are going to put in place will seriously impact how the services are rolled out and provided across the country. As the Deputy is aware, previously, responsibility for domestic violence has been based in various locations within Government. It was previously the responsibility of the HSE. There have been various iterations. This is not an attack; it is just a description. As members are aware, responsibility has been moved from within the Child and Family Agency. I cannot stress enough the fact that the Child and Family Agency had responsibility for the area, without a mention of the word “woman”. The role of the woman has been almost reinscribed in a knee-jerk fashion as one of carer, as subservient to the needs of those who are dependent around her. Her own rights, needs and violations, in themselves, do not have priority. Safe Ireland will never stand on that ground. We see this as an opportunity to move away from that inadvertent reinscription of the problem. I must say that we have really good relationships with Tusla, by the way. This is not an attack on anyone; it is just about how best to create the right system in this country.

Keeping domestic violence under the remit of children and young people, as is proposed in the draft strategy, will just simply serve to reinscribe the very thing we have been working to stop. We wanted and asked for policy and services together. We want an articulated structure from the top down, with oversight by the Taoiseach's office, a Cabinet-level responsibility and an interdepartmental and a whole-of-government response. I know that everybody in this House has been listening to the term "whole-of-government" for probably about 20 years, as everybody needs such a response to everything, but we need a whole-of-government response to be put in place for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. When it comes down to the regional structures, importantly and crucially, it will fall or stand on this point. There are several models such as the Garda regional divisions, community healthcare organisation, CHO, divisions, and those of the courts. There are many models of regionalisation and we are not proposing any one in particular but they need consideration. From there, one works directly with the already-in-place, however fragile, unsupported and 19th century, Dickensian and badly resourced services, but there are, nonetheless, enormous levels of expertise all around the country. That expertise must not be lost and dedicated DSGBV structures at local level must be created to access the resources that are already there. Does that answer Deputy Niamh Smyth's question?

**Deputy Niamh Smyth:** Yes.

**Chairman:** I have a minute where I will return to Mr. Cooke and Mr. Kelly Ryan on Deputy Smyth's question.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** I want to come in behind what Ms McDermott is saying on the regional provision and structures. On the development of those regional structures, a previous regional plan used to be in place and it does not exist any more. It is a very strong mechanism to roll out, certainly around the perpetrator programmes that have been happening in Ireland. We are part of the Choices programme called MEND. Along with our colleagues in MOVE Ireland, Men Overcoming Violence, and in the north east domestic violence intervention programme, we roll out the national Choices programme, which is a 32-week programme of engaging men around this particular issue of their own behaviour and of changed behaviour. We come to this and our strength is based on a positive perspective in that regard. A review is happening in respect of the roll-out of that particular programme. In some ways, many of these reviews are interwoven with the national strategy, with other particular programmes and with the accommodation review. This review is still ongoing in respect of effectiveness, delivery, project management and the delivery of that particular programme. This would clearly suggest that regional structures are probably the most appropriate way in which to start to look around the issue of delivery and engagement in order to address the issue of domestic violence.

It would also be remiss of me today as a representative of a men's development organisation, although it is not because of that that I say this, not to state there is also a recognition that we are talking about domestic violence being an inclusive issue that addresses a whole range of people, genders and sexes, which we need to acknowledge. We certainly feel the need for a gender-sensitive approach in how we go about this work. Ms McDermott and I have worked on various issues and have been in discussions over many years, in the brief moments when we get to take our heads out of the sand to do so, when we talk about the most appropriate ways and the language that we need to use when we talk and address the issues of domestic violence, regardless of the gender or sex of the person who is the victim.

As I said earlier we work very much with both perpetrators and victims, which is somewhat unusual in that sense but whatever way we come to this work, this is done from a collaborative and partnership perspective, working in a non-adversarial way, on the basis and with the opti-

mism that people can change, and that we can engage with their behaviours and change them in that regard.

The other piece I will speak quickly on is the question of accommodation. As it stands at the moment in Ireland, there is not any provision of refuge for men. In saying that, there is capacity in which we can and have used the various different systems and hotel rooms in gaining access to crisis accommodation for men at various different times. The Men's Development Network will be doing a review of its own work with the Male Advice Line, which we run. This is a national freefone service. We have identified from what we see happening and in how men present themselves that refuge is not necessarily the cornerstone, and as Ms McDermott was saying, is not the endgame in addressing the issue of domestic violence. It is not necessarily what is required at this point in time.

We have made a proposal to Tusla and are rolling out a pilot programme at present, which is a wrap-around remote service being offered to men. This is so that when they engage with our services, we can then refer them to our client support worker. We are finding that men are not looking to get out because the original question that is usually asked when they contact our services is whether they being abused as they are unsure what the situation is. When we talk to them then it is more about developing a plan and what is the most coherent one for them as to whether they are going to exit the relationship or the home. This is done in a way, however, that does not undermine them culturally, socially or even economically. That is the sort of network there.

**Chairman:** I will move on now to Deputy Carroll MacNeill, who is next.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** I thank all of our guests for coming in today. Every month, I have been trying to keep the women who have died through male violence in our thinking today and not just after the death of Ashling Murphy. I have taken the opportunity, therefore, to read their names into the record at different opportunities in January, February and March. Today is an appropriate day if the Chair gives me the time to do it, as it will give me a little more time to describe some of the circumstances. It is so important to remember much of what we are trying to do here.

