

UK response to Resolution on Femicide; Taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an unacceptable crime that the Government is committed to ending. It is a violation of basic human rights, and is an obstacle that prevents many women and girls from leading their own lives and contributing fully to our society and economy. It extracts a huge cost in our health services, our criminal justice system, and in the wasted opportunity of blighted lives, both in this generation and the next.

That is why on 25 November 2010, the Government published its strategy 'Call to End Violence against Women and Girls' to tackle these crime across England, by placing prevention at the heart of its approach. The strategy is underpinned by four guiding principles:

- **Prevent:** We will prevent violence from happening in the first place by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it, and intervening early where possible to prevent it.
- **Provide:** We will provide adequate levels of support where violence does occur.
- **Work in partnership:** We will work in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families.
- **Reduce the risk:** We will take action to reduce the risk to women and girls who are victims of these crimes, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

For the first time, the Government put stable funding in place, ring-fencing nearly £40 million up to 2015 for specialist local domestic and sexual violence support services, rape crisis centres, the homicide service and national helplines.

The strategy is updated through annual action plans, and the latest was published on 8 March 2014, to coincide with International Women's Day. The new action plan can be accessed through the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-call-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-action-plan-2014>

Recent actions that the UK Government has taken to reduce VAWG domestically include:

- We have Criminalised **forced marriage** and reforming civil orders to manage sex offenders in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- We have formed the **Sexual Violence against Children and Vulnerable People national group**, a panel of experts brought together to coordinate and implement the learning from recent inquiries into historic child sexual abuse and current sexual violence prevention issues (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-against-children-and-vulnerable-people-national-group>)
- We have a duty to provide vulnerable people with the best possible protection which is why the Government commissioned **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)** in September 2013, to review current practice on domestic

violence; their report was published in April which sets out a number of recommendations. The report found that although domestic abuse was a feature in most Police and Crime Commissioners Crime Plans, this did not translate into operational priorities in police forces. There is a frontline culture in which domestic abuse is not understood and often not regarded as a crime.

- The Home Secretary has written to Chief Constables and police force leads on domestic abuse, making clear her expectation that every police force will have an action plan in place by September 2014, to improve their response to domestic violence and abuse. She will also be chairing a **National Oversight Group** to monitor delivery against the recommendations made by HMIC. Further details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmics-inspection-of-police-handling-of-domestic-violence-and-abuse>.
- On 8 March we announced the national roll-out of **Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs)** across England and Wales from March 2014. This follows the successful conclusion of a one-year pilot in three police force areas in England. DVPOs can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days, giving the victim time to consider their options. Further information relating to DVPOs can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-pilot-of-domestic-violence-protection-orders>
- On the same day we also announced the roll-out of the **Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)**. The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) introduces recognised and consistent processes to enable the police to disclose to the public information about previous violent offending by a new or existing partner where this may help protect them from further violent. Further information on the Scheme can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/clares-law-to-become-a-national-scheme>
- We extended the **definition of domestic violence** and abuse to cover 16/17 year olds and coercive control.
- We also recognise the need to **change attitudes and influence behaviour**, starting with the young, who can be more vulnerable to violence. Our national prevention campaigns – This is Abuse - encourage teenagers to re-think their views about rape, consent, and abuse. This campaign was re-launched earlier this month (it can be seen at (thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk)).

Other frameworks

In April 2011 the UK Government commenced Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 putting in place statutory domestic homicide reviews. The purpose of a domestic homicide review is to establish what lessons can be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims. Professional and organisations are expected to apply these lessons to service responses

including changes to policies and procedures as appropriate, and prevent domestic violence homicide by improving the service responses for all domestic violence victims and their children through improved intra and inter-agency working. Further details on domestic homicide reviews can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/domestic-homicide-review>

and wider work around domestic violence can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-uk>

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for prosecuting criminal cases that have been investigated by the police within England and Wales. Detailed information on how the CPS prosecutes cases relating to VAWG can be found here:

<http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/equality/vaw/index.html>

National Rape Action Plan

On Friday 6 June, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the national policing lead for adult sexual offences announced the publication of a new national rape action plan in which they set out their clear commitment to address the issues preventing rape cases from successfully progressing through the criminal justice system.

