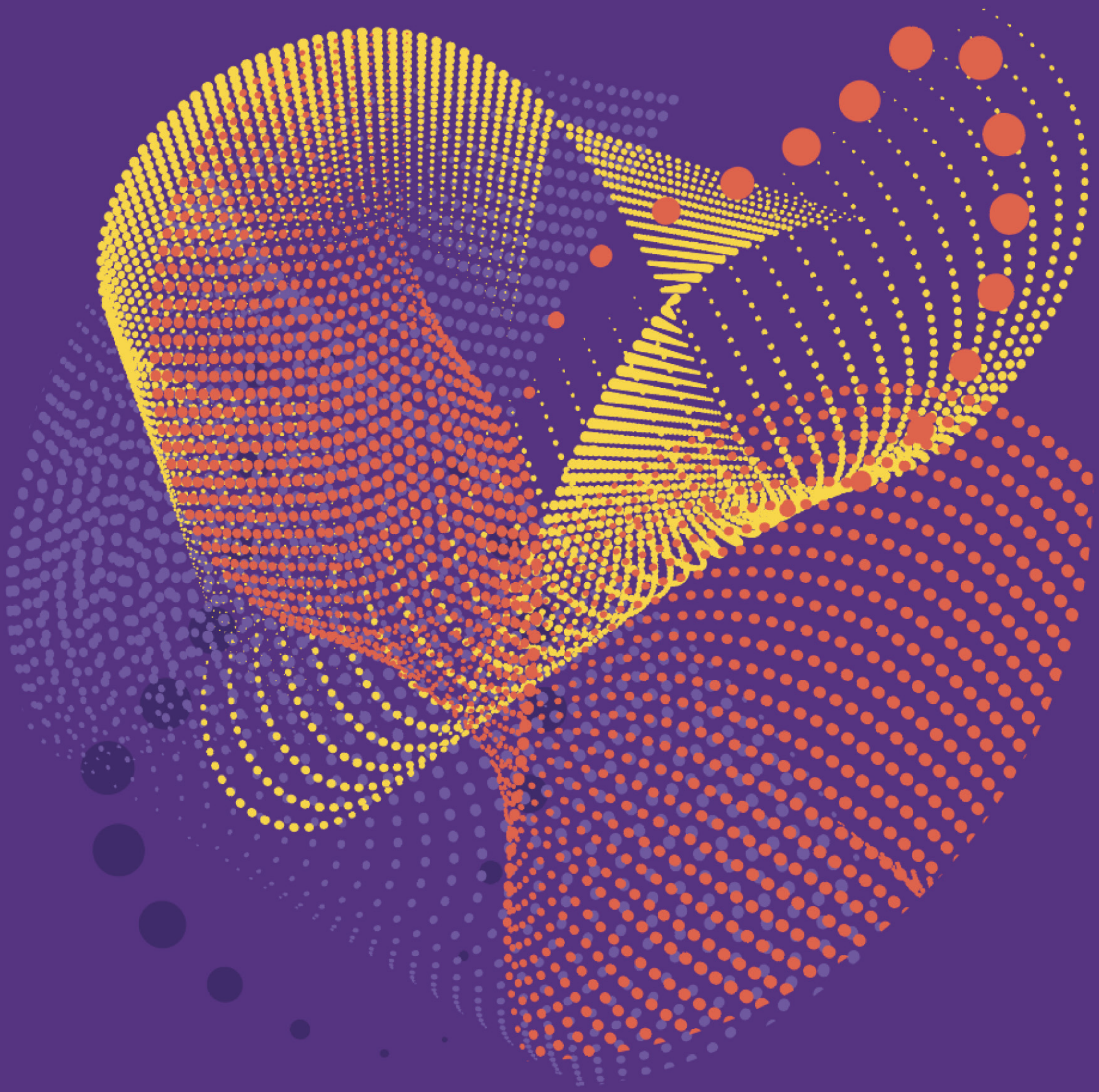
April 2026

Structures of Engagement for Survivors of Violence Against Women



Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women

National Women's Council

Acknowledgements

We sincerely acknowledge and thank all the women with lived experience of domestic, sexual and gender based violence who participated in this project, who shared their expertise and insights with us, and who participated in interviews, workshops and in the Learning Exchange. The experience, wisdom and commitment of survivors to create long-term change and an end to violence against women, for the benefit of all, is truly inspiring.

We would like to particularly acknowledge the experts by experience from the survivor-led organisations Survivors Informing Services and Institutions, and Beyond Surviving — Leyla Simsek, Mary Louise Lynch, Lucia Rovenco, Roseanne Keogh, Mairead Christie and Karen Handibode, whose invaluable insights, perspectives and lived experience have been vital to this report. Their leadership ensured that this work is grounded in lived experience and responsive to what survivors themselves identify as crucial to strengthen structures of engagement with and for survivors in Ireland.

We also thank the many professionals and agencies, including members of the National Women's Council and Violence Against Women Observatory, national and local services, government departments and agencies, who gave their time generously to share their expertise, in meetings and interviews. We also sincerely acknowledge and thank survivor advocates and professionals who participated in our international Learning Exchange, who have committed to continued dialogue to improve the way governments integrate survivors' expertise into their work .

National Women's Council acknowledge the support of Cuan and Community Foundation Ireland, which funded the Senior Policy Coordinator with a responsibility for Violence Against Women to undertake this research and produce this report. This research would not have been possible without their commitment to supporting projects to address gender-based violence and to meaningful survivor engagement.

Thanks to Eleri Butler, for delivering this project and authoring the report. Thanks also go to members of the Project Advisory Group and in particular, to Ivanna Youtchak, Senior Policy Coordinator with a responsibility for Violence Against Women at the National Women's Council, for overseeing the Project, coordinating discussion and agreement on the recommendations, and for contributing to the final Report.

We dedicate this report to Jennifer Jackson, an inspirational survivor advocate who sadly was too unwell to join the Learning Exchange as part of this project, and who tragically lost her life too soon. Following her role as Chair of the Victoria Victim Survivors Advisory Council, Jennifer continued to be a passionate and motivating leader who advocated for government accountability, for remembrance of lives lost and the potential those lives held, and for a future free from violence against women.

"We are more than our story. It is only through survivors' generosity, who draw on traumatic times in their lives, that we can hope to ensure governments' responses meet the expectations of all of us with lived experience".

"It is vital that governments resource survivor engagement structures, to introduce the best legislation, provide early support for survivors to rebuild lives, to hold perpetrators to account, and for communities to achieve prevention. Centring our voice and expertise means the work is more effective, so will lead to bigger savings in the long run, but most importantly will lead to freedom from violence for everyone." (Jennifer Jackson)

Contents

Executive Summary

This project explored the potential options to support the development and implementation of survivor-centred structures for engagement in Ireland. It focussed on considerations for developing a more consistent and effective national survivor engagement framework, informed by survivors and stakeholders across civil society organisations and government departments. Learning from promising practice in other jurisdictions was also a central feature of the project.

This project builds on the Observatory and its members' long-standing commitment to an intersectional approach to policymaking and service provision, placing women's voices – particularly those of victim-survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) – at the heart. It further draws on the literature review developed by the Observatory in 2024, supported by Community Foundation Ireland, which explored the importance of embedding lived experience of DSGBV in policy as a form of expertise in its own right. This review has strengthened collaboration with Cuan to advance its commitments, as well as those set out in the Third National Strategy on DSGBV and the forthcoming Fourth National Strategy. In particular, it supports the development and implementation of survivor structures of engagement in tackling DSGBV.

Common themes identified

There is already substantial work carried out by services to incorporate survivors' experiences to inform their national advocacy, and their responses to government consultations. However, government efforts and understanding of survivor engagement were felt to be inconsistent across departments.

The majority felt that the nature of survivor engagement should move beyond episodic testimony towards a combination of advocacy, decision shaping, co-design, and system oversight. Multi-annual funding was considered vital, including for enhancing specialist services' capacity to support lived experience engagement. Given the pressure on existing DSGBV services and organisations, funds should not be diverted from their vital work to resource an engagement framework.

Any new framework should be co-designed with survivors, alongside specialist DSGBV and community advocacy services, and it should include clearly defined pathways to named decision-makers responsible for reporting back on recommendations. Any engagement framework should also be sustainably resourced to deliver a model that is inclusive and accessible, and "intersectional by design", which takes into account sex, disability, gender identity, sexuality, age, geographic location, and people from Traveller and Roma communities, Black, migrant and minoritised communities, that interact to shape experience, barriers and opportunities, trauma and recovery.

It was a priority raised by several participants that survivor engagement should not be tokenistic, and that diverse perspectives should be included at every stage of the framework's design, development, implementation and review. This included ensuring survivors from diverse communities participate in the co-design process, using recruitment processes into national boards and regional forums that prioritise equity, diversity and inclusion, and working alongside specialist organisations and networks led by and for the communities they serve, to reach out to and offer support to survivors from under-represented communities. Other measures suggested to maximise equity and diversity included equitable remuneration and reimbursement; trauma-responsive approaches that create a culturally safe environment; reflective spaces, peer support and coaching, and embedding coproduction, accountability and review.

Most participants outlined the need to build the readiness of government departments and its agencies to engage meaningfully with survivors. It was strongly recommended by civil society organisations that specialist services and survivors should be resourced to engage, informed by a public service trained to receive their advocacy. It was mainly civil society organisations and survivors that felt a survivor engagement framework should also prioritise regional and local systems for engagement. Many civil society organisations and survivors felt strongly that whereas a shift from consultation with survivors led by one or two government departments and agencies would be significant progress, embedding survivor engagement across all relevant government departments and moving towards power redistribution in the long term would be desirable. Civil servants predominantly felt that any new framework should be led by Cuan.

A survivor led national board was proposed by a majority of participants, chaired by survivors, with membership spanning DSGBV experiences and diverse identities with defined scope over strategy, legislation, services and campaigns. It was suggested that thematic groups could be established depending on survivors' interests and/or experience as well as opportunities within government-identified public policy priorities, for example, related to the family courts, publicity campaigns and/or a focus on specific forms of violence, such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, trafficking, prostitution, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, or stalking.

Further themes and feedback from participants; learning and promising practice from Ireland and other countries; suggestions for principles and enablers; and full details of the recommendations for action, are included in the Report.

A framework for Ireland: recommendations

The National Observatory on Violence Against Women has long advocated for a national survivor engagement framework, that should be relevant for government agencies and departments, policy makers, strategy leads and funders, public services and local government.

These are its immediate and longer-term recommendations for a framework for survivor engagement in Ireland. Prioritised and structured across two phases, these aim to build on existing forms of engagement with survivors from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, while also leveraging national and regional opportunities.

Phase 1: Recommendations for implementation in the short term

1 **Co-design and co-production process established by Cuan**
Cuan should establish a timely co-design and co-production process for creating the survivor engagement framework, and standards and protocols that underpin it. This process should involve survivors and DSGBV and community advocacy organisations, who advocate on behalf of survivors and can bring a collective voice of discriminated against groups, to co-design the survivor engagement framework, standards, and protocols.

2. **Responsibility for survivor engagement mechanisms should be assigned to and led by Cuan**
Informed by feedback from stakeholders and survivors who contributed to this report, consideration should be given to establishing a national survivor-chaired **Lived Experience Advisory Council**, incorporated into existing DSGBV governance structures led by Cuan and Department of Justice. ***This Lived Experience Advisory Council should be established alongside existing engagement mechanisms with DSGBV services and representative organisations***.

Survivor membership:

2.1 An open call for recruitment should be made, for survivors to join the Council, informed by clear role descriptions, and this would include appointment of a Chair and Vice Chair, within the process.

2.2 Recruitment should be open to people with experience of different forms of DSGBV, including family members bereaved through homicide/femicide or suicide, recognising that survivors appointed would not be representative of all survivors or of all experiences of forms of abuse. It should clarify remuneration commitments at the point of recruitment.

2.3 Careful attention should be given within the recruitment process to prioritising survivors under-represented within service systems, from diverse communities with experience of intersecting forms of discrimination (e.g. survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, from urban and rural areas, survivors who are disabled, younger and older, from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities), and with lived experience of different and/or multiple forms of DSGBV (e.g. trafficking and sexual exploitation, sexual violence, coercive control, FGM, forced marriage, stalking and harassment, families bereaved through femicide).

2.4 Survivors appointed to the Council should not be expected to talk about their own experience of DSGBV, nor advocate for their personal experience; they would draw on their own lived experience to advocate for systems and service improvements, to benefit all survivors of DSGBV collectively.

2.5 Appointment should be on a three-year basis, including time allocated for survivors to be trained and supported to undertake survivor advocacy, at the outset. Training may be provided by DSGBV specialist agencies or professionals experienced in survivor advocacy and government advocacy mechanisms.

Operation:

2.6 The Council should operate on survivor led agendas ("come to our table") and have the option to invite cross government senior-level attendance to report on departmental progress and priorities, to avoid this becoming a 'talking-shop' or being inundated with government priorities, papers or presentations.

2.7 Themed or targeted sub-groups should be agreed by survivors, which may include thematic consideration of priorities within Ireland's Programme for Government. Groups may also emerge from identified opportunities for influence and draw on relevant lived experience and expertise (e.g. Family Law Courts, FGM).

2.8 The Council's work should be supported by appropriate funding, by senior civil servants supporting the framework's intent, and by secretariat and development support.

2.9 The Council's mandate should include advising ministers, government departments and its agencies on DSGBV related policy, legislation, and service design (not only DSGBV specific issues); co production of national guidance and implementation of strategy delivery plans; commissioning; campaigns; and include a mandatory feedback loop to participants.

2.10 The Council's Chair and Vice Chair should be offered mentoring support from an independent and suitably experienced DSGBV leader.

Safety and support:

2.11 Safety is a significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. Safety should be maximised, voluntary participation and informed consent should be prioritised, access to support services should be available in parallel to engagement, and options should be available to enable survivors to participate in discussions in ways that are accessible and safe for them. For many survivors, distrust of state systems is also shaped by fears relating to state interventions, which must be recognised in engagement design.

Values and principles:

2.12 Agreeing values and principles, from the outset, is also an enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. The survivor engagement framework, standards and protocols should be guided by principles developed by survivors. It is suggested these include being DSGBV- and trauma-informed; doing no harm and maximising support and safety; recognising that survivors are experts by experience; accountability, inclusion and anti-discrimination.

3. National consultation to inform the Fourth National DSGBV Strategy

A national consultation process should be commissioned (with survivors, services and DSGBV advocacy groups informed by survivors' lived experience) to inform priorities within the future National DSGBV strategy.

3.1 The consultation should be delivered in collaboration with the Observatory, survivor-led agencies and DSGBV membership organisations.

3.2 Survivors should feature in the consultation as standalone stakeholders.

3.3 Engagement should be sensitive of DSGBV, anti-racist, rights-based and trauma-informed approaches and pay attention to language, literacy, digital exclusion and other access needs. It should prioritise accessibility, safety, confidentiality and inclusion of survivors from discriminated against communities, those who have experienced diverse forms of DSGBV, and who are often furthest away from services and systems. This includes survivors who are disabled, younger and older, from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities, and for survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, survivors from urban and rural areas, and survivors of different forms of DSGBV.

The Observatory, working with national DSGBV membership organisations, should continue to engage with Cuan and government departments, on delivery of these recommendations.

3.4 Funding and Strategy Commitment – Department of Justice and Cuan
The proposed new survivor engagement framework should be a commitment that is prioritised in Ireland's national DSGBV Strategy. In the short term, this will include a cost analysis of the establishment and implementation of a national Lived Experience Advisory Council, with particular consideration given to this operating alongside exiting mechanisms, not diverting resources from specialist services, ensuring sufficient remuneration for survivors, and resources to meet the support costs associated with participation.

Phase 2: Long-term recommendations for a sustainable and flexible structure

4. Sustainable funding

Resourcing is a significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. Resources for survivor engagement should be sustainable and not divert from resources from DSGBV organisations. It should be the responsibility of the Department of Justice and Cuan to secure sustainable budget for this work, whilst working on establishment of the structure with survivors, the Observatory, survivor-led agencies and DSGBV organisations. This should prioritise resourcing both individual lived experience and expertise, and the collective expertise held within survivor advocacy organisations. Resourcing considerations should also include:

4.1 Recognition that community/advocacy organisations bring a collective voice from discriminated groups, and that commitments should also align with relevant national commitments, including the National Action Plan Against Racism, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and the National Strategy for Women and Girls.

4.2 Prioritising survivors' appropriate remuneration, in ways that consider risks to immigration status or eligibility for social welfare, housing, healthcare or immigration supports. Resourcing models must include clear safeguards to ensure participation does not undermine access to social welfare supports, medical cards, housing supports or other entitlements.

4.3 Removing barriers to engagement, training and support for co-production, evaluation and review, contributing funds to independent survivor networks, and funding for existing approaches, including for:

  - organisations who analyse data on anonymised experiences to inform their advocacy,
  - services that support survivors' involvement in policy advocacy or in speaking publicly,
  - survivor-led organisations, established to provide connection, advocacy and voice and to support women to be recognised as experts.

5. Promoting choice: more than a 'one size fits all' approach

The survivor engagement framework should be sufficiently structured yet flexible to maximise choice and ensure engagement is inclusive of people's diverse identities and experiences, including, for example, substance use, mental health support needs, homelessness, involvement in the justice system, and experiences of multiple forms of violence. It should offer safe, accessible and meaningful engagement opportunities for DSGBV survivors. This should be resourced separately, and not at the expense of funding for DSGBV organisations and happen alongside resources for agencies and membership organisations that already support survivors to participate, or who undertake national advocacy informed by survivors. Dedicated resources for survivor engagement should not be diverted from existing resources allocated to DSGBV organisations.

6. Other flexible mechanisms for survivor engagement

Reliance on one state agency to represent survivors' diverse experiences, or on designing processes that serve specific strategy or policy needs, would be progress, but it would not be sufficient. There was strong support for flexible and diverse mechanisms for more consistent and meaningful survivor engagement, in knowledge-production and policy-making processes, and a need for clarity on how to achieve this, nationally and locally.

It is vital the framework should include opportunities for anonymous input, small group dialogue, creative methods for engagement, peer advisers and researchers, and be accessible for language, literacy and digital inclusion needs. Enabling parallel anonymous participation is essential for survivors who fear state surveillance, data sharing, or community repercussions. Creative and flexible methods can also increase safety and accessibility. For example:

6.1 Anonymous participation and capturing survivors' voices via specialist services, including the continuation of anonymised data analysis that is disaggregated by characteristics such as sex, gender, race or ethnicity, Traveller and Roma, disability, sexuality, and age.

6.2 Resourcing services who already support survivor engagement, for example, engagement with survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, people who have been subject to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, survivors of sexual violence, coercive control, FGM and forced marriage. Targeted engagement would also be needed with disabled people, people from LGBT, Traveller, Roma, and migrant communities.

6.3 Encourage survivor advocacy and activism independent of government power structures by fostering a culture of survivor activism and movement-building. National DSGBV membership organisations could be jointly resourced to establish a national network of DSGBV survivors, that may include online spaces and in-person convenings to build alliances around shared priorities. This would enable safe spaces for survivors to engage independent of government structures, and for survivor activists to connect across issues, generations, and geographies and contribute to a survivor activist movement.

7. National and local opportunities, supported by standards and protocols

The framework should combine national and local opportunities for safe and accessible engagement pathways for survivors with trusted routes into participation, including for Traveller and Roma survivors, disabled survivors, younger and older people, survivors from LGBT, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities, and with lived experience of different and/or multiple forms of DSGBV. Local engagement structures are vital for discriminated against communities and should be clearly linked to national processes. These opportunities should be supported by survivor engagement standards and ethical engagement protocols, grounded in safety, trauma-informed and anti-discriminatory practice, power-sharing, transparency and accountability.

Further consideration should be given to how national and local structures for survivor engagement might connect in future, without overriding existing arrangements.