There were 23 women who died in the month of April because of male violence going back to 1997. They include Noeleen Cawley, aged 39, a mother of five who was stabbed to death by her husband; Anne Shorthall, aged 47, who was bludgeoned to death by a man that she knew; Joan Casey, aged 64, who died from a gunshot wound arising from male violence; Catherine Smart, aged 57, who died after an assault from a man she was living with; and Bernie Sherry, aged 44, who was shot twice by her ex-partner. They also include Irene White, aged 43, who was stabbed in her home; Emer O'Loughlin, aged 23, who was stabbed by her neighbour; Joan McCarthy, aged 47, who was strangled in her home; Rose Patterson, aged 30, who was stabbed by the father of her son; and Alison White, aged 13, who was murdered by a stranger. They also include Janet Cheney, aged 47, who was killed by her partner of 18 years; Anne Marie Duffin, aged 39, who was stabbed by a friend of her eldest son; Diane Burroughs, aged 30, who was strangled in her flat by her ex-partner; Jennifer Doonan, aged 42, who was strangled by her 20-year-old son and Joan Vickers, aged 43, who was stabbed to death in her home by her husband. They also include Mary Hannon, aged 59, who was stabbed by her long-term partner in their home; Ciara Dunne, aged 25, who was murdered alongside her two young daughters by her husband; Lorraine Flood, aged 38, who was murdered alongside her two young children by her husband; Anne-Marie O'Neil, aged 50, who died after an attack on her home; and Nicola Sweeney, aged 19, who was stabbed to death by her neighbour. They also include Samantha

Walsh, aged 31, a mother of four who was murdered by a stranger; Natalia Karaczyn, aged 30, who was murdered by her husband after attempting to separate from him; and Amy McCarthy, aged 22, who was murdered by her boyfriend and father to her infant son.

I apologise for taking this time but I do this simply to keep this going and keep the awareness of why we are doing this work right to the forefront of our mind. Deputy Smyth already asked my question of Ms McDermott as I was going to ask her specifically about that point on page 3 of her submission on the structure and model. What she has said is very important in not reinforcing sexist stereotypes. Her language was “erases and infantilises the status of women and the violence they experience”. It brings to mind the excellent document Safe Ireland produced in March 2021, *No Going Back*, which I thought was a moment of reflection, both intellectually and philosophically about women and their status, and is deeply relevant to the work of this committee. In that document, in particular, it states on root causes that:

It is our continued understanding that DSGBV is a root cause, not an effect or side-issue, of many households and family’s sufferings, regardless of what formation that home takes. We believe that if DSGBV were placed centrally in conceptualising these problems many parallel social problems ... would gain greater capacity to respond at depth.

I wanted to take a moment within the committee’s work to go back to that document and to ask Ms McDermott about the philosophical underpinning of it, as it was a very important moment in the debate.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** I have to say to Deputy Carroll MacNeill that I am quite moved by the Deputy’s input with the list of murders.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** It is very difficult and we put it on our social media every day and I am very conscious of my staff, who help me compile this information and who take the time to put it up. I am aware that is bleak to look at and to hear and I do not mean to trivialise it by going through such a list so quickly or anything in that regard. Unless we acknowledge each of those women, however, they are voiceless in death. They remain voiceless unless we acknowledge them here and it underpins the work we are doing. We try to keep doing this every day on social media. I acknowledge that it is very unpleasant work for my female staff.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** But it is important.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** It has to be done.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** Safe Ireland works in a moment of hope. We really believe we are at a historic moment. Parties, businesses and individuals have approached us. Everybody wants to do something about this. You can see it. Everybody knows it exists. *No Going Back* was written under the pressure of Covid. We said we have to reframe this. The Deputy will see from my notes on my submission that there are secondary notes under the other recommendations I did not speak to because last week, my colleagues put in substantive issues there. What I wanted to note was that the issue of language and conceptualisation is crucial. First, we have a very simple statement. Nobody should have to live in an oppressive home. That goes straight to all the tropes and fatalism upon which we rely all the time - you made your bed now lie in it. Second, we believe we need new language to describe this. In our opinion, the axis of DSGBV runs along sex, gender and sexualities. There is a hierarchy under all of those categories and you can track the lines of power and control. We believe we must extend and increase our capacity to speak about this by extending our vocabulary and conceptualisations. Mr. Cooke and

I have had quite a few head-banging sessions on this issue. We say that we need to make room for more people and younger people whose identities and concerns are different to our own and we need to be able to conceptualise DSGBV across the standard social exclusion and poverty categories of our national social policy, a project we are working on with TASC, and to address it across the issues that arise under what we call diversity and inclusion. If you put sex, gender and sexuality as the core axis along which this violence runs, I believe you will develop a really robust and sophisticated way of speaking about this and will, therefore, be able to develop a social policy that will meet that demand.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** One of the things we keep talking about is a new relationships and sex education programme that is very different to the one in schools. I will come back and ask Ms McDermott about that because I have only a minute left. The Department of Education is developing a new junior cycle programme based on consent. That is fine except nobody has yet seen it. What really needs to happen is at primary level. I was in Kilkenny the week before last talking to teachers and gardaí. They spoke about how it can be a bit difficult when the schools say they want to talk about image sharing and Coco's Law but how when the gardaí say they want to talk about it for the protection of all of the children, there is a slightly different reaction from parents. What needs to be in the programme from primary education? How do we talk about gender, consent, personhood and boundaries in an age-appropriate way? How do we make parents who might feel that this is very different comfortable? What is the right approach for the Department to take? Clearly, it is part of what we are talking about in terms of the recommendations of the citizens' assembly, but what is the right way to do that to make sure we are hitting it correctly from a gender and diversity perspective and really get this right first time? I know I am out of time. I will be happy to come back to the matter.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** I thank all the witnesses for their contributions and for coming before us today. I have met some of them previously. One issue I raised with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth previously concerned assaults against children. What are the witnesses' thoughts on that? When we look at recommendation 37, we see that it talks about gender-based violence but it also talks about violence in general so we must take that into consideration in our recommendations and the work in their organisations? I know the Minister is to come back to us regarding ongoing work in his Department.

The other issue I wish to raise concerns the joint policing committee for Galway. Rape and sexual assaults were the offences that increased the most during lockdown. They went up by 100% during that period. Are we left with a legacy from Covid or has it just expanded our knowledge base concerning what is happening in people's homes? From speaking to those impacted and relevant services in my constituency, I know that by the time it gets to somebody making a call to the police, it has been happening for a really long time and people were alone within their own homes so I can only imagine what led up to that. Is there an added legacy from Covid?

