Mid-term progress review of the implementation of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014

Institute of Public Administration

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Introduction

1.1   Focus of the report

The main purposes of this review are (a) to assess progress and effectiveness with regard to the implementation of the *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014*, and (b) to help provide a foundation for future national work on domestic and sexual violence. This is the first of two reviews Cosc intends to undertake over the lifetime of the strategy. The rationale behind the review is to enable Cosc, the Strategy Oversight Committee and key stakeholders to make more informed decisions about the structures, processes and outcomes associated with the implementation of the strategy.

As noted in the invitation to tender the focus of the review is on how the strategy operates in practice and on whether it facilitates primary and secondary intervention outcomes in line with the strategic goals. In other words, the review does not seek to evaluate the strategy itself but rather to focus on its implementation.

1.2   The rationale, objectives and structures underpinning the strategy

The *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014*[1] is a statement of Government priority actions to address domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Ireland in the five-year period from early 2010 to the end of 2014. The context for the strategy is the Government's concern about 'the consistent prevalence and the high level of non-disclosure or non-reporting of incidences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence' (Executive Summary, p.1). The strategy sets out a plan for 'whole-of-government' action for a more effective system to prevent such violence. Five government departments, their agencies and up to one hundred non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are involved in work relevant to the prevention and alleviation of abuse[2]. According to the strategy report:

> There is a need for a clear direction for all this activity, a collective vision and
> a common view of effectiveness. This strategy aims to meet that need and to

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[1] Cosc (2010), *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014*, Dublin: Stationery Office
[2] At the time of the launch of the strategy six departments were involved. Due to the reconfiguration of departments in 2011 this was reduced to five, of which four have specific commitments assigned under the strategy.

provide a clear vision for all government-related action on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in the period 2010-2014. (par.1.1)

The strategy's vision is that by the end of 2014 in Ireland, there will be:
- Clearer societal acknowledgment of the unacceptability of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence
- Greater recognition and a broader understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence
- Greater confidence in high-quality and consistent services
- Increased safety for victims
- Increased accountability of the perpetrator
- Structured and improved planning and monitoring to ensure continued effectiveness

The four high-level goals of the strategy are:
1. To promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence
2. To deliver an effective and consistent service to those affected
3. To ensure greater effectiveness of policy and service planning
4. To ensure efficient and effective implementation of the strategy

The strategy distinguishes between primary and secondary interventions. Primary interventions, it argues, are those that aim to prevent a problem from occurring, or, when it has taken place, to prevent its recurrence. Secondary interventions arise once an incident has occurred and there is a direct role for services to deal with a report, to respond or to refer on for needs to be met by a more specialised service.

The key headline indicators agreed for the strategy are:
- A reduction in the prevalence of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence
- An increase in the level of disclosure and reporting, as a result of improved opportunities for disclosure and confidence in the response system
- That people in the community and in service provider organisations are better informed about how to respond to disclosures of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

The strategy places a particular emphasis on the importance of high-quality information and on a systematic approach to data capture and collation: It contends that the lack of consistent information about the number of people affected by domestic and sexual violence limits the capacity to respond to the problem. According to the strategy, with an improved approach to data, the country will be in a better position to evaluate effectiveness.

A network of structures has been put in place to support implementation of the strategy. At the centre is Cosc itself, the national office for the prevention of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The office is an executive office of the Department of Justice and Equality. It is situated within the department, but has a remit to address domestic, sexual and gender-based violence from a cross-government perspective rather than solely from that of the justice sector. Cosc's role covers co-ordination across the justice, health, housing, education, family support and community sectors. This work includes close interaction with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the area of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

With regard to implementation of the strategy, Cosc reports to a National Strategy Oversight Committee[3] composed of the statutory bodies responsible for the implementation of the strategy. The Oversight Committee meets twice yearly and is chaired by the secretary general of the Department of Justice and Equality. It is made up of representatives from Cosc, the Department of Health, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Education and Skills, the Garda Síochána and the HSE. The role of the Oversight Committee is to monitor the implementation of the strategy and to assist in identifying solutions to any delays in implementation.

The implementation of the strategy is also supported by a number of other committees. Cosc chairs the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women (NSCVAW) and the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Men (NSCVAM). The NSCVAW includes representatives from the key government

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[3] Referred to throughout this report as the Oversight Committee for short.

departments, the Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Probation Service and NGO representatives. The NSCVAW also has sub-committees reporting to it: a Legal Issues sub-committee, a Public Awareness sub-committee, and a 'One-Stop-Shop' sub-committee. The NSCVAM includes representatives from Cosc, AMEN (a national NGO working with men who are victims of domestic violence), and representatives from other government departments as agendas require. The committees meet quarterly.

There are also eight Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), supported by the HSE which focus strategically on the services and needs in their regions. The RACs support the implementation of the strategy through acting as a conduit, for information, exchange of ideas, or suggestions with respect to specific initiatives, between Cosc, the NSCVAW and local services. An independent chair has been appointed to each RAC and all chairs attend meetings of the NSCVAW.

Cosc has set up a number of specialist committees to deal with specific issues: Justice Committee, Perpetrator Programme Committee, Training Committee and Data Committee. Cosc is also represented on a number of other government committees with responsibilities that impact on the implementation of the strategy, including the HSE-led National Elder Abuse Steering Group and Cross Departmental Team on Homelessness led by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

The committee structure is shown graphically in Appendix 1.

1.3   Review approach and methodology

There are two main elements to the review. The first element is concerned with whether or not the strategy facilitates primary and secondary intervention outcomes in line with the strategic goals (high level goal one in relation to primary interventions, and high level goal two in relation to secondary interventions). Activity and impact review was used here in order to assess the extent to which the strategy is contributing to change in the desired direction.

The activity and impact review examines progress in relation to the implementation of activities outlined under high level goals one and two. Both quantitative and

qualitative data were used. Qualitative data drew heavily upon the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the outcomes achieved.

The second element is concerned with how the strategy operates in practice. Issues such as the role of Cosc, the Oversight Committee and participating delivery organisations, and the development of planning and data collection systems are of prime concern. Structure and process review was adopted here to systematically investigate and document the operation of the strategy. A particular focus was put on policy planning (high level goal three) and strategy implementation (high level goal four) in terms of the arrangements put in place to promote policy planning and to secure monitoring and lesson learning.

The operation of Cosc, the Oversight Committee and the various other committees, and the 'buy in' of participating organisations are important structural elements supporting the strategy. Also, the provision of improved data to enhance the evidence base, and greater coordination between organisations involved in delivery of the strategy, are important elements in securing a successful strategy. Essentially, the concern is with securing sound structures and processes to facilitate strategy implementation. The structure and process review is seen as important in providing comment on the structures and processes put in place and how well they are operating in practice.

These two elements to the review underpin the analytical framework for the research set out in Figure 1.1. The analytical framework makes explicit the workings and assumptions underlying strategy implementation. The analytical framework is based on a theory of change as to how the strategy intends to achieve its goals:

- The structures to underpin the strategy – Cosc itself, the Oversight Committee, and the structures to facilitate the participation of key bodies – are all important elements in securing the achievement of the strategy and provide the basic building blocks from which progress is made.
- Processes are put in place whereby planning and data collection are to be improved. Closer cooperation and coordination of participating organisations is a key process change desired by the strategy. These processes in turn are intended to secure desired outcomes.
- Outcomes can be differentiated at two main levels:

> o Incidences of domestic and sexual violence will be reduced or prevented through raising awareness of the problem and changing attitudes
>
> o Once an incident has occurred services to victims are delivered effectively and consistently