7.1 For example, several participants suggested that national structures could be 'mirrored' regionally/locally, in the form of a 'hub and spokes' model, involving dedicated survivor-led scrutiny and action panels, which have a clear upward reporting to the national Council.

7.2 Regional Survivor Panels could be aligned with existing organising or partnership structures without duplicating existing arrangements, including, for example:

- An Garda Síochána divisions,
- Local authority/county structures, and
- Multi agency partnerships (links to community safety partnerships was preferred).

7.3 Regional survivor panels and the national Lived Experience Advisory Council could appoint survivors to existing relevant partnership forums and boards. This would not be instead of safe, trusted and accessible survivor engagement structures, and could include, for example, designating two survivor representative seats from national and regional survivor panels, at existing partnership structures, like the:

- Homelessness Consultative Forums,
- Community Safety Partnerships, and
- HSE regional service user engagement structures.

8. Build capacity and readiness for meaningful engagement, with a focus on governance and leadership, an integrated approach, and power sharing

Capacity building is another significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. While governance structures will evolve over time, clarity and transparency on independence, oversight and leadership will be important from the outset, to prevent conflicts of interest, support meaningful engagement, and build trust with survivors who have experienced harmful state-led interventions. The Observatory and DSGBV organisations, including those representing discriminated against communities, should be included in relevant structures and collaborate in ensuring inclusivity and accountability. Whilst the framework is being co-designed, attention should be given by the Department of Justice (as policy and legislative lead for DSGBV) to ensure government departments and public services are ready to engage meaningfully with survivors, by:

8.1 Establishing cross-departmental collaboration and mechanisms to embed survivor engagement in policy-making; securing leadership for survivor engagement within relevant departments; and addressing the perceived lack of readiness of some departments and agencies to engage meaningfully with survivors.

8.2 Ensuring civil servants (who are usually not specialist) have a good understanding of survivor engagement methods, and are trained in DSGBV and trauma informed approaches, and anti racism and anti-discrimination, that is inclusive of anti-Traveller and Roma racism, LGBT and disability inclusion. DSGBV, trauma informed and anti-discriminatory training, that is inclusive of anti- Traveller and Roma racism, should also be mandatory for those who facilitate engagement. While training programmes can evolve, it is important that such basic mandatory training is provided from the outset, to ensure engagement is safe, respectful and meaningful.

8.3 Capacity building services to support survivors to participate. The creation of 'lived experience' coordination roles in specialist organisations should be considered to support survivor engagement capacity-building.

8.4 Supporting survivor engagement to be embedded across government, not confined to Cuan. For survivor engagement to have most impact commitment to it should be integrated into and across all relevant strategies, policies, service and programme areas. This should be supported by integrated whole-of-government collaboration and coordination between national and local panels and partnerships.

Power sharing and redistribution is another significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. This is predicated on understanding that survivors' expertise be valued as equivalent to traditional sources of data; the need to disrupt harmful systems that retraumatise survivors or enable violence; and the need to actively challenge sexism, racism, disablism and all forms of discrimination and oppression, within a rights-based approach. It is not enough for survivors to have "a seat at the table"; those who want to meaningfully engage should also show up at survivors' "tables" at which survivors shape agendas, priorities, strategies and decisions. Power-sharing also requires recognising collective experience and community knowledge as valid forms of evidence, alongside individual testimony and other data.

9. Accountability and reporting on progress

Once the framework is co-designed and agreed, the co-design of toolkits for structured, creative, and alternative options for accessible and anonymised participation should follow, supported by guidance on accountability and evaluation mechanisms. Evaluation will be essential to ensure transparency and prevent engagement fatigue, and it should assess whether the framework works equitably for survivors from discriminated against communities.

Survivor-led accountability mechanisms should include accessible reporting on what has changed as a result of engagement, feeding back to survivors on the impact of their engagement. Survivor-led organisations should also be resourced to deliver a mechanism of annual accountability to survivors, in the form of a survivor-led forum or event, co-chaired by the responsible minister and survivor, to which senior government and agency leaders would be invited to report on progress and address issues prioritised by survivors.

The Observatory, working with national DSGBV membership organisations, should also advocate for a national DSGBV Commissioner or Adviser, as suggested by several participants, to obtain political support for such a monitoring body independent of government departments and agencies, which would include coordination bringing the voice of survivors to government Ministers and departments and holding them to account for strategy and policy delivery.

1.

Introduction

Section 1. Introduction

There is growing interest from, and commitment by, policy makers, practitioners, legislators, funders, and leaders to understanding the best ways to meaningfully involve people with lived experience of domestic, sexual and gender based violence (DSGBV) in work to prevent these human rights violations.

There is also an increasing commitment by professionals to centre survivors' lived experience as a form of evidence and knowledge. There are several potential benefits to doing so, including growth in the personal or professional development of those involved, and an improvement in the way such work is designed, delivered, and what it achieves. There may also be challenges and pitfalls to overcome, which should be identified and mitigated from the outset, to ensure meaningful engagement is ethical, purposeful and accompanied by pathways to sustainable support.

This project explored the potential options to support the development and implementation of DSGBV survivor-centred structures for engagement in Ireland. It focussed on considerations for developing a more consistent and effective national survivor engagement framework that captures breadth and depth of experience. Consultation with survivors and stakeholders across civil society organisations and government departments considered what may be effective models for development and implementation in Ireland, alongside learning from promising practice in other jurisdictions. This report presents key findings from data and literature reviewed, and recommendations for implementing learning.

Background

The National Observatory on Violence Against Women (the Observatory) in Ireland was established in 2002 and is chaired and convened by the National Women's Council (NWC). The Observatory (see Appendix One) has historically advocated for an intersectional approach to policy making and service provision with women's voices - particularly those who are victim survivors of domestic sexual and gender-based violence - at the heart. The Observatory is an independent network of grassroots and national civil society organisations, and members come together regularly to monitor progress on work to prevent and respond to DSGBV in Ireland. This includes commitments in the Council of Europe *Convention on Preventing and Combatting all forms of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence* (Council of Europe, 2011). The Observatory provides space for organisations to collaborate to improve policies, strategies and practice, helps raise visibility of DSGBV, and links with the European Women's Lobby European Observatory on Violence against Women.

In 2021, an audit of structures in Ireland in relation to DSGBV identified that future strategies needed to focus on interventions that had *"the victim at their centre."* (Department of Justice, 2021). The Irish Government's Third National Strategy on DSGBV (2022-2026) committed to

> *"Recognise the voice of the victim-survivor (adults and children and young people) and provide an opportunity for their voices to be heard at different levels … - Strengthen consultative structures to engage victim-survivors, children, civil society, and sectoral organisations on the implementation of this Strategy, the development of services, research and public awareness campaigns. (4.7.1).* (Department of Justice, 2022)

The Third National Strategy also provided for the establishment of Cuan, to lead the monitoring, coordination, and reporting on the strategy's implementation by 22 partners, both Government Departments and Statutory Agencies. The intention was for this new government agency to drive progress on preventing DSGBV and responding to the diverse needs of survivors, work collaboratively, and ensure appropriate service provision to meet the diverse needs of survivors. It was also a priority between 2023 and the third Implementation Plan of the Zero Tolerance Strategy, 2025-2026, for Cuan to establish strong governance, oversight and reporting structures for implementation, that align with its corporate governance structure and utilise existing partner structures.

Following the Observatory's monitoring of the Strategy's implementation, it found there was an absence of survivors' voices being placed front and centre of delivery across all pillars of work (National Women's Council, 2023). In 2024, the Observatory also produced a report that summarised engagement approaches and models used in other jurisdictions, to inform discussion in Ireland on this topic. The same year, Cuan committed to co-develop an engagement model that ensures an intersectional approach to meeting needs and places the voice of survivors, including children, at the centre. In its 2025-2027 Corporate Plan, Cuan also committed to integrate "*lived experiences of victim survivors into all aspects of its work"* and ensure *"responses to domestic, sexual and gender based violence are grounded in robust data, research, evidence and the lived experiences of victim-survivors"*; progress would be measured by the *"integration of victims-survivors' voices into research and data programmes."* (Cuan, 2025).

This project built on the Observatory's 2024 report on engagement approaches, and aligned with Cuan's commitments to embed lived experience, and aims to support a future survivor-centred focus. The project also recognises that survivor-led organisations have indicated there continues to be a significant gap in Ireland regarding mechanisms to learn from real-time lived experience, as an important evidence-base for the improvement of services, and to inform policy and legislators. The options for structures for survivor engagement in Ireland were explored, with a focus on young people aged 16+ and adults, in recognition of existing mechanisms[1] to engage children in Ireland in accordance with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

---

[1] For example, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in Ireland has adopted the Lundy model of child participation for its organisation and funded partners, which focusses on children's rights to participation across four interrelated elements: 'space' (provision of a safe and inclusive space to invite children's views); *'voice'* (supporting children to express their view); *'audience'* (views must be listened to), and *'influence'* (views must be acted on as appropriate). Hub na nÓg is also a national centre of excellence and coordination in children and young people's participation in decision making, which supports Ireland's government departments, state agencies, public service and non-government organisations in providing opportunities for children to participate in decision-making, with a particular focus on those that are seldom-heard.

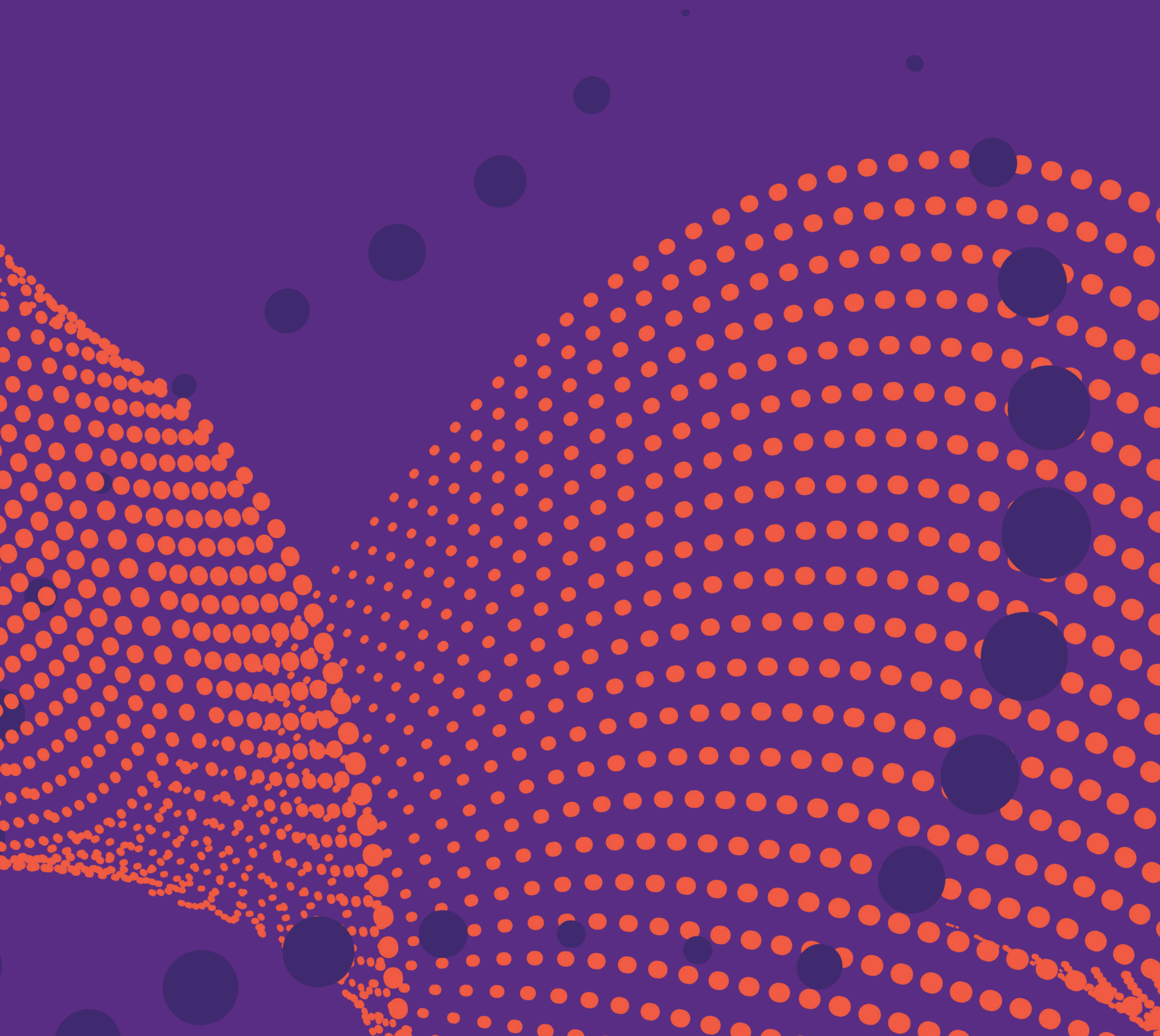
This project was led by an independent consultant (see Appendix Four), appointed by the National Women's Council, who worked with the Observatory and an Advisory Group, which identified groups and agencies to participate in the project. Individual and group meetings with participants explored views on and suggested models for survivor engagement structures, and made recommendations for taking this work forward. This report is informed by their feedback, a review of earlier work and relevant literature, reflections from an international learning exchange, and Advisory Group advice.

This will be used by the Observatory to inform Cuan's and the Department of Justice's work in relation to DSGBV services, strategy, policy and public awareness. The learning will also help inform public services' and other government departments' approaches to survivor engagement.

What follows, is a summary of the methodology, anonymised key findings from data and cross cutting themes identified (Section 2). This is followed by promising practice examples (Section 3), principles that should inform future work (Section 4), and recommendations for implementing learning (Section 5).

2.

Consultation with services, survivors and professionals



Section 2. Consultation with services, survivors and professionals

This project had the following objectives:

To explore the understanding of survivor engagement approaches and perspectives of identified stakeholders in government departments, civil society organisations and survivors in local communities.

To consider suggested promising practices and learning in relation to survivor engagement, with a focus on practice in identified comparative jurisdictions.

To consider the benefits of, and ways of achieving, meaningful survivor engagement, and

Make recommendations for developing and delivering a survivor engagement framework in Ireland.

Methodology

A Project Advisory Group was established, chaired and led by NWC, that included representatives of the Observatory, Cuan and the Department of Justice. Between September and December 2025, sixteen consultation meetings were held, which were in the form of a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, conducted by the independent consultant. These variously comprised discussions with specialist DSGBV service leaders, survivor led organisations, survivors of DSGBV, leaders of national and local civil society organisations, researchers, leaders in public services and civil servants working across government departments and agencies on the implementation of the Third National Strategy on DSGBV.

All participants were invited to take part, informed by discussion with the project's Advisory Group. All but two were able to participate, and some also provided supplementary written information. All were advised their contribution would inform the development of this report, on behalf of the Observatory. Background information about the independent consultant was provided, meeting guidance and information was shared in advance, setting out how the sessions would run and how the information discussed would be used. All participation was voluntary, and participants could stop the discussion at any time. Survivors who were not part of an existing organisation were remunerated for their time and expertise.

It was confirmed that any information shared in meetings would be anonymised and non-attributable in the final report. On occasion, feedback may be attributed to groups of respondents, for example, to civil or public servants, civil society organisations or survivors, where relevant; however, individuals would remain unidentifiable. Some anonymised quotes may be used where, for example, suggestions for good practice were made; again, these would not be identifiable.

The report content may be used to inform a summary presentation of findings, at the discretion of the Observatory. However, no further research will be undertaken or content produced from the data gathered, other than this report. No personal details were held, and participants' contact details were shared only with their consent; the information from interviews and groups would be destroyed following completion of the report.

This report is informed by data obtained following engagement with the agencies and individuals below, with those who joined the international Learning Exchange in October 2025, and a review of relevant grey literature suggested by the project Advisory Group (see Appendix Five).

Organisations and individuals invited to participate in the project

Civil Society Organisations:

Observatory on Violence Against Women members (group meetings – see Appendix One), plus individual meetings with Observatory members Akina Dada wa Africa (AkiDwA), Beyond Surviving, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Ruhama, SAOL Project, Survivors Informing Services and Institutions (SiSi); and invites to participate were extended to:

Independent Living Movement Ireland,
LGBT Ireland,
Rape Crisis Ireland, and
Safe Ireland.

Survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Ireland, supported by survivor-led services. This included a focus group with six survivors who agreed to participate in and advise on the project.

Civil and public servants:

An Garda Síochána.
Courts Service.
Cuan.
Department of Children, Disability and Equality.
Department of Health.
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration.
Health Service Executive.
Probation Service.
Tusla.

Learning Exchange participants:

Cuan.
Department of Justice.
Observatory on Violence Against Women members.
Australian Commissioner's Office for Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence.
Family Safety Victoria, Victoria Government.
Victim Survivors Advisory Council (outgoing co-Chairs), Victoria.
Welsh Government National Adviser.
Survivor Scrutiny, Voice and Involvement Panel member.
Welsh Women's Aid (national membership body for domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women specialist services).
England and Wales Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office.
National Women's Council.

Summary of findings

Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations identified the work they already do to involve and support survivors of DSGBV with their service developments, delivery and review, and to inform their advocacy on policy and system improvements locally and nationally. The importance of government departments engaging effectively and consistently with national and local DSGBV specialist services[2] and specialist 'by and for' services[3] was overwhelmingly reinforced. These organisations represent the experiences of survivors from discriminated against communities or who feel too unsafe or are unable to be visible advocates.

Adopting flexible mechanisms to engage survivors to improve services – and crucially, not having a 'one size fits all' approach – was considered vital by civil society organisations. It was emphasised that models of appointing individual survivors cannot be done at the expense of representative organisations, and that multiple perspectives should be valued. It was noted that representative organisations hold collective experience and knowledge from the communities they serve. This perspective is built through lived realities and cannot be replaced or sidelined by individual participation alone. Many services were also either founded by survivors and/or also include employees with lived experience within governance and staffing structures. For many, their delivery of gender-responsive services is by specially trained staff with an in-depth knowledge, informed by lived and learned experience of DSGBV. Some organisations also undertake targeted recruitment of survivors or use survivor led design and programme delivery.

Many national organisations advocated the need for capacity building, peer discussions, and women's groups to inform solutions related to accessing services, and to address gaps in education and prevention initiatives. The relevance of services to different communities, and the need for inclusivity and non-discrimination to be central to DSGBV policy, strategy and service responses, was also highlighted as a priority.

Civil society organisations provided examples of what they currently did to ensure their advocacy continues to be informed by and centred lived experience (see below, promising practice). They also identified several issues of concern with the way survivors' views, or their involvement had been sought. For example, they criticised ad hoc, inconsistent and unstructured approaches to engagement by government departments, which they felt tended to favour engagement with some services over others, and therefore heard from the survivors they supported and not others, rather than being open to all DSGBV services. It was also noted that Ministers and government departments tend to meet survivors who successfully engaged with them, including at the request of survivors, their family

---

[2] Specialist services differ from generic services because they are independent from the state, were established either (1) as local, grassroots and independent organisations, to deliver specifically support survivors affected by domestic, sexual or gender-based violence, or (2) national membership organisations for these services. Lived experience is represented within governance and staffing structures, their delivery of gender-responsive services is by specially trained staff with an in-depth knowledge of DSGBV.

[3] Specialist 'by and for' services are run by and for the communities they serve, such as for Black and Global Majority/ migrant women, Deaf and disabled survivors and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, and the client group is reflected in staffing, management, and governance structures.

or representatives. Many felt engagement was often too late in the policy process, and consultation with survivors felt tokenistic, if it happened at all. Survivors who experience systemic barriers to accessing support or who wanted to remain anonymous were less likely to be heard.