The work we must do involves making quite firm recommendations and asking really serious and important questions about what is happening within Departments. What other models around the globe could we look at and incorporate here? We could often look at what has not happened and what the numbers are like but we must look at what the best model is and incorporate it into what is being done in Ireland.

**Chairman:** Perhaps the witnesses from Safe Ireland could answer that question?

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** It is directed to all the witnesses because those points are rel-



evant to all organisations.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** I will ask Ms Marmion to speak about the issue of children. I draw members' attention to the document, No Going Back, referenced by Deputy Carroll MacNeill. In that, we set out the journey of a woman, although, of course, women are diverse and there is no one type of woman. Notwithstanding that, we also draw out the journey of children aside from their parents through domestic violence and what is required for that support. It is a unique journey that needs dedicated attention. Safe Ireland was very concerned to ensure that the issue of children was included in the new national strategy so there is a lot of work to be done there.

In respect of the legacy of Covid, Safe Ireland's position is that Covid did not cause domestic violence; it exposed it. It may have increased it where perpetrators were locked in a smaller domain but it certainly did not cause it. We were very strong on that because that is another distraction.

Ms Marmion will be very happy to hear me say that the whole housing approach is a model used in the UK that is effectively like a plug-in housing response around accommodation needs and domestic violence. I will pass over to Ms Marmion, who will speak about children.

**Ms Lisa Marmion:** The issue of children is an area of particular focus for us. We encourage viewing children as victims in their own right. We are very aware of the work we do with children and how they are triangulated in this experience. It is a triadic experience for them. The Senator mentioned assaults on children. There is an opportunity for us to widen the lens in terms of the experience of coercive control that children battle with on an ongoing basis. They are often embroiled in coercively controlling behaviours and their space for action is limited. We must move away from that physical incident model and understand the complexity of the experience for children and young people. Obviously, when we understand the depth and breadth of their experience, we are more inclined to be more engaged and to dedicate resources towards the safeguarding of children in this context.

*(Interruptions).*

**Chairman:** The connection is a bit weak but I thank Ms Marmion for her contribution.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** In response to the question on children, within AkiDwA we work on raising awareness among migrant women. We are aware of the cultural differences. We educate people, especially migrant women, on the laws associated with the protection of children. The issue of FGM is something that also affects underage girls so that is one of the reasons for our recommendation. The first thing that I noticed in the recent announcement from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was an absence of diversity. There is an opportunity to include contributors from other backgrounds in order to ensure the curriculum is future-proofed and takes into account the diversity that now exists in modern Ireland. That is a very important aspect and will support our collective efforts to safeguard children in Ireland.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** When we talk about children and trauma, it is not always in terms of physical abuse - it can also involve being a witness to the other abuse that happens within the home and its impact. The other critical thing is how being a witness or a victim as a child translates towards being a victim or perpetrating later in life. That is something we have come across. We believe a significant amount of work needs to be done to recognise the trauma that

children experience within these kinds of relationships and the impact that has on them, and on the relationships they have with their parents and members of their extended family.

The legacy of Covid has been mentioned. I fully concur with Ms McDermott's comment that Covid did not bring about domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, but it certainly increased the visibility of such violence. One positive thing that emerged from Covid was an initiative within the Department of Justice. When the pandemic began, the concepts of staying at home and staying safe were anathema for people who found themselves in certain circumstances. As a result, the Department brought together a consortium of organisations that provide safety and supports to victims of domestic violence as part of a campaign to ensure people knew that support was still available and in place. A really significant campaign, *stillhere.ie*, came out of that. It was really important that the Department listened to the providers on the ground and took their advice. The initial conversation was not about the *stillhere.ie* campaign, but something else. When the campaign came about, it let people know that help was still available and that it was okay for them to travel outside the 5 km limit to seek support. That is a positive legacy. Certainly the Department is looking at other ways to address these issues, including coercive control. We saw the recent media campaigns on coercive control.

**Senator Fintan Warfield:** I thank all of the witnesses for their incredible work in this area. I am quite moved by the contribution made by Deputy Carroll MacNeill and thank her for it. What stood out for me in the contribution made by Ms McDermott was the need to call this out as a large-scale social problem. If we can address it, we will fix a lot of things.

Deputy Carroll MacNeill spoke about the core axis of sex, gender and sexuality. That is helpful for me as a queer man on this committee in terms of how I can contribute to the committee. I believe I have found my tribe here. It is a great privilege for me to be a member of this committee, but I must figure out my place on it. I found the Deputy's contribution quite helpful. The response to the murder of Declan Flynn in Fairview Park triggered the first Pride march, which travelled all the way from Liberty Hall to Fairview Park. I will always remember that one of the banners at the march said "Stop Violence Against Gays and Women". We have parallel struggles. I thank everyone for spelling these things out today.

**Chairman:** I agree with the Senator it was really powerful to hear Deputy Carroll MacNeill read the individual names of the women killed. It reminds us all why we are here and what we are doing.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** To reply to Senator Warfield, I am an old lesbian - out of school, fading identity and in the universe. We welcome the Senator's words because we believe that if we use the terms "sex", "gender" and "sexuality" we will begin to account for all of the dimensions of our intimate lives, for the reproductive or non-reproductive capacities of our bodies and how they affect us materially and symbolically, for our gender identities, and for how we choose to express ourselves. We are forced into social and personal roles because of stereotypes. The other binary in the area of sexuality that I did not put into this space is of course the hairy one of masculinities and femininities, and how they play out differently on all the sexes, all the genders and all our desiring roles. Violence and domination is eroticised to the extent that it is considered part of love and intimacy. No wonder it is so difficult to deal with. That is part of the work we do in Safe Ireland. We try to dismantle that. We try to dismantle that in schools in order that children do not think the adrenaline rush of fear is necessarily love.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms McDermott for that exchange. It was very powerful. I thank Senator Warfield for raising this aspect of the matter.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I apologise to the witnesses because I was bilocating in another committee room. I had to attend a meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts. I captured much of the beginning of the presentations made by the witnesses.

