



HM Government

TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

The safety of women and girls
across the country is **our priority**

July 2021

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Annex A: Progress Against Previous Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy Actions

Forewords

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary



I didn't feel safe. In fact, I was terrified. I carried on walking – I had no choice – but I picked up the pace and clutched my keys in my fist. It was a horrid experience, but by no means an extraordinary one.

The safety of everyone in our country, wherever they are, is my priority. Certain crimes disproportionately affect women and girls, manifest themselves in different ways, and demand targeted solutions.

Crimes such as rape, female genital mutilation, stalking, harassment, and digital crimes such as cyber-flashing, 'revenge porn' and 'up-skirting' are taking place every day. We often say these things have no place in our society. It would be more accurate to say that they should have no place, because they are still all too prevalent. They illustrate appalling, often outdated, attitudes and prejudice towards women and girls.

Good progress has been made in tackling these crimes. While the Prime Minister was Mayor of London, he ensured our capital became the first major city in the world to launch a comprehensive violence against women and girls strategy. Since he has been Prime Minister, cross-Government funding for action to tackle violence against women and girls has more than trebled in relation to any other two-year period. The United Kingdom's second female Prime Minister, Rt Hon Theresa May MP, led internationally renowned work on new offences for controlling and coercive behaviour, stalking, female genital mutilation and so-called 'revenge porn'. This year, the landmark Domestic Abuse Act passed. It will improve the response to domestic abuse on every level, strengthening protection for victims whilst also ensuring perpetrators feel the full force of the law.

But the fact remains that these crimes are still far too prevalent and there are too many instances of victims and survivors being let down. The tragic cases of Sarah Everard, Julia James, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman touched us all. But for every high-profile case, there are sadly many more. And the pandemic has brought new challenges and presented sick perpetrators with new opportunities as more people stayed at home and went online. We must honour these women and girls by doing more to prevent violence, support victims and pursue perpetrators. This Strategy presents our next step in doing so.

In December, for the first time, I opened a Call for Evidence to hear directly from the public on tackling violence against women and girls. Following the national outpouring of grief as a result of the tragic case of Sarah Everard, I reopened it. Amazingly, we received more than 180,000 responses. That is unprecedented. It made for essential but grim reading. Every day, women and girls have bad experiences at school, at work, on buses and trains, on the street, and even at home. Many respondents felt that crimes like sexual harassment are almost an inevitable part of being a woman.

We heard about behaviour – some of it almost unconscious because it is so habitual – and the daily calculations women and girls adopt so they feel safer. This is intolerable and must change. I am deeply grateful for the courage and commitment of everyone who responded to the Call for Evidence. Sharing such intensely personal and traumatic experiences is far from easy, but it means we can now present a comprehensive strategy for major societal change.

Finally, a word about men and boys. While this strategy focuses on women and girls, there is much more we all can do to support men and boys across a number of areas, including their safety. Later this year, I will publish further work in this area.

I do not accept that violence against women and girls is inevitable. This Strategy will help bring about real and lasting change.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. J.', located in the center of the page.

Victoria Atkins MP, Minister for Safeguarding



We are half the population. We are daughters, sisters, friends, colleagues and partners. Our safety, security and prosperity are everyone's business. And yet in the 21st century, there are still crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This must stop.

These crimes can be sexual, violent and frightening. They take place behind our front doors and beyond them. The range of crimes covered by the term 'violence against women and girls' is shocking. Some of these crimes are life-changing; a juncture after which time is measured as 'before' or 'after'. Other crimes may not cause such seismic change but are, instead, in the background of our lives - ordinary, rarely commented on or complained about.

These crimes are conducted by a minority of people, yet the consequences reach far and wide across society. They cause us to calculate risk without realising it, to calibrate our behaviour, to live our lives differently in response to our experiences and fears. They also require national and local responses, from prevention to policing, both offline and online, with economic as well as personal costs.

This national strategy has been shaped by these experiences and the 180,000 responses to our Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Call for Evidence. We have drawn on the expertise of charities, academics and frontline professionals. We have also asked victims to help us understand what we need to do better. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to create this Strategy - particularly those who have relived horrific experiences in so doing.

This is the next step in our programme of work to tackle crimes against women and girls. We passed the landmark Domestic Abuse Act this year which will help millions of adult victims and their children. In that Act, we have defined domestic abuse and the various forms it takes to foster better understanding, we have created a duty for local authorities to provide specialist services for victims who have fled their homes and we are changing court processes to ensure that justice is delivered, as well as many other positive developments to tackle this heinous crime. We will continue this momentum by launching a complementary Domestic Abuse Strategy later this year.

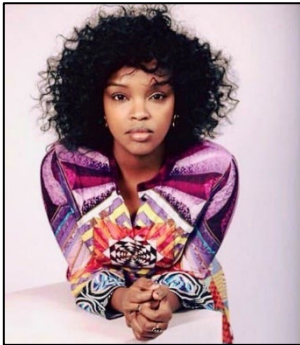
This Strategy tackles offending online as well as offline. Technology is used by perpetrators to commit established offences such as stalking, as well as new behaviours such as cyber flashing. The Law Commission's review into the law around online communications, as well as the forthcoming Online Safety Bill, form part of our longer-term work to tackle online crimes.

Concerns about the impact of online pornography on attitudes towards women and girls have been voiced in the public survey. We have already drawn a line in the sand on such attitudes by clarifying the law on the so-called 'rough sex defence', outlawing non-fatal strangulation and criminalising threats to use revenge porn. We will build on this work through education and public communications to prevent harms in the first place.

I want women and girls to look forwards, not over their shoulder. I want us to feel safe and secure wherever we are. This can and should be the decade of change in which this is achieved. We will work hard to make sure it happens.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nimco Ali OBE, Independent Adviser on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls



Women and girls in the UK and around the world are facing a parallel pandemic of violence committed against them - mostly by men or because of patriarchal structures. As a survivor, I know the impact violence against women and girls can have on one's life and how it can impact those around us. The high-profile murders of several women in the last 12 months has meant that the issue has received extensive media coverage - and we have received over a hundred thousand responses to the Call for Evidence from members of the public.

We are increasingly aware that far more needs to be done to tackle this in the UK, whether it's sexual violence, female genital mutilation or street harassment. With this in mind, I am delighted to be advising the UK Government on its new Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, which sets out its ambition for the coming years. I believe that not only can violence against women and girls be prevented but that women and girls have the right to live free of the fear of it. To do this we have to build a new social contract based on equality.

I hope we can continue to play a leading role globally by ratifying the Istanbul Convention as soon as we possibly can and continuing to strengthen our society's response to issues such as child marriage and public sexual harassment. We owe it to ourselves and generations to come to take the steps today that will bring about a safer and better world for all.

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Introduction

The safety of women and girls across the country is our priority

Violence against women and girls is an unacceptable, preventable issue which blights the lives of millions. Crimes of violence against women and girls are many and varied. They include rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, ‘honour-based’ abuse (including female genital mutilation and forced marriage and ‘honour’ killings), ‘revenge porn’ and ‘upskirting’, as well as many others. While different types of violence against women and girls have their own distinct causes and impacts on victims and survivors, what these crimes share is that they disproportionately affect women and girls.

These crimes are deeply harmful, not only because of the profound effect they can have on victims, survivors and their loved ones, but also because of the impact they can have on wider society, impacting on the freedom and equality we all should value and enjoy. These impacts can include day-to-day decision-making, but also extend to the social and economic costs to the economy, society, and taxpayer. We know that the devastating impact of these crimes can include the loss of life, the destruction of homes, futures, and lives. Everyone in modern Britain should have the freedom to succeed and everyone deserves the right to public safety and protection under the law. This is as true for women and girls as it is for anyone else.

Throughout this Strategy we draw on the testimonies of victims and survivors who bravely describe the impact these crimes can have. The Government thanks them for their contributions.

“I don't think anybody realises the impact [of these crimes] on younger girls and women. I had never felt so lost in my entire life at the time of the abuse. I thought my life would never be the same again. I had devastating and overwhelming feelings of distress and desperation. I had suicidal thoughts, I didn't eat for months, and still have a lot of suppressed feelings” – Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

A note on terminology: The term ‘violence against women and girls’ refers to acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation forced marriage, and ‘honour’ killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online. While we use the term ‘violence against women and girls’, throughout this Strategy, this refers to all victims of any of these offences.

Progress to date

We have made huge strides forward since the 2010-15 Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition Government published the first Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls in 2010¹. We have introduced new offences for:

- controlling or coercive behaviour;
- stalking;
- so-called 'revenge porn'; and
- 'upskirting'.

We have:

- raised the maximum penalties for stalking and harassment;
- ended the automatic early release of violent and sexual offenders from prison;
- introduced new orders for stalking, preventing sexual harm, and female genital mutilation to better protect victims and those at risk;
- introduced a mandatory duty for frontline professionals to report cases of FGM in children to the police; and
- strengthened the tools available to frontline professionals - including putting in place a range of statutory guidance, training and online resources.

We are continuing to help ensure victims and survivors are supported, including through funding specialist helplines and services, the work of our Forced Marriage Unit, and record levels of funding to recruit more Independent Sexual Violence Advisers and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers. In the two years since this Government came to office, **cross-Government funding for action to tackle violence against women and girls has more than trebled** in relation to any other two-year period.

In addition, this year the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ('the 2021 Act') passed². The 2021 Act will transform the response for the 5 in 100 adults who have suffered domestic abuse in the year to March 2020³ by strengthening protections for those who have experienced abuse and harm whilst also ensuring perpetrators feel the full force of the law. Measures introduced by the 2021 Act include:

- a statutory definition of domestic abuse to ensure it is properly understood by professionals across policing and law enforcement, health, housing, social care and education, as too many children suffer as a result of domestic abuse;
- establishing the position of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner in law to provide accountability to the public and Ministers on failure within statutory service provision and poor practice in services; and

¹ [Call to end violence against women and girls - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431211/call-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-2010.pdf)

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

³ [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-in-the-uk/health-and-life-expectancy/domestic-abuse-prevalence-and-trends-england-and-wales)

- new Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, which will help prevent perpetrators from contacting their victims, as well as requiring them to take positive and responsible steps to change their behaviour.

The 2021 Act also makes clear that a person cannot consent to the infliction of serious harm for the purposes of obtaining sexual gratification (frequently referred to in this context as the ‘rough sex defence’). In addition, new laws are now in place which have made non-fatal strangulation a specific offence, and we have widened the law on ‘revenge porn’ to make threats to share intimate images an offence.

And in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill currently making its way through Parliament we are ending the halfway release of offenders sentenced to between four and seven years in prison for serious violent and sexual offences, as well as strengthening the regime for managing registered sex offenders and those who pose a risk of sexual harm to the public.

In recent years we have seen a significant increase in the reporting of crimes such as sexual offences and domestic abuse to the police, as a result of improvements the police have made in how they record these crimes and an increased willingness of victims and survivors to come forward. For example, the number of all sexual offences recorded by police sharply increased between 2011/12 and 2018/19, with only a slight decrease in recent years. In addition, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has found that the proportion of women reporting feeling fairly or very safe walking home after dark has increased in recent years, rising from 57% in 2012/13 to 69% in 2019/20. We also know that prevalence of a number of violence against women and girls crimes, including domestic abuse, stalking, rape, indecent exposure and unwanted touching, has remained broadly the same since 2008/09.

But the fact remains that these crimes are still far too common, and there are too many instances of victims and survivors being let down. For example, the CSEW – which provides a good reflection of the true prevalence of crime (including where it is not reported to the police) - estimates that in the year ending March 2020, 618,000 women and 155,000 men experienced sexual assault (including attempts), and 892,000 women and 443,000 men experienced stalking.⁴

“Some forms of violence against women and girls are so commonplace that many women and girls don’t even think they are worth reporting. This is the case for things like being grabbed, touched, and/or threatened by strangers. This needs to change.” - Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

⁴ [Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales](#). Data based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.

As set out in the Government's recent End-to-End Rape Review Report on the criminal justice system response to rape⁵, the volume of cases being referred by police, charged by the Crown Prosecution Service and subsequently going to court has declined significantly since 2016. We need to reverse this trend and have set out publicly ambitions to do this. It is still the case that too many victims do not have confidence in the response they will receive if they report to the police and so do not come forward, and too many of those who take the brave step to report will withdraw at some point before the case concludes (because, for example, of the length of investigations, lack of support, or concerns about the process).

This Strategy sets out how we plan to prevent these crimes, improve the experiences of victims and survivors, ensure perpetrators are brought to justice, and improve the way different organisations work together.

Call for Evidence

This Strategy has been shaped by a comprehensive Call for Evidence on violence against women and girls which the Home Office ran in two phases. Phase 1 invited the public to respond between 10 December 2020 and 19 February 2021. In Phase 2, the public survey was reopened by the Home Secretary between 12 March and 26 March 2021, following the tragic rape and murder of Sarah Everard⁶. Where applicable, we refer to the data and evidence gathered from these periods as Phase 1 and Phase 2 throughout the Strategy. The Call for Evidence included:

- **A public-facing survey** which represented the first time the Government has invited views from the general public to inform a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, as well as a **nationally representative survey**⁷ to ensure a fair representation of views from across our society;
- **A victim and survivor survey** to better understand lived experiences of people when accessing support and the criminal justice system, distributed via specialist support organisations;
- **16 focus groups** with a range of expert organisations and professionals to discuss specific crime types as well as broader issues; and
- **Written submissions** from a wide range of expert respondents which provided information on the scope, scale, and prevalence of these crimes, prevention, support available, perpetrator management and more.

⁵ [End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92424/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions)

⁶ [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) Call for Evidence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92424/vawg-call-for-evidence)

⁷ Quotas were set on age, gender and region with weighting applied on these variables to reflect national profiles. Note: the respondents to the public-facing survey were more likely to be female, LGBT, of no reported religion and victims of violence against women and girls offences than the wider population, therefore their views will differ from the views of the wider population.

Through this process, the Government sought to better understand these crimes, the impact they have on individuals and communities, and what more can be done to tackle them. **The Call for Evidence received over 180,000 responses**, making this the largest ever consultation the Government has run in this area. The responses and engagement have provided us with rich evidence which has informed this Strategy. The evidence collected through the Call for Evidence is presented throughout each section of the Strategy.

The Call for Evidence was open to people aged 16 or over across England and Wales. Respondents tended to be female and aged between 16 and 34. But we heard from a wide range of people, including from different locations across the country and different ethnicities, and of different ages and sexual orientations. A number of these respondents, or their friends, family or colleagues, had been directly affected by these crimes. **The quotes from the Call for Evidence which can be found throughout this Strategy are the voices of real people who participated in the consultation.**

Our approach

These often hidden crimes have absolutely no place in our society. This Strategy sets out the actions the Government will take to increase support for survivors, bring perpetrators to justice, and, ultimately, reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls. We want to ensure that victims and survivors can be confident they will get the support they deserve, that perpetrators face justice, frontline professionals are supported to work effectively together, and, most importantly, that there is a relentless focus on preventing these crimes from happening in the first place.

The Government will continue to use the findings from the Call for Evidence to inform our work to tackle violence against women and girls and investment in the next Spending Review. This Strategy outlines the overarching ambition and steps to move forward and achieve real, sustainable progress. To do this, everyone must play a role - we need national and local government, charities, schools, colleges, universities, businesses and the private sector, local communities and others to all work together.

This Strategy will be followed by a dedicated and complementary Domestic Abuse Strategy later this year, along with a refreshed National Statement of Expectations⁸ to help those responsible for commissioning services (for example, services to provide support to victims and survivors) in this area to do this effectively. We recognise that men and boys are also affected by these crimes which is why in 2019 we published the first men and boys position paper⁹. We will publish a new position paper later this year.

⁸ The National Statement of Expectations is a public document explaining the actions local areas should take to ensure victims of violence against women and girls get the help they need. The Government will update and publish a refreshed statement in 2021. [Violence against women and girls: national statement of expectations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-against-women-and-girls-national-statement-of-expectations)

⁹ [Male victims position paper \(March 2019\) \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/male-victims-position-paper)

While domestic abuse is reflected throughout this Strategy, specific commitments relating to the response to domestic abuse and the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 will be reflected in the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Strategy. The Domestic Abuse Strategy will also be informed by the Call for Evidence and will share the same strategic objectives as this Strategy. Domestic abuse is a major form of violence against women and girls; the most recent statistics show that there were 2.3 million victims of this crime in the last year, and the social and economic costs have been estimated to be £66 billion (about £74 billion in today's prices)¹⁰. In addition, in the year ending March 2020 there were 114 recorded domestic homicides, 18% of all homicides of victims aged 16 and over recorded in that year¹¹. The high prevalence and high harm of domestic abuse warrants a dedicated approach.

This Strategy complements and is complemented by wider work across Government to tackle violence against women and girls, including the Government's End-to-End Rape Review, the cross-Government Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, the Ministry of Justice's Concordat on women in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System, and forthcoming Victims' Bill consultation, the Women's Health Strategy, the National Disability Strategy, and the Hate Crime Strategy.

Geographic Scope

The elements of this Strategy which relate to crime, policing and justice apply to both England and Wales. The elements relating to health, social care, and education are devolved to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and therefore apply to England only.

¹⁰ [The economic and social costs of domestic abuse - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

¹¹ Home Office Homicide Index, [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

Executive Summary and Ambition

“I do not accept that violence against women and girls is inevitable, and this Government is determined to bring about real and lasting change.”

Home Secretary, Priti Patel

The Government’s Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy follows the Government’s previous 2010, 2016 and 2019 Strategies which set out our approach to tackling crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls. This year, the extent to which violence against women and girls exists has been brought to the forefront of the nation’s attention. We have seen reports to domestic abuse helplines increase in the context of COVID-19; we have read about tragic cases such as the deaths of Sarah Everard, Balvinder Gahir, Bibaa Henry, Julia James, Khloemae Loy, Nicole Smallman, Libby Squire; and girls and women everywhere have shared their personal experiences of sexual abuse via the ‘Everyone’s Invited’ website, leading to an urgent Ofsted review in schools and colleges. The Government is determined to build on this awareness and momentum for change.

The very existence of violence against women and girls is a problem for all of society. These abhorrent crimes can change the course of a victim’s life, their experiences and their future. Sadly, they are also far too prevalent. And when individuals do become victims, accessing support can involve long waiting lists and limited support, reporting can mean not being believed, and seeking justice when there is not an admission of guilt by the offender can sometimes entail a lengthy delay until the trial takes place. In addition, agencies beyond those in the criminal justice system are also not always working in unity to prevent and address violence against women and girls. The Call for Evidence highlighted numerous problems that this Government is determined to address.

Ambition

Following the recent enactment of our ground breaking Domestic Abuse Act 2021, this Strategy and our forthcoming complementary strategy on domestic abuse provide a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls, and improve the support and response for victims and survivors. Our ambition is:

- Firstly, to **increase support for victims and survivors**, through ensuring they have access to quality support appropriate to their needs (as measured through increased funded support services);

- Secondly, building on increases we have seen in reporting to the police for some of these crimes, we want an **increase in the number of perpetrators brought to justice** (including for rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, and ‘honour’-based abuse including female genital mutilation and forced marriage). This will be measured via police recorded crime and court data¹². In addition, given the under-reporting of these crimes, the Government wants to see an **increase in reporting to the police** (as measured by Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime) and **increased victim engagement with the police and wider public service response**. We specifically want to reduce the proportion of victims of these crimes withdrawing from criminal justice proceedings and increase public confidence in the system (measured by police recorded crime and criminal justice agency reporting data); and
- Thirdly, the Government’s long-term fundamental ambition must be nothing less than to **reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls**. We will achieve this by preventing more of these crimes in the first place and by identifying more of the crimes that we do not prevent. In the long term, we want to see a decrease in the number of victims experiencing these crimes in each year (measured through reporting in the Crime Survey in England and Wales, which includes information on the prevalence of crimes such as rape and other sexual offences and stalking).

