

Submission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in response to the request for information from the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, dated 30 October 2018.

In response to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women's letter of 30 October 2018, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) welcomes the opportunity to submit data and information in relation to the work the UK is undertaking to combat gender-based violence and femicide.

Protecting women and girls from violence and abuse, and supporting victims and survivors, remain key priorities for the UK Government. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious crime and has a huge impact both for those subjected to such violence and more broadly on the UK economy, health services, and the criminal justice system. The UK Government is committed to doing everything it can to eliminate domestic violence and abuse.

VAWG Strategy

In March 2016 we published our cross-Government VAWG Strategy, which set out our approach to tackling all forms of VAWG, including domestic abuse, so called 'honour-based' violence, stalking and sexual violence. The Strategy recognises the gendered nature of these crimes, and commits to continuing to challenge deep-rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate against and limit women and girls across all communities. The Strategy is underpinned by £100m of Government funding. This session, we will refresh the Strategy to ensure that we are doing all that we can to tackle these crimes which disproportionately affect women. The refresh will reaffirm the UK Government's commitment to tackling all forms of VAWG, capture new programmes of work, and provide an update on the delivery of existing actions. The refresh will also allow us to feed in the wealth of insights gained from the domestic abuse consultation and ensure we capture emerging areas such as sexual harassment and VAWG committed online.

Domestic Abuse Consultation

Over the last few years, the UK Government has strengthened the law, introduced new protective tools, and issued a range of guidance and support for frontline professionals. But we know there is more to do. That is why in March 2018 we launched our '*transforming the response to domestic abuse*' consultation on what more we can do to protect and support victims, recognise the life-long impact domestic abuse can have on children and make sure agencies effectively respond to domestic abuse. As part of this, we consulted widely on the legislative and non-legislative steps we can take to ensure victims are afforded the greatest possible protection. The consultation closed on 31 May - we received over 3,200 responses which we are currently analysing.

Measures we consulted on included:

- creating a legal definition of domestic abuse to ensure it is properly understood as more than just isolated incidents of violence;

- creating a new domestic abuse prevention notice and order to provide clearer pathways of protection for victims;
- making sure that if abusive behaviour involves a child, that the court can hand down a sentence that reflects the devastating life-long impact that abuse has on the child; and
- establishing a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to stand up for victims and survivors, raise public awareness, monitor the response of statutory agencies and local authorities and hold the justice system to account in tackling domestic abuse.

We will shortly be publishing a Government response and a landmark draft Domestic Abuse Bill will follow later this session.

Statistics

The Office for National Statistics publishes statistics on domestic homicides in England and Wales broken down by gender and relationship. The data can be found here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017#domestic-homicides>

Legislation

Where these crimes are committed, we have robust laws in place to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Over the last few years we have significantly strengthened the legislation to tackle VAWG including:

- two new stalking offences which were introduced in 2012, and raising the maximum sentence for stalking and harassment offences to 10 years' imprisonment in 2017;
- a coercive or controlling behaviour offence which came into force in 2015. The offence aims to protect victims who would otherwise be subjected to sustained patterns of abuse that can lead to total control of their lives by the perpetrator. The offence carries a maximum 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or both;
- a 'revenge porn' offence introduced in 2015, making it a criminal offence to disclose private sexual photographs and films without the consent of an individual who appears in them and with the intent to cause that individual distress;
- changes to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) legislation including a new offence of failing to protect a girl from the risk of FGM; granting victims lifelong anonymity; and the extension of extraterritorial jurisdiction over FGM offences to habitual as well as permanent UK residents, all introduced in 2015; and
- a specific offence of forced marriage, including extraterritorial jurisdiction, which came into force in 2014, and the introduction of lifelong anonymity for

victims of forced marriage in 2017 to encourage more victims to come forward.

The UK Government is committed to tackling the heinous behaviour of 'upskirting' which is why we have recently introduced our own legislation to make this a specific offence as quickly as possible.

Prosecution

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) publishes an annual VAWG report on prosecutions and convictions which covers a broad range of offences including domestic abuse, rape, stalking, sexual abuse, forced marriage and so-called 'honour-based' violence. The report can be found here:

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/violence-against-women-and-girls>

In 2017-18, the CPS brought more than 100,000 prosecutions of this type, a fifth of the total caseload.

Analysis of cases and actions undertaken

Each time a death occurs within an intimate partner relationship or a family through violence, abuse or neglect, the local partnership where the victim normally resides is required to undertake a domestic homicide review (DHR). These reviews became a statutory requirement in 2011 and their purpose is to establish whether there is any learning that can be identified from the homicide regarding the way agencies and professionals work individually and together to safeguard victims and ultimately prevent future homicides.

There have been in excess of 500 DHR reports produced and submitted to the Home Office to be quality assured by a panel of statutory and voluntary sector experts. The reports are anonymised and published by the partnerships who commission them so that the learning can be disseminated and good practice shared.

International work

The UK is proud to be demonstrating international leadership in our commitment to ending VAWG. We are investing in world-leading research and innovation on what works to prevent these crimes. For example, the Department for International Development's "What Works to Prevent Violence" flagship programme is generating world-leading innovation and evidence on the most effective interventions to drive down global rates of violence against women and girls. This work is pioneering approaches across 12 countries in Africa and Asia to deliver lasting change. Throughout 2018, What Works is releasing new evidence on preventing violence for women and girls in some of the world's most challenging contexts. Initial results have shown a significant reduction in violence against women and girls of over 50%, providing robust evidence that these crimes are preventable.

The UK Government remains committed to doing all that it can to tackle VAWG. Everyone has the right to live in safety, regardless of their gender. As we drive forward our VAWG strategy, we will ensure we continue to deliver for all and make VAWG everyone's business.