All of us, like Senator Warfield, are trying to find our way on this committee and discover what role we can play. The question of how men respond to this issue is a key one. Senator Warfield is right when he says that both men and women are often the victims of toxic masculinity and are limited by it. In saying that, I do not in any way deviate from the very serious issue of domestic violence. How can we get that conversation to happen in the places where it is most needed, such as a changing room after a GAA game or a WhatsApp group of lads who are going on a stag weekend? I am not sure I ever thought I would hear myself say this, but maybe Donald Trump was right when he said that men say certain things in those places. Not all men say them, but some men do. It is a question of how to start a conversation among young men. We know there are huge issues around mental health, the rate of suicide among young men and the role of young men in society. How do we start this conversation in a constructive way? My comments are probably directed towards MDN, but I would welcome replies from everybody. How can the State put in place programmes with voluntary organisations to start the conversation? How do we ensure that the conversation continues in families where there might be generational differences of opinion and, where AkiDwA's area is concerned, cultural differences as well? These are broad questions, but I would appreciate feedback on the issue.

AkiDwA's submission refers to the registration fee for victims of domestic violence when registering for the first time. Will the witnesses from AkiDwA expand on that point? I apologise if they have already done so and I missed it. I welcome my colleague, Ms Adejinmi. It is good to see her in the Oireachtas. We may see more of her in future.

**Chairman:** We will go to the Men's Development Network first and then AkiDwA.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** I will answer the first part of the question before passing over to Mr. Kelly Ryan on how we engage men and boys in a practical sense in the issues of gender violence and gender equality. We work through a transformative approach. This is a positive approach, one that is strengths based and engages them on their mental health in these areas. Under our White Ribbon campaign, a pledge is made never to commit, condone or remain silent on violence against women or gender-based violence. This is a critical and bold statement and we need to give young men and boys agency to say it.

After the Ashling Murphy case, there was a great deal of conversation and many people said that we needed to get men and boys involved in that conversation. While that is true, we must also decide how. We need to tell men and boys to buy a white ribbon, take the pledge and have that conversation. We talk about stepping into the conversation. There are three steps: men and boys need to step into the conversation, listen to the women in their lives, hear their testimony and understand what they are talking about and where they are coming from; they need to step up and challenge the attitudes and behaviours, not of everyone, but of their peers and friends in locker room-type conversations and say that they are not comfortable with them and they are not what should be happening; and step back and acknowledge our privilege as men. I am here today, white and-----

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Stepping back is good.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** We sometimes need to do that and acknowledge the leadership shown by the women's movement in the strides that have been taken to date towards gender equality.

We also need to step back and reflect on our own privilege and what we can do to encourage a greater understanding of and empathy and emotional intelligence around that.

I will pass over to Mr. Kelly Ryan, who has a more specific understanding of the White Ribbon campaign.

**Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan:** The Deputy's question was valid. There is a level of innovation in the draft third national strategy whereby we begin to talk about prevention and we are clear on what that means. It was nearly a subpoint in the first and second national strategies - it was a paragraph. When discussing deconstructing structural inequalities, structural human rights abuses, structural racism and structural discrimination against LGBTI+ communities, though, it requires more than a subparagraph. It requires a commitment as well as structural and tangible priorities. I use that term strongly because it is a priority. I hope that, in finding its role, the committee will share our view that prevention is a priority if we want to change these circumstances. We in the network say that prevention is better than intervention. If we can prevent it from happening and can engage with men and boys using a strengths-based, non-judgmental and non-adversarial approach on changing the norms in society, creating safe spaces for reflection and moving towards action, that is how we will make change happen. This is how we do our work. If we want to become a more human rights and gender equal society-----

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** The anti-racism work in sport has been positive. Is that something that could be done at governmental level by, for example, the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media? Has the Men's Development Network considered pursuing that?

**Mr. Colm Kelly Ryan:** I believe so. When we consider what the basis for doing this would be and how we could make it happen, it is in recognition that, under Article 14.2 of the Istanbul Convention, education can take place in informal education settings. I am sure Deputy Carroll MacNeill will ask us how we take these measures in a formal education setting, but it can also take place in informal settings.

I know that we are short on time but, as Deputy McAuliffe has mentioned, this conversation needs to take place in family homes as well. We need to ensure that it takes place in a safe manner. The challenge is getting the message into the family home and permeating that space. In the Constitution, we recognise that the family home is a private space for family life. At the core of how we will do this are awareness-raising campaigns, messaging and the use of media and social media. I will refer once more to Article 30(b) of general recommendation No. 35 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, which reads:

These programmes should target: (a) women and men at all levels of society; (b) education, health, social services and law enforcement personnel and other professionals and agencies, including at the local level [the community level, which is close to the family home, and this is an important point to remember], involved in prevention and protection responses; (c) traditional and religious leaders; and (d) perpetrators of any form of gender-based violence, so as to prevent recidivism.

I am sure this matter will be raised later, but what I am talking about is that the scope of the messaging and how we have this conversation need to be human rights based, holistic and tackle the structural inequalities in our society while also engaging with men and boys through a strengths-based approach, not through a deficit-based approach that says men are

broken and may be the perpetrators. Instead, we need to tell men and boys that they can be allies - that is the key word - in ending gender-based violence and promoting gender equality.

I hope this has answered the Deputy's question.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I am sorry, but I asked too many questions. Perhaps AkiDwA might answer in the second round.

