

Joining the Dots

Housing Precarity, Homelessness
and Violence against Women and Girls

Challenges,
Barriers and
Solutions

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1. Background to the Conference

The National Women's Council held a major conference to explore the link between the housing crisis and violence against women and identify effective policy solutions.

Women and children are finding themselves trapped between the housing crisis and rising levels of homelessness and shocking levels of domestic abuse, sexual violence, exploitation and control against women in Ireland¹ which significantly impacts their lives. These are not separate crises. Housing insecurity makes women more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. For many women, domestic abuse is the direct cause of their homelessness. For Traveller and Roma women, migrant women, disabled women, lone parents, older women, members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) community, the situation is often more complex and the barriers to accessing safety even higher.

This often means that women must make the choice to stay with an abuser or leave and navigate homelessness. Where women – often with children – choose to leave, they encounter a system with severely limited availability due to high demand, capable of meeting only immediate short-term emergency accommodation needs. Once that immediate crisis period is over, many survivors are left with no long-term housing options. This results in women and children moving from one emergency shelter or accommodation to another, piecing together unsafe temporary arrangements, or returning to abusive relationships simply because they have nowhere else to go. Just as homelessness has become increasingly normalised, housing scarcity has created new opportunities for predators. A 2024 study by the NWC spotlighted 'sex for rent' exploitation, with landlords openly offering or advertising discounted or even free accommodation in exchange for sex. Students, migrant women, and women already greatly struggling to find housing, were found to be targeted. Women living in direct provision are also at heightened risk—many are survivors of trafficking for sexual

¹ Gardaí report responding to a domestic abuse call every ten minutes and the Central Statistics Office reported that over half of women in Ireland will experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

exploitation² and, even after being granted permission to remain, are unable to secure affordable housing. As a result, they are forced to remain in direct provision, leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation.

To explore this link and identify effective policy solutions, the National Women's Council (NWC) hosted this major conference on Housing and Violence against Women. NWC through this conference gathered evidence, ideas and testimonies from services, survivors, policy makers and political parties to highlight these close connections and identify effective solutions that are informed by the lived experiences of women.

² Nationally there are just eight dedicated spaces for female victims of trafficking.

2. Outline of the Conference

The Conference was opened by the Director of the National Women's Council, who laid out the context and background. She was followed by three keynote speakers, James Brown TD Minister for Housing Local Government and Heritage who spoke to government commitments and progress on the intersection between housing and violence against women, as well as to engage in the conference's learnings, through a video input. Dr Paula Mayock from Trinity College provided evidence from her research of the clear intersection of housing and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). This was followed by an input from Elizabeth Pena, Head of Services, Delivery and Development at Cuan (DSGBV Agency) who spoke of the seventy-eight organisations supported and she outlined the plan for the development of additional refuge accommodation around the country. The second half of the morning consisted of two panels. The first panel focused on the role of domestic violence as a driver of homelessness, while the second panel focused on the impact of housing precarity, institutional care, and the direct provision system on the increased risks of sexual exploitation of women and children. After lunch, a video input from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales was played. The Commissioner focused her input on the provision of long-term survivor centered housing solutions. Two more panels followed this session. The first of these focused on inclusive and accessible housing supports for all women. The second was a discussion of political party responses from the opposition parties on housing and violence against women. (See Appendix 1 for full details).

3. Women, Homelessness & Gender-Based Violence

Women and gender-diverse people experience high levels of hidden, unsafe, and unrecognised homelessness. In Ireland, the number of women experiencing homelessness increased by more than 400% between June 2014 and June 2025. It is also the case that family homelessness, which primarily impacts low-income women who are mothers; typically, young and often parenting alone, has also increased dramatically since 2014. July 2025 women made up 40% of the national homeless figures.³ It should be noted that these official national homeless figures only include those accommodated in Section 10⁴ funded emergency accommodation overseen by housing authorities during a specific week. They do not include the number of individuals rough sleeping, nor those staying in women's refugees, or indeed within the direct provision system, nor do they include those living in institutions or indeed those who are "sofa surfing" with friends and family or indeed "doubling up" in halting sites who fall through the cracks of Irish official statistics.

From research it is possible to identify some frequently occurring characteristics among women who are homeless. Firstly, many grew up in family circumstances characterised by tension and/or conflict, where economic hardship was often a daily reality. Experiences such as childhood sexual abuse and violence, being in state care as a child, intimate partner violence and maternal trauma have also been demonstrated to push women along a trajectory of housing instability and homelessness.⁵ These experiences while not limited to women are gendered in nature.

³ Mayock, P (2025) The Intersection of Homelessness and Gender-based Violence. Paper presented at the NWC Conference: Housing Precarity, Homelessness and Violence against Women September 16, 2025

⁴ Section 10 funding comes from Central Government (specifically the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) to Local Authorities under the 1988 Housing Act combined with a contribution (at 10 percent) of funding directly from each Local Authorities revenue streams.

