



# Submission to An Garda Síochána regarding the development of their Older Person Strategy

6 April 2022



*The Scheme to Support National Organisations is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development*



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

1. How to improve or enhance Garda engagement and accessibility with older people (e.g. initiatives learned from the COVID-19 pandemic).

Age Action recognises and appreciates the work An Garda Síochána do to engage with and render their services accessible to older persons. The strong community policing response during COVID-19 was beneficial and it reinforces the argument in favour of a community policing model. Community policing is important to build long-term relationships locally and to ensure that local Gardaí become known individuals that people find it easier to approach. Smaller community-based police forces lead to more active and engaged citizens. The visibility of Gardaí in a community policing model is also important to counteract negative sentiment and increased anxiety due to the closure of many smaller Garda stations.

One of Age Action's concerns during COVID-19 was the move of so many services to online first or effectively online only. Based on survey data, 65% of persons aged 65 or older are digitally excluded because they do not use the Internet or have below basic skills. Among this group, 56% of those aged 75 or older are not using the Internet. It is important to continue to use traditional channels of communication to convey information to many older persons (e.g. local and national radio, tv, newspapers, public notices, etc.), and to ensure other ancillary services, such as the Garda Victim Service, are accessible to those who do not use the internet.

A particular concern, given the closure of local stations, is how to ensure access to Garda desk services within reasonable proximity to people's homes. One option would be to have a Garda representative available at other venues in a community at specified times, to give people the opportunity to transact face-to-face. Similarly, Age Action would recommend making it possible to meet with Garda Victim Service representatives in person, rather than communicating via email or over the phone.

Ageism from public services is also a concern of Age Action. It can negatively impact older persons' ability to benefit from the services available to them. This includes practices like 'elder speak', in which older persons are talked to in an infantilising manner and not trusted to understand complex issues. Age



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

Action recognizes the 2019-2021 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy of An Garda Síochána, which opposes discrimination based on age, as does the Garda Code of Ethics. It is important that all Gardaí know how to engage with older persons respectfully and how to support them in making informed decisions about their own lives.

Age Action is also concerned about the situation of older persons who are arrested for commission of a crime. We recognise that Garda receive training on handling older persons in custody. We believe that the Older Person Strategy should set out standards and objectives regarding not only older persons who are victims of crimes, but those who are accused of or arrested for commission of a crime. In relation to these older persons, but also older persons who may find themselves going to Garda stations for any reasons, Age Action recommends a nation-wide audit of Garda infrastructure for age friendliness and accessibility.

2. How An Garda Síochána can reduce the fear of crime and crimes against older people (including Elder Abuse) using crime prevention approaches? (e.g. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design or crime prevention campaigns).

Fear of crime is slightly higher among people aged 60 or older compared to other age groups, with between 14% to 24% worried about different types of crime (CSO 2019, fear of crime statistics, <https://data.cso.ie/table/CVS02>) and three in ten (29%) feeling unsafe walking in their local area (<https://data.cso.ie/table/CS07>). More than one in eight (13%) older persons were affected by crime in their local area (<https://data.cso.ie/table/CVS12>), and one in twenty (5%) report being a victim of crime, mostly fraud or non-violent theft (<https://data.cso.ie/table/CVS38>).

As shown below, over the five-year period 2016-2020, there were over 5000 recorded crimes against older persons. A major concern is the near trebling of attempts/threats to murder from 40 in 2016 to 118 in 2020. Recorded assaults also increased by 40%, from 570 in 2016 to 801 in 2020. In the same period, the population of people aged 60+ increased by 17.8%, indicating a significant increase in serious crimes in real times.



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

Recorded crime	Incidences affecting people aged 60 or older in 2020	Proportion of crimes affecting people aged 60 or older in 2020	Incidences affecting people aged 60 or older, 2016-2020
Murder/manslaughter/infanticide	4	10.5%	23
Dangerous driving leading to death	6	17.6%	48
Rape and sexual assault	35	1.4%	191
Attempts/threats to murder	118	8.1%	334
Assaults	801	5.4%	3,752
Harassment and related offences	134	8.6%	654

Source: <https://data.cso.ie/table/CVA04>

It would be helpful if crime statistics could distinguish between a wider range of older age cohorts (such as people aged 60-69, 70-79, 80-89 and 90 or older). Community policing, as described in response to the first question, can also alleviate fear of crime. Promotion of the Senior Alert Scheme as a matter of course to older members of the community could assist with both crime prevention and alleviation of fear, as could dissemination of more general information regarding personal and household safety. Combatting isolation within the community will also reduce fear. As Age Action highlighted in our 2018 submission to the Garda Policing Plan, 'the best deterrent against criminals is good neighbours.' It is important that Gardaí are equipped to dispel any myths around older persons and the risk of crime, and to keep older persons informed – for example, about phone fraud, or about the relatively low rates of violent crime in which older persons are the victim.

