



**A response to**

**Draft Programme for Government  
Framework 2016 - 2021**

**Northern Ireland Executive**

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**24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline**

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Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of the draft Programme for Government Framework, and the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Women's Aid Network in Northern Ireland.

## 1. Structure & Delivery of the Programme for Government

- Women's Aid broadly supports the outcomes based accountability model in theory. This kind of approach highlights the government's focus on what we want to achieve as a society, and allows for flexibility to change what isn't working, in order to achieve those outcomes.
- We welcome the fact that the new Programme for Government framework is being formulated to coincide with the new Executive mandate, and in line with the reduction in departments. Given the focus on cross-departmental and cross-sectoral working within the document, the new PfG will be very timely. It is also encouraging that this draft framework recognises the long-term nature of some problems and need for a long-term approach, and that it is "designed to stay in place for a generation rather than a single Assembly term" as this recognises the long-term issues requiring long-term solutions".
- We do however have a number of concerns in practice about the proposed framework and the outcomes based model. Firstly, we are not convinced that the indicators and measures attached to outcomes will in fact signify success of the desired outcomes. It appears that measures have been chosen mainly from existing quantitative data, which may relate to the outcomes but may not necessarily indicate success or achievement of selected outcomes.
- We are also concerned that measures of success are mainly based on quantitative rather than qualitative information. Quantitative data alone rarely tells the complex story of how the lives of citizens improve as a consequence of community or government intervention.
- There is also a danger that measuring the success of the PfG against limited quantitative indicators may negatively impact on service provision. If service providers are encouraged to alter their work to meet specific quantitative targets as set out under PfG indicators, and those indicators are not the best means of capturing that progress, it could result in a situation where services provision becomes less about best practice and more about ticking boxes and meeting targets. To give one hypothetical example, a simple statistic which shows more people moving out of homelessness support and into homes may on the face of it look like a reduction in housing stress, but in reality it may not reflect that some of those 'success stories' are in fact women who have returned to their abusers, because support providers have been pressurised to 'turn round' their intake of service users quickly in order to meet indicators. A return to an abusive home situation cannot be regarded as a 'success'.

- We are concerned that there is no indication of how any of the outcomes will be delivered within the framework. While we understand that action plans are to be put together on the basis of a confirmed framework, it is difficult to comment on the framework in isolation without some understanding of how government intends to deliver on these outcomes. The relationship between government and the third sector also requires clarification, our concern is that in the current funding climate, the need for a strengthened equitable partnership with the sector is increased, and this should be highlighted and planned for as part of the PFG.
- It is of concern that there are no specific details as to what model of cross-departmental and cross-sectoral working will be introduced. Cross-departmental and cross-sectoral cooperation forms the core of this framework, and this collaborative working is crucial to the success of the PfG. Without a plan to change how government works, the work needed to achieve the outcomes set out in the PFG are at risk. Experience demonstrates that departments have most often worked in silos, to the detriment of the delivery of outcomes and to the detriment of the people of Northern Ireland. Changing this requires a culture shift that will require incentives and structural change, leadership from the top and the allocation of responsibility on heads of civil service departments to ensure it happens and action is taken to enable change. We urge that a model is put in place which embeds cross-departmental and cross-sectoral working within the PfG, with incentives for success and consequences for failure to work to this new model. Relationship between departments and across sectors will need to be prioritised and protocols established that support engagement, partnership, transparency, equity and practical process that mean we work together to create change for the people of Northern Ireland.

## 2. Lack of gendered perspective

- It is disappointing that a gendered perspective has not been mainstreamed throughout this document. Women make up 51% of the population of Northern Ireland, and have different needs and different life journeys from men. Therefore the indicators, measures and actions must be gendered to ensure that the outcomes are applicable to, and achievable for, women. For example, the outcome for more people to be in better jobs requires a gendered approach, as women's success in employment is affected by pregnancy, difficulties associated with re-entering the job market after time out of employment to raise children, the gender pay gap, prevailing gender stereotypes in certain employment fields, the fact that most single parents are women, and gendered factors affecting one's ability to work full-time.
- Similarly, domestic violence and sexual violence are gendered issues. While men are affected by domestic and sexual violence, the majority of victims are women, and the driving factor behind the violence against women is rooted in traditional notions of a

woman's place in the home, in a relationship and in society. Violence against women is often called the greatest of all gender inequalities, and it can only be effectively tackled if these gendered issues are addressed. Women's Aid is of the view that tackling domestic and sexual violence in a gender neutral manner, which fails to take into account the unique motivations behind violence against women and violence against men, or its gendered manifestations, does a disservice to women and men. In as much as it fails to recognise their specific needs and the requirement for specialised services that work together to support all victims of violence.