⁵ Mayock, P (2025) The Intersection of Homelessness and Gender-based Violence. Paper presented at the NWC Conference: Housing Precarity, Homelessness and Violence against Women September 16, 2025

For women who experience DSGBV, there are many barriers to accessing both short term and longer-term accommodation. Barriers identified included:

- Having difficulty accessing specialist refuge accommodation (with limited provision and high demand).
- Elevated levels of transience and instability when in homeless services – that means that women often must move between services from refuges/safe houses to B&Bs, to family and friends, to emergency accommodation, Family Hubs and supported temporary accommodation. In many instances women can find themselves cycling between a number of these options.
- The inadequacy of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) effectively means that women and children are excluded from much of the private rental sector.
- Lack of co-ordination between policies, services, and sectors.
- Lack of understanding of the dynamics of DSGBV among homelessness and housing services.
- Lack of understanding among homelessness and housing service providers as well as at times providers of DSGBV services, of the specific and additional needs of particular groups of women (migrants, Travellers, disabled women, members of the LGBTQI+ community)
- The existences of overt and covert racism and discrimination.

It is very clear from the research that housing precarity and DSGBV reinforce one another, trapping women and children in a cycle of perpetual vulnerability. A woman trapped in an abusive relationship because she has no safe housing option is not just a victim of domestic violence — she is also a victim of housing failure. A woman coerced into “sex for rent” is not only experiencing sexual violence — she is also experiencing the brutal consequences of a broken housing market. See Table 2.1 for details of the various accommodation options currently open to women (and children) experiencing/at risk of experiencing DSGBV.

Fig 2.1 Housing options for women experiencing /at risk of experiencing DSGBV

DSGBV	Operational Category	Living Situation	Definition
Women (and children) leave their current living situation because of DSGBV	1. Women (and children) move in and living temporarily with family and friends (sofa surfing)	Conventional if sometimes overcrowded and unsuitable housing, not the person's usual place of residence.	This accommodation is used due to a lack of suitable alternatives.
	2. Women (and children) living rough	Cars in public/external spaces	Living in their cars/ in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters.
	3. Women (and children) living in emergency accommodation	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between several types of accommodation.
	4. Women (and children) living in accommodation for the homeless	Homeless hostels/ Family Hubs	The period of stay in this type of accommodation is time limited in nature.
		Temporary housing (B&Bs/Hotels)	
		Transitional supported accommodation	
		Women's refuge/Safe house accommodation	
	5. Women (with children) move into a hotel or B&B paid for from their own resources	Commercial hotel, guesthouse, or B&B	This private sector housing is used by individuals due to a lack of suitable alternatives. It is only a very short-term option due to the costs involved.
Women living in institutions	Penal institutions	Healthcare institutions	Women (and children) stay longer than needed due to lack of housing. No housing is available prior to release/getting status.
		Penal institutions	
Women (and children) living in direct provision centres		Direct Provision	
Women (and children) living in private rental accommodation in exchange sex for rent		Sex for rent exploitative arrangements	Women (and children) stay/return to these unsafe and abusive situations due to lack of alternatives.
Women return to live/continue to live with the perpetrator in the absence of other options			

Source: Adapted from the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.⁶

⁶ <https://www.feantsa.org/download/fea-002-18-update-ethos-light-0032417441788687419154.pdf> (accessed 9th Sept 2025)

Some progress has been made. The Third National Strategy on DSGBV outlines clear goals to deliver services and supports to victims/survivors, including the provision of safe and accessible short and long-term accommodation. Cuan, the statutory Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency launched in 2024 has the mission to combat and reduce domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence (DSGBV) in Ireland and is working in partnership with local providers to develop refuges in locations where none currently exist. Extended Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) funding has been committed to the development of refuges in partnership with local services providers. The 2025 Programme for Government reinforced these commitments. Steps have also been taken to move forward on housing policy with a successor to the Housing for All Strategy launched in November 2025. The issue remains however that the relationship between housing precarity and DSGBV need to be more clearly recognised as being deeply connected, otherwise the responses will remain incomplete. The reality being that this is not just about housing and it is not just about abuse, control and violence. It is about women and children's right to recover from their DSGBV experiences and live safely, securely, and with dignity.

4. Challenges & Barriers

4.1. For Women

In most instances of domestic abuse, it is the women (and children) who leave the family home while the male perpetrator remains in the home. Women living in rented accommodation are also vulnerable. There currently is no legal requirement or instrument requiring the perpetrator to surrender the family accommodation and be held accountable for their actions. This means that the woman and children's lives are uprooted, and, in some instances, families can be spilt up where older children are above the age threshold for accommodation at a refuge. Women with children also report being traumatised by having to bring their children into homelessness and into contact with homeless services.

The accommodation options for women and their children who experience domestic violence and leave their home are limited: move in with family or friends, pay (from their own resources) to stay in a hotel or guesthouse (assuming they have the resources), sleep rough in a car or a public place, stay in emergency accommodation or homeless accommodation (including refuge⁷). All these options are temporary in nature, and in many cases, women and children can end up constantly moving between these various options, getting stuck and lost in the various systems. Accessing homeless accommodation can involve navigating your way through a lot of gatekeepers including the Family Homeless Action Teams. Assuming a woman successfully navigates these, emergency and homeless accommodation options can also have a lot of rules that are triggering for some women and make it difficult for children of all ages living in these situations. The uncertainty caused by having to use the freephone service to access homeless accommodation – sometimes daily – was specifically referenced by conference participants as negatively impacting women's mental health.

Outreach and drop-in DSGBV services can be very important sources of support to women and children in this situation as housing and homeless services do not always understand the complexities of the situation. Expecting women to carry the burden of finding a place to stay, as well as deal with and process the trauma they have experienced while living in temporary accommodation is unrealistic. It is also the case that the trauma caused by being homeless is exacerbated by having experienced DSGBV.