The rape action plan includes:

- Steps to ensure better application of the legislation on consent and that police and prosecutors focus on steps taken by a suspect to seek consent from their alleged victim where this is an issue.
- Updating the joint police and CPS national rape protocol on the investigation and prosecution of rape cases.
- Steps to monitor police decisions to take no further action in rape cases, including the quality of record-keeping and authorisation of decision making.
- New practical guidance for frontline police officers and prosecutors.
- A National Conference later this year with all specialist rape prosecutors and police rape leads to raise awareness of key issues.
- Reviews of the operation of CPS rape and serious sexual assault units and the instruction of appropriate advocates in rape trials.

The action plan is the outcome of more than six months of work and a rape scrutiny panel convened to investigate the fall in the number of rape-flagged cases referred by police to the CPS. New figures already show an 8% rise in the volume of police referrals for 2013-14, compared with 2012-13, and the CPS charged 700 more defendants over the same period, which is an increase of 25% from the previous year. This increase in volume will take time to impact on statistics for completed cases.

Latest data relating to violent crime and sexual offending across England and Wales for 2012/13 can be found here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-violent-crime-and-sexual-offences--2012-13/index.html>

Criminal Justice response

- The Government is determined to provide the best support for the most seriously affected, vulnerable and persistently targeted victims of crime. The **Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS)** is administered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority ('CICA') which is a Government organisation that can pay compensation to people who have been physically or mentally injured because they were the blameless victim of a violent crime. The CICS was reformed and the CICS 2012 came into force on 27 November 2012.
- The types of payments that can be made under the CICS include injury payments including both physical and mental injuries, bereavement payments (fatal awards), child's payments (loss of parental services), dependency payments (in fatal cases) and other payments in fatal cases (resultant losses to a child).
- The Government brought the **Code of Practice for Victims of Crime** ("the **Victims' Code**") into force on 10th December 2013. The Code gives victims of crime clearer entitlements from criminal justice agencies and better tailored services to individual need so they get the right support at the right time.
- The new Code provides an enhanced level of service to victims of the most serious crime, persistently targeted and vulnerable or intimidated victims to make sure they get the right support at the right time. There is also a section dedicated to the needs of children and young people.
- Bereaved families will be entitled to enhanced services from criminal justice agencies at key stages of the process, including face-to-face meetings with the Crown Prosecution Service before and after a court trial. Bereaved close relatives of a victim of serious crime are also entitled to make a **Victim Personal Statement** to the police at any time prior to a convicted offender being sentenced. This gives them an opportunity to explain in their own words how a crime has affected them, whether physically, emotionally, financially or in any other way.

Devolved Administrations

Wales

The Welsh Government is committed to tackling issues of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and are pursuing a number of initiatives to this end.

The 'Right to be Safe' Strategy, launched in 2010, is a six year integrated strategy focused on reducing the incidence of violence against women and domestic abuse and increasing the safety of those experiencing it. The Strategy identifies four key priority areas:

- Prevention and raising awareness
- Providing support to victims and children

- Improving the response of criminal justice agencies
- Improving the response of health services and other agencies

We are at the midpoint of this strategic work and have made significant progress against its objectives. A link to the most recent annual reports published in relation to the strategy are provided here: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/safety/domesticabuse/publications/right-to-be-safe-annual-report-12-13/?lang=en>

Given the additional work outlined below, we will take some time this year to review the strategic work and consider future development opportunities.

A Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill is a key action in the Programme for Government and is included in the Welsh Government's Legislative Programme. The First Minister announced in his Legislative Statement in July 2013 the Bill will be introduced in June 2014.

