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Submitted to Your Vision, Our Future
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About You

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A representative of an organisation

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Organisation:
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Chapter 1 - General Questions

1 What elements of the taxation and welfare systems do you feel are working well?

Please elaborate below::

2 What elements of the taxation and welfare systems do you feel are not working well?

Please elaborate below::

3 Good quality public services, welfare provision and infrastructure are financed mainly from taxation and PRSI. What are the features that you think our taxation and welfare systems should have in order to meet these needs?

Please specify::

4 In your view, what main reforms are necessary so that the Irish taxation and welfare systems can embrace the opportunities and meet the challenges that Ireland may face over the next 10-15 years?

Please outline your views::

We are a voluntary organisation with charitable status which provides services to those who have suffered sexual violence. We wish to submit some information which we hope will be useful to the Commission based on our experience as a charity and as a public health service providing entirely outsourced services which the State requires to be delivered.

In March 2019, Ireland ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) which, amongst other obligations, at Article 6, requires the State to include a gender perspective in the implementation and evaluation of the impact of the Convention and to promote and effectively implement policies of equality between women and men, and the empowerment of women.

This is not the first time that the State has recognised its obligations in relation to equality in general and gender equality in particular. It is noted that the issue of Equality Budgeting has been on the public service agenda for some time and that an equality budgeting expert advisory Group met for the first time in 2021. Taxation is one of the ways in which equality can be advanced, or can be impeded.

We urge the Commission to advance a resilient inclusive and sustainable taxation system through assessment of all taxation policies and practices through a gender perspective. As the Commission will know, gender equality is good for the entire society. It is of particular interest to our mission. As the Citizens Assembly on the topic identified, the elimination of sexual violence is crucial to gender equality. Gender equality reduces abuse of power, reduces the traumatic injuries incurred by such abuse, and encourages a healthy, resilient society which in turn reduces the burdens imposed by the harm and damage of trauma.

Chapter 8 - Public Health

1 How well do the taxation and welfare systems support good public health outcomes, addressing health challenges including but not limited to those caused by or related to tobacco and alcohol use, obesity, poverty and/or environmental issues?

Please outline your views::

2 What changes would you like to see to better promote the goal of good public health?

Please specify::

Ever before COVID-19, the prevalence and harm of sexual violence and domestic violence in Ireland was being recognised as an epidemic. As we now know, an epidemic is a public health disaster. It can only be remedied through ensuring those harmed by it have access to healing; by ensuring those who perpetrate or spread the harm are contained and stopped; and by prevention. The World Health Organisation has called sexual violence "a serious public health and human rights problem with both short and long-term consequences on ….physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health…. It is a deeply violating and painful experience for the survivor." Nonetheless, there is a critical lack of data on the topic, due to the hidden nature of sexual violence and the reluctance of society to discuss or recognise it. While up to date data is still sketchy, best estimates are that one in ever 3 women and one in every five men experience sexual abuse in their lifetimes.

If we are to promote good public health in Ireland, we have to address the needs of those who have experienced sexual violence and we have to build a society consensus around non-violence in the area of sexual activity. This will require:

- Adequate counselling and advisory resources for those who have been harmed by sexual violence. Until now, resources have grown in an ad-hoc way. All state obligations in this area are outsourced to voluntary/ private sector organisations such as ourselves. While the State outsources the obligation, they have consistently refused to recognise that they need to ensure that those delivering services are remunerated adequately, and at the very least in a way that is comparable to those employed in the public sector. In particular, those providing a State service funded through Tusla, under s.56 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 – and DRCC is one of those - have been resolutely ignored in terms of pay restoration making it increasingly difficult for us to compete for staff and resources with the much stronger, much better resourced public sector. This is a false economy. We have the expertise. We have the experience. We cannot however do our work while disadvantaged by the unfair competition imposed by the State. The State may think it is saving money. But this is a false economy.

- Awareness raising on equality and consensual sexual activity. Despite the resolution of the then Minister for Education Richard Bruton in 2019 to review the RSE programme on consent and healthy relationships for second level schools, last updated in 1999, the Department of Education has failed to implement recommendations of the National Council on Curriculum Assessment or to build any culture amongst our young people of how to avoid this public health plague.

- A changed mind-set in relation to consent. We recognise and applaud the recognition of the Department of Justice in its area, and the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to challenge society's indifference to this public health scourge. We are working with both, within our own capacity to advance a society where everyone recognises the need for genuine consent in sexual activity. The Commission has an opportunity to identify this public health issue and to enquire into procurement and grant making processes to build in criteria to public funding which requires all funded organisations to commit to zero tolerance of sexual violence of any kind.

Chapter 10 - Submit Your Ideas

1 Taking into account the Terms of Reference, submit any other thoughts, ideas or feedback on taxation and welfare in Ireland:

Please outline your views::

While many investments carry with them the attractive incentive of being tax deductible, this is not true for donations to charities. Some wealthy members of our society can and do understand and agree with our ambition to create an Ireland free from the harm of sexual violence, where those who suffer it receive the care and attention they need. They may even agree with our methods and innovations we produce. However, they may equally favour an entrepreneur in private business and we, the charity, can ultimately lose out to the private sector because the tax-deductible investment to the private sector is more beneficial to the donor. Making donations to charity tax deductible could significantly increase the funding available to charities and could help to increase the resources available for these services.

Many of our donors make small, monthly donations to us. We are very grateful for them because this regular income helps us plan and budget. However, it is a great pity that someone who is paying less than €21 a month cannot avail of the scheme whereby we as a charity can claim a refund of tax paid on that donation. A number of our valuable monthly donations are at the rate of €10/€15/€20 a month. We would ask that the Commission consider reducing the ceiling for claiming tax from €250 to €120. It may be that this needs to be done incrementally in which case we suggest that the Commission might start with at least allowing the tax of a €20 a month donor or €240 a year, perhaps working down to €120 over a 3 year period.

We as a charity are hampered greatly by the need to pay VAT on goods and many premises. While the VAT refund scheme for charities is welcome, it only makes the most minimal of returns given the ceiling of €5 million on the whole scheme annually. This has had a significant impact in relation to all the equipment we needed to purchase during the pandemic and also in relation to any modern premises we might need. We submit that this is an unfair anomaly and a significant indirect tax on charities.