Not every county has safe houses and refuge provision is uneven. Even where these services exist, they are often over-subscribed with women regularly turned away because the refuge is full. Women (and their children) who cannot access refuge often return to very unsafe situations. It should also be noted that refuge accommodation is not suitable for some women and their children. For many of these women own door accommodation is the most suitable housing option, but it is generally not available. Plans are in place to develop additional refuges, and these are welcome, but these are going to take time to develop, and the question remains: what plans are in place to provide supports and or accommodation options in the interim?

Currently women have two main options available to them to move out of emergency and homeless accommodation services. The first option is that they locate suitable private rental accommodation, together with a private landlord willing to accept the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). The second is that they make a successful application for social housing. Both options are challenging, the first because of the shortage of affordable private rented accommodation and the many issues in the delivery of HAP (for example, rates have not increased adequately and proportionally with the rental inflation), the second because of the wait time for and shortage of social housing. In many cases women who leave home because of domestic violence are not on the social housing list and require help to complete the lengthy application forms. Unlike other jurisdictions like Northern Ireland, in Ireland domestic abuse does not constitute grounds for women and children to be defined as statutorily homeless and therefore prioritised on the housing waiting list through the so called 'points system'. It was also noted that there is a cohort of women living in social housing and enduring abusive relationships because applying for a social housing transfer can take so much time. The lack of joined up housing solutions also prevents specialist service providers from maintaining care over families as they face the unknown having to register as homeless following exit from the refuge, an additional burden on women and children's journey to safety.

4.2. Additional Challenges for Specific Groups of Women

Disabled women are more than three times more likely to experience DSGBV than non-disabled women. Despite this many DSGBV centres are not accessible and services are not well informed about the specific needs of this group of women. It was noted in this context that as signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities the State needs to make some very specific

provision for disabled women.⁸ It is important too that disabled women can clearly recognise and call out abuse (and have not internalised ableism).⁹ A 2024 Research report titled “Disabled Women’s Experiences of Intimate Partner Abuse in Ireland,” a collaboration between Women’s Aid, Trinity College Dublin, and the Disabled Gender Based Violence Taskforce, sheds critical light on the unique challenges faced by disabled women experiencing intimate partner abuse.¹⁰

Girls under 18 in residential care are at specific and significant risk of being targeted by predators. Their need for love and acceptance makes them vulnerable to love bombing in the first instance and ultimately to being groomed to have underage and abusive sex, firstly, with the predator, then with others and to recruiting their friends and peers to become involved too. These girls can often find it hard to recognise this as sexual exploitation. While victim blaming and high levels of staff turnover in these care facilities means that in some situations insufficient questions are asked when girls go missing and return, while in other situations the girls do not trust the staff sufficiently to disclose what is happening for them. It was noted that technology is amplifying these situations, with girls being targeting via the phone specifically via Snapchat and Instagram. Young women as they age out of the care system were also identified as a particularly vulnerable group whose experiences in relation to DSGBV need to be explored further. The Scoping Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Ireland.¹¹ published by the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) in 2023 provides a comprehensive examination of the nature, extent, and systemic responses to child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Ireland. One of its critical contributions is its focus on the experiences of girls in care, who are identified as particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Migrant women come to Ireland through various routes. Some come as students, while others come to work, others may be trafficked here for purposes of sexual exploitation. Many come fleeing their home country and seeking international protection, while a smaller number arrive as immigrant spouses (accompanying and dependent on their spouse). Immigrant spouses have reported being afraid to leave their spouse when they are experiencing DSGBV for fear of not being believed and because they are afraid that their visa will be revoked, even though victims of domestic abuse whose immigration status is dependent on the perpetrator can access independent immigrant permissions.

Migrant women do not have an automatic entitlement to social houses¹² or emergency accommodation. It was also noted that some local authorities are currently requiring evidence of 12 months income to be placed on their housing list.

⁸ Articles 6, 13,15, 19,23, 24 and 25 of the Convention were specifically referenced in this context.

⁹ Ableism is prejudice, discrimination, or discrimination against disabled people, based on the belief that non-disabled people are superior. Like other “isms,” it harms disabled people by fostering negative stereotypes it can be both overt and subtle.

¹⁰ Flynn, S., Sundaresan, S.L., Holt, S., Price, A., & O’Neill, G. (2024). Disabled Women’s Experiences of Intimate Partner Abuse in Ireland: Research Project Report. Women’s Aid, Trinity College Dublin, and the Disabled Gender Based Violence Taskforce.

¹¹ Canning, M., Keenan, M., & Breslin, R. (2023). Protecting Against Predators: A Scoping Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Ireland. Dublin: Community Foundation Ireland.

¹² Applicants for social housing must have a long-term right to reside in the country and to show a ‘local connection’ to the area which they are applying in.

