CUAN

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

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

Zero Tolerance — The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: 2022–2026

Progress Report on Implementation July–December 2024

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

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

An tSeirbhís Phromhaidh
The Probation Service

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais, Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

An Roinn Iompair
Department of Transport

An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí Sheachadadh PFN agus Athchóirithe
Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and Community Development

An Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

An Roinn Airgeadais
Department of Finance

An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais, Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Seirbhís Phríosúin na hÉireann
Irish Prison Service

An Roinn Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

NCCA
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

An Garda Síochána
Ireland's National Police & Security Service

GSOC
Garda Ombudsman
INQUIRY INDEPENDENCE IMPARTIALITY

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh
Central Statistics Office

HEA
HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY

ACTIVE*CONSENT

THE CONSENT ED. PROJECT

Cigireacht An Gharda Síochána
Garda Síochána Inspectorate

An Bord Um Chúnamh Dlíthiúil
Legal Aid Board
Providing access to justice since 1979

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Comhairle na mBreithiúna
The Judicial Council

Coimisiún na Meán

Óglaigh na hÉireann
IRISH DEFENCE FORCES

All of Government and Society Strategy

Zero Tolerance - The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) (2022–2026) was published in June 2022. The Zero Tolerance Strategy approaches change as a whole-of-government and whole-of-society task. Government departments, state agencies, NGO partners and DSGBV services work collaboratively to deliver on the Strategy. The previous page illustrates the breadth of cross-governmental collaboration evidenced in the Strategy and its Implementation Plan, which Cuan is responsible for coordinating. Cuan is committed to growing the partnership network across government and society more broadly. Subsequent progress reports will aim to profile the significant role of DSGBV services and civil society organisations in implementing Zero Tolerance.

Contents

Glossary of Abbreviations 2
Foreword from the Minister for Justice 3
Introduction from the CEO of Cuan 4
Implementation Structures 6
Snapshot of Progress 7
Key Progress by Pillar 8
1. Prevention 9
2. Protection 11
3. Prosecution 13
4. Policy Coordination 15
Spotlight Feature on Implementation 16
Next Steps 18

Glossary of Abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
AGS	An Garda Síochána
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEY	Department of Education and Youth
DSGBV	Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
EAS	Employee Assistance Service
GNPSB	Garda National Protective Services Bureau
HSE	Health Service Executive
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NIAP	National Inter-Agency Prevention Programme
NSIO	HSE National Social Inclusion Office
SORAM	Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education

Foreword from the Minister for Justice

I am delighted to present the second progress report on the implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy in the latter six months of 2024. Zero Tolerance is an ambitious Strategy, delivered through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, in partnership with civil society and the DSGBV sector.

This report outlines the meaningful work undertaken by implementation partners across Government to advance the Strategy since the publication of the previous Mid-Year Progress Report on Zero Tolerance Implementation, September 2024.[1]

The Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Public Services provides political oversight of the Strategy and receives regular updates on implementation. I will continue to utilise this structure to brief my Cabinet colleagues on progress, and to address any challenges to implementation.

While we know that we have a long road to travel to deliver on the vision of Zero Tolerance, and to ensure that all victim-survivors are protected, supported and have effective access to justice, significant progress has been made over the last six months which it is important to reflect on.

This report gives a snapshot on progress in the latter half of 2024 across key areas, such as enhancing the general public's understanding of the root causes of DSGBV, educating young people on what constitutes a healthy relationship, and building the capacity of front-line professionals to better identify and support victim-survivors of DSGBV.

Some of the recent achievements in progressing the Zero Tolerance Strategy include the reform of the SPHE curriculum undertaken by the Department of Education, enhanced DSGBV training for staff undertaken by the Probation Service, the Legal Aid Board and the HSE, and developing the co-design structures necessary to plan and roll out DSGBV campaigns, particularly in relation to consent.

I look forward to working with colleagues within and beyond Government to continue progress over the course of the next implementation plan, 2025–2026.

Jim O'Callaghan, TD
Minister for Justice

1 Mid-Year Progress Report on Implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy.

Introduction from the CEO of Cuan

I am pleased to present this second progress report from Cuan on the implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy in 2024. Ending domestic, sexual and gender-based violence requires a sustained, coordinated and collective effort, engaging Government departments and statutory agencies, frontline services, civil society and the public to transform how Ireland prevents and responds to these issues.

Cuan's focus in 2024 was on establishing relationships and strengthening collaboration to drive nationwide action. Throughout the year, the Agency engaged with Government departments, statutory agencies, third-level institutions and local authorities to build alliances, gain expertise and strengthen collaboration across Government. This involved multiple rounds of stakeholder engagement to introduce Cuan's purpose and vision and outline our role in driving the Zero Tolerance Strategy.

The work completed in 2024 has established Cuan as a key partner in galvanising nationwide action to eliminate DSGBV in Ireland. Through the development of a clear understanding of the stakeholder landscape, Cuan is now well positioned to strengthen and support whole-of-government and whole-of-society action in the months and years ahead. A core responsibility of Cuan is to lead in the development and delivery of quality and effective services and supports, accessible to all victim-survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Active engagement and collaboration with Cuan's partners across the DSGBV sector are at the heart of this objective. Over the last six months, we have established teams and ways of working with DSGBV services and the wider sector, to set us up for collective impact.

We have initiated an important shift towards co-designed, evidence-informed funding and oversight, that now lays the foundations for multiannual planning and delivery. At the same time, we are focusing on structures that enable victim-survivor voices to be heard across all four pillars of intervention: prevention, protection, prosecution and policy coordination.