Several DSGBV organisations also gave the example that they had not been consulted on recent DSGBV awareness campaigns promoted nationally, and that dissemination channels chosen would exclude the communities they served, who faced multiple discrimination and therefore would have benefitted from targeted approaches. It was confirmed these were developed with the engagement of existing survivor panels, and publicity was disseminated across print, digital and broadcast media, and in cafés, public transport, on billboards and in pubs, on dating apps and other platforms. It was acknowledged that tailored approaches for specific groups may be necessary, and this would be incorporated into the campaign roll-out.

Civil society organisations called for earlier involvement and more structured and resourced targeted engagement, which included co design with communities where relevant, and where access, inclusion and safe routes to speak out had been prioritised. Support to engage in consultations and language accessibility was also identified as important.

Several organisations said that survivors' expertise should be remunerated, and that this should be considered within the context of risks to immigration status or eligibility for social welfare payments. Some organisations suggested that a national policy on remuneration should be introduced, to avoid unintended consequences, if a national survivor engagement framework was established.

Most organisations raised concerns about the readiness of government departments and agencies to engage meaningfully with survivors, even if individuals had previously worked in community services. Issues raised included the need for lead civil servants to have training in trauma informed approaches, anti racism, cultural competence, LGBT and disability inclusion, and power sharing, in addition to DSGBV training and experience. This was considered vital, to ensure survivor engagement is safe, respectful and meaningful, and to avoid reinforcing harm, stigma and victim-blaming. Mandatory anti-racism and anti-discrimination training would be particularly important, as the intersection of sex, race and ethnicity, disability, age, sexuality and gender identity shapes survivors' collective experiences of DSGBV and their interactions with institutions and services.

It was suggested that a national survivor engagement unit or office should develop trauma informed survivor engagement standards and ethical engagement protocols. This could include toolkits for encouraging creative/anonymous participation, which should be informed by community development principles. It was also advised that any framework should incorporate evaluation and reporting back to survivors on the impact of survivor engagement.

The lack of alignment between policies and strategies, and an inability of DSGBV governance mechanisms to 'join the dots', was raised by several organisations. If consistent survivor engagement mechanisms were established, organisations wanted clearer governance and accountability structures that were accessible to or representative of all, rather than relying on "hand-picked services", at a national and local (county) level. It was also suggested that civil servants should attend community led sessions facilitated by trusted specialist organisations, with a focus on listening rather than undertaking survivor engagement in state controlled settings.

Several organisations identified the need for targeted and different means of engagement with people with lived experience of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, of sexual violence, coercive control, FGM, and forced marriage. It was also suggested that targeted engagement was needed with disabled people, people from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, and migrant communities. Multiple options for engagement on policy and strategy were advocated, including anonymous input; smaller group dialogue; use of creative methods, and by resourcing ‘lived experience’ coordination roles in specialist organisations to support survivor engagement capacity-building in specialist/community services.

Improvements suggested included identifying priorities for co design, having time-bound activities, clarity on scope for influence, and consistent timely feedback for survivors. Some advised that a properly resourced co-design phase would be necessary to embed anti-racism, community and development approaches from the outset. Community advocacy organisations that bring forward a collective voice, not only service providers should be recognised as partners in this process. This should include a commitment to regularly publish what changed as a result of the engagement. It was also felt important that officials from relevant government departments be required to embed survivor engagement into their work, without reliance on Cuan to be the only Agency to do this.

Civil society organisations unanimously felt it was important that national and local mechanisms for engagement formed part of the framework to be developed. Organisations suggested the need for structured, resourced, transparent and accountable survivor engagement built on choice, safety, diversity, and power sharing, mirrored at national and local levels. Many services also urged a shift from individual story based engagement to consideration of how to learn from collective voice of survivors provided by organisations, that could lead to system change.

Survivors

Survivors recommended engagement that is structured, sustainable, resourced and accountable; centred on choice, safety, diversity and power sharing; and a framework that is national, regional and local, and not tokenistic but creates measurable systems change.

Differences between advocacy within governmental and policymaking structures, and survivor activism through campaigns was explored, and it was felt that multiple options for engagement would remain important within any new framework. Survivors spoke positively about recent examples in Ireland of how survivor-led advocacy has changed the law and knowing that survivors’ experience and expertise can change the law to improve systems for other women was considered empowering and inspiring.

In November 2023, stalking became a stand-alone criminal offence and in September 2024, further changes to the law[4] offered enhanced protections for stalking victims and a quicker, more accessible process for obtaining civil orders. This followed campaigning by the co-founders of *Stalking Ireland*, Una Ring and Eve McDowell who, following their own experience of stalking without recourse to protection from the legal system, waived their anonymity, established an online support and action group, and advocated for a change in the law.

There has been a long campaign to reform the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, and Ruth Maxwell's experience of male violence and of the legal and financial compensation process led her to advocate for justice for victims with government departments, ministers, the Law Commission, alongside services, and in the media.

Several survivors spoke about the long-term and enduring expertise within specialist community services who may also have survivors working in those organisations. Some organisations already gather data on survivors' experiences and testimonies, often anonymised, and some organisations also support survivors' involvement in policy advocacy or speaking publicly if they want to do so. Survivors also spoke positively about survivor-led organisations in Ireland, established to provide connection, advocacy and voice to survivors and to support women to become leaders and be recognised as experts by experience. They felt strongly that any national framework should integrate, build on, and resource these existing approaches to centring lived experience of DSGBV.

Participants emphasised the need to move beyond tokenistic or episodic storytelling to structured, ethical advocacy. Survivors felt that one of the benefits of a national framework would be consistency and transparency of approach, instead of depending on "who you know" or reliance on a short timeframe for engagement without any continuity. Another strength was perceived to be a move away from requests to "tell your story" which brought with it risks of harm, paternalism and exploitation, and sometimes lack of remuneration and support.

Survivors advised that one of the challenges a national framework would need to address, was that multiple government departments and programmes engage with survivors either inconsistently or not at all. It was felt there was limited visibility of who is accountable for effective engagement within government departments, and of how survivors' input makes any difference to policy or practice. Where engagement with survivors had taken place, it was unclear if decision-makers had listened to their views as there had been a lack of feedback. Survivors also felt that there should be a cross-government approach to survivor engagement, which had the support of the Irish Government and its relevant departments, without there being a reliance on Cuan to do this for them or to be the only ones to do this at all.

Remuneration was considered a priority, and it should be additional to funds for DSGBV delivery by specialist organisations. Unpaid engagement was considered negatively, as was short term consultations, and the absence of survivor engagement and leadership was felt to undermine equity and trust.

---

[4] Part 5 of the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023.

Survivors strongly advised that any new framework should involve survivors in its development from the outset. Some felt that survivors should lead the engagement without having to advocate for a place around the government department table: *"let's build our own table, invite government to come our table."*

Survivors recommended that government officials responsible for DSGBV be invited to attend survivor organised forums and events, and to be asked to respond to survivor set agendas for survivor-chaired national panels, thereby flipping the usual dynamic of survivors learning to adapt to governmental spaces. As with civil society organisations, survivors also said it was important that government officials be trained to engage in ways that would not be judgemental, victim-blaming or dismissive, from the outset. Some provided examples of problematic attitudes and approaches, which impacted the effectiveness of future engagement opportunities. It was also suggested that any national survivor engagement panel should be accompanied by dedicated projects or smaller group discussions or opportunities for getting involved. This may include opportunities for anonymous input, small group dialogue, use of creative methods, formal advisory roles, and targeted attention being given to different lived experiences (e.g., sexual violence, trafficking, stalking, prostitution, FGM and forced marriage), while ensuring connections can be made to shared priorities for structural reform. Participants felt it was important to have a flexible approach to engagement, and to not pre-determine what themes or issues would be discussed, or the function of particular structures, prior to any co-design process with survivors, to establish the structures first.

The importance of trauma informed survivor engagement was discussed, which survivors said involved creating space and time for preparation and pre briefings; coaching and mentoring for survivor chairs by someone external; actively seeking consent to share personal information, free from coercion; the ability to opt out at any time; paid participation or equivalent remuneration for time and knowledge sharing; access to group or individual clinical supervision or support; and transparent feedback mechanisms on how survivors have change policy or services. Ultimately, it was felt that survivors involved in the engagement framework should be treated as experts or consultants, who would be resourced, remunerated and supported.

Civil and public servants

Within current DSGBV governance arrangements, where a national DSGBV Forum meets regularly and is used by Ministers to hear from civil society, it was understood by several participants that there was no designated survivor advocate representation at the Forum. It was also confirmed that invited survivors had been invited to speak at several Forum meetings, and that survivor advocates and their representatives were on the Forum invitee list. It was also noted that DSGBV policy development (which is the responsibility of the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration) would usually involve consultation with specialist civil society organisations, on an ad-hoc basis. Participants also noted that Ministers would also meet survivors directly, on request, if they were written to about a specific matter relevant to their portfolio, and that civil servants were involved in supporting these meetings.

Some government departments and agencies, like the Courts Service and Tusla, had undertaken co design work with civil society organisations, and rolled out trauma informed practice training for key professionals. Practice guidance had also changed as a result of engagement, for example, feedback from stakeholders had highlighted the need to shift focus for frontline teams towards perpetrator accountability. Child and Youth Participation awards are also issued by Tusla, to Tusla-funded services, in recognition of agencies' commitment to ensuring that children's voices are heard when it comes to any decision that affects them. An Garda Síochána also liaise nationally with specialist DSGBV organisations to inform national developments related to policy, training, or awareness raising, and it was noted that the Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management interagency group included a victims' voice representative.

The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) indicated there were multiple structures in place to engage with communities, people with lived experience and civil society organisations, although nothing specifically targeted for engaging DSGBV survivors. For example, the Women's Health Taskforce had modelled "open policy making" involving policy makers, clinicians, international partners, advocates, health experts, including women, through workshops, research and outreach. Since its establishment in 2019, the Taskforce had engaged with more than 2,000 individuals and organisations representing women across the country. The HSE Social Inclusion Office governance structure includes working groups on eight thematic areas, including a DSGBV subgroup and a Human Trafficking subgroup working group (involving agency representatives who work with survivors). It was also noted that work is underway on an HSE social inclusion engagement framework, with lived experience input being sought via subgroups.

Some civil and public servants suggested that Cuan's establishment meant that survivors' experiences could be centred by departments engaging with Cuan, and said it was preferable for them to engage with Cuan, who would bring lived experience expertise through their agency, rather than each department engaging directly with national civil society organisations and services. It was also noted that civil society organisations were represented at regional Homelessness Consultative Forums, and Cuan's representation on the National Homelessness Action Committee was assumed to bring DSGBV survivor perspectives to the Committee. It was clarified by Cuan that the agency does not claim to represent survivor voices, but they would bring the views of funded partners with whom Cuan works, many of whom represent survivors, but not exclusively so.

The Department of Children, Disability and Equality and Department of Housing confirmed that consultations and engagement happened predominantly via organisations rather than with individual survivors. Examples provided of recent consultations with DSGBV and other organisations included the development of the National Strategy for Women and Girls, and reporting on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It was noted that future arrangements for a new Gender Equality Forum and Strategy for Women and Girls Committee might benefit from including more diverse voices within engagement structures.

Many civil and public servants suggested that national and local structures would benefit from involving survivors within their processes, once the framework is established, including the Community Safety Partnership structure, the HSE Social Inclusion structures, Homelessness consultative forums and local authorities' housing forums. It was also noted that whilst there were several challenges with establishing a national survivor engagement framework, it could help address some of the current issues raised by community services about inconsistencies in practice and with engaging survivors. These included, for example, that survivors often do not know consultations are happening; there is no central mechanism to communicate engagement opportunities locally or nationally; and survivors and specialist organisations complain of consultation fatigue without visible subsequent action.

Many felt that having one national survivors panel, for example, would not be sufficient because survivors of different forms of DSGBV might be excluded. This would also not include survivors for whom it was undesirable or too risky to identify themselves, and those on a panel could not represent all survivors. It was felt by some that working groups focussed on specific themes that represent survivors' experience (for example, family justice) would be beneficial. It was also suggested that different pillars of engagement for different forms of DSGBV could be incorporated into the structure, which was similar to the structure adopted by Ireland's Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse: seven pillars, representing a specific area of institutional abuse had been established to report into their Advisory Council.[5]

The lack of readiness by some government departments to embark on survivor engagement was also raised by civil servants (which was also reinforced by community organisations and survivors). Concerns identified included a general lack of capacity or awareness of trauma informed approaches to undertake DSGBV survivor engagement well, that there was inconsistent access to training, and relative lack of knowledge of DSGBV in some departments and agencies. The need for culture change regarding departments' readiness to listen to and act on survivors' expertise was also noted.

Not all civil servants identified the need for a survivor engagement framework. It was felt important by many civil and public servants that DSGBV organisations who had survivor-informed data and evidence to inform their advocacy, remain important to evidence gathering, policy and strategy work. Several spoke of the necessity of continuing to engage with specialist services, and it was reinforced that Ireland is a relatively small country so this could happen easily.

There were varied views amongst civil and public servants on how a national survivor engagement framework should be resourced, and whether services' funding allocations should include an element of survivor engagement, or whether this should be resourced centrally for services to apply for. There were also different views on whether this should be supported by budget allocation within departments or allocated centrally between those responsible for DSGBV policy and services. It was noted by many that survivor engagement within the Zero Tolerance Strategy is the responsibility of Cuan, so the majority felt that the establishment and delivery of a survivor engagement framework should be coordinated through Cuan, in collaboration with national civil society organisations. It was felt that funds should not be diverted from DSGBV organisations to establish survivor engagement.

---

[5] See for example, the structure of engagement for the Special Advocate in Ireland is summarised at: here.

Common themes

There was consistent feedback that the nature of survivor engagement should move beyond episodic testimony towards a combination of advocacy, decision shaping, co-design, and system oversight. It was also acknowledged by civil society, survivor-led organisations and civil servants, of the substantial work carried out by services to incorporate survivors' experiences to inform their national advocacy, and their responses to government consultations. Several participants also highlighted the benefits of engaging with survivors in policy development. However, government efforts and understanding of survivor engagement were felt to be inconsistent across departments.

The authorising environment also mattered for many participants, who noted that symbolic survivor panels attended by public servants with limited decision-making power would not work and be a waste of resource. Multi-annual funding was considered vital, including for enhancing specialist services' capacity to support lived experience engagement. Given the pressure on existing DSGBV services and organisations, funds should not be diverted from their vital work to resource an engagement framework. It was felt that a framework should be co-designed with survivors and that it should be supported by senior-level leadership across departments and agencies, who advocated the benefits of survivor expertise and survivor-informed data. The framework should include clearly defined pathways to named decision-makers responsible for reporting back on recommendations.

The views of civil and public servants, relating to where development and delivery of survivor engagement should be located, contrasted with feedback from services and survivors. Civil society organisations and survivors felt strongly that, in Ireland, there needs to be a shift from consultation with survivors led by government departments and its agencies, to power sharing, to embedding survivor engagement across all relevant government departments, whilst also enabling specialist services to continue survivor advocacy, and support for survivor-led panels and networks to be established. An engagement framework should be sustainably resourced to deliver a model that is inclusive and accessible, and "intersectional by design", which takes into account those intersecting factors - including sex, disability, gender identity, sexuality, age, geographic location and people from Traveller and Roma communities, Black, migrant and minoritised communities, that interact to shape experience, barriers and opportunities, trauma and recovery.

Most participants questioned the readiness of government departments and its agencies to engage meaningfully with survivors, although they did not all agree on what that meant. For civil and public servants, many felt this meant a change in their culture to help them listen to and act on survivors' feedback. For most civil society organisations, this meant government departments and agencies being skilled not only in DSGBV and trauma informed approaches but also in anti-racism, cultural competency, disability and LGBT inclusion, safety and confidentiality, and in understanding how to engage meaningfully with survivors in order to prevent harm and build trust.

Survivors and some civil society organisations felt strongly that a new national governance and monitoring mechanism needed to be established, because survivor engagement could not be effective if it was controlled by government departments and agencies. A DSGBV Commissioner or DSGBV Survivor Advocate or similar was recommended during several group discussions and interviews, which should be independent from government departments and Cuan, with the authority to independently establish a survivor engagement framework (see below, promising practice).

It was mainly civil society organisations and survivors that felt a survivor engagement framework should also prioritise regional and local systems for engagement involving, for example, scrutiny panels, dedicated engagement pathways focussed on forms of DSGBV or specific projects, organisations resourced to support survivor engagement work nationally and locally, funds for services to capture data on survivors' experience of service systems, and opportunities for survivors to have a voice in local communities. Pathways between local and national structures should ensure connections between the collective voice of survivors and actions locally and nationally. It was strongly recommended by civil society organisations that specialist services and survivors should be resourced to engage, informed by a public service trained to receive their advocacy.

It was raised by several participants that services should have published minimum standards, and mechanisms for measuring survivors' satisfaction with the range of services received, which should be reported publicly. Survivors suggested that alongside an engagement framework there should also be a survivor designed national portal that provides written, plain language guidance on rights and entitlements, decision-making pathways and timelines, and DSGBV leadership contacts for relevant agencies. This would enable survivors to undertake their own advocacy, or do so alongside services, if the agency response they received was not in line with standards and expected processes. This would also support survivors' agency, reduce harm caused by inaccessible or inconsistent information, and support survivors to raise issues and influence change. It was noted by many participants that one of Cuan's statutory responsibilities is the development of national service standards and governance arrangements for DSGBV services.

A survivor led national board was proposed, co-chaired by survivors, with membership spanning DSGBV experiences and diverse identities with defined scope over strategy, legislation, services and campaigns. It was suggested that thematic groups could be established depending on survivors' interests and/or experience, for example, related to the family courts, publicity campaigns and/or a focus on specific forms of violence, such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, trafficking, prostitution, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, or stalking. It was also proposed that a national Board be accompanied by Regional Survivor Panels, to inform the national board's work.

It was a priority raised by several participants that survivor engagement should not be tokenistic, and that diverse perspectives should be included at every stage of the framework's design, development, implementation and review. This included ensuring survivors from diverse communities participate in the co-design process, using recruitment processes into national boards and regional forums that prioritise equity, diversity and inclusion, and working alongside specialist organisations and networks led by and for the communities they serve, to reach out to and offer support to survivors from under-represented communities. Other measures suggested to maximise equity and diversity included equitable remuneration and reimbursement; trauma-responsive approaches that create a culturally safe environment; reflective spaces, peer support and coaching, and embedding coproduction, accountability and review.

Many participants reinforced that any survivor engagement framework should be developed and designed with survivors, from the outset, to lay the foundation for future delivery. It was suggested that the format of engagement should be tailored to the specific purpose. Some services and survivors spoke of the importance of not solely relying on traditional reports, discussion groups or meetings to engage survivors. The need to use creative methods was discussed, including film, peer-led theatre, creative writing or art, to generate feedback or communicate impact, and it was also felt important that anonymised feedback or 'case study' materials be used to capture system feedback.

It was also proposed that government departments and its agencies should annually publish a cross-government survivor engagement impact report which reinforces accountability to survivors and summarises any policy or service changes attributable to survivor advocacy, nationally and locally. Recognising that attribution in policy-making can be difficult, it was also suggested that a survivor engagement impact reporting could be reported on as part of the Fourth National Strategy.

Survivors also wanted to see a specific resourced national survivor-led conference held annually, to promote the survivor engagement framework, and at which senior government leads (Ministers, Heads of Departments) would be invited to attend and report on progress against DSGBV priorities and commitments. It was flet this would help make accountability to survivors in Ireland visible and transparent.

Survivor advocacy groups or peer support groups can experience differences of opinion and conflict, and some suggested that an engagement framework should incorporate clear terms of reference and boundaries agreed from the outset. Mentoring and coaching for survivor groups and Chairs of national and regional groups was recommended, as was the option of skilled facilitation to provide conflict resolution support if needed.