In terms of gathering of data for the review, the main aspects of methodological approach were:
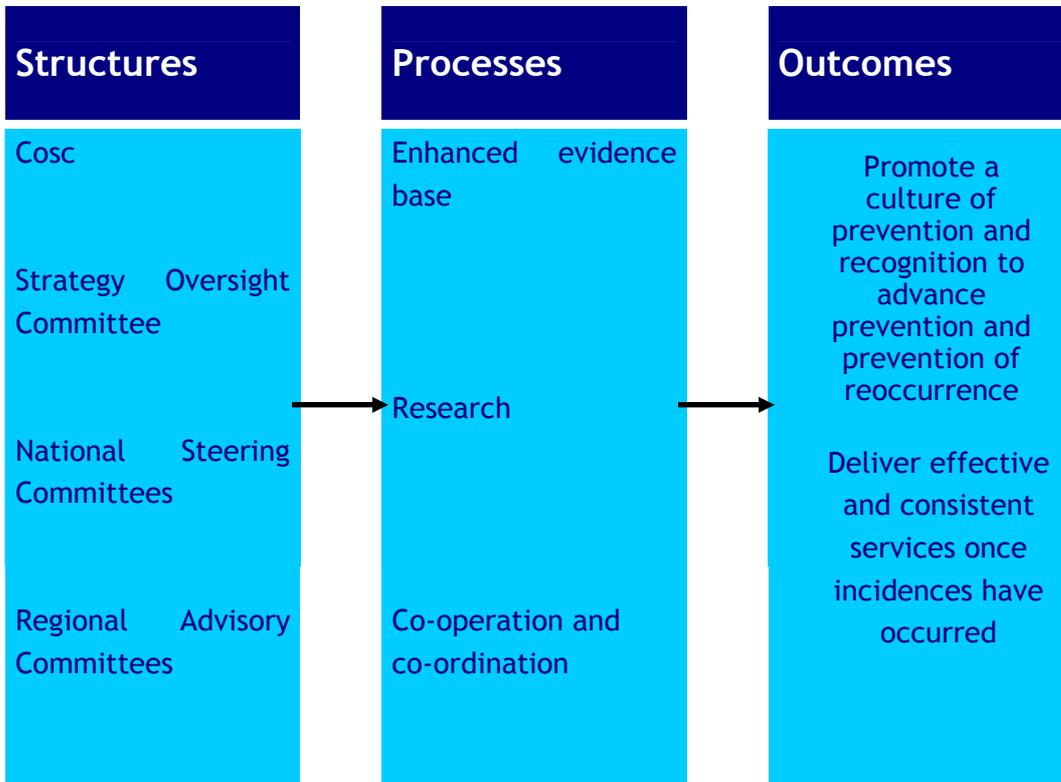
- Documentary analysis of reports and relevant material on strategy implementation and development
- Semi-structured interviews with the key stakeholders. This was the main method of data collection. The range of stakeholders interviewed was determined in collaboration with Cosc at the project inception. 27 interviews covering 18 organisations were conducted during the course of the review. Interviews included representatives from departments and agencies involved in implementing the strategy (including Cosc, the HSE, Garda Síochána, Courts Service, Department of Health, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government) and selected NGOs/voluntary organisations working in the area. Appendix 2 gives details of the organisations with whom interviews took place
- Interactive sessions with Cosc to (a) outline key findings from the review on a periodic basis and (b) discuss emerging issues and progress

As per the agreed contract with Cosc, twenty-one person days were allocated in total for the review, including documentary analysis, the completion of the semi-structured interviews and the report writing.

1.4 Structure of the report

Following this introductory chapter, and drawing from the analytical framework, chapter two looks at the outcomes achieved so far from the strategy by means of an assessment of the impact of the strategy to date. Chapter three examines the operation of the structures and processes set up to implement the strategy, as outlined in the first two columns in Figure 1.1. Chapter four draws overall conclusions.

Figure 1.1: A framework for the review of the National Strategy

Structures	Processes	Outcomes
Cosc	Enhanced evidence base	Promote a culture of prevention and recognition to advance prevention and prevention of reoccurrence
Strategy Oversight Committee		
National Steering Committees	Research	Deliver effective and consistent services once incidences have occurred
Regional Advisory Committees	Co-operation and co-ordination	

2
Impact of the strategy

2.1 Introduction

In assessing the impact of the strategy so far, the main recorded activities arising from the strategy in the areas of primary and secondary interventions provide the basic building blocks for the assessment. These activities are targeted at achieving the actions, objectives and goals of the strategy of promoting a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and delivering an effective and consistent service to those affected (high-level goals 1 and 2).

In assessing progress with regard to the implementation of the activities, the bi-annual progress reports produced by Cosc for the Oversight Committee provided the foundation for the analysis presented here. There have been four progress reports to date, the first in June 2010, the second in December 2010, the third in June 2011 and the fourth in December 2011. These progress report findings are supplemented by information obtained in the stakeholder interviews.

2.2 High-level goal 1: To promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

This high-level goal focuses on prevention and the achievement of primary intervention outcomes aimed at preventing a problem from occurring, or, when it has taken place, preventing its recurrence. There are three actions aimed at meeting this high level goal, with ten associated activities. This analysis focuses on the activities, as these are the main deliverables of the strategy and are central to implementation. The linkage between activities, actions and the high level goal is shown in Appendix 3.

Overall, progress is being made with regard to the implementation of the agreed activities, but this progress has in general been somewhat slower than planned, as Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 illustrate.

Table 2.1   Implementation of high-level goal 1 activities

High-level goal	Number of activities	Activities completed or progressing in line with or close to target	Activities progressing but not in line with target	Activities not progressed or seriously out of line with target
1	10	2	8	0

Figure 2.1   Implementation of high-level goal 1 activities

☐ Good progress ☐ Progress with delays
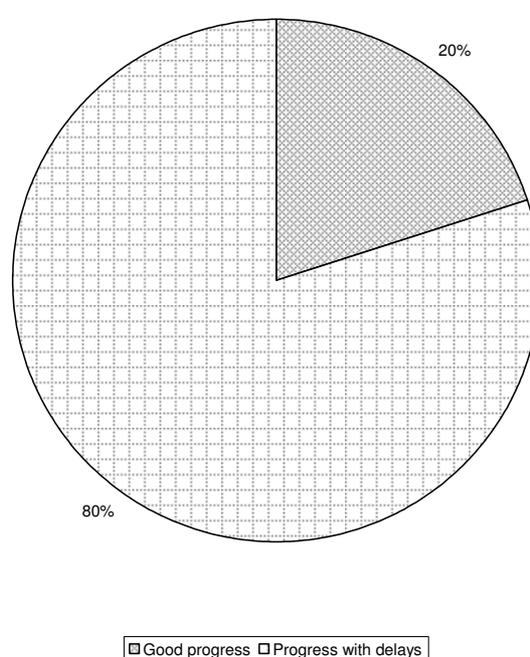
There have been some areas of good progress, particularly with regard to the objective to promote and develop an understanding and recognition of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence among the general public and specific audiences, and associated activities 1.1 and 1.2. In relation to this, the second progress report stated that an annual information programme would be developed by January 2011 while the third progress report indicated that the 2011 programme was in place and was targeting the general public, traveller and migrant communities, and justice professionals. The fourth progress report refers to the implementation of the Cosc awareness raising grant scheme 2011.

Progress has also been made in relation to the other activities, but has fallen somewhat behind schedule in many cases. For example in relation to the development of a training needs analysis for the justice sector and consequent development of training programmes (activity 2.2), the target was to have training needs identified by the first quarter of 2011 and training programmes implemented by the fourth quarter of 2011. The first progress report refers to the planned operation of a Justice Sector Training Committee while later reports indicate that this committee met on three occasions in 2010 and four times in 2011. By the end of 2011 a report on training needs was described as being in the process of being finalised.

With regard to activity 2.4 to promote issues relevant to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in the training of school professionals, it was originally envisaged that training would have commenced by the end of 2011. In practice, the development of content and resources is underway and the reported intention is to have support materials completed by the end of the 2011/2012 school year. It is noted in the fourth progress report that progress in this area was delayed as the SPHE (social, personal and health education) team had to prioritise training for schools in the new child protection guidelines. In a context of reducing resources, prioritisation of activities is an important issue and one commented on further in this report.

The feedback from the interviews with stakeholders in relation to the success to date of the activities in the strategy relating to prevention broadly supports the findings above. The awareness raising campaigns were generally regarded in a positive light. Several respondents noted the view that the awareness raising campaigns had, in their view, been a positive development helping to promote better public understanding of the issue.

Apart from the timeliness with which initiatives were seen to be developed and progressed, the main concern raised by stakeholders in relation to this goal was that several of the NGOs raised questioned in respect of the 'stay safe' emphasis in some of the awareness raising campaigns. It was suggested that this is out of line with international best practice and puts too much emphasis on the victim and what they need to do to stay safe rather than on the perpetrator.

