



RCNI Election Manifesto 2024

Rape Crisis Network Ireland work for an Ireland where everyone is free from sexual violence and the fear and threat of sexual violence.

Sexual Violence erodes everyone's freedom, girls' and women's freedom in particular. We are asking candidates and Political Parties to work for this freedom. Ireland has shown considerable leadership and all-party commitment to taking seriously zero tolerance to sexual violence. The next step is to build on that momentum and end injustices once and for all.

The long years of neglect means that despite recent significant advances we still have some way to go before the investment of effort and resources matches the scale of the challenge.

- Sexual, Domestic and Gender based Violence is estimated to cost the Irish economy €4bn per annum.ⁱ
- Cuan, the DSGBV agency's budget for 2025 is €67m to fund all activity in primary and secondary prevention, including over 60 services meeting the needs of survivors, research & development, data, awareness raising and campaigns to prevent DSGBV.

RCNI Top Five Priorities for the next Government

1. Evidence & Court Processes

Give victims support, protection and dignity in the justice system by reforming the justice process.

- Continue to reform the justice process to put in place adequate protections for vulnerable witnesses in criminal and civil proceedings related to sexual violence;
- Establish and fund advocacy services nationally for all survivors of sexual violence in the justice process equally regardless of geographic location.
- Encourage further development of the specialisation of justice professionals including the Gardaí, DPP and court staff, prosecution and defence advocates and judges;
- Ensure the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) survivor-centred model of emergency response to survivors of sexual violence is preserved. Review and

support the standardisation and provision of advocacy workers to SATUs nationwide.

- Ensure national rollout of the Barnahus Centres alongside adequate provision for advocacy and follow on care.

2. Tackle delay in sexual violence justice once and for all

Alleviate delays in the report-to-court process. Ensure specialisation at every point.

- All sexual crime should be investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated by specialist personnel and teams.
 - Specialist sexual violence investigation (DPSUs) and prosecution (DPP specialist unit) has been proven to work in raising standards and improving the experience of the justice journey.
 - This means increasing the numbers of DPSUs, fully expanding the DPP pilot SV specialist unit to deal with all SV cases. Increased training of all court personnel, prosecution and defence advocates as well as judges engaged in sexual violence cases.
- Establish a multidisciplinary task force to deliver solutions to the operational, practical, procedural, physical, ICT, and varying duties and powers challenges currently hindering the effective progress of a case from report to court and beyond.
- Closely monitor the adherence of all agencies and professionals to their duties to timeously inform victims of their rights and entitlements. This monitoring to be reported to government and open to public scrutiny.

3. The Child Survivor - systems that centre their support and Protection

Courts and child protection processes must be transformed to make them child-centred and accountable.

23% of sexual violence happens within the family. Child protection not only requires a criminal justice and Tusla response, but it also includes private Family Law, which is a critical part of journey for this child survivor of sexual violence, to centre their best interests.

- Provide Specialist Family Law Courts to meet the needs of the child where sexual and domestic violence within the family is alleged.
- Develop a Courts Welfare Service to support the needs of everyone accessing family law and to provide reports to the courts on the welfare of children and their carers;
- Ensure that experts advising the courts on issues relating to children's interests and related matters as well as the management of any risks arising from sexual and/or domestic violence, are appropriately qualified and regulated;
- Build fit for purpose Family Law Courts in Hammond Lane and nationwide.
- Ensure a consistent provision of services in Family Law Courts across the country.
- Ensure the child sexual abuse investigation and protection systems are appropriately coordinated, fit for purpose and specialised, through specialist Garda units, social workers and other relevant professionals.
- Set targeted time limits for the joint interviewing of the child survivor of sexual violence by the specialist Gardaí and social workers whereby these are conducted within a week of first disclosure.

4. Prevention through Culture & Infrastructure

Build, fund and protect independent voices and an infrastructure of transparency and accountability on our whole of society response to sexual violence.

- Fund and protect the independent voice of civil society to participate in shaping a survivor centred transformation.
- Ensure multiannual funding becomes the standard to enable for planning and transformation towards survivor responsive service provision.
- Fund and support the collective voice of survivors through gold standard administrative data collection infrastructure involving people, systems and shared definitions across all point of contact for survivors, operating with excellence in data governance, privacy and security.
 - These administrative data points of contact to include all agencies and actors in the State's justice response to the Victims Journey from 'report to court' and beyond.
 - The administrative data points of contact also includes the array of other support services and advocacy that survivors engage with as part of their wider justice journey. These include sexual violence specialist centres and other community based organisations as well as health and other settings where survivors may seek support.

- Ensure Sex and Relationships Education in schools for all children is always addressed in the context of the facts of gender inequality, stereotypes and gender based violence;
- Recent evolutions in government platforms have erased access to the critical activities of an open democracy. Guarantee that information on government activity and policy development in responding to sexual violence and equality is freely and transparently available to all through publicly accessible online platforms.

5. A national Commission to address the practice of disclosure of personal information of survivors of sexual violence throughout the justice process, specifically its appropriateness, relevance and impact on victims.

RCNI are calling for a Commission to interrogate and make recommendations on:

- The standing given to the victim in the case such that we radically reconsider the appropriateness and relevance of the disclosure of personal information and the imbalance between disclosure of a victim's and an accused's personal information.
- A critical analysis of the constitutional and human rights positioning of the victim within the criminal justice process. To include an analysis on the balancing of rights between victim and accused and the appropriateness of the privileging of the rights of the accused over the rights of the victim.
- An examination of how sexual violence crimes could be prosecuted within an alternative structure from the current adversarial system to provide an approach that is fit for purpose, designed to minimise delay and prioritises the protection of the victim.

For more contact

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ENDS

<https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/costs-gender-based-violence-european-union-technical-report>

<https://eige.europa.eu/e-reader/4961> EIGE extrapolation of national costs across EU from UK study <https://www.safeireland.ie/policy-publications/> for NUIG SI study on DV cost in Irl – est. at €113,500 per woman.