

Call for Views

New Strategies

Domestic and Sexual Abuse
(DoH, DoJ)

Violence Against Women and
Girls (TEO)

10 January 2022

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Foreword by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the Equally Safe Strategy – A Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence and the fear of violence in all its forms has long-lasting, life-changing impacts on the most personal aspects of the lives of women and girls. It limits their life-chances and causes misery to individuals and their families which ricochets out into the community and workplace. It has no place in our community.

The Executive is committed to preventing and, as far as possible, doing away with Violence Against Women and Girls. There will be a framework of Strategies to help us do that –

- The Gender Equality Strategy which will focus on eliminating systemic gender inequality that lies at the root of violence against women and girls;
- The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy which will apply to all victims; and
- A Strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls which will tackle all forms of violence and abusive or unwanted behaviour.

The Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls; the Equally Safe Strategy will identify actions to tackle violent and abusive behaviour directed at women and girls precisely because they are women and girls. This includes crimes and unwanted behaviour in the physical and online world.

The behaviour, and the attitudes that allow it stem from deep rooted inequality. We want a society in which all are equally safe; where everyone is respected and can reach their full potential. This has never been more important with already existing inequalities in our society made worse over the last two years by the impact of COVID-19.

This is a challenge we can all play our part in meeting, in our private and public lives. There is something that everyone can do; government, community and voluntary groups, education and health services and employers as well as the criminal justice system.

We want our strategy to be built on evidence. That means finding out about the lived experience of women and girls here, accessing research evidence and evidence of what works in other places. This initial Call for Views is an invitation to join the start of a conversation which will continue in further, varied and more detailed engagements. They will be at the heart of planning our new Equally Safe Strategy to

tackle violence against and women and girls.

Our approach will be ambitious; focused on working collaboratively to tackle the root causes of violence against women and girls. We will seek to intervene early to deliver long term outcomes.

We are joining with the Ministers for Health and Justice in this Call for Views, but we want to be very clear that there will be further opportunities to give us your views and share the evidence you have about the Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls as we go forward.

Together, we will build a society in which every woman and girl feels safe and is safe and free from violence.

We look forward to hearing from you and starting this journey together.



**PAUL GIVAN, MLA
FIRST MINISTER**



**MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

Foreword by the Minister of Health and Minister of Justice on a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy

As Ministers of Health and Justice we are committed to working with our Executive colleagues to challenge and address the societal attitudes and behaviours that contribute towards domestic and sexual abuse in our society. Tackling domestic and sexual abuse is, and will continue to be, a key priority for us.

During 2020-2021, police responded to 31,196 domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland. There were also 3,335 sexual offences and yet much of the extent and impact of domestic and sexual abuse remains hidden. Whilst most victims are female, men can be victims too and it doesn't just affect those in heterosexual relationships. Domestic and sexual abuse can also occur within families and across generations. Anyone can be a victim, just as anyone can be an abuser.

This paints a stark picture and reinforces the nature and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse in our community. It is why we believe that tackling this issue warrants a dedicated approach, an identifiable strategy, with specific commitments. Our Departments will therefore develop a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, which will complement work being taken forward by the Executive Office on the Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls.

We have already taken a number of important steps to address domestic and sexual abuse, including new legislation to make domestic abuse an offence which covers physical violence as well as non-physical (including coercive and controlling behaviour) and sexually abusive behaviour. We have also provided funding for vital frontline services and support organisations but there is more to do. By responding to this Call for Views, you will help us to consider the challenges and opportunities as we plan ahead to develop this new strategy for Northern Ireland, to raise awareness, support victims and address offending behaviour.

We very much look forward to hearing your views.



ROBIN SWANN, MLA
HEALTH MINISTER



NAOMI LONG, MLA
JUSTICE MINISTER

Support for those affected by this Call for Views

If you have been upset or affected by reading this Call for Views or commenting on the issues involved, help and support is available.



The **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline** can be contacted free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This is a confidential service available to both women and men. A telephone translation service is also available.

Trained helpline workers can talk about the help and support that you could get. You can also contact the Helpline if you're worried about a friend or relative and you want support on how to help them. The Helpline also provides information to statutory agencies and charities.

To contact the Helpline call **0808 802 1414**. It is free and the number doesn't appear on a landline telephone bill. You can also send an email to the Helpline address help@dsahelpline.org. The email service is also confidential and doesn't record your email address. Visit www.dsahelpline.org for more information and webchat.

You can also seek emotional and practical support from **Victim Support NI** if you have been affected by crime.

Contact the Belfast Hub on 028 9024 3133 or email belfast@victimsupportni.org.uk.

Contact the Foyle Hub on 028 7137 0086 or email foyle@victimsupportni.org.uk.

1. Introduction

Strategic context

The [Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy](#) is the Northern Ireland Executive's current framework of priority actions to address domestic and sexual abuse in the seven year period from 2016 until 2023. The Department of Health and the Department of Justice lead jointly on its delivery.

We are now in the sixth year of this seven year strategy. It is important, therefore, that we plan ahead for a new strategic framework to be in place in 2023.

The current strategy applies to all victims, regardless of a person's age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability they may have. It is intended that the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy will continue to adopt an inclusive approach and continue to be gender-neutral to address the specific issue of domestic and sexual abuse. That is because abusive behaviour, particularly in intimate relationships (both mixed-sex and same-sex) is not limited to abuse against women and it is important to recognise that 31% of victims of domestic abuse crimes are male.

