

Violence against women and girls newsletter

December 2010

'As women and as a society we have made great strides but we need to do more to ensure that women and future generations are not held back. My ambition is nothing less than ending violence against women and girls and our strategy document will outline our commitments to seeing this become a reality.'

Theresa May MP, Home Secretary

INTRODUCTION

On 25 November, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the coalition government published *Call to end violence against women and girls* which outlines our ambition and guiding principles in this area.

Please visit www.homeoffice.gov.uk/vawg to read the paper and to learn more about our key commitments including funding for specialist services that support victims of sexual and domestic violence. Please read on for more information. This paper will be followed by a detailed action plan will be published in spring 2011.

The coalition government has clearly prioritised this issue; however, we all have a role to play and it is important to work together to achieve our goal to end violence against women and girls. This is not a task for central government alone. We will need to work with families and communities to change attitudes. Local authorities, police and crime commissioners, voluntary and community organisations, community safety partnerships, the NHS and others to work together to meet the needs of their local communities.

In the meantime, thank you to the fifteen organisations from the women's sector who attended a Ministerial meeting with stakeholders on violence against women and girls on 15 December. The meeting was chaired by the Home Secretary and ten departments were represented. This included the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions and Ministers from the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health and the Solicitor. There was a productive discussion about the government's approach to tackling violence against women and girls and the importance of challenging attitudes and behaviours.

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Bid period for Home Office funding opens

The Home Office has made up to £3.3m funding per annum available to support Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) over the next four years on a stable funding basis. Applications are now invited for this funding for IDVA services in the voluntary and community sector and in local authorities. The bid period opened on 20 December and will close on 11 February. The fund criteria and application form can be found at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/idva

The Home Office has also made £1.72m funding per annum available to support Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) working in the voluntary and community sector and in Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) over the next four years on a stable funding basis. Applications are now invited for this funding. The bid period opened on 13 December and will close on 4 February. The fund criteria and application form can be found at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/isva

Review of commercialisation and sexualisation of children

Parents express real concern about children being pressured into growing up too quickly, becoming consumers or sexualised young people earlier than is appropriate. The government has therefore made a commitment to take action to protect children from excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation. The Minister of State for Children and Families, Sarah Teather MP, has asked Mr Reg Bailey, Chief Executive of the Mothers' Union, to conduct an independent review into this issue and to make a full report with recommendations in May 2011. For further information, please visit: www.education.gov.uk

Managing sex offenders

The Home Office continues to work with key partners including the police and other law enforcement agencies to identify ways to further strengthen the management of sex offenders and reduce the risks they pose to the public, especially those that are vulnerable.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has been working with the police to explore where individuals, who are barred from working with children in the UK, have gained work with international schools or other organisations that look after vulnerable young children. For example, CEOP have been working with the ACPO Criminal Records Office (ACRO) to develop an international child protection certificate. When established, the process will mean that, during the recruitment process, international schools will require UK nationals to supply an international child protection certificate; this will provide details of any convictions the individual has in the UK.

Forced Marriage Unit publishes guidelines for the forced marriage of people with learning disabilities

These new practice guidelines have been developed to assist professionals encountering cases of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities. The guidance was developed in conjunction with learning disability charities the Ann Craft Trust and the Judith Trust. It is aimed at frontline workers, to help raise awareness of the issue and support practitioners to identify the warning signs of this complex and often hidden practice. The guidelines also set out the steps that practitioners should take when dealing with cases. You can download the guidelines at: www.fco.gov.uk/fmu

Department of Health launches paper on violence against women and children

On 25 November, Public Health Minister, Ann Milton MP, launched *Improving services for women and child victims of violence* which sets out the departmental Taskforce's findings for 2010. Key to their findings was the acknowledgement that at the local level, A & E units, doctors' surgeries and sexual health clinics were the key areas where change was necessary. The actions outlined to tackle violence and abuse includes:

- awareness training for the NHS workforce and the general public;
- workforce development, training and education;
- commissioning appropriate easily accessible services to reflect local need; and
- robust evidence gathering and appropriate information sharing.

Visit www.dh.gov.uk/vawc for more information. This website also provides access to a selection of campaign materials developed in partnership with voluntary sector partners. These campaign materials can be used to target both NHS professionals and the general public.

Review of UK Border Agency Gender issues in the asylum claim guidance

As part of its continuing efforts to make the asylum process as gender-sensitive as possible, the UK Border Agency has been working closely with Asylum Aid as part of its 'Charter of rights for women seeking asylum' campaign. This has reviewed gender-sensitivity in the asylum process, specifically looking at the Agency's asylum determination system, detention services and support services.

The Agency has recently published a well received revised version of its *Gender issues in the asylum claim* guidance for asylum decision-makers. The guidance covers issues such as childcare, internal relocation and the protection available in the applicant's country of origin, and the need to create a reassuring interviewing environment that allows applicants to disclose their fear of persecution. This guidance can be found on the Agency's website:

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/asylumpolicyinstructions

Overseas champion to tackle violence against women and girls appointed

The Prime Minister has appointed Lynne Featherstone MP as the UK's Ministerial champion to tackle violence against women and girls abroad. The role will provide policy coherence and co-ordination across Whitehall departments to tackling gender-based violence, including the implementation of the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

Further information about the UK's international work to tackle violence against women and girls will be provided in the next newsletter.