This Strategy sets out a cross-Government approach with an ambitious package of activity to help achieve this ambition and ensure everyone plays their part in preventing and identifying these crimes, creating the safety that we all deserve. Everyone has the right to go about their lawful business and not be subject to violence or other criminality. This Strategy complements wider work across Government to tackle other key priorities, including homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime.

Prioritising Prevention

“More needs to be done to prevent women and girls becoming victims...more done about the perpetrators, education about consent, boundaries, a change at societal level” - Call for Evidence, Public Survey

We must address the attitudes and behaviour that can underpin crimes of violence against women and girls as part of our approach to tackling them. To do this, more needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding of them across the public and among professionals, and to make sure more of our children and young people understand what healthy relationships and behaviour look like. More also needs to be done to better understand what works to prevent the cycle of abuse.

¹² For forms of violence against women and girls where we lack police recorded crime or court data (e.g., sexual harassment), we will use alternative data sources and proxy measures (e.g. use of support services) to monitor progress.

The Government has already taken action to prevent these crimes, including making Relationships Education compulsory in all primary schools, Relationships and Sex Education mandatory in all secondary schools, and Health education compulsory in all state funded schools. We also know that crime is often heavily concentrated, and we know that through targeted improvements to the environment it is possible to both prevent crime and improve feelings of safety. That is why we have invested in the Safer Streets Fund, which enables Police and Crime Commissioners and local authorities to bid for investment in initiatives, such as street lighting and home security. We are investing a further £25 million in the Safer Streets Fund to enable local areas to put in place innovative crime prevention measures to ensure women and girls feel safe in public spaces.

Key additional actions the Government will take forward to help prevent violence against women and girls include:

- A **national communications campaign** focused on raising awareness of violence against women and girls and creating behaviour change;
- The Home Office will invest £3 million to better understand **what works to prevent violence against women and girls**;
- To help ensure women feel safe in public places, the Home Office is launching a **£5 million Safety of Women at Night Fund** focused on the prevention of violence against women and girls in public spaces at night, building on the additional £25 million already invested in the Safer Streets Fund;
- The Home Office will also **pilot a tool, StreetSafe, which will enable the public to anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe** and identify what about the location made them feel this way. The data will be used to inform local decision-making; and
- The Department for Education will **better support teachers** to deliver the recently introduced Relationships, Sex and Health education curriculum, as well as explore how we can use young people, such as university students, to support this.

Supporting Victims

“Support services are vital. I would never [have] been able to overcome the abuse without specialised support. Some helplines were really hard to access. We need more services and investment as it took me days of trying to call all the time to get through” - Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

The Government is continuing to make record investment so that victims and survivors are supported with more than £300 million being invested this year to ensure this. This includes £27 million to recruit more Independent Sexual and Domestic Violence Advisers who provide advice and support for victims.

In addition, to make sure that victims know what they can expect from the police, Crown Prosecution Service, courts and other criminal justice organisations, we introduced a revised Victims' of Crime Code of Practice (Victims' Code) which came into effect in April 2021.

We have already committed to significant additional action; the Ministry of Justice will launch a Victims' Bill consultation to keep victims at the heart of our work to tackle crime and will also publish a new Victim Funding Strategy to improve the way that this funding is managed across Government. Key additional actions the Government will take forward to help further build on this and ensure victims and survivors of violence against women and girls get the support they deserve include:

- The Home Office will provide £1.5 million **funding to further increase provision for 'by and for' services and to further increase funding for valuable specialist services** such as the 'revenge porn' helpline;
- To ensure students and young people are supported, the Department for Education will work with the Office for Students to **tackle sexual harassment and abuse in higher education (including universities)** and will **review options to limit use of Non-Disclosure Agreements in cases of sexual harassment in higher education**; and
- NHS England and NHS Improvement are **developing local 'pathfinder' projects for enhanced trauma-informed mental health support for sexual abuse victims and survivors** with the most complex needs.

Pursuing Perpetrators

"If perpetrators aren't punished quickly and severely, women will never feel safe and will never feel confident [in supporting police action against them]" – Call for Evidence, Nationally Representative Survey

These are some of the most hidden and complex crimes in our society, and we know that abusers exploit this. This Government wants to see perpetrators of these abhorrent crimes ruthlessly pursued and brought to justice in the same way as perpetrators of any other crime.

This Strategy builds on recent work to help drive this change, including the Government's End-to-End Rape Review¹³(the Rape Review') which sets out a range of action to transform the criminal justice response to this crime - including an additional £3.2 million to pilot further work to improve rape investigations and prosecutions through Operation Soteria – and the Home Office's £11.1 million fund for programmes for domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators. In addition, through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill the Government is bringing forward a range of measures such as changing the arrangements for serious violent and sex offenders so that they serve longer in prison and making changes to strengthen the management of sex offenders and those who pose a risk of sexual harm.

¹³ [End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544444/End-to-End-Rape-Review-Report-on-Findings-and-Actions.pdf)

Key additional actions the Government will take forward to make sure that the right laws are in place and that law enforcement have the tools they need to bring perpetrators to justice include:

- The Home Office will **appoint an independent reviewer to review the police management of registered sex offenders in the community** and will provide new investment for the National Crime Agency to develop new methods of identifying serial sex offenders from existing data. The Government will also take forward **work looking at the escalation of sexual offending**;
- The Department for Health and Social Care will work to **criminalise ‘virginity testing’**, which some women and girls are being forced to undergo, to send a clear message that this practice is wholly unacceptable in our society;
- The Home Office is working with the College of Policing and others to produce new advice on existing laws for police officers to **more effectively respond to street harassment** and **to better understand the effectiveness of existing offences in tackling the issue of sex for rent**, and to ensure that proper use is consistently made of tools such as Stalking Protection Orders; and
- The Government is **carefully considering the recommendations of the Law Commission’s review of abusive and harmful online communications** which was commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport and recommends a range of new offences, including a new threatening communications offence and a new offence of cyberflashing.

Strengthening the System

“Most of the resource and most of the connections between organisations are very much focused on the victim/survivor and picking up the pieces. But what you see is a lack of connection, a lack of understanding around perpetrators, and also for children. That whole picture is really not present.” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

Tackling these crimes requires a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach. There should be no facet of life where violence and abuse are allowed to occur – at home, at work, at school, online, or on the streets. A ‘whole system’ approach means different professionals and agencies (including criminal justice professionals, as well as teachers, health and social care professionals and others), local and national Government, charities, and others all working together to tackle violence against women and girls. Partnerships at a local and regional level should be striving to ensure better joint working and more effective interventions.

Phase one of the Home Secretary-commissioned report by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) into policing's approach to female victims of violence against women and girls was published in July 2021¹⁴. The inspectorate found that, while progress has been made, it is still the case that urgent and significant action is needed across all agencies to protect women and girls.

The Government has already committed to action in this area. The Home Office and Ministry of Justice are investing £8.1 million to develop a new system, MAPPS, which will help improve the risk management of all offenders managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) (including registered sex offenders and domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators who are managed under MAPPA), and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill includes measures to further strengthen the legal framework for information-sharing between MAPPA partners. In addition, the Government has put in place a range of multi-agency guidance for education, healthcare, and the police. The serious violence duty we are introducing through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will help ensure agencies work together more effectively to tackle serious violence.

Key additional actions the Government will take forward to help make sure organisations and individuals work together effectively to tackle violence against women and girls include:

- The Home Office will work with the police to **introduce a National Policing Lead for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls**. They will drive forward the policing approach and action following HMICFRS's inspection;
- The Home Office will **review the disclosure and barring regime**, which helps ensure employers make safer recruitment decisions and that unsuitable people are prevented from working with vulnerable groups, including children;
- To help ensure women and girls are safe on our public transport, the Department for Transport will appoint a **new Violence Against Women and Girls Transport Champion**; and
- To make sure that we are continuing to build understanding of these crimes, who they happen to, and who commits them, we will work across Government to **improve data, and in turn improve understanding, of these crimes**.

Change will not happen overnight, but by delivering the action set out in this Strategy and continuing to take forward work across Government and beyond, we are confident we can achieve it.

¹⁴ [Radical action needed to tackle crime epidemic against women and girls - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls

“I have had to change the way I live” – Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

The term ‘violence against women and girls’ covers a range of crimes, with the common theme that they disproportionately affect women and girls. The most recent statistics show that 1 in 5 women are victims of sexual assault (or attempted assault) in their lifetime (5% of victims are men)¹⁵, over 27% of women had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 (14% of men)¹⁶, and 20% of women aged 16-74 had experienced stalking since the age of 16 (10% of men)¹⁷.

The most prominent impacts of crimes including stalking, sexual offences, domestic abuse and female genital mutilation (FGM) which the Home Office has identified through the Call for Evidence and wider literature include:

- a **detrimental effect on mental health**: this may be short or long-term and could include anger and frustration, decreased self-esteem, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and a loss of identity. For example, research conducted by Sussex Stalking Support and the National Centre for Cyberstalking Research at the University of Bedfordshire (in conjunction with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust) found that as many as 91% of victims of stalking involved in the research reported suffering from mental health problems after being stalked¹⁸;
- **physical harm**: victims of these crimes have been found to experience poorer physical health outcomes. Evidence suggests that women and girls who have been victims of these crimes engage in poorer health behaviours, including smoking, substance misuse and poor eating habits, and crimes such as FGM can result in long-term physical health complications;
- **negative employment, educational and financial impacts**: violence against women and girls has been linked to having an impact on victim and survivors’ educational attainment, employment and income prospects due to being absent from school or work, being unable to find and keep employment, or being forced to incur debt. Evidence also suggests a link between a lack of financial independence and sustained levels of domestic abuse, where this can be a barrier to victims leaving an abusive situation. Domestic abuse is associated with a range of complex issues, including low income;
- **homelessness**: domestic abuse can lead to homelessness, either arising from victims losing their home due to a lack of income or from the fact many victims have to flee their home in order to find safety and escape an abusive situation;

¹⁵ [Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

¹⁶ [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁷ [Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ [Health Care Responses to Stalking: Implications and Recommendations | Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)

- **a negative impact on children and family:** being exposed to domestic abuse can affect a child's educational attainment and mental health as well as increase the risk of engaging in risky behaviours, such as smoking or substance use or violence victimisation and perpetration later in life. Evidence also suggests that children and young people immersed in county lines¹⁹ are likely to have experienced any combination of key adverse childhood experiences such as substance abuse in the family, physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect, mental illness in the family, loss of a parent, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, an incarcerated family member and physical neglect²⁰. This suggests that exposure to domestic abuse can be a risk factor for county lines involvement, along with a number of other key factors. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims in their own right; and
- **making women feel less safe:** the most recent statistics show that only 24% of women felt very safe walking alone after dark (in comparison to 46% of men)²¹. However, the proportion of women reporting feeling fairly or very safe walking home after dark has increased in recent years, rising from 57% in 2012/13 to 69% in 2019/20.

“I am too scared to go outside in the dark. In winter this means I don't go outside at all except at the weekend, as I work full time. If I am at work and finish at 7pm and have to walk to my car, I'm scared... I have a car because I'm too scared to walk the streets – [if] you push for more people to use public transport...you need to make the journey to and from bus stops safe first” - Call for Evidence, Public Survey

As well as the significant impact on individuals, these crimes also have a damaging impact on wider society. For the estimated 122,000 rape offences in 2015/16, the Home Office estimated the total socio-economic cost to be £4.8 billion in 2015/16 (circa £5.5 billion in today's prices)²².

¹⁹ 'County lines' is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. More information on county lines is available at [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁰ ['Vulnerable' Kids Going Country: Children and Young People's Involvement in County Lines Drug Dealing - James Windle, Leah Moyle, Ross Coomber, 2020 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

²¹ [Estimates of proportions for how safe people feel walking alone after dark, by respondent sex, Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2020 - Office for National Statistics](#)

²² [Home Office. The economic and social costs of crime second edition.](#) Note the total costs uprated to 2021/22 prices only account for changes in inflation and do not consider other potential changes in prevalence and estimated unit costs of crime.

Due to its high prevalence and prolonged period of abuse, the total socio-economic costs of domestic abuse were estimated at £66 billion for the 1,946,000 estimated number of victims identified in England and Wales within 2016/17 (about £74 billion in today's prices)²³. Of that, the largest component was physical and emotional harms incurred by victims (£47 billion), particularly the emotional harms (fear, anxiety and depression) experienced by victims. Domestic homicide accounts for around a fifth of all homicides²⁴, and it is estimated that the cost of each homicide to society is £3.7 million (2021/22 prices)²⁵. Despite the wide range of costs included in these estimates, there are some impacts of these crimes that cannot be estimated due to the lack of available evidence or data. This includes the costs relating to the fear of crime, and costs to victims' families and communities.

Reporting to the police

“The police need to listen to victims of these crimes.” Call for Evidence, Public Survey

Crimes of violence against women and girls are still all too often hidden and go unreported to the police. For example, in the year ending March 2020, of the victims who had experienced rape (including attempted rape) since the age of 16, only 16% reported it to the police, with the main reasons for not reporting being ‘embarrassment’, that they ‘didn’t think the police could help’ or that they ‘thought it would be ‘humiliating’²⁶. The Government wants to ensure that more victims and survivors have confidence in the police and other agencies and feel able to report them, to help ensure that they receive appropriate support, more perpetrators are brought to justice, and action is taken to intervene as early as possible and prevent further offending.

We also recognise that there may be some cases where people are not aware they have experienced a crime.

Where a victim or survivor does come forward to report a crime, too many cases still do not progress through the criminal justice system, and many victims withdraw from the process. Research conducted as part of the Rape Review found that the most common reasons why rape victims withdraw from the process are: an increase in requests for personal digital information from mobile phones and social media, delays in investigative processes, strained relationships between different parts of the criminal justice system, a lack of specialist resources, and inconsistent support²⁷. Other reasons identified through the victim and survivor survey conducted as part of the Call for Evidence include wanting to move on, the length of the overall criminal justice process and a fear of further violence.

²³ [Home Office. The economic and social costs of domestic abuse.](#) ibid

²⁴ Home Office, Homicide Index. [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁵ [Home Office. The economic and social costs of crime second edition.](#) Costs cover all types of homicide. Note the costs updated to 2021/22 prices only account for changes in inflation and do not consider other changes in prevalence and unit costs.

²⁶ [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

²⁷ [End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

In addition, the recent inspection into the police response to violence against women and girls²⁸, commissioned by the Home Secretary in March 2021, has shown that significant reform to the response to these offences is needed. The inspection found that there is a need for immediate, urgent action across all agencies to better tackle these crimes and that it is still too often the case that there are inconsistencies, or even failures, in the support provided to victims and survivors.

We know that there are many hard working and dedicated police officers, prosecutors and others, including those working in charities, who do all they can to support victims and survivors. The Government wants to drive change so that the system does not let down either those who need support or those doing all they can to provide it and ensure justice is done.

For those victims who decide to continue, fewer cases of domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault are being charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and progressing to court. In 2019/20, 34% fewer domestic abuse cases were prosecuted compared to 2014/15²⁹, while the proportion of rape cases charged by the CPS fell from 57% in 2015/16 to 45% in 2019/20³⁰. The number of sexual offences prosecuted also fell by 36% and convictions by 40% between 2015 and 2020³¹.

Common reasons given in the Rape Review for the decline in cases charged, prosecuted and convicted included an increase in personal digital data being requested, delays in investigative processes, strained relationships between different parts of the criminal justice system, a lack of specialist resources and inconsistent support to victims. Some of these were echoed in the Call for Evidence where respondents said they believed fewer rape cases were reaching court because of delays to the process (including relating to COVID-19), as well as highlighting the role they believed the presence of myths and stereotypes related to violence against women and girls were having. To combat this, the Government is committed to taking action. As set out in the Rape Review, we will take a range of measures to drive improvements in case quality, timeliness and the engagement of victims throughout the criminal justice process.

²⁸ [Interim report: Inspection into how effectively the police engage with women and girls - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

²⁹ [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

³⁰ [CPS quarterly data summaries | The Crown Prosecution Service](https://www.cps.gov.uk)

³¹ [Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Public understanding and awareness

“Five years ago, people didn’t recognise the impact of domestic abuse like they do now. We have been raising awareness and keeping it in the public consciousness.” – Call for Evidence, Focus Group

Changing attitudes toward violence against women and girls is important if we are to continue to make progress in tackling these crimes. The public survey explored the public’s understanding of violence against women and girls and gave an insight into how well these issues are recognised and understood within society. The majority of survey participants recognised the range of acts that can be a crime in this area, however, recognition was generally lower for those relating to controlling or coercive behaviour³² (than other forms of domestic abuse) and harassment.

Despite this finding from the public survey, many of the victim and survivor survey respondents highlighted that they did not recognise what had happened to them as abuse, or as a crime.

Demographics

Sadly, we know that certain groups are more likely to be victims of these crimes. For example, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that amongst adults aged 16 to 74 in the year ending March 2020, disabled people were more than twice as likely to have been victims of domestic abuse, stalking or rape than people without a disability³³. In addition, when considering sexual orientation, gay, lesbian or bisexual people were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than heterosexual people.³⁴ This was also the case for stalking, sexual violence and rape.

Age can also increase likelihood of victimisation. For domestic abuse, sexual assault, rape and stalking those aged 16-19 and 20-24 were more likely to be victims of these crimes than any other age group. This difference across age groups is particularly apparent for sexual assault, where 12.9% of women aged 16-19 and 10.5% of women aged 20-24 had been a victim in the last year compared to 3.2% of women aged 25-34, the next highest group. Prevalence decreased as age increased³⁵.

³² For example, only 55% of the nationally representative sample agreed ‘a romantic partner controlling what their partner wears’ would be a crime.

³³ [Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#); [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#); [Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁴ Terminology used here reflects that used in the CSEW. [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics - Appendix tables](#)

³⁵ [Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

The link between victimisation and ethnicity has also been explored in other research, with some studies seeming to indicate that ethnic minorities may be at a heightened risk of victimisation of child sexual exploitation³⁶, and of intimate partner sexual violence³⁷. It is difficult to disentangle ethnicity from socio-economic status and other contributing factors, meaning these findings need to be interpreted with caution. Increased prevalence amongst some ethnic minority groups was also evident, for example, those identifying as being of mixed ethnicity were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than other ethnic groups; those identifying as black/black British were more likely to be a victim of sexual assault and those identifying as being of an 'other ethnic group' were most likely to be victims of stalking than other ethnic groups. Rape was the only crime captured by the CSEW that showed white people were more likely to be victims³⁸.

In addition, a common theme raised during the focus groups and via written submissions related to the increased risk of victimisation faced by some migrant women. Whilst the CSEW does not capture data on domestic abuse and immigration status, we are aware of the additional risks that this group may face and have launched the 'Support for Migrant Victims' pilot scheme to provide support for migrant victims of domestic abuse who do not have access to public funds.

The Government will build on the commitments in our Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy and the Rape Review to better understand offence, offender, and victim characteristics, to help inform efforts to prevent offending and to pursue perpetrators, helping guide both operational and strategic decisions to protect the public, including through our National Crime and Justice Laboratory with its aim of providing insight into crime problems and identifying effective solutions to enable the criminal justice system and its partners to reduce and prevent crime and improve criminal justice outcomes. In addition, through the forthcoming National Disability Strategy the Government will make practical changes to help strengthen disabled people's ability to participate fully in society and to level up opportunity so everyone can reach their potential and participate fully in life in this country.

