



Men's Development Network

The Men's Development Network CLG.

49 O'Connell St., Waterford, X91 E866
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Opening Statement

Oireachtas Sub-Committee Gender Equality

7th April 2022

Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. On behalf of the board of the Men's Development Network, its staff, clients, participants and volunteers I wish to express our gratitude at being offered the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations on Gender Equality and specifically on the area of Domestic Sexual and Gender based violence. As a follow up to our contributions to the Citizen's Assembly, we see it as both a privilege and necessity for men to be part of this discussion.

My name is Sean Cooke and I am CEO of the Men's Development Network, with me today is our Head of Programmes & Advocacy Colm Kelly Ryan and Kenny Doyle our recently appointed project development officer for research policy and advocacy. I would also like to offer the apologies of John Doyle our Director of Services for Client supports as he could not attend due to a prior engagement with our facilitators and partner support organisations on our domestic violence intervention programme MEND.

Before we share our reflections, I think it would be useful to give a brief introduction to MDN and its work and methodologies.

The Men's Development Network celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. It established itself in 1997 in the southeast of Ireland by a group of men supporting each other to be the best fathers and partners possible. This initial group of men were developing a greater awareness of how the system of patriarchy impacted negatively on them, their partners and families. The men also readily acknowledged their own sense of privilege.



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We have our headquarters in the sunny southeast Waterford, and have 17 core staff and a further 22 sub-contracted staff working on all our programmes. We run four national programmes that include MEND: Domestic Violence Intervention Programme, Engage: National Men's Health Training Initiative, Male Advice Line: national freephone service for male victims/survivors of domestic abuse and the all-Ireland White Ribbon Campaign: men ending violence against women.

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

As an organisation we have five core values that when adhered to create the conditions for individuals to thrive and grow and for societies to adapt and change for the betterment of all. These values of Equality, Non-judgmental, Partnership, Professionalism and Love underpin all our work and ensure that the principles of tolerance, respect and dignity are cornerstones of our non-adversarial approach.

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

Our work is about Transforming Masculinities by providing opportunities to engage men and boys on issues such as their Health and Well-Being, Gender Equality and the ending of Gender based Violence, not only in the national programmes mentioned earlier but also in programmes such as



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our Parent Support Programme, Walk the Talk, FarmConnect, MenConnect, Mens Leadership and our Counselling Services.

Over the past twenty-five years we have worked hard to develop partnerships and collaborations with the women's movement and acknowledge the leadership shown by women in creating a more equal society as we have today. I hope as a men's development organisation we are viewed as strong allies and supporters of the quest for an end to inequality and the elimination of violence against women and although many strides have been taken to address inequality there is much to be done. The policy and legal frameworks are generally in place, the next step is, we feel, the transformation of hearts and minds. The rationale and evidence is now in place to positively engage men and boys in becoming the catalyst and agents of change. This is only one piece to the puzzle but a significant piece nonetheless in creating the cultural shifts that engage the silent majority of men and boys in becoming their most authentic selves and standing together with women in the ongoing process of creating a society of equality, respect and non-violence.

I hope this gives you all a context for our contributions and reflections on the various recommendations today and that our mission statement of "Better lives for Men Better lives for all" is seen in the context of what I have outlined earlier and that we are here today with an open mind, tender heart and willingness to engage.

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



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Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (37-41)

In March 2022, Men's Development Network submitted a paper to the Department of Justice in relation to the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. The recommendations in the submission were as follows:

