



Chartered
Institute of
Housing



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Housing
Ireland

Make a Stand against Domestic
Abuse
September 2025



Chartered
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Housing
Northern Ireland

Why Domestic Abuse is a Housing Issue



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- Housing professionals can play a vital role in identifying and responding to domestic abuse in communities.
- A fear of homelessness and a lack of safe, affordable housing is a common barrier preventing people from leaving their abuser
- There is a well-evidenced link between domestic abuse and homelessness
- Once made homeless, many survivors face additional barriers when they need to flee to achieve safety, including a loss of a previously held secure tenure, debt accrual and isolation.

What could change



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- Housing staff face a lack of knowledge, understanding, training in how to recognise and identify domestic abuse
- Often there are few housing alternatives other than the homeless route or returning to the perpetrator
- Unhelpful conflation of domestic abuse with anti-social behaviour
- An underdeveloped coordinated response alongside other services in the community.
- Perpetrator's rights to remain in the family home unchallenged by landlords

What good looks like



- 1.Actions to prevent victim-survivors becoming homeless
- 2.An effective response to perpetrators of domestic abuse
- 3.A sensitive service response to the needs of victim-survivors
- 4.A collaborative response, the policy was developed and is implemented with relevant organisations and partners
- 5.A homelessness response that reduces the impact of homelessness on victim-survivors

What is the Make a Stand Campaign



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Commitments;

1. Put in place a domestic policy for residents
2. Make information domestic abuse support services available on your website.
3. Put in place a policy to support staff who experience domestic abuse.
4. Appoint a champion at a senior level in your organisation.

A graphic for the 'Make a Stand' campaign. It features the words 'MAKE A STAND' in a bold, sans-serif font. 'MAKE' and 'A' are in a medium blue color, while 'STAND' is in a darker blue. The text is flanked by two vertical bars of the same medium blue color, one on the left and one on the right, creating a frame-like effect. The background is a light, muted blue.

MAKE
A
STAND

Where we are at now



Northern Ireland

- CIH Northern Ireland Board has chosen to prioritise action on domestic abuse, to align with the Government's focus on ending violence against women and girls.
- We have recommended to the NIHE that section 5 of the 1988 Order be updated to include the definition of domestic abuse as laid out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

CIH Ireland

At the beginning of this journey with three aims

- Establish domestic abuse as a housing issue
- Encourage partnership working
- Gather evidence on what works for housing providers and what needs to change.

Women's Aid



NORTH DOWN & ARDS



Prevalence of Abuse

- ▶ 1 in 4 women
- ▶ PSNI called out every 18 mins to a Domestic Abuse incident
- ▶ Rarely a one- off
- ▶ Increases in frequency, intensity risk
- ▶ 35 incidents of abuse
- ▶ 30,509 domestic abuse incident
- ▶ 18,656 domestic abuse crimes

(1st Jan24 – Dec24)



Women's Aid Northern Ireland

1. ABLCN
2. Armagh Down
3. Belfast and Lisburn
- 4a. Causeway/Mid-Ulster
(Causeway office)
- 4b. Causeway/Mid-Ulster
(Mid-Ulster office)
5. Fermanagh
6. Foyle
7. North Down and Ards
8. Omagh
9. WAFNI

Services

- Emergency accommodation
- 'Floating Support' in a safe place in the community
- Support and information on rights
- Accompany women to solicitors and court
- One-to-one support
- Children Services
- Personal Development programmes
- One Stop Shop
- Partnership working with other agencies
- Awareness raising
- Partnership working

Housing & domestic abuse: an immersive training course

- ▶ CIH All Ireland Awards 2025, 'Working in Partnership' award winner

**Housing
Rights**



Women's Aid
NORTH DOWN & ARDS

Housing & domestic abuse: an immersive training course

- ▶ What is domestic abuse
- ▶ How to identify signs of domestic abuse and how to signpost
- ▶ How to identify housing options available to those with experience of domestic abuse
- ▶ Looking at relevant housing case law, policy and legislation

‘Spend time in Refuge’

- ▶ Training is for anyone working on the frontline in housing & homelessness
- ▶ Delivered focus groups with women from North Down & Ards Women’s Aid
- ▶ Women helped develop story line for the Virtual Reality experience
- ▶ At the heart of the course is our Virtual Reality film, based on the women’s experiences of domestic abuse and homelessness
- ▶ Women consulted on the specialist housing and domestic abuse training module