For women from non-EU countries studying in Ireland, admission is generally contingent on the student locating accommodation in Ireland. The shortage of accessible and affordable student accommodation can push some female students into overcrowded and unsafe situations and in some instances entering sex for rent arrangements. Under the Direct Provision¹³ system, people are accommodated across the country in communal institutional centres or former hotel style settings. Nationally there are over 300 centres/facilities providing accommodation for 32,000 persons including 8,000 children. Many centres are managed on a for-profit basis by private contractors. The lack of services and the rationed daily allowances in some centres have been found to push women to offer sex for favours.¹⁴ This situation is seen to be exacerbated by overcrowding, lack of privacy (with individuals generally required to share rooms with others), and poor security measures. It was noted that many women are afraid of reporting incidents of DSGBV for fear it will negatively affect their International Protection Application. In addition, many International Protection applicants experience lengthy stays within this system, which is associated with declining physical and mental health. Official homeless statistics do not currently include the number of people living within this system who remain effectively invisible. Some women also find themselves stuck in this system even after they have their status, because they cannot find suitable alternative affordable accommodation options. Women whose International Protection Applications are unsuccessful in contrast are increasingly finding themselves deported. It was noted that women facing deportation do not have an entitlement to State support and as a result can become increasingly vulnerable to DSGBV.

For **Traveller women and Roma women** experiencing DSGBV it can take a long time to leave the situation, as it often also requires leaving the wider family. For many, refugees may be the only accommodation option available. If they are met with racism in refuge/homeless accommodation, which is a regular occurrence, they might have no choice but to return to the perpetrator. Traveller women are also often fearful of moving in to live with their own immediate family, for fear their family might also be targeted by the perpetrator and his family. This leaves them with limited choices, return to refuge, to homelessness or home to their abuser. Roma women who have moved jurisdictions when escaping domestic violence can also be impacted by the Habitual Residence Condition. The inability to prove one's connection to the state impacts women's capacity to access homeless and domestic violence accommodation services and makes it difficult for Roma women experiencing domestic and sexual violence to seek support and protection. It is also the situation that despite residing in Ireland for several years, Roma women may lack the necessary documentation, proof of address and/or language and literacy skills to prove their connection to the State.

For **women in and exiting the criminal justice system**, The two women's prisons in the State are operating over capacity (135% capacity in Dublin (201 women) and 155% capacity in Limerick (86 women)).¹⁵ In 2024 one third of women in prisons

¹³ Direct Provision is Ireland's system of accommodating those seeking international protection while in the asylum process.

¹⁴ Akiwda (2025) Amplifying Unheard Voices A Report on the Experiences of Migrant Women in Emergency Accommodation Centres.

¹⁵ These were the figures for Monday 15th Sept 2015. https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/15-September-2025.pdf (accessed 18th Sept 2025)

were there for minor (often survival) crimes and non-violent offences, while 12% of the women in prison had no fixed abode when they went into prison. The assumption that women will be able to access services they need when in prison is currently incorrect. Current levels of overcrowding mean that services are stretched to their limit, making very difficult for women to access appropriate gender-sensitive healthcare and other essential supports. Due to the capacity issues women are often released from prison after five days, only to find they have lost their accommodation and must start again. It was noted that Traveller women—who make up 16% of prisoners—are unlikely to disclose they are a parent for fear of Tusla involvement, which acts as a significant deterrent to access and fully engage with mainstream services and supports.

Women who are victims of trafficking. Organisations supporting women who are trafficked were concerned that trafficking is currently being hidden in plain sight as the operational guidelines for the reform of the national referral mechanism remain outstanding. Safe and gender-sensitive accommodation was identified as the pressing issue for victims of trafficking. Currently, there is just one eight bed unit available nationally and it is not available to women with children. This means that women who are victims of trafficking can often be found living within the International Protection Accommodation or less commonly within homeless services. In both situations, women and their families, often must deal with poor conditions and in some instances constant relocation. Because these practices replicate their experiences when they were originally trafficked, they can be the cause of re-traumatisation and can impact negatively on their mental health. This in turn can impact the ability and capacity of the women to provide the statements and testimony necessary to secure a conviction of traffickers, causing cases to collapse. The 2025 Ruhama Report “Room for Recovery: Housing Hope After Exploitation” which critically examines the state of accommodation for victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Ireland offers further insights in this area.¹⁶

Women experiencing addiction may be very reluctant to disclose domestic and/or sexual abuse for fear that their children could be taken away from them and into care. Addiction can also be a route into prostitution and homelessness (given some drugs including crack cocaine are very expensive). Women who use drugs and alcohol are also often in different stages of recovery and are often dealing with trauma from childhood. Trauma can lead to heightened stress responses, meaning that stability, predictability, and routine are important for recovery and wellbeing. Given this is the case, the freephone helpline (which is the gateway to homeless accommodation in Dublin) can be seen to be particularly challenging and re-traumatising for women experiencing addiction as they move between accommodation options trying to figure out where they will stay and whether they consider it safe. The question was raised at the event about whether systems designed primarily for bed allocation are meeting the needs of women with complex trauma and addiction. Women in these circumstances may be excluded or blamed for their difficulties engaging with services, which can reinforce stigma and further entrench trauma. A trauma-informed, gender-sensitive approach to housing and addiction services is therefore essential.

¹⁶ Ruhama. (2025). Room for Recovery: Housing Hope After Exploitation – Comparing Models of Accommodation for Victims of Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation. Dublin: Ruhama.

5. Potential Solutions

5.1. Overall Solutions

A series of solutions were identified from across the various inputs see Table 5.1 for a summary of these. Most of the identified solutions highlight the need for joint up implementation across the different sectors and Departments. The remainder of the section explores each solution in more depth.