However, this criticism may be somewhat dated. A recent public campaign (Your Silence Feeds the Violence) focuses on the perpetrator and the bystander. And the work done in this area is based on consensus advice of the Public Awareness sub-committee of the NSCVAW. Included in this work is the development of guiding principles for public awareness raising activities relating to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence issued in 2011 and aimed at encouraging a shift from a focus of public awareness raising activities on the victim to an inclusion of a focus on the perpetrator and bystander.

A small number of other interviewees felt it was either too early yet to really judge how successful the awareness raising and training programmes had been, or that there was insufficient data to make an informed judgement as to their impact so far. There is no hard data available on the impact of awareness campaigns on attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, the challenges associated with obtaining good evidence on final outcomes of awareness campaigns are internationally recognised.

Several NGOs also expressed a view that their expertise in the training area had been under-utilised in the planning and development of training programmes by the Cosc training committee. However, there have been no training programmes developed to date and it is open to the committee to draw as necessary on available expertise.

2.3 High-level goal 2: To deliver an effective and consistent service to those affected

This high-level goal focuses on services to victims and the achievement of secondary intervention outcomes which arise once an incident has occurred and there is a direct role for services to deal with a report. There are fifteen actions aimed at meeting this high level goal, with forty-one associated activities. This is thus the goal with by far the most activity associated with it in the strategy. The linkage between activities, actions and the high level goal is shown in Appendix 3.

Overall, progress is mixed with regard to the implementation of the agreed activities, as Table 2.2 and Figure 2.2 illustrates.

Table 2.2   Implementation of high-level goal 2 activities

High-level goal	Number of activities	Activities completed or progressing in line with or close to target	Activities progressing but not in line with target	Activities not progressed or seriously out of line with target	Activities with target commencement not yet reached
2	41	10	18	7	6

Figure 2.2   Implementation of high-level goal 2 activities
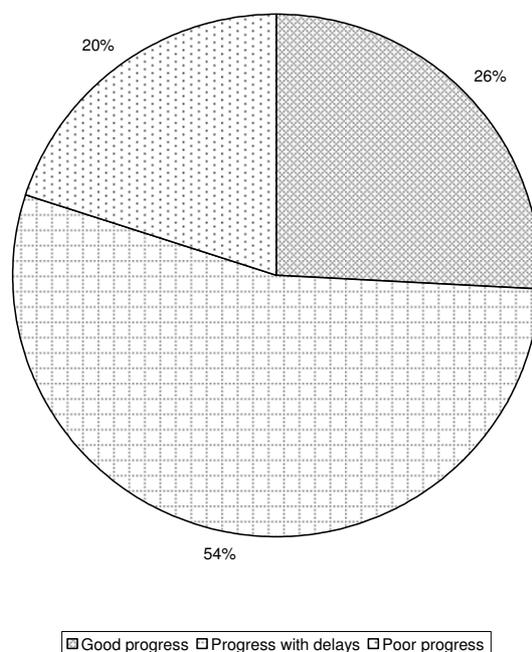
Good progress has been made in relation to around a quarter of the planned activities. Progress is being made in relation to roughly a further fifty per cent of the activities, though with some delays. And with regard to approximately a fifth of the planned activities, progress has been limited or poor.

Regarding good progress, activities 4.1 and 4.2 seek to ensure that information on services is available to victims in user-friendly formats. The third progress report describes an evaluation of the websites of State organisations in this area regarding

their accessibility and consistency. The Cosc awareness raising grant scheme also provided grant funding of just under €300,000 to 65 projects in 2011. In relation to activity 6.1 the first progress report refers to plans to publish a new edition of the *Victims Charter and Guide to the Criminal Justice System*. The second progress report indicates that this document was published in July 2010 and the third report adds that it is available on the Victims of Crime office website in eight languages. Regarding activity 6.6 concerning the implementation of the recommendations on standardisation of sexual assault services as set out in the national review of sexual assault treatment units (SATUs), the fourth progress report states that most of the relevant recommendations are now fully implemented. In relation to activity 16.1, aimed at strengthening measures to deal with domestic violence perpetrators, steady progress is noted in all four progress reports.

As an example of activities where progress is being made but it is delayed or limited, activity 10.2 promotes the evaluation of approaches and experiences of initiatives related to minimising the extent of victim homelessness arising from domestic violence, with a view to the evaluation being completed by the fourth quarter of 2011. The fourth progress report notes that at the end of 2011 the evaluation is underway. Similarly activity 13.1 regarding improving legislative provisions of vetting has an associated progress indicator that vetting legislation would be brought into operation by the fourth quarter of 2011. In practice a Bill is being drafted in 2012. Regarding activity 6.2 on the production of best practice models for service delivery, information on models was to be circulated to service providers by the third quarter of 2010, but the fourth progress report notes that at the end of 2011 a draft general best practice paper has been circulated to the NSCVAW and NSCVAM.

In relation to activities where progress has been poor or significantly out of line with target, activity 5.1 sets out to agree and implement an assessment form with domestic violence questions for routine use for all staff in different health care contexts/environments with specific target groups. The first progress report notes that this deliverable had not been advanced because of the industrial relations environment in the health services. The second progress report noted that the target here was somewhat amended to become that of developing 'a process of routine enquiry by all staff in the A&E context'. The third and fourth progress reports state that this work

has now been assimilated into the HSE training working group, which will develop 'routine questions for different health care settings'

Activity 7.2 states that guidance would be provided on the data protection implications of information sharing across services, with the guidance developed by the fourth quarter of 2010. The third progress report noted that legal advice in relation to sharing data was sought by Cosc on the request of the Oversight Committee. The advice was subsequently received and circulated to relevant departments, agencies and offices for observations and discussion. A proposed meeting with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) originally scheduled for January 2011 was postponed pending the receipt and consideration of the legal advice and discussions. The fourth progress report simply notes that Cosc is in continuing contact with ODPC.

Activities 9.1 and 9.2 concern a review of counselling services for victims of domestic and sexual violence and the development of proposals for improvement. This work has not been advanced as it is dependent on work on standardisation, which has been delayed.

In general with regard to delays and failures in relation to the implementation of agreed activities, in its introduction to the third progress report, Cosc makes the following comment about delays in achieving the targets:

> While specific reasons for delays in achieving the target indicators have not been provided by respondents, Cosc has been made aware that staff resource issues, such as restrictions in T&S[4] spending, non-replacement of staff, reorganisation and the change of Government have contributed to the delay in achieving some targets.

As well as delays, concerns were expressed by some respondents as to the quality of some outputs being delivered. For example a draft best practice paper on models of service delivery was criticised by several NGO respondents as not showing sufficient understanding of aspects of the issue and not referring to research conducted on behalf of the NGOs.

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[4] Travel and subsistence

A more general overview of where delays are emerging is given in Table 2.3. This covers the activities from both high level goals 1 and 2. The table shows that of those activities that are progressing broadly satisfactorily, the vast majority identify Cosc as the principal lead body (though Cosc also has lead responsibility for some activities which are delayed or progressing poorly). Of the seven activities rated as poor with regard to implementation, in four of these cases the HSE is the designated principal lead body. Industrial relations problems in the health services were identified in the progress reports as a factor limiting progress in some instances.

Table 2.3   Lead body and progress in implementation of activities

Principal lead body	Activities completed or progressing in line with or close to target	Activities progressing but not in line with target	Activities not progressed or seriously out of line with target
Cosc	10	8	2
Department of Environment, Community and Local Government	0	2	0
Department of Education	0	3	0
Department of Health and Children	0	2	0
Department of Justice and Equality	0	4	0
Health Service Executive	1	7	4
Office of the Data Protection Commissioner	0	0	1
Victims of Crime Office	1	0	0

In the interviews with stakeholders, most service providers, both statutory and voluntary organisations, referred to the challenges funding and staffing cutbacks were causing with regard to the implementation of activities aimed at securing effective and consistent service provision. Counselling services, for example, were explicitly mentioned by one respondent in this regard. However, one respondent from the Courts Service noted that while cutbacks have increased the pressure within the system, with staff working very hard in order to cover positions, it has also challenged

them to be more resourceful. For example, in conjunction with the Courts Service three NGOs provide a support and referral service every morning for women clients of the Family Law Courts in Dublin. In the same court premises another NGO provides a similar service for men one half day a week. These services are provided at no extra cost to the Courts Service.