³⁶ Franchino-Olsen, H., 2021. Vulnerabilities Relevant for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Systematic Review of Risk Factors. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 22(1), pp. 99-111; Laird, J., Klettke, B., Hall, K., Clancy, E., Hallford, D., 2020. Demographic and Psychosocial Factors Associated with Child Sexual Exploitation: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Network Open*, 3(9).

³⁷ Martin, E., Taft, C., Resick, P., 2007. A review of marital rape. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 12(3), pp. 329-347.

³⁸ Terminology relating to ethnicity reflects the terms used in the CSEW. [Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk); [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

Trends in violence against women and girls³⁹

The CSEW provides the best available estimate of prevalence for a number of violence against women and girls crimes, namely: domestic abuse, stalking, rape (including assault by penetration), indecent exposure and unwanted touching. Data shows that the prevalence of these crimes has remained broadly the same since 2008/09. However, the CSEW does not include information relating to any other forms of violence against women and girls. As such, our understanding of the prevalence of crimes such as ‘revenge porn’, ‘honour’-based abuse, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage is limited.

Police data provides us with some understanding of these wider crime types. However, it only captures crimes which have been reported to and recorded by the police and so does not give us a measure of prevalence. The police have made significant improvements to the way they record crimes, and we are encouraged that more victims and survivors have had the confidence to come forward to report ‘hidden’ offences like domestic and sexual abuse⁴⁰, which are often not reported to the police.

Rape and sexual violence

Sexual assaults measured by the CSEW combine rape (including attempts), assault by penetration (including attempts), indecent exposure and unwanted sexual touching experienced by people aged over 16. 1.8% of adults aged 16 to 74 (equivalent to 773,000 people) had been a victim of sexual assault in the last year; 2.9% of women and 0.7% of men. In the same year, there were 139,000 victims of rape (including attempts), 132,000 of whom were women. This is equivalent to a prevalence rate of 0.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 (0.8% of women and 0.01% of men)⁴¹. Over the past 15 years, the prevalence of sexual assault in the last year among the adult population aged 16 to 59 years has fluctuated between 1.5% and 3.0%, with a decrease in the latest year, however, the prevalence of rape or assault by penetration has remained stable over this time.

Police recorded crime includes a broader range of sexual offences⁴² than measured in the CSEW and includes offences against both adults and children. In 2020, the police recorded 151,059 sexual offences, of which 55,632 were rape offences. Sexual offences recorded by the police have seen substantial increases since 2011/12 with numbers of offences recorded tripling⁴³.

³⁹ CSEW data presented in this section refers to year to March 2020 unless otherwise specified.

⁴⁰ This means that the number of crimes reported to, and recorded by the police has risen, however, this does not necessarily show that the number of these crimes taking place have increased.

⁴¹ [Sexual offences in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-in-the-uk/crime-and-justice/articles-and-features/sexual-offences-in-england-and-wales-overview)

⁴² Sexual offences recorded by the police are grouped into two main categories; rape and other sexual offences. The other sexual offences category covers a broader range of offences than the CSEW, for example, sexual assault, sexual exploitation of children, incest and sexual grooming. Given the broader range of offences covered in police recorded crime and other differences described in this section, these figures are not directly comparable with the estimates from the CSEW.

⁴³ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-in-the-uk/crime-and-justice/articles-and-features/crime-in-england-and-wales)

Despite prevalence estimates remaining stable and police recorded crime numbers increasing in recent years, some stakeholders participating in the Call for Evidence perceived sexual violence to still be vastly underreported, in particular amongst men, older victims and victims from different ethnic backgrounds, with many victims fearing disbelief.

Sexual and other forms of harassment

There is no reliable national data on the specific context, location or type of harassment that occurs. A nationally representative survey commissioned by the Government Equalities Office found that in the last 12 months 20% of women had experienced unwanted sexual comments. Furthermore, 6% had experienced being followed or threatened, and 14% had experienced unwanted non-sexual touching.

Respondents to all aspects of the Home Office's Call for Evidence believed that physical and sexual, verbal, emotional and online harassment were particularly prevalent. 44% of the respondents to the nationally representative survey thought sexual harassment was more common now than five years ago (35% thought it was about the same, 10% that it happened less, with the rest not sure)⁴⁴. Some participants in the focus groups said they felt sexual harassment needs to be taken more seriously, a point echoed in some of the written submissions.

While it only covers incidents reported to the police, police recorded crime data show that in 2020 the police recorded 219,661 harassment offences and 4,810 racially or religiously aggravated harassment offences. It is not possible from the data to identify the types of harassment being recorded by the police.

Stalking

“We have to start raising a generation of people that know stalking is up there amongst the most serious crimes, they can identify it and they know they are going to be met with the seriousness required for their experiences.” – Call for Evidence, Focus Group

Data from the CSEW shows that 4% of adults aged 16-59 experienced stalking in the last year – equivalent to 1.3 million victims - 892,000 women and 443,000 men. Prevalence of stalking has increased slightly in recent years; however, it is significantly lower than in 2004/05 when an estimated 7.8% of adults aged 16 to 59 (equivalent to 2.4 million victims) had experienced stalking in the last year⁴⁵.

In 2020, 81,955 stalking offences were recorded by the police⁴⁶. Unlike some other forms of violence against women and girls, the number of defendants prosecuted and convicted for stalking offences has increased in recent years⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Percentages were higher in the open public survey – 61% in Phase 1 and 69% in Phase 2.

⁴⁵ [Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/crimeandjustice/articles/stalking-findings-from-the-crime-survey-for-england-and-wales-2019-2020/2019-12-10)

⁴⁶ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/crimeandjustice/articles/crime-in-england-and-wales-2020/2020-12-10)

⁴⁷ [Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2020)

Those participating in the Call for Evidence focus groups thought there was a lack of understanding of stalking behaviours amongst victims and police which may be resulting in an underestimation of its real prevalence and under-reporting to the police. Online forms of stalking were perceived to be increasing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

‘Honour’-based abuse, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage

Understanding the prevalence of ‘honour’-based abuse⁴⁸, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, is challenging as there is limited information. However, a 2009 Government-commissioned study on forced marriage (using data from ten local authorities, Karma Nirvana and the Government’s Forced Marriage Unit) estimated the national prevalence of reported cases of forced marriage in England to be between 5,000 and 8,000 cases (including those involving threats to force someone into marriage)⁴⁹. Home Office-funded research conducted by City University London in 2015 estimated 137,000 women and girls with FGM, born in countries where it is practised, were permanently resident in England and Wales in 2011.

In addition, there are several data sources which, whilst they cannot be used to measure prevalence, can provide additional insights into these crimes:

- Data from the Forced Marriage Unit show that between January and December 2020 the Unit gave advice or support in 759 cases related to possible forced marriage⁵⁰;
- Ministry of Justice data show that, to date, over 2,800 Forced Marriage Protection Orders and almost 700 FGM Protection Orders have been made since their respective introductions in 2008 and 2015⁵¹;
- Experimental statistics from the Home Office show 2,024 ‘honour’-based abuse offences were recorded by the police in 2019/20⁵²; and
- Between April 2015 and March 2021, 27,255 women and girls who had undergone FGM have been seen at NHS services in England where FGM was relevant to their attendance⁵³.

⁴⁸ ‘Honour’-based abuse’ is defined as “an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour”.

⁴⁹ This estimate does not include cases that were not reported and so likely underestimates the true prevalence [Forced marriage: prevalence and service response \(natcen.ac.uk\)](https://natcen.ac.uk/forced-marriage-prevalence-and-service-response/)

⁵⁰ [Forced Marriage Unit statistics 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020)

⁵¹ [Family Court Statistics Quarterly: October to December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2020)

⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020>.

⁵³ [Female Genital Mutilation - NHS Digital](https://www.nhs.uk/digital-forensics/female-genital-mutilation) Where information about when their FGM took place is known, most of these women and girls were under 18 when they underwent FGM. In most cases there is a long gap from when the FGM was undertaken, to when information on that FGM was collected by the NHS. [This is because FGM is most often seen by the NHS when an individual with FGM attends a maternity or obstetric clinic, years later, as an adult]

Respondents to the nationally representative survey carried out as part of the Home Office Call for Evidence generally thought the prevalence of these crimes had not increased compared to five years ago. People working on violence against women and girls issues who participated in the focus groups also thought there had been no significant changes in the prevalence of these offences in the last five years.

Domestic abuse

The CSEW shows that 5.5% of adults aged 16-74 had been victims of domestic abuse in the last year (equivalent to 2.3 million victims). This equates to 7.3% of women and 3.6% of men. While there has been a decline in the prevalence of domestic abuse since 2011/12, this crime remains highly prevalent when compared to the prevalence other crimes⁵⁴.

There were 758,941 domestic-abuse-related crimes recorded by the police in 2019/20, equating to 15% of all crimes recorded by the police that year. The vast majority (79%) of these offences were violence against the person-related crimes⁵⁵. The number of domestic-abuse-related crimes recorded by the police has increased year on year since 2015/16.

Violence against women and girls in public places

“There needs to be greater recognition that women and girls often feel unsafe on the streets, especially at night or in parks or on commons etc. This is outrageous. These are our streets, parks, commons...”- Call for Evidence, Nationally Representative Public Survey

A large proportion of these offences happen within the victim’s or offender’s home, in particular domestic abuse and rape. However, many victims also experience violence against women and girls in public spaces - for example, 37% of rape offences were reported to be outside the victim or offender’s home⁵⁶. The responses to the Call for Evidence, in particular the respondents to the Phase 2 survey, highlighted concerns about women and girls’ safety in public places in relation to public forms of harassment. Other evidence supports this. For example, a survey conducted by Plan International UK in 2018 showed that as many as 38% of young girls aged 14 to 21 have experienced verbal harassment, including sexual comments in public places, at least once a month. In addition, a YouGov poll found 37% of adult women on London transport had experienced someone ‘deliberately pressing against them’ compared to 12% of men, and that 22% of women had a ‘sexual statement directed against them’ (7% of men⁵⁷). CSEW data shows that 31% of women felt unsafe walking alone after dark (in comparison to 13% of men)⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

⁵⁵ [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics - Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

⁵⁶ [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

⁵⁷ [Most women have been sexually harassed on London public transport | YouGov](https://www.yougov.com)

⁵⁸ [Estimates of proportions for how safe people feel walking alone after dark, by respondent sex, Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2020 - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

The CSEW also shows that young people are more likely to experience rape or serious sexual assault in a public space compared to their older counterparts. 9% of those aged 16 to 19 years who experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 were victimised in a park or open public space compared to 2% of victims aged 25-34⁵⁹.

Violence against women and girls perpetrated online

We know that new forms of violence against women and girls are continuously emerging, particularly online. We also know that crimes which take place online can have additional considerations – for example, it may be easier for the perpetrator to remain unknown or for them to carry out their abuse from any location. In 2017, Amnesty International and Ipsos Mori conducted a survey relating to online abuse or harassment of women aged 18-55 years in the UK, US, New Zealand, Spain, Italy, Poland, Sweden and Denmark.⁶⁰ It found that in the UK a total of 21% of respondents had experienced abuse or harassment online at least once (the average was 23% across the countries, ranging from 17% to 30%). A further breakdown of results shows that 18% of these women said that they had received abuse or harassment from a current or former partner, and 59% that they had received abuse from someone that they did not know personally at all. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse found that girls are more likely than boys to be victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse.⁶¹

The majority (75%) of respondents to the nationally representative survey element of the Call for Evidence thought online forms of violence against women and girls were more common now than five years ago (93% of respondents to the open public survey thought the same). However, there is limited data available on the prevalence of violence against women and girls online to confirm this perception.

Prostitution and sex work

“Sometimes we see men who are violent who started off with violence against a sex worker, because that’s seen as less serious, or easier.” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

We know that prostitution and sex work can lead to the exploitation of women and involve sex trafficking and modern slavery. It also may lead to harms arising from the inherent vulnerabilities involved (such as the increased risk of robbery, sexual assault or, for online activity, the risk of images being recorded and used without consent).

⁵⁹ [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁶⁰ [Online abuse and harassment](#)

⁶¹ [The Internet: Investigation Report \(iicsa.org.uk\)](https://iicsa.org.uk)

There is limited information on the prevalence of prostitution and sex work. Research conducted by University of Bristol on behalf of the Home Office in 2019 attempted to assess the prevalence of those involved. It highlighted that estimating prevalence is challenging as many existing studies focus on specific types of prostitution and sex work (for example, street-based or online), meaning they are not inclusive of all prostitutes and sex workers. The research referenced various studies which have attempted to estimate the number of prostitutes and sex workers, with numbers ranging from 35,882 to 104,964 depending on the methods used. These estimates, and other future estimates, are likely to underestimate the number of people involved in prostitution and sex work given the hidden nature and the fact many trafficked and exploited people will not be counted⁶².

We know from existing research with prostitutes and sex workers, and via information shared during the focus groups and written submissions, that many will not report crimes against them due to concerns around stigma and being blamed (see for example Hester et al, 2019⁶³).

The impact of COVID-19

Evidence shared via the Call for Evidence's written submissions raised the role that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions have played in relation to the potential for increases in instances of violence against women and girls. Several submissions gave views that for some forms there had been an increase in prevalence but also an increase in severity during the pandemic. For example, it was suggested by some that the restrictions, or the risk of catching the virus, were being used by some domestic abuse perpetrators to further control and isolate their victims.

Some of the written submissions stated that the pandemic had disproportionately disadvantaged women, which could impact on the prevalence of crimes of violence against women and girls.

In addition, the written submissions highlighted the far-reaching impact of the pandemic in terms of a decline in referrals into children's services from safeguarding professionals, including police, teachers, and social workers, due to less contact during lockdown. One said that children's services in their geographical location reported that whilst the volume of referrals had reduced, the severity of abuse had increased.

Due to data gaps in CSEW because of the suspension of face-to-face interviews as a result of COVID-19, it is not possible to say with certainty whether there has been any significant overall change to the prevalence of violence against women and girls during the initial national lockdown or subsequent periods of COVID-19 restrictions⁶⁴. The level of domestic homicide does not appear to have been affected by the pandemic⁶⁵.

⁶² [Prostitution and Sex Work Report.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ [Estimates from CSEW are annual and currently not available due to suspension of face-to-face interviews.](#)

⁶⁵ [Review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic - HMICFRS](#)

However, there was a clear increase in demand for domestic abuse victim services during the pandemic. Between April and June 2020, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline logged a total of 40,397 calls and contacts on its database, a 65% increase compared with the first three months of 2020⁶⁶. While this increase in demand does not necessarily indicate a rise in the number of victims (given we are not able to identify who the calls were from, i.e. whether they were the same people calling several times) or whether they were in relation to new victimisation, it may also reflect a greater severity or complexity of abuse experienced by victims or more difficulty for victims in seeking respite. These increases were noted across a number of other support helplines.

In addition, unlike most other types of crime, police recorded domestic abuse-related offences increased between April and December 2020 (compared with the same period in 2019). Domestic abuse-related offences have risen by 7% in the April to December 2020 period (to 641,405 offences) compared with April to December 2019 (600,935 offences)⁶⁷. As the number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related has been increasing in recent years, it is not yet possible to determine what impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on the increases in 2020.

It is likely that overall trends in police recorded data are masking underlying changes in the incidence of domestic abuse between those who live together and those who do not. Analysis of Metropolitan Police Service data by the London School of Economics found that abuse by current partners and family members is found to have increased by 8.1% and 17.1% respectively while ex-partner abuse on the other hand, declined by 11.4%⁶⁸.

Globally, there is evidence that survivors of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence have struggled to access support and services, including essential sexual and reproductive health services, due to resources being diverted to deal with the pandemic⁶⁹.

⁶⁶ [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶⁷ [Crime in England and Wales: Other related tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶⁸ [Changing patterns of domestic abuse during COVID lockdown - Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics](#)

⁶⁹ [Now and the Future – Pandemics and Crisis Report](#)

Prioritising Prevention

“More needs to be done to prevent women and girls becoming victims, i.e. more done about the perpetrators, education about consent, boundaries, a change at societal level.” - Call for Evidence, Public Survey

To prevent violence against women and girls we need to address the root causes of the problem. This term covers a wide range of crimes, and the underlying reasons for why they occur are many and varied. International evidence shows that no single factor causes violence and there is no single route to how people become perpetrators of these crimes. The consensus in the literature is that a complex interplay of factors influences the likelihood of violence against women and girls occurring, including individual, interpersonal, and community factors⁷⁰. Most research focuses on violence perpetrated by men against women in intimate partnerships, or domestic abuse, with fewer studies looking at other forms of violence against women and girls. The complex nature of these crimes means that the measures which need to be put in place to prevent them vary.

What we know

“Education has to start early, and it has to address boys/young men as well. All too often, responsibility falls upon the girls/young women to behave in a manner to protect themselves or discourage violence against them.” – Call for Evidence, Public Survey

There are a range of factors highlighted in existing evidence that can be linked to perpetrating violence against women and girls. The literature highlights that whilst younger males can be more likely to perpetrate violence against women and girls, there are many other factors influencing whether someone might commit these crimes, including: having a criminal history, having a lower level of education, having peers who endorse sexual violence, low socio-economic status, neighbourhood deprivation, and societal norms that condone violence and gender inequality. People who have experienced child abuse, who have substance misuse needs or mental health problems may also be more likely to be involved in violence, although the relationship between violence, trauma and mental health is complex and experiencing any of these factors does not mean violence will occur⁷¹.

Whilst the factors that contribute to violence against women and girls are complex, the risk of it occurring in the first place has been linked to attitudes toward gender roles, both at an individual and societal level. At an individual level, large-scale multinational studies such as the International Men and Gender Equality Survey have identified inequitable gender beliefs and permissive attitudes about violence against women as important risk factors for male perpetration of violence⁷².

⁷⁰ Heise, LL. Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework. *Violence Against Women*. 1998;4(3):262-290.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Risk Factors for Men's Lifetime Perpetration of Physical Violence against Intimate Partners: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Eight Countries. *PLOS ONE* 10(5): e0126676.

In terms of over-arching social norms, societies that condone violence and inequality are associated with an increased risk of violence against women and girls⁷³. Effective prevention must include early intervention to attempt to influence these values in childhood and adolescence, as well as shifting social norms to become less accepting of violence and inequality.

When asked which of several options they thought should be the highest priorities for the Government in tackling all forms of violence against women and girls most respondents (33% nationally representative, 31% Phase 1, 45% Phase 2) selected “more action to prevent violence against women and girls from happening, for example, education programmes in schools to teach children about these crimes” as the highest-ranking option.

In addition, in free text responses, many respondents to the victim and survivor survey spoke about the need for children to be educated about healthy relationships and consent, all the different types of violence against women and girls (including the less publicised or less easily identified forms such as controlling or coercive behaviour and ‘honour’-based abuse), the laws about these types of violence against women and girls, and how to access help if needed.

There’s work to be done on education to prevent it before even looking at the perpetrator picture.” – Call for Evidence, Focus Groups

The literature shows that educational interventions (at schools and universities) can be effective at changing attitudes towards violence against women and girls, but there is less evidence of whether and how this results in changes in behaviour or levels of violence. In order for educational interventions to be effective, it is essential for those teaching about these issues to have appropriate training and guidance.

The thousands of testimonies of abuse and harassment experienced in education settings, including higher education, posted on the ‘Everyone’s Invited’ website have highlighted the scope and scale of abuse that children and young people face. Following this, the Government asked Ofsted to carry out a review of safeguarding responses in state and independent schools and colleges in England in relation to sexual abuse. This confirmed how certain activity has become commonplace for some young people, such as receiving unsolicited nude images, sexist name-calling, and sexual assault. Incidents of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are so commonplace for some children and young people that they often see no point in reporting them.