**Chairman:** That is a good suggestion and I thank the Deputy. We are moving to the second round now anyway.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I thank the Chair for allowing us to contribute again. I wish to ask Ms McDermott a question. Recently, I engaged with a local domestic violence service provider. One of the issues that was strongly raised was that there appeared to be an imbalance being created between funding and the governance and compliance requirements on the service. What is being asked of services is increasing but funding is not increasing to match it. The impact of inflation on the delivery of these services is becoming more profound. Will Ms McDermott and the gentlemen comment on their experience in this regard?

Ms McDermott spoke about "the full accommodation and support needs of women in their journey to freedom." What is her opinion on the current structure for funding the provision of refuge spaces? The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has responsibility over this area, but the provision of refuge capacity lies with Tusla. Is that relationship something that Ms McDermott would like to see changed? Is there a more streamlined and efficient way of providing funding so that it results in better delivery?

Other commentators have mentioned regionalisation, joint policing committees, JPCs, and the capacity to speak. At what other forums do this issue and all issues that relate to gender-based violence need to be discussed? An issue that I have been examining is that of JPCs. It is not that long since domestic violence figures started being extrapolated out within the crime statistics. Are we at a point where membership of our local JPCs needs to be designated and retained for those who work in the area of DSGBV?

**Chairman:** I believe there were questions in that for everyone. I am conscious that AkiDwA has yet to reply on the earlier questions. Its representatives might like to respond to Deputy Clarke's questions as well as the questions from Deputy McAuliffe.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** I will start with the earlier question on the area of the legal provisions and the policies that we have in place that impact on the lives of migrant women. Even when we describe that, given the work that we do, we are conscious that migrant women are not a homogeneous group. They come from different ethnic backgrounds but also immigration status. It has affected the way they integrate into society and the way they receive support and any other kind of services, including coming out of isolation to look for those services. We spoke so much about if a woman comes as a dependant of her spouse, she comes under that spouse's dependency and she has to be with him so that she can get her residency or, if they are claiming for international protection if they come as a couple, refugee status. One will find quite often that women will not report on what is happening because if they leave that abusive pattern, they will not have access to social welfare because of the habitual residency. Sometimes they are accepted by the refuges, but refuges also have the right not to accept them because of the public funds and the way it works. It is difficult for them.

AkiDwA and some other organisations came together and formed a coalition in 2011 and



2012 and that is how the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, INIS, guidelines, that help women who are experiencing violence to seek independent status, were sought. We are saying that while this is there, and it is a good and welcome development, it is still within the discretion of the Minister. It should be out there and automatic that if a woman who is a dependant of a spouse, where they have type 3 stamp duty because stamp 3 spouses are not allowed to work, she could be able to access social welfare easily and that she can get out of that violent relationship.

Under stamp 3, they were not allowed to work but we know things are changing. We even have some people in international protection now working. These things need to be looked into.

Also, the issue of the family reunification is important. It is maybe not even a partner joining but the family member who can help such a woman to be able to support the family and to support her when she is going through that. In Ireland, we still have significant issues and challenges on family reunification which need to be looked into.

I hope I have addressed that. I do not know whether any of my colleagues want to answer any of the other questions.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** Maybe I can add to the latter part of the question in terms of prevention.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I am probably taking Deputy Clarke's time. When I get my turn again, maybe Ms Adejinmi can answer my questions. Would that be better?

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** Okay. That is fine.

**Chairman:** Would Ms Adejinmi like to respond to Deputy Clarke's question? Then I will call Ms Mary McDermott, as it was addressed specifically to Safe Ireland as well.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** In terms of the refuge, definitely the current system needs to be looked at. Either the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage or Tusla should have full responsibility, but perhaps not Tusla because of what the organisation stands for. There needs to be a particular focus on the woman, on the victim. The children are also victims, often, by association, for witnessing and being traumatised by what they witness but there needs to be an increased focus in terms of providing refuge and then stepping it up to providing stand-alone accommodation.

Another current issue is if the family have a mortgage, for example, for the victim to access, if the woman has to leave the home. That was an example that has been given because of the pressure of family. The woman has to flee the home. She cannot get access straight away to social housing because of the joint-----

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** It needs a wrap-around.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** Exactly. That is another support and another wrap-around service that needs to be triggered straight away to support such a victim in order that she does not have any reason to go back to an abusive relationship and that coercive control situation.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Adejinmi for that very practical point. Ms McDermott might like to respond quickly to Deputy Clarke. We will come back to the Men's Development Network in the next round.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** I will try to be as quick as I can here but, obviously, this is a huge question. The starting point here - we put it in our No Going Back document - is we are dealing currently with a 19th century infrastructure trying to respond to 21st century problems. There is no coherent national process around this. I need not say that the services - the front-line providers - are working day and night to try and provide services under very stressed circumstances but what is really of burden to them is that every year there are annual service level agreements, SLA, and there is no long-term planning. Multi-annual funding is it.

I refer to the backroom work that we need to do for governance, compliancy and recording. I note that last week there was an extended discussion around issues of therapeutic notes and disclosure, recording and data protection. All of these issues are a burden and our front-line services - every one of those independent organisations - need full resourcing to do that back work. Everyone in this chamber will fully appreciate that over the past two years under Covid people responded from the heart with great generosity. They want to see the front-line provision but it is difficult to get well-grounded fully sustained resourcing for the backroom work for compliance, governance, finance, data protection, and IT infrastructure and managing in order that we can communicate with each other in a systematic and meaningful way and, therefore, crucially, that we can provide a coherent national fully-functioning 21st century infrastructure for domestic violence in the country.

With regard to regional structures, in response to Deputy Clarke I would say that there are various options. We have worked positively with An Garda Síochána. There are various ways in which we interact but, again, I would say this is part of the national strategy's work. We should not in a rush shoehorn domestic violence into any of the previous existing structures that are inappropriate. We should take time, sit down, draw up the terms of reference, make the process consultative and co-design, which, as we know, is welcomed at present. That is what we need.

