

New Garda Sex Offences Unit to be Established

March 31, 2010 [sineadmaryring](#) [Leave a comment](#) [Go to comments](#)



We at Human Rights in Ireland welcome the [announcement by Garda Commissioner Fachtna Murphy](#) yesterday that a new Garda Unit dealing with sex offences is to be established. Speaking at the Annual Conference of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors in Galway, Commissioner Murphy said that the publication of the [Murphy](#) and [Ryan](#) Reports had “highlighted shameful history of child sexual abuse in this State.” He continued:

We now see the community looking for answers as to how such abuse occurred and An Garda Síochána has had to ask its own searching questions following critical findings and comment about the manner in which some complaints were investigated.

Commissioner Murphy noted that the Murphy and Ryan Reports, along with the [Rape Crisis Network report](#) (authored by [Conor Hanly and his team at NUI Galway](#)) on attrition rates in rape cases, raised issues as to how some investigations were carried out. In particular he stressed the duty to investigate fully all allegations of sexual violence and the importance of importance of sensitivity and understanding when dealing with victims:

This is particularly important when a victim displays behaviour that seems strange or uncharacteristic, which can be so common following incidents of sexual crime. We must show our understanding of the physical and emotional pain often suffered by victims, whether of recent or historical abuse.

Commissioner Murphy referred to developments like the setting up of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation (DVSAI) Unit and the establishment of a Crime Training Faculty to train senior investigators, the training and appointment of specialist child interviewers and the establishment of dedicated child interview suites. He stated that in the coming days he would circulate a “comprehensive policy on the investigation of

sexual crimes, on crimes against children and on child welfare.” In addition, a Sexual Crimes Management Unit is to be established within the existing DVSAI Unit:

Each year this Unit will evaluate a number of investigations of child sexual abuse, child neglect and other sexual offences to ensure they are receiving appropriate attention and being brought to a prompt conclusion. The Unit will also be focused on assisting and advising members in the investigation of such crimes and in promoting best investigative practice in line with international standards. The unit will also maintain a record of all complaints of clerical sexual abuse and will interact as appropriate with contact points in these agencies who are in a position and have a responsibility to report complaints of sexual abuse to An Garda Síochána.

According to [The Irish Times](#) the new Unit will be lead by a detective superintendent and will begin its work next month. [Senator Ivana Bacik \(Labour\)](#) has criticised the delay in establishing the unit, noting that it was scandalous that it has taken the appalling revelations of the Murphy and Ryan Reports for the unit to be set up. Senator Bacik’s criticisms are well taken, particularly since she has a proven track record in this area, having conducted one of the [first in-depth studies](#) into rape victims’ experiences of the legal system. Indeed the Senator has consistently called for improvements in how the criminal justice system treats victims of sexual violence – see for example her [ongoing research](#) exposing the frequency with which applications are granted by trial judges under [s 3 of the Criminal Law \(Rape\) Act 1981](#) (as amended) to adduce evidence of (or ask a question in cross-examination about) the complainant’s previous sexual history.

We at Human Rights in Ireland welcome the establishment of this specialist unit and hope that more details will be provided on the policies to be adopted by the Gardai in relation to how they investigate sexual offences crimes- like, for example the publication of a handbook for all gardai involved in cases of alleged sexual violence against children. We will wait to see if the policy to be circulated to garda stations will be made public. Such a move would greatly improve public accountability and would encourage victims to perhaps feel more confident in coming forward and knowing that there is a clearly defined process for dealing with cases of sexual violence. Information provision is key to encouraging victim participation in the legal process. It is hoped that the establishment of the new Sex Offences Unit and the development of the investigation policy will go some way towards making the legal process more understandable and more accessible to victims. Here on Human Rights in Ireland we will be keeping a close eye on developments in this area.

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