This is the final progress report under the 2024 Implementation Plan for Zero Tolerance. Cuan is now working to develop the 2025–2026 Implementation Plan, which will be the first two-year Zero Tolerance Implementation Plan, with dedicated performance measures and a bespoke monitoring framework. This will enable robust measurement of progress on an annual basis, and public reporting on the same.

I would like to thank all Cuan's partners across Government departments, state agencies, civil society and the DSGBV sector who are committed to an Ireland where there is zero tolerance of domestic and sexual violence, and who are steadfast in their work to achieve this. Most significantly, I would like to thank the victim-survivors of DSGBV who have shared their experience with Cuan throughout 2024. Your voices inform our efforts to eradicate and respond to the scourge of DSGBV in our society, and you have shown immense bravery and generosity of spirit.

Dr. Stephanie O'Keeffe
CEO, Cuan

Zero Tolerance—the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (2022–2026)

The Strategy was developed through co-design and collaboration with civil society and DSGBV services. At its centre, the Strategy recognises that "it is only through an integrated approach across all sectors of society that the problem of DSGBV, which is an expression of historical unequal power relations...will be tackled."

Under the Strategy, Government departments, state agencies, NGO partners and DSGBV services work collaboratively to deliver on commitments.

The Strategy is structured into pillars of activity aligned to the pillars of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention).

The Prevention Pillar focuses on supporting evidence-based actions designed to prevent DSGBV. The goal of this pillar is to work towards the eradication of the social and cultural norms that underpin and contribute to gender-based violence. The actions cluster under themes of education, training and awareness raising, and making places where people congregate, such as workplaces and education settings, safer.

The Protection Pillar focuses on actions designed to protect victim-survivors of DSGBV, both adults and children, and to guarantee access to therapeutic support and services. The goal of this pillar is to ensure that all victim-survivors have immediate and longer-term access to the safety, support services and advocacy they need, with due regard to their diversity. The actions cluster under themes of providing refuge, support services and information.

The Prosecution Pillar focuses on actions designed to advance effective law enforcement and judicial proceedings that enable victim–survivors to access the justice they deserve. The goal of this pillar is to ensure that the justice system implements the law and provides the consistent enforcement and judicial proceedings necessary to vindicate the rights of victim-survivors, including children. The actions cluster under themes of strengthening access to justice for victim-survivors and building awareness and capacity of justice sector professionals in relation to DSGBV.

The Policy Coordination Pillar focuses on actions designed to support effective policy coordination and implementation at both national and local levels. The goal of this pillar is that the state offers a comprehensive, coordinated, whole-of-government, authoritative, monitored and evaluated set of responses to DSGBV.

Implementation and Oversight Structures

Cuan, the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency, was established in January 2024. Placing a specialist statutory agency in the centre of a coordinated whole-of-government response marked a significant step in Ireland's commitment to zero tolerance of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

A significant part of Cuan's work is driving the implementation of Zero Tolerance, the Third National Strategy on DSGBV. Regular updates are provided to the Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Public Services and the High-Level Oversight Board on DSGBV.

Cuan has a statutory obligation to monitor, coordinate, and report on the implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy. To date, two implementation plans have been published to support and guide delivery of the Strategy. The first covers the period of June 2022 – December 2023, and the second covers the entirety of 2024. The 2024 Implementation Plan for the Zero Tolerance Strategy was published in April 2024 and sets out 121 actions for delivery by end of 2024.

This is the second of two progress reports on implementation in 2024. The first Mid-Year Report (January-June 2024), was discussed at the High-Level Oversight Board meeting in September 2024. It was subsequently approved by Cabinet in November 2024, with findings presented to implementation partners, civil society organisations, and DSGBV services during a dedicated webinar hosted by Cuan. The webinar was attended by over 80 participants from across Government, civil society and the DSGBV sector and included a presentation by the Department of Justice on legislative reforms to improve the criminal justice system for victims of sexual violence, focusing on the Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking Act 2024.

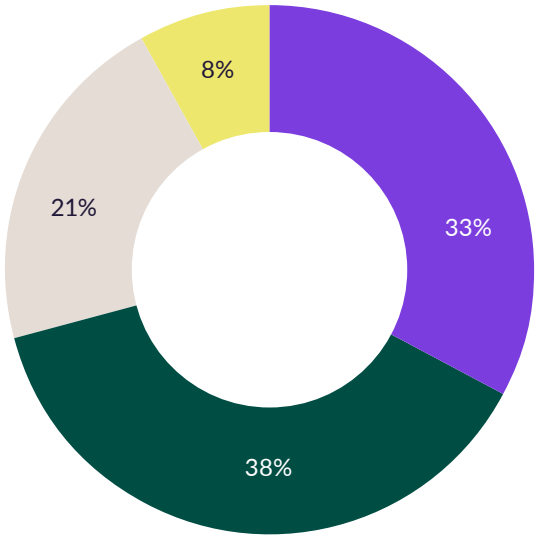
This second progress report aims to highlight the progress made across Government in the implementation of Zero Tolerance from July–December 2024.

Updates for this Progress Report were taken from July – December 2024 and were gathered from Cuan's Zero Tolerance Implementation Partners using an online survey. The survey included questions on the status of actions, determined by a colour-coded system (Blue, Red, Amber, Green) to classify status, a high-level summary of progress, and an opportunity to identify resources that would assist partners in the implementation of their Zero Tolerance actions. The survey was circulated to implementation partners in December 2024.