Several survivors and services also spoke about the importance of survivors having opportunities for reporting local system or service failures, without fear of reprisal. Participants described significant discrepancies between service intent or expectations and the reality of using services, in different geographic areas. It was recommended by some that survivors who had recently used services, for example, in the last two years, and survivors involved in survivor-led organisations and survivors who had not used services, should be brought together in focus-group discussions focused on how services and systems should be improved. Holding national focus groups with survivors, facilitated by people experienced in DSGBV but independent of services in Ireland, should also happen in parallel to survivors co-designing the engagement framework, to inform Ireland's new DSGBV Strategy, and the data from these would also help inform future regional and national survivor engagement groups to prioritise issues important to survivors across the country.

Any focus group engagement, and subsequent survivor engagement structures, must recognise how racism, structural discrimination, poverty and exclusion shape the experience of DSGBV, access and outcomes in support and services, whether or not perpetrators are held to account for the violence, and action taken to prevent violence from happening or recurring. DSGBV also frequently intersects with compounding support needs, and experience of disadvantage, including substance use, mental health support needs, homelessness, involvement in the justice system, poverty and disadvantage.

It is vital that any focus groups are facilitated by people experienced in DSGBV, in anti-racist, rights-based and trauma-informed approaches and pay attention to literacy, digital exclusion, and be independent of state services, considering the historical mistrust of state systems and services in many communities. The groups must be accessible, including for survivors who are disabled, younger and older, from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities, and for survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, survivors from urban and rural areas, and survivors of different forms of DSGBV. Community facilitators and/or interpreters should be used where language or trust issues emerge.

Additional issues raised

Several survivors and services spoke about the importance of survivors having opportunities for reporting service failures, without reprisal. Participants described significant discrepancies between service intent or expectations and the reality of using services, in different geographic areas. It was noted that Cuan could support greater service consistency in responding effectively to survivors through the National Services Development Plan and development of standards.

Whilst some individual good practice examples were shared (in some areas, survivors recognised that An Garda Síochána had been trauma informed), consistency in good practice across regions and public services was felt to be lacking. Issues raised included there being a ‘right to information’ gap in the system, as survivors had no single authoritative written source of information on their rights, entitlements, justice system processes, decision-making structures, and opportunities to influence change.

The family courts’ “in-camera” rule in domestic violence cases was criticised, which is where certain family proceedings are heard in private with no public access to the courtroom, and where any breach of confidentiality or information sharing with third parties can lead to legal penalties. With reform of reporting is pending, to aim to introduce transparency for the public the family justice system, survivors felt it was vital that domestic violence survivors be supported to have a say on any changes but also recognised that the rule silences advocacy informed by using the system, and this can be weaponised by perpetrators of abuse. The Department of Justice is continuing to review the ‘in-camera’ rule in line with commitments in the Family Justice Strategy and following recent research on its operation (Parkes et.al., 2025).

Services said they regularly experienced pressure from the media and government departments to provide “a survivor” willing to talk to the public or audiences, which they felt was sometimes inappropriate. Some participants also advised that survivors who have used local services may feel pressure or obligation to participate in an engagement session or event, because they had received support from a service. Services advised that any survivor engagement process must be designed to mitigate or prevent such pressure arising, and services should adopt an open call for expressions of interest rather than undertake targeted calls with service users.

There was some criticism of recent publicity and awareness campaigns that had been discussed with a selected number of DSGBV agencies and panel of survivors, and materials had not been subject to feedback from wider DSGBV experts prior to the launch. Services and survivors suggested any national campaigns should be subject to a pre launch review by representative specialist civil society organisations, especially those working with Roma and Traveller communities, migrant and discriminated against communities, to prevent exclusionary messaging and mitigate prospective community backlash. Cuan advised that one of its stated objectives is to ensure inclusive campaigns that are intersectional and reach seldom heard communities.

It was suggested by services that national survivor engagement protocols for the media, Ministers and government departments be produced, to inform how to incorporate survivors' experience into events, reports and media. Several suggestions were made for what this should include, for example, ensuring requests are made with sufficient notice to ensure survivors have support beforehand; ensuring that professional female interpreters are present if needed, and that support is available during the event or interview. The option should always be provided for survivors to remain anonymous; survivors should not be pressured to tell their story and the vivid recounting of trauma by survivors should be avoided. The reinforcing of stereotypes or victim-blaming should also be avoided, and the principle of doing no harm should be central to any protocols, as should survivors being remunerated for their contribution. Survivors should also be clearly told how, where and when their contributions will be used, to inform consent, and for pre-recorded engagement, survivors should have sight of this and be able to comment before it goes public. Support should also be available afterwards, to support any debriefing survivors mya need after speaking at an event or in an interview.

3.

Promising practices

Section 3. Promising practices

Services, professionals and survivors who participated in this project were asked whether they wanted to highlight any learning from their own engagement work, or promising practices that had happened in Ireland or elsewhere.

Learning from other jurisdictions was also captured at an international learning exchange meeting, involving Ireland, Australia, Wales, and England, and which also helped inform further discussions and meetings with participants in Ireland.

The following provides a summary from the International Learning Exchange held in October 2025, followed by an overview of some of the promising practice identified by participants during individual and group discussions, some of which was informed by what was shared at the Learning Exchange.

International Learning Exchange

The focus of the learning exchange meeting was to examine the barriers and opportunities for establishing a national survivor engagement framework, to support the development of strategy, policy, and practice, and consider what learning has been identified in different jurisdictions, that supports good practice in moving from being survivor-informed to survivor centred and led.

Australia – Commonwealth and Victoria

In Australia, Victoria Government had established a ***Victim Survivors Advisory Council***, in 2016, to advise on improvements to family violence and sexual violence policy, system and service delivery, and ensure the voices of victim-survivors are included and acted on. The fifteen people on the Council are appointed by the government for rolling three-year terms, and they each have a role to:

- bring lived experience to inform Victoria's family and sexual violence initiatives and policies;
- provide advice and insights to the government to influence the design and development of services, policy, laws and systems to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence;
- work collaboratively to strengthen the family and sexual violence system for victim survivors, hold people who use violence to account, and prevent violence from happening, and
- provide advice that reflects the diversity of victim survivors' experience.

In Victoria, the Victim Survivors Advisory Council advised on the implementation of Victoria Government reforms and recommendations, and in 2022, produced a ***Lived Experience Strategy for Government*** to support Victoria Government to evolve its work with survivors. It was noted that the outgoing Co-Chairs of the Council, who participated in this learning exchange, along with public service leaders in government departments responsible for embedding lived experience, had left a strong legacy of advocacy, particularly in justice system reform and improving outcomes for children and young people.

Domestic, family and sexual violence membership organisations in Victoria, funded by the government, had also developed multiple tools, resources and research, to support the ethical engagement of survivors in the work of specialist organisations regionally and locally (see 'promising practices' below).

The membership organisation ***Safe + Equal***, based in Victoria, has been delivering a programme of work to lead and support the sector in best practice engagement with survivor advocacy.[6] This built on work undertaken in 2020 with the University of Melbourne, which identified the need for a more comprehensive, coordinated, and consistent approach to working with survivor advocates in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, and the need for a survivor advocacy function within the specialist sector. An *'Experts by Experience'* framework was co-produced with victim survivors and included guidelines, principles and resources (including engagement expectations and reflection tool, feedback templates, and ethical engagement of survivor advocates at speaking engagements) to support survivor advocates and organisations to engage and work collaboratively (Lamb et al, 2020).

In 2021, the Safe and Equal Expert Advisory Panel was bringing together victim survivors who support the organisation's work and who apply their living expertise of services and systems to advocate for improved services and systems. The Panel has also developed an Experts by Experience Framework Implementation Plan for the organisation, to increase and monitor the best practice engagement with survivor advocates.

The organisation also acknowledges lived experience of survivors in its workforce – who have variously been clients, self-advocates, expert advisors, researchers and research participants, and as leaders and practitioners within services – and reflects on how their expertise is valued and harnessed.

In Victoria, the membership organisation **Sexual Assault Services Victoria 'Your Say' project**, an online platform that invites community members to engage with the organisation's advocacy priorities. The aim is to ensure the voices of survivors of sexual violence and the broader community are heard by political leaders. A panel of victim survivors, working with the organisation, will then champion the panel's chosen ideas for advocacy priorities, in the lead up the state election.[7]

Nationally in Australia, an Independent Collective of Survivors formed in 2021, which was survivor and volunteer run, to work with individuals and organisations to build capability to ethically and effectively employ lived experience knowledge of domestic, family, and sexual violence and other forms of gendered violence. The Collective campaigned for the Commonwealth Government to establish a *Victim Survivor Expert Advisory Council* to ensure the voices and insights of lived experience would be embedded in policy decision making. In response, government committed an initial $1million Australian dollars (around 600K Euros) to engage with survivors, and a survivors' statement opened the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

---

[6] For more information on the framework for the specialist sector, tools and resources, see here.

[7] See here for example.

The newly appointed Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner, appointed by the Australian Government, recruited a group of seven survivors in 2023 to steward the formation of the first national ***Lived Experience Advisory Council***, to engage with government and its departments, and ensure trauma-informed processes and supports were established. From June 2024, twelve Advisory Council members were appointed by the Australian Government for a two-year term, to amplify the voices of people with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence nationally. Significantly, over 400 people applied to the first Lived Experience Advisory Council.

The Lived Experience Advisory Council continues to contribute to the work of the Commission by giving advice, reporting on implementation of the objectives of the Government's Plan, and advising governments on policies, systems and services. The Commissioner also established a podcast with survivors: Voices Towards 2050: Ending Gender Based Violence, which brought together survivor advocates, survivors working in frontline services, and others to share their insights, ideas and vision for a future free from violence.

Learning

Participants considered it positive the national Lived Experience Advisory Council was developed and co-designed by a group of survivor advocates, whose involvement was targeted, and they were supported to do so by domestic and sexual violence services, Aboriginal community-controlled services, LGBT, disability and other services. Survivors' expertise and services' support was remunerated, and their involvement was time bound to inform the establishment of the framework. Recruitment onto the national council subsequently utilised the public appointments system.

It was noted that this framework is *"not symbolic participation but a systemic requirement. Engagement must be safe, consistent and influential if policies and services are to be credible and effective."* Challenges to overcome included government's ability to be flexible in terms of processes, ensuring adequate remuneration, and that the national council remains an accountability – not just listening – mechanism. Council members offer a rich source of intelligence related to systems change and what will be most impactful. The value given to a diversity of perspectives and intersectionality was powerful, and it was equally important to ensure there are mechanisms for wider engagement, with communities who are most impacted by a particular issue.

The benefits of the national council being established and supported by the independent Commissioner's office were also evident, in terms of being arms-length from government, able to provide advice to the Commissioners' office, and departments not influencing the council's priorities or scope. At the same time there were opportunities for council members to speak directly to ministers and parliament.

Future priorities for the Lived Experience Advisory Council include:

- leading the development of a ***Lived Experience Engagement Framework and Toolkit*** for agencies and governments in Australia to guide safe, respectful and productive engagement with people with lived experience. This aims to provide practical guidance on psychological and cultural safety, recognition and payment, accessibility, consent, debriefing and influence. The aim will also be to demonstrate what changed because of survivors' engagement.

- developing a ***Lived Experience Evaluation Framework*** for agencies and governments in Australia to implement, to assess whether engagement is occurring with integrity, quality and influence, not to evidence compliance but as a learning tool to strengthen engagement and influence.

In Victoria, the learning from supporting and working alongside the Victim Survivors Advisory Council, included the importance of challenging government departments' approaches and the effectiveness of attempts at power sharing. Engagement with survivors and people with lived experience of DSGBV included people who have been bereaved from homicide or suicide as a result of DSGBV.

Participants noted learning for government departments included the need to be ready to engage with survivors, to have uncomfortable conversations and face challenges to traditional ways of working which can lead to reflection on positions and power. Another important consideration was for survivors to have clarity on what scope there is for change, where decision-making lies, and what opportunities there are for changing anything. The importance of transparency, accountability and receiving feedback, even if decisions made were not ultimately influenced by survivors' advocacy, was also reinforced by participants.

The importance of survivors determining their own priorities and calling government departments to report to them, was highlighted, instead of survivors being overwhelmed by government-led agendas and meetings.

Previous Co-Chairs of the Victim Survivors Advisory Council spoke powerfully of learning from their experience. The reiterated that the only way for government departments to create effective policy is to include people whose lives they will impact. The importance difference between activism and advocacy was examined, and it had been valuable for survivors to receive training and support on how advocacy might lead to change within government. There was a perception that government engagement with survivors might risk their re-traumatisation, but participants noted that systems failure was often more traumatising and could lead to being further abused by state services that should protect and support.

Diversity was important not only in terms of DSGBV experience, but also background, age, characteristics and abilities. Barriers that need addressing when establishing a national framework include mitigating against only involving articulate, well-educated survivors who appear to be able to engage with public servants. Young people's experiences should be central to any framework established, and learning included the importance of focussing on ethical and safe storytelling, so that survivors are not left to navigate this alone. Impact statements and reports are vital for survivors to illustrate the impact their advocacy had. Some form of clinical supervision or support should also be available, so that remuneration provided is not spent on external support.

Wisdom in Practice: reverse mentoring

In Australia, a guided reverse mentoring programme, developed by a survivor advocate previously involved in the Victim Survivors Advisory Council in Victoria, has been developed and piloted, and is now included in service models as an example of good practice, and resourced by government through workforce development grants, to support workforce accountability to survivors.

Survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are trained and supported to mentor professionals working in specialist services, with the intent of flipping power dynamics, creating reflective practice and accountability to survivors, and developing survivor centred approaches.

The programme has been adapted for Executives and managers, a recent evaluation found that the programme *“influenced professionals’ attitudes, mindsets, and critical thinking about how clients are regarded”*, as well as challenged assumptions and biases.[8]

Wales and England

In Wales, the statutory National Adviser to Welsh Government for the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy and programme of work, has established a National Survivor Scrutiny, Voice and Involvement Panel. The Panel is chaired by the **National Adviser and reports to the National Partnership Board of state agencies. Survivors from the Panel** are represented at several meetings: the National Partnership Board, Programme Board and on six working groups focussed on national strategy and action plan delivery (the ‘blueprint for delivery’). Survivors on the Panel can also feedback to Ministers, where relevant.

Regional multi-agency partnerships to address domestic and sexual violence and violence against women, have in some areas established parallel ***regional Survivor Advisory Panels***. Their aim is to bring together survivors, with state and community services, to inform and influence policy and practice in the region. Opportunities are provided for survivor consultations through events, focus groups or surveys. Regional panels aim to inform national structures for survivor engagement.

---

[8] Wisdom in Practice is copyrighted and trademarked, agencies are running the program in Victoria under a 12-month licensing agreement. See here.

Welsh Women's Aid, which funded by Welsh Government and is the membership organisation for domestic violence, sexual violence and violence against women services, has established a national ***survivors' network*** in Wales, to engage meaningfully with survivors to inform their work and to inform and support national advocacy. The network resources and reimburses experts by experience and enables survivors to share their experience and speak truth to power.

Resources co-produced with survivors include a *'Meaningful Survivor Participation'* toolkit for organisations to develop survivor engagement plans that adopt a needs-led strengths-based trauma informed approach (Welsh Women's Aid, 2022). This includes a focus on the approach, planning, wellbeing and safety considerations, session plans and checklists. Its stated aim is to offer *"a 'back to basics' framework as for some practitioners it will be an already established way of working. However, for some organisations commissioning pressures that prioritise outcomes over values may have led to a distancing from these principles. Our aim is to put them back at the heart of all of our work."*[9]

The toolkit was developed in consultation with and for adults affected by violence against women and domestic violence. Resources designed to engage children and young people are separately available through specialist services in Wales.

The law in England and Wales introduced a Domestic Abuse Commissioner to give an independent voice to victims, to raise public awareness and hold agencies and UK Government to account in tackling domestic violence. The statutory Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales has since set up ***VOICES***, a virtual ***Survivor Platform*** for victim survivors of domestic abuse to stay connected to relevant policy, research, and practice development. This is for adult victim survivors and for friends and family bereaved by domestic homicide and domestic abuse related deaths, and those who experienced domestic abuse in their childhood.

Survivors receive an email newsletter every three months, the Commissioner may request input, and members of the platform are notified about announcements. Survivor engagement opportunities from domestic abuse organisations, universities, and local and national government were shared, from those who are looking to include the voices of those with lived experience in their work.

---

[9] The Toolkit is aimed at specialist and general services planning engagement with survivors, and is available here. A joint 'best practice guide' was also developed in the UK in 2024 by membership organisations addressing domestic, sexual and other forms of violence against women, including women from Black and Global Majority communities. See here.

Learning

Learning included noting that space needs to be created for survivors to raise what is important for them, and not being directed by policy leads on what they need or only engaging on matters most useful for government priorities. Although government departments may use the platform to engage with survivors, others may use their own mechanism, so the structure and process was not centralised. Government capacity and timeframes also need to be adjusted, if they want to enable meaningful engagement, as the timeliness of establishing and maintaining engagement processes need to be survivor-led, whilst having regard for Ministerial priorities and the Programme for Government commitments and timeframes. It was also considered vital that engagement should be values-led and resourced sufficiently to avoid concerns about tokenism or short-termism.

One of the restrictions noted in relation to the survivor engagement framework established by Welsh Government was that it lacked resources and relied on the professionalism, experience and goodwill of the Advisor to support survivors and facilitate panel meetings. It was felt important to recognise survivors as partners, and their professionalism and expertise, because state services risk patronising or 'over-protecting' survivors. It was also important that government departments do the work to be prepared and ready to engage, otherwise spaces created will not be safe, supportive or meaningful. Government had to allocate ongoing budgets for survivor engagement, and be prepared to hear the real story and actions required, not only those that may already align with government narrative or plans.

Participants considered the importance of building trust with survivors, throughout the engagement process, especially as so many will have experienced state systems being weaponised against them or having actively harmed them. Creating flexible space was considered important, for people to participate and drop out, due to life challenges, without feeling excluded, as was ensuring multiple engagement options to mitigate against the perception that a small cohort of people can represent the voices of all survivors. Creating meaningful engagement required dedicated support at a national and local level, in recognition that a narrow focus on investment in one national survivor network ignored the geographically dispersed and diverse experiences at community-based survivor networks, which hampered an effective inclusive approach.

Research conducted by the University of South Wales (Underwood-Lee, 2022) also examined the extent of meaningful survivor engagement across the country and found similarly that common barriers and issues raised by survivors included lack of trust in the organisation leading engagement mechanisms, an absence of support and remuneration, and inaccessible meetings, due to use of language or availability of childcare. A fear that their confidentiality would be breached was also an issue raised, as well as feeling they did not have the skills or time to contribute. Services that had developed survivor engagement mechanisms referenced they had introduced clarity on confidentiality boundaries within terms of reference for the engagement, provided support and training before and after any meetings, paid attention to physical and emotional safety, providing feedback, being clear about the remit and scope of engagement, ensuring any materials used were translated, having information in advance, covering the costs of childcare and remunerating survivors for expenses.

The research noted that survivors had the opportunity to not only participate in meetings but also to influence and set agendas, and to review what impact that contributions or meaningful engagement had made. Examples of proactive engagement led by the survivors' network in Wales included survivors forming an advisory board to inform government scrutiny committees and arrange meetings with Members of Parliament in advance of committees to pre-empt input into legislative developments, evidence sessions or debates. Survivor network members were represented on national standards panels for the accreditation of specialist services, there were regular online or in-person meetings and newsletters that promoted engagement opportunities, and survivors were also appointed to organisations' Boards of Trustees, to contribute to their leadership and governance.

Many specialist services also had their own survivor networks, supported by a dedicated employee who facilitated and convened local engagement, and this helped strengthen connections between local and national advocacy, enabling more survivors to contribute their expertise.

Learning from the research included the need to *'build a network not a monolith'* which recognised people's strengths and preferences for engagement. Meaningful survivor engagement required long term investment and commitment, supported by specialist staff, in order to value survivors as experts in their experience of DSGBV and what might be done to prevent it. Coordination between engagement structures was vital, because survivors did not want to be asked the same questions multiple times by different agencies. Survivors also offered considerably more than their experience of abuse, and they held expertise on a range of issues relevant to service and systems change. Alongside national panels, it was recognised that organisations that supported survivors needed sustainable funding in addition to provision of services, to enable survivors to be supported to engage, to ensure national coordination and advocacy, and for survivors to be remunerated.