### 3. Domestic and Sexual Violence and the PfG Framework

- Women's Aid notes with concern that there is no mention of domestic violence, sexual violence or any form of gender-based violence within the PfG framework. Northern Ireland has a new strategy for tackling domestic and sexual violence, which requires significant cross-departmental and cross sectoral work that must be carried forward and funded if we are to deliver the strategy. Given that there is no funding attached to the strategy to carry this work out, it is even more important that the work to combat domestic and sexual violence has a central place within the PfG framework.
- Domestic and sexual violence are core components of a wide number of outcomes within the PfG framework. Tackling domestic and sexual violence is vital to successfully achieving a more equal society; to ensuring people enjoy long, active healthy lives; to ensuring that people are able to fulfil their potential and are able to be employed in better jobs; to having a community which respects the law and each other; to having a society that cares for each other and helps those in need; to give children and young people the best start in life. At the same time, domestic and sexual violence are unique problems for society, requiring a tailored response that is perhaps not in line with how government tackles other similar issues. For example, given the hugely under-reported nature of domestic and sexual violence, it is good practice to seek a rise in reportage of incidents of abuse to police, a policy that the PSNI currently practices. This is contrary to the general societal aim to reduce crime, as reflected in crime reportage statistics. For this reason, we would suggest that domestic and sexual violence could be included in the PfG framework under a separate outcome.
- **A more equal society**. Gender equality should be expressly included under this outcome and within the indicators and measures. Gender-based violence is often described as the greatest of gender inequalities, and it is not possible to effectively tackle domestic and sexual violence without doing so within a context of working towards full gender equality in our society. Under the Scottish government definition, 'gender' means the **“socially constructed roles, traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, responsibilities, relative power, status and influence** ascribed to male and female humans on a differential basis.” Gender refers not simply to women and/or men, but to the relationships between and among them, and to the social structures and mechanisms which affect our everyday lives. Gender identities condition the way human

beings are perceived, and how they are expected to think and act. Male violence against women in the form of domestic and sexual violence is often carried out within the context of these roles, based on the belief that the position of the woman in the home, in the relationship and within society is to be subservient. It cannot be effectively tackled or eradicated without acknowledging this historical basis.

- **Enjoying long, healthy active lives.** Domestic and sexual violence impede the health and wellbeing of all victims and those affected by it. These impacts include immediate and chronic physical injuries as a result of assault, mental health issues, substance abuse and addiction as a direct consequence of the trauma of abuse, and premature illness and death as a result of the stress of abuse (for example certain cancers etc.). The indicator of healthy life expectancy is therefore not only a matter of “providing quality healthcare and supporting people to make healthy lifestyle choices”, it must also include multi-agency intervention in cases of domestic violence and abuse at the earliest possible stage to prevent a person’s quality of life being seriously inhibited by domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Similarly, in working to reduce preventable deaths, it should be acknowledged that deaths from suicide, alcoholism, substance misuse, or trauma-related illnesses like cancers etc. can be linked to a person’s experience of domestic abuse. In our experience, this link is rarely made.<sup>1</sup> Yet, without making this link and taking significant preventative and investigative action, it is unlikely that such premature deaths will be reduced.
- In terms of improving health in pregnancy, it is disappointing that the measure focuses solely on the health of the foetus. While this is important, so is maternal health, and measures should be included to this effect. Furthermore, given that roughly 30% of domestic abuse begins in pregnancy, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth, it is important to include measures and indicators that reflect this.
- **An innovative, creative society where people can fulfil their potential.** Domestic violence is not simply about what a perpetrator does to a victim, but about what a perpetrator prevents a victim from doing for themselves. For many women in Northern Ireland, the coercive controlling nature of their relationship prevents them from working, from contributing actively in society, and from reaching their full potential.<sup>2</sup> One indicator of the government’s success in its domestic violence response may be evidence of victims of domestic violence who have been empowered and supported to re-join the

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<sup>1</sup> Recently the office of the Attorney General has highlighted the issue of premature deaths with a causal link to domestic violence, and has taken steps under his power to direct the coroner to conduct an inquest into deaths where domestic violence may have been a factor.