With regard to the consistency of service provision, several respondents (both statutory and voluntary) expressed the view that better delivery is being promoted through activities such as the provision of guidelines being provided as part of the strategy. However, most respondents noted that consistency of supports is still a significant issue. The general view expressed was that there are still serious inconsistencies, both depending on where victims lived (lack of standardisation of service provision) and with regard to consistency of practice by service providers, notably the Garda Síochána and the judiciary. Though efforts to improve consistency in the Garda Síochána were positively noted by several respondents. Also, the Courts Service has provided training in respect of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence for courts staff and the issue of judicial training remains a high priority and the need for continuous professional development is recognised.

2.4   Longer-term impact of the strategy

Although it is outside the timescale of this mid-term review, it is important to reflect on the longer-term outcomes that the activities are intended to support on strategy completion. The goals of the strategy are, quite properly, very broad. The vision, set out in section 1.2, includes that by the end of 2014 there will be 'clearer societal acknowledgement of the unacceptability of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence' and 'greater recognition and a broader understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.' Moreover, the first high-level goal of the strategy, also cited above, has arguably very broad ambitions, that is, 'to promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.'

A point of note here is that it is a very challenging task to achieve such broad societal outcomes as are set out by the strategy and also to measure success in their achievement.

The activities and progress indicators set out in the strategy are very substantial and cover an impressively extensive and detailed range of activities. They are intended to be appropriate ways of meeting the broad outcomes listed and provide evidence that the strategy is operating well in practice and that it is facilitating primary and secondary intervention outcomes in line with the strategic goals. However, the strategy's activities and progress indicators are essentially only 'proxies' for the achievement of the high-level, societal change at which the strategy is aiming.

In other words, the achievement of all the activities carried out in the strategy may imply movement towards, but does not necessarily guarantee, for example, the achievement, by 2014, of 'clearer societal acknowledgement of the unacceptability of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.' That is, the task of establishing at that time that such acknowledgement had taken place would arguably involve reflection not just on the issue of whether the activities listed in the strategy had been carried out but also on a wide range of social data – relating, for example, to prevailing social attitudes to the violence highlighted by the strategy or, more positively, to the respectful interaction within family or social life which firmly excludes violent responses.

3

The operation of the strategy: process and structure issues

3.1 Introduction

The focus in this chapter is on the processes and structures set up to implement the strategy, how they operate, and the nature and level of interaction amongst the various participants. It is important to know how the implementation of the strategy operates in practice as the lessons learned from this experience have important implications for future arrangements for co-ordinating approaches.

As with the activity and impact assessment, in assessing progress with regard to the implementation of the activities, the bi-annual progress reports produced by Cosc for the Oversight Committee and information obtained in the stakeholder interviews provides the basis for findings outlined here.

3.2 High-level goal 3: To ensure greater effectiveness of policy and service planning

This high-level goal focuses on seeking to ensure more effective policy and service planning particularly through improved data capture and data coordination. There are three actions aimed at meeting this high level goal, with four associated activities. The linkage between activities, actions and the high level goal is shown in Appendix 3.

Progress with regard to the implementation of the agreed activities is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1   Implementation of high-level goal 3 activities

High- level goal	Number of activities	Activities completed or progressing in line with or close to target	Activities progressing but not in line with target	Activities not progressed or seriously out of line with target	Activities with target commencement not yet reached
3	4	3	0	0	1

All three of the activities under this high-level goal that have associated targets that can be reported on to date are making progress, as reported on the progress reports. In

relation to activity 19.1 (improve data on domestic and sexual violence), the first progress report noted that a report on a data project was nearing completion, the second progress report stated that it was complete and would be used to inform the work of a data committee while the third progress report stated that a data plan had been finalised by the data committee. The fourth progress report notes that a draft first progress report on the work of the data committee has been prepared.

Regarding activity 20.2, which is concerned with encouraging consultation with representative groups in the development of policy and services, the fourth progress report refers to regular meetings of the NSCVAW, bilateral meetings with NGO groups, presentations to all RACs and other stakeholders and discussions held with RAC chairs and members.

In relation to activity 21.1, regarding the development of a coordinated research programme, the progress reports refer to steady progress in relation to the completion of research programmes for 2010 and 2011 respectively.

However, feedback obtained from the interviews showed very significant variations in views as to the amount of progress made, particularly with regard to data collection and coordination.

Data collection

Regarding data collection, there were disparate views on the amount of progress that had been made. Those who viewed progress as positive made comments such as: 'the strategy has brought people together and improved data sharing' and 'the picture and profile of perpetrators and victims is getting better'. Those who took a contrary view made comments such as: 'the strategy has done nothing in terms of data; it is one of the failures of the strategy', 'it is not possible to say if women are safer because of the strategy' and 'lack of up to date data is the number one issue'. Predominantly, negative views on data collection tended to come from NGO representatives, though this was not universal with some positive comments, and similarly some negative comments from some of the statutory body representatives.

There is thus a disconnect between the views expressed by several of the respondents and the progress as noted in the progress reports. In part this reflects a real issue and

challenge with regard to data, with the presence of significant data deficits. For example a 2011 Cosc report on service provision relied on data sets from 2007 on the range and accessibility of services as this was the most recent comparative data available for a full year. There is a particular gap with regard to data on the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence.

In part the difference in views may also reflect a communications issue around progress made to date and plans for future actions. The data committee is composed of representatives from the statutory organisations only, and its initial work has focused on short-term improvements in the examination of data by individual state agencies. It is intended to move on to examine medium to longer term improvements in the collection of data by state agencies and then data collected by NGOs will be considered.

3.2.2   Coordination

While all respondents welcomed and valued the benefits of consultation and coordination, there were divergent views on the effectiveness to date of consultation and coordination. These tended to break down between statutory body representatives, the majority of whom noted improvements, and NGO representatives the majority of whom were more negative on this issue (though again this was not uniform across the board). Positive comments tended to stress things like the fact that spaces to get together are always valuable, the presence of good working relationships at front-line level and that the strategy has brought all stakeholders around the table. Comments critical of the level of consultation and cooperation referred to issues such as perceived poor working relationships between the NGOs and state bodies notably the HSE and Cosc, and that while pockets of practice have changed it is not consistent and tends to be relationship rather than policy driven.

Clearly the main challenges are around maintaining a good working relationship between the statutory agencies and the NGOs, and particularly between Cosc and some of the NGOs and between the HSE and some of the NGOs. There is little evidence of an improvement in relationships between the statutory and voluntary sectors during the course of the strategy, and in some cases it is perceived to have worsened. Tensions between national level and regional level as exemplified by the

lack of clarity with regard to the role of RACs have exacerbated the situation in recent times (this issue is examined in more detail below in section 3.3).

It would appear that both the statutory and voluntary sectors have concerns that the other side does not fully understand the pressures and constraints acting on the other. For example some state sector respondents felt that the NGOs did not have a full understanding of the policy making process and how it operates and the need for state officials to have a strategic and oversight role. It was also suggested that the NGOs can have fixed mind sets and agendas with an unwillingness to consider there may be another side to the discussions.

There was also evidence of some issues or tensions within sectors. In the NGO sector, a few respondents noted what they saw as poor cooperation particularly between the bigger NGOs, in part driven by the competition for scarce resources. Some comments were received that there was also limited engagement between NGOs focusing mostly on supporting women and those supporting men. In the state sector, while interviewees were generally more positive with regard to the strategy leading to improvements in consultation and cooperation, some problems were also noted by them. The limited engagement of the Department of Health with strategy implementation, for example, was noted by a small number of respondents. This may in part stem from a perception within the Department of Health that the implementation of the strategy comes under the remit of the HSE. However, this view undervalues the important contribution which the Department can make in developing policy in the area.

But generally the state agencies were more positive on the impact of the strategy on coordination, for example improvements in relationships between the Garda Síochána and HSE were noted, as were improvements within Justice agencies, where working relationships were described as more effective.

3.3   High-level goal 4: To ensure efficient and effective implementation of the strategy

This high-level goal focuses on monitoring progress in relation to implementation of the strategy and ensuring the effectiveness of strategy implementation. There are two

actions aimed at meeting this high level goal, with four associated activities. The linkage between activities, actions and the high level goal is shown in Appendix 3.