Snapshot of Progress

The figures below provide a summary snapshot of progress

Figure 1: 2024 Actions by Status



Status Indicators

Complete

In Progress

Minor Delivery Issue

Major Delivery Issue

Complete

40 actions, equating to approximately 33% of the total number of actions in the 2024 Implementation Plan, have been completed. This shows an additional 22 actions as having been completed when compared with the 14 actions (12%) which were reported as being completed in the Mid-Year Progress Report.

Minor delivery issue

25 actions or 21% of the total actions are reporting minor delivery issues. A significant level of work is being undertaken to ensure these actions are delivered in the next implementation phase. This marks an improvement on mid-year status where approximately 30% of actions were reporting minor delays.

In progress/on track

46 actions or 38% of the total number of actions remain in progress at the end of 2024 and will continue in the next implementation phase.

Major delivery issue

10 actions or just 8% of the total number of actions are reported as having a major delivery issue. Cuan is the lead delivery partner for eight of these actions. This is due to the timing of Cuan's establishment in January 2024 whereby staff and capacity were not yet in place to fully execute its actions in the period under review. Several projects required more time and resources to complete, as well as deeper consultation with DSGBV services and civil society, as well as other partners.

As such, Cuan has focused on engagement with the DSGBV sector to build improved data sets to inform its research and data plan, as well as to better map service delivery needs in order to advance progress in the next implementation phase.

Action 2.5.4 which seeks to establish a virtual Barnahus in the East is also experiencing a major delivery issue as efforts are made to address staffing and capacity issues before the service is initiated. Action 3.3.6 which entails planning for enhanced information of processes in the family justice system has experienced a delay due to capacity issues. However, a significant amount of work in relation to information provision has been undertaken by the Courts Service and resulted in improved information being provided on key aspects of family law.

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these actions will continue in the next implementation phase and Cuan and its partners will work to overcome gaps in implementation and associated delivery challenges.

Key Progress by Pillar

Cuan's work is built upon **four pillars,** reflecting the **Istanbul Convention's** internationally recognised framework for tackling domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. This section provides a summary of key achievements at the end of the year across each of the four pillars.

Prevention

Raising awareness and challenging societal attitudes to stop violence before it occurs.

Protection

Strengthening support services, crisis intervention and accommodation for victim-survivors.

Prosecution

Ensuring stronger legal protections for victim-survivors and improved justice system responses.

Policy Coordination

Driving a whole of-government approach to DSGBV strategy implementation.

Each of these pillars underscores the critical importance of adopting an inclusive, whole-of-government approach, driven by collaboration between government departments, statutory bodies and agencies, service providers and civil society.

Prevention

This pillar focuses on **supporting evidence-based actions to prevent DSGBV.** Actions span multiple sectors and are embedded at community level to address the spaces we inhabit in everyday life with the overall aim of eradicating the social and cultural norms that underpin and contribute to gender-based violence.

A key objective of the prevention pillar is to enhance the understanding of the public of all forms of DSGBV and its root causes and educate society to recognise the harm and prevent the human rights abuse that is DSGBV.

Following the enactment of Coco's Law, the Serious Consequences campaign,[2] which educates the public that it is illegal to share or threaten to share an intimate image of another person, ran from May to July 2024 and again from November to December 2024. Specific channels to target young men were used such as television coverage of the 2024 UEFA European Football Championship, YouTube and Reddit. Independent evaluation of the campaign was extremely positive with public awareness of the new law rising to 96% of the population from the benchmark position of 51% before the campaign was launched.

Let's Have the Consent Conversation,[3] an innovative campaign focusing on deepening public understanding of consent and addressing key social and cultural barriers to DSGBV prevention, ran in October 2024. Independent evaluation of the campaign showed that those who have seen the campaign are 17% more likely to talk about consent. Cuan also showcased the campaign at the National Ploughing Championships in September 2024, where public engagement was reported as overwhelmingly positive.

Recognising the importance of engaging men and boys in DSGBV prevention, Cuan supported the Game Changer campaign,[4] a three-year initiative led by Ruhama, in partnership with the GAA and the Men's Development Network, using sports-based advocacy to raise awareness of gender-based violence.

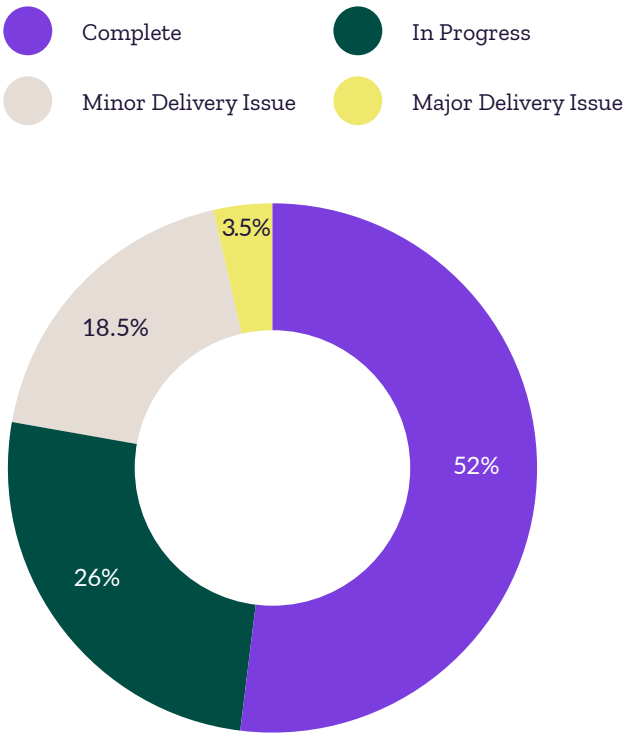


Figure 2: Prevention Pillar

This campaign launched on the 25th of November 2024 to coincide with the first day of the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

In October 2024, Cuan convened a Consent Forum bringing together experts from civil society and statutory agencies to discuss public engagement, awareness and education initiatives taking place nationwide – from grassroots to national level.