Table 5.1 Summary of the solutions identified

- | |
|---|
| 1. Declare housing emergency and work to dramatically increase the supply of all types of housing across the country. |
| 2. Clearly recognise the mutually reinforcing relationship between homelessness and DSGBV across policies. |
| 3. Ensure that housing policy, homeless policy and DSGBV policy and practices are all survivor informed. |
| 4. Introduce a Housing First response to DSGBV based on the recognition that stable housing is critical to safety, to dealing with trauma and ultimately to recovery. |
| 5. Ensure all victims/survivors of DSGBV receive high quality trauma informed services, recognising that different women will need different solutions. |
| 6. Address the disconnect between homelessness, housing and Domestic Violence (DV) sectors and services. |
| 7. Make housing a human right. |
| 8. Improve access to legal protections. |
| 9. Investigate and address the relationship between homelessness and mental health. |
| 10. Better address the issue of perpetrator accountability. |

1. Declare a housing emergency and work to dramatically increase the supply of all types of housing across the country.

The declaration of a housing emergency would enable the government to prioritise the necessary resources to stop the homelessness situation getting worse. By declaring a housing emergency, the government would also be able to work to:

- Accelerate vacant and derelict properties coming on stream.
- Significantly increase the amount of social and cost rental accommodation being built, making them more affordable and accessible.
- Strengthen tenants' rights by removing the part 4 exceptions¹⁷ to the Residential Tenancies Act.
- Implement the findings arising from the ongoing review of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) thereby making it easier for tenants and landlords alike to navigate.
- Undertake earlier intervention and provide greater levels of resources for homeless prevention, e.g. via resourcing tenancy support services and invest in targeted campaigns for women at higher risk of losing their tenancies.
- Ensure a better gender balance within the membership of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

It was noted that bringing these solutions on stream will take time and interim solutions will need to be provided in the short to medium term.

2. Clearly recognise the mutually reinforcing relationship between homelessness and DSGBV.

DSGBV is indeed one of the leading causes of homelessness globally and is far more likely to affect women than men. Homelessness is therefore not gender-neutral with women and gender-diverse people experiencing high levels of hidden homelessness. It is also the case that homelessness increases exposure to gender-based violence. Specific actions that can address this include:

- Ensuring that DSGBV related homelessness (including women in refuge) numbers are counted, specifically referenced and included within the official homeless figures.
- Pilot a gendered approach in the successor to the National Youth Homeless Strategy which ends in 2025 and include a focus on young parents and migrants.
- Ensure the successor to the national Housing for All strategy includes the provision of accommodation for women experiencing DSGBV and for women who are homeless.
- Ensure the full implementation and resourcing of the Third National Strategy on DSGBV.

¹⁷ Property is going to be sold/is needed for a family member or /is going to be significantly refurbished.

- Ensure the learning arising from the implementation of the Third National Strategy on DSGBV informs the development of the Fourth National Strategy.
- Establish clear pathways to safe (emergency, medium and long-term) accommodation for victims/survivors of DSGBV.¹⁸
- Collect more inclusive, comprehensive consistent data on homelessness including homeless people in hospitals and prisons, those in direct provision centres or emergency reception centres/hotels, as well as homeless households in domestic violence refuges.

3. Ensure that housing policy, homeless policy and DSGBV policy and practices are all survivor informed.

Those who have lived with and through the realities of homelessness and DSGBV know best what needs to change in these areas. Policies and services have been found to benefit from experts by experience and lived experience input. The development of survivor informed policies is crucial to ensure that survivors receive the services they need. However, this work requires time and adequate resourcing. Cuan, as the coordination and implementing agency of the Third National Strategy, has a vital role in supporting the development of survivor centred policies and services. This needs to be acknowledged, appropriately resourced and connected at all levels, including relevant policies across departments. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and its Housing for All Strategy needs to include new measures to adopt a survivor informed approach, that could be informed by the work of CUAN.

4. Introduce a Housing First response to DSGBV based on the recognition that stable housing is critical to safety, to dealing with trauma and ultimately to recovery.

Access to safe accommodation in the short-term requires:

- The continuation of funding and support for emergency accommodation including Safe Houses¹⁹, 2) Homeless accommodation and 3) Refuge expansion, especially in those counties where there are currently no refuges.
- Introducing an enhanced assessment of emergency accommodation needs.
- The adoption of a Housing First approach to DSGBV, making it easier for local authority officials to prioritise victims/survivors of DSGBV. This would also require waiving the local connection requirement and the Habitual Residency Condition²⁰ requirement for acceptance onto the local Authority Housing List for individuals dealing with DSGBV.

¹⁸ Safe Ireland has a series of policy recommendations to address the intersection of domestic violence and housing insecurity that may be relevant in this context.

¹⁹ Currently not all local authorities are able to provide safe houses.

²⁰ The Habitual Residency Condition (HRC) is a requirement in Ireland that determines an individual's eligibility for certain social welfare payments based on their established residency status.

- Ensuring all accommodation has adequate and professionally trained staff (it was noted some locations out of hours services are solely reliant on security guards who are not trained to deal with trauma); and including the provision of ongoing training (including anti-racism and trauma-informed training) for the relevant housing staff to ensure they are client centered, and client led.
- Ensuring all providers of emergency accommodation are subject to the same standards, compliance, and inspection processes and that all publicly funded services must be accessible. Currently access to many of these locations is restricted, increasing the vulnerability of the residents living there. Recognition that while the plan to provide refuge accommodation in every county is welcome it is only a part of the solution.
- Ensuring universal design guidelines are applied across the range of accommodation options.