Progress with regard to the implementation of the agreed activities is shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2   Implementation of high-level goal 3 activities

High-level goal	Number of activities	Activities completed or progressing in line with or close to target	Activities progressing but not in line with target	Activities not progressed or seriously out of line with target	Activities with target commencement not yet reached
4	4	2	1	0	1

Activities 22.1, 22.2 and 22.3 relate to the objective of monitoring progress and are concerned primarily with the production and submission of the bi-annual progress reports. These reports have been produced and submitted to the Oversight Committee on time. The fourth progress report mentions delays in the process causing collective RAC comments to be excluded in the second and third progress reports to the Oversight Committee.

While monitoring activities are generally progressing satisfactorily, the high-level goal of efficient and effective implementation of the strategy provides a context for examination of the structures supporting the implementation of the strategy as noted in the analytical framework set out in section 1.3. The operation of Cosc, the Oversight Committee and the various other committees are important structural elements supporting the strategy. Respondents were asked for their views on how effectively they felt the operational structures put in place were supporting the implementation of the strategy. Elements of the structure and the views expressed are set out below.

Cosc

There were generally positive views overall with regard to the role of Cosc. The need for a lead body to coordinate activity was widely acknowledged and a contrast made with the organisation of the sector prior to Cosc's creation. Where tensions arose it

was with regard to the management of relationships, particularly with regard to several of the NGOs and the RACs. There was also an issue raised by NGOs about the level of expertise available to Cosc relating to a perceived need for specialist skill sets rather than general administrative skills in some areas.

Some respondents felt that despite the strategy there was still in some instances a lack of clarity about responsibility for delivery, given Cosc's lead role in terms of coordination but other service providers, and notably the HSE, with regard to delivery.

One particular issue raised by a couple of respondents was whether or not the Department of Justice and Equality was the appropriate 'home' department for Cosc. On the one hand, given the centrality of crime and its prevention to the strategy, the current location was seen as appropriate. But a couple of respondents noted that as the majority of funding related to the strategy came from the health sector, the Department of Health might be a more appropriate location.

Oversight Committee

The Oversight Committee meets bi-annually. With regard to attendance, attendance levels are good from all participating organisations with the exception of the Department of Health, which attended less than half the meetings from 2009 to 2011[5].

Very few comments were made about the operation of the Oversight Committee, with those comments that were made generally positive. The importance of the meetings being chaired and given priority by the secretary general of the Department of Justice and Equality was commented on by a couple of respondents, as a signal of commitment to the strategy and necessary to encourage the commitment of other senior managers in the system. One respondent noted that there was a case for including a representative from the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) on the committee, given the role of local authorities in relation to housing and the need to encourage a consistent approach across local authorities.

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[5] It should be noted that attendance at meetings, which is also referred to later with regard to the NSCVAW does not provide a full picture of participation. The seniority, role and engagement of those participating are all also important. However, attendance levels are one indicator of commitment and ability to resource attendance.

National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women (NSCVAW) and National Steering Committee on Violence Against Men (NSCVAM)
The national steering committees meet quarterly. The NSCVAW pre-dates the strategy. The NSCVAM has only been in operation since December 2011 and so it is too early to comment on its operation.

Attendance levels at the NSCVAW has been mixed. Organisations that attended all or the vast majority of meetings between 2009 and 2011 include Cosc, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Women's Aid, Garda Síochána, HSE, Pavee Point, Probation Service and the RAC representatives. Those that managed to attend 50 per cent or less of the meetings include the Family Support Agency, National Women's Council of Ireland, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Law Society of Ireland and AkiDwA.

While one respondent felt the NSCVAW meetings were very efficient and well run and another that there were a lot of able people on the committee and the interaction was positive, a number of respondents noted problems with engagement, linked to relationship issues between the NGOs and state sector mentioned earlier. In particular the issue of the strategy being gender-neutral rather than gender specific was seen as impacting on the relationships at the committee given the views of many of the NGOs, who would prefer gender-specific strategies. One respondent noted that it was evident that some of the NGOs would have had pre-meetings and that the state bodies had started to do something similar. Other respondents stated that they saw people coming out of the meetings conveying high levels of frustration and also with little sense of engagement or of progress having been made.

Other issues raised included the size and chairing of the committee. The large size was seen as making for a slow process as getting change involves getting agreement amongst such a large number of bodies and people. The committee is chaired by Cosc. Some respondents referred to the fact that a pre-cursor committee was chaired by a Minister of State, which in their view enhanced the degree of political engagement (this issue is addressed further below in the section on political engagement).

By way of contrast, the various sub-committees established under the NSCVAW were generally commented on favourably. The legal issues sub-committee was universally mentioned positively by those who referred to it. Comments on why it was seen to work well include the expertise of the personnel involved, good chairing of the meetings, and the presence of clear agreed objectives. The public awareness sub-committee also received generally favourable comments. The one-stop shop sub-committee was the one that received more mixed comments, related to the limited progress on this issue.

RACs

The RACs also meet quarterly. Formerly regional planning committee's, the remit and role changed with the development of the strategy, and the RACs became advisory committees feeding into the NSCVAW. Unlike the other committees, which are directly linked to Cosc, RACs are funded and supported by the HSE. The need for a regional and local perspective to complement the national perspective was commented on by many respondents. However, there was a general view expressed that the RACs were not operating effectively with regard to their role in strategy implementation, even though many of the RACs were seen as effective at a local level. This issue had been recognised and Cosc had commissioned a review of the RACs. But there was a general level of dissatisfaction with the outcome of this review amongst respondents and a feeling that it had not solved the problems. Cosc itself regard the RACs as an important element in the support structures, and has worked with the HSE to strengthen the RACs.

A clear need for greater clarity as to the role of RACs was expressed by the majority of respondents who commented on the role of RACs. There was a general view that they were not sufficiently linked in with strategy implementation or target driven. It was taking some time for the change of role of RACs from the old planning committee role to take root. Though the Mid West and Eastern RACs were cited by several respondents as examples where progress was being made and which operate relatively well. For example the support and referral service now provided within the Dublin District Court family law offices at Dolphin House came about as a result of a suggestion at an Eastern RAC meeting.

There were also practical issues raised of representation and attendance at committee meetings caused in the current environment of staff cutbacks. For example three of the eight HSE officers designated to the RACs had taken early retirement and could not be replaced. This lack of replacement of people with knowledge of the system and a general sense of a loss of institutional knowledge from the HSE input to RACs caused by staffing difficulties was commented on adversely by several respondents. Similarly, local authorities were reported to be finding it difficult to ensure continuing participation at all meetings.

Political engagement

A more general structural issue raised in the interviews was the level and functioning of political engagement with and commitment to the strategy. The support for the strategy of the current Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality was commented on positively by respondents. However, there was a general view that in a broader sense there was an absence or limitation of political drive and engagement behind strategy implementation. The need for stronger engagement and coordination at political level was mentioned by several respondents, both statutory and NGOs. The need for political oversight was viewed as particularly important at this time of economic difficulty, to ensure that the national strategy continued to receive priority from participants rather than becoming a secondary priority to be addressed as possible after other core activities were undertaken.

One respondent suggested that the Cabinet committee on social policy is the appropriate forum for the strategy to receive more direct political oversight and that there should be direct interaction with this committee. This would be in line with good international practice for joined-up government, where a coordinating group of ministers oversees progress in relation to strategy implementation[6].

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[6] See for example Efficiency Unit (2008). *Joined-up Government*. Hong Kong: Efficiency Unit

4
Review Overview and Conclusions

4.1 Introduction

The review comes at the mid-point of implementation of the *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014*. As such it is an opportune time to examine what is working well and what is working less well with regard to strategy implementation. This chapter draws together the conclusions on the workings and impact of the strategy and the role of the supporting structures and processes.

One general point to make at the outset of these conclusions is that there are major social problems in Ireland, coupled at present with a deep economic recession, that exacerbate the challenge of addressing the issue of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. In the midst of all these tensions, Cosc has carried forward a wide range of activities in a difficult context. All the respondents interviewed clearly support the high-level goals of the strategy and care greatly about improving the situation with regard to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Interventions focused on prevention, the provision of better and equitable services and better data and policy planning are all desired outcomes shared across the spectrum. There is a great deal of commitment to these outcomes, and a sense of some progress towards them from most respondents. Where differences arise, it is largely in terms of how to best secure such outcomes.