The Ofsted review also found that incidents in school tend to be ‘lower-level’ sexual harassment, with other incidents tending to happen online, at parties or parks. Additionally, the report identified that only two in five young people said they would speak to someone at school about sexual abuse, and that school staff rely too heavily on children raising a concern. Inconsistencies in how schools see their role and understand what constitutes harmful sexual behaviour were identified.

⁷³ Alessandra Guedes, Sarah Bott, Claudia Garcia-Moreno & Manuela Colombini (2016) Bridging the gaps: a global review of intersections of violence against women and violence against children, Global Health Action, 9:1, DOI: [10.3402/gha.v9.31516](https://doi.org/10.3402/gha.v9.31516)

The report also highlighted issues regarding the operation of online companies which means pornography is easy to access and harmful sexual behaviour is harder to detect⁷⁴.

As well as highlighting the desire for increased education about these issues in schools, respondents to the Home Office Call for Evidence called for education through public awareness campaigns. Through all aspects of the consultation respondents highlighted how they deemed improving public awareness and understanding of violence against women and girls as key to preventing these crimes. In particular, respondents suggested there was a need for public awareness campaigns to include: consent and healthy relationships, available support, the nature of specific forms of violence against women and girls (such as sexual violence, female genital mutilation, and controlling or coercive behaviour), as well as to challenge myths and stereotypes and to aid perpetrators in recognising their own behaviour.

Awareness raising campaigns were seen as vital to address stigma, to encourage victims and survivors to seek support, to offer counter narratives to misogyny and normalisation of these crimes and to encourage more open discussion of them within society. There is some evidence that such campaigns can have the potential to change beliefs and attitudes which condone violence, however the impact they have on changing behaviours is less well established⁷⁵. Responses to the Call for Evidence also highlighted an interest in employers playing an active part in preventing violence against women and girls, as well as of the need for evidence-based perpetrator programmes to prevent re-offending.

The Call for Evidence showed a widespread consensus about the harmful role of violent pornography can play in violence against women and girls, with most respondents to the open public surveys and many respondents to the nationally representative survey agreeing that an increase in violent pornography has led to more people being asked to agree to violent sex acts (54% nationally representative, 79% Phase 1, 78% Phase 2), and to more people being sexually assaulted (50% nationally representative, 70% Phase 1, 71% Phase 2).

⁷⁴ [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

⁷⁵ [What Works in preventing violence against women and girls: review of the evidence from the programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk); Communicating about child sexual abuse with the public: learning the lessons from public awareness campaigns: Journal of Sexual Aggression: Vol 23, No 2; Microsoft Word - ed draft IPV-SV paper Dec 27 AB-cgm.doc (ndhealth.gov)

Existing evidence examining the relationship between pornography and attitudes supporting violence against women and girls suggests for some individuals there may be a link between watching - in particular violent - pornography and aggressive attitudes or behaviours towards women⁷⁶. Evidence also suggests that young people who watch pornography are more likely to have unrealistic attitudes about sex and to hold less progressive gender roles (e.g. male dominance and female submission)⁷⁷ with research drawing links between violent attitudes and exposure to violent media and pornography⁷⁸.

Prevention efforts must also target online forms of violence against women and girls and ensure safety in our public spaces. Focus group participants and the written submissions to the Call for Evidence also referenced new forms of these crimes emerging, and, in particular, online-facilitated abuse. Specific behaviour identified by stakeholders included monitoring of social media profiles, messages or emails, spreading lies or personal information online, and using GPS or spyware to track the location of victims. In addition, the majority of respondents in all parts of the public survey agreed that online forms of violence against women and girls are more common now than five years ago.

What works

Education initiatives have been shown to have promising effects on changing attitudes relating to violence against women and girls, but the evidence is limited on their effectiveness at reducing violence or changing perpetrator behaviour⁷⁹.

However, some longer-lasting interventions have been shown to have positive effects on reducing violence. For example, the 'Healthy Relationships' intervention trialled with 14-15 year olds in Canadian schools with a focus on gender roles, dating violence and non-aggressive problem solving found that children involved reported significantly less physical violence in their own dating relationships in follow-ups of up to two and a half years⁸⁰. Rigorous evaluations of several multi-agency programmes that work with perpetrators to reduce violence have shown very promising results in reducing perpetrator abuse, particularly in relation to domestic abuse.

⁷⁶ [The Relationship between Pornography use and Harmful Sexual Behaviours](#); Hald, G, Malamuth, N and Yuen, C, 2009, [Pornography and Attitudes Supporting Violence Against Women: Revisiting the Relationship in Nonexperimental Studies](#), *Aggressive Behaviour*, 35:1-7.; Wright, P.J., Tokunaga, R.S. and Kraus, A. (2016), A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies. *J Commun*, 66: 183-205. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12201>

⁷⁷ Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. (2013) "'It's wrong - but you get used to it": a qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England'. University of Bedfordshire.

⁷⁸ ["Basically... Porn is everywhere" \(mdx.ac.uk\)](#)

⁷⁹ Ellsberg M, Arango DJ, Morton M, Gennari F, Kiplesund S, Contreras M, Watts C. Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say? *Lancet*. 2015 April 18;385(9977):1555-66. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61703-7. Epub 2014 Nov 21. PMID: 25467575.

⁸⁰ Wolfe DA, Crooks C, Jaff e P, et al. A school-based program to prevent adolescent dating violence: a cluster randomized trial. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med* 2009; 163: 692–99; Wolfe DA, Wekerle C, Scott K, Straatman AL, Grasley C, Reitzel-Jaff e D. Dating violence prevention with at-risk youth: a controlled outcome evaluation. *J Consult Clin Psychol* 2003; 71: 279–91

An international What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls programme funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) in 15 countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East rigorously evaluated a range of preventative approaches. These included school-based programmes to change children's attitudes and norms in emerging economies, community activism to shift social norms, and economic empowerment with gender equality training. While these programmes have taken place in emerging economies and so their findings are not directly transferrable to England and Wales, they provide a promising evidence base to build upon in the UK. We will continue to share evidence and lessons domestically at home, as well as with other countries to support a more effective global response.

What we are already doing

Education

"I just think education is such a thing here, I remember PHSE lessons but I don't remember anything about this. I think the sex education stuff is vital." - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

We know we need long-term cultural and societal change to deal with this issue, which is why the Government is ensuring that Relationships, Sex and Health Education is designed so that young people develop an understanding of what healthy and mutually respectful relationships are. Important issues such as personal privacy, consent and challenging gender stereotypes are part of the Department for Education's existing guidance to make sure more young people have a better understanding of how to behave towards their peers, including online.

Relationships Education has been mandatory in all primary schools, Relationships and Sex Education in all secondary schools, and Health education in all state funded schools since September 2020. Relationships Education for primary pupils covers the characteristics of healthy relationships, building the knowledge and understanding that will enable children to model these behaviours. In secondary schools, the subject introduces concepts about healthy intimate relationships. The Department for Education's statutory guidance on this states that pupils should be taught about the concepts of, and laws relating to a range of areas including consent, exploitation, grooming, coercion, harassment, domestic abuse and female genital mutilation.

Further to this, the Department for Education has **updated the Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance** for schools and colleges to take into account views from its consultation on the statutory guidance, the Home Office's Call for Evidence, as well as findings from the Ofsted review. The revised guidance is due to come into force in September 2021 and will help ensure that all school and college staff are clear on how to deal with reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment, whether they occur inside or outside the school or college gates, or online. It will also ensure that all school and college staff understand how they can actively identify and respond effectively to all forms of abuse and neglect, including harmful sexual behaviour and peer-on-peer abuse, so that victims are confident action will be taken and both they, and perpetrators, will get the support they need.

Social Care

Child and family social workers play an essential role in tackling child sexual abuse. The Department for Education has committed, through the Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy published in January 2021, to **improve child and family social workers' ability to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse** by influencing pre and post qualification training and pathways. This will include working with Government-funded training programmes, working closely with Teaching Partnerships to improve training on this topic pre-qualification, ensuring that material is included in the National Assessment and Accreditation System, and exploring a roll-out of harms-specific training.

The Department for Education is also working with the Home Office to consider how to make resources and training on harmful sexual behaviours and sexual abuse available to both social workers and designated safeguarding leads. In addition, the Government is currently **providing £2 million for a tackling child exploitation support programme to help safeguarding partnerships in local areas to develop a strategic response to extra-familial harms** including child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation.

In addition, the Chief Social Worker for Adults has worked with sector partners to develop a transitional safeguarding publication with a focus on supporting children who continue to be at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation when they turn 18. There will be a webinar in September 2021 to build on the launch.

Online

“There should be wider recognition of online crimes by the police and law” – Call for Evidence, Public Survey

Preventing children and young people from being exposed to harmful online content both helps prevent them from developing harmful views and protects them from direct harm and abuse.

Online Safety Bill

The Government **published a draft Online Safety Bill** in May 2021 for pre-legislative scrutiny - a truly world-leading and much needed law which will make the UK the safest place to be online. The Online Safety Bill will give effect to the regulatory framework outlined in the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper, published in December 2020⁸¹.

⁸¹ [Online Harms White Paper: Full government response to the consultation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper)

Through the Online Safety Bill, companies will need to remove and limit the spread of illegal content. This means that there will be less illegal content online and that when it does appear it will be removed more quickly. This will include child sexual exploitation and abuse material. The Online Safety Bill will mean social media companies must keep promises to their users about their standards on harmful material. Where the abuse is illegal, all companies in scope of the legislation will need to take robust action to tackle it. They will need to take swift and effective action against harassment and threats directed at individuals.

The strongest protections in this framework will be for children. The Online Safety Bill will introduce a **new regulatory framework to help protect children online**. All companies covered by the legislation will need to consider whether their service is likely to be accessed by children and put in place extra protection for them. Companies will also need to do far more to protect children from being exposed to harmful content or activity such as grooming, bullying and pornography. Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, will set out the steps companies can take to protect children on their service so there will be a consistent approach. Companies will also be expected to take steps to **ensure that children are not able to access services which pose the highest risk of harm such as online pornography** and dating websites.

Companies will also need to provide age-appropriate protections for children using their service. This includes protecting them from harmful content and activity on their service and reviewing children's use of higher risk features such as live streaming or private messaging. This will capture both the most-visited pornography sites and, unlike previous legislation, pornography on social media. This covers the vast majority of sites where children are most likely to be exposed to pornography. Under the Government's proposals, to prevent children from accessing content which poses the highest risk of harm to them, **we expect companies to use measures that provide them with the highest confidence in the age of a user, for example, age verification**. If companies do not use age verification technology, they will be required to demonstrate that their alternative approach delivers the same level of protection for children.

We will also work to **ensure that technology companies are making their platforms safer for children and young people**. Some online harms, such as online abuse and harassment, can be countered through safer platform design. The Government's response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation highlighted the importance of platform design and committed to developing 'safety by design' guidance for companies. A safety by design approach, which embeds safety as a core consideration in the design and development of an online platform, has an important role to play in creating safer online spaces for women and girls. In June 2021, the Government published voluntary safety by design guidance for small and medium enterprises and start-ups that sets out clear principles and guidance to help companies make safer design choices⁸².

⁸² [Principles of safer online platform design - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/principles-of-safer-online-platform-design)

In addition, users will be able to report bullying and online harassment to platforms, and reporting mechanisms will need to be easy to navigate for child users. Users should expect to see platforms take appropriate action in response to reports including the removal of harmful content, sanctions against offending users, or changing their processes and policies to better protect their users.

Until the Online Safety Bill comes into effect, the Government has set out our expectations on companies in the Interim Code of Practice on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, which was published in December 2020⁸³. The Interim Code sets out a broad range of measures that companies are encouraged to implement now to address the breadth of these crimes online, including the livestreaming of child sexual abuse, the sharing of child abuse material and online grooming.

Safer online spaces

The Home Office has also funded a number of initiatives in light of heightened concerns about online harms during the pandemic, including through South West Grid for Learning and Internet Matters, to **develop a new online hub, specifically designed to decrease online abuse and raise awareness of its risks.**

In addition, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has published a **Media Literacy Strategy** and action plan to help empower people, including parents and children, and give them the skills and knowledge they need to make more informed and safer choices online. A collection of media literacy resources which signposts users to guidance, tools and advice to help citizens stay safe online is available on GOV.uk.

Internationally and at our borders

Internationally, the Government has worked through the G7 to tackle violence against women and girls globally. The Government invited Interior Ministers to work on a **G7 agreement on sharing of information and best practice on tackling existing and emerging online forms of these crimes**, including forms of online abuse. Foreign and Development Leaders and Heads of State committed to driving forward the 'three Es': educating girls, empowering women and ending violence against women and girls.

Violence against women and girls is a global challenge: it undermines poverty reduction, gender equality, conflict prevention and resolution. The Government is using our influence through international global fora to persuade others that prevention is possible, and to increase investment in proven approaches to prevent violence. In line with the Integrated Review, we are supporting Women's Rights Organisations and Movements to play their central role in ending violence against women and girls.

⁸³ [Online harms: interim codes of practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92422/online_harms_interim_codes_of_practice.pdf)

The UK continues to take a leading role to tackle gender-based violence in conflict and crisis including through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI). This year, the UK will be launching a new PSVI strategy and theory of change to increase the prosecution of perpetrators and to support survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The UK is a founding Board member of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. The partnership is driving the international movement to deliver Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 to end the violence, abuse and exploitation of children, including work to tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

This year, we will begin the implementation of ‘What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale’, the international successor programme to our ‘What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls 2014-2020’. This will expand proven approaches to prevent violence and pioneer new scalable interventions where evidence is lacking, such as for women with disabilities and adolescent girls. It will include rigorous evaluations of interventions to improve understanding of what works to prevent violence against women and girls at scale.

The UK is a founding Board member of the Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children (EVAC). The partnership is driving the international movement to deliver Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 to end the violence, abuse and exploitation of children, including work to tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Recognising the inherently transnational nature of online child sexual abuse, the Government works closely with global partners to strengthen protections against it around the world. This includes through the **Home Office’s investment in EVAC’s work to keep children safe online, as well as our permanent seat on the Board of the WePROTECT Global Alliance**, a global coalition to end online child sexual abuse which was funded and hosted by the Home Office at its inception and is now an independent organisation comprising governments, industry and civil society.

In September 2020, the **Government launched the UK Strategy: Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment within the Aid Sector**⁸⁴. This sets out the UK’s action – across all Government departments which deliver Official Development Assistance – to prevent sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment from occurring, and respond appropriately where it does. An action plan to specifically **combat transnational child sex offenders who target children abroad** has been published as part of the Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021, in line with the recommendation by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. This includes the Home Office commissioning the National Crime Agency to develop a list of countries at high risk from UK-based transnational child sex offenders to inform travel restrictions as part of civil orders, as well as work by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Interpol and the National Crime Agency to prevent perpetrators of sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment from working in the aid industry and ensure that there is no impunity for those that are apprehended.

⁸⁴ [UK strategy: safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment within the aid sector - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-strategy-safeguarding-against-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment-within-the-aid-sector)

The Istanbul Convention is a Council of Europe treaty which requires states to have in place a range of measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. The UK signed this landmark instrument in 2012 and we have been working hard to address the few remaining changes which we need to make in order to be in a position to ratify it. While we are and have for a long time been carrying out almost all of the requirements placed on us by the Convention, we do recognise the need to ratify it as soon as possible, not least to send a clear message about our commitment across all areas of violence against women and girls. The Government **remains committed to ratifying the Istanbul Convention**⁸⁵.

The Home Office's Border Force works with the police to identify those at risk and to help prevent female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and other harmful practices, such as breast ironing⁸⁶. These coordinated, multi-agency operations involve speaking to passengers, distributing leaflets, and identifying anyone at risk. They focus on raising public awareness, safeguarding victims, and identifying perpetrators travelling between the UK and countries of high prevalence for these crimes. In addition, the FDCO will **continue to support the Africa-led movement to end FGM**, including through its multi-year programme which commenced in 2019.

Ending child marriage

We know that forced marriage disproportionately affects women and girls, and - while existing tools and activity, such as Forced Marriage Protection Orders, have helped prevent this appalling practice - the Government remains committed to the goal of ending child marriage in this country. We also recognise the need to signal to other countries that child marriage is something which needs to be tackled.

Child marriage and having children too early in life can deprive children of important life chances, which is why the Government will **support raising the age of marriage and civil partnership in England and Wales from 16 to 18**, when an appropriate legislative vehicle becomes available, to help stamp out marriage of minors. The age of 18 is widely recognised as the age at which one becomes an adult, and at which full citizenship rights should be gained.

⁸⁵ [Ratification of the Council of Europe convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence - progress report 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸⁶ [Operation Limelight: instructions to police and Border Force staff - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Our public spaces

“We shouldn’t have to take a spare pair of flat shoes out with us on a night out, just so we can have the ability to run easier. We shouldn’t have to pretend to be on the phone, or actually call someone, just because we’re scared to walk down the street in case we get attacked. We shouldn’t have to change our route home, just so we are walking in street lights.” Call for Evidence - Public Survey

Safer streets

We should all feel safe to walk our streets, which is why the Home Office is **investing a further £25 million into the Safer Streets Fund** in 2021/22. This additional funding will enable local areas across England and Wales to put in place innovative crime prevention measures in the public domain, with a particular focus on ensuring women and girls are and feel safe in our public spaces, including:

- close working with Night-time Economy establishments;
- improving street lighting;
- increasing CCTV coverage so people think twice before committing a crime and can be identified and brought to justice more quickly;
- establishing Neighbourhood and Business Watch schemes to empower and support communities; and
- education and awareness raising activity in communities and institutions to change behaviours and attitudes.

The pilot nature of this additional round of Safer Streets Funding, reflecting a new primary focus on helping to combat these crimes, provides a valuable opportunity to build information and evidence to inform future funding and policy decisions. In addition, in July 2021, the Minister for Safeguarding hosted a **Summit bringing together representatives from across the hospitality sector, policing, and the violence against women and girls sector** with a focus on the safety of women and girls.

Safer transport

It is also critical that women and girls can use public transport safely. The British Transport Police (BTP) and Transport for London (TfL) have undertaken innovative new approaches to address sexual offending through their ‘Project Guardian’ and ‘Report IT to Stop It’ campaigns. This has led to the forming of the Sexual Harassment on Rail Steering Group which is working across the rail industry to address sexual offending. For example, BTP and the Department for Transport are developing further initiatives which give victims greater control over the entire reporting process by making it easier to access and more victim-centric, including ways in which to enable anonymous and confidential reporting of incidents. In addition, **British Transport Police are improving training for their staff on identifying and addressing unwanted sexual behaviour** to help ensure incidents are treated sensitively and appropriately.

In addition, the Government's National Bus Strategy is striving for the highest safety standards to support the personal safety and security of every passenger. The Strategy has encouraged local authorities to review the impact of roadside infrastructure (bus stops and shelters) as part of their Bus Service Improvement Plans. The Strategy supports the deployment of 'demand responsive' bus services, which offer more personal, on-demand services, from a person's door, or closer to their door than a regular bus. These services can **help overcome the concerns some women have about taking public transport at night**. Bus operators now also have a legal obligation to publish timetable and running data, and the **Department for Transport will be providing funding for predictive information which will inform passengers how many minutes away their bus is from the bus stop** and on average how long the journey will take. This will give people the information they need to plan their journey safely.

In 2020, the Government set out **tough new licensing standards for the taxi and private hire vehicle sector** (including for app-based services) to improve consistency and reduce the risk of harm to children and vulnerable passengers. The standards include criminal record checks for drivers every six months and safeguarding training to help drivers identify and respond to passengers who may be being abused or exploited. The Government is engaging with all licensing authorities in England⁸⁷ to ensure they are acting on these Standards. Licensing authorities are expected to have reviewed their existing policies and procedures against the Standards by the end of 2021, so that any necessary changes can be in place by early 2022. The Department for Transport will continue to monitor licensing authorities' policies to ensure they are aligned with the Standards through its annual survey of licensing authorities.