But the fact remains that women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic and sexual abuse as well as broader forms of violence, such as honour-based violence, sexual harassment, trafficking and child sexual exploitation. Although (like domestic and sexual abuse) these specific issues are mainly addressed through other separate work programmes, the Executive Office has committed to developing a new overarching Executive-wide strategy to address societal attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that contribute towards violence against women and girls.

Two new Strategies are therefore being developed: a new **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** led by the Department of Health and the Department of Justice; and an **Equally Safe Strategy** – a new Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls led by the Executive Office. The development of both will also be aligned with other social inclusion strategies that are being taken forward by the Department for Communities, such as the Gender Equality Strategy.

Other existing strategies and programmes of work that are also relevant to the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy include the Digital Justice Strategy; the Modern Slavery Strategy; the Gillen Review Implementation Programme; the Department of Justice's programme of legislation to deal with stalking and sexual offences as well as action plans to implement Criminal Justice Inspection and Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland recommendations in relation to domestic and sexual abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation.

Purpose of this Call for Views

This Call for Views is the first formal stage in the development of a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and an Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls and, as they are being developed in parallel, we are calling for views on both as part of this exercise. You are invited and encouraged to share your views on issues that could help inform their content, actions and overall direction. It will be a continuing dialogue and the final draft strategies will also be subject to a full public consultation. You are welcome to provide views on either strategy or both.

The key stages in the strategy development process are summarised below:



We have already taken a number of important steps in this area but there is more to do and we want to draw on your knowledge, experience and views, to drive forward improvements and strengthen the Northern Ireland Executive's response to domestic and sexual abuse as well as violence against women and girls.

In respect of the Equally Safe Strategy, this is the start of our engagement to inform the development of that Strategy. The responses from this Call for Views will inform surveys and further opportunities to express views which will follow. In parallel the Executive Office will be commissioning research to better understand current thinking in this area and to identify and analyse data which will help us to more fully understand how to tackle the problem of violence against women and girls here. This will also inform the development of that strategy.

This Call for Views is open for **8 weeks** and will close on **Monday 7 March 2022** after which the results will then be analysed by the three Departments.

How can you help us?

We are particularly keen to engage with and listen to:

- those with lived experience. That includes those directly affected by domestic and sexual abuse or other kinds of violence, as well as their friends, family and colleagues;
- those from different groups and communities, including victims from LGBTQIA+ and minority ethnic communities and those with a disability;
- organisations that provide support to victims (including victims of violence against women and girls);
- organisations that provide support to children and young people;
- frontline professionals, such as those working in health and social care, education, housing and the criminal justice system;
- academics and researchers; and
- the general public.

We welcome your ideas and, in particular, the following information:



Research &
learning from
best practice



Practitioner
knowledge and
skills



Experience and
views



Data and
statistics

2. Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy

An Executive priority

The Northern Ireland Executive is committed to working together to tackle domestic and sexual abuse. It is an issue that cuts across many policy areas including health; justice; education; housing; the workplace and the impact on our economy; and our local and rural communities. It calls for a joint response, requiring the involvement of many government departments as well as our delivery partners across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

The new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy will therefore need to be underpinned by a recognition and commitment to partnership working and be built upon foundations that can develop and deliver cross-cutting solutions. No single agency can address domestic and sexual abuse alone.

Co-production with stakeholders, partners, the general public and victims will be at the core of the strategy's development. This Call for Views is the first formal stage in that process and its purpose is to gather as much information as possible on key issues to inform the draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy which we expect to bring to formal consultation later in 2022.

The strategy will be underpinned by an outcomes framework with key performance indicators to assess progress and will be supported by a series of action plans. This will help us to identify how much we are doing, how well we are doing it and, importantly, the extent to which people are better off as a result of the work progressed under a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.

It is envisaged that the strategy will cover a seven year timeframe.

What is domestic and sexual abuse?

Regardless of the type of situation, domestic and sexual abuse is wrong and is never the victim's fault. The blame lies solely with the abuser. Any form of abuse is still abuse and there is no excuse for it. Just because it may be in the context of a relationship doesn't make it right.

Domestic abuse can happen across a range of relationships, including those between partners, former partners, those in an intimate relationship (mixed-sex and same-sex) or between close family members. Anyone can be a victim and anyone can be an abuser.

Domestic abuse also includes a wide range of behaviours aimed at making a person dependent on their abuser, isolating them from friends and family, controlling them, limiting their freedom or making them feel frightened or humiliated. Importantly domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence and assaults and can also include sexual abuse. Many people will suffer from what is often referred to as ‘controlling and coercive’ behaviour that invades every part of their life.



The current strategy defines domestic abuse (including violence) as:

“threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member”.

Sexual abuse may not necessarily, but can, involve someone that you are (or have been) in a relationship with and can also be carried out by family members. While it may be carried out by a stranger, most victims will know their abuser which can include an acquaintance, colleague or friend. The abuse can have happened recently or occurred many years ago.

Sexual abuse can take many forms and includes contact and non-contact sexual activities.

Coercive, exploitative and harmful behaviour includes taking advantage of an individual’s incapacity to give informed consent.

Any behaviour of a sexual nature that occurs without consent is considered to constitute a form of sexual abuse.