<sup>2</sup> Evan Stark defines the coercive control model thusly: “The coercive control model defines abuse as a “liberty” crime and sets the use of violence in the context of the abrogation of women’s human rights, the realization of which is critical to overall social and economic development as well as their ability to fulfill their purposes in the world. Women can be controlling as well as men. When the offender is a male, however, coercive control exploits and reinforces sexual inequalities in the larger society in ways that make it far more devastating than when women are controlling.”

[http://www.stopvaw.org/uploads/evan\\_stark\\_article\\_final\\_100812.pdf](http://www.stopvaw.org/uploads/evan_stark_article_final_100812.pdf)

workforce, particularly those who have been able to fulfil their potential by working in their career of choice.

- **More people working in better jobs.** This outcome should be gendered to acknowledge the different barriers and circumstances that affect women's ability to partake in the economy, including the impact of caring for children, lack of effective childcare strategy, the gender pay gap and gender stereotypes that discourage women's entry into certain careers (eg STEM), and the impact of domestic violence on victims' ability to develop a career.
- **Safe community where we respect the law, and each other.** Women's Aid urges that tackling domestic and sexual violence is explicitly included in this outcomes section alongside tackling poverty, drug and alcohol use and paramilitarism. In 2014-15, the PSNI responded to a domestic violence incident every 19 minutes of every single day. 13,426 domestic abuse crimes were reported, which amounted to approximately 13% of the overall crime in Northern Ireland (105,072). 6 out of 16 murders, 37.5% of all murders in Northern Ireland, had a domestic abuse motivation. There were over two and a half times as many domestic abuse crimes (13,426) as drug offences (5,048), and more domestic abuse crimes (13,426) than burglary offences (8,937). There were 2,734 sexual offences recorded including 737 offences of rape. Domestic and sexual violence remain one of the biggest threats to the safety and wellbeing of our citizens, yet because these abuses are hidden and under-reported they may be forgotten or sidelined by government and society in general. We urge that the PfG framework includes domestic and sexual violence in its top priorities, and amends the indicators and measures accordingly to reflect an understanding of domestic and sexual violence.
- For example, the indicator of reducing crime does not reflect an understanding of reportage of domestic and sexual violence crime. As domestic and sexual violence crime is chronically under-reported, it is established practice that law enforcement agencies should seek to achieve a rise in reportage. This reflects the understanding that it often takes 35 incidents of abuse before a victim will come forward, and that a rise in reportage represents an increase in confidence in police and support services as opposed to a rise in incidences of domestic and sexual violence. This has been reflected in PSNI statistics over the last decade – while general levels of crime have dropped, reportage of domestic and sexual violence crime has risen.
- Our concern regarding the use of a general indicator and measure of reducing crime is that the more successful our response to domestic and sexual violence, the more likely victims are to report to police or feel comfortable to disclose in a crime survey. Conversely, this data could then be misinterpreted as an indicator of failure under the current draft of the PfG framework. It may be useful therefore to include separate outcomes and indicators around domestic and sexual violence within the framework to more accurately reflect the government's aims and targets in this regard.

- **We give children and young people the best start in life.** Giving children the best start in life is extremely important, and we welcome the separate outcome focusing on children and young people in this framework. We especially welcome the commitment to provide services that protect children from harm, and the inclusion of the voice of children in developing these services. We would urge that as part of this outcome, a commitment to preventative education is included, designed to build the resilience of children, develop their understanding of what constitutes abuse and support them to understand what a healthy relationship looks like. We would also suggest that the measure relating to looked after children is limited, and does not reflect the breadth of issues affecting looked after children or the complexity of support required from government. We would also point to MARAC statistics on high-risk victims of domestic abuse as instructive of the many cases where children are living in a household with serious abuse and are therefore being impeded from getting the best start in life by a domestic violence perpetrator. Since January 2010 (cumulative until 31 March 2015) 8,363 MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) cases have been discussed, within these cases there were 10,856 children living in the household. Domestic violence affects children and young people both as witnesses and as direct victims of abuse. Therefore the government's response to domestic violence in preventative, early intervention and protective capacities is central to the protection and wellbeing of children.
- **Improve the supply of suitable housing.** Housing is about more than buildings – it is about the complex lives of people and the reasons why they are in housing stress or homeless. We suggest that this outcome and associated indicators should be expanded to reflect the complexities that lead to housing stress, and include a commitment to tackle homelessness. While it is a positive step to commit to building more suitable housing stock, it is also important that government understands and tackles the complex reasons why people become homeless or live in housing stress. This should include recognition of the economic circumstances brought about by austerity, and the impact of factors such as domestic violence on someone's housing situation.

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