Benefits of and barriers to survivor engagement

The benefits and value associated with survivors' engagement with governments remains relatively under-researched. A review of promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience of trafficking (Asquith et.al., 2022) found evidence of clear and specific benefits related to improvements to programmes, policy and practice; benefits for people with lived experience and affected communities; and benefits for colleagues.

- Organisational benefits included greater understanding of people's diverse experiences, more confidence in the organisation's approach and procedures, and the potential to create more positive change for people in communities. Benefits were most evident when organisations invested in meaningful engagement which was long term, spanned the programme or project duration, and where engagement had a clear and specific focus. Including people with lived experience within the team, or ensuring the involvement of employed colleagues who had lived experience, also offered insight and understanding that benefitted the organisation's delivery. Survivors also had greater trust in organisations and services when they were led by colleagues with lived experience.

- Including people with lived experience as peer-researchers, peer-providers, consultants or as advocates within service or project teams also was found to benefit individuals, for example, by developing new skills, improving confidence and self-esteem, financial stability, and professional development.
- These benefits were found to be dependent on the extent to which organisations provided support. Colleagues also reported an improved awareness and understanding of the of the service-needs of victims.

Some participants in this project felt that whilst there were several potential benefits to survivor engagement, there were also significant potential risks associated with engagement that was not meaningful or effective and could do more harm to survivors if not done well.

Barriers to meaningful effective engagement identified included lack of capacity and funding within organisations, barriers associated with the geographic location of survivors and lack of access to support, experiences of racism, and gatekeeping by services who do not want their authority challenged. Professionals also identified workplace barriers to disclosing their own lived experience. The extent of visible support for survivor engagement by leaders was considered a significant factor in whether organisations valued co-production with survivors or whether it was considered too risky or not.

Survivors also felt that being engaged in developing strategy, policies or services had the potential to be therapeutic and empowering, and it was also a benefit to share information and learning and meet with and obtain support from other survivors.

It was also felt to be significantly beneficial to government programmes on DSGBV to have survivors involved in their development, delivery and review throughout the process. For example, some participants emphasised that it would be important to ensure survivors, along with specialist services, are involved by Cuan from the outset in the development, implementation and review of Ireland’s National Services Development Plan and national service standards.

Participants broadly agreed that whilst survivor engagement needed to be flexible and inclusive, it would also be beneficial to develop guidelines and tools, as well as dedicated resources, to support organisations who want to engage survivor advocates in policy, service planning and improvements. Several people noted that starting small and doing it well was considered more beneficial than delaying survivor engagement to wait until the perfect circumstances had been achieved.

Examples of promising practices provided by participants

The following organisations, invited to interview as part of this project, already support survivor engagement and advocacy and, if resourced, could contribute to a national survivor engagement framework. They offer a combination of service and system advocacy, informed by a combination of anonymised data capture, and structured engagement with women who have a range of experience and expertise. This includes of sexual violence, of being trafficked and of commercial sexual exploitation, of domestic violence combined with addiction, and expertise held by migrant women, disabled women, Roma and Traveller women, and women within LGBT communities.

Akina Dada wa Africa - AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) was established in 2001 and is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. The organisation promotes the equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping and applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a migrant and gender-specific approach to public services, as well as encouraging migrant women's access to mainstream services and initiatives. AkiDwA employs several strategies to achieve its objectives, outreach, networking, research, policy work and capacity building.

For AkiDwA, the term 'Migrant Women' includes not only recent immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, but also migrant workers, 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.

AkiDwA's work on gender-based violence remains pivotal nationally for migrant women, and specifically focusses on FGM, domestic violence, trafficking, and early and forced marriage. This includes support for migrant women and research and awareness campaigns. Survivor groups also that provide structured feedback on services and what needs to be improved to meet the needs of migrant women. The organisation's service development is informed by survivors' experience which in turn influences and informs its policy and advocacy work nationally.

Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) is a campaigning, cross-impairment, National Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO). This means that all disabled people are welcome to join, support and guide the work, and influencing disabling policies and practices that keep disabled people from fully participating in society is the mantra. Disabled people run and control the organisation and ILMI aims for disabled people to have the same freedom, the same choice, and the same control over their lives so they can fully participate in society as equal citizens.

ILMI works to remove societal barriers that prevent active equal participation of disabled people, challenging the denial of people's rights, promote Independent Living as defined by the Disabled People Movement and the Social Model of Disability. Informed by principles of community development, the focus is on collective working and processes, collaborative decision making, and the empowerment of people affected by the issues they have identified. The focus is on disabled people's collective lived experiences of exclusion and discrimination as a driver for change.

ILMI also works to challenge the negative narratives of disability and disabled people, individual and institutional discrimination, structures and systems that disempower, and vested interests that maintain the status quo. Peer to peer support, mentoring and networking was identified as especially valuable for disabled women, and this is in line with the *UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities* and rights to live free from abuse in all its forms.

ILMI advocates that survivor engagement frameworks in Ireland must be actively inclusive of disabled peoples' lived experiences, alongside ensuring that support services are accessible and available for disabled women when they are needed. This means that all DSGBV services should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to support all disabled women, regardless of impairment. Services must have mandatory disability equality training delivered by disabled women. Disabled women must have a seat at all tables, whether at policy level or within organisations that support DSGBV survivors. Zero tolerance of DSGBV within communities must be accompanied by capacity building, for services to identify and respond effectively to disabled survivors of DSGBV, and a fully funded DSGBV service that is run and controlled by and for disabled women.

LGBT Ireland prioritises advocacy informed by the issues and experiences raised in its frontline services and provides a national voice on the opportunities and challenges facing people from LGBT+ communities.

Campaigns are developed in consultation with members of the community affected by the policy or legislation they seek to change, which can involve public meetings, information events and engagement online. The organisation has also undertaken collaboration with specialist services to improve LGBT inclusivity, informed by the feedback the organisation receives from LGBT communities on experiences of DSGBV. Targeted engagement has also been undertaken on safe accommodation, and access to justice for international protection applicants.

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre is a national organisation comprising Travellers, Roma and majority population working at local, regional, national and international levels to promote Traveller and Roma human rights. Pavee Point recognises that to achieve equality and inclusion for Travellers and Roma, both targeted and mainstream approaches are required. Within mainstream systems, this requires targeted positive action measures, such as outreach measures, anti-racism and discrimination measures, and partnerships with Traveller and Roma organisations.

The Second National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS II) sets the parameters for special measures in this area and includes strategic outcomes relating to Traveller and Roma women and DSGBV. It commits to addressing gender-based violence, fostering participation and leadership, and ensuring the specific needs of Traveller and Roma women and girls are considered in awareness-raising and in improving access to DSGBV supports.

Pavee Point's Violence Against Women (VAW) Programme has worked since 1998 to address violence against Traveller and Roma women through mainstream and targeted approaches to raise awareness, address barriers and advocate for effective policy and legislation. Pavee Point's analysis is grounded in intersectional analysis, recognising that Traveller and Roma women experience multiple forms of discrimination and gendered forms of racism which act as barriers for women to access information, safety, and protection from DSGBV. The programme works in partnership with Traveller organisations and national and local services to support the development of service provision that is responsive to Traveller and Roma women and to address structural barriers experienced when seeking safety and support.

Through its dedicated VAW Programme, Pavee Point embeds community development approaches within its DSGBV analysis and responses, and provides advisory support informed by collective experiences of the communities. This includes facilitating structured and culturally appropriate engagement pathways through which Traveller and Roma women engage collectively, rather than individually, on issues of DSGBV. The learning arising from this work, captured in anonymised and thematic ways, informs national advocacy, policy development and system improvement. Traveller and Roma organisations and networks play a vital role in supporting policymakers and service providers to apply intersectional analysis in practice and to ensure that Traveller, Roma and other minority ethnic women are centred within both mainstream and targeted responses.

Rape Crisis Ireland is a leading feminist membership organisation that advocates on behalf of survivors of sexual violence. In doing so, the organisation supports member services, advocates for justice and provides expert advice and research. Survivors' lived experience is centred, informed by the Rape Crisis model of supporting survivors in a way that is trauma informed, empowerment and healing based, non-directive and non-judgemental. The model is also survivor-led in recognition that survivors' lived experience informs its leadership, advocacy and practice, and that the best responses possible are led by survivors themselves who are best placed to know what they need at any given point.

Survivors using services are not only supported, but by anonymously and safely sharing their experience through the RCI Mosaic system, they also gain a voice, whether or not survivors choose to report to An Garda Síochána or other authorities, or to speak out publicly. This data analysis is stored securely and confidentially, and informs the organisation's national advocacy, to ensure survivors' voices shape and challenge society's responses and inform policy development.

Annual analysis is published - 'Learning from Survivors of Rape and Sexual Violence', Rape Crisis Ireland Statistics 2024[10] – and in doing so, transforms the collective experience of survivors into a powerful evidence base, to inform public debate and drive policy, system and service changes nationally. This most recent report also recommended that *"survivors' voices remain central in shaping policies, services and societal change by supporting survivor engagement mechanisms, and ensuring the anonymised testimonies of survivors collected across specialist services continues to inform national developments"*. It also advocated to *"invest in survivor-centered research to deepen understanding of disclosure experience and barriers to reporting and improve responses to survivors facing multiple discrimination and disadvantage"*.

---

[10] https://www.rapecrisisireland.ie/research/statistics-2024/

Ruhama provides services and supports to women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and the organisation also advocates for change to policy and legislation that will support and protect women impacted by sexual exploitation. This includes acting as an advocate to influence policy that will support and protect women.

All support provided by Ruhama is delivered using a trauma informed approach from a human rights and social justice perspective, while upholding lived experience work values and principles to build relationships with people accessing the peer support and service. As a survivor-informed organisation, Ruhama seeks to actively incorporate meaningful input from a diverse community of survivors at all stages of its programmes or projects, including development, implementation and evaluation. This approach recognises the expertise and lived experiences of survivors, ensuring their voices shape policies, practices and decision-making. Where employees also have lived experience of violence and the systems that replicate that, the organisation is clear that when they undertake national advocacy on policy and strategy, they represent the organisation's positions informed by the collective voice and experience of service users, and not their own lived experience.

Ruhama also established a peer support model that is being rolled out nationally that includes peer-led groups that are centrally supported and led by women who have used the service. The peer support and mentoring programme involves individuals who have been impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Some peer led groups are actively undertaking discussions on system change advocacy, whilst continuing to protect women's choices on anonymity or visibility and use of language. Ruhama ensures its advocacy nationally is informed by lived experience, to improve policy and strategies related to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence nationally.

SAOL – DAVINA project, was set up in response to an increased need among women who were presenting to SAOL for support around domestic violence. SAOL estimate that well over 90% of women who attend the project have experienced domestic abuse and violence at some point in their lives.
It aims to bridge the gap between addiction and domestic violence services. The project was co designed with women who have lived experience of domestic violence and addiction.

DAVINA EVE's (Experts Via Experience) inform the direction of the project, developing materials that can be used by professionals to support women with the dual experience of addiction and domestic violence. A 10-module programme has also been created and is being rolled out nationally informed by survivors lived experience. SAOL supports DAVINA EVE's with this work to help improve policy and strategies related to addiction and domestic violence.

Participants involved in this project also identified the following as promising practices in Ireland, which set a precedent for innovative survivor engagement mechanisms:

> The ***Special Advocate in Ireland*** was established by the Irish Government as part of the *Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions*, published in 2021, in recognition that the response of government to the legacy of these institutions must be directly informed by those most centrally affected. The Special Advocate's role was agreed by government, as a Ministerial appointment, to ensure survivors' views are central to the delivery of the State's response to the legacy of institutional trauma in Mother and Baby or County Home institutions, Magdalen Laundries, Industrial Schools and Reformatories and related institutions.
>
> Activities delivered include facilitating consultation; providing opportunities for survivors and affected people to meet to share lived experiences and views; report on collective interests, experiences and issues, and ensure their voices are central in key projects. This does not include service provision, investigating experiences or complaints, regulating the quality of service delivery, or providing legal advice on individual cases.
>
> The Special Advocate's role also includes establishing an *Advisory Council of Survivors and Affected Persons*, reflective of the broad range of experiences of institutional abuse. Its aim will be to explore key themes of collective concern, relating to records, redress, support and services, and memorialisation and dignified burial. In doing so, it will not focus on or review any individual issues, concerns or individual matters. Seven pillars reflecting the diverse experience of different forms of institutional abuse and forced family separation will appoint up to five people, each pillar will meet three times a year and they will come together for an all-Advisory Council meeting annually.
>
> ***Hub na nÓg in Ireland*** is a national centre of excellence and coordination in children and young people's participation in decision making. Its establishment in 2017, by the then Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, followed the National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020, and the centre of excellence created a national Children and Young People's Participation Framework (DCEDIY, 2021), published in 2021, to support and enhance participation work by providing practical tools to ensure that children and young people are included in decision-making in all settings where decisions made by adults will impact their lives.
>
> Hub na nÓg supports government departments, state agencies, public service and non-government organisations in providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision-making, which may include running targeted consultations, producing guidance and toolkits and resources, mentorship and guidance to help professionals meaningfully involve children and young people in the creation of policy.
>
> The centre has a particular focus on the voice of seldom-heard children and young people. This includes, among others, children and young people with disabilities, Traveller and Roma children and young people, children and young people from Black and minoritised communities, children and young people in alternative care, LGBT children and young people, young carers, the children of prisoners, and those from disadvantaged situations.

Priorities identified to improve survivor engagement in Ireland

Participants in this project identified that promising practice should in future include:

- Survivors who had recently used services, in the last two years, and survivors from survivor-led organisations, and an open call for survivors who had not used services, should be invited to participate in focus-group discussions to discuss future DSGBV strategy priorities and how services and systems should be improved. Holding focus groups with survivors, facilitated by people experienced in DSGBV but independent of services and who are trained in anti-racist, rights-based and trauma-informed approaches, should happen in parallel to survivors co-designing any future engagement framework, and the data from these would help inform the new Strategy and regional and national engagement groups and help prioritise issues important to survivors across the country. Participants identified this as a foundational priority action, and that prioritising independent facilitation of accessible and inclusive focus groups, alongside the meaningful involvement of services and organisations representing survivors, will be essential to legitimacy, trust and the quality of evidence gathered. Groups must be accessible, including for survivors who are disabled, younger and older, from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities, and for survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, survivors from urban and rural areas, and survivors of different forms of DSGBV. It was suggested that without well-resourced survivor engagement to inform the Strategy, there is a significant risk that it will not reflect lived realities or will be perceived as a tokenistic consultation.
- Ensuring strategy commitment to an enduring lived experience framework is important, and this commitment must also recognise and resource the essential role of specialist services and DSGBV organisations, including those that currently undertake survivor advocacy and that already support survivors to engage safely and meaningfully. Securing political and budgetary commitment at an early stage, with clear responsibility assigned to the Department of Justice and Cuan, is essential to the framework's long-term viability.
- Publishing minimum standards and mechanisms for measuring survivors' satisfaction with services received, which should be reported publicly. It was suggested by many participants that this should be led by Cuan and codesigned with survivors and specialist services, as Cuan is the agency already responsible for gathering DSGBV data and for improved services and systems.
- Creating a national portal to bring together plain language guidance on survivors' rights and entitlements, services' decision-making pathways and timelines, and DSGBV contacts for relevant agencies. It was proposed this be led or commissioned by Cuan and would enable survivors to understand what to expect from services, undertake their own advocacy, if the response they received was not in line with expected processes. This would also support survivors' agency, reduce harm caused by inaccessible or inconsistent information, and support survivors to raise issues and influence change.

- Establishing a dedicated DSGBV survivor advisory board nationally, supported by multiple-year funding, as one way to ensure an enduring survivor engagement framework. This would move away from ad-hoc consultation and should connect with local survivor engagement panels and other opportunities to engage. The framework should be sustainably resourced and not divert from funding for DSGBV services, and include designated funding for services that provide survivor-informed advocacy and support survivors to engage.
- Co-design of the survivor engagement framework, informed by the Australian learning from establishing a Lived Experience Advisory Council, and Victoria's *Lived Experience Strategy for Government* developed by survivors. Government investment should include a co-design process with survivors to shape the structure, ethical protocols and engagement processes for the framework. Participants felt it was important to prioritise a co design phase with survivors, to avoid imposing a 'top-down' model, and to build survivor ownership and trust. It was also felt important that this be as independent of government departments and Cuan as possible, ideally aligned with a new independent scrutiny function in Ireland (see below).
- Survivor-led boards or forums, independent of a national advisory board set up by Cuan. Survivors felt strongly that regional and national survivor organised and led forums or scrutiny panels be established, to which government departments are invited, to listen, answer, and commit to action, to shift power and increase accountability to survivors. Some participants, including survivors, also called for more consistency in reviewing of government-led DSGBV awareness campaigns before launch, to inform final decisions, to prevent harmful messaging, re-traumatisation, or collusion with perpetrators.
- Strong independent governance of the survivor engagement framework. It was recommended that a DSGBV Commissioner for Ireland be established, who is independent from government and its departments and from Cuan, with statutory authority to support the survivor engagement framework, and scrutinise and monitor implementation of Ireland's DSGBV strategy by government and its agencies. This could include independently reviewing legal provisions and the effectiveness of government and its departments and agencies, through engaging with survivors and stakeholders and establishing the survivor engagement framework.
- Survivors emphasised that participating in engagement structures, or leading survivor forums or contributing in other ways, should be valued as a professional contribution that is remunerated, to move away from drawing on 'hand-picked' and/or 'voluntary storytelling'. This would acknowledge advocacy as skilled work, promote equity, and counter stigma and paternalism. Survivors also called for resources to create a survivor-led conference, alongside regional and national survivor-led scrutiny panels, where government departments and agencies attend to report on progress, to help build accountability and momentum for system reform.

- Targeted engagement to capture expertise informed by different DSGBV experiences and diversity of survivors, with a focus, for example, on trafficking, sexual exploitation, coercive control, FGM, and migrant, disabled, Traveller and Roma survivors, LGBT, young and older survivors. Options for engagement to offer choice and flexibility was also supported, ranging from being informed clearly about rights and entitlements, to anonymised ways to contribute, anonymised data from survivors informing organisational advocacy, survivor focus groups, use of creative methods and more formal advocacy options. It was felt that flexible approaches would increases accessibility and safety, and help capture diverse voices, without forcing visibility or disclosure.
- Anonymised data analysis should be conducted in line with a human rights framework, including self-identification, explaining the reason for asking demographic questions and asking everyone the same questions. This should include disaggregation by characteristics such as sex, gender, race or ethnicity, Traveller and Roma, disability, sexuality, and age, to ensure inequities in participation and outcomes are visible. This would align with commitments in a number of government strategies that have called for improvements in equality data, with a particular emphasis on achieving a consistent and uniform approach.[11]
- Recognition that local area networks focussed on DSGBV were an important mechanism for convening grassroots participation and multi-agency coordination. Some recommended reviving these structures, with survivor representation and clear links to national structures, to connect local issues to national policy developments and to maximise local engagement from rural, migrant and Traveller and Roma communities. It was noted by some that Local Community Safety Partnerships and Children and Young People Services Committees already have a responsibility in this regard. Training should be prioritised for local authorities, An Garda Síochána and other public services, and for government departments, to engage well with survivors. This should include training on trauma- and DSGBV- informed approaches, supported by safe and ethical protocols for engagement, to help prevent harm and build trust.
- Investment in DSGBV related research which involved collaboration with survivors, and with DSGBV specialist services, which would fill gaps in knowledge and help evidence what works. Survivors should shape study design, process and analysis, and dissemination of findings. An example was provided of Ruhama's work on pathways to exit sexual exploitation involved women impacted by sexual exploitation throughout, including when presenting findings to policymakers. Survivors should be deliberately positioned as knowledge producers, not just subjects of research. Noting that Cuan already had a research programme on DSGBV as a statutory requirement, it was suggested that government-funded DSGBV research programmes centre collaboration with survivor-informed organisations and survivors as peer-researchers, which would strengthen the evidence base for future policy and strategy implementation.