In the medium term there is a need to:

- Move away from the use of the for-profit sector to provide a range of homeless and International Protection accommodation on behalf of the state, especially for highly vulnerable and marginalised individuals/groups.

In relation to longer term accommodation there is a need to:

- Develop and provide clear pathways out of homelessness to stop women and their families getting stuck in emergency or short-term accommodation options. The creation of these pathways will require significant capital and multiannual funding to increase the range of long-term housing options for women and children.
- Ensure the most vulnerable are accommodated in social housing.

5. Ensure all victims/survivors of DSGBV receive high quality trauma informed services, recognising that different women will need different solutions.

Housing and accommodation services need to recognise that women have different needs in relation to DSGBV and offer a range of support options to meet these different needs. This involves:

- Ensuring women know their rights while also facilitating them to disclose safely.
- Embedding a trauma informed way of working, by recognising that trauma can be cumulative and needs to be dealt with as part of the recovery process, with services working to provide the right support at the right time.
- Putting in place a ‘safe at home’ scheme for women who make the decision to stay with a perpetrator.
- Recognising that context is important, in rural areas for example it can be harder to make the perpetrator leave the home where their business is attached or close by, for example, farming.

- Initial and ongoing training (including anti-racism training) of services staff to ensure they are client centered, and client led (rather than discriminatory, controlling and/or judgmental).
- Recognising the value of peer-mentors and advocates and working to support the provision of this type of services which can be seen to provide hope and offer practical solutions for individuals based on lived experience.

Reforming the existing Homeless Freephone services that people experiencing homelessness must use to access emergency accommodation, as service providers report this is retraumatising for many of the women they support.

6. Address the disconnect between homelessness, housing, and DV services.

This can be achieved by implementing service initiatives that directly address the intersection of DSGBV and homelessness/housing. Women (and children) who experience domestic and other forms of violence and abuse typically interact with multiple agencies and organisations involved in the delivery of shelter, housing, health and in many cases children's services. This highlights the need for improved coordination and integration across services (that include DSGBV services, housing services, child support services, health services as well as social protection services) to ensure consistent, trauma-informed, and effective responses. This would be facilitated by:

- Recognising that both housing and support needs must be prioritised, and services need to be appropriately and securely funded to work together to do this.
- Providing targeted funding to enable the operation of co-ordinated and integrated services for women and children experiencing DSGBV.

7. Make housing a human right.

The state must dramatically increase its own public provision of housing, focusing on the provision of social, cost-rental, and affordable homes. It is vital that the focus on housing is not purely about numbers – but on ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs, recognising the unique needs of different women, and that every person should have the right to a home. This would result in a move away from a market-based response to housing. This would have to include the provision of a diversity of culturally appropriate accommodation for diverse groups as well as for single individuals and larger families. The housing provided also needs to be secure, appropriate, and affordable. Leadership from Government and greater direct state intervention in the building of homes is essential to tackle this crisis and to homelessness.

- Increase investment in state-led housing for provision of public, affordable and cost-rental homes, gender-proofing all housing policies and investment.
- Revisit the recommendation arising from the work of the Housing Commission to hold a referendum on enshrining the right to housing in the Irish Constitution.

8. Improve access to legal protection/s.

Throughout the conference several challenges and barriers were identified in relation to the ability of survivors/victims to access legal protections. Solutions identified in this context included the following:

- Introduce strong legislation to ensure sex for rent exploitation is a specific offence.
- Removal of the means testing requirement for free legal aid in all cases of DSGBV.
- Ensure that victims/survivors can effectively access barring orders from the courts for all forms of abuse, not only physical abuse. Reform the courts to ensure that a no contact directive is a no contact directive in practice.

9. Investigate and address the relationship between homelessness and mental health.

There is a need for:

- The statutory sectors to undertake more work on the linkages between women's experiences of homelessness, gender-based violence and mental health.
- The community and voluntary sector to undertake more work on the linkages between women's experiences of homelessness, gender-based violence and mental health.
- The statutory and community and voluntary sector to work together to undertake more work on the linkages between women's experiences of homelessness, gender-based violence and mental health.

10. Address the issue of perpetrator accountability.

There is a need to focus on both perpetrator accountability and on the men who are using the services provided by victims of trafficking and by women in prostitution:

- In the case of domestic violence, there is a need to be able to remove and rehouse the perpetrator (rather than the victim/survivor—often the protective parent and child/children)
- Need to develop systems for better perpetrator management, including arrest and tagging.
- Perpetrators need to be brought before the courts, which provides accountability and justice for victims/survivors while also contributing to a fall in rates of recidivism.

5.2. Solutions for Specific Groups

Some groups of women – whether because of specific characteristics or life experiences – are more likely to experience DSGBV than others. Predators are often aware of certain vulnerabilities and target the women accordingly. Table 5.2 details the various solutions identified for these different groups.