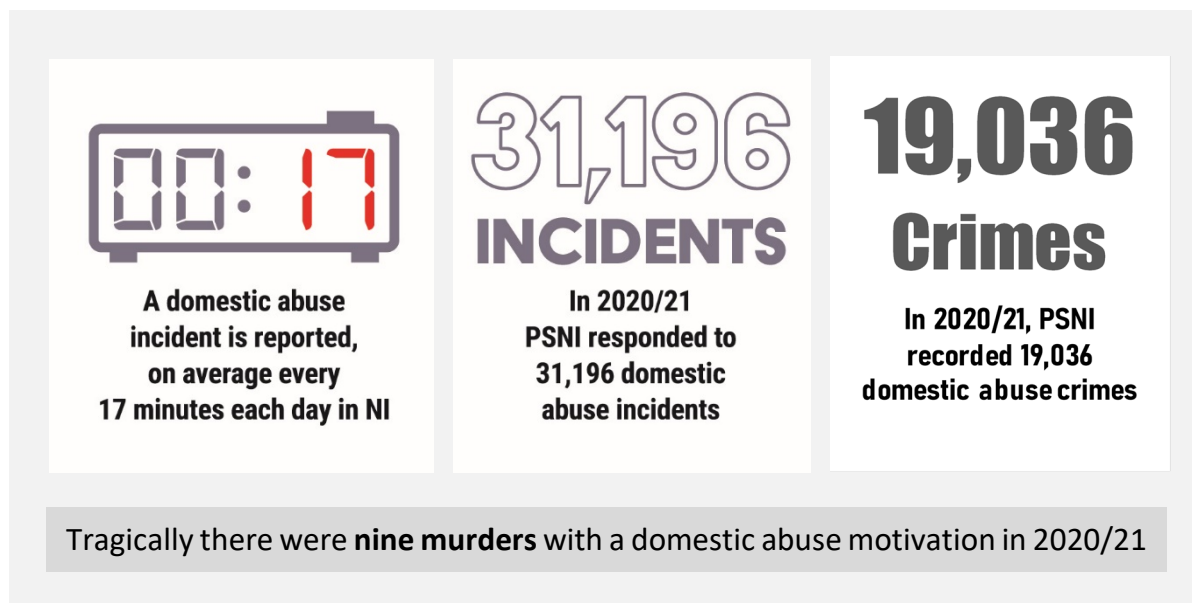


The current strategy defines sexual abuse (including violence) as:

“any behaviour (physical, psychological, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful, or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability).”

Prevalence and impact

It is important to recognise that anyone, whatever their gender, gender identity, age, ethnicity or sexual orientation, can be a victim or an abuser. Some key statistics are outlined here. However, the true figure is likely to be much higher due to underreporting.



Around 69% of victims of domestic abuse crimes are female and 31% male

34% of relationships involved a former partner
25% a current partner

Almost a quarter of cases involved a parent child relationship

86% of offenders were male and 13% female
95% of offenders were aged 18 or over

1 in 4 lesbian and bisexual women and
4 in 10 gay and bisexual men
have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship

There were **3,335 sexual offences in 2020/21**. This included 1,028 rape offences and 2,307 other sexual offences.

How are we currently tackling this issue?

As outlined previously, the Department of Health and the Department of Justice lead jointly on the delivery of the current *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy*, working with the Department for Communities and the Department of Education, as well as a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector partners. Annual [action plans and progress reports](#) are published every year and the Northern Ireland Executive receives progress reports every six months.

Important achievements to date have included:

- ✓ **New domestic abuse legislation** marks a significant step forward. The [Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2021](#) includes the creation of a domestic abuse offence covering physical violence, non-physical abusive behaviour (including coercive and controlling behaviour) and sexually abusive behaviour. Due to come into operation in late February it allows for heavier sentencing where children are involved and someone convicted of the worst criminality could potentially face up to 14 years in prison. Sentencing may also be increased for any other offence involving a single incident of domestic abuse.
- ✓ **Funding for frontline services and support organisations.** This includes the 24 hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline; the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre; emergency accommodation and refuge provision; floating support services in local communities; and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences for victims considered to be high risk.
- ✓ The **Identification and Referral to Improve Safety** programme (also known as 'IRIS') is being piloted in the Belfast and Newry and Mourne areas to train and support GPs to recognise and respond to domestic and sexual abuse and refer patients to specialist advocacy support.
- ✓ **Free public transport** for those going to refuge or emergency accommodation as a result of domestic abuse.
- ✓ **Introduction of Domestic Homicide Reviews.** These are independent multi-agency investigations into the circumstances of tragic cases where a person has died from domestic abuse with the aim of promoting lessons learnt.
- ✓ The launch of '**ASSIST NI**', a new regional advocacy support service primarily for victims of domestic and sexual abuse crimes.

✓ Introduction of the **'Ask for Ani' pharmacy code word scheme** to allow those at risk or suffering from abuse to discreetly signal to pharmacy staff that they need help to access support. Participating pharmacies will have promotional material on display in store to signal that they are taking part.

✓ If you are worried that your partner, or the partner of someone you know, has a history of domestic abuse, you can ask the police to check for you through the **Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme**.

✓ Piloting of the **Operation Encompass** programme in schools across the Down area. This will see police share information with schools where there have been instances of domestic abuse involving a child. It will allow officers to advise schools of this, so that the right support can be put in place.

✓ **Promoting Positive Relationship Programmes** to provide men alleged to be abusive towards their partners, and where children are involved, with the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in which to develop healthy, non-abusive relationships.

