

Violence against women and girls newsletter

8 March 2011

INTRODUCTION

On November 25, 2010 the Government published *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls* to outline its strategic vision in this area. Today, on International Women's Day, we are publishing *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan*. This reflects the guiding principles we outlined in our strategic vision and also includes our response to Baroness Stern's Review into the way rape complaints are handled in England and Wales.

This Action Plan provides an overview of the wide range of actions the Government will be taking forward with key partners to deliver its strategy on ending these forms of violence. It will be a dynamic document which will be refreshed and updated every six months. While priorities for action will change over time, developments will be consistent the overarching guiding principles set out in *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*. And, for the first time, our approach to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) recognises that it is an issue which occurs in all countries.

Prevention is at the heart of our approach, with new campaigns in 2011/12 to tackle teenage relationship abuse, sexual assault and rape. These campaigns are part of our broader goal of bringing about long-term cultural transformation, focusing on our objective to tackle the social and cultural acceptance of VAWG.

We know that ending VAWG is a difficult task which cannot be achieved by central government alone. We also recognise that the majority of services to support women and girls will continue to be funded and delivered at a local level. In order to realise our vision, we must therefore work together to ensure collective action from international institutions, central and local government, voluntary groups and local communities. We should strive to be ambitious in our aims and shared objective to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

For more information please visit: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/vawg If you have any questions relating to violence against women and girls, e-mail us at: VAWGenquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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UPDATES

Direct funding for rape crisis centres

The Ministry of Justice has announced £29.4 million of dedicated funding over the next three years for vulnerable victims of crime. The money will be used to support the most seriously affected, vulnerable and persistently targeted victims and witnesses.

An important part of this will be to ensure those traumatised by rape and sexual violence receive the specialist support they need. Therefore, up to £10.5 million of this funding will go directly to local rape crisis centres. This is part of a wider Government commitment to sustain the provision of rape crisis centres across England and Wales.

This is also the first time funding has been guaranteed on a three year basis to help put providers on a stable, financial footing, enabling them to give sustained support to those who need it most. The funding pool opened to eligible providers on 31 January 2011. Funding decisions will be made by April 2011. For more information visit: www.justice.gov.uk

Improving our response to domestic violence

The Immigration Rules make provision for spouses (including registered civil partners, same-sex partners and unmarried partners) of British citizens and persons settled here who have been subjected to domestic violence during the probationary period to apply for indefinite leave to remain. Support for spouses in this position is currently provided by the Sojourner Project.

An agreement has now been reached between the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions that will enable those who are eligible to apply under the domestic violence provisions to have a limited period of access to income-related benefits. The intended implementation date is April 2012 and funding for the Sojourner Project will continue in the interim. We are also pleased to confirm that from April 2011, the Home Office will provide a total of 50 days support per eligible applicant via the Sojourner Project.

A letter with further details on this issue will be sent to external partners shortly.

Establishing statutory domestic homicide reviews

Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 will be implemented from 31 March 2011. This provision will establish multi-agency domestic homicide reviews on a statutory basis to ensure all the agencies involved identify lessons that can be learned from domestic violence homicides, with a view to improving policies and practice.

Community Safety Partnerships will play a key role by initiating a review and utilising their local contacts to establish a multi-agency review panel. The review will help identify and improve the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to better protect and safeguard victims of domestic violence. Implementation of this provision will be supported by statutory guidance and an e-learning training package.

For further information contact: DHRenquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Ministry of Defence publishes tri-service policy to tackle domestic and sexual violence

The policy has been developed to provide guidance for the Service community on domestic and sexual violence, as well as providing useful information on other forms of violence against women and girls. It raises awareness and provides guidance to the Armed Forces, including Commanding Officers and the Service specialist welfare organisations, about these forms of violence. The policy includes information to help recognise the signs of violence as well as signposting internal specialist welfare services and external support services.

We would like to thank stakeholders from the women's sector who provided detailed feedback to help us develop this policy.

Guidance published to prevent and tackle female genital mutilation

The new practice guidelines have been developed to assist front-line professionals to safeguard girls and women from the risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) and support those affected by the practice's severe health consequences. The guidelines set out the:

- complex issues around FGM;
- the signs that girls and women may be at risk, or have undergone, FGM; and
- the actions that professionals should take, often in conjunction with other agencies.

The guidelines can be found at www.fco.gov.uk/fgm

Taking steps to tackle forced marriage

In a special feature broadcast from Pakistan on 23 February, BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat revealed an increase in the number of individuals approaching the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) for help. In 2010 the FMU received 1735 reports relating to possible forced marriage, and provided direct support in 469 assistance and immigration cases.

The FMU and the Ministry of Justice, in conjunction with other partners, will host two events to raise awareness of the provisions under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and the support and help available to victims. Titled *Breaking the Barriers: Reaching closed communities*, the events will be held on 25 March in Ilford and 31 March in Cardiff. To book a place, please email lucy.torrington@fco.gov.uk or call 0207 008 0243

For more information about the work of the FMU see their website at www.fco.gov.uk/fmu

New actions to tackle stalking and harassment

The effect of stalking on victims' lives can be devastating. A third of victims said they had lost their job, their relationship or had been forced to move house as a result of stalking. We recognise that all organisations need to work together to improve their understanding of and their response to stalking. This includes the Police, the Crown Prosecution Service, magistrates, the NHS and the prison service. In December 2010, the Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) organised a joint National Stalking Conference to promote the sharing of best practice between the police and the CPS. A short video of the event can be found at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdYU77DOQ3M

We want to build on the success of this event to ensure that all police force areas and prosecutors have access to best practice and encourage them to adopt it in their area. The Government's VAWG Action Plan outlines the start of a new approach to tackling stalking.