I do not know if my colleague, Ms Lisa Marmion, has anything to say. Ms Marmion has been sitting, witnessing.

**Chairman:** Does Ms Marmion want to contribute on that?

**Ms Lisa Marmion:** I echo what Ms McDermott stated so comprehensively. In terms of the services and the pressures that they are under, even at a basic level their terms and conditions and the regularisation of that would be a significant starting point.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Marmion. I welcome Senator Flynn, who is here subbing. The Senator is here in her own right as well. I welcome her to the committee. On our second round-----

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** Sorry, there is the Men's Development Network response.

**Chairman:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** First, I echo what Ms McDermott stated in terms of taking the time to reflect on the structures that need to happen. There are certain limitations in using the children and young people's services committees, CYPSC, model that is in place, certainly, in terms of my own understanding of it.

I will return to the area of compliance. As much as we fully wish to adhere to it in the charity sector or wherever, to give the committee a sense of what happens in terms of refuge provision, I would make two points. The first is that at present it is through the Department of

Housing, Local Government and Heritage and one has to be a housing association to provide refuge. There is considerable compliance attached to that in its own right, let alone the compliance of service delivery. There is significant back-up support required in terms of fulfilling all one's obligations as a charity or as a company limited by guarantee. There is not significant support. Certainly, from our organisation's experience, we have to find ways in which to try and support the ongoing roll-out of our programme of work because we do not get the dedicated funding in relation to that.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** That is right.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** For me to offer support and supervision to my staff, I cannot draw on the funding that I get from Tusla or the Department of Justice to do that because it is dedicated towards a particular programme of work and output that is required. There needs to be an acknowledgement in terms of funding coming in to organisations that allows them to operate. There are programmes, such as the scheme to support national organisations, SSNO, from Pobal. Unfortunately, we do not have support from that at present. Hopefully, we will be successful in the next round. It would be great. That is the point I wanted to make on that.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Cooke. I am conscious we have kept everyone over two hours and we still have private business. We are into the second round of questions and Deputies McAuliffe and Carroll MacNeill have indicated.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I will not take a full round to allow Ms Adejinmi to respond to the second part of that question.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** I thank Deputy McAuliffe for his warm welcome. I really appreciate it. In terms of preventative measures, it is about educating not just men and boys but people in general. We need more integration. We need to look at our education system, institutions and same-sex schools. Part of the issue, to borrow Deputy McAuliffe's phrase, is prevention rather than intervention. If we can get them at that early stage to acknowledge equality of the sexes that will go a long way to doing away with the malaise we experience in later life. Somebody also mentioned the media. Advertising and trying to discontinue stereotypical product promotion can also get to homes. That would be a way of educating people within homes without being too intrusive.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I have heard the Taoiseach speak about our current system of domestic violence shelters. His commentary was that they have sprung up where communities, rather than the State, have responded and that that is the wrong way to approach it and there needs to be the national infrastructure that we talk about.

We are having the same issue with hospitals, schools and all other sorts of areas where we allowed voluntary or previously religious groups operate our social services, but this is slightly different. How do we integrate people who are currently providing those services into a national infrastructure that takes on board their experience and marries it with a national infrastructure to provide those services, in a way that they do not feel disempowered?

By the same token, inevitably, finances may be different when we move to a national structure. There may be regional structures and contracts of service that include the back end and financial management, rather than just a per-night type of approach. Has Ms McDermott talked about how we marry our voluntary system with a new State system? I know that is a lot to ask.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** That is a very difficult question but we have thought about it. The

position that we have in our initial discussions among ourselves has really been that in the new roll-out of refuge, it is very important that, precisely, we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We need land and gifts, for example, to be free and unencumbered and for the ethos, ideology or development around domestic, sexual and gender-based violence to follow and track the findings of a House such as this, in order that the Government has a guide over what is right for the citizens of this country. That is a very important part of what we do.

With regard to the process of merging, we cannot underestimate the breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise in the networks of refuge and support services around the country. They have to be absolutely front and centre in guiding, advisory and consultative, if not lead, roles as the local communities see fit. However, this is a process of consultation and design. If we take the time to do it, we will not repeat the difficulties of the past. The Deputy has put his finger on a thorny issue that we need to talk through, as a democracy and a republic.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** If Ms McDermott is uncomfortable with me pressing her on this, I am happy for her to say that.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** Not at all.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** If Ms McDermott was to make that hard decision between what is to come, would it be her preference that domestic violence shelters be a fully public service with public governance? Is it possible to allow voluntary bodies, with all the limits on protections and so on, to be part of some sort of service delivery? Does Ms McDermott believe their role should be in advocacy and advice and that service delivery should be by the State?

**Ms Mary McDermott:** That is a process we need to work through and think through, but I would use the words partnership and co-design. This is something that we need to talk through completely. Much politics and many strategies are involved here but we have to sit down and work this one out. We do not want to repeat the troubles of the past. Deputy McAuliffe put his finger on a very important question.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** If we were to design a new system for housing, education and so many others, the broad political view is that we would not have so much dominance of voluntary sectors out of State control. The difficulty with that is if we apply that now to domestic violence shelters and someone in the Department sits down to plan out 30 or 40 shelters, one in every county-----

**Ms Mary McDermott:** That simply cannot happen. There has to be a process. Anybody in any Department who would sit down and say it would be rolled out without consultation would hit a very big wall.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** All of the learning we take from hospitals and education is not the same approach we need to take here because the people involved in domestic violence shelters are coming from, even though the same type of voluntary model, a totally different perspective than voluntary providers in other sectors-----

**Ms Mary McDermott:** Can I just say-----

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** -----and we have to be very careful to try to marry them into the process, even if, ultimately, services are only provided by the State. I think we are saying the same thing.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** Absolutely. There can be no progress without consultation but there is no one-size-fits-all on the side of the Government or what we are calling the voluntary sector. There is complexity and great models that can be shared. There is no question that a new model can be developed.