2 Action 1.1.3 Evaluate cut-through of the 'Serious Consequences' campaign on Intimate Image Abuse.

3 Action 1.1.2 Evaluate impact of the 'Let's Have the Consent Conversation' campaign and augment campaign messaging.

4 Action 1.1.3 Design and execute a best-in-class approach to produce an evidence-led prevention plan for DSGBV.

The Forum explored synergies between initiatives and ensured alignment around objectives and messaging on the prevention of DSGBV.[5]

The education system is uniquely placed to support the achievement of a further key objective within the prevention pillar, to enhance the understanding of children and young people on what creates gender inequalities and what constitutes gender equality, consent and healthy relationships.

The Department of Education, a key implementation partner for Zero Tolerance, has been leading on a significant programme of curricula reform to deliver on this objective. See the Spotlight Feature on Implementation on p.16 for full details.

During this reporting period, the Department of Education (now the Department of Education and Youth) worked to implement the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice which promotes a school environment free from gender-based violence and ensures that children, young people and staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported in the school environment.[6] Actions under the Wellbeing Implementation Plan seek to promote a whole-of-school approach to ensure that children, young people, and staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported.

Embedding awareness and understanding of DSGBV across sectors is a key part of prevention and response, as evidenced in the objective to enable frontline professionals and support staff to have the necessary skills and expertise to identify potential DSGBV risks and make appropriate preventative interventions and referrals. The HSE has played a lead role in furthering this objective through the development of a National DSGBV Training Programme.[7]

The e-learning programme, developed by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office, comprises four modules and is available to all HSE employees in Ireland within the hospital and community setting, in the voluntary hospital sector and in associated Non-Governmental Organisations working in health or social care services.

This reporting period saw the launch of Module 2[8] (Recognise) which provides information and tools for staff to better recognise DSGBV, understand the impact on victim-survivors, and identify barriers that may inhibit victim-survivors from seeking support, particularly those experiencing marginalisation or discrimination.

The first Module (Awareness), which was launched earlier in the year, saw an additional 1,311 completions by frontline staff in this reporting period, bringing the total number of completions for 2024 to just under 2,500.

The prevention pillar places a strong emphasis on targeted action to make our communities safer. Steps have been taken across a number of actions to improve safety in domains such as workplaces and public transport, and there has been an increased focus on digital spaces. Some of these actions include:

- The Department of Defence progressed the recommendations of the Report from the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality Issues in the Defence Forces, aiming to reduce opportunities for sexual violence and gender-based violence to occur in the workplace.[9]
- The Department of Transport, in collaboration with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport for Ireland (TFI) developed awareness campaigns to promote inclusivity and respect for all when travelling on public transport,[10] and increased the availability of public transport, particularly at night, to ensure the safest possible travel experience for users.[11]

The establishment of Coimisiún na Meán is a key milestone in making digital and media spaces safer through robust regulation and fostering public awareness of the harm caused by DSGBV.

Cuan engaged with Coimisíun na Meán on their regulatory regime for online safety prior to its submission of the Online Safety Code to the European Commission.[12] Further engagement is underway as part of preparations for the next Implementation Plan 2025–2026.

5 Ibid.

6 Action 1.3.4 Continue the implementation of actions in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice to promote a school environment free from gender-based violence.

7 Action 1.4.5 Healthcare worker training will take place to assist identification of domestic violence and refer victims-survivors to appropriate services.

8 Launch of Module 2 connected to previous goal.

9 Action 1.6.5 Take forward actions on the recommendations in the Report from the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality Issues in the Defence Forces.

10 Action 1.6.2 Continue awareness campaigns with the aim of promoting inclusivity, courtesy and respect for all when travelling on public transport.

11 Action 1.6.3 Continue to take steps to increase the availability of public transport, including taxis, to make travel, particularly in the nighttime economy safer and more accessible for women and more vulnerable users.

12 Action 1.6.1 Engage with Coimisiún na Meán on their establishment. of a regulatory regime for online safety.

Protection

This pillar focuses on actions designed to **protect the safety and meet the support needs** of adults and children who have experienced DSGBV. To ensure that victims and survivors of DSGBV can access the services they need, it is incumbent on the State to provide adequate, appropriate and accessible information on and offline.

This pillar is a key objective for Cuan with foundational work underway to establish the necessary supporting infrastructure. The HSE National Social Inclusion Office has been a key partner for Cuan in the development of material to promote awareness of DSGBV services, resources and national campaigns and has made the material available in healthcare settings across the country.[13]

The Department of Justice, in collaboration with the Courts Service, created informative court familiarisation videos for witnesses in criminal trials.[14] The Courts Service similarly developed accessible user-friendly guides using plain language information related to family law, including domestic violence, which were informed by adult and child survivors.