What more we will do

It is clear from the Call for Evidence that there is a demand for education in schools on violence against women and girls' issues, to help address the root causes. School plays a vital role in fostering a positive culture in which healthy behaviours are understood and harmful attitudes challenged before they escalate. In addition, the Call for Evidence highlighted the actions women and girls have adopted to feel safe in public places. While the Government has already taken a range of action to prevent violence against women and girls, there is more we can do.

⁸⁷ Whilst taxi and private hire vehicle licensing is a devolved policy area in all nations, the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards were issued under powers in the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Policing and criminal justice is not a devolved matter in Wales. The Standards therefore have effect in Wales, but it has been agreed with the Welsh Government that they will monitor Welsh licensing authorities' progress.

National public information campaign on violence against women and girls

The Call for Evidence has highlighted there is more to do to increase awareness of violence against women and girls in public spaces, with evidence showing that the public want a national communications campaign to raise awareness of these crimes, to promote how to access support, and to tackle unacceptable behaviour. **The Government will be launching a violence against women and girls communications campaign** focused on creating behaviour change. It will target and challenge perpetrators and the harmful misogynistic attitudes that exist within wider society, educate young people about healthy relationships and consent, and ensure victims can recognise abuse and non-contact sexual offending, while seeking support at an earlier stage.

The UK as a world leader in preventing violence against women and girls

We also need to take longer term action. To do this we must continue to understand the most effective ways of preventing these crimes. That is why we will invest £3 million towards understanding **what works to prevent violence against women and girls**. This will enable us to identify the highest quality, evidence-informed prevention projects for investment, for example:

- programmes for all: focused on universal programmes in schools, aiming to educate and inform children and young people about violence against women and girls, healthy relationships and the consequences of abuse;
- targeted support focused on teenagers at high-risk of experiencing or perpetrating abuse;
- programmes to tackle non-contact sexual offending in public spaces, and potential escalations in offending behaviour; and
- programmes focused on addressing exposure to violence against women and girls in the home, recognising that this constitutes an adverse childhood experience.

As a result of this, we will develop a library of evidence that will be transformative in implementing future evidence-based preventative action building on and extending existing work on prevention of violence. Evaluation and learning from this work will inform future provision on prevention. This will build on and align with international What Works practice and learning.

Prevention in schools, colleges and universities

The Everyone's Invited testimonials and Ofsted Review of sexual abuse in schools have shown us that the frequency of harmful sexual behaviours experienced by young people means that some children and young people consider them normal. There is an urgent need to address violence against women and girls in our educational institutions. The Department for Education has **accepted the Ofsted review's findings in full**.

The Department has funded the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care to work with the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (set up and funded by the Home Office). The Centre for Expertise will develop and deliver child sexual abuse training to social workers, who will provide supervision to designated safeguarding leads, and share practice resources with schools. The Government will expand on this work with additional funding to deliver **training for up to 250 designated safeguarding leads on how to identify and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse**.

The Department for Education will also develop additional support to **help teachers deliver statutory relationships, sex and health education effectively and confidently**. This will include working with leading experts to provide the best evidence-based approach to teaching about violence and abuse and enable teachers to share good practice. The Government will make sure that teachers of vulnerable pupils - such as those with special educational needs and disabilities, and those in care or in need - have the right support to deliver the curriculum. To ensure consistency of approach, the Department will **develop non-statutory guidance and monitor and evaluate teacher confidence** to deliver these difficult topics and continue to build a programme of support that meets teachers' needs.

In addition, the Department for Education is exploring how **university students might be utilised to support peer delivery of RSHE lessons in schools**. A 2019 Universities UK report⁸⁸ highlighted that there is significant value in building relationships with young people prior to entry into Higher Education, as it helps ensure continuity of messaging and cultivate active leadership in students from the outset. Some Higher Education providers already deliver sessions focusing on consent in schools, and we are exploring how these models may be further expanded.

The Department for Education will also **work with multi-agency safeguarding partners, the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care to support effective safeguarding arrangements with schools**. It is essential that the wider safeguarding system, including statutory and non-statutory partners, works together effectively to identify and challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours, and to support children and young people who both exhibit and are victim to such abuse. Statutory guidance already sets out a clear expectation for every local safeguarding partnership to include all schools in their safeguarding arrangements. To strengthen this requirement, the Department for Education has asked all safeguarding partners to report on how they are engaging schools in local safeguarding arrangements.

⁸⁸ [Changing the Culture Tackling gender-based violence, harassment and hate crime: two years on](#)

We also know that it is vital that social workers are able to identify and work with girls and young women at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM). The Department for Education will work with a small number of local authorities, as part of the Children's Social Care COVID-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better Fund, to **identify the challenges and barriers in effective safeguarding work addressing FGM** and develop and disseminate good practice to other local authorities.

The Department for Education will also work with colleges and Further Education sector representative bodies **to better understand how to raise awareness of healthy relationships among students**. We will also work to understand what further support students and teachers need to identify, report and address issues on sexual harassment and how good practice can be disseminated across providers to facilitate sector-led learning and improvement.

Safer public spaces

To help ensure women feel safe in public places, the Home Office has launched a **£5 million Safety of Women at Night Fund** focused on the prevention of violence against women and girls in public spaces at night, including in venues or on related routes home. The fund will be open to initiatives that target potential perpetrators, seek to protect potential victims, or deliver programmes intended to address offending behaviours. The pilot fund seeks new and innovative approaches to help build the evidence base.

In addition, the Home Office is supporting the Security Industry Authority's work to ensure door supervisors' and security guards' qualifications include specific content relating to violence against women and girls, and its campaigns to remind the industry and operatives of its role and responsibility to keep people safe, with a focus on women's safety. **The Home Office will work with the Security Industry Authority to consider what more can be done to strengthen these safeguards further**. This will also form part of a review of the disclosure and barring regime.

It is crucial that women and girls are able to share their views and experiences of where in our public spaces they feel unsafe to enable local areas to take preventative, tailored action. That is why the Home Office will work with the police to **pilot StreetSafe, an online tool which will enable the public to anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe**. StreetSafe will enable everyone, including women and girls, to report locations where they feel or have felt unsafe and to identify the features about that location that made them feel this way. The data will be made available to Police and Crime Commissioners and local authorities who will use it to support their local Policing and Crime Plans and influence community safety partnerships with stakeholders.

Effective prevention also involves our public spaces being designed in a way which helps ensure women and girls are and feel safe and deters offending. That is why the Department for Transport will **consult on whether and what street design features could help improve personal safety, and the perception of safety**. The results from this will inform an update to the Government's Manual for Streets, our key piece of street design guidance covering the design of residential and high streets.

Safer online spaces

Where pornography sites host user-generated content or facilitate online user interaction (including video and image sharing, commenting and live streaming), they will be subject to the Online Safety Bill. The Government recognises the concerns that have been raised about protecting children from online pornography on services which do not currently fall within the scope of the draft Bill. The Government will use the Online Safety Bill's pre-legislative scrutiny process to **explore ways to provide wider protections for children from online pornography**, including on sites that do not fall within scope of the draft Bill.

Safer workplaces

The Home Office's Call for Evidence highlighted the concerning extent to which sexual harassment occurs in the workplace. In addition, in 2019, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) ran a consultation on sexual harassment in the workplace which found that women had experienced incidents across a range of types of harassment, from sexual jokes and comments, to criminal offences like assault and rape.

The Government response to the GEO consultation sets out that the Government will introduce a number of measures to ensure employees have adequate legal protections and to prompt employers to take action to prevent harassment. This includes introducing **a new proactive duty on employers requiring them to take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent their employees from experiencing sexual harassment**, explicit protections for employees from harassment by third parties (for example, customers or clients), looking closely at extending the time limit for bringing Equality Act 2010 based cases to the Employment Tribunal from three months to six months, and supporting the Equality and Human Rights Commission to produce a statutory Code of Practice.

Safer transport

To build on our work to help ensure women and girls can travel safely, the Department for Transport will appoint a **new Violence Against Women and Girls Transport Champion**. They will help shape the approach to reporting unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport across England⁸⁹. As part of this they will engage widely with transport operators, local authorities, enforcement bodies, charities, and other transport stakeholders, including listening to the concerns of younger transport users. They will make sure best practice is shared and acted on and suggest ways in which the Department for Transport can improve safety for women and girls on transport.

⁸⁹ In rail, Department for Transport managed operators

Ending 'honour'-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other types of 'honour'-based abuse are hidden crimes, and to tackle them we need to change attitudes and behaviour. It is important that everyone knows that these practices are harmful, not sanctioned by any major religion and are in no way 'honourable'. The Home Office already provides a range of resources, such as free e-learning courses for professionals and awareness raising materials, but to really deliver change on the ground we need to work directly with communities. That is best done by members of those communities themselves, who bring the credibility and the knowledge which can best change minds. The Home Office will therefore **seek out community advocates who can talk to community audiences to explain why these practices are wrong, and we will provide them with resources to back up the messages.**

Supporting Victims

“The trauma will stay with the victim forever. It seriously compromises ALL life prospects and opportunities.” – Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

The ultimate aim is of course to prevent crime and have fewer victims. But when they do happen, crimes of violence against women and girls can have a devastating and life changing effect on victims and survivors. Through the responses to the Call for Evidence we have heard first-hand about serious trauma, physical harm, and long-term mental health impacts. Respondents also raised ongoing effects such as lack of trust and fear of walking alone which victims and survivors are experiencing as a direct result of the abuse they have been subjected to. Not only do these crimes have long-lasting impact on individuals, but victims' families and friends may also suffer, and individuals' ability to engage in and contribute to society may also be affected.

That is why the needs of victims and survivors are at the heart of the Government's approach to tackling violence against women and girls. Ensuring they can access quality, timely support is vital. It is also essential that they have the confidence to report their abuse and feel assured that our criminal justice system will support them to do so.

We know that in many ways the response to victims and survivors is not where it needs to be. For example, the Rape Review showed some serious failures in how rape cases have been handled throughout the criminal justice system. The Government has published a detailed plan of action to improve this⁹⁰.

What we know

The Home Office's Call for Evidence and other wider research has further affirmed the importance of appropriate and sufficient support for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls and also, sadly, the continuing challenges which they may face in accessing this.

Availability of support

“I only got support after I moved from a rural area to London, I think there needs to be investment in strengthening and publicising online/ remote services to give people in smaller, more remote communities privacy and support” – Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

The Call for Evidence has demonstrated that victims and survivors are concerned about the availability of support. The majority of respondents to the victim and survivor survey (77%) and to the nationally representative public survey (76%) did not think enough support was available for victims of violence against women and girls, and highlighted that public awareness of the support which is already available should be increased.

⁹⁰ [End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444444/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions)

In addition, 54% of respondents to the victims' survey thought more support services tailored to specific groups of people were needed (for example, based on sex, ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability). The Government is clear that victims should have access to support regardless of where they live. Evidence from the focus groups and written submissions pointed to a 'postcode lottery', where the location in which people live may determine whether or not support is available.

Some respondents to the victim and survivor survey specifically spoke about a lack of support in relation to 'revenge porn' and of help in ensuring harmful images were taken down from online platforms.

From wider work, such as the research conducted as part of the Rape Review, we know that provision of support is inconsistent across the country and the demand for support often outweighs the support that is available, meaning for many victims their needs are unmet⁹¹. The Government recognises that there will be a difference in outcomes across the country as a result of a range of factors and is committed to taking a joined-up cross-Government approach through this Strategy.

Accessing support

When respondents to the public survey were asked how confident they would feel in being able to access support if they or a friend or family member experienced violence against women and girls, there were mixed views. Whilst 60% of the nationally representative sample felt confident, only 44% of the first phase and 30% of the second phase of the open public survey respondents felt confident. Given the larger proportion of people identifying as having been a victim of violence against women and girls in Phase 1 and Phase 2, it is concerning so few respondents felt confident about accessing support⁹².

Around three quarters (78%) of victim and survivor survey respondents reported speaking to someone about their experiences. Victims reported seeking support from a wide array of sources, with the most frequent being a friend (72%), a family member (61%), or the police (61%).

When asked to rate their satisfaction with various forms of support, respondents to the victim and survivor survey were most satisfied with:

- trained counsellors/psychologists;
- Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs);
- Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs);
- support services (e.g. rape crisis centre or refuge); and
- specialist service helplines.

They were least satisfied with the service received from the police and social services.

⁹¹ [End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612122/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions.pdf)

⁹² 81% of Phase 1 and 86% of Phase 2 respondents disclosed they had been a victim compared to 20% of the nationally representative sample

The available research has shown that advocacy and therapeutic interventions can have positive effects on victims' and survivors' well-being, but the influence on violence reduction is not established in the literature⁹³. Those interventions that are most effective at supporting victims are those that are personalised to individual victims, and where the goals of the advocacy are tailored to their needs⁹⁴. Some respondents to the victim and survivor survey also spoke about positive experiences they had had in accessing support, including the ease of accessing it online.

“Online support is (a) great way to communicate and share the experience.” – Call for Evidence Public Survey – Call for Evidence, Nationally Representative Sample

Just under a fifth (18%) of victim and survivor survey respondents reported that they did not receive professional support. The most frequently given reasons related to problems with accessing support. Several respondents who did access support also spoke about there being barriers to accessing support. Reasons they gave for this included there not being enough support in their area, having difficulties finding the appropriate support, there being long waiting times, there being a lack of understanding from certain organisations (e.g. police, employers, education and healthcare services), having concerns about 'victim blaming', and there being a lack of support services directed at men. This illustrates the ways in which victims and survivors can be better supported, and that current support structures should be improved. Furthermore, there is a need for improved signposting and referrals to support from all relevant parties, and campaigns to enhance public awareness of how and where to seek help.

The research conducted as part of the Rape Review also highlighted that some victims and survivors feel unable to access support from statutory and counselling organisations due to perceptions that they will be unwilling to provide support to them if they are engaged with the criminal justice system due to the possibility of having to disclose information relating to support sessions as part of any prosecution. Linked to this, participants felt the criminal justice system process limited access to the long-term therapeutic support due to restrictions surrounding what victims and survivors are able to discuss with support agencies while a case is ongoing, prolonging their trauma.

Support for specific groups

A third of victim and survivor survey respondents felt that their identity or personal characteristics acted as a barrier to accessing support or other services (54% of respondents did not feel this was the case). Some of the personal characteristics that they felt acted as a barrier included their sex or gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture or religion, illness or disability, age, socio-economic status, and/or their personal history (e.g. being a prostitute or sex worker).

⁹³ Ellsberg M, Arango DJ, Morton M, Gennari F, Kiplesund S, Contreras M, Watts C. Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say? *Lancet*. 2015 Apr 18;385(9977):1555-66. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61703-7. Epub 2014 Nov 21. PMID: 25467575.

⁹⁴ Rivas C, Vigurs C, Cameron J, Yeo L. A realist review of which advocacy interventions work for which abused women under what circumstances. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2019, Issue 6. Art. No.: CD013135. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD013135.pub2.

The importance of tailoring support to individuals came across clearly. There were clear calls for an improved ‘by and for’⁹⁵, trauma-informed provision and for support to be tailored to specific forms of violence against women and girls or specific groups of victims and survivors (including men and boys, people from different ethnicities and LGBT people) to ensure all victims and survivors were able to access appropriate and effective support. Stakeholders in the focus groups discussed how tailored ‘by and for’ services allow for a comprehensive, cultural understanding of victims’ experiences and ensure accessibility.

Experiences of the criminal justice system

Participants in the Call for Evidence’s focus groups highlighted that only a small proportion of victims and survivors engage with the criminal justice system. Other sources of data, such as the Crime Survey of England and Wales, echo this, for example, fewer than 1 in 6 victims of rape report to the police⁹⁶. Wider research has also drawn links between victims’ and survivors’ access to support and the likelihood of them reporting to the police⁹⁷.

Respondents to the victim and survivor survey shared their experiences of reporting to the police, with 69% saying they had reported their abuse. 8% of those whose abuse was reported to the police had it reported by someone else on their behalf, and 29% chose not to report to the police. Reasons given for not reporting included that they did not believe anything would be done by the criminal justice system (46%), embarrassment (40%), and a fear of not being believed (33%). These findings echo those found in other research, for example, in a study about rape victims and survivors and the criminal justice system, 95% of those who did not report to the police said the fact they did not think they would be believed was a key reason for their decision⁹⁸.

“I didn’t want my family to find out at the first time. I didn’t think I would be believed later” - Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

Those respondents to the victim and survivor survey who chose not to report to the police provided details about changes which could be made to increase the likelihood of victims and survivors reporting. These included: increasing awareness of the law and victims’ rights, making changes to the reporting process and what protection is available after a report is made, improving public understanding and education about violence against women and girls, making sure there is greater access to support, improving the Crown Prosecution Service’s response, putting measures in place to give victims and survivors greater confidence that they would be believed and not blamed, and taking steps to reduce their fear of the escalation of violence. Some respondents said that nothing would change their mind.

⁹⁶ [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁹⁷ [Denti, D and Iammarino, S, 2021, Coming Out of the Woods. Do local support services influence the propensity to report sexual violence?, LSE](#)

⁹⁸ [Molina, J and Poppleton, S, 2020, Rape survivors and the criminal justice system, Victims Commissioner’s Office](#)

The Rape Review highlighted the importance of victim support in helping victims and survivors remain engaged with the criminal justice system, citing one study which found those receiving specialist support were 49% less likely to withdraw from the process. However, there were concerns about the availability of this support while cases progress through the criminal justice system and about a lack of understanding amongst criminal justice practitioners of the role of support services such as Independent Sexual Violence Advisers at court⁹⁹.

Impact of COVID-19

Many support services have reported experiencing increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence provided to the Home Office's Call for Evidence suggested an increase in referrals for refuge accommodation of over 50% between January 2020 and January 2021. The Respect helpline, which supports domestic abuse perpetrators, saw calls increase by 62%. The Karma Nirvana helpline, which supports victims of 'honour'-based abuse, reported an increase of calls by 64% during 2020 compared to 2019. Calls and webchats to sexual violence and abuse services have also significantly increased during the pandemic with combined volumes of contact 167% higher in May 2021 compared to March 2020.

The Government has been clear in its messaging on the COVID-19 restrictions that someone can leave home to avoid injury or illness or to escape risk of harm (for example, from domestic abuse). However, concerns remain that the restrictions have increased victims' exposure to violence and abuse. Throughout the pandemic, support services have consistently reported an increased complexity of cases with many victims presenting with multiple experiences of crime. For example, Victim Support reported that, in May 2021, the number of referrals received for victims of domestic abuse was 25% above, and rape was 23% above volumes of the same referrals received in early 2020¹⁰⁰.

Concerns have also been high for children and young people during the pandemic, with the impact of the restrictions necessitating school closures and a move to online learning. Victim Support reported increases in the number of children and young people (aged 17 and under) accessing support for high-harm crime types when schools have returned to in-person teaching. In May 2021, there was a 32% increase in young victims accessing support for rape compared to early 2020. During the same period, there was a 49% increase in young victims of other sexual offences (excluding rape) accessing support from Victim Support.

⁹⁹ [End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94444/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions)

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Justice Silver Command data pack, June 2021

As the restrictions have eased, demand for face-to-face support has risen again as more victims feel able to access support services in person. Rape Support Centres, funded by the Ministry of Justice, have reported increasing numbers of referrals since March 2021. In May 2021, Rape Support Centres reported that the volume of new referrals was 19% higher than the monthly average during 2019. This was reported to have led to an increased number of victims of sexual violence being placed on waiting lists to access support. Rape Support Centres have reported a 10% increase in volumes of people on waiting lists for their services between April 2020 and May 2021.¹⁰¹

Research conducted by Women's Aid cited in one written submission indicated 78% of victims surveyed who were experiencing abuse said that COVID-19 made it harder to leave. As a result of the pandemic, much of the support on offer switched to phone or online, and a few written submissions noted that this was not suitable for many victims and survivors who could not find a private space to access this type of support, were concerned about accessing it with the perpetrator at home or did not have the necessary technology.