---

[11] Recent strategies and plans that reference the need for improved data collection include the National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy, the National Traveller and Roma Strategy, the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People, the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2025-2030, and the National Action Plan against Racism. These are consistent with government commitments set out in the National Equality Data Strategy 2026-2031 published in March 2026.

Some participants also highlighted that Ireland should prioritise compliance with the Istanbul Convention, which would provide the foundation for promising practice in survivor engagement to take place.

In 2023, the European Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) published its baseline evaluation report in respect of Ireland's compliance with the Istanbul Convention. It identified numerous positive legal and policy measures that have been taken, and drew attention to the Strategy's intersectional approach and drafting in co-operation with some civil society organisations as promising practice. However, it also noted poor co-ordination and consultation with some organisations representing some groups of women, including Roma and Irish Traveller women. It also highlighted insufficient focus on forms of violence against women other than domestic violence, sexual violence, and sexual harassment in the workplace, and a lack of provision and capacity amongst support services, amongst other issues to be addressed.

Whilst there is no single Article that focusses on survivor engagement standards and mechanisms, the principle of meaningful survivor and services' engagement is embedded throughout the Convention, in order to inform policy-making, service design, and monitoring. For example:

Article 7 which requires states to ensure that co-ordinated and comprehensive measures to prevent and combat violence against women, should ensure survivors' views and lived experiences inform the implementation and evaluation of national strategies, and that organisations representing women subject to discrimination should also be effectively involved in shaping policy.

Article 9 mandates that governments recognize, encourage, and support non-government and civil society organisations, many of which are led by or represent survivors. Doing so ensures a primary mechanism for indirect and direct engagement with survivors.

Articles 18, 20, and 22 require that support services be "based on a gendered understanding of violence" and focused on empowerment, and providing effective support necessitates understanding survivors' needs through direct engagement. In addition to providing specialist support, services also contribute vital advocacy, awareness raising, and data collection, that brings the voices of survivors unable to participate in engagement mechanisms, to government. (Council of Europe, 2023)

4. Principles and enablers to inform meaningful engagement

Section 4. Principles and enablers to inform meaningful engagement

There are a plethora of frameworks and guidance documents that have been developed to inform approaches to lived experience engagement in different countries.

Meaningful engagement

The Council of Europe produced guidelines (Taylor and Otiende, 2024) for policy makers on engaging with survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, because people most impacted by strategy, policy, publicity campaigns or in need of services, should be involved in their development and implementation. The guidance aimed to help identify gaps in systems and services and create opportunities for people to advocate for change. Drawing on other frameworks, it clarified that 'meaningful engagement' meant:

> *"respectful, dignified and equitable inclusion of individuals with lived experience in a range of processes and activities within an enabling environment […] valuing lived experience as a form of expertise" (WHO, 2023) and "ensuring that people who are or have been impacted by an issue are involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies to address the issue".* (Ash and Otiende, 2023).

It also reinforced what participants in this project suggested, that engagement should be a continuum, an ongoing process, not a one-off event, and may variously include, depending on the context:[12]

- **Informing** survivors about strategy, policies, services and campaigns that affect them, in ways that are accessible, transparent, clear and understandable.
- **Asking** for testimonial evidence or views about policies, strategies, services or campaigns, and incorporating their feedback to improve and strengthen future work.
- **Involving** survivors from the outset in the development, implementation and review of strategy, policies, services and campaigns, for example, through an advisory group.
- **Collaborating** with survivors at every stage of the process, by employing survivors as expert advisors, peer researchers or consultants.
- **Empowering** survivors in ways that recognise and value their ideas and expertise, and that survivors have decision-making responsibility which will be implemented, or decision makers are accountable to survivors by reporting back to survivors.

---

[12] This is drawn from Council of Europe guidance (Ash and Otiende, 2024) which itself adapted this spectrum of engagement from Ash, C., (2019) 'Expanding Our Reach'.

Ireland's National Framework for children and young people's engagement refers to 'participation with purpose', which means that *"when children and young people are involved in decision-making, their views are listened to, taken seriously and given due weight with the intention of leading to an outcome or change."* (DCEDIY, 2021).

If applied to young and adult survivors of DSGBV, meaningful engagement would involve the intention, or actual evidence of, engagement leading to an outcome or change. Whether change is created from engagement is not always monitored, and is not an area that has been extensively researched. A recent Australian report (Wheildon, 2023) identified findings relevant for policy makers and governments seeking to meaningfully involve survivors in the coproduction of public policy and whether this created positive change for survivors or not. In summary, it found that:

- ***Survivors' independence***, or lack of, impacted their ability to effectively influence government. The more they became part of the machinery of government and its power structures, the more pressure survivors felt to compromise. Creating space for survivor advocacy and activism is therefore important: survivors spoke positively about the success of 'collective action' activism external to government that had helped change laws to benefit survivors. Engagement frameworks should include funding and support not only for advisory groups, but also for independent survivor networks, supported by specialist organisations with training for networks, and who can also be a conduit for feedback on policy and services.
- ***Inclusion*** of survivors from marginalised or discriminated against communities should be prioritised, especially by those likely to experience significant impact from multiple forms of violence, who are also less likely to be heard by policymakers. Frameworks should include flexible tailored approaches, not be a 'one-size-fits-all' model and include support for independent survivor networks and action. Mitigations should also be included against risks of survivors being co-opted by politicians or others whose agendas may not support survivors' collective interests.
- ***Support*** for survivors and for policymakers, that is trauma informed and explains the policymaking and coproduction process for survivors, and in parallel offers training for policymakers. It was found that the lack of preparedness and capabilities within government departments or its agencies can impact not only how vicarious trauma is managed but also exacerbate trauma experienced by survivors. Training for government and its agencies should also cover how to share or relinquish power, how to do effective co-production, and importance of valuing survivors' expertise.

Several lived experience frameworks and guidance documents also incorporate principles that should underpin how best to undertake meaningful lived experience engagement in different countries. For example:

> The World Health Organisation's principles underpinning its framework for meaningful engagement for people living with mental health and other conditions, include **dignity and respect, power and equity, inclusivity and intersectionality, commitment, transparency, and institutionalisation**. (WHO, 2023).

Australian guidance for mental health lived experience governance (Hodges et al. 2023) centres a values driven focus on partnership and coproduction; safeguarding, responsibility and power; involvement, expertise and leadership; transformative workplaces; innovation, and continuous improvement. Principles identified reiterate the importance of equity, inclusivity and transferring power, by focussing on self-determination and cultural responsiveness, and reinforce valuing lived experience as **expertise**, being **recovery-focused, person directed, strengths-based, trauma-informed, humanistic** and **voluntary**.

An Australian national framework for engaging people with lived and living experience of domestic and sexual violence (ANROWS, 2023), which was informed by consultation with survivors, practitioners, and organisations, positions survivors as experts and aims to ensure engagement is safe, ethical, inclusive and meaningfully contributes to policy, service and system improvements. A summary of some of the principles adopted includes paying attention to **trauma-informed practice, safety first, intersectionality and inclusiveness, cultural safety, valuing expertise, provision of support,** and a **long-term commitment**.

Victoria Government's Lived Experience Strategy (VSAC, 2022) was created by the *Victims Survivors Advisory Council* to guide government to embed survivors' experience amongst the full spectrum of family and sexual violence reforms across policy, strategy and services. Its co-designed principles included **dignity, value, inclusion, accountability, trust**, and being **trauma-aware**, and aimed to serve as an anchor to sustain the relationship between government and those with lived experience, including survivors and people bereaved from family violence. These principles and the strategy called on government to embed in every piece of work produced the experience and expertise of those who live with and have survived family and sexual violence.

The above-mentioned Wales toolkit (Welsh Women's Aid, n.d.) for specialist and public services to undertake survivor and service user engagement recommends that frameworks should be **trauma-informed, strength-based, needs-led, empowering and dynamic**. The UK also produced a Research Integrity Framework, created by academics and UK Women's Aid federations (Women's Aid England, 2020) to promote best practice in recognising the merits of evidence and accountability to survivors and specialist services. It advocates that gender-based violence researchers commit to prioritising safety and wellbeing, transparency and accountability, equality and social justice, engagement, and ethics. With regards survivor engagement, it emphasises that survivor perspectives should be present from the outset, noting also that *"it is not ethical to ask for survivor input if the research is poorly designed, is methodologically flawed, or where the risks to the survivor in offering their expertise is not outweighed by the benefits to them both personally and in relation to society more broadly"*.

In Ireland, the Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse operates from principles of **transparency** and **integrity**, and is committed to a **trauma informed** approach. The Advocate's work is also informed by the following values: **independence, integrity, openness, fairness, full and equal participation, respect, confidentiality**, and **accountability** (Special Advocate, 2025).

> The Ireland Children and Young People's Participation Framework (DCEDIY, 2021) supports departments, agencies and organisations to improve their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. It was developed as a collaboration between the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Hub na nÓg and Queens University, Belfast, and is based on the child rights model of participation developed by Professor Laura Lundy, which provides guidance for decision-makers. The Framework includes the principles of being **transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child friendly, inclusive and non-discriminatory, supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk**, and **accountable**.

Suggested principles for meaningful survivor engagement in Ireland

The proposed principles that should inform the survivor engagement framework for Ireland, should ultimately be created in collaboration with survivors of DSGBV, when developing the framework.

However, informed by participants feedback, and a review of frameworks from other jurisdictions (some of which are summarised above), it is suggested that the following principles and enablers be considered, for a future survivor engagement framework:

DSGBV and trauma informed

The term 'trauma-informed' is commonly used, and sometimes misused, and clearly defining what a 'trauma informed approach' means will be important for the framework, which should align with Ireland's policy and legislative landscape. In the absence of an all-Ireland definition, learning from Wales' whole-of-society-approached to being trauma informed (ACE Hub Wales, 2022) suggests:

> *"A trauma-informed approach recognises that everyone has a role in sensitively facilitating opportunities and life chances for people affected by trauma and adversity…. [which] "takes account of the widespread impact of adversity and trauma and understands potential ways of preventing, healing and overcoming this…" [and] "where people recognise the multiple presentations of being affected by trauma…".*
>
> *"In this approach knowledge about trauma and its effects are integrated into policies, procedures, and practices. It seeks to actively resist traumatising people again and prevent and mitigate adverse consequences, prioritising physical and emotional safety and commits to 'do no harm' in practice and to proactively support and help affected people make their own informed decisions."*

In practice, such an approach means people recognise everyone may at some point experience trauma; understand 'behaviour as communication', the importance of safety and trust, and the cumulative impact of inequalities and their causal link with trauma; and behave in ways that are non-judgemental, kind and compassionate whilst ensuring support is provided when trauma or distress happens. Identifying, understanding and supporting people's needs should include maximising psychological and physical safety by promoting choice, collaboration and transparency.

In practice this may also include paying attention to language, acknowledging that people who have experienced or be impacted by DSGBV may not identify as 'victims' or 'survivors'; some may prefer "peer supporters" or "survivor advocates," for example. Some survivors also called for the Observatory to use the term "Experts by Experience", and it is proposed the language used for the survivor engagement framework be agreed during the co-design phase. Similarly, whilst there are differences in terminology regarding prostitution, and civil society organisations might use language that reflects Ireland's DSGBV Strategy – which indicates commitment to "women in prostitution hav[ing] access to safety, health care, support, and exit routes" – women may choose to use different language.

Participants felt it was important that survivor engagement frameworks not only reduce risks of re-traumatisation but also centre knowledge and expertise on DSGBV. People undertaking engagement with survivors should not only be trauma informed but also have a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and impact of violence, and adopt a supportive approach that prioritises safety, trust, and support before, during, and after any participation. Survivors should be given the choice of whether to engage or not, whether to remain anonymous or not, to choose what they share and how to participate.

Do no harm: maximise support and safe spaces

Safe, supportive, empathic, compassionate approaches to building trust with survivors, in ways that are focussed on strengths, are also central to being trauma informed. Survivor engagement frameworks should promote transparency, honesty and reliability in interactions with people with lived experience. There is a need for ongoing support and the creation of safe spaces for meaningful engagement to take place. This should include clarity on confidentiality and use of data, safe participation protocols. Resources to establish and sustain survivor engagement mechanisms should not divert from DSGBV organisations, that support the movement across Ireland and are already stretched in terms of their capacity to support and create safe spaces for survivors.

Survivors are expert by experience

Listen, acknowledge and learn from the expertise of survivors, recognising survivors' lived expertise as equal to learned knowledge. Participants felt it was also important to elevate survivors' voice and contribution by creating spaces where survivors are true partners in decision-making. Power sharing with DSGBV survivors should be purposeful, not performative, and the effectiveness of survivor engagement frameworks will depend on how effectively unequal power structures and systems are addressed (see below, enablers).

Inclusion and anti-discrimination

Principles guiding the framework must explicitly include anti-racism and anti-discrimination and community development approaches, alongside trauma-informed and rights-based practice. A trauma-informed approach recognises and seeks to address the impact of discrimination and oppression. For the full diversity of women's voices to be heard, we need to recognise and overcome the additional barriers that exist for women based on their identities and experiences. Participants felt strongly that a survivor engagement framework should include voices that reflect the diversity of women impacted by DSGBV, in relation to age, sex, gender identity, migration, disability, sexuality, survivors from Traveller and Roma communities, urban and rural areas, and whether survivors have co-existing support needs relating to mental health, problematic substance use, homelessness, involvement in the justice system, or poverty. A framework should provide opportunities for survivors to contribute (anonymously or not) if they have experienced all forms of DSGBV including trafficking, sexual exploitation, sexual violence, coercive control, stalking, FGM or forced marriage.

Inclusive engagement also requires some key questions to be addressed, including digital and literacy capabilities, accessibility of locations, communication accessibility, cognitive and sensory support needs, financial and practical supports, confidentiality needs, and preferences of survivors when choosing methods of engagement.

Accountability and transparency

Be clear about the point of engagement and transparent with all involved about the process. Create space to consider and address what support is needed to overcome barriers to participation. Clarify the process: what has come before, how voices will be recorded and used, what follows next and what information and assumptions are being made. Ensure work with people with lived experience leads to action and outcomes. Commit to "you said—we did" reporting and shared indicators of progress or success. There should also be clarity about when codesign and coproduction are appropriate or when existing research may be available that should be utilised. Engagmeent should not be tokenistic; if a decision has already been made, or there is no influence or scope for change, then it would be irresponsible to ask survivors to advise on actions to create change.

Some enablers for meaningful survivor engagement

Sustainable resourcing and remuneration

Sustained financing from a range of sources is essential to achieve the vision of a meaningful survivor engagement framework for Ireland. This should supplement, and cannot be at the expense of, resources for DSGBV services, because support for survivors and the specialist services that provide support is a foundational requirement for effective survivor engagement to take place.

Lived experience is a form of expertise, equivalent to and on a par with learned expertise, and survivors with lived experience of DSGBV should be remunerated accordingly, at a rate equivalent to that for external consultants or technical experts. Funding should also be made available to remove barriers and improve access to engagement where necessary, and to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion.

Funding should be allocated for supporting the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the survivor engagement framework. This includes the recruitment, engagement, support and training of survivors and those undertaking related engagement activity.

Funding should also be provided directly to DSGBV specialist national and local organisations who contribute to the framework, who support their membership to deliver the framework, and who support survivors who participate in engagement activities and who may still need support related to DSGBV. Survivor engagement funding should be additional to, and not divert resources from, designated funds for DSGBV services that support survivors. It is important that establishing new structures do not unintentionally dilute quality, expertise, or survivor centred principles within DSGBV specialist services, particularly for smaller organisations operating under constrained budgets.

Survivors' safety

If survivors will be identifiable, through engagement, it is vital that safety concerns and how best to maximise their safety and wellbeing is discussed and addressed from the outset. Recognition that if they have used services, survivors may likely have experienced trauma by the organisations or services when they sought help. Whilst DSGBV survivors are experts in their own experience, engagement work may also impede their freedom from abuse or exacerbate trauma. Participating in group discussions or meetings also requires consideration of survivors' safety, in terms of empathy and confidentiality boundaries, as well as have available pre and post participation supports. Any framework should offer options to enable survivors to choose anonymity and participation in discussions in ways that are accessible and safe. These considerations should be reconsidered regularly because their own circumstances or factors related to perpetrators of violence may change.

Systems for safeguarding survivors' data should be prioritised, and any engagement framework should operate founded on voluntary participation and informed consent. Secure communication methods should be used, access to support services should be available, and confidentiality boundaries should be clearly understood.

Survivors' engagement also should not have to involve disclosing personal experiences, and some survivors working in services who have lived- and professional- experience may want to contribute to engagement activities from their professional perspective, as someone who is expert by experience. Enabling this and seeing the 'whole person' can be powerful for some who have only been seen as their 'survivor identity' by agencies.

Capacity building and integrated approach

Supporting survivors to engage with governmental and policy-making systems and services, will be just as vital as ensuring public services, specialist services and government departments build their own ability to undertake and support meaningful engagement and rights-based approaches.

Survivors should be given an overview of how information and data is accessed and applied, and training and support in engaging in meetings or groups.

Organisations should assess their readiness to safely engage lived experience, and not only focus on ad-hoc service or policy design, but also incorporate survivor engagement into strategic planning, evaluation, and system monitoring. DSGBV, trauma informed and anti-discriminatory training should also be mandatory for staff who facilitate engagement. Government departments' capacity-building should include understanding DSGBV, the value of learning from survivors lived experience as a form of expertise, and skills for engaging meaningfully and addressing power imbalances through participatory approaches for their respective areas of work.

Any future survivors' engagement framework should be formalised, mandated, and embedded in relevant institutions. It should be integrated into and across all relevant strategies, policies, services and programme areas, to move from siloed approaches. This will require a whole-of-government collaboration. This approach can also support integration of meaningful survivor engagement into other national commitments and action plans relevant to or that intersect with DSGBV.

Redistribution of power

To address unequal power structures and systems, power must be redistributed and shared with DSGBV survivors. Survivors' expertise should be viewed as equivalent to traditional sources of data, research or evidence.

Creating spaces for meaningful engagement which are safe and conducive to survivors having a voice relies on equitable power dynamics, attention to the use of language, a non-judgemental approach, active listening and engagement, and non-discrimination. This involves promoting and practising 'allyship' and respectful disruption, of harmful systems that retraumatise survivors or enable violence, and actively challenging sexism, racism, and all forms of discrimination and oppression, within a rights-based approach.

Instead of ensuring survivors have "a seat at the table" this may mean bringing the "table" to survivors who are most marginalised, in local settings, and showing up at survivors' "tables" at which survivors shape agendas, priorities, strategies and decisions.

Power redistribution can be difficult at first for those who already hold power, in services and in government departments, but it is a fundamental enabler to ensure that people with lived experience are empowered to participate fully.

An example of moving from power sharing towards self-determination in Victoria:

In Victoria, there is learning from the model of power transfer to Aboriginal communities[13] with lived experience of trauma, injustice and discrimination, particularly in relation to family and sexual violence.