The protection pillar contains a specific commitment to recognise and support children and young people as individual victim-survivors of DSGBV, using child friendly and age-appropriate communications, and providing tailored supports and services.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth is leading on the implementation of the Barnahus model in Ireland. Barnahus, which translates as 'Child House', is the foremost European model of a child-centered multidisciplinary response to child sexual abuse. It has been established in Ireland to integrate health, medical, child protection, therapeutic, and policing services for children and young people who may have experienced child sexual abuse under one roof. Progress in this reporting period includes the development of the Barnahus Therapeutic Framework for nationwide implementation.[15]

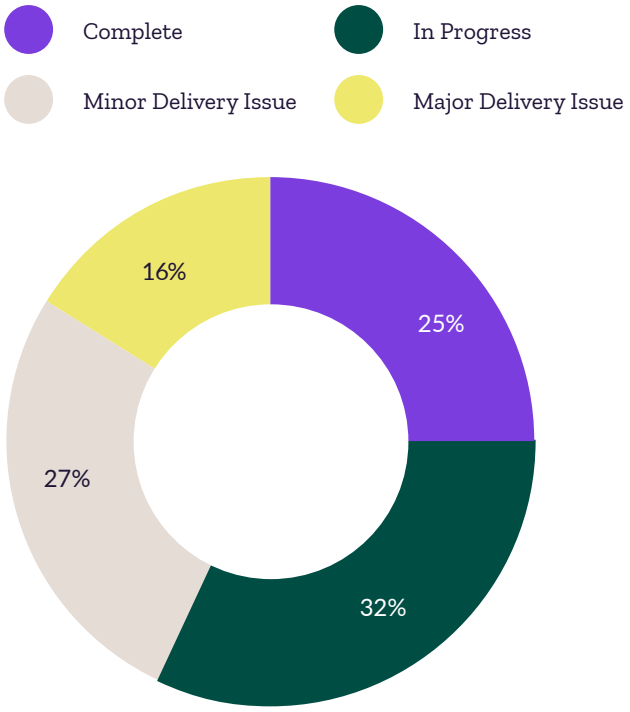


Figure 3: Protection Pillar

In pursuit of the commitment to recognise and support children and young people as individual victim-survivors, in 2024 Cuan distributed €17 million to 60 services which provide court accompaniment and related support services to children and adolescents who are witnesses in criminal trials.[16]

13 Action 2.1.6 Develop and distribute materials, promote awareness of existing DSGBV services, resources, and national campaigns which will be available in healthcare settings.

14 Action 2.1.5 Create a user-friendly guide to the family law system, the criminal law system and civil law system, informed by adult and child survivors.

15 Action 2.5.2 Complete interagency agreement on Barnahus therapy model implementation plan.

16 Action 2.5.7 Resource the provision of enhanced court accompaniment and related support services for children as witnesses in criminal trials.

The Wexford Women's Refuge was launched by Minister for Justice Helen McEntee in September 2024. The Wexford Women's Refuge provides a safe, confidential, non-judgmental support service and emergency accommodation for women experiencing violence. Wexford Women's Refuge aims to empower women who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse or at risk of experiencing domestic violence and abuse, and to improve the quality of their lives through support, information and education.[18]

The building is state of the art and has been built not only to provide accommodation but to facilitate a range of wraparound and ancillary services for service users, including:

- Therapeutic supports
- Children's services
- Practical supports such as advocacy, court accompaniment and key worker liaison

The protection pillar aims to enable victim-survivors to rapidly access and live in safe, accessible short and long-term accommodation as a priority. To advance this, Cuan visited 18 priority locations for refuge development and liaised with stakeholders including local service providers, local authorities and housing bodies to progress development.[17]

To support a victim-survivor-centred wraparound service through the creation of clear integrated local pathways for adults and children, additional funding was made available by Cuan to expand the development of the national domestic violence helplines, to support enhanced services, responsiveness and to enable increased data collection.[19] The national helplines are provided by Women's Aid and the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and are available to callers on a 24/7 basis.

During this period, Cuan ran Always Here, a public awareness campaign specifically aimed at protecting victim-survivors of domestic violence by signposting them to services. As well as running the campaign across mass media, the campaign ran in GP services and hospital waiting rooms, pharmacies and was featured in female-focused media such as RSVP, Women's Way magazine, Her.ie and on Síle Seoige's Ready to Be Real podcast.

Independent evaluation of the campaign has found that it recorded very high levels of effectiveness at delivering each of the key messages with up to 99% agreement that it clearly communicated that there is help and support available to all victim-survivors of domestic and sexual violence and that, if they come forward, they will be believed and taken seriously.[20]

The protection pillar plays an important role in ensuring those in prostitution, primarily women, are afforded additional protection and safety. To achieve this, the Department of Health put a patient management system in place to facilitate data collection for the Women's Health Service which aims to ensure people in prostitution have access to safety, healthcare, support and exit routes. In addition, this allows for an analysis of data for future service planning, development and improvement.[21]

17 Action 2.3.7 Active planning and engagement underway for the delivery of 150 additional family refuge units.

18 Action 2.3.3 Explore models for the delivery of domestic violence refuge accommodation and identify opportunities to accelerate delivery to meet the targets set out in the Strategy.

19 Action 2.4.5 Continue development of the HSE national helpline services, expanding their capacity and responsiveness across multiple platforms through delivery of HSE-lead training and provision of resource materials enhanced data collection.