Table 5.1 Solutions For Specific Groups of Women	
Disabled women	– The State needs to fulfil its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) with respect to the provision of universally designed homes services and supports. – Advocacy and support for disabled women by disabled women on issues relating to housing, accommodation, and DSGBV. – Resources to address issues of intersectionality and gaps in services where they arise.
Girls under 18 living in residential care	– Need to ensure that Children First legislation is not driving under 18s into emergency care by supporting parents to more effectively engage with social workers. – Where teenagers are taken into the care system, where it is appropriate, support their parent/s or guardian/s to get them out of this system. – Young women in the care system need trusted adults to help them navigate challenges and feel a sense of continuity.^{21 22} The creation of a trusted adult relationship takes time and can be challenging for the young person if there is ongoing turnover of staff. There is a need to support staff retention within the care system to enable young people build relationships with staff and feel comfortable to disclose what is going on.
Girls aged 18 who are ageing out of the formal care system	– Need to provide transitional support and safe accommodation for those ageing out of the formal care system.

²¹ wFor young people in care, a trusted adult is someone who will listen, advocate for them, and help them feel safe and respected, creating a vital connection that supports their well-being These individuals can be social workers or care staff but also other figures such as teachers, coaches, or trusted family friends.

²² <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/by3o0aru/someone-to-turn-to-report.pdf> (accessed 23rd Sept 2025)

Migrant Women	In the private rental sector	– Work with housing providers, accessing community support, and developing targeted programmes and platforms to address discrimination/racism and lack of transparency in the rental market.
	In the Direct Provision System	– The Direct Provision system needs to be overhauled or replaced with an alternative system that is based on human rights principles and the best interests of the child. – Official homeless statistics to be adjusted to include the number of people living in the International Protection System, making the Direct Provision numbers visible and transparent. – For women within the International Protection System dealing with DSGBV there is a need to establish a safe place for women to report their experiences prior to their arrival and indeed following their arrival. – Where incidences of DSGBV occur within the International Protection System they need to be independently investigated within an agreed timeframe. Women need to be clear that any such investigation will not affect their International Protection Application. – Women whose International Protection Applications were unsuccessful and who are facing deportation need to be accommodated in a safe and secure accommodation until such time as they are deported.
	Women who have their status and want to exit the Direct Provision System	– Women exiting the Direct Provision system can struggle to find affordable accommodation. The creation of an Approved Housing Body dedicated to providing accommodation for those given their status/leave to remain could support these exits.
	Immigrant Spouses	– Ensure the Immigration guidelines for victims of domestic abuse are effectively implemented to ensure that victims/survivors of domestic abuse who are in Ireland on a spousal/partner visa are granted Stamp 4 status.

Traveller and Roma Women	– Provision of culturally appropriate accommodation and services for Traveller and Roma women. – Waive the Habitual Residence Conditions (HRC) for Roma women who need to access supports because of DSGBV.²³
Victims of Trafficking The provision of safe, appropriate, stable and accessible accommodation is a prerequisite for the recovery and protection of this group of women	– The existing dedicated provision for victims of trafficking (Rose's Place) needs to be independently evaluated. – Additional provision is also needed in the form of different types of accommodation provided within a model of informed consent. This includes 1) Gender-specific, specialist shelters with wraparound support as a short-term option, 2) Step-down accommodation to support the transition from specialist shelter to own-door living and 3) Own door Approved Housing Body (AHB) accommodation in the community for victims (and their children) for a period of up to three years. – The allocation of this accommodation needs to be determined by individual needs and risk assessments, carried out by specialist caseworkers with intersectional and complex needs recognised and met. – Wraparound support for victims/survivors needs to be provided based on their individual needs, including but not limited to victims/survivors with children, pregnant victims/survivors and disabled victims/survivors, and those with intersectional needs. Targeted supports need to include case management, trauma support and counselling, specialist health service access and interpretation and legal support access. – A high level of regular and specialised training must be mandatory for all staff and personnel involved in managing or delivering housing services for this group. – The model should also include clear mechanisms for monitoring, inspection and oversight that cover all aspects of individual risk, general operation and infrastructure, whether the accommodation is operated by the State, AHBs or local authorities.

²³ The habitual residence condition (HRC) is a qualifying condition for various Irish social welfare entitlements. The condition is assessed using five factors, including your length of residence, employment, main centre of interest, and future, though the term "habitually resident" isn't legally defined

Women as they age	– The growing numbers of older women living in private rented accommodation into older age was touched on briefly by several speakers. Further consideration and research need to be undertaken in relation to the impact of and relationship with DSGBV for this specific group.
Women in prison/ Women at risk of going to prison	– Collect better data on women in prison where mental health is a significant issue.²⁴ – Invest more in both the prison service and the probation service. – Introduce more community-based sanctions with judges required to give a reason for custodial sentences. – Introduce a Bail Support Scheme, where services go to the individual.
Women experiencing addiction	– Expand the provision of gender sensitive and trauma informed housing solutions for women experiencing addiction. – Address the double stigma of addiction and prostitution in services.
Women in prostitution	– Recognise that poverty is often the cause/ or a significant contributory for prostitution. Introduce of long-term solutions to tackling poverty. – Provide gender sensitive and trauma informed housing solutions together with support for women exiting prostitution.