✓ **Media campaigns to raise awareness of domestic abuse and sexual consent.**

Good progress has been made but there is still more to be done. More targeted and focused work is needed to reduce instances of offending behaviour, to ensure that where offending occurs that offenders are brought to justice and importantly that the necessary support is provided to those affected.

This is particularly the case in relation to preventative and early intervention work, which has the potential to have the greatest impact over the medium to longer term. Only through an increased focus in trying to prevent abuse, and also educate and raise awareness among all our people and across society that abuse is wrong and must not be tolerated, can we hope to bring about meaningful change.

Proposed Scope, Vision and Objectives of the new strategy

Scope

The new strategy will focus solely on the specific issue of **domestic and sexual abuse**. Although there are links with other crimes such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and human trafficking, most of which are being addressed through separate work programmes. As such it is not our intention to deal with these issues through this particular strategy. Rather the focus is solely on issues that are

deemed to be domestic and sexual abuse.

It is also important to note that a range of work related to sexual abuse is also being progressed under the Gillen Review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland. We will need to ensure appropriate connectivity with this work as we develop the new strategy.

As is currently the case, the new strategy will apply to all victims, regardless of a person's age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability they may have. It will also continue to be gender neutral to address the specific issue of domestic and sexual abuse.

Some of the broader initiatives, including those designed to address societal attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that contribute towards the wider issue of violence against women and girls, will be led by the Executive Office under the Equally Safe Strategy – a new Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls. As all the evidence is gathered from this exercise, we will collectively consider how best to address the range of issues under the guise of one of the two proposed strategies.

A Shared Vision

Developing a new strategy starts with a vision (our ambition). Our proposed vision, which will be the anchor point for the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, is that:

“Domestic and sexual abuse becomes unacceptable within our homes and across our society, so that everyone can live without fear. By working together as partners, agencies and communities we achieve real, sustainable progress to prevent it; ensure those affected get the right support; and hold perpetrators to account.”

Building on the work of the current strategy we can continue to break down barriers between sectors and services, in neighbourhoods and communities, recognising that domestic and sexual abuse is everyone's business and that responsibility for tackling it is shared by all. This is not simply a private matter, it is everyone's responsibility.

We want to provide a future where everyone can live safe lives, without the threat or experience of domestic and sexual abuse. It is important that when someone becomes a victim that they are believed, not blamed, are treated with dignity and respect and also supported in order to feel safe within their community, whilst seeing their offender change their behaviour or brought to justice.

Objectives

We are suggesting five thematic workstreams as a helpful starting point to underpin the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, which we would welcome your views on:

Workstream 1: Driving change together

Delivering change through joint commitment, leadership and partnership working

Objectives:

- A whole system approach across government in partnership with the statutory, voluntary and community sector to deliver joined up solutions.
- Development of an outcomes framework with key performance indicators to assess progress over the long term.

Workstream 2: Prevention and early intervention

Early and effective interventions that prevent violence and maximise safety

Objectives:

- Individuals and communities recognise and challenge domestic and sexual abuse and the attitudes that drive it.
- Children and young people develop an understanding of safe and healthy relationships from an early age.
- Increased focus on addressing abusive behaviour and changing the behaviours of abusers.

Workstream 3: Responsive services

Building responsive services to ensure victims get the support they need

Objectives:

- Improved capability across services and the workplace to identify and respond effectively to domestic and sexual abuse.
- Provision of emergency housing and, if appropriate, floating support services.

Workstream 4: Supporting different needs

Taking account of the needs of specific groups of victims

Objectives:

- Greater understanding of the needs of different groups including women; men; LGBTQIA+ individuals; minority ethnic communities; children and young people; older people; and people with a disability.
- Improving victims' experiences by addressing specific barriers that can make it hard to access services and reach support.

Workstream 5: Protection and Justice

Effective, supportive, responsive and timely protection across the criminal justice system.

Objectives:

- Increased focus on holding offenders to account and addressing violent and abusive behaviours.
- A focus on repeat offenders and a whole-systems approach to addressing this issue.
- Improved protections for those subject to domestic and sexual abuse.
- Improved connectivity in dealing with cases in the court system.

We would welcome comments on whether these are the right workstreams for the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse strategy to focus on, to most effectively tackle domestic and sexual abuse, and whether there are any other workstreams or key objectives that should be considered.

3. Equally Safe – A Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls

An Executive Priority

The development of an Equally Safe Strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls is an Executive priority. Work is just beginning on this, the first such strategy in this jurisdiction.

We recognise there is work to be done to understand the nature, scope and extent of the violence and unwanted behaviour women and girls face all too often, in both the physical world and online. This Call for Views is one of the first steps in helping us to gather the data we need, and to grow our understanding so as to be able to tackle the root causes of this problem. The responses we receive will inform surveys and further engagement which will follow.

We want to get to the very root of violence against women and girls; we need to change the culture in respect of how women and girls are viewed and treated. This will take time and we will need a number of tools working collaboratively across government and with civil society to do this. These tools include not just this strategy but the complementary Executive strategies – the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and Gender Equality Strategy. We also want to understand how the work of this strategy is relevant to other areas, such as Tackling Paramilitarism and the New Beginnings work on women in the workplace, to name a couple.

This work is also clearly related to efforts to stop violence against other groups of people and in other specific contexts, including violence against men and boys, hate crime against other groups, paramilitary style violence and gang violence. We are keenly aware of the suffering of victims of violence who may feel that when we prioritise violence against women and girls, their trauma is being seen as less important.