20 Action 2.1.1 Evaluate the domestic violence stream of the 'Always Here' campaign on pathways to safety for victims of DSGBV.

21 Action 2.6.4 Women's Health Service data collection systems in place.

Prosecution

This pillar focuses on actions **designed to support effective law enforcement and judicial proceedings** that enable victim-survivors access the justice they deserve. Strengthening the policing and prosecution of DSGBV is a crucial component of an effective law enforcement system enabling victim-survivors to access justice.

The Garda Inspectorate led an investigation into the effectiveness and efficiency of An Garda Síochána's response to domestic abuse. The Garda Inspectorate's report of its findings entitled, "Domestic Abuse: An inspection of An Garda Síochána's approach to prevention, protection, prosecution and victim support" was submitted to the Minister for Justice in October 2024.[22] During the latter half of 2024, the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) conducted one-day seminars to over 300 members of An Garda Síochána to reiterate and reinforce training and knowledge around domestic abuse orders. The seminars covered a number of aspects including education regarding domestic abuse order, eligibility and the process to request a special sitting of the District Court as per Section 24 of the Domestic Violence Act 2018. There is a commitment to continue providing seminars in 2025.[23]

The effective prosecution of perpetrators of DSGBV reinforces the message that such violence is serious crime, not a private matter.

The prosecution pillar is committed to developing and strengthening risk assessment mechanisms for perpetrators of DSGBV and the Probation Service played a key role in this in 2024. The Probation Service worked in collaboration with members of An Garda Síochána and Tusla to implement SORAM nationally, including the screening and management of adult sex offenders in the community. The Probation Service also co-delivered the National Inter-Agency Prevention Programme (NIAPP) alongside Tusla for children and young people who have exhibited harmful sexual behaviour. The NIAPP is ongoing in Oberstown Detention Centre, Dublin North and South, Cork and Louth with a new programme established in Limerick in September 2024.[24]

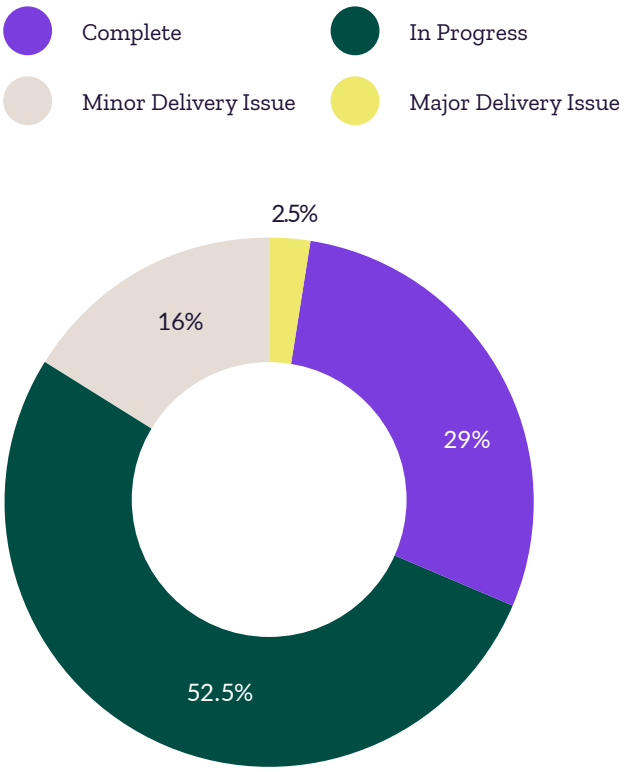


Figure 4: Prosecution Pillar

A core objective under this pillar is the reform of the operation of the family courts to ensure victim-survivors, particularly children, are better protected and supported throughout the judicial process.

22 Action 3.5.10 Finalise report on the effectiveness and efficiency of An Garda Síochána's response to domestic abuse.

23 Action 3.5.7 Ensure that training and knowledge around prosecutions of domestic abuse orders, in particular barring orders, is reiterated and reinforced to the operational ranks of An Garda Síochána.

24 Action 3.6.5 Agree approach to strengthen risk assessment mechanisms for adults and child victims/survivors in the post release of perpetrators convicted of DSGBV and implement necessary measures.

The Department of Justice enacted the Family Courts Act 2024 in November 2024,[25] which will, when commenced, provide for the establishment of family court divisions within the existing court structures including a Family High Court, a Family Circuit Court and a Family District Court.

Key reforms contained in the Family Court Act include, the assigning of judges on a full-time basis to the Family Court divisions who, by reason of their training or experience, are suitable to deal with matters of family law; a requirement for ongoing professional training in the area of family law for judges, allowing for joint applications to be made for judicial separation, divorce and dissolution of civil partnerships; and the setting out of guiding principles for the conduct of family law proceedings aimed at ensuring the best interests of the child are a primary consideration.

The Department of Justice Working Group on the Voice of the Child in Private and Family Law and Alternative Dispute Resolution was established in 2024 and includes representation from across the justice sector and civil society.[26] Over the latter half of 2024, the Working Group scoped and developed the role of a children's court advocate to uphold the voice of the child in private and family law proceedings, which will be piloted in 2025.