²⁴ IPRT have estimated that it would cost approximately 1 million euro to develop and introduce a mental health needs assessment in prison

Appendix 1 – Conference Agenda

- 9.30 – 9.40 Welcome and introductory remarks Orla O'Connor, NWC Director and Grainne Healy, Chairperson of the Conference
- 9.40– 10.15 Keynote speakers:
- James Browne, TD. Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Video)
 - Dr. Paula Mayock, Trinity College Dublin
 - Elizabeth Pena, Head of Service Delivery and Development at Cuan
- 10.15 – 11.15 **Panel 1:** DV as a key driver of homelessness amongst women and long-term housing solutions. Moderator: Denise Charlton, CFI. Inputs: Caroline Forde, Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, Sligo, Emma Reidy, Aoibhneas, Mary Louise Lynch, SiSi and Fiona Weldon, ILMI
- 11.30 – 11.30 **Break**
- 11.30– 12.45 **Panel 2:** The impact of housing precarity, institutional care, and Direct Provision system on the increased risk of sexual exploitation of women and children. Moderator: Shirley Scott, DRCC. Inputs Barbara Condon, Ruhama, Mary Patricia Acom, Akidwa, Ruth Breslin, SERP and Anne Marie O'Reilly, Threshold.
- 12.45 – 13.40 **Lunch**
- 13.40 – 13.50 Long-term survivor centred housing solutions. Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales (Video)
- 13.50– 14.40 **Panel 3:** Inclusive and accessible housing supports for all women. Moderator: Jennifer Okeke, NWC Chair. Inputs Gary Broderick, SAOL, Pauline McDonnell, Pavee Point. Colette O'Regan, LGBT Ireland and Saoirse Brady, the Irish Penal Reform Trust.
- 14.14– 15.30 **Panel 4:** Political party responses from housing and VAW perspectives. Moderator: Noeline Blackwell. Inputs Rory Hearne, TD - Social Democrats. Laura Harmon, Senator – Labour Party, Eoin Ó Broin, TD – Sinn Féin and Ruth Coppinger, TD - People Before Profit-Solidarity.
- 15.30 – 15.35 Closing remarks, Ivanna Youtchak, NWC VAW Coordinator

Appendix 2 – Examples of initiatives working outside of Ireland

Finland is working to eradicate long term homelessness by 2027 using a Housing First Approach.

In the United Kingdom they have appointed a dedicated Minister for Women and Equalities. England and Wales have appointed an Independent Domestic Abuse (including coercion) Commissioner for England and Wales²⁵. Their role is to create momentum, advise government and hold them to account in relation to their commitments, The Commissioner can also publish reports and request information from public bodies who are required to respond within 56 days. In relation to housing the current Commissioner is keen that consideration would not only be given to refuge, but also a range of other housing options. She is also keen to see a more holistic approach to housing and homelessness as well as an enhanced understanding of the complexity of women experiencing DSGBV in relation to their housing arrangements (in private rental, owner occupied with a mortgage, social housing) in what is being called a whole of housing approach. The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act made provision for women centred housing first, the provision of sanctuary services as well as a register of social landlords (who are supported) to accommodate DSGBV survivors.

In 2006, **Brazil** approved one of the most comprehensive and progressive law aimed at tackling domestic violence. Besides typifying the different forms of domestic violence, Law 11.340/2006– known as Maria da Penha Law¹⁰– alters the Penal Code and makes it possible to arrest aggressors in the act, or to have them arrested preventively when woman’s physical integrity is threatened. It also provides protective measures for woman under life threat, facilitating the issuing of temporary restraining orders and removal of the aggressor from home. In February 2012, the Brazilian Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Maria da Penha law, ruling that prosecutors may bring domestic violence cases regardless of whether the victim presses charges or not²⁶ (p.6)

Spain has established specialized courts to handle cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV), with courts of instruction for gender violence playing a central role in the judicial process. These courts, which began opening in 2005, are designed to provide a more focused and efficient response to gender violence cases and have specialized units to assess evidence and support victims. Each court handling gender violence cases has a Comprehensive Forensic Assessment Unit with forensic pathologists, psychologists, and social workers to assess medical, psychological, and social impacts. These courts exclusively deal with cases of domestic and gender violence, allowing for greater expertise and focus within the judicial system. An on-call service is available to handle emergency situations related to gender violence. Judges working in these specialized courts are required to undergo specific, mandatory training on gender violence.

²⁵ <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/> (accessed 18th Sept 2025)

²⁶ The World Bank (undated) Gender-Based Violence Country Profile – Brazil. (<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099071723163037876/pdf/P1769790ceb7ed0c80b5e705f557711d627.pdf>) (accessed 23rd Sept 2025)

In 2024 **the Australian Government** established the Leaving Violence Program as a permanent and ongoing financial support program for victim-survivors leaving a violent intimate partner relationship. The program provides people leaving intimate partner violence with individualised financial support packages including short-term referral services, risk assessments and safety planning to help leave violent relationships and build better lives .Up to \$5,000 is made available in financial support for the victim-survivor, in the form of up to \$1,500 in cash (or cash equivalent) and the rest as a pre-paid card for goods and services. It is estimated that this Leaving Violence Program will support over 36,000 victim-survivors each year.²⁷

²⁷ Dept of Social Services/Australian Government (2024) Empowering victim-survivors and targeting perpetrators of gender-based violence 2024–25 May Budget (<https://www.dss.gov.au/empowering-victim-survivors-and-targeting-perpetrators-gender-based-violence>) accessed 23rd Sept 2025.

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