4.2 Overview of impact of the strategy

In broad terms, the strategy is widely seen as having put a spotlight on the issue of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Summary progress against the four high-level goals is outlined in Table 4.1. With regard to impact, the first two high-level goals, concerned with prevention and service delivery, are of primary interest.

Table 4.1   Summary   outline   of   progress   with   regard   to   strategy implementation

Strategy high-level goal	Comment
To promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence	Progress being made but slower than planned. Awareness raising seen as a positive. Data limitations hamper full assessment.
To deliver an effective and consistent service to those affected	Mixed progress. Staff resourcing issues impacting negatively in relation to some activities. Consistency still a significant issue.
To ensure greater effectiveness of policy and service planning	Good progress. But mixed views on the effectiveness of data collection policy and coordination of planning.
To ensure efficient and effective implementation of the strategy	Good progress overall. Diverse views as to the effectiveness of the support structures in place to ensure implementation.

High-level goal 1: To promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

With regard to high-level goal one, which is focused on prevention, implementation is proceeding reasonably well. The agreed activities in the strategy are for the most part being progressed, though with some delay in many cases compared to initial plans and targets (the issue of delay is discussed further below in relation to high-level goal two).

Awareness raising

Most of the activities in high-level goal one concern the development of awareness raising and educational training programmes targeted at particular groups such as school professionals, young people, front-line health care staff and justice organisations. The logic and rationale of these interventions is clear. The programmes are widely supported amongst respondents interviewed for this review.

However, the early stage of development of the programmes and lack of data on the effect on attitudes and behaviour means that it is not possible to say with any certainty what the impact of these programmes will be. It will be important as the programmes proceed to generate information on their impact on attitudes and behaviour. This may be done through evaluation of the programmes. Or there is international literature on the effectiveness of awareness campaigns that can be drawn together to suggest what types and features of campaigns are likely to be more or less successful, and the campaigns could be assessed against such guidance.

High-level goal 2: To deliver an effective and consistent service to those affected

Regarding high-level goal two, focused on effective and consistent service delivery, aimed at both victims and perpetrators, more variable progress against activities is being made. While most activities are progressing albeit with some delays, several activities have not been progressed or are advancing much slower than originally planned.

In part this situation reflects the rapidly and significantly changing environment since the strategy was developed. Cutbacks in funding and staffing levels have impacted negatively on the ability of organisations, both public and voluntary, to progress and resource activities. In such an environment, prioritisation of activities becomes an important issue. Identifying and agreeing those elements of the strategy that are priority issues is important in a context of reduced resources, but also means that some activities will have to be recognised as of lower priority and consequently not advanced to the same speed or degree. Also, new opportunities or issues may emerge in the changed environment and it is important that the strategy is not so fixed that it cannot respond to and develop new activities as needed.

This would suggest the need for some prioritisation of activities in the strategy and possible re-phasing of lower order priorities. However, resource constraints should not be seen as an excuse for lack of progress in all cases, and attention needs to be given to ensuring that the strategy is given high priority within all participating organisations.

Effective and consistent service delivery

A significant issue regarding service delivery that came up several times in the interviews with respondents is that of consistency of service provision. There was a view expressed by many respondents that the historical legacy of services being developed across the country in an ad hoc manner and with little reference to need, as funding came from the different health boards without a clear national strategic overview, continues to present challenges in terms of achieving a consistent level of services across the country. Also highlighted were inconsistent responses to domestic and sexual violence and therefore inconsistent messages being conveyed by key players in the system, and in particular the judiciary.

Efforts to improve the standardisation of service provision need to be further progressed. In particular, ensuring consistency of services remains a vital objective which needs further work. For example one respondent suggested that a national policy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence for the Courts Service might help ensure consistency in this area.

4.3 Overview of the processes and support structure of the strategy

On one level good progress is being made in advancing the activities set out against high-level goal three, focused on securing better policy and service planning, and high level goal four focused on implementation. The activities are being advanced in line with targets set out in the strategy. But these are areas where there are strongly contrasting views as to the quality of the activities being undertaken.

Data collection

There are varying views on the steps being taken to improve domestic and sexual violence data, some positive and viewing things moving in the right direction with others more negative and seeing this issue as a major weakness of the strategy. There are undoubtedly still significant data gaps, particularly with regard to data on the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence. It is not possible with any degree of certitude to say if progress is being made towards reducing the prevalence of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in the absence of such data. Indeed, there is no hard data as yet to enable rigorous assessment of the three headline indicators for the strategy outlined in section 1.2.

The data committee, composed of representatives from the statutory organisations, has focused initially on short-term improvements in the examination of data by individual state agencies and intends to move on to examine medium to longer term improvements in the collection of data by state agencies and then data collected by NGOs. It is important that these activities are advanced as soon as practicable within the parameters of the strategy if the goal of a better evidence base is to be achieved. More collaboration between the statutory sector and NGOs on data development and coordination is needed.

Improving the data base on domestic and sexual violence remains a key issue. While progress has been made, there are still significant data gaps that need to be filled over the course of the strategy.

Coordination

The issue of coordination, involving cooperation and collaboration, is one that raised a lot of contention in the interviews. The main divide is in the relationship between the statutory agencies and the NGOs, and particularly between some of the NGOs and Cosc and some of the NGOs and the HSE. If allowed to continue, this has the potential to impact adversely on strategy implementation. There are also challenges with regard to collaboration between the national level and regional level as exemplified by the role of RACs. There was also evidence of some issues or tensions within sectors.

In several areas, there was evidence cited by respondents of improvements in coordination, for example between the HSE and Garda Síochána and between the Courts Service in Dublin and some of the NGOs. However, taking a broad overview, and particularly in the case of the relationship between NGOs and the state sector more generally, there is little sign of progress in terms of coordination since a review undertaken by Cosc and published in 2011 that found that coordination on the issues of domestic and sexual violence are at an early stage in Ireland, with vertical coordination (between local, regional and national) and coordination between the State and NGOs being most problematic[7]. If anything, the interviews suggest the situation may have worsened since then in some cases.

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[7] Cosc (2011), *Domestic and sexual violence services in Ireland: service provision and coordination*, Dublin: Cosc

A key underlying issue concerning the limited cooperation between the statutory sector and many of the NGOs is remaining differences on the issue of the strategy being gender-neutral, that is encompassing both women and men, as opposed to gender-specific, focusing on the needs of women as victims, which many of the NGOs would prefer. While the strategy was accepted by all participants when developed, and reflects Government policy of being gender neutral, there remain concerns amongst NGOs as to the efficacy of this approach. These differences impact on working relationships and have the potential to impact on strategy implementation and buy-in if the NGOs as service deliverers are not fully committed to the strategy.

The relationship between the NGOs and statutory bodies needs particular attention. Working relationships, as expressed in the interviews for this review, are often perceived as difficult and challenging. Some tension is inevitable given the different mandates and missions of the different bodies, and current funding pressures, but more needs to be done to foster more cooperative and collaborative behaviours. Improving communication across and between the many stakeholders and committees at both national and regional level involved in implementing the strategy is one important way in which better coordination could be supported.

Structural supports

With regard to the structures established to support strategy implementation, the main features are set out in Table 4.2. There is an overall sense from many of the interviewees that the 'architecture' supporting strategy implementation is proving challenging to service in an era of staffing reductions and where retiring or departing employees are not being replaced. Efforts to simplify and/or streamline the arrangements would be welcomed.

Table 4.2   Main features of the strategy support structures

Cosc	Role of Cosc and need for a lead body to coordinate widely accepted. Some tensions in relationships with NGOs and RACs. Location of Cosc in Department of Justice and Equality questioned.
Oversight Committee	Operating broadly as planned, but mixed levels of

	participation and engagement from participants. Good working relationships overall. General agreement on objectives.
National Steering Committees	NSCVAW has mixed levels of engagement amongst participants and views on strategy implementation. Working relationships and co-operation need further development. Issues raised around size and chairing of the committee. Sub-committees seen as useful. NSCVAM not in operation long enough for review assessment.
Regional Advisory Committees	Need for greater clarity as to their role and relationship with Cosc. Link with strategy implementation unclear. Attendance problems for some organisations given staffing cutbacks.