Some of the solutions we find to address violence against women and girls may help stop violence against other people too. So it might make sense to look at violence against some other groups of people alongside this work that the Executive has asked us to do.

However, we are also aware of the risk of trying to cover too many bases at once and so dissipating our efforts and failing to achieve anything.

Setting the Scope, Vision and Objectives

The Executive agreed to bring forward a strategy to tackle the root causes of violence against women and girls that must be inter-sectional and focus on all forms of violence, with a particular emphasis on behavioural and attitudinal change.

This is the challenge that the Executive has set us, and we intend to rise to it. We are beginning our engagement with the stakeholder community at this very earliest stage to inform the development of the Equally Safe Strategy.

This call will inform the scope, vision and objectives of that strategy. The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy has a very specific focus on domestic and sexual abuse. The Equally Safe Strategy will reach more widely to include other acts and threats of gender based violence that result in, or may result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether occurring in public or in private life, in the physical world or online.

The strategy will also deal with the “unwanted” behaviour or actions that emanate from an attitude or perception of women and girls that lacks respect. In this Call for Views, we want to begin to understand the scope of unwanted behaviour (in both the physical and online world); how prevalent that behaviour is, its impact on women and girls here, and the sorts of interventions that can stop the behaviour and the harm it causes.

Most importantly, the strategy will move upstream the problems of violence and unwanted behaviour to look at their root causes – the attitudes, culture and inequalities which give rise to them. We want to ask how other places have successfully made changes that have helped, and whether there are any aspects of the problem that are specific locally, such as intergenerational trauma arising from our troubled past.

We want to use this Call for Views to inform the scope, vision and objectives of the strategy. We also want to be ambitious and future focused. An early draft of these is set out below to inform the Call for Views only; and some questions to help inform discussion on our objectives to help you identify relevant data, and most importantly, your experience, which you may want to share.

Scope

The term ‘violence against women and girls’ refers to acts of violence or unwanted behaviour that we know disproportionately affects women and girls. We recognise that men and boys are also victims of violence and unwanted behaviour.

We are, however, inclined to the view that this new Equally Safe Strategy should focus on women and girls. This reflects the different forms of violence against women within

the gendered reality of men's and women's lives. We welcome your views on this approach.

We would also welcome your views on whether this approach or another approach is more appropriate.

Vision

At this early stage of developing the vision for the Equally Safe Strategy, we would like to hear your views on how it should be defined. We set out below a draft vision –

Every woman and girl is safe in our communities, feels safe and can reach their potential.

We have a society in which violence against women is not tolerated in any form, in which all victims are supported, and perpetrators are held to account.

Our draft vision focuses both on the future state we want to reach and the behaviour that we want to change.

We would like to hear your views on whether these, or different words, would best catch the ambition of what we want to do.

If there are vision statements from other places that you think capture a vision for a Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls well, we would be glad to hear them.

Objectives

The objectives will define the basis for our work to achieve the strategy's vision. At this early stage, we have identified the following possibilities and again welcome your views on whether these, or others, would best catch the ambition of what we want to do.

Objective 1

Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the Equally Safe Strategy is seeking to tackle.

- Do you agree that the new strategy should first seek to understand the current landscape and to identify and fill any gaps in data and our understanding?

Objective 2

Prevention – Early intervention to get upstream of violence.

- Do you agree that the Equally Safe Strategy should consider early intervention measures which can change attitudes and behaviours at home, in education, in the workplace and in the public sphere?
- Do you agree that it should also work closely with other strategies to ensure that measures to support victims and survivors of violence and to help perpetrators to change are in place?

Objective 3

A co-designed strategy which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence.

Do you agree that the Equally Safe Strategy should specifically seek to build collaborative development and delivery of the strategy to help to achieve our objectives?

- Across government
- With the third sector
- With the private sector
- With people in our communities, including women and girls

Objective 4

Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.

Do you agree that we should seek to understand the scope of the current services available and seek to build on these to improve capabilities and responsiveness?

Prevalence and impact

There is a dearth of information at present on the non-criminal behaviours which are within the scope of the Equally Safe Strategy. We acknowledge that there may also be under-reporting of some or all of the behaviours which are within its scope. Further, there is limited data on the attitudes and behaviours which contribute to violence against women and girls, and on the impact of such violence, and fear of it, among women and girls.

However, current reported crime statistics and crime surveys give us a sense of the urgency of the situation.

According to the findings from the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey, 1.1% of women reported having been the victim of a violent crime in 2019-2020, rising to 3.4% among 16-24 year olds. PSNI recorded crime statistics show that there were 37,112 offences against female victims reported between November 2020 and October 2021. Within this number, there were 5,208 instances of violence with injury against females reported (including homicides and death/serious injury by unlawful driving, 43% of the overall number for this period) and 8,257 instances of violence without injury (51% of the overall number). Additionally, there were 7 homicides against women, 6 of which had a domestic abuse motivation. In the same time period, there were 8,326 harassment offences against females reported (63% of overall number of harassment offences during this period) and there were 2,900 sexual offences against females (78% of overall number of sexual offences during this period).

Between April 2020 and March 2021, the PSNI reported 2,182 female victims of online violence and 1,186 male victims of online violence. Of the female victims of online violence, 2,145 (98%) were online harassment or malicious communications, an almost nine fold increase since 2016-2017 when there were 245 cases of online harassment or malicious communications against females reported. In 2020-21, 261 online sexual offences against females were reported, a 78% increase from the 147 online sexual offences against females reported in 2016-2017.

The Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey asks respondents about fear of crime, and in the 2019-20 survey 31% of women reported feeling that fear of crime has a moderate or great effect on their quality of life, compared to 25% of men. Similarly, a higher proportion of women said they felt very unsafe walking alone in their area after dark (9%), compared with 4% of men. Looking at overall worry about crime, 9% percent of women are very worried about crime, compared with 4% of men.

Conclusion

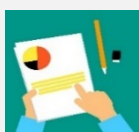
We are at the very beginning of developing our strategy and we are asking for your help. By sharing any information you hold, and by allowing us to hear and understand your views and experience, you can help us to inform the development of the first Equally Safe Strategy – A Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls and help ensure a future where its vision is a reality.

4. How to Respond

There are a number of ways that you can respond to this Call for Views. You may use any or all of the following options:



Take part in our **online surveys** as a member of the public or as a victim of domestic or sexual abuse. There are also **easy read** and **children and young person's** versions of the Call for Views document which seek your views;



Submit additional information, evidence and data by completing our **online written response form**; and/or



Join one of our **online focus groups**.

The Call for Views will be open for **8 weeks**. The closing date is **Monday 7 March 2022** (please note that we will be unable to accept responses after this date).

Online Surveys

There are two surveys available, one for the general public and one for those with lived experience of domestic and sexual abuse. The questions in the online surveys mainly ask about domestic and sexual abuse; there are a small number of questions about Violence Against Women and Girls. As noted above, this is an initial stage of the engagement in respect of the strategy being developed to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls; further engagement will follow.

The public survey can be accessed on the [NI Direct Citizen Space](#) website.

It should take no more than **15 – 20 minutes** to complete. The majority of the questions are multiple choice. You can respond to as many (or as few) areas as you wish.

The public survey asks about what people think about domestic and sexual abuse; how common it is in Northern Ireland; awareness of the current strategy and awareness raising campaigns; what support is needed for victims; and what actions the Northern Ireland Executive should prioritise. The survey also asks questions about

demographic information.

The survey for victims can be accessed on the [NI Direct Citizen Space](#) website.

It should take no more than **20 – 30 minutes** to complete. This survey has been designed to ensure that the views and unique experience of victims of domestic and sexual abuse are captured. We are particularly keen to hear from those who may feel underrepresented or who feel their circumstances are not supported by existing services. The survey also asks about victims' experience of the criminal justice system, whether incidents were reported to the police, and any experience of the court process.

Similar to the public survey, it seeks views from victims about the development of a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and the actions that should be prioritised by the Northern Ireland Executive. The survey also asks questions about demographic information.

In completing this survey we would encourage those who have been victims to talk to, and seek support from, specialist organisations. All of the questions are optional and you can choose not to respond to any of them or end the survey at any time.

Written response form

We would welcome additional evidence and data (specific to Northern Ireland) from practitioners, specialist organisations and academics, to inform the development of both strategies. This information can be submitted using our **online written response form** (which forms part of the call for views paper).

We would ask that responses are made online **through the NI Direct Citizen Space website** [Call for Views paper – written response](#), and that electronic or hard copy responses (using the template at **Appendix 1**) are only submitted in exceptional circumstances.

The written response form has a number of questions split into two sections (one covering each strategy). In responding, it is important that inputs are not limited to the health and justice arenas. They should cover interventions and support that would be relevant across the spectrum of all Northern Ireland Executive Departments, as appropriate.

The questions relating to the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and those relating to the Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls are set out at **Appendix 1**.

Easy Read and young person versions of the Call for Views paper are also available

on the Departmental websites (see below), which include a number of questions seeking views on the way forward.

In relation to the Call for Views on Violence Against Women and Girls it is a first stage in our engagement with everyone who has an interest. There will be further opportunities to help shape the strategy. At this stage, we would like to hear views and experience from people and organisations across our communities.

The two new strategies will be informed by evidence of people's lived experience, by research and by evidence of what works. We welcome submissions from the public, academics, professionals and others who have an interest and expertise in domestic and sexual abuse as well as violence against women and girls or associated issues and the use of new sciences like data analysis and behavioural economics to help enable attitudinal change.

Written submissions can include the contribution of published data, research, and other reports of relevance to domestic and sexual abuse and violence against women and girls. If you have a relevant published data set we would welcome reference to it. In terms of the Equally Safe Strategy we would welcome particular insights and information in respect of girls.

The questions on the Equally Safe Strategy, which are set out at **Appendix 1**, seek views on –

- the draft scope, vision and objectives set out above for the strategy;
- information on the scope and scale of the violence that may be tackled by the new Equally Safe Strategy (including criminal behaviour outside the Scope of the Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy);
- information on the scope and scale of unwanted behaviour that may be within the scope of the new Equally Safe Strategy.

Focus Groups

The publication of this Call for Views will also be supported by a number of focus groups/stakeholder events with the statutory, voluntary and community sector as well as academics and public sector professionals. We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss key issues with members of the public.

Details of these events will be available on the Departmental websites.

[Consultations | Department of Health](#)

[Consultations | Department of Justice](#)

[Consultations | The Executive Office](#)

If needed, separate focus groups will be held to discuss issues related to the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and the Equally Safe Strategy – A Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls.

We would also be keen for our voluntary and community sector partners to facilitate engagement with those with lived experience (including children and young people).

Due to COVID-19, all engagement activities will be conducted using a virtual platform.