What we are already doing

“Women’s lives aren’t one thing, they are complex. Responses need to be reflective of that, we shouldn’t be scared but should embrace it.”- Call for Evidence, Focus Group

The Government recognises the critical role victim and survivor support organisations play by providing victims and survivors with the support/tools to rebuild their lives. The Home Office’s Call for Evidence highlighted the requirement for increased provision to ensure support can be accessed by all victims, regardless of their protected characteristics or where they live.

That is why the Government continues to make record investment in this area, with **more than £300 million from across Government being spent to support victims and survivors this year alone**. This includes:

- £32 million for sexual violence support services over three years;
- £27 million to recruit more Independent Sexual and Domestic Violence Advisers who are a key component in support through the criminal justice system, resulting in the recruitment of nearly 700 new posts, an increase of 44% on existing provision;
- £20.7 million for community-based sexual violence and domestic abuse services, helping to reduce the amount of time survivors have to wait for support. Male specific services will see a 60% funding increase following a significant increase in demand for support from men and boys;

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Justice (2021) Silver Command data pack: Rape Support Fund data - unpublished

- £2 million for smaller specialist organisations helping people from different ethnic backgrounds, LGBT or disabled victims; and
- £1.3 million support package to support more victims and survivors to access support while at home.

In response to the impact of COVID-19, the Government provided an additional £76 million to support victims of domestic and sexual abuse, vulnerable children and their families, and victims of modern slavery, as well as £2 million for immediate support to domestic abuse helplines and online services, particularly on technology needs. NHS England and NHS Improvement provided £2.5 million to support the voluntary sector with activity and capacity to respond

The Ministry of Justice has **launched a fund which aims to build the digital capacity of smaller, specialist ‘by and for’ organisations supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence** who fall under protected groups who may face additional barriers to accessing support. The fund aims to increase the organisations’ digital capacity, so they are able to pilot new ways of working and support more victims. The fund should also bring these groups together to identify future funding opportunities, build alliances across the sector and share best practice.

The Government recognises the importance of helping make sure that victims and survivors know how and where they can access support and are encouraged to take the often difficult step of doing so. That is why we established the #ItStillMatters campaign¹⁰² which aims to raise awareness of sexual violence services, and the #YouAreNotAlone communications campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse and guides people to advice and support.

Victims’ rights

The **revised Victims of Crime Code of Practice (Victims’ Code)** came into effect on 1 April 2021. The revised Code sets out a clear framework for victims’ rights, with 12 key overarching rights that set out what victims can expect from all criminal justice agencies, including:

- to have the details of the crime recorded without unjustified delay;
- to be provided with information when reporting the crime and with regular updates on the progress of their case;
- to be referred to services that support victims and have services and support tailored to their needs;
- to be provided with information about compensation;
- to be given information about the outcome of the case and any appeals;
- to be given the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement and be informed how it is used in court; and
- where eligible, under the Victim Contact Scheme, to be informed when an offender is released.

¹⁰² [Sexual abuse support – Support for victims-survivors of sexual abuse \(campaign.gov.uk\)](https://www.campaign.gov.uk/support-for-victims-survivors-of-sexual-abuse)

The Ministry of Justice will **publish a new Victim Funding Strategy** to improve the way that funding is managed across Government and ensure that it is aligned. The Strategy will set out commissioning standards and expectations to place the victim support sector on a sustainable footing and ensure that victims and survivors continue to receive the support they need now and in the future. These reforms will come together to inform the re-commissioning of the national Rape Support Fund in 2022, offering a significant opportunity to redesign how support is delivered and funded to make sure it meets the needs of all victims and survivors in the most effective way.

A new **Victims' Bill**, announced in the Queen's Speech in May 2021, will be the cornerstone of the Government's work and ensure that victim and survivors' experiences are at the heart of our approach to tackling crime. The Ministry of Justice will consult on the Bill, and as part of this will explore the provision of community-based domestic abuse and sexual violence services to truly transform the support landscape. Provisions setting out clear accountability for commissioning and the provision of support should improve the quality of and access to support, and result in better outcomes. We will also use the Victims' Bill to **consult on the statutory underpinning of the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser and Independent Domestic Violence Adviser roles**, exploring options for a national framework of standards, professionalisation and training.

Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, which enables pre-recorded cross-examination and re-examination, has been rolled out to Crown Courts for vulnerable witnesses and is being piloted for intimidated victims and witnesses. As set out in the Rape Review, **the Government will expand the Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 pilot for intimidated witnesses**, with the aim of wider roll out, subject to evaluation. The Government will also develop a best practice framework for the progression of rape and sexual offences cases at the courts stage, including in relation to special measures.

Health services

NHS 111 provides telephone and online help to support people to access the right health support and information. Where appropriate, call handlers are trained to signpost people to their local Sexual Assault Referral Centre. NHS England has put in place **training for NHS 111 call handlers to ensure they are equipped to support victims and survivors of sexual violence** appropriately.

In September 2019, NHS England and NHS Improvement launched eight pilot female genital mutilation (FGM) clinics to support women with FGM who are not pregnant through providing basic healthcare services and emotional and psychological support. The Government has this year **extended the funding for clinics which support victims and survivors of FGM**. The pilot will help ensure that local areas have the evidence base they need to commission such services locally in a sustainable way.

The criminal justice process

We know that victims and survivors of these crimes, in particular domestic abuse, may withdraw from the prosecution process or feel unable to support a prosecution for a range of reasons – including fear and intimidation, concern for children involved, financial worries, or hope that the perpetrator will change.

In some cases, there will be enough other evidence that the prosecution need not rely on the victim's testimony. These are known as evidence-led prosecutions. It is essential that police officers investigate all evidential possibilities in order to build a successful evidence-led case, including other witness testimony, evidence from social media and cyber sources, medical reports and photographs or physical evidence, 999 call recordings, evidence from police body-worn cameras, and circumstantial evidence. It is the responsibility of prosecutors when providing charging advice to identify reasonable lines of enquiry and evidential opportunities in order to build the strongest possible case, including where a case which passes the full Code test can be built without relying on the victim to give evidence. To encourage this approach, the **Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is refreshing legal guidance on domestic abuse, 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage** to include more practical examples, revising its training, and sharing casework examples of where this approach has been successful to encourage more police officers and prosecutors to do so too.

Recognising the importance of Independent Sexual Violence Advisers, and under a Joint National Action Plan on Rape, the CPS and National Police Chiefs' Council published a national framework in June 2021 setting out minimum standards to improve ways of working with them. In addition, to increase understanding, trust and confidence in the CPS's role in prosecuting rape, the CPS will publish **a policy outlining what victims should expect from the CPS** and what might be expected from them. The CPS will also develop a 'digital walkthrough' to help victims of rape and sexual assault navigate, and understand what to expect from, the criminal justice process.

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is committed to providing a high-quality service to victims and **ensuring that victims who are eligible for the statutory 'Victim Contact Scheme' – through which victims of violent or sexual crimes where the offender is sentenced to 12 months or more are entitled to receive information on, for example, the offender's prison sentence and release - are offered it** directly by the Probation Service after their sentence. HMPPS are committed to ensuring that those who join the scheme are kept informed of key stages of the offender's sentence, including release, and are offered the chance to request licence conditions.

The Victims' Bill will also allow us to go further to **improve victims' experience of the criminal justice system**. We will transform the way victims' rights are perceived and delivered in the criminal justice system by using the Victims' Bill to guarantee these rights, ensure that victims receive them, and hold agencies to account for delivering them.

Safe accommodation

“The refuge had been my biggest support, in terms of mental health. My key worker...made me feel comfortable and safe. I was able to express my feelings to her, knowing that I [would] not be judged and [that she was] there to help me through it. The idea of leaving home with nothing but the clothes on my back was daunting...but having people around like my key worker made everything feel safe” - Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

We know that some forms of violence against women and girls leave victims at greater risk of homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced duties on local authorities and other public bodies to work together to prevent homelessness for people at risk. The legislation is clear that a person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence or threats of violence has priority need. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is backing this legislation with a £310 million Homelessness Prevention Grant.

This year, MHCLG are providing **£203 million across England for the flagship Rough Sleeping Initiative** - an increase of 81%. Through this the Government asks authorities to take an ambitious approach and, as part of this locally focused approach, some areas choose to fund specialist women-only provision. In addition, MHCLG's recently announced **£4.2 million Respite Room pilot programme** will help the Government better understand the needs of rough sleepers who have experienced domestic abuse and other forms of violence and abuse, with a focus on women.

The Ministry of Justice is currently carrying out a **review of the means test for Legal Aid** to assess the effectiveness with which the test protects access to justice. The review is specifically considering the experience of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The Government will publish a consultation this Autumn setting out the proposals in response to the review.

Safe technology

The Home Office is working with the UK technology sector **to grow the UK and international market in 'safety tech'** (products and services that help deliver safer online experiences for citizens). Many of these technologies tackle harms that disproportionately affect women and girls, for example, child sexual exploitation, grooming, harassment, cyberbullying and eating disorder content. A number of safety technology companies are working with manufacturers to explore how safety technology can be embedded into their solutions by default.

Support for our Armed Forces

The Ministry of Defence is reviewing its internal policies and communications to reflect the relevant changes introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act and ensure there is information to help survivors identify abusive behaviour, where to access support, and what Defence can do to help. The Ministry of Defence has also teamed up with Hestia and The Royal Mail to **provide an Online Safe Spaces tool which will help members of our Armed Forces access support information** in a secure way.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence is exploring practical arrangements to keep victims and survivors safe at work and on the Defence estate, as well as other compassionate support including leave arrangements, access to counselling, and adjusted performance expectations. The Department is reviewing what financial support can be provided by Defence to help survivors who are fleeing an abusive relationship.

The **Ministry of Defence is also introducing Regulations which allow broader use of 'special measures' in the Court Martial**, including the use of pre-recorded cross examination of the witness, to help ensure that the courtroom process is as fair for victims and witnesses as it can be.

What more we will do

Since the Call for Evidence closed in March 2021, the Government has announced a range of new measures to further support victims and survivors, including the intention to introduce a new Victims' Bill. The following actions will further build on that progress.

Increasing support for victims and survivors

“The specialist ‘by and for’ services are in crisis mode and they have been for years. There are closures of these organisations everywhere.”- Call for Evidence, Focus Group

The Home Office will **provide an additional £1.5 million funding this year for ‘by and for’ service provision and to further increase funding for valuable specialist services for victims of violence against women and girls**, including by increasing the £2 million Specialist Fund (2021-22) recently launched by the Ministry of Justice with Comic Relief which will build the capacity of smaller, specialist ‘by and for’ organisations supporting survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence who are from ethnic minorities, are disabled, or are LGBT. Comic Relief will be distributing up to 25 grants to these smaller, specialist organisations to support activities which aim to improve digital and remote capacity, provide continuity in support, and enhance future sustainability. The Home Office has tripled funding for the Suzy Lamplugh Trust’s National Stalking Helpline (to £155,000 in 2021/22) and will **increase funding for the 'Revenge Porn' Helpline in recognition of the significant increase in demand to the service**. The Government will also continue to provide support for victims, survivors, and those at risk of forced marriage through the joint Home Office and FCDO Forced Marriage Unit’s helpline.

“The Suzy Lamplugh Trust made me feel like I wasn't...exaggerating what had happened to me” - Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

In addition, victims of rape and sexual assault should be able to easily access a single source of support, online or over the phone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Government will, in consultation with victims and those that support them, **commission a support service that provides rape victims with easy access to immediate support, whenever and wherever they require it.**

Improving specialised healthcare

NHS England and NHS Improvement are **developing local ‘pathfinder’ projects for enhanced trauma-informed mental health support for sexual abuse victims and survivors** with the most complex needs. Clients of Sexual Assault Referral Centres can already access long-term support including advocacy, sexual violence counselling, pre-trial and longer-term therapy. Building on existing provision, local ‘pathfinder’ projects will be a collaboration between statutory mental health providers and the voluntary sector to develop tailored, trauma-informed models of care to support adult survivors of sexual assault and abuse who have complex, trauma-related mental health needs. Over the next 12 months, the partnership will create a network of ‘pathfinder’ projects to test and evaluate approaches to better meet survivor needs.

In addition, this year, NHS England and NHS Improvement will launch a **communications campaign to raise awareness of the support available to victims and survivors through Sexual Assault Referral Centres**. This will build on work recently undertaken, including updated e-learning health resources.

Support in higher education

The Department for Education will **work with the Office for Students to tackle sexual harassment and abuse in higher education settings, including within universities**. We are absolutely clear that sexual harassment is in no way tolerable on campuses or in online environments and will continue to encourage higher education providers to review and update their systems, policies and procedures, in line with the Office for Students’ statement of expectations on harassment and sexual misconduct before the next academic year.

These steps also include exploring further options to ensure that all providers see the statement of expectations as the minimum standard for addressing sexual harassment on campus and how the Office for Students can take action against providers who are not doing enough to support students experiencing harassment. This will include the Office for Students considering options for connecting its statement of expectations to its conditions of registration. The Department for Education will also **review options to limit the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements in cases of sexual harassment within higher education**.

Pursuing Perpetrators

“I think we’re failing perpetrators as well – I say that as a survivor. I just don’t believe that we can’t change behaviours. I think we’re failing perpetrators, which means we’re failing the public and future victims.” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

While the Government’s ultimate aim is to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place, perpetrators of all forms of violence against women and girls must be brought to justice and receive tougher sentences, and the cycle of re-offending and re-victimisation must be broken. It is also crucial that the criminal law is robust, effective and addresses new and emerging forms of these crimes.

What we know

Because many violence against women and girls crimes all too often remain hidden, many perpetrators remain unknown, and our knowledge of their characteristics is often limited. However, available data on stalking, sexual offences and domestic abuse indicates that perpetrators tend to be male, and most victims female. Over 90% of people prosecuted in 2020 for stalking, domestic abuse and sexual offences sex offenders were male¹⁰³. The Government however recognises that perpetrators and victims can be male or female.

In addition, the available data indicates that these crimes are most often committed by someone known to the victim, with many perpetrators being in or having recently left an intimate personal relationship with the victim. For example, data from the CSEW for 2017/18 to 2019/20 highlights that 42% of women who had experienced stalking since the age of 16 had been stalked by a current or ex-partner and 14% had been stalked by a family member¹⁰⁴. Additionally, for 84% of victims aged 16 to 59 who had experienced rape since the age of 16 the perpetrator was known to them (44% being a partner or ex-partner, 4% a family member, 12% a friend, 10% a date and 15% another known person (including colleague, person in position of trust and neighbour))¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ [Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2020)

¹⁰⁴ [Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/people-and-population/crime-and-justice/crime-survey-for-england-and-wales)

¹⁰⁵ [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/people-and-population/crime-and-justice/sexual-offences)

Changing perpetrator behaviour

“I would call for an expanded understanding of perpetration.” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

As information on perpetrators of these crimes is limited, we need a better understanding of what works to change the behaviour of perpetrators. Existing research shows that many perpetrators of these crimes continue to offend even if they have been prosecuted, with some cases resulting in an escalation of behaviours. For example, studies with those charged with stalking indicate that up to 56% go on to reoffend and suggest a link between unchecked stalking behaviours and domestic homicides¹⁰⁶. This evidence highlights the importance of increasing our understanding of what works to tackle perpetrator behaviours to prevent further harms occurring.

“It’s well-established now that you cannot just put perpetrators in prison and expect behaviour to stop, we’ve moved from thinking it detracts from survivor funding I think, we need to know something has to be done to reduce reoffending.” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

There is some evidence that intervening early can prevent violence from escalating and further offending occurring, and there is some promising evidence from domestic violence perpetrator programmes. For example, an evaluation of an early behaviour change programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse offences who did not have any previous convictions, ‘Cautioning and Relationship Abuse’, found that those who attended the course were significantly less likely to re-offend than those who did not.¹⁰⁷ Intervening later in the cycle of violence can also have substantial benefits, as demonstrated in evaluations of the ‘Drive’ programme for high-risk, high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse, which has been shown to successfully reduce levels of abuse¹⁰⁸.

The criminal justice system response to perpetrators

For many forms of violence against women and girls, the number of perpetrators charged, prosecuted and convicted has been falling. Of the large number of these crimes recorded by the police in 2019/2020, only 9% of domestic-abuse-related crimes, 4% of sexual offences, and 2% of rape offences were given an outcome of charged/summonsed in the same year. A significant proportion of these cases are recorded by the police as having been closed with the outcome ‘evidential difficulties, victim does not support action’ (54% of domestic-abuse-related crimes, 35% of sexual offences, and 44% of rape offences), indicating that the victim withdrew from the process¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ [POST-PN-0592.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

¹⁰⁷ Strang, H., Sherman, L., Ariel, B. *et al.* Reducing the Harm of Intimate Partner Violence: Randomized Controlled Trial of the Hampshire Constabulary CARA Experiment. *Camb J Evid Based Policing* 1, 160–173 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41887-017-0007-x>

¹⁰⁸ [Executive-Summary_Final2020.pdf \(driveproject.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system – Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\); Crime outcomes in England and Wales, year to December 2020: data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

As outlined in ‘Understanding violence against women and girls’ and the ‘Supporting Victims’ chapters, victim withdrawal has been linked to the lengthy and often intrusive investigation process, the need for victims to be able to move on and inconsistent levels of support. The Rape Review also highlighted the role that releasing offenders under investigation can have on victim withdrawal, drawing links between the fact that offenders are often released with no bail conditions and therefore are able to harass or intimidate victims into withdrawing from the process¹¹⁰.

In 2020, 8,069 defendants were prosecuted for sexual offences, of which 1,939 were for rape offences. This is a fall of 36% for sexual offences and 50% for rape offences compared to the highest level in 2015. There were 4,165 defendants convicted of sexual offences in 2020, of which 537 defendants were convicted of rape offences. The number of convictions has also fallen drastically, with rape convictions down 60% since the highest level in 2016¹¹¹.

Concerns over prosecution rates for these crimes being very low, especially in relation to rape, sexual assault and controlling or coercive behaviour were raised in the Call for Evidence’s focus groups and written submissions. Participants expressed frustration at the criminal justice system’s response to those who commit these crimes. They felt prevention efforts were being undermined by a failure to convict perpetrators and that this was contributing to a culture in which perpetrators think they can ‘get away with it’. There was a perception that the criminal justice system was failing victims and survivors, leading to lack of confidence in it, and indicating a need for change. Participants referred to very low rape prosecution rates as a perceived ‘decriminalisation’ of these offences.

“The lack of accountability and punishment for perpetrators discourages women from reporting crimes, as there is the understanding that they will have to relive a traumatic event and go through the distress of an investigation without any action coming of it.” – Call for Evidence, Public Survey

When asked about their experiences of the criminal justice system, a number of respondents to the victim and survivor survey felt that they had not seen justice done due to a perception of lenient sentences. The need for an increase in the number of people prosecuted and convicted for crimes of violence against women and girls, as well as the need for harsher punishments or sentences was put forward by respondents to the public surveys. This shows that swifter and tougher justice is vital in not only preventing those perpetrators from continuing to offend but also increasing victim confidence in the criminal justice system. This in turn could result in these crimes becoming less hidden.