The Bill will support our intention for relevant public bodies to address violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in a coordinated and coherent manner, and specifically to address preventative, protective and supportive aspects. The legislation will be supported by strong national and regional leadership to drive up service standards and deliver consistency in outcomes.

The White Paper (<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/people-and-communities/vawwhitepaper/?status=closed&lang=en>) included a number of proposals aimed at strengthening the response of public services, including placing a duty on key public sector professionals to 'ask and act' in relation to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Also, as preventative measures are a priority for the Bill, we also proposed ensuring education on healthy relationships is delivered in all schools. We also proposed placing a duty on local authorities to provide a spectrum of safe accommodation options which are informed by risk assessment and the choice of the service user. Overseeing this agenda will be the Independent Ministerial Adviser for ending violence against women, the first of its kind in the UK. The Adviser will work to improve joint-working operationally and monitor service providers and public sector agencies adherence to a set of quality standards. We are working with relevant Stakeholders to develop each of these proposals.

The proposed legislation will not seek to address criminal justice issues – a non devolved responsibility. It will seek to complement existing criminal law, focussing on social issues around prevention, protection and support.

Northern Ireland

Addressing violence against women and girls

The links below relate to the current strategies in Northern Ireland aimed at tackling domestic and sexual violence and abuse. It should be noted that both strategies are gender neutral. A link is also provided to the current Action Plan which remains

operational for both these strategies. While the Action plan states that it covers the period until September 2013, this has been extended until the introduction of the new joint domestic and sexual violence strategy due for publication later this year (2014).

Domestic Violence Strategy:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/tackling_violence_strategy.pdf

Sexual Violence Strategy:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/tackling_sexual_violence_and_abuse_strategy_.pdf

Current Domestic and Sexual Violence Action Plan:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dom-vio-plan.pdf>

Since the current strategies were introduced in 2005 and 2008 there have been highly effective working relationships with women and women's interest groups through working in partnership with them through their representation in the Regional Strategy Group and Protection and Justice Sub Group. Membership of these groups has been drawn from all the relevant statutory and voluntary organisations who work in this area. In addition, and recognising the need to learn from the experiences of others, the Department Of Justice funded two Northern Ireland Women's European Platform representatives (one from Women's Aid and another from Youth Action) to attend the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York in March 2013. This opportunity not only gave officials information to inform policies but ensured these local representatives were given the opportunity to participate in the negotiations and to influence the policy outcomes of the session.

New Joint Strategy for addressing domestic and sexual violence and abuse

On 15 January 2014 a consultation on a new Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy was launched. The 2014-2020 strategy, which is also gender neutral aims to further improve services and support for **all** victims and witnesses, and ensure perpetrators are called to account for their actions.

The main strands of the Strategy are Driving Change, Prevention and Early Intervention, Delivering Change, Support and Protection and Justice.

The Consultation ran from 15 January 2014 to 11 April 2014. The strategy and relevant consultation documents can be accessed at:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/showconsultations?txtid=65665>

Victims and Witness strategy in Northern Ireland

On 13 June 2013 the first strategy under devolution to improve the services for victims and witnesses of crime in Northern Ireland was published.

The victim and witness strategy and associated action plan (as well as associated consultation document and the Government response to consultation) are available

at <http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/media-centre/new-strategy-will-address-the-needs-of-victims-and-witnesses-ford.htm>

The five strands of the strategy are:

- (i) the status and treatment of victims and witnesses;
- (ii) communication and providing information;
- (iii) providing support and special measures;
- (iv) getting involved and improved understanding; and
- (v) gathering information and research on the experiences of victims and witnesses

Latest data relating to crime in Northern Ireland can be found here:

<http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/northern-ireland-crime-survey-s-r.htm>

Scotland

Details of how Scotland is addressing violence against women can be found here:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/violence-women>

Latest data on homicide figures in Scotland can be found here:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/TrendHom>