Accessibility

Hard copies of this document (as well as the online surveys), and copies in others formats (including Braille, large print etc.), can be made available on request. If it would assist you to access the document in an alternative format, or language other than English, please let us know and we will do our best to assist you. We would still ask that you submit any responses online through Citizen Space.

Confidentiality and access to information

We may publish all responses to this Call for Views, except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity will be published (removing email addresses and telephone numbers). For more information about what we do with personal data, please see our privacy notice (**Appendix 2**).

Your response, and all other responses to this Call for Views, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential please explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered should there be a request for the information to be provided under FOIA or EIR.

Enquiries and responses

Should you have any queries on this Call for Views, please contact us as below:

Phone: 028 9052 0534
E-mail: CallforViews@justice-ni.gov.uk
Write to: Community Safety Division
Room A4.03
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SG

If you have any concerns about the way this process has been handled, you should send them to:

Standards Unit
Department of Justice
Knockview Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SL
Email: Standardsunit@justice-ni.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1 – WRITTEN RESPONSE FORM

Your views are being sought in order to inform the development of a new **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** and the new **Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls**.

As far as possible responses should be **made online through the NI Direct Citizen Space website** [Call for views paper - written response](#) where the document and response form can be found. This will assist for analysis purposes. Electronic or hard copy responses, using this template, should only be in exceptional circumstances.

Please submit your response online, **no later than Monday 7 March 2022**. Alternatively you can:

Phone: 028 9052 0534

E-mail: CallforViews@justice-ni.gov.uk

Write to: Community Safety Division
Department of Justice
Room A4.03
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SG

A summary of the responses to the Call for Views engagement exercise will be made available on the Departmental websites in due course. This will not contain any information that would identify individual respondents.

[Consultations | Department of Health](#)

[Consultations | Department of Justice](#)

[Consultations | The Executive Office](#)

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU

Question (a):

I am responding as... *(Please tick one option only)*

A member of the public (**Do not provide your name or email address**)

On behalf of an organization – Please specify below and include your organisation's email address.

SECTION 2: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON A DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE STRATEGY

Question 1: What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland, supported by relevant data and statistics where available, to help underpin workstreams under the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy?

Please set out your response below

Question 2: Are there specific areas where service provision and support could be further improved, and strengthened, in order to most effectively respond to domestic and sexual abuse?

Please set out your response below

Question 3: What activity should be undertaken to aid prevention, and provide for early intervention, in order to help reduce the number of people that become victims in the first place? Linked to prevention, and equally important in preventing crimes, is any evidence that can be provided on abusers, particularly repeat offenders, so that we can gather as much evidence as possible on both who commits these crimes and what works to help them stop.

Please set out your response below

Question 4: How best can we take account of the needs of specific groups of victims, including, for example: women; men; LGBTQIA+ individuals; minority ethnic communities; children and young people; older people; and those with a disability? This should include consideration of how the experience of these groups of victims could be improved, including how to overcome any barriers to accessing services and reaching support.

Please set out your response below

Question 5: How best can protection and justice be secured, in responding to domestic and sexual abuse, so that we protect those that are affected by abuse, address abusive behaviour to reduce numbers of victims and effectively hold offenders to account for their behaviour?

Please set out your response below

Question 6: How best can linkages within the justice system be strengthened in order to most effectively deal with domestic and sexual abuse more widely?

Please set out your response below

Question 7: Do you agree with the following proposed workstreams suggested for the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy? Have you any comments about how best these workstreams can be progressed as well as their content?

- **Driving change together:** Delivering change through joint commitment, leadership and partnership working.
- **Prevention and early intervention:** Early and effective interventions that prevent violence and maximise safety.
- **Responsive services:** Building responsive services to ensure victims get the support they need.
- **Supporting different needs:** Taking account of the needs of specific groups of victims.
- **Protection and Justice:** Effective, supportive, responsive and timely protection across the criminal justice system.

Please set out your response below

Question 8: Are there any other key issues, on the specific area of domestic and sexual abuse, which you would like to raise?

Please set out your response below

Question 9: How best can we engage with, and draw from, the experience of those affected by domestic and sexual abuse going forward?

Please set out your response below

SECTION 3: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON EQUALLY SAFE – A STRATEGY TO TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Question 1: We are inclined to the view that this new Equally Safe Strategy should focus on women and girls. This reflects the different forms of violence and unwanted behaviour against women and its impact within the gendered reality of men’s and women’s lives. We welcome your views on whether this approach or another approach is more appropriate?

Please set out your response below

Question 2: We would like to hear your views on whether the draft vision set out below, or different words would best catch the ambition of what we want to do.
Every woman and girl is safe in our communities, feels safe and can reach their potential.
We have a society in which violence against women is not tolerated in any form, in which all victims are supported, and perpetrators are held to account.

Please set out your response below

Question 3: Do you agree with the draft objectives suggested for the new strategy? Are there any other objectives that should be included?

- Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the strategy is seeking to tackle.
- Prevention - Early intervention to get upstream of violence.
- A co-designed strategy which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence.
- Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.

Please set out your response below

Question 4: What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of acts or threats of gender based violence (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) that result in, or are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls?

Please set out your response below

Question 5: We want to understand the “unwanted” behaviour or actions (including on-line) that emanate from an attitude to, or perception of, women and girls that lacks respect. What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of such behaviour?