- To provide a clear outline of available resources to implement the National Strategy and its Action Plans.
- To ensure prevention and awareness raising efforts target the '*general public*' rather than specific sectors of society, in accordance with Article 13(1) and (2) of the Istanbul Convention and Article 30(b)(ii) of CEDAW General Recommendation 35.
- To ensure awareness raising programmes address the root causes of DSGBV in accordance with International Law.
- To ensure engagements with men and boys is based on international and national best practice in the most appropriate ways: from a strengths-based, non-judgemental, non-adversarial approach and that there is a positive call to action for men and boys which instils supports to build capacity and safety in prevention of DSGBV.
- The development and funding of the White Ribbon Campaign and similar initiatives which engage with men and boys as allies for gender equality in ending Gender-Based Violence.
- To expand the proposed content of awareness raising activities and training programmes beyond the aspect of consent to include themes mentioned in Article 14(1) of the Istanbul Convention, such as gender equality, respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, Gender-Based Violence, and integrity.
- The inclusion of the role of non-formal education settings under the Prevention Pillar, including 'cultural, leisure facilities and the media', in accordance with Article 14(2) of the Istanbul Convention.
- The integration of perpetrator programmes into the delivery of frontline professional training.



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- The ratification of ILO Convention No.190 and implementation of its accompanying Recommendation No.206.
- The introduction of hate crimes/speech legislation in acknowledgement of the links between racialised and Gender-Based Violence. We recommended the passage of a single piece of Hate Crime/Speech legislation in accordance with the conclusions of the Report on the Public Consultation Legislating for Hate Speech and Hate Crime in Ireland.
- Specific inclusion of anti-racism and equality/diversity training within the prevention pillar training and capacity-building programmes.
- To review the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme and commitment to periodic regularisation processes, with reduced processing fees, given the evidence that absence of legal status among undocumented women leads to fear of reporting domestic violence to An Garda Síochána.
- To include the participation of the private sector and media in the prevention of DSGBV, as required by Article 14(2) of the Istanbul Convention.
- To recognise the existing National Domestic Violence Intervention Programme within the National Strategy.
- To analyse effective regional structures that worked in the past *e.g.* the Regional Planning Committees where there was representation from key statutory and non-statutory agencies. This was a recommendation of the Task Force on Violence against Women (1997).
- To conduct research on the factors which contribute to domestically violent behaviour.

In addition, Men's Development Network have specific thoughts in relation to Recommendations 37-41 on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

In relation to Recommendation 37, under the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence will create a new statutory body which will be coordinated by the Minister for Justice with direct responsibility for implementation of the strategy. The development of this agency will add stability and sustainability to this work.



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Regarding awareness raising, prevention and education campaigns for children in relation to DSGBV as outlined in Recommendation 38, Men's Development Network believe the Recommendation needs to be extended beyond its current expression. The trainings should be based on the Prevention Pillar of the Istanbul Convention to include engaging with men and boys in the most appropriate ways as allies for gender equality and in ending Gender-Based Violence.

In relation to Recommendation 39 on supporting justice for victims/survivors, Men's Development Network acknowledge sub-recommendations (a) – (e) as presented by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality and note overlaps with objectives in the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. To advance justice for victims/survivors of DSGBV, Men's Development Network also recommendations also should include the option to develop restorative justice/practice processes where appropriate.

Men's Development Network support Recommendation 40 as presented and encourage that such provision is as inclusive as possible to all genders and their children, with due regard to the fact that the majority of victims/survivors of DSGBV are women.

With regards to female genital mutilation as a ground for seeking asylum as expressed in Recommendation 41, UNHCR publications¹ as well as a wide range of jurisprudence in case law² indicate that female genital mutilation is a ground to seek asylum and for granting refugee status and therefore Men's Development Network support this position.

¹ 'Too Much Pain' (UNHCR, 2014) < <https://www.unhcr.org/53187f379.pdf> > accessed March 27th, 2022.

² Principle outlined in *Aminata Diop* CRR 164078, (18 September 1991) < <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b7294.html> > accessed March 30th, 2022. For successful examples of the principle in application, see: *Mlle Kinda*, CRR 366892, (19 March 2001) and *Khadra Hassan Farah, Mahad Dahir Buraleh, Hodan Dahir Buraleh, Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, (10 May 1994) available at: <https://www.refworld.org/cases,IRBC,3ae6b70618.html>.



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