NIHE & Housing Associations

- ▶ NIHE & WA Domestic Abuse Protocol
- ▶ NIHE introduced new Domestic Abuse training
- ▶ Housing Rights secured funding for more NIHE staff to attend Immersive training course
- ▶ NIHE & Housing Associations attend Immersive training course
- ▶ NIHE Sanctuary Scheme initiative
- ▶ Housing Associations looking at introducing Sanctuary Scheme

Progress to date in NI

- 2018 Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)
- 2021 Domestic Homicide Reviews
- 2022 Domestic Abuse Bill
- 2022 New Stalking Bill
- 2023 Non-Fatal Strangulation
- 2023 Operation Encompass
- 2024 Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- 2024 Domestic Abuse Strategy

CIH Make A Stand Pledge

- ▶ Working together to end Domestic Abuse
- ▶ Support residents & staff affected by Domestic Abuse
- ▶ Introduce Domestic Abuse policy
- ▶ Provide Domestic Abuse training for staff

Contact for Support:

- ▶ NDAWA 028 9127 3196
- ▶ www.ndawomensaid.org
- ▶ info@ndawomensaid.org
- ▶ www.womensaid.org.uk
- ▶ 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline 0808 802 1414

Thank you

Domestic abuse – a housing issue in the Republic of Ireland

Christina Sherlock

Head of Strategic Communications and Fundraising

Women's  Aid

About Women's Aid

Women's Aid has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence and abuse against women and children since 1974.

We do this by advocating, influencing, training, and campaigning for effective responses to prevent and reduce the scale and impacts of domestic violence and abuse on women and children in Ireland and providing high quality, specialised, integrated, support services.

What we do:

- Direct support for women experiencing abuse including the 24hr National Freephone Domestic Violence Helpline 1800 341 900, including instant message support and interpretation service (240+ languages)
- Greater Dublin one to one support, Court drop in, accompaniment, High Risk Support Project* (*national roll out)
- Communications and Public Awareness Campaigns
- Policy and Research and strategic partnerships
- Centre for Learning and Practice Development

[For more, visit \[www.womensaid.ie\]\(http://www.womensaid.ie\)](http://www.womensaid.ie)

Domestic violence and abuse in Ireland

- 35% of women in Ireland, **more than one in three**, have experienced psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse from an intimate partner. ([EU gender-based violence survey, Fundamental Rights Agency, 2024](#))
- In 2024 there were **32,144 contacts** with Women's Aid including 24,396 with the Women's Aid 24hr National Freephone Helpline and 7,748 with our Face-to-Face Support Services
- During these contacts, we heard **46,765 disclosures of abuse** including 41,432 disclosures of abuse against women and 5,333 disclosures of abuse against children. ([Women's Aid Annual Impact Report 2024](#))
- **One in four (25%)** women in Ireland experienced sexual violence as an adult with a partner. ([CSO Sexual Violence Survey 2023](#)).
- An Garda Síochána responded to over **65,000 domestic abuse incidents** in 2024, which translates to an average of 1,250 incidents every week. ([An Garda Síochána, 2025](#)).

Domestic abuse – the ‘invisible’ housing issue

- In 2024, Women’s Aid made **6,424 referrals to refuges** and local domestic violence and **1,984 referrals to housing and homeless services**.
- According to research by Focus Ireland on domestic violence and homelessness (2021):
 - Domestic violence and abuse is a key driver of women and children’s homelessness in Ireland and internationally.
 - Moreover, a significant proportion of families accessing generic homelessness services have experienced domestic violence and abuse.
 - There is also a significant link between experiencing homelessness and having experienced domestic violence /sexual violence in childhood and/or adulthood.
- Focus Ireland maintains there has been a **45% rise in the number of homeless women between 2022 and 2024**.

Domestic abuse – the ‘invisible’ housing issue

- Victim-survivors of domestic abuse are **seldom included** in Housing and Homelessness initiatives and strategies in Ireland.
- The current national Housing Strategy **does not specifically mention survivors of domestic violence and abuse** nor includes any specific actions in relation to supporting their long-term housing needs.
- Women and children staying in Domestic Abuse refuges or with friends/family while escaping from an abuser are not counted in official homelessness data, which reinforces their invisibility in relevant housing and homelessness policies.
- Thus, the specific housing needs of women and children who are homeless due to domestic abuse remain unknown and unaddressed.