Please set out your response below

Question 6: We want to understand the root causes of violence against women and girls, and would especially welcome learning on intersectional approaches and on what works in promoting behavioural and attitudinal change.

Please set out your response below

Question 7: We want to understand whether there are particular groups of women and girls, including those with specific vulnerabilities, who are more at risk of particular offences or 'unwanted' behaviour or actions.

Please set out your response below

Question 8: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls who are victims of crime (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) in the criminal justice system that you would like to draw to our attention.

Please set out your response below

Question 9: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the treatment of perpetrators of violence against women and girls by the criminal justice system or other public services which reflect good practice, or which could be improved.

Please set out your response below

Question 10: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls, or of men and boys, in the community, which you would like to draw to our attention in understanding violence against women and girls and how it can be combatted.

Please set out your response below

APPENDIX 2 – PRIVACY NOTICE: CALL FOR VIEWS

Engagement on a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and an Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls

Data Controller: Department of Justice
Address: Community Safety Division, Department of Justice
Room A4.03, Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate,
BELFAST, BT4 3SG
Telephone: 028 9052 0534
Email: CallforViews@justice-ni.gov.uk
Data Protection Officer: Department of Justice Data Protection Officer
Telephone: 028 90378617
Email: DataProtectionOfficer@justice-ni.gov.uk

Data Controller: Department of Health
Address: Domestic and Sexual Violence Unit, Room D2.17, Castle
Buildings Stormont, BELFAST, BT4 3SL
Telephone: 028 9052 2512
Email: CallforViews@justice-ni.gov.uk
Data Protection Officer: Department of Health Data Protection Officer
Telephone: 028 9052 2353
Email: DPO@health-ni.gov.uk

Data Controller: Executive Office
Address: The Executive Office, SD03 Stormont Castle, Stormont
Estate, Belfast, BT4 3TT
Telephone: 028 9037 8151
Email: CallforViews@justice-ni.gov.uk
Data Protection Officer: Executive Office Data Protection Officer
Telephone: 028 9052 2334
Email: DPO@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Why are you processing my personal information?

Comments are being sought from interested parties as part of a Call for Views on a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and a new Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls. Personal data is not being sought as part of the Call for Views engagement but names, addresses and/or e-mail addresses may be provided as part of responses received. Consultation is a requisite part of the development of public policy and strategy.

Consent is not being relied on for processing the data supplied by consultees. Responses are being sought as part of the policy development process.

Lawful Basis for processing

The lawful basis relied upon by DoJ, DoH and TEO is Article 6(1)(e) UKGDPR, as we are carrying out this Call for Views engagement in the public interest and on the basis of our public task.

While we do not intend to identify individuals with their responses, as some respondents may provide personal information we have taken into consideration how some questions may inadvertently lead to processing special category personal data. We consider the lawful basis for processing this data to be covered under Article 9(2)(g) UKGDPR and meeting the condition for processing contained at Schedule 1 Part 2 Paragraph 7 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (Administration of Justice).

The intention is to anonymise all responses once they are received and processed by the Department of Justice, prior to them being shared with the Department of Health, the Executive Office or PSNI.

What categories of personal data are you processing?

While not being sought responses to the Call for Views may include names, addresses and/or e-mail addresses and in respect of the victims survey, special category data may be processed.

Where do you get my personal data from?

The personal data will originate from the person responding to the Call for Views exercise.

Do you share my personal data with anyone else?

The Department of Justice will be processing the responses when they are received and will provide anonymised responses to the Department of Health and Executive Office, so that these may be considered in the context of the strategies being taken forward. We will also share information from the survey for victims, where the questions relate to engagement with the police, with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Again these responses will be shared in an anonymised format.

Do you transfer my personal data to other countries?

No.

How long do you keep my personal data?

We will retain your data in line with 5.7 of Schedule 5 of the DoJ Retention and Disposal Schedule (<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/doj-retention-and-disposal-schedule>).

(If you use automated decision making or profiling) How do you use my personal data to make decisions about me?

Automated processing for responses to this Call for views engagement will not be used.

What rights do I have?

You have the right:

- to obtain confirmation that your data is being [processed, and access to your personal data](#). This privacy notice provides you with the relevant information about how your data will be processed. If you wish to make a request for access to your data you should contact the Department of Justice using the contact details above.
- to have personal data [rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete](#). If you wish for your contact details to be rectified in any way you should contact the Department of Justice using the contact details above.
- to have personal data erased and to prevent processing, [in specific circumstances](#). If you wish for your contact details to be erased you should contact the Department of Justice, using the contact details above.
- to 'block' or suppress processing of personal data, [in specific circumstances](#). If you wish to block or suppress the processing of your personal data you should contact the Department of Justice, using the contact details above.
- to data portability, [in specific circumstances](#). The only personal data processed should be your contact details as outlined above.
- to object to the processing, [in specific circumstances](#)
- in relation to [automated decision making and profiling](#). As there will not be automated decision making and profiling as regards to the uses of your personal data for the purposes of this Call for Views engagement, this right does not apply.

How do I complain if I am not happy?

Complaints should be submitted to:

Freedom of Information Unit

Department of Justice
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SG

Telephone: 02890 378617

Email: FOI@justice-ni.gov.uk

If you are unhappy with any aspect of this privacy notice, or how your personal information is being processed, please contact the *Departmental Data Protection Officer* at: DataProtectionOfficer@justice-ni.gov.uk

If, after contact with the Departmental Data Protection Officer, you are still not happy, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>