A key component of this pillar is the work undertaken to reduce attrition rates and enhance access to the legal system for individuals experiencing DSGBV. The Department of Justice enacted the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Act 2024[27] in July 2024, and on 31 August 2024 the provisions in the Act which strengthen the law around sexual offences and improve protections for victims of sexual offences were commenced. The reforms protect the privacy of victims in court and strengthen measures that protect victims from re-traumatisation and re-victimisation as they engage with the justice system during the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences. A more detailed account is available in the Mid-Year Progress Report on Implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy 2024.[28]

25 Action 3.2.3 Work towards the enactment of the Family Courts Bill 2022 and plan for its commencement.

26 Action 3.2.4 Progress the work of the Voice of the Child Working Group to examine current arrangements to hear the voice of the child in private family law and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

27 Action 3.3.1 Work towards enactment of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023.

28 Mid-Year Progress Report on Implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy.

Policy Coordination

This pillar focuses on actions designed to **support effective policy coordination** and **implementation at both national and local levels**. Under this pillar, the state seeks to provide a comprehensive, coordinated, authoritative, monitored and evaluated response to DSGBV, informed by engagement with both key stakeholders and service users at national and local levels.

An enhanced approach to the coordinated collection of data across Government and the DSGBV sector is central to achieving zero tolerance of DSGBV in our society, and an objective of this pillar is to ensure an effective, robust research and evaluation strategy to inform policy development and decision-making and to measure progress. In this regard, Cuan engaged with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in the reporting period to scope the development of a Domestic Violence survey to commence in 2025.[29]

Cuan also commenced work to develop a research and data plan to identify the priorities for 2025 activity and which incorporates a mechanism to support the collation of DSGBV data across Government departments and agencies.[30]

The establishment of strong oversight and governance structures are key to the implementation of and delivery of the commitments of the Zero Tolerance Strategy and is a key component of coordinating policy development. Cuan has developed a Monitoring and Reporting Framework which sets out clear reporting processes on the implementation of the Strategy, and a roadmap for improved performance measurement.

The policy coordination pillar emphasises the importance of collaboration with Government, statutory agencies and the DSGBV sector and most importantly with victim-survivors to ensure their lived experience shapes policy and practice. To support partnership, Cuan has conducted initial stakeholder mapping and documented the various forums where Cuan should be represented to enable a DSGBV lens in the implementation of relevant public policy. Additionally, an initial consultative structure has been drafted to guide the implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy in 2025 and 2026.

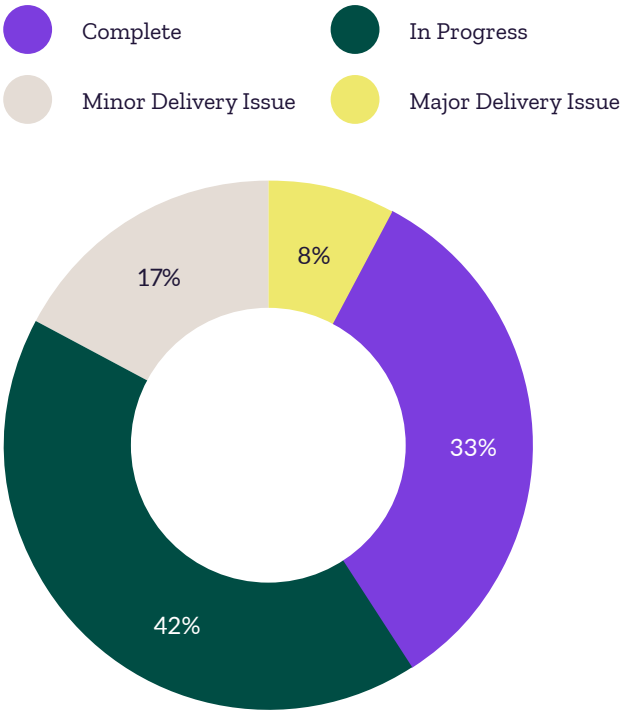


Figure 5: Policy Coordination Pillar

The work completed in 2024 has established Cuan as a key partner in galvanising nationwide action to eliminate DSGBV in Ireland. Through the development of a clear understanding of the stakeholder landscape, Cuan is now well positioned to support whole-of-government and whole-of-society action and to strategically develop its framework for action in the years ahead.

29 Action 4.2.4 Agree a project plan and timeline for a Domestic Violence/ Gender Based Violence survey

30 Action 4.2.1 Develop a research and data plan that identifies priorities and outcomes for 2024 and 2025 and incorporates a mechanism to support the collation of DSGBV data across government departments and agencies.

Spotlight Feature on Implementation

Reform of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum to empower students to be healthy and resilient young adults who have the skills and confidence to nurture healthy relationships.

The prevention pillar focuses on raising awareness and furthering education surrounding DSGBV and its root causes amongst the public.

The goal of the prevention pillar is to work towards the eradication of the social and cultural norms that underpin and contribute to gender-based violence. One of the objectives of this pillar is to enhance the understanding of all children and young people on what creates gender inequalities and what constitutes gender equality, consent and healthy relationships.

The new **SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle** was approved by the Minister for Education in October 2024 and will be rolled out in post-primary schools across the country on a phased basis from September 2025. It will enable students to deepen the core social and emotional skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationships skills.

The new curriculum is divided into three strands; Health and Wellbeing; Relationships and Sexuality; and Into Adulthood. The Relationships and Sexuality strand focuses on giving students knowledge and skills to support them in creating and nurturing respectful, caring and healthy relationships, including respecting boundaries, communicating effectively and navigating difficult conversations. It also supports students to recognise and be empowered to respond to instances of abuse or violence in relationships.