Understanding the impact of domestic abuse

- Once a woman, often with children, leaves the family home due to an abusive relationship, re-establishing secure housing is one of the most urgent yet difficult issues she must face.
- The 2021 Focus Ireland research shows that the path from leaving to secure housing is **long, complex and all but straightforward**, with families having to move in and out of unstable accommodation multiple times.
- It must be noted that in most cases, prior to becoming homeless a victim-survivor has lived with abuse and violence for years, this may **impact on the resources** she would need to exit homelessness, such as:
 - employment and financial situation
 - physical and mental health,
 - ability to call on family and social networks.
- Currently victims of domestic violence and abuse face huge issues in securing accommodation both emergency and long term.

Immediate short-term concerns

- Refuges are **often full** as there are not enough units, which prevents women from leaving dangerous homes. Many refuges were not designed considering the needs of disabled women and children.
- When women do access refuge, the **lack of long-term safe, secure, and affordable accommodation options** mean that women and children remain in refuges for longer than needed -which contributes to the lack of refuge spaces - return to the abuser or move to unstable and inadequate premises or straight into homelessness.
- If the victim-survivor **remains in the family home**, there may be issues relating to safety as the perpetrator knows where she is and there is no national and consistent program providing for enhanced safety measures.
- Women and children may **initially stay with family and friends**; however, due to the housing crisis it may take them a long time to move on from there to independent accommodation. Moreover, this may put both the victims and their families at risk from the perpetrator.

Longer term concerns

Issues accessing social housing

- The **lack of social housing** and consequent **huge waiting lists** is the main barrier survivors face.
- Women who hold joint tenancies are often left in unsafe situations if the abuser is not removed from the tenancy (e.g., when barring orders are in place).
- Additionally **administrative barriers and inconsistent** application of guidelines prevent domestic violence and abuse victims from accessing local /social housing or being prioritised. For example:
 - Domestic abuse is not named specifically in the factors used to assess a person as homeless under the Housing Act 1988. Consequently, some Local Authorities do not consider women who have left their homes because of domestic abuse and are staying with friends/relatives as “homeless”. Therefore, they are deemed as ineligible for priority housing.
 - However, staying with friends or family is not an appropriate long-term solution for many women and children in this situation.

Longer term concerns

Issues accessing social housing

- Some Local Authorities require applicants to have lived in the area for a specified time or to have local connections to the area to be eligible for housing. This is problematic for women and children who wish to relocate to an area far away from where they were living with the abuser to keep safe.
- Some Local Authorities do not consider a woman entitled to social housing if she jointly owns a property with her abuser, although she is not able to live there due to safety concerns.
- There is no clear guidance on how to transfer local authority tenancies from joint tenancy with the perpetrator to a sole one in case of domestic violence and abuse.

Longer term concerns

Issues accessing social housing

- While Department of Housing Guidance states that housing authorities have discretion in allowing applications or establishing priority for victims of domestic violence, it does not place a **positive obligation** on housing authorities to disregard the above rules in cases where there is domestic violence, which means that there is no consistency in dealing with victims/survivors.
- A survivor on a local authority housing list who needs to move to another local authority for safety would have to start a fresh application and lose the time they have built up.

Recommendations for change

- The Housing Plan should link with the Third National Strategy on DSGBV and ensure that the fast delivery of refuge accommodation remains a priority.
- The National Housing Plan should explicitly include the experiences and needs of women and children who are homeless due to domestic abuse and outline strategies and actions to address them.
- Increase social housing as a matter of urgency and allocate a % of it to domestic violence victims.
- Housing providers should have policies and training in place to ensure tenants subjected to domestic abuse can feel safe and supported to stay in their established communities.
- Prioritise victims of domestic abuse in local authority allocations.
- Revise the Department of Housing Guidance to extend the definition of homeless person to people out of home due to domestic violence and abuse; disregard the local connection and the joint property rule for these applicants; clarify the process to transfer to sole tenancy.

Make a Stand Campaign

- Women's Aid is proud to partner with Chartered Institute of Housing to support housing providers in the Republic of Ireland create safer, more supportive housing environments for victim-survivors of domestic abuse.
- Four key practical actions - developing and embedding **policies** to support residents affected by domestic abuse, ensuring **information** about support services is easily accessible, putting in place a **HR policy** to support members of staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse and appointing a **senior champion** to lead on this work.
- By signing the pledge, we believe that housing organisations will signal their commitment to recognising the role they can play in offering safety, support and signposting to those being subjected to domestic abuse.
- We are a willing partner sharing 50 years expertise, frontline experience, policy input and specialist trauma informed training.

Thank you for listening.



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To pledge email:

policyandpractice@cih.org

**WE ARE
PROUD TO
PLEDGE TO**

**MAKE
A
STAND**

Our homes, our people,
our problem.