¹¹⁰ [Review into the Criminal Justice System response to adult rape and serious sexual offences across England and Wales \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹¹ [Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Several written submissions stated there was a perception that the system favours perpetrators, for example, they raised concerns that the onus is on victims to prove there has been a breach of a preventative order and that police are not acting when breaches occur promoting the idea that there are no repercussions for the behaviour. The written submissions also suggested a link between victim attrition and a belief the system was designed to favour the perpetrator. Respondents to the victim and survivor survey echoed these findings with some highlighting that the justice system did not do enough to identify perpetrators and seek justice. Some respondents to the survey outlined that they felt the perpetrator was believed more than them by the police and that the court case was designed to favour the perpetrator by tricking and blaming the victim. The low prosecution rates and what are deemed to be lenient sentences were also flagged by respondents to the victim and survivor survey and the open public survey as being a sign the system favours the perpetrator.

“There are so many examples of lenient sentences given to perps for reasons such as 'they would lose their job' or 'woman not seen as vulnerable’”-Call for Evidence, Public Survey

Evidence about what works to change the behaviour of perpetrators of crimes of violence against women and girls is limited. Given the high risk of re-offending for some of these crime types, in particular sexual offences, there is a strong need for increased perpetrator programmes, research into the success of these in addressing perpetration and also in quality assurance and accreditation to make sure robust and appropriate interventions are used. Further work to understand and respond to perpetrators of these crimes is needed.

In addition, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate recently published the findings of phase one of their inspection into the police and Crown Prosecution Service’s response to rape¹¹². This found that – while there are examples of effective practice – overall, “there needs to be an urgent, profound and fundamental shift in how rape cases are investigated and prosecuted”. The Government is carefully considering the inspectorates’ recommendations, and the action set out in the Rape Review is intended to help increase the number of rape cases reaching court, while bolstering support for victims at every stage of the justice system.

What we are already doing

“This sense of agency through the Respect helpline [which offers help to domestic abuse perpetrators who want to change] is essential in encouraging people to take their own initiative in changing their behaviour and in doing so, their life” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

¹¹² [A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service’s response to rape – Phase one: From report to police or CPS decision to take no further action - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/a-joint-thematic-inspection-of-the-police-and-crown-prosecution-service-s-response-to-rape-phase-one-from-report-to-police-or-cps-decision-to-take-no-further-action/)

Building capability

Through the Rape Review Action Plan, the Government is taking forward actions that will improve the criminal justice system's response to rape cases. To improve the investigatory stage of the process and reverse the decline in charges and prosecutions, **the Home Office is this year providing an additional £3.2 million to pilot further work to improve rape investigations and prosecutions** through Operation Soteria. Operation Soteria is a joint initiative between the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and will build on an existing pilot - Project Bluestone - in Avon and Somerset that has brought together the police and academics from different disciplines to transform the local response to rape. It will expand into four further 'pathfinder' areas to drive a systematic and sustainable transformation in how the police and CPS work together to handle investigations into and prosecutions of rape and increase victim confidence. Ultimately, the ambition is to see more cases resulting in early intervention or ending with offenders receiving a sanction.

In addition, in February 2021, the Government published **a total police funding settlement of up to £15.8 billion in 2021/22, an increase of up to £600 million** compared to 2020/21¹¹³. We are also increasing the number of police officers by 20,000 by March 2023, sending a clear message that we are committed to giving police the resources they need to tackle the scourge of crime. As a result of their hard work and commitment, **police forces in England and Wales have recruited 8,771 additional officers**, exceeding the first target of 6,000 additional officers by March 2021. It is also important that the police represent the communities they serve – policing is more diverse than ever, with the latest data showing the highest proportion of black, Asian, and minority ethnic and female officers since records began.

Pre-charge bail

Pre-charge bail allows the police to place robust and proportionate conditions on those under investigation, reducing the risk of harm to victims and witnesses. Since reforms introduced in 2017 to address concerns that individuals were being kept on pre-charge bail for long periods, the use of pre-charge bail has fallen, and there has been an increase in the number of individuals 'released under investigation'. This has prompted concerns that bail is not always being used when appropriate, including to prevent individuals from committing an offence whilst on bail or interfering with victims and witnesses.

¹¹³ This includes: Government grants to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) (including police core grant, counter-terrorism funding, and pensions grant), funding through local council tax precept, and funding for national priorities, such as tackling serious and organised crime.

Following a consultation, to incentivise the use of pre-charge bail and thereby strengthen the safeguarding of victims, **the Government is removing the presumption against pre-charge bail** and amending the timescales for bail periods to reflect operational realities through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. We are also introducing a **new duty on the police to inform victims of changes to pre-charge bail conditions and to seek views from victims** on what the conditions concerning their safeguarding look like, ensuring that victims are more involved and informed in the process. Officers can then take into account any safeguarding concerns that are raised to ensure appropriate measures are in place. The Government expects there to be a reduction in suspects released under investigation and more suspects to be put on pre-charge bail, meaning further protection of victims and clearer timescales for suspects.

Building understanding

The Ministry of Justice has asked the **Law Commission to review how rape myths are tackled as part of the court process** and the way in which evidence about victims is used. The recommendations from this review will be considered in due course. This work builds on updated legal guidance the CPS provided to prosecutors on identifying and addressing myths and stereotypes, including those which reflect changes in sexual behaviours and encounters. The key messages regarding myths and stereotypes will be reinforced in the CPS's policy statement on rape for the general public, which will be of particular interest to victims and survivors.

In addition, the Law Commission is undertaking a targeted **review considering existing offences relating to the non-consensual taking and sharing of intimate images, to identify whether there are any gaps in the scope of protection** already offered to victims. This includes issues such as 'revenge porn', 'deep fakes', 'downblousing' and taking photographs and videos of breastfeeding without consent. Following a public consultation in early 2021, we expect the Law Commission will publish its recommendations in Spring 2022, which the Ministry of Justice will consider carefully.

Recovery in the criminal courts

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented challenge across the whole criminal justice system. While the administration of justice did not stop, courts had to close some rooms and pause jury trials until they could be made safe – hindering them from delivering swift and certain justice for victims and defendants. The most urgent and serious cases had to be prioritised above others by the judiciary, and caseloads built up. The Ministry of Justice are acting to mitigate this impact; **the Government has invested a quarter of a billion pounds to support recovery, and is taking every possible step to maximise capacity in the Crown Court, including having no limit on sitting days this year.** These steps, alongside our Nightingale courtrooms, will help us reduce caseloads and ensure that those guilty of violence against women and girls offences are brought to justice as swiftly as possible.

Robust management of offenders

The UK has some of the toughest powers in the world to deal with sex offenders, and the Government is committed to ensuring that the system for managing these offenders is as robust as it can be. Individuals convicted or cautioned of certain sexual offences are required to notify their personal details to the police (this system is often referred to as the 'sex offenders' register') and are managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. In 2014 we introduced Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPOs) and Sexual Risk Orders (SROs), which can place a range of restrictions on individuals depending on the nature of the case, including preventing travel abroad.

The Government is further **strengthening the management of sex offenders and those who pose a risk through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill**, including by enabling positive obligations to be imposed on those who pose a risk of sexual harm through SHPO and SROs and extending the list of sexual offences which make someone eligible for polygraph testing. The Bill also extends the scope of offences in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 relating to the abuse of positions of trust to capture additional roles, such as sports coaches and religious leaders.

Through the same Bill, the Government is introducing measures to **end the halfway release of certain offenders sentenced for serious violent and sexual offences** and ensure that the proportion of the sentence served in custody reflects the gravity of the offence committed. Offenders sentenced to a standard determinate sentence between 4 and 7 years for certain sexual or violent offences (where that offence attracts a maximum penalty of life) will serve two-thirds of their sentence in custody instead of half. This will bring the release point for these offenders in line with serious violent and sexual offenders sentenced to 7 years or more who, following the secondary legislation we introduced in April last year, are required to serve two-thirds of their sentence in custody instead of half.

We are also using this Bill to enshrine in primary legislation the provisions governing the release point for sentences of 7 years or more. These changes will apply to those convicted of certain types of sexual or violent offences for which the maximum penalty is life – such as rape, manslaughter and wounding with intent to cause Grievous Bodily Harm – but where the court imposes a standard determinate sentence. This will also amend the automatic release point for children sentenced to determinate custodial sentences of 7 years or more under section 250 of the Sentencing Act for the most serious violent offences and all serious sexual offences. The automatic release point in such cases will change from half to two-thirds of the sentence.

To review the existing management of offenders, the Government has commissioned **a joint inspection of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) by HM Inspectorates for Prisons, Probation, and Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to consider agencies' performance in managing offenders** across the MAPPA framework. This will include eligible domestic abuse offenders.

Perpetrator programmes

“In the absolute vast majority of perpetrator cases, we know a tiny minority get any intervention at the moment. So many are contingent on a criminal justice response, but domestic abuse cases don’t get any criminal justice response anyway.” - Call for Evidence, Focus Group

There is an urgent need for robust evaluations of new perpetrator programmes for all types of violence against women and girls, with a view to accrediting and quality assuring successful programmes. This need has been highlighted in the academic literature, as well as in the Call for Evidence’s focus groups and written submissions. We have launched a **£11.1 million fund for Police and Crime Commissioners to bid to run programmes for domestic abuse perpetrators and perpetrators of stalking** (in the case of stalking, whether or not it takes place in a domestic abuse context). This will complement existing service provision, and interventions will be required to ensure support for victims is in place.

HM Prison and Probation Service support a range of accredited programmes that, as part of a wider package of rehabilitation, target the needs of those who have offended against women and girls. These programmes have been awarded accreditation by the Correctional Services Accreditation and Advice Panel - an independent and international advisory body of academics and expert practitioners who offer evidence-based advice on the development and implementation of effective criminal and social justice services and programmes. Accreditation seeks to provide assurance that the programme is aligned to the evidence base and congruent with the ‘what works’ literature, providing confidence in the quality of programmes that aim to reduce reoffending. The suite of programmes in totality targets a range of offence types including, intimate partner violence, sexual offending, serious violence and gang afflicted offending, and these are available in both custody and the community. All programmes are evaluated by the Ministry of Justice.

Violence against women and girls and the Service Justice System

There is a significant amount of work to improve how the Service Justice System deals with perpetrators in the Armed Forces, many of which were recommended in the Service Justice Review¹¹⁴. These include the **creation of a tri-Service (Navy, Army and RAF) Rape and Serious Sexual Offences working group**, attachments with Home Office Police Forces to improve skills, identify best practice and knowledge of the Service Police, and the development of a Defence version of the National Police Chiefs’ Council and Crown Prosecution Service Joint National Action Plan to improve the response to rape cases.

¹¹⁴ [Service Justice System review - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

What more we will do

To ensure perpetrators of violence against women and girls are brought to justice, it is essential that we have in place appropriate and effective offences which capture the different types of behaviour involved in these crimes. While the Government has already significantly strengthened the law in this area, we must keep pace with the changing nature of these crimes.

Tackling sex offenders

The National Crime Agency's Serious Crime Analysis Section deals with the most serious, sexually motivated crimes. Central to their work is finding links between crimes to help identify serial sex offenders, particularly high-harm, high-risk offenders. This enable local police forces to prevent and tackle this offending. The Agency has a database of around 3,000 offence records which increases at a rate of approximately 1,200 per year. **The Home Office will invest £500,000 this year for the Agency to use innovative data capability to identify new methods of identifying serial sex offenders**, identifying undetected links and generating new investigative leads for police, specifically in stranger sexual assault cases, to better protect the public.

We have one of the most robust systems in the world for managing registered sex offenders and those who pose a risk of sexual harm. However, the Government is committed to ensuring that system is as robust as it can be and is concerned by instances of victims coming into contact with their abusers in their communities in places like Rochdale. The Government has reinforced to local areas the importance of using the powers at their disposal and is further strengthening powers to manage offenders through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. But we want to go further to provide assurance to victims of these crimes that everything is being done to keep them safe. That is why the Home Office will be appointing an independent reviewer to carry out **a review into the police management of registered sex offenders in the community**. The review will be independent of Government and will look at areas including the resourcing of police forces, the consistency of the management of registered sex offenders across England and Wales and whether the current laws to manage them are fit for purpose, and how effective the risk assessment of these offenders is.

Street harassment

The Call for Evidence acknowledged that sexual harassment in public places is all too common. It is not acceptable that women and girls do not feel safe on our streets as a result of this behaviour. Yet we know that, while there is not a specific offence of street harassment, there are a number of offences in place which do capture the behaviour raised in the Call for Evidence, depending on the specific circumstances (including offences under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Public Order Act 1986 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003).

However, the Government is committed to ensuring not only that the laws are there, but that they work in practice. For example, we know from the Call for Evidence that women and girls may not report some forms of public sexual harassment because they do not think that it is criminal behaviour, nor that it will be taken seriously by the police. Our priority must be to ensure that victims know they can report these crimes, and have confidence in the process for doing so.

Therefore, we will urgently progress work to tackle this issue. Firstly, our national communications campaign will challenge this kind of behaviour, and ensure victims know how and where to report it. Secondly, we will ensure police and prosecutors are confident about how to respond to public sexual harassment. The College of Policing will provide new guidance for police officers and the Crown Prosecution Service will update its legal guidance on public order offences to add specific information on public sexual harassment. Thirdly, in order to prevent this from happening in the first place, we need to deepen our understanding of who commits these crimes, why they do so, and how this behaviour may escalate, including through our new funding on what works to tackle violence against women and girls.

It is important that the police enforce the law properly and give women the confidence that if they report an incident, it will be dealt with. We are looking carefully at where there may be gaps in existing law and how a specific offence for public sexual harassment could address those. This is a complex area, and it is important that we take the time to ensure that any potential legislation is proportionate and reasonably defined.

Banning 'virginity testing'

Following concerns that some young women and girls are being coerced and forced to have their virginity tested by examining if their hymen is intact, we have undertaken an intensive review. This concluded that there is no reason why a virginity test should be carried out - it is not a medical procedure and is based on repressive and inaccurate¹¹⁵ views about female virginity and the hymen. It can have detrimental physical and psychological impacts on women and girls, and we fully agree with the World Health Organisation's view that 'virginity testing' is a violation of the victim's human rights.¹¹⁶ This unacceptable procedure will not be tolerated. We will therefore be **working to criminalise 'virginity testing'**. Legislation on this area will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows. This alone will not tackle the harmful misconceptions and misbeliefs surrounding virginity, and we will also put in place a programme of education in community, education and clinical settings.

¹¹⁵ A broken hymen is not a sign of virginity, the hymen can be torn at any time, during menstruation and day-to-day activities such as sport.

¹¹⁶ [WHO | Eliminating 'virginity testing'](#)

In addition, the Government remains concerned that demand for hymenoplasty surgery - a temporary cosmetic procedure to repair the hymen that is regulated in line with other forms of cosmetic surgery - is driven by a repressive approach to female sexuality and closely associated with virginity testing. **We will set up an independent expert panel to look further into the clinical and ethical aspects of hymenoplasty and to consider whether it should also be criminalised.**

‘Sex for rent’ and exploitation

The Government is aware of concerns about the unequivocal abuse of the landlord-tenant relationship known as ‘sex for rent’. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government have introduced banning orders and a database to protect tenants by preventing the most serious offenders from letting or managing property, and the Crown Prosecution Service published guidance to assist the police and prosecutors considering such allegations¹¹⁷. However, the Home Office is working with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the police **to better understand the effectiveness of existing offences in tackling the issue of sex for rent, and whether further reform is needed.**

The Government is committed to tackling the harm and exploitation which can be associated with prostitution and sex work and believes that people who want to leave should be given every opportunity to find routes out. In addition, we know that victims of modern slavery, including sexual exploitation often have needs arising from their exploitation. The Government provides specialist support and advocacy services for victims of modern slavery (regardless of their immigration status) to assist them in rebuilding their lives and reintegrating into local communities. In order to continue to ensure the Government is addressing the exploitation and harm of women which may arise from prostitution and sex work, the Home Office will work with the other Government departments, the police, charities and others to **consider whether there are additional measures to address those aspects of sex work and prostitution that have the potential to cause harm or exploitation.** The Government will also bring forward a **standalone Tackling Modern Slavery Strategy.**

Online offending

The Government is working to ensure that criminal law keeps pace with changes in technology to better protect women and girls online. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport sponsored a review of abusive and harmful online communications by the independent Law Commission which considered whether the current law needs updating to account for online abuse, which is frequently targeted at women. The Law Commission has now published its final report setting out recommendations for reform, including proposing a new threatening communications offence, and a new offence to capture cyberflashing. The Government is **carefully considering the Law Commission’s recommendations for new offences and may use the Online Safety Bill to bring them into law,** where it is necessary and appropriate to do so.

¹¹⁷ [Prostitution and Exploitation of Prostitution | The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](https://www.cps.gov.uk/prostitution-and-exploitation-of-prostitution)

Stopping offending from escalating

“There needs to be greater understanding that perpetrators of serious crimes usually start with smaller incidents which are not taken seriously.” Call for Evidence, Public Survey

We must learn from those cases where the perpetrator’s criminal behaviour escalated from serial non-contact sexual offences to the gravest offences, including rape and murder. It is crucial that we have interventions in place to stop perpetrators at the earliest opportunity and prevent further offending. Our communications activity will help highlight that non-contact offences are criminal offences and should be reported to the police. This will support the police to identify serial offenders and take action to stop them before offending behaviour escalates.

The Government will continue to work with the police and others to ensure that where there is evidence an individual poses a risk of harm to the public, or is convicted of a non-contact sexual offence, this behaviour is addressed and managed at the earliest possible opportunity, including through use of existing tools such as Sexual Risk Orders. In addition, the Government will continue to build our understanding of the escalation of offending behaviour, including through research being scoped by the Ministry of Justice **looking at the escalation of sexual offending amongst repeat perpetrators**. An academic roundtable will take place, followed by a rapid evidence assessment.

Stalking Protection Orders were introduced in January 2020 to provide early protection to victims of stalking by placing restrictions and requirements on those perpetrating stalking behaviours. The Home Office has worked with the police to review how well these orders are working. While the review found they are working well, it also showed that there is more that can be done to increase their use, as well as to manage individuals who have an order imposed on them. The Home Office will therefore work with the police to **ensure that all police forces make proper use of Stalking Protection Orders**. Amongst other actions, the Safeguarding Minister will write to all Chief Constables whose forces applied for fewer orders than might have been expected, to encourage them to always consider applying for them.

In addition, the **College of Policing will produce advice for police officers to advise both first responders and investigators on how to deal with cases of ‘honour’-based abuse**. This will prove a vital tool in further improving the police’s understanding of these usually hidden crimes.

A Stronger System

“All the pieces of the system have to work properly to make it effective.” - Call for Evidence, Public Survey

We will not prevent and tackle violence against women and girls without a truly cross-system approach. As the findings of the Home Office’s Call for Evidence make clear, this is a complex issue and responding to it demands every person and organisation plays their role, whether that is health and social care professionals and specialist organisations supporting those affected by these crimes, teachers and other education professionals raising awareness, police, prosecutors and others ensuring that victims and survivors see justice, or the public calling out unacceptable behaviour. It is vital that everyone is not only equipped to take action to tackle violence against women and girls but works together to do so.

Since the 2010 Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Vision, the Government has strived to make sure we work effectively across Government departments and to support an effective multi-agency approach beyond this. We have made great strides in transforming the response.

For example, the Home Office’s £17 million Violence Against Women and Girls Transformation Fund (2017-2020) helped encourage better collaboration and new, joined-up approaches between local authorities and health commissioners, and with specialist service providers. Northumbria Police and Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner received funding to carry out a Domestic Abuse Cyber Stalking and Harassment Pilot Project in Sunderland, whose key aim was to improve the force's response to cyber-enabled incidents of stalking and harassment in the context of domestic abuse. The project was successful in improving the identification and investigation of such offences, increasing the number of successful prosecutions, improving victims' journey through the criminal justice system and increasing victims' perceived safety. Lessons from the project were shared with other police forces across England and Wales.