As part of the Relationships and Sexuality strand, students will learn to:

- Demonstrate the awareness and skills needed for nurturing healthy in-person and online relationships, including respecting boundaries, communicating effectively, navigating difficult conversations, preventing and managing conflict and dealing with break ups;
- Discuss the need for consent and the importance of care, respect, empathy, and trust within an intimate relationship;
- Examine how both positive and harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online, and in society and discuss strategies for challenging and changing harmful attitudes and narratives;
- Identify and consider common signs of abusive relationships, including coercive control;
- Explore root causes and consequences of DSGBV and outline the supports and services available, and protections under the law;
- Investigate the possible influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviors and relationship expectations and what supports are available for those impacted by pornography;
- Discuss intimate image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape and what to do and how to seek support if they or someone they know has experienced any of these.

The consultation process for the reform of the SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle consisted of engagement with parents, teachers and students by way of focus groups, online surveys and written submissions.

Individual focus groups were held with school leaders, Department of Education SPHE inspectors, the Executive of the Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU) and a stakeholder consultation event took place with agencies and organisations who work directly in SPHE or have expertise in a particular aspect relevant to SPHE.

Online survey responses were received from over 640 students, more than 200 teachers and over 2,100 parents. In addition, written submissions were received from 56 organisations/agencies and over 100 individuals.

The majority of students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders who participated in the consultation discussions welcomed the draft SPHE specification and stated that the specification provides continuity and effectively builds upon learning at Junior Cycle; it addresses the gap in previous SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle and addresses the learning needed by students at Senior Cycle.

A new SPHE curriculum for Junior Cycle was introduced in 2023 for all first-year students. Over the three years of Junior Cycle, students will learn a variety of skills, including how to communicate respectfully and effectively, understanding the importance of setting healthy boundaries, and recognising the effects of stress and how to manage it. They will also learn about the dangers of alcohol, smoking, and other addictive substances.

SPHE in Junior Cycle is divided into four parts: Understanding Myself and Others; Making Healthy Choices; Relationships and Sexuality; and Emotional Wellbeing. Under the topics of Understanding Myself and Others, and Relationships and Sexuality, students will learn more about themselves and develop the social and emotional skills they need for building and maintaining healthy, respectful relationships. Students learn the signs of unhealthy and abusive relationships, how to set boundaries, and respect others' boundaries and learn about consent.

The SPHE curriculum works best when parents and schools work together, using the same approach. This partnership ensures that children have a consistent experience and can see the links between what they learn at home, in school, and in their community. The importance of reaching out to a trusted adult, such as a parent or guardian, is a strong and repeated message within the SPHE curriculum.

To support this reform, and the teachers responsible for its implementation, Minister for Education Norma Foley TD, announced a new postgraduate programme to upskill registered post-primary SPHE teachers. The programme provided by DCU provides a pathway for progression for post-primary teachers interested in developing their skills in teaching SPHE and in doing so build capacity and leadership within the teaching profession.

This is in addition to the professional learning experiences delivered by Oide, the support service for teachers and school leaders, to support the introduction of the new curriculum specifications. These commenced in late 2024 for the new Senior Cycle specification, and 48 teachers attended 4 events in December 2024. In 2024, 449 teachers attended 26 events for Junior Cycle SPHE.

The Department of Education committed to providing additional resources for post-primary SPHE teachers via online toolkits, including guidance on teaching topics such as consent and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The Junior Cycle Toolkit and Senior Cycle toolkit are published online. Most recently, a suite of resources to support the teaching of the Relationships and Sexuality Education strand of the Junior Cycle SPHE have been published online. Topics explored in these resources include skills for creating healthy relationships, how to recognise signs of unhealthy relationships, gender roles and expectations, sexual consent, sexual harassment, and the influence of popular culture, including pornography.

Another resource, developed by Cuan, to support the updated SPHE curriculum and its educators is the Consent Ed Project, which is a sexual violence prevention resource for young people. The project provides learning materials for educators to promote consent, healthy relationships and a society free of sexual violence. The project offers facilitator-friendly resources to be used alongside the SPHE curriculum and works with teachers to build the skills and confidence to start conversations with young people about the challenges they face.

Over 800 teachers, youth workers and professionals have been trained since the beginning of the Consent Ed project, and almost 350 schools and youth organisations have become involved in the project since 2022. Over 3,000 young people were involved in the pilot programme, and it is estimated that over 44,000 young people were reached in the 2023–2024 academic year.

After taking part in the pilot programme in 2024, 99% of first-year students agreed they understood what a healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationship was. 92% of second-year students were more aware of support services for DSGBV victim-survivors and 94% were more aware of online sexual harm, and 97% of third-year students agreed they understood the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent.

The project also works with youth workers and other professionals outside of the formal education setting. By investing in this, the project aims to reach the more vulnerable population of young people that are not in formal education and to ensure the sustainability and continued impact of the initiative beyond its duration.

Next Steps

The final phase of implementation for the Zero Tolerance Strategy will be covered by a two-year plan spanning 2025 and 2026.

The final implementation plan will consolidate actions to date and incorporate performance indicators for each action to strengthen reporting capability. This will result in robust, annual reporting, with interim reporting directly to the Minister for Justice, the High-Level Oversight Board and the Cabinet Committee as required. A bespoke monitoring and reporting framework has been developed to support this.

Notes

Cuan | An Ghníomhaireacht um Fhoiréigean Baile, Gnéasach agus Inscnebhunaithe (FBGIB)
Cuan | The Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) Agency

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