



**General
Election 2024:
Calls to Action**



Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and common human rights violations globally. Ireland is no exception. One in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence, most often perpetuated by someone known to them.

We are asking General Election candidates in Co. Meath to recognise violence against women has its root cause in gender inequality. We urge candidates to commit to advancing gender equality at all levels in Ireland including addressing economic, care and representative inequity and funding a public model of childcare. We believe the recommendations of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality in Ireland should be acted on, including reducing gender stereotypes by investing in education and cultural change.



We have 10 Calls to Action to Candidates running in the General Election in Co. Meath.

These actions could be transformative in reducing and working towards eliminating Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence in our county.

<p>1</p>	<p>Urgently increase investment in social and affordable housing, additional refuge beds and step-down homes.</p> <p>The lack of available housing is a major deterrent to women leaving abusive relationships and establishing safe long-term homes. At present women and children staying in domestic violence refuges are not counted in official homeless figures. 185 women and children stayed with Meath Women's Refuge & Support Services last year, and over 4,000 nation-wide. The majority of women and children leaving refuge after fleeing violence are now going to transitional or homeless accommodation.</p> <p>We believe perpetrators of Domestic Violence should be removed from the family home in the first instance and legislation, including the powers of the Gardai, enhanced to ensure this can happen. These powers exist in other countries.</p> <p>We need to fast-track refuge construction and step-down home provision locally. Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services is working towards the development of a 12 unit refuge and ancillary services building for Co. Meath and its vital that the full cost of developing this large-scale project is resourced by the State.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Establish a three-year national Pilot Flee Fund to the value of €1.5 million.</p> <p>Recently Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services produced a report entitled No Safety Net-The Cost of Survival on our experience of providing emergency grants directly to survivors of Domestic Violence as a fund of last resort. Since 2020 we have provided over €61,000 directly to 125 women and 204 children. These grants were funded through philanthropic organisations and Women's Aid. These funds are due to be spent down by June 2025 with no future funding currently available.</p> <p>The UK government in January 2024 introduced an emergency flee fund valued at £2 million to support women to leave abusive relationships and supporting women to set up for their new living situations. We are calling on Ireland to pilot a National Flee Fund for Survivors.</p>



<p>3</p>	<p>Ensure the full implementation and resourcing of the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence.</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Increasing multi-year core funding for domestic and sexual violence services to maintain and keep up with the demand for services coupled with the development of a National Service Development Plan through Cuan. Many Domestic Violence services have submitted plans for the growth and development of their services to Cuan to take into account new refuge development but also the wider expansion of services after 10 years of no investment (between 2009 and 2019). → Ensure a strong focus on the rights of child survivors/victims, in line with the National Strategy and with our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children must be treated as survivors in their own rights with a right to adequate protection and recovery supports. → Increase the focus and investment into Community Responses to Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence that address the root causes and build the capacity of communities to respond locally. Fund local domestic violence services to engage with community education, schools and youth programmes to reinforce national campaigns at local level.
<p>4</p>	<p>Establish an Independent Commissioner on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence to monitor progress</p> <p>This independent Commissioner should have appropriate resources and powers to monitor the National Strategy's implementation. In line with the Ombudsman for Children's recent call, appropriate levels of funding should be allocated to their office to enable them to monitor the impact on children of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Provide Medical Cards for all Refuges</p> <p>All refuges working with survivors of Domestic Violence should have access to an emergency medical card. Local GPs who provide services should be paid a fee per visit along with annual card fee as per normal medical card procedures. These cards, which have been in place in many parts of the country historically for many years are under review and are currently renewable every 3 months through the medical card section of the HSE. In early 2024, these cards were withdrawn for a period from Meath Women's Refuge & Support Services and other local Domestic Violence Support Services, which meant we had to fund the medical costs for families in that period of time.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Fund a Dedicated Rape Crisis Centre for Co. Meath</p> <p>Implement the recommendation in the Istanbul Convention which is that areas with a population of more than 200,000 - such as Co. Meath - have a dedicated and fully serviced Rape Crisis Centre. The most recent report by the GreVio Committee (the committee that monitors the Istanbul Convention) cited that Dedicated Rape Crisis Centre in areas (to include access to Sexual Assault Treatment Unit-SATU and helpline service, court accompaniment and counselling services) should be in place in areas with a population size in excess of 200,000 in line with the Istanbul Convention. Our organisation has worked with Rape Crisis Northeast to establish a sexual violence counselling service for the county in 2023 but Co. Meath should have a dedicated Rape Crisis Centre.</p>



<p>7</p>	<p>Ensure that Coimisiún na Méan is fulfilling its role to regulate intermediaries and platforms to prevent illegal and harmful activities online</p> <p>Digital platforms are gateways to technology facilitated abuse and the levels of abuse are increasing. Unauthorised sharing of intimate images, cyber stalking, violent pornography and child sexual abuse materials are facilitated by a culture of impunity and anonymity online. Coimisiún na Méan must be resourced to fulfil its mission to hold platforms to account for material published and regulate illegal and harmful activities online.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Support and Protect Survivors in Criminal Proceedings</p> <p>Advocate for the prompt publication of legislation that has been proposed by the Department of Justice to ensure that the counselling notes of victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence cannot be used in court proceedings. The UK recently changed the law to ensure that counselling notes cannot be subpoenaed in criminal cases. Currently in Ireland this can happen in the case of coercive control and sexual violence criminal prosecution proceedings. This is a breach of confidentiality of the relationship between counsellor and survivor and can act as a barrier to accessing services and supports. Additionally, the recent EU directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence in Ireland, also called for evidence relating to the victim's past sexual conduct should only be permitted in criminal proceedings when it is relevant and necessary.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Ensure Ireland is fulfilling its obligations under EU legislation</p> <p>New EU Directive on Violence Against Women - Resourcing its implementation and ensuring full transposition into Irish law - the State has 3 years to coordinate and cost this work.</p> <p>Support the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Ireland. The four pillars of the Convention frame Ireland's National Strategy on DSGBV, namely, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Policy Co-ordination however much remains to be done to implement its requirements. We need three times as many refuge beds as we currently have and urgently need to invest in step down housing.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Drive robust Research, Policy and Legislative responses in Ireland towards term change.</p> <p>These are needed if we are to make systemic change towards reducing the high levels of DSGBV in our communities, including in Co. Meath.</p> <p>The list below is not an exhaustive list but demonstrates the scale of change required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Resource and implement the Family Law Reform Strategy and the Family Justice Strategy. → Develop and an Action Plan to implement recommendations of the Study on Familicide and Domestic and Family Violence Death Reviews. → Transposition of the EU Directive on Violence Against Women