But we know there is more to do. A true ‘stronger system’ approach means that every person and every organisation understands the role they play. It means a criminal justice system which operates as a cohesive whole. It means that teachers in schools and health professionals and probation officers in the community are as much a part of creating a society which will not tolerate these crimes as parents or the police.

What we know

The findings of the Call for Evidence reinforce the need for a co-ordinated approach, both across Government and more widely. Research has shown the importance and effectiveness of taking a ‘whole system’ approach to tackling violence against women and girls, and for communication between services to tackle the multiple and varied risk factors for these crimes.

For example, putting in place an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) service in a maternity hospital setting in Manchester enabled early intervention for pregnant women experiencing domestic violence, resulting in increased safety for women and their children. In addition, locating the service within the hospital meant that communication between midwives and IDVA staff improved, and midwives became more competent at identifying and referring cases of domestic abuse¹¹⁸. Other studies have shown that routine screening and identification of potential victims via healthcare services can have a positive effect on the number of domestic abuse cases identified, however, the impact they have on recurrence of violence was limited¹¹⁹. When combined with other follow-up actions in relation to support routine screening of people to identify possible abusive situations could be of benefit to victims.

Effective communication across and within services at all levels was also highlighted through the Call for Evidence and considered as vital to ensuring an effective whole-system approach, as was the importance of effective information sharing and clear data.

“There needs to be a clear pathway through the whole process that ALL professionals working in this area of expertise have a good understanding of. With the ease of information sharing via the internet this should not be difficult.”
- Call for Evidence, Victim and Survivor Survey

The role of commissioning and funding to ensure the right services are in place to tackle violence against women and girls was highlighted through the Call for Evidence. The existing way in which services are commissioned was considered in the focus groups and written submissions to be problematic. An inconsistent commissioning process was said to lead to a ‘postcode lottery’ of service provision and there was concern that current processes often exclude smaller, specialist services (such as community organisations which support victims of ‘honour’-based abuse, including forced marriage and female genital mutilation) from bidding, which can negatively affect the quality of support available for victims. Many written submissions discussed the need for commissioning processes to involve those with expertise in this area, including ‘by and for’ services, so that they can inform the development and delivery of services.

¹¹⁸ Granville, G. & Bridge, S. (2010). PATHway Project: An Independent Domestic Violence Advisory service at St Mary’s Maternity Hospital, Manchester: Independent Evaluation: Final Report.

¹¹⁹ O’Doherty L, Hegarty K, Ramsay J, Davidson LL, Feder G, Taft A. Screening women for intimate partner violence in healthcare settings. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2015, Issue 7. Art. No.: CD007007. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD007007.pub3.

Through the Call for Evidence, many respondents raised the need for improvements to data collection to give a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of these crimes. Data collection was considered often to be poor, siloed and limited. There were calls for the collection of comprehensive, comparable and disaggregated data across Government and for this to include information on protected characteristics¹²⁰, immigration status for both victim and perpetrator, and the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

“Most of the time, the only reliable data we have is through the criminal justice system – it’s the tip of the iceberg if we’re honest.”- Call for Evidence, Focus Group

What we are already doing

The available evidence indicates these crimes are underreported, meaning it is often difficult to understand their scope, scale, trends and impact. This in turn affects whether the right services are commissioned, and the right support is put in place. To address this, the Government needs to continue to build the evidence base and improve our collective understanding of all forms of violence against women and girls.

We recognise the importance of supporting voluntary and community sector organisations who are working to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls. The Tampon Tax Fund, which is generated by the VAT from period products, has played a helpful role in providing charitable, benevolent and philanthropic organisations with funding for innovative work.

Since the Autumn statement of 2015, the Government has awarded £79 million from the fund through over 100 direct grants and 100 onward grants to not-for-profit organisations supporting disadvantaged women and girls. Of this, over £24 million has been awarded to projects working in the violence against women and girls sector. This year is the final year of the fund - as the United Kingdom no longer has to charge VAT on period products following the UK’s exit from the EU - and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is running an **£11.25 million grant fund for projects that improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls**, including a category on violence against women and girls. The application period closed in July and successful applicants will be announced in Autumn 2021.

Multi-agency working and information sharing

It is also critical that those working in agencies including the police, health, education, social care and the Crown Prosecution Service have the skills, tools and expertise to effectively prevent and tackle violence against women and girls.

¹²⁰ The following characteristics are protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

In March 2021, the Home Secretary **commissioned HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to undertake a bespoke inspection into policing's approach to female victims of violence against women and girls** and engagement with women and girls more broadly. This found that, while some progress has been made, there is more to do across all agencies to effectively tackle violence against women and girls, and that urgent and significant action is needed.

To make sure that the police, prisons, probation service and others have the right systems in place to share information on registered sex offenders and other dangerous individuals, **the Home Office and Ministry of Justice are investing £8.1 million to develop a new multi-agency public protection system (MAPPS)** which will enable more effective and automated information sharing, which will in turn improve the risk management of all offenders managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). This includes registered sex offenders and those domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators managed under MAPPA.

In addition, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill includes measures to further **strengthen the legal framework for information-sharing between MAPPA partners**. It will also strengthen the law on the use of digital information extraction as part of criminal investigations through a new statutory power so the police can obtain digital evidence to prosecute criminals while providing additional safeguards so that only information that is relevant to the investigation is taken. This will protect privacy and support victims of crime and others who voluntarily provide information to the police.

The National Police Chiefs' Council, with £248,900 of funding provided by the Home Office, recently developed and introduced a **system so that the police are automatically notified of new Forced Marriage Protection Orders and Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders made by a court**. This means rather than having to wait to be informed about them by the party who applied for them, the police will be notified quickly, enabling them to put in place any necessary safeguarding measures earlier. The police are considering whether this system could be extended to other protective orders.

In addition, through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill the Home Office will place **new duties on a range of agencies, such as the police, local authorities, youth offending teams, and health and probation, to work collaboratively to prepare a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence**. When defining the scope of their strategies, local areas will have the flexibility to include other crime types which are prevalent in the local area, which may include violence against women and girls.

Technology

It is also crucial that the private sector plays a role in addressing harmful online content. Through the new Online Safety Bill, **companies will need to take swift and effective action against illegal content targeted at women**. They will have to have effective systems in place to minimise priority illegal content and remove all illegal content quickly once they are aware of it. The Government will work with stakeholders and Parliamentarians to identify priority illegal harms which will be specified in secondary legislation and may include those of particular relevance to women, such as ‘revenge porn’, extreme pornography, illegal sexual abuse and harassment and illegal ‘deepfake’ pornography. Following consultation with Ofcom, the Government will also set out in secondary legislation priority categories of legal content that may harm adults - this may include forms of online abuse, including sexist abuse targeted at women. Companies will have to have effective arrangements in place to allow people to report abuse and receive an appropriate response from the platform. If a company fails in these duties it may result in an investigation and enforcement action from Ofcom.

In the UK, adult services websites are a significant enabler of sexual exploitation linked to trafficking. These websites are online advertising directories that provide a platform on which sex workers can advertise their services. Alongside legitimate escorts and adult service workers, offenders may use these websites to advertise the services of victims of modern slavery. Work to tackle sexual exploitation on these sites is led by the National Crime Agency with support from the police and the Home Office, as well as with online companies to ensure they live up to their responsibilities of preventing their services from being used for criminal activity. To help continue to tackle this, the **Government will work with adult service websites to explore a set of voluntary principles to counter exploitation on their sites**. The principles will encourage adult service websites to take reasonable and practical steps to prevent modern slavery and exploitation on their platforms and work collaboratively with law enforcement.

Banning ‘conversion therapy’

We know that in the United Kingdom, ‘conversion therapy’ practices affect LGBT people, including women. These practices can range from coercing people into pseudo-psychological interventions to, in extreme circumstances, violent assaults – this is often motivated by a belief that there is a correct sexual orientation or gender identity, and that a person can be ‘cured’ of this. The National LGBT Survey 2017, which provides the best evidence on the extent of this practice in the UK, found that 5% of transgender women respondents had experienced it and a further 7.6% were offered it. For non-transgender women who responded to the survey, who identify as having a minority sexual orientation, 1.9% had experienced it and further 4.4% had been offered it.

This Government is committed to banning ‘conversion therapy’ and legislation will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows. The Government Equalities Office will launch a consultation before details of the ban are finalised to hear from a wide range of voices on how best to protect people from demonstrable harm while protecting best practice in the medical profession, defending freedom of speech, and upholding religious freedom. Alongside a ban, the Government Equalities Office will be making funding available to ensure victims can find and access the support that they need.

What more we will do

An effective frontline response to violence against women and girls

Criminal justice system

The HMICFRS inspection into the police response to these crimes has shown that radical reform is needed. The Government will work with policing to support the introduction of a full-time **new National Policing Lead for Violence Against Women and Girls** to help drive forward the policing approach and action to address the inspection’s findings, and take a similar approach to other national coordination roles, in recognition of the severity of these crimes. The new lead will report on progress to the Home Secretary-chaired National Policing Board and will provide national coordination across policing working as part of the National Police Chiefs’ Council. It will include acting as the point of contact for every police force, to ensure best practice is shared and that progress on improving the response to these crimes is being monitored. An immediate focus of their role will include working with police forces nationally and the Government to make sure action is taken in response to the inspectorate’s findings and their recommendations considered and implemented as appropriate.

The Home Office has already asked the police, on an experimental basis, to record crimes of violence perceived by the victim to have been motivated by hostility based on their sex. In addition, we will **explore options to better understand the experience victims have with policing and wider criminal justice system partners.**

The **Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) will refresh its overarching Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy** - the previous 2017-20 strategy will be updated to align with the CPS’s revised strategic direction and reflect its rape and sexual offences and domestic abuse programmes.

Health and social care

“One of the really important points is educating our health care professionals...Health and social care need to talk to specialist services.”- Call for Evidence, Focus Group

The Department of Health and Social Care has run a Call for Evidence to inform its forthcoming **Women's Health Strategy**, which will help make sure that women's voices are heard and that they are at the centre of their own care.

In respect of the health and social care system, through the Health and Care Bill we will **create 42 Integrated Care Systems (ICS)** across England - these will allocate resources, coordinate services and plan in a way that improves population health and reduces inequalities between different groups. The Department of Health and Social Care, including its Office for Health Promotion to be established in Autumn 2021, will work in partnership with NHS England and NHS Improvement to develop guidance that promotes evidence-based approaches to violence against women and girls through the new ICSs. This will support the delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan's ambition particularly on tackling health inequalities.

The Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and NHS Improvement and the Ministry of Justice will continue to work collaboratively to ensure alignment between statutory ICSs in health and social care in England and victim support services for survivors of sexual violence and domestic abuse. The Government is committed to consulting on the provision of these services and the pathways between them in the upcoming Victims' Bill consultation, to ensure victims have access to whatever services they need to cope and recover.

The Department of Health and Social Care's Office for Health Promotion, to be established in Autumn 2021, will work with NHS England and NHS Improvement to review and build on their workforce policies to ensure safe, effective processes are in place to support staff affected by violence against women and girls, and other forms of violence and abuse, and that staff understand how these issues affect them as individuals and how to access any support they may need.

Organisations working together

The newly named Supporting Families Programme (which succeeded the Troubled Families Programme) supports some of the most vulnerable families in society by facilitating greater multi-agency working amongst local authorities and their partners, to ensure families get access to the early, coordinated support they need to help them overcome their problems before they escalate. The programme is backed by £165 million in funding in 2021-22. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will continue to **encourage local areas to improve multi-agency working and update keyworkers' best practice on violence against women and girls**.

Following the Girl Summit hosted by the Home Office and UNICEF in 2014, where we mobilised domestic and international efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM), we produced a resource pack about FGM¹²¹, and we made significant updates to it last year. The resource pack provides vital information for local authorities, the police, schools and healthcare services about how they can help to prevent girls being subjected to FGM and give them the very best possible support when they are at risk. It includes examples of valuable initiatives which charities and local councils have pioneered to safeguard victims, a range of resources for teachers, and facilities to deal with both the physical and psychological consequences of FGM, as well as a range of videos, leaflets and support organisations. When it comes to forced marriage, while our Forced Marriage Unit produces a range of its own useful materials, there is more that we could do to showcase to frontline professionals the excellent resources and services offered by other organisations, as we do with FGM. We will therefore **produce a resource pack for local authorities, the police, schools, healthcare services and others on forced marriage**, like the one for FGM. That way, we can ensure that the widest possible range of support is available to victims of this awful practice.

Industry

The **Home Secretary will host a technology industry roundtable** to encourage industry to take action on violence against women and girls in advance of the Online Safety Bill coming into force; this will include looking at areas such as dating apps.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable people

The Home Office will commission a **review of the disclosure and barring regime** to provide assurance on its effectiveness in safeguarding the vulnerable.

In addition, the Government will consider the findings of an ongoing consultation by Sporting People¹²² and whether there is a need for a sector-wide registration scheme to support qualified and competent sport and physical activity professionals in England. The Government is also **exploring ways to create eligibility for criminal record checks for those who are self-employed in sport and other sectors** to ensure the same level of safeguarding is applied to all people who work with children and vulnerable people. And through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill we are adding sports coaches to those who are considered to be in a 'position of trust' in relation to 16 and 17 year olds. This will make it an offence if the adult then engages in sexual activity with the young person in their care, even if the activity is apparently consensual.

¹²¹ [Female genital mutilation: resource pack - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304242/female_genital_mutilation_resource_pack.pdf)

¹²² Commissioned by The Chartered Institute for Management in Sport and Physical Activity, with Sport England backing

In 2015 the Government introduced a mandatory reporting duty which requires regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales to report known cases of FGM in under 18s which they identify in the course of their professional work to the police. The Home Office will continue to work with the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care to **raise awareness of the FGM mandatory reporting duty** and ensure that frontline professionals are aware of their obligation to report these cases.

Violence against women and girls services

The Home Office will **publish a refreshed National Statement of Expectations**, taking into account the feedback from the Call for Evidence, to outline the activity local areas should undertake to ensure victims and survivors of violence against women and girls get the help and support they need. This will include guidance and best practice on commissioning services suited to the local need, and further engagement with commissioners, service providers and regional and local partners will help inform this. This will help ensure that services are consistent and cohesive, that they recognise the gendered nature of violence against women and girls, and that they address prevention and support.

We know that smaller ‘by and for’ organisations can face challenges in navigating local commissioning processes. The Government is committed to ensuring that the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 duty on local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation is implemented properly, with commissioning approaches which enable all victims, including children, to access safety and support when they need it. The **Government will be making clear its expectations for the Domestic Abuse Act duty on local authorities in Statutory Guidance**, being clear that where possible, commissioning should be conducted on a long-term basis, unless there is good reason not to, and at a minimum should reflect the three year period covered under the local strategy. Government will give guidance to commissioning authorities to ensure that the process does not exclude smaller voluntary organisations, including those that are run by ‘by and for’ groups with particular characteristics such as victims from minority ethnic backgrounds, those identifying as LGBT or disabled victims. This could include smaller organisations rooted in particular communities which support victims of ‘honour’-based abuse, including forced marriage.

Building our knowledge and understanding

We recognise the wealth of expertise held by the violence against women and girls sector and are committed to engaging and developing our approach to tackling these crimes throughout the life of the Strategy. The **Minister for Safeguarding will host a summit with representatives from across Government** to share learning and best practice, discuss emerging issues, increase collaboration across agencies and better understand how the Government can improve and implement policies to prevent violence against women and girls, support victims and survivors, and pursue perpetrators.

Effective data collection is vital to inform, design, and implement policies to tackle violence against women and girls, as well as monitor our progress towards achieving the objectives of this Strategy. We have identified evidence gaps in relation to certain types of violence against women and girls (such as FGM and forced marriage), what works in preventing these crimes and in tackling perpetrator behaviours. In addition, there is a need for better data on victim and perpetrator characteristics, including in relation to protected characteristics and other groups such as migrant victims and survivors.

We are working with the Office for National Statistics to **review current available data on violence against women and girls** and identify the priorities for data improvement. The Home Office will also explore options to better understand **the prevalence of FGM and forced marriage** in England and Wales given their hidden nature and lack of robust estimates. In addition, the Government will **continue to improve data on rape offences across the criminal justice system** to meet the commitments we have made in the Rape Review, in particular, publishing regular scorecards to show how rape cases are progressed through the system. We will also progress work on a single case management system for rape cases for the Courts Service and the CPS.

The Government's aim is that this activity will help drive improvements and culture change which will ultimately result in improvements at a local level. The forthcoming National Statement of Expectations will outline further how local areas will play their part in delivering the ambition set out in this chapter.

Delivery

The effective implementation of this Strategy relies on a cross-system approach. Tackling violence against women and girls demands a co-ordinated and cohesive response and every organisation, employer, agency, Government department and crucially, individual, across the country has a role to play in helping us deliver our ambition to reduce the prevalence of these crimes, improve victim support and engagement, and increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice.

That is why we are putting in place a delivery plan which sets out how we will ensure the accountability of this Strategy, implement it effectively and monitor its progress.

We are clear that our commitments will be delivered over the short, medium, and longer term and aim to have realistic and achievable timeframes to implement the Strategy, against which the Government can be held to account. The Cabinet Office is clear that tackling violence against women and girls is a priority for this Government and will be monitoring progress closely.

Implementation, delivery and monitoring progress

The successful implementation of the commitments throughout this Strategy requires close cooperation and coordination across England and Wales. We expect joint working between Government departments, the devolved administrations, policing and the wider criminal justice system, the violence against women and girls sector, health and social care agencies, and others. The Minister for Safeguarding will also engage with the private sector, voluntary organisations, community groups and the general public to further develop, test and implement our policies and approaches throughout the life of this Strategy.

We will assess the progress of our commitments against our strategic ambition to increase support for victims and survivors, increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice, increase reporting to the police, and, ultimately, reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls.

We recognise that crimes of violence against women and girls are constantly evolving, and we must keep pace with changes. We commit to continuing to work with violence against women and girls sector specialists to further develop and implement the commitments set out in this Strategy, and continually improve and learn from their experiences, data and insight.

Investment

The Spending Review set budgets for each Government Department, and for 2021-22 the Home Office alone has allocated **£43 million to tackling violence against women and girls**, which includes the scoping, development and implementation of key activity identified in this Strategy for expansion in future years. The £43 million also includes £25 million allocated to target perpetrators, funding for the Rape Review and to strengthen Domestic Homicide Reviews, and frontline funding aimed at tackling specific crime types such as forced marriage.

We will **continue to invest in new programmes of work to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls throughout the life of the Strategy** as new funding opportunities arise. This will enable us to build on the commitments we have set out in this Strategy.

Governance

The implementation of both this Strategy and the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Strategy will be overseen by the Home Secretary, and a Ministerial-led Oversight Group. This Group will hold the Government to account for delivery, and ensure other key groups (including the Prime Minister-chaired Crime and Justice Taskforce) are able to scrutinise progress. The Oversight Group will include Ministers from across Government and will benefit from advice and input from key external voices such as: senior law enforcement representatives, the Domestic Abuse and Victims' Commissioners, the Government's independent Adviser on Violence Against Women and Girls, and key violence against women and girls sector representatives.

The Oversight Group will also oversee a range of working level activity to ensure progress against thematic issues, like prevention.

We are enormously grateful for the vital role the violence against women and girls sector plays in providing support directly to victims and survivors of these crimes and the valuable insight and challenge they provide to Government to enable us to improve our policies and, as a result, outcomes for victims and survivors. Our success will continue to depend on the quality of our engagement and we will continue to work with the sector to ensure we are doing all we can to put a stop to these crimes.