**Chairman:** It is good to end with a hopeful note.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I appreciate they were thorny questions.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** This is not, strictly speaking, for this session but I would like the view of the witnesses on curriculum review development on promoting gender equality and diversity. It explicitly covers gender, power dynamics, consent and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, both online and offline within the revised relationship and sexuality curriculum. I have been raising this with the Minister, Deputy Foley, for two years now. I would really like the perspective of the witnesses, as we move into that body of work.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** From our perspective, there needs to be a programme. We talk about the three “Rs” in our education system; reading, writing and arithmetic. There needs to be a fourth “R” which looks at the holistic nature of engaging with young people in an age-appropriate way, from Montessori, right through to third level. That needs to be a continuous run that is age appropriate, addresses all of the areas around healthy relationships, consent, gender equality, gender-based violence and is done in a particular programme that runs its way through the organisation.

The other thing that needs to happen is that it needs to be graded in some way. I do not say that on the basis that people learn this thing but it is the one way in which the schools and teachers will see a need for it. They will know what the benchmark is in terms of making sure they do these programmes. Many programmes go into schools and they are not part of the integrated or the full, core curriculum. Schools and teachers then do not know what is success in terms of the programme.

They also do not put the time and effort into it, as they know that when the cigire comes along they do not have to worry about what the issue is in terms of the healthy relationship, the issue of consent or even the concept of climate and gender. All of those types of things need to be incorporated in the CSPE model and it needs to be broadened at that extent. Critically, there needs to be a continuity that runs from the very early stages right through.

Part of that, certainly, is using a particular model of engagement, whether it is with girls or boys. It is about a non-judgmental approach. It is about saying we are not trying to fix them, but are inviting them into a conversation around what they need to do and how they need to bring it home into the family.

My biggest problem with school sometimes is that they are overrun with many different programmes that they have to go into. It is very difficult to get time and space to do stuff. Really, we need to have a fourth element to our core curriculum that-----

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** Instead of saying a day here and a day there, it is an integrated model right throughout, week on week, all the way through.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** Absolutely.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** That is my view, also.



**Mr. Seán Cooke:** One of the greatest examples I have had of using different approaches is that I remember doing geography through music, once.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** How did Mr. Cooke do that?

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** I am saying that there is no reason why you cannot have a gender equality issue when you are doing maths. You integrate it and embed it in the full system. Rather than saying that you will go off now and do gender and gender equality stuff or consent stuff, you talk about consent within the day-to-day operations of the school.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** They are already doing that. You are not allowed to hit another child in the school. When we finish, I still want to hear more about geography through music.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** Yes.

**Chairman:** Will AkiDwa and then Ms McDermott respond please?

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** Mr. Cooke just triggered my memory of a class in Kevin Street where osmosis was described with a party of boys on one side and girls on the other. A lot can be achieved in that way. With education, we must look at all the stakeholders: the children, the providers, that is, the school and then the home environment with the parents who support outside of the school environment. Every area has to be looked at with inclusion among our educators because that will also help with the continuity of learning and making sure that every aspect is integrated in every subject which is possible, as Mr. Cooke began to highlight there.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** We need to make sure that every child gets a consistent education and that it is not dependent only on the home situation either.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** I would add something. We mentioned the curriculum. Mr. Cooke mentioned the need for integration. It needs to be integrated and inclusive. The curriculum that we have now does not reflect the diversity of people in Ireland today. It has to go deeper and look at grounds of discrimination, for example. You are in school with the children who have one parent, and others who may come from different backgrounds, including ethnic and religious. The curriculum needs to be holistic and not only integrated but also very inclusive from primary level all the way up.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** I agree. It is important to acknowledge that there are lots of teachers and schools who are way ahead of the conversation that we are having here. They are already doing that. It is about making sure that it is a consistent, every child experience. That is why the curriculum review is so important.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** Absolutely.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** Education is another thorny question. I return to sex, gender and sexuality and how it is handled in schools. Core to that whole dynamic is the issue of violence and control in intimacy and what that is all about. We talk about consent and who would not support that? On the other hand, one of the most dispiriting things I heard within a short time of this issue being raised was that you already had young men asking young women to sign a consent on the phone to say that they had agreed to sex. Consent is completely meaningless without context and the issue of choice: whose choice; what are you choosing; whose desire is

at play here? Famously women's desire is always rather submerged.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** You cannot talk about what you are not consenting to without knowing what is on the table, essentially.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** Exactly.

**Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill:** Exactly. It is really talking about healthy relationships. We keep teaching this in terms of how not to get pregnant or get a sexually transmitted disease. It is always "how not" but with no context for what might be happening.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** If I may pick up on something Mr. Kelly said earlier. He was talking about the private sphere which is greatly protected but I would raise the separation of the world into private and public is itself a patriarchal construct. It is a place where men divide what may be counted and not counted as real, not least among them, violence. I was having a very interesting conversation with a UK expert last week when she said that if we look again at the figures around violent crime and put the private sphere into that assessment and take the outliers out, for the data nerds, then the most prevalent form of violence is of men against women. And we all know that intuitively. The division of the private and public is problematic, as I said in my opening remarks, which has been redrawn during Covid but also within an educational context. There is the attitude of "We cannot talk about that here". We have to sit down and talk about all this. That is where we want to go.

**Chairman:** I am conscious that Senator Flynn wants to come in and I must step out to the Dáil Chamber after 12 noon and we have kept everyone for two and a half hours.

**Mr. Colm Kelly:** If I was able to have one minute?

**Chairman:** Absolutely. Then we will go to Senator Flynn.

**Mr. Colm Kelly:** I thank the Chair. I really appreciate it. I thank the Deputy for the question. First, I would highlight that education also needs to extend into the world of work. We know that patriarchal structures, since time immemorial, put down women and girls. I would call for an action that is in the national strategy and is something that we have lobbied the Government on this for the last eight months namely, the ratification of ILO convention 190 and implementation of recommendation 206.