The role of Cosc as a lead agency with a focus on coordination of strategy implementation is widely accepted. Cosc should continue to focus its energy on coordination of the strategy, ensuring clarity with regard to progress and working to enhance the quality of services and information. There was a view raised by some respondents as to whether the Department of Justice and Equality is the most appropriate 'home' for Cosc, as much of the funding support is channelled through the health services. In this context, the planned establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency early in 2013 may provide an opportunity for an examination of more general arrangements for family and domestic support services with a view to considering if the location of Cosc should remain as it is.

There are some strong arguments for Cosc remaining within Justice and Equality, given the centrality of crime and crime prevention to the strategy. Though conversely a case can be made for the area providing the greatest level of funding hosting the coordinating body, in this case the Department of Health. However, ultimately, location of the hosting department is unlikely to be the most crucial aspect determining Cosc's effectiveness. Rather, it is the willingness of participating bodies to engage and provide the necessary resources to support the implementation of the national strategy, with Cosc ensuring coordination and monitoring of progress.

The Oversight Committee and National Steering Committees are operating as planned but with mixed levels of participation and engagement. With regard to the Oversight Committee, the role of the chair is important in driving the agenda forward, as is the role of the committee generally in highlighting areas of strength and areas of weakness with regard to progressing and completing agreed activities. The limited participation and engagement of the Department of Health was commented on by a number of respondents as a limiting factor. One respondent interviewed felt that consideration should be given to including a representative from the County and City Manager's Association on the committee.

With regard to the NSCVAW the working relationships between the statutory and NGO representatives, as discussed above under the heading of coordination, are a potential constraint on effectiveness. Also, the size of the committee, with 22 participating organisations, is unwieldy and likely to lead to the formation of informal sub-groups that are less likely to reach agreement on issues. A smaller committee with selected representatives from participants would likely be more effective[8].

At the RAC level, despite the recent review, there remains a problem with regard to clarity of their role in relation to the implementation of the national strategy and their role as a regional promoter and coordinator of activity. Attendance problems are an increasing issue as staffing and funding cutbacks impact on participating organisations. Consideration might be given to reducing the number of RACs to reflect the realities of servicing the committees.

Role of individual stakeholders
As well as the structural supports, the role of the participating bodies can be seen to have had an impact on strategy implementation to date and as likely to influence engagement during the remainder of the strategy. A number of comments on the role of participating bodies have been referred to throughout the report, and here an assessment of the role of the bodies in strategy implementation is brought together.

The HSE in particular has a crucial role to play given its direct role as the main funder of the NGOs working in the sector and its own policy on domestic, sexual and gender-

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[8] Buchanan, Mark. Explaining the Curse of Work. New Scientist Magazine, Issue 2690, January 2009, 38-39.

based violence. The HSE is committed to the strategy, and coordination with other agencies, particularly the Garda Síochána, has improved. But there have been some problems arising from staffing difficulties that have caused delays to implementation. Reductions in staffing numbers arising from workforce planning reductions and early retirements are causing continuing challenges in areas such as support for the RAC meetings. It is likely that resourcing issues will continue to pose challenges which will need close scrutiny as to their impact on strategy implementation.

Similarly, the proposed establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency and transfer of function to this new body have the potential to disrupt activity. It will be vital that the planned changes are progressed in such a way as to minimise adverse effects on strategy implementation. In this changing environment, the HSE needs to ensure clarity as to its role and responsibilities with regard to implementation of the strategy and ensure that relevant tasks are appropriately assigned throughout the organisation.

Other state bodies and agencies have similarly expressed commitment to the strategy during the course of this review. However, while good progress has been made in many areas, in the departments with lead authority for progressing activities in the strategy (Environment, Community and Local Government, Education, Health, and Justice and Equality) completion of activities and progress in line with targets has been deficient.

Again, resourcing constraints due to reorganisation and staffing reductions have been cited as reasons. This suggests that as resourcing pressures increase, departments are increasingly concentrating on their core activities, with collaborative activities receiving lesser priority by default. However, while resourcing is clearly an issue where the environment has changed radically since the strategy was introduced, it should not be regarded as the only or in all cases a viable reason for implementation delays. The Courts Service for example has been able to make service innovations at no extra cost. Primarily, the issue is one of prioritisation of activities within constrained resources. It is important to reassert that the strategy is a national strategy, not a Cosc strategy, and that all organisations have a part to play in ensuring it is progressed to the extent possible.

The role of the voluntary sector is important given that in addition to their advocacy role, they are particularly focused on service delivery. Important innovative work in both policy and delivery areas has come from NGOs. NGO commitment to the strategy is varied. Some respondents stated their organisations were fully behind the strategy, others that issues such as gender neutral versus gender specific differences impacted on their full 'buy-in' with the strategy. There are also some differences of views within the NGO sector. Respondents referred to competition for limited resources, confusion around roles in organisations, or organisations holding to rigid positions at times. And as with the state sector, some respondents noted a danger that as resources decline, NGOs will be increasingly challenged to engage in inter-agency working.

Political oversight and engagement

Many of the respondents raised the issue of political engagement with the strategy, and the key role it plays in implementation. While the commitment of the Minister of State for Justice and Equality was commented on favourably, there was a general sense that stronger and broader political sponsorship and oversight of and engagement with the strategy is needed.

Consideration should be given to the Cabinet committee on social policy being the appropriate forum for the strategy to receive more direct political oversight and that there should be direct interaction between this committee and the Oversight Committee. The main point here is the perceived need to deepen political engagement so as to provide further impetus to strategy prioritisation and implementation at a time of resource constraint.

4.4 Final comment

The review indicates broad support for the high-level goals of the strategy and a strong level of commitment amongst all parties to addressing more effectively the issue of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The strategy has helped highlight the issue and has brought together various participants to work towards common goals. Progress is being made in relation to most of the activities set out in the strategy, albeit somewhat slower in many cases than originally envisaged. An identification of priority activities for the remainder of the strategy, and efforts to

improve working relationships, are needed now to provide renewed impetus to strategy implementation.