Research from 2019 suggests those aged 55 and older lose more money to fraud than other age groups; take longer to realize that money has gone missing; and are most likely to be targeted by email fraud. This last point is particularly worrying given that less older persons use the internet. Positively, the same research suggests persons aged 55 and older take more steps to prevent fraud (BPMI 2019). Age Action recommends targeted awareness campaigns around cybercrime and fraud to raise awareness and encourage further vigilance. This could be done in part through partnerships with community-based organizations.

As a member of the National Safeguarding Advisory Committee, Age Action supports the introduction of Adult Safeguarding Legislation and educational



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

and awareness measures to protect adults in vulnerable situations. We also support Safeguarding Ireland's call to expand current legislation to criminalize the coercive control of another person in any close adult relationship. Through our work, Age Action is aware that older persons can be victims of coercive control within family or caring relationships. Continuous training of Gardaí to identify and support people who are in such situations is vital.

In 2021, 92 of the contacts to our Information Service were about elder abuse. We know that many older persons find it difficult to report elder abuse because the perpetrator may be a family member or a carer and they don't want the relationship to end. It is important in the first instance for An Garda Síochána to be aware of this barrier to reporting, but also to create supports for victims of elder abuse and ensure these supports are known about. These supports should serve the dual purpose of encouraging reporting, and protecting the wellbeing of victims of elder abuse in their engagement with An Garda Síochána. Measures should be taken to encourage reporting of elder abuse not only by victims but by anyone who has concerns around safeguarding.

3. How can An Garda Síochána support Community Safety initiatives that assists older people? (e.g. partnership initiatives with communities).

Age Action appreciates the work of An Garda Síochána in supporting community alert and neighbourhood watch schemes. These remain at the forefront of ways to support older persons and to both deter crime and to gather evidence of crime. The Senior Alert Scheme is very valuable, and ought to be promoted. Again, it is important that communication with and about these schemes is not only online, but is through traditional channels of communication that will reach many more older persons.

Age Action is grateful for the engagement by An Garda Síochána with Age Action volunteers on anti-fraud and cybercrime. This area continues to be one where older persons can be targeted by fraudsters and where a lack of digital skills can leave many older persons open to exploitation. We know that in 2019, 19% of persons aged 60 or over worried often or all the time about becoming victims of fraud or deception targeted at their personal finances or



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

data. 14% were worried often or all the time that they may be victimized on foot of their use of the internet (<https://data.cso.ie/table/CVS02>). An Garda Síochána should continue to share their experience and knowledge with community actors who engage with older persons.

Gardaí can also signpost older persons they come into contact with to relevant services and resources available in their community. For example, they can inform older persons who have been victims of crimes about restorative justice options, which may repair and maintain community cohesion and relationships.

4. How can An Garda Síochána respond in partnership with others to the ongoing safety needs and expectations of older people? (e.g. available community safety forums, established safety networks, etc...)

An Garda Síochána are well placed to contribute to challenging ageism, both through their practice (in terms of Diversity and Inclusion in the force) and in their communications (for example, avoiding stereotypical language or imagery when dealing with the variety of different circumstances of people aged 60 or older).

Another issue where An Garda Síochána can be instrumental is Adult Safeguarding. See, for example, the 2014 HSE national policy on *Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse* (<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/socialcare/safeguardingvulnerableadults/safeguardingvuladts.html>). The HSE identifies a wide range of types of abuse, including physical, sexual, psychological, financial, institutional, neglect and discrimination. All Gardai should be trained in how to identify and respond to reports of each type of abuse.

The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 is coming into force, and the national Decision Support Service (<https://decisionsupportservice.ie>) has already begun recruitment and some operations. It is essential for all Gardai to be aware of the wide-ranging implications of this law, including the presumption of the capacity of a person, the need for testing of a person's capacity to make a specific decision at a specific time without assuming they will lack the capacity in future, and the role of those appointed to assist a



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

person in making decisions. The new law should greatly assist older persons affected by dementia or other cognitive issues, but it will take training and practice for it to become embedded in society and across public services. The Decision Support Service have created bespoke guides to assist a range of professionals (including legal practitioners and court friends) and could perhaps create one for An Garda Síochána.