In summary, an Aboriginal-led agreement with government (Dhelk Dja) centres on self-determination, strengths and shared decision-making. This agreement enables people with lived experience to directly influence and inform work on family and sexual violence, funding decisions and policy development, by providing a strong and informed voice, cultural perspective, and strategic advice based on self-determination. A robust governance structure guides this work, which is funded separately from the resourcing of specialist and community controlled organisations to support survivors and their families:

- Community members and leaders form eleven local *Action Groups* at a community level.
- Action Group chairs come together with specialist community-led services, to form the Dhelk Dja Koori *Caucus*, which in effect forms a conduit between Aboriginal community with lived experience and the government system. The Caucus includes Aboriginal survivors on the Victim Survivors Advisory Council. It also contributes to and leads on how government funding is allocated for domestic and sexual violence initiatives.
- Three times a year, Action Groups host the Dhelk Dja *Partnership Forum*, which brings together Action Group Chairs and Caucus members, with senior leaders in government departments, to agree three year action plans. Chaired by the Minister and an Action Group Chair, senior government leaders are accountable and report to the Forum on their department's progress on delivery against the plans. The Forum oversees and coordinates the strategic implementation, monitoring and evaluation of action plans to drive improved outcomes for Aboriginal people with lived experience of family and sexual violence.

---

[13] The partnership forum is resourced by government to enable shared decision-making with Aboriginal communities and organisations. Victoria's Treaty process seeks to reset the relationship between First Peoples, the State and all Victorians, and will be the primary mechanism for transferring decision-making power and resources to communities in Victoria. The Dhelk Dja Partnership and Action Plans, including governance and funding arrangements, will be adjusted as required to align with Treaty.

5. Recommendations for action: Towards establishing a survivor engagement framework in Ireland

Section 5. Recommendations for action: establishing a survivor engagement framework in Ireland

The lived experience of people affected by domestic, sexual and gender based violence has underpinned the leadership, advocacy and practice of specialist services and their membership organisations across Ireland for decades. Being trauma-informed and survivor-led is often at the core of many services' and organisations' models for responding to DSGBV, and they form part of a European and global movement to prevent such violence from happening in the first place.

Experiential evidence is also drawn on by national specialist organisations in anonymised data analysis reports that inform their advocacy for system change.[14] Peer-networks are being supported by some services, and survivor-led organisations have also been established in Ireland, where women who have experienced domestic, sexual and gender-based violence can come together to collectively advocate for service and system improvements.[15] As outlined above, experiential knowledge of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence has also successfully led to some law changes and policy improvements in Ireland.

Where state-led survivor participation processes have happened in Ireland, they have been linked to specific DSGBV actions, or might occur at the request of survivors or their representatives, and have often been robust and welcomed. Yet this report shows that many also felt the approach has tended to be ad-hoc and inconsistent across government departments. There is also now an assumption by some Strategy leads within several government departments, that their engagement with the government agency, Cuan, will bring the voice of DSGBV survivors into policy-making processes, when in fact there are no clear processes in place for doing so; that is also not Cuan's role.

There was broad consensus across meetings with civil society organisations, with survivors and some government departments, and the message was clear: Ireland needs a structured, resourced, intersectional and accountable survivor engagement framework, that is national and local, co-produced with survivors and those who hold DSGBV expertise, and incorporates a national Advisory Council, regional survivor-led panels, and crucially, the continuation by DSGBV organisations of existing survivor engagement and survivor advocacy work. It was suggested that public and civil service leaders be invited to survivor-led meetings. Survivors also recommended engagement with survivors of different forms of violence; a framework that is structured, sustainable, resourced and accountable; centred on choice, safety, diversity and power sharing; and that is national, regional and local, and not tokenistic but creates measurable systems change.

---

[14] For example, see Rape Crisis Ireland (2024) 'Learning from Survivors of Rape and Sexual Violence.'

[15] For example, see Beyond Surviving, and Survivors Informing Services and Institutions (SiSi).

The Observatory offers structured collaboration and diversity of experiences and, alongside DSGBV membership organisations and specialist services in Ireland, they offer collective engagement opportunities for policy-makers and funders. The Observatory has long advocated for a national survivor engagement framework, that should be relevant for government agencies and departments, policy makers, strategy leads and funders, public services and local government.

These are its immediate and longer-term recommendations for a framework for survivor engagement in Ireland. Prioritised and structured across two phases, these aim to build on existing forms of engagement with survivors from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, while also leveraging national and regional opportunities.

A framework for Ireland: recommendations

Most participants felt strongly that any survivor engagement framework should be co-created with survivors with lived experience, and with specialist services, and the framework and engagement approaches should continue to evolve with ongoing contributions from survivors and services.

As such, many of the recommendations presented here, which are informed by participants to this project and a review of relevant literature, are suggestions for consideration during a future co-design process, without being too prescriptive. Further information to support implementation are provided in appendices.

Phase 1: Recommendations for implementation in the short term

1. **Co-design and co-production process established by Cuan**
   Cuan should establish a timely co-design and co-production process for creating the survivor engagement framework, and standards and protocols that underpin it. This process should involve survivors and DSGBV and community advocacy organisations, who advocate on behalf of survivors and can bring a collective voice of discriminated against groups, to co-design the survivor engagement framework, standards, and protocols.

2. **Responsibility for survivor engagement mechanisms should be assigned to and led by Cuan**
   Informed by feedback from stakeholders and survivors who contributed to this report, consideration should be given to establishing a **national survivor-chaired Lived Experience Advisory Council**, incorporated into existing DSGBV governance structures led by Cuan and Department of Justice. ***This Lived Experience Advisory Council should be established alongside existing engagement mechanisms with DSGBV services and representative organisations.***

   2. 1 Survivor membership:

   2.1.1 An open call for recruitment should be made, for survivors to join the Council, informed by clear role descriptions, and this would include appointment of a Chair and Vice Chair, within the process.

2.1.2 Recruitment should be open to people with experience of different forms of DSGBV, including family members bereaved through homicide/femicide or suicide, recognising that survivors appointed would not be representative of all survivors or of all experiences of forms of abuse. It should clarify remuneration commitments at the point of recruitment.

2.1.3 Careful attention should be given within the recruitment process to prioritising survivors under-represented within service systems, from diverse communities with experience of intersecting forms of discrimination (e.g. survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, from urban and rural areas, survivors who are disabled, younger and older, from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities), and with lived experience of different and/or multiple forms of DSGBV (e.g. trafficking and sexual exploitation, sexual violence, coercive control, FGM, forced marriage, stalking and harassment, families bereaved through femicide).

2.1.4 Survivors appointed to the Council should not be expected to talk about their own experience of DSGBV, nor advocate for their personal experience; they would draw on their own lived experience to advocate for systems and service improvements, to benefit all survivors of DSGBV collectively.

2.1.5 Appointment should be on a three-year basis, including time allocated for survivors to be trained and supported to undertake survivor advocacy, at the outset. Training may be provided by DSGBV specialist agencies or professionals experienced in survivor advocacy and government advocacy mechanisms.

2.2 Operation:

2.2.1 The Council should operate on survivor led agendas (“come to our table”) and have the option to invite cross government senior-level attendance to report on departmental progress and priorities, to avoid this becoming a ‘talking-shop’ or being inundated with government priorities, papers or presentations.

2.2.2 Themed or targeted sub-groups should be agreed by survivors, which may include thematic consideration of priorities within Ireland’s Programme for Government. Groups may also emerge from identified opportunities for influence and draw on relevant lived experience and expertise (e.g. Family Law Courts, FGM).

2.2.3 The Council’s work should be supported by appropriate funding, by senior civil servants supporting the framework’s intent, and by secretariat and development support.

2.2.4 The Council’s mandate should include advising ministers, government departments and its agencies on DSGBV related policy, legislation, and service design (not only DSGBV specific issues); co production of national guidance and implementation of strategy delivery plans; commissioning; campaigns; and include a mandatory feedback loop to participants.

2.2.5 The Council's Chair and Vice Chair should be offered mentoring support from an independent and suitably experienced DSGBV leader.

2.3 Safety and support:

2.3.1 Safety is a significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. Safety should be maximised, voluntary participation and informed consent should be prioritised, access to support services should be available in parallel to engagement, and options should be available to enable survivors to participate in discussions in ways that are accessible and safe for them. For many survivors, distrust of state systems is also shaped by fears relating to state interventions, which must be recognised in engagement design.

2.4 Values and principles:

2.4.1 Agreeing values and principles, from the outset, is also an enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. The survivor engagement framework, standards and protocols should be guided by principles developed by survivors. It is suggested these include being DSGBV- and trauma- informed; doing no harm and maximising support and safety; recognising that survivors are experts by experience; accountability, inclusion and anti-discrimination.

3. National consultation to inform the Fourth National DSGBV Strategy

A national consultation process should be commissioned (with survivors, services and DSGBV advocacy groups informed by survivors' lived experience) to inform priorities within the future National DSGBV strategy.

3.1 The consultation should be delivered in collaboration with the Observatory, survivor-led agencies and DSGBV membership organisations.

3.2 Survivors should feature in the consultation as standalone stakeholders.

3.3 Engagement should be sensitive of DSGBV, in anti-racist, rights-based and trauma-informed approaches and pay attention to language, literacy, digital exclusion and other access needs. It should prioritise accessibility, safety, confidentiality and inclusion of survivors from discriminated against communities, those who have experienced diverse forms of DSGBV, and who are often furthest away from services and systems. This includes survivors who are disabled, younger and older, from LGBT, Traveller and Roma, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities, and for survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, survivors from urban and rural areas, and survivors of different forms of DSGBV.

The Observatory, working with national DSGBV membership organisations, should continue to engage with Cuan and government departments, on delivery of these recommendations.

3.4 Funding and Strategy Commitment – Department of Justice and Cuan

The proposed new survivor engagement framework should be a commitment that is prioritised in Ireland's national DSGBV Strategy. In the short term, this will include a cost analysis of the establishment and implementation of a national Lived Experience Advisory Council, with particular consideration given to this operating alongside exiting mechanisms, not diverting resources from specialist services, ensuring sufficient remuneration for survivors, and resources to meet the support costs associated with participation.

Phase 2: Long-term recommendations for a sustainable and flexible structure

4. Sustainable funding

Resourcing is a significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. Resources for survivor engagement should be sustainable and not divert from resources from DSGBV organisations. It should be the responsibility of the Department of Justice and Cuan to secure sustainable budget for this work, whilst working on establishment of the structure with survivors, the Observatory, survivor-led agencies and DSGBV organisations. This should prioritise resourcing both individual lived experience and expertise, and the collective expertise held within survivor advocacy organisations. Resourcing considerations should also include:

4.1 Recognition that community/advocacy organisations bring a collective voice from discriminated groups, and that commitments should also align with relevant national commitments, including the National Action Plan Against Racism, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and the National Strategy for Women and Girls.

4.2 Prioritising survivors' appropriate remuneration, in ways that consider risks to immigration status or eligibility for social welfare, housing, healthcare or immigration supports. Resourcing models must include clear safeguards to ensure participation does not undermine access to social welfare supports, medical cards, housing supports or other entitlements.

4.3 Removing barriers to engagement, training and support for co-production, evaluation and review, contributing funds to independent survivor networks, and funding for existing approaches, including for:

- organisations who analyse data on anonymised experiences to inform their advocacy.
- services that support survivors' involvement in policy advocacy or in speaking publicly.
- survivor-led organisations, established to provide connection, advocacy and voice and to support women to be recognised as experts.

5. **Promoting choice: more than a 'one size fits all' approach**
The survivor engagement framework should be sufficiently structured yet flexible to maximise choice and ensure engagement is inclusive of people's diverse identities and experiences, including, for example, substance use, mental health support needs, homelessness, involvement in the justice system, and experiences of multiple forms of violence. It should offer safe, accessible and meaningful engagement opportunities for DSGBV survivors. This should be resourced separately, and not at the expense of funding for DSGBV organisations and happen alongside resources for agencies and membership organisations that already support survivors to participate, or who undertake national advocacy informed by survivors. Dedicated resources for survivor engagement should not be diverted from existing resources allocated to DSGBV organisations.

6. **Other flexible mechanisms for survivor engagement**
Reliance on one state agency to represent survivors' diverse experiences, or on designing processes that serve specific strategy or policy needs, would be progress, but it would not be sufficient. There was strong support for flexible and diverse mechanisms for more consistent and meaningful survivor engagement, in knowledge-production and policy-making processes, and a need for clarity on how to achieve this, nationally and locally.

   It is vital the framework should include opportunities for anonymous input, small group dialogue, creative methods for engagement, peer advisers and researchers, and be accessible for language, literacy and digital inclusion needs. Enabling parallel anonymous participation is essential for survivors who fear state surveillance, data sharing, or community repercussions. Creative and flexible methods can also increase safety and accessibility. For example:

   6.1 Anonymous participation and capturing survivors' voices via specialist services, including the continuation of anonymised data analysis that is disaggregated by characteristics such as sex, gender, race or ethnicity, Traveller and Roma, disability, sexuality, and age.

   6.2 Resourcing services who already support survivor engagement, for example, engagement with survivors with substance use or mental health support needs, people who have been subject to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, survivors of sexual violence, coercive control, FGM and forced marriage. Targeted engagement would also be needed with disabled people, people from LGBT, Traveller, Roma, and migrant communities.

   6.3 Encourage survivor advocacy and activism independent of government power structures by fostering a culture of survivor activism and movement-building. National DSGBV membership organisations could be jointly resourced to establish a national network of DSGBV survivors, that may include online spaces and in-person convenings to build alliances around shared priorities. This would enable safe spaces for survivors to engage independent of government structures, and for survivor activists to connect across issues, generations, and geographies and contribute to a survivor activist movement.

7. **National and local opportunities, supported by standards and protocols**
The framework should combine national and local opportunities for safe and accessible engagement pathways for survivors with trusted routes into participation, including for Traveller and Roma survivors, disabled survivors, younger and older people, survivors from LGBT, Black, Global Majority and migrant communities, and with lived experience of different and/or multiple forms of DSGBV. Local engagement structures are vital for discriminated against communities and should be clearly linked to national processes. These opportunities should be supported by survivor engagement standards and ethical engagement protocols, grounded in safety, trauma-informed and anti-discriminatory practice, power-sharing, transparency and accountability.

Further consideration should be given to how national and local structures for survivor engagement might connect in future, without overriding existing arrangements.

7.1 For example, several participants suggested that national structures could be 'mirrored' regionally/locally, in the form of a 'hub and spokes' model, involving dedicated survivor-led scrutiny and action panels, with have a clear upward reporting to the national Council.

7.2 Regional Survivor Panels could be aligned with existing organising or partnership structures without duplicating existing arrangements, including, for example:

- An Garda Síochána divisions,
- Local authority/county structures, and
- Multi agency partnerships (links to community safety partnerships was preferred).

7.3 Regional survivor panels and the national Lived Experience Advisory Council could appoint survivors to existing relevant partnership forums and boards. This would not be instead of safe, trusted and accessible survivor engagement structures, and could include, for example, designating two survivor representative seats from national and regional survivor panels, at existing partnership structures, like the:

- Homelessness Consultative Forums,
- Community Safety Partnerships, and
- HSE regional service user engagement structures.

8. **Build capacity and readiness for meaningful engagement, with a focus on governance and leadership, an integrated approach, and power sharing**
Capacity building is another significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. While governance structures will evolve over time, clarity and transparency on independence, oversight and leadership will be important from the outset, to prevent conflicts of interest, support meaningful engagement, and build trust with survivors who have experienced harmful state-led interventions. The Observatory and DSGBV

organisations, including those representing discriminated against communities, should be included in relevant structures and collaborate in ensuring inclusivity and accountability. Whilst the framework is being co-designed, attention should be given by the Department of Justice (as policy and legislative lead for DSGBV) to ensure government departments and public services are ready to engage meaningfully with survivors, by:

8.1 Establishing cross-departmental collaboration and mechanisms to embed survivor engagement in policy-making; securing leadership for survivor engagement within relevant departments; and addressing the perceived lack of readiness of some departments and agencies to engage meaningfully with survivors.

8.2 Ensuring civil servants (who are usually not specialist) have a good understanding of survivor engagement methods, and are trained in DSGBV and trauma informed approaches, and anti racism and anti-discrimination, that is inclusive of anti-Traveller and Roma racism, LGBT and disability inclusion. DSGBV, trauma informed and anti-discriminatory training, that is inclusive of anti- Traveller and Roma racism, should also be mandatory for those who facilitate engagement. While training programmes can evolve, it is important that such basic mandatory training is provided from the outset, to ensure engagement is safe, respectful and meaningful.

8.3 Capacity building services to support survivors to participate. The creation of 'lived experience' coordination roles in specialist organisations should be considered to support survivor engagement capacity-building.

8.4 Supporting survivor engagement to be embedded across government, not confined to Cuan. For survivor engagement to have most impact commitment to survivor engagement it should be integrated into and across all relevant strategies, policies, service and programme areas. This should be supported by integrated whole-of-government collaboration and coordination between national and local panels and partnerships.

Power sharing and redistribution is another significant enabler for meaningful survivor engagement. This is predicated on understanding that survivors' expertise be valued as equivalent to traditional sources of data; the need to disrupt harmful systems that retraumatise survivors or enable violence; and the need to actively challenge sexism, racism, disablism and all forms of discrimination and oppression, within a rights-based approach. It is not enough for survivors to have "a seat at the table"; those who want to meaningfully engage should also show up at survivors' "tables" at which survivors shape agendas, priorities, strategies and decisions. Power-sharing also requires recognising collective experience and community knowledge as valid forms of evidence, alongside individual testimony and other data.

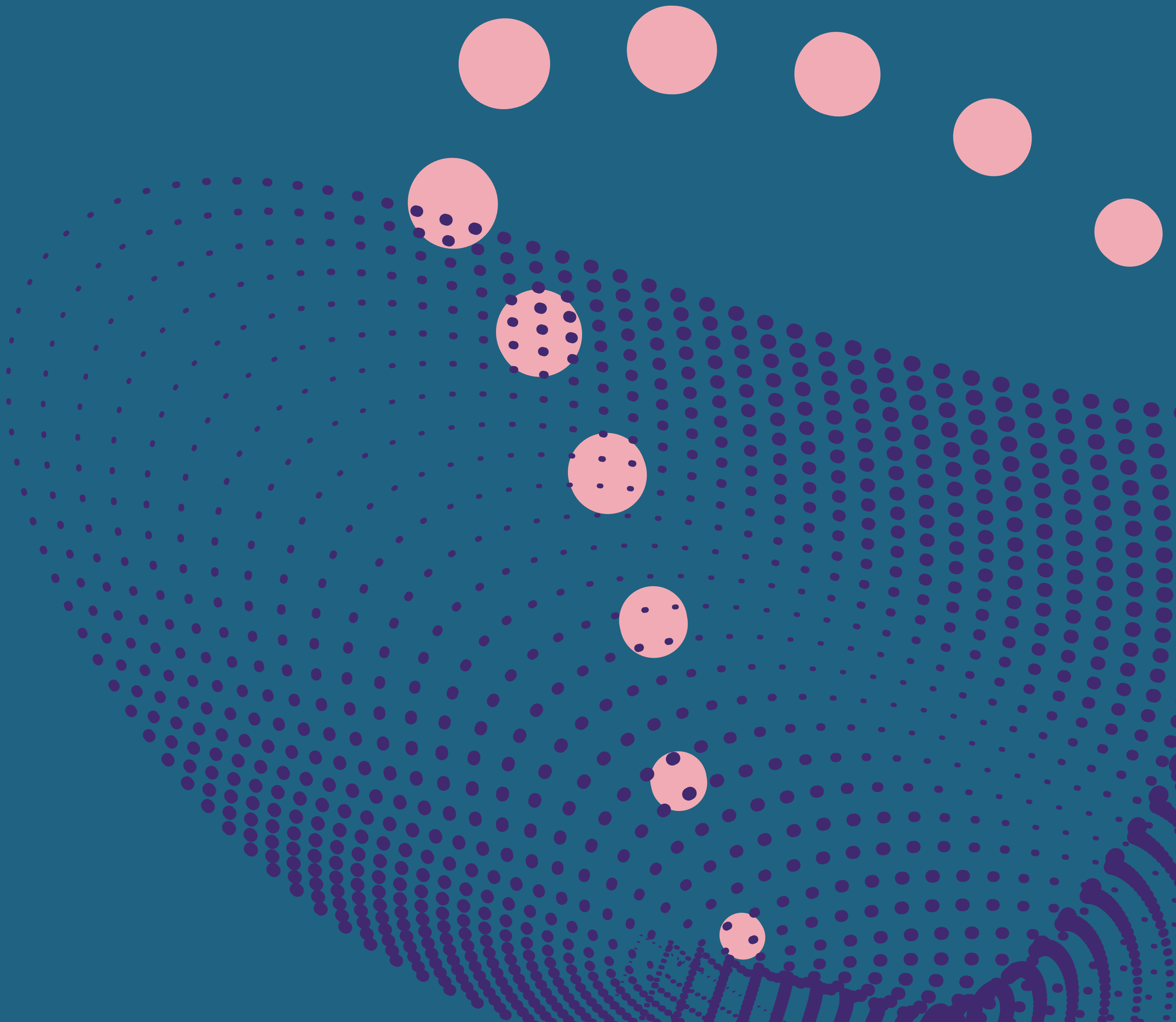
9. Accountability and reporting on progress

Once the framework is co-designed and agreed, the co-design of toolkits for structured, creative, and alternative options for accessible and anonymised participation should follow, supported by guidance on accountability and evaluation mechanisms. Evaluation will be essential to ensure transparency and prevent engagement fatigue, and it should assess whether the framework works equitably for survivors from discriminated against communities.