Appendix 1

Cosc Committee structure
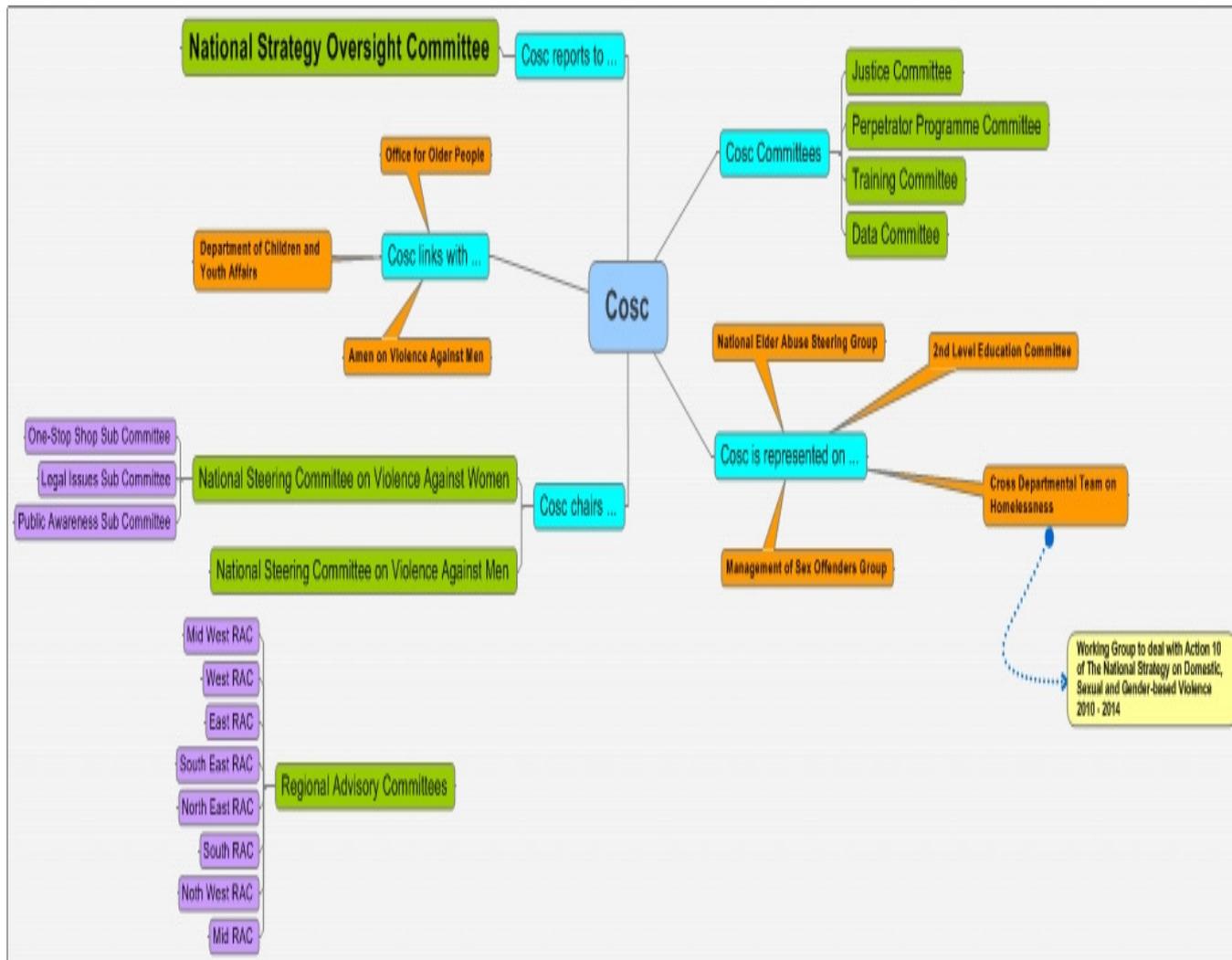
Appendix 2

Organisations with whom interviews took place

Akidwa

AMEN

An Garda Síochána

Courts Service

Department of Education and Skills

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Department of Health

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Family Support Agency

HSE

National Women's Council of Ireland

Pavee Point

Probation Service

RCNI

Three Regional Advisory Committee Chairs

Ruhama

SAFE Ireland

Women's Aid

Appendix 3

Linkage between activities, actions and high level goals

☐ Activities completed or progressing in line with or close to target

☐ Activities progressing but not in line with target

◼ Activities not progressed or seriously out of line with target

▮ Activities with target commencement not yet reached

High Level Goal 1: To promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

Activities	**Actions**	**High Level Goal**
1.1 Undertake a range of activities including engaging national, local and journal media in delivering articles to the general public, and to specific audiences	Promote and develop an understanding and recognition of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence among the general public and specific audiences	
1.2 Develop guidance on practical steps to increase personal safety for those most at risk from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence		
1.3 Agree a national awareness training pack for all community groups and organisations that receive funding from the HSE		
2.1 Agree and deliver a suite of national training packs for all front-line staff in different health care settings	Promote and develop understanding and recognition of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence across the State sector	To promote a culture of prevention and recognition through increased understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence
2.2 Conduct an analysis of training needs for all relevant justice sector organisations, and develop and implement training programmes		
2.3 Work with third-level institutions to include understanding and recognition of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in curricula		
2.4 Continue to promote issues relevant to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in training on student care among school professionals		
3.1 Develop and implement sustainable second-level educational programmes	Embed domestic, sexual and gender-based violence content in second- and third-level educational institution action on healthy relationship	
3.2 Develop and implement programme for young people attending Youthreach and similar education programmes		
3.3 Work with third-level institutions and student media to increase understanding and practical information on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence		

High Level Goal 2: To deliver an effective and consistent service to those affected

Activities	Actions	High Level Goal
4.1 Promote dissemination to victims of accessible and consistent information **4.2** Encourage and support dissemination of information on DSV services provided by non-State organisations	Ensure information on services is available to victims in user-friendly formats	
5.1 Agree and implement an assessment form with DV questions for all staff in different health care contexts/environments with specific target groups **5.2** Identify and promote best practice to encourage disclosure of DSV in relevant sectors	Ensure reasonable opportunity is provided for disclosure of DSV	
6.1 Publish a new edition of the *Victims Charter and Guide to the Criminal Justice System* **6.2** Identify best practice models for service delivery for victims and perpetrators of DSV **6.3** Encourage improvements to service delivery based on consideration of best practice models **6.4** Identify and promote state service responses in relation to DSV for vulnerable or high risk groups **6.5** Work in partnership with the national NGO networks to develop standardisation within specialist DV services **6.6** Implement the recommendations on standardisation of sexual assault services as set out in the National Review of SATUs **6.7** Ensure that the *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* are being adhered to **6.8** Develop and disseminate guidelines on working with children in DV situations **6.9** Ensure the assessment form for children at risk contains key questions about DV **6.10** Ensure the assessment form for children at risk regarding DV contains questions regarding children's welfare	Promote clear, high-quality standards in service delivery for victims and perpetrators of DSV	To deliver an effective and consistent service to those affected by domestic and sexual violence
7.1 Promote and further develop practices and protocols on inter-agency referrals and co-operation based on best practice **7.2** Provide guidance on data protection implications of information sharing across services	Promote inter-agency co-ordination through multi-agency projects	
8.1 Promote opportunities for networking, sharing information and best practice across State agencies **8.2** Regular liaison between Cosc and the relevant HSE personnel on all HSE-related action on DSV **8.3** Support RACs to improve collaboration and the implementation of national policies on DSV	Improve collaboration and information sharing in relation to service provision	

8.4 Explore areas of work to identify those suitable for cross-border co-operation to address DSV

9.1 Review the availability of counselling services **9.2** Develop proposals for improvement	Ensure reasonable accessibility to counselling services for victims of DSV
10.1 Develop policy guidance for local authorities on their housing remit in relation to DV **10.2** In the context of minimising the extent of victim homelessness arising from DV, evaluate approaches and experiences of initiatives such as safe rooms, security support, etc.	Ensure effectiveness and consistency in housing responses
11.1 Develop proposals for multi-agency one-stop shop for victims of domestic and sexual violence **11.2** Implement pilot of one-stop shop **11.3** Review pilot and implement outcome of review	Examine a one-stop-shop option for greater accessibility to services for victims of DSV
12.1 Develop a greater understanding of the extent and nature of attrition in DSV cases **12.2** Develop proposals to minimise attrition in DSV cases, where appropriate	Minimise attrition in domestic and sexual violence cases, where appropriate
13.1 Improve legislative provisions on vetting **13.2** Strengthen vetting arrangements for those who may come into contact with potential victims of DSV	Use vetting arrangements to provide greater protection for victims of DSV
14.1 Provide for pre-sentence risk assessments for the courts in relation to convicted SV perpetrators **14.2** Further develop risk management arrangements for convicted SV perpetrators **14.3** Explore the feasibility of multi-agency risk management arrangements for unconvicted SV perpetrators **14.4** Develop and implement risk management arrangements for high-risk DV perpetrators	Strengthen measures to manage the risks posed by DSV perpetrators
15.1 Monitor and review implementation of new prison treatment programme for convicted SV perpetrators **15.2** Integrate custodial and community intervention programmes for convicted SV perpetrators **15.3** Develop best practice actions for dealing with SV perpetrators in the community and outside the criminal justice system	Strengthen measures to deal with SV perpetrators
16.1 Strengthen DV Perpetrator Programmes to ensure their greater effectiveness	Strengthen measures to deal with DV perpetrators
17.1 Review and improve legislative provisions on sexual offences	Update the law on sexual offences
18.1 Improve legislative provisions protecting victims of domestic violence	Update the law on domestic violence to give further protection to victims

High Level Goal 3: To ensure greater effectiveness of policy and service planning

Activities	Actions	High Level Goal
19.1 Work with all relevant organisations to develop and improve DSV data	Improve data on domestic and sexual violence	To ensure greater effectiveness of policy and service planning
20.1 Develop an evaluation framework for assessing cross-organisational strategic impact	Ensure improved impact evaluation	
20.2 Encourage consultation with representative groups in the development of policy and services		
21.1 Encourage the development of a co-ordinated research programme	Promote the design of planned research to ground policy development and service planning	

High Level Goal 4: To ensure efficient and effective implementation of the strategy

Activities	Actions	High Level Goal
22.1 Collate bi-annual reports on strategy progress	Monitor progress in the implementation of this strategy	To ensure efficient and effective implementation of the National Strategy
22.2 Liaise on draft progress reports		
22.3 Submit progress report, including material derived from liaison process, to Oversight Committee		
23.1 Review effectiveness of strategy to prepare for future work	Ensure effectiveness of strategy implementation	