Second, I want to refer to an observation made by our colleagues and friends, from the National Women's Council of Ireland in its submission to the Department of Justice in June 2021. It noted that consent education is an important element of DSGBV education it is but one aspect, albeit an important one. Consent as the primary framing or focus fails to capture the inherent complexities of DSGBV. I would echo that. This needs to be a broader human rights, and as our colleagues at AkiDwa mentioned, holistic approach to the issue.

There are broader measures required. The Istanbul Convention speaks of legislative measures also.

I will quote from the Department of Justice report on legislating for hate speech and hate crime last year. It states: "Measures ranging from education and awareness to codes of conduct and professional standards are essential to any comprehensive approach to tackling hate speech and hate crime, including by effective prevention." What I noted in reviewing that report is that there are some very clear nexuses in relation to the intersectionality *vis-à-vis* who experi-

ences hate crime and speech in this country and who may be at heightened risk of experiencing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. We need to ensure that the education programme we have is age appropriate, that it begins at primary level but that it does tackle-----

**Chairman:** I am sorry we have gone way over time.

*Senator Pauline O'Reilly took the Chair.*

**Senator Eileen Flynn:** I will not keep the committee a minute. On education, consent and sex education in school and our education system, I know of many Traveller children who were told they did not have to do sex education or consent education on the grounds of culture. I have seen this with Muslim people and black people too. That is something that needs to be addressed.

I welcome the Men's Development Network here today. When we do talk about gender we include men in that conversation as well.

Very quickly, I wish to refer to refuges. I do not know if anyone can answer this question. To the best of my knowledge, from my own personal experiences working as a community development worker on the ground with people from ethnic minority groups, our refuges are not fit for purpose for use by all women. They are not inclusive of all women from ethnic minority groups.

As Ms McDermott just pointed out, racism can be in school. We need to educate our children in how to not be racist. Much of the time education starts at home. Unfortunately, we educate our children to hate and to be racist and we normalise it within our society, especially towards members of the Traveller community.

We need a bigger conversation around how our refuges can be inclusive and can meet the needs of women, especially from ethnic minority groups. Our education system should be inclusive of all of our children. They all need the same information around consent. No matter what older traditions there are or anything that goes with that, it is still eventually going to happen. People need to be educated and that includes Traveller people. If your culture puts men in one place and women in another, there is an issue with the culture. Sometimes our systems can put men from different cultures in one place and women in another. That is very unfair in general. That is a general point that I would like to make.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Senator Flynn for her powerful words.

**Mr. Seán Cooke:** That discussion on refuge and what we mean about it being fit for purpose is critical. It is about the inclusivity of all aspects of provision, whether it be women or men. As was said, we do not have provision in place for men. We do not think it is a requirement to have a dedicated refuge for men but others might have a different opinion on that. We think there are much more appropriate wrap-around services and that client support systems are the way to go forward. When we talk about refuge, whether it be the model of compliance and governance or whether it is delivery, we need to have a broad discussion on it. I would fully concur with what Ms McDermott and our friends from AkiDwA said.

**Dr. Salome Mbugua:** I want to add to that because Senator Flynn highlighted the key issues we have been advocating for in AkiDwA. This is about all front-line services providing what we call culturally competent services. Anybody who is providing a service should do so because the issue of culture and people not understanding other different issues which are hap-

pening in Ireland which are sometimes different to the culture where they are coming from can be difficult. AkiDwA has produced training on cultural competency. To date, Women's Aid and Ruhama have taken this training and we are calling everybody to take this training. This training has to be provided by people who experienced these kind of challenges when they went looking for services. We cannot provide training on the culture of Travellers; they have to be there. The Senator also mentioned the key issue of racism in children. We have racist bullying in residential areas and schools and that is why we go back to the curriculum and education for how we tackle these issues because we have to talk about them as well.

**Ms Uruemu Adejinmi:** I want to add a point to Senator Flynn's remark about inclusive refuge spaces. That lends to Deputy McAuliffe's point about the refuge services that are available nationwide and why there should be uniformity of service. The experience is traumatic enough as it is and the response to those experiences are informing every refuge service around the country to support these victims who desperately need help to rebuild their confidence and trust in society.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** I want to acknowledge the point on the need for diversity in training and cultural sensitivity. I refer to Deputy McAuliffe's point on the origins and history of refuge in Irish society. We know, for example, that in certain areas there are groups that predominantly fill the refuges. Particular groups will fill particular refuges depending on the population of the area. There is no manager or CEO of a refuge or service around the country who would not agree with every word that has been said. The question is around resourcing, training and upskilling and this is the moment when we can do it. Cultural competence training and so on is needed. At one point we were talking to embassies to try to provide translation facilities but we are trying to do it on the run and we need a large-scale and systematic response that covers all of this.

**Senator Eileen Flynn:** To be fair, I am not saying it is the staff in the refuges because that is part of the point.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** The Senator is right.

**Senator Eileen Flynn:** I rang Safe Ireland 100 times and I have networks in there where I am able to get good support for women on the ground. It is just that refuges are not invested in and that they do not meet people's needs.

**Ms Mary McDermott:** By the same token there are issues around race, sexuality, ability and accessibility. There are also issues around class, which are really interesting, and which fall in ways one might not think they would. For example, wealthy women will often not go near a refuge because of class stigma. There are a range of issues we have to deal with, along with racial, ethnic and religious issues. This is the moment to do it.

**Vice Chairman:** That concludes our session and "This is the moment to do it" is a good final remark. I thank the representatives of AkiDwA, the Men's Development Network and Safe Ireland for their contributions today. All of the statements and reflections today will form part of our report so it is valuable work.

*Sitting suspended at 12.05 p.m. and resumed in private session at 12.12 p.m.*

The joint committee adjourned at 12.42 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 28 April 2022.