Survivor-led accountability mechanisms should include accessible reporting on what has changed as a result of engagement, feeding back to survivors on the impact of their engagement. Survivor-led organisations should also be resourced to deliver a mechanism of annual accountability to survivors, in the form of a survivor-led forum or event, co-chaired by the responsible minister and survivor, to which senior government and agency leaders would be invited to report on progress and address issues prioritised by survivors.

The Observatory, working with national DSGBV membership organisations, should also advocate for a national DSGBV Commissioner or Adviser, as suggested by several participants, to obtain political support for such a monitoring body independent of government departments and agencies, which would include coordination bringing the voice of survivors to government Ministers and departments and holding them to account for strategy and policy delivery.

6. Appendices



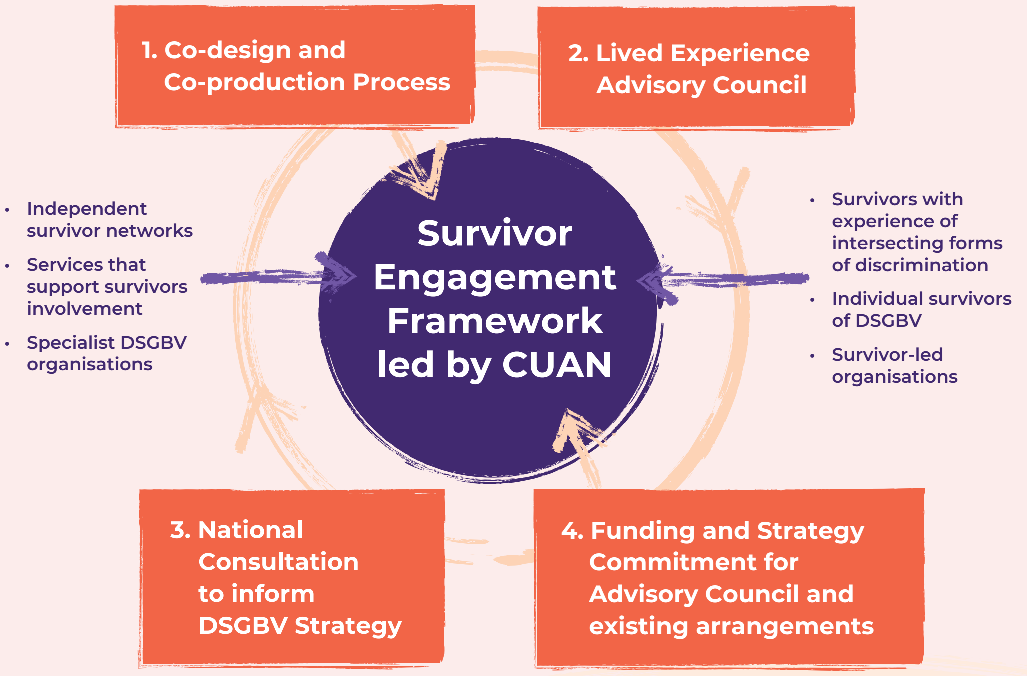
Appendix One: Observatory on Violence Against Women Members

Action Aid Ireland
AkiDwA
AMAL Women's Association
Amber Women's Refuge
Aoibhneas
Ascend-North Tipperary Development Company
Beyond Surviving
Cairde
Cope Galway Domestic Services
Grupo Mulheres do Brasil - Irlanda
Domestic Violence Response Galway
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Exchange House
Galway Rape Crisis Centre
Haven Horizons
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence
Irish Refugee Council
Latina Women Against Violence
Longford Women's Link
Love & Care for People
Men's Development Network
Move Ireland
National Women's Council (NWC)
Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
Ruhama
Saoirse Domestic Violence Services
Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP)
Sexual Violence Centre Cork
SAOL project
Sonas Domestic Violence Charity
Spunout
Survivors Informing Services and Institutions (SISI)
Tintean Housing Association
Technological University of the Shannon
Wexford Women's Refuge
Willow Domestic Abuse Services
Women's Aid
Women's Collective Ireland
Young Women's Christian Association of Ireland (YWCA)

Appendix Two: Model framework for survivor engagement

Framework for Survivor Engagement

Phase 1: Recommendations for Implementation in the Short Term



1. Co-design and Co-production Process

2. Lived Experience Advisory Council

Survivor Engagement Framework led by CUAN

- Independent survivor networks
- Services that support survivors involvement
- Specialist DSGBV organisations

- Survivors with experience of intersecting forms of discrimination
- Individual survivors of DSGBV
- Survivor-led organisations

3. National Consultation to inform DSGBV Strategy

4. Funding and Strategy Commitment for Advisory Council and existing arrangements

Principles

- DSGBV and trauma informed
- Do no harm
- Expert by experience
- Inclusion and anti-discrimination
- Accountability and transparency

Phase 2: Long-term Recommendations (co-produced)

5. Sustainable Funding

6. Promoting choice and diversity

7. Flexible options, anonymous, existing services, independent from government

8. National and local structure

9. Capacity-building and readiness

10. Accountability and reporting

Appendix Three: Terminology

The terminology used in this report is that which is used by the Observatory and in the work of the National Women's Council in Ireland.

This includes use of **'survivor'** and **'victim-survivor'** to refer to people with lived experience of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Within interviews and discussions, it was noted that victim-survivor refers to women, men and boys, and gender non-binary identifying people. Some noted that the term 'survivor' was not always adequate to refer to those at risk of sexual exploitation. Where 'people with lived experience' or 'peer advocate' has been the preferred term used by some agencies in Ireland, we have retained this within the report.

'Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence' or **'DSGBV'** is used as an umbrella term to encompass all forms of violence referenced within Ireland's Zero Tolerance Third National Strategy, which also advocates an intersectional approach.[16] Domestic and sexual violence definitions align with the Istanbul Convention, and recognised forms of gender-based violence in the Strategy include "pervasive partner, home-based, post-separation, psychological/physical coercion, abuse and violence; prostitution, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), stalking and related acts, and cyber violence."[17]

The commitment to centre survivors' voices and expertise therefore must include survivors of such diverse forms of violence and survivors within marginalised groups or communities, including Traveller and Roma communities, survivors from migrant, Black and Global Majority communities,[18] disabled people and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (LGBT) communities. Ireland's Strategy also identifies children and young people as victim-survivors, which reflects the focus of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Istanbul Convention.

Lived experience is direct, personal experience of a particular issue or service. In the case of this report this refers to experience of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and/or use of DSFGBV services.

Lived experience of DSGBV refers to the knowledge, understanding, and insights gained through directly experiencing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and recognises survivors as experts in their own lives and the systems they have navigated.

Experts/Experts by experience may also be used, to refer to people with lived experience of DSGBV who are using this expertise to bring about change to the systems that affect others facing DSGBV.

---

[16] Department of Justice (2022) Zero Tolerance Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026. Government of Ireland; page 11.

[17] Department of Justice (2022) Zero Tolerance Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026. Government of Ireland; page 12.

[18] 'Black and Global Majority' is a term that references the lived experiences of people from African, Asian, indigenous, Latin American, mixed-heritage or other non-White backgrounds, including from the Global South, who collectively constitute 85 percent of the global population.

Trauma informed is more than being kind or recognising that trauma can have an impact on someone's ability to function in everyday life. Trauma informed practice includes an analysis of power and structural inequality as well as understanding survivors' experiences. To avoid being performative, being trauma informed in approach and intent requires culture, relational and structural changes. This involves understanding what works in creating physical and emotional safety, being consistent and predictable, sharing power, dismantling harmful hierarchies, systems design and changing policies and procedures that recreate harm. Trauma informed leadership requires understanding that organisations can either replicate or disrupt patters of trauma through organisational structures, culture, hierarchies and decision-making processes, and subsequently transforming these systems, policies and practices that exacerbate and compound trauma.

Co-production involves creating, delivering, improving and evaluating services jointly with people who will use them. This involves an equal partnership where people with lived and learnt experience work together from start to finish. It acknowledges that people with lived experience are often best placed to advise on what support and services will make a positive difference to their lives. This starts from the idea that no one group, or person, is more important than any other group or person. The principles of equality, diversity, accessibility and reciprocity (getting something back for putting something in) are critical values for making co-production as inclusive as possible.

This includes **co-design** with people with lived experience and incorporating their ideas into the final approach. In Northern Ireland, the *Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework for 2024-2031* identified co-design as being ***"about designing with, not for."*** Co-design with civil society organisations in Ireland helped inform the main functions of the government agency, Cuan, and it was expected that approach would carry forward into its operation. Co-design is also identified as a priority in the current Zero Tolerance Strategy a nd implementation plan, although nowhere is this defined.

Multiple disadvantage refers to experience of three or more of overlapping issues including domestic violence, homelessness, reoffending, substance use, mental ill health. Many people will also experience other forms of disadvantage too.

Specialist services differ from generic services because they are independent from the state, were established either (1) as local, grassroots and independent organisations, to deliver specifically support survivors affected by domestic, sexual or gender-based violence, or (2) national membership organisations for these services. Lived experience is represented within governance and staffing structures, their delivery of gender-responsive services is by specially trained staff with an in-depth knowledge of DSGBV. Specialist 'by and for' services are run by and for the communities they serve, such as for Black and Global Majority/migrant women, Deaf and Disabled People, and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, and the client group is reflected in staffing, management, and governance structures.

Appendix Four: About the Researcher and Report Author

Eleri Butler has worked in the UK, Europe, and Australia on preventing domestic and sexual violence and violence against women and her work spans over three decades in public services, government departments, and the specialist sector.

Currently a freelance consultant (consultancy@eleributler.com), Eleri's focus is on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response; chairing Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews; research, learning and evaluation; survivor engagement; capacity building and sustainability; strategy and business planning; policy/services design and implementation; coaching, leadership and governance.

Most recently Eleri was Deputy Secretary in Victoria Government, and CEO of Family Safety Victoria, the government agency responsible for domestic, family and sexual violence policy, services and systems reform. Eleri led delivery of reforms to acquit Royal Commission recommendations to deliver multi-agency collaboration, systems and service improvements, in order to safeguard women and children, families and communities from domestic, family and sexual violence.

Previously Eleri was CEO of Welsh Women's Aid, a national membership body working to prevent domestic and sexual violence and deliver national Helpline support for survivors. Eleri has previously worked on helplines, in refuges and community services, has established and led specialist services, women's centres and support for women in the justice system. She has also led national policy, strategy and programme design and delivery whilst seconded to UK Government. She has advised on improvements to the criminal and family justice systems in several capacities, and has worked as Commissioner, Advisor, manager of European research programmes, and strategic coordinator to prevent violence against women.

With qualifications in Sociology, Housing, and a Masters in Film, Eleri is also an Honorary Fellow of Cardiff University, and in 2007 was awarded an MBE for services to domestic violence.

Appendix Five: Selected Bibliography

ACE Hub Wales. (2022). *Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity*. Public Health Wales NHS Trust.

Ailwood, S. Loney-Howes, R. Seuffert, N. and Sharp, C. (2022) *Beyond Women's Voices: Towards a Victim-Survivor-Centred Theory of Listening in Law Reform on Violence Against Women*. Feminist Legal Studies (2023) 31:217–241

ANROWS. (2023). *Engaging people with lived and living experience*. ANROWS.

Ash, C. and Otiende, S. (2023). *Meaningful Engagement of People with Lived Experience: A framework and assessment for increasing lived experience leadership across the spectrum of engagement*. Global Fund to End Modern Slavery and National Survivor NetworkCast.

Asquith, W. Kiconco, A. and Balch, A. (2022). *A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and trafficking*. University of Liverpool.

Australian Government National Mental Health Commission (2019) *Paid Participation Policy for people with a lived experience of mental health difficulties, their families and support people*. Australian Government Mental Health Commission

CFE Research (2020) The *role of lived experience in creating systems change. Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs*. Fulfilling Lives programme, UK.

Cattaneo, L. (2020) *Survivor-Centered Practice and Survivor Empowerment: Evidence From A Research–Practitioner Partnership*. George Mason University.

Children's Voices for Change (2024) *CHANGE Children's Feedback Tool Family Safety Victoria's Family Violence Research Grants Program*. Victoria Government.

Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 – 2032*. Department of Social Services.

Council of Europe. (2011). *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. Istanbul, 11.V.2011. CETS No. 210.

Council of Europe. (2023). *GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – Ireland*. Council of Europe.

Cuan. (2025a). *Cuan Corporate Plan 2025 – 2027*. Cuan, The Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) Agency. Government of Ireland.

Cuan. (2025b). *Progress Report on Implementation July–December 2024*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth (2024) *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II, Action Plan 2024-2026*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth (2023) *National Action Plan Against Racism 2023-2027*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. (2021). *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. (2022). *Framework for trauma-informed practice: Supporting children, young people and their families*. Victoria Government.

Department of Justice. (2021). *Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence: An Audit of Structures*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Justice. (2022a). *Zero Tolerance Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Justice. (2022b). *Family Justice Strategy 2022-2025*. Government of Ireland.

Department of Justice. (2025). *Zero Tolerance Implementation Plan*. Government of Ireland.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales. (2025) *Lived Experience Matters*. Accessed online December 2025.

Egan, N. and O'Malley Dunlop, E. (2023). *A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Childcare Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence*. Department of Justice and the National Women's Council.

EU Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Fitzgibbon, K. Reeves, E. Gelb, K. McGowan, J. Segrave, M. Meyer, S. and Maher, J.M. (2022). *National Plan Victim-Survivor Advocates Consultation Final Report*. Victoria, Monash University

Gavin, M. (2024). *Engaging lived experience and expertise in domestic violence policy: A Research Report*. UTS Business School, Australia.

Hodges, E. Leditschke, A. Solonsch, L. (2023). *The Lived Experience Governance Framework: Centring People, Identity and Human Rights for the Benefit of All.* Prepared by Lived Experience Leadership & Advocacy Network for the National Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network. Mental Health Australia.

Home Office. (2025a). Freedom from Violence and Abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls, Volume 1 – Strategy. Home Office, HMSO.

Home Office. (2025b). Freedom from Violence and Abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls - Volume 2 - Action Plan. Home Office. HMSO.

Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women. (2022). *Shadow Report to GREVIO in respect of Ireland*. Community Foundation of Ireland / NWC.

Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women. (2023). *Observatory Monitoring Report on the Implementation of The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. Key Findings, June 2023*. Community Foundation of Ireland / NWC. Community Foundation of Ireland / NWC.

Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women. (2024). *Survivor-Centered Approaches and Engagement Strategies in Government Policy*. NWC.

Kombo, B. (2024) *From Survivor Centred to Survivor Led: Lessons from Promising Survivor-Led Gender-Based Violence Accountability Initiatives*. Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence.

Lamb, K. Dembele, L. Anonymous, N. Anonymous, L. and Hegarty, K. (2023) *Australian Framework for the Ethical Co-production of Research and Evaluation with victim survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence*. University of Melbourne and Safer Families Centre of Research Excellence.

Lamb, K. Hegarty, K. Amanda, Cina, Fiona, and the University of Melbourne WEAVERs lived experience group. (2020). *The Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework*. Safe and Equal.

Longford Local Community safety Partnership (2022) *Longford Community Safety Plan 2022-2024*. LCSP.

McInerney, C. (2023). *Report on DSGBV Agency Co-design Process*. University of Limerick.

NSW Council of Social Service. (2021). *Lived Experience Framework: Principles and practices for Lived Experience partnerships*. NCOSS

National Women's Council (2023) *Monitoring the Implementation of Zero Tolerance*. NWC.

National Women's Council (2024) *North South Co-operation to Tackle Violence Against Women Dialogue Report*. NWC.

Parkes, A. McCaughren, S. and Burns, K. (2025) *The Operation of the In Camera Rule in Family Law in Ireland*. UCC, TCD and Department of Justice.

Pfizer, N. Harris, B. Simms, L. Fahour, H. Valentine, K. Scott, B. (2025). *Embedding client experience family violence service design and delivery*. Monash University.

Pfizer, N. Harris, B. Simms, L. Fahour, H. Valentine, K. Scott, B. (2025). *Embedding client experience family violence service design and delivery project: Client Feedback Framework*. Monash University.

Pfizer, N. Harris, B. Simms, L. Fahour, H. (2025). *Embedding client experience in family violence service design and delivery project: Client feedback stocktake.* Monash University.

Rape Crisis England and Wales (2024) *Survivors' Journeys – Survivors' Voices*.

Rape Crisis Ireland. (2025). *'Learning from Survivors of Rape and Sexual Violence – Rape Crisis Statistics 2024'*. RCI.

Safe and Equal. (2022). *Sources of Lived Experience in the Family Violence Sector.* Safe and Equal.

Special Advocate Ireland (2025) *Report of the Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse March 2-24-2025.*

Suomi, A. Freeman, B. and Banfield, M. (2020). *Framework for the engagement of people with a lived experience in program implementation and research*. Centre for Mental Health Research and Australian National University.

Taylor, S. C. and Otiende, S. (2024). *Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*, in "Nothing About Us Without Us". Council of Europe.

Underwood-Lee, E., and Wallace, S., (2022) 'Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence survivor engagement in Wales', University of South Wales.

Victim Survivors Advisory Council (2022) (2022) Lived Experience Strategy for Government. Family Safety Victoria and Victoria Government.

Victoria Government. (2025). Department of Health Lived and Living Experience Leadership Strategy.

Warwick-Booth, L. (2022) '*You're not going to give a monkey's chuff': exploring co-production in the design of services for women who have experienced sexual violence*. Royal Society for Public Health.

WAVE Network. (2025). *WAVE Country Report 2025: The status and value of women's specialist services in tackling gender-based violence against women.* Vienna: Women Against Violence Europe.

Welsh Women's Aid. (no date). *Meaningful Survivor Participation: an engagement toolkit for organisations.*

Wheildon, L., and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2023). *Towards meaningful engagement: Key findings for survivor co-production of public policy on gender-based violence*. ANROWS Insights Series, 05/2023. ANROWS.

Wheildon, L. True, J. Flynn, A. and Wild, A. (2022) *The Batty Effect: Victim-Survivors and Domestic and Family Violence Policy Change*. Violence Against Women. 28(6-7): 1684-1707.

Women's Aid England. (2020). *Research Integrity Framework*. Women's Aid.

Women's Aid Federations and Imkaan (2024). *A Guide to Meaningful Survivor Engagement.*

World Health Organisation. (2023). *Framework for meaningful engagement.* WHO.

CUAN

An Ghníomhaireacht um Fhoréigean Baile,
Gnéasach agus Inscnebhunaithe
The Domestic, Sexual and
Gender-Based Violence Agency

Community
Foundation
Ireland