



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## PUBLICATION

# Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: annual progress report 2020 to 2021

Summary of progress made from April 2020 to March 2021.

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# Contents

## Current context

---

## Introduction

---

## Response to COVID-19

---

## National Strategy objectives

---

## Conclusion and next steps

---

## Current context

While this report covers the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, it is important to situate it within the context that it is being published.

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) is at the forefront of the public conscience following the details of recent high profile cases in the media. The subject of male violence is being debated and discussed as well as the need to tackle misogyny and gender inequality as the root cause of VAWDASV.

This is compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which is rightly the focus of this report. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, data has shown that VAWDASV has intensified, with UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, describing the proportions of violence against women and girls as a '**shadow pandemic**'.

It is right therefore that this report looks back at the work of Welsh Government, in partnership with the specialist sector, over the last year to support victims and

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survivors during an exceptionally difficult time, but it will also pull out some of the continuing commitments being made to fulfil our ambition to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

## Introduction

Under section 12 of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act'), the Welsh Ministers must, in respect of each financial year, publish a report which addresses the following:

- progress made towards achieving the objectives in the national strategy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (2016 to 2021)
- progress made towards achieving the purpose of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 in Wales (by reference to the national indicators).

This report covers the period between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. Work that has taken place outside of this reporting period is not included in this report.

While previous annual progress reports have specifically covered progress against the objectives set out in the national strategy, it must be noted that the time period of this report spans the course of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This raised significant challenges for victims, survivors and specialist services in the sector and required immediate realignment of Welsh Government priorities to urgently respond to the crisis. This progress report will therefore focus mainly on the Welsh Government response to COVID-19.

While progress continued to be made against each of the objectives set out in the national strategy, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be underestimated. It has required an urgent and flexible response to an exceptional crisis, the Welsh Government increased the allocation to the VAWDASV sector by more than £4 million for one year to ensure they could respond to the increased demand as a result of the pandemic.

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Recognition and thanks must be given to the VAWDASV sector and specialist services for their response to victims during the pandemic. They have been a crucial lifeline to many and have shown an extraordinary ability to adapt. Their resilience and commitment has meant that victims and survivors have continued to be supported through this tremendously challenging period.

The strong partnerships across the sector and government, along with the invaluable support of the National Advisers to Welsh Government, has enabled an effective and rapid response to the challenges brought about by the crisis. However, the pandemic is not yet over and these partnerships will continue to address the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

Alongside responding to this unprecedented crisis, 2020 marked the fifth anniversary of the ground breaking Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. Since the Act came in to force the approach to tackling VAWDASV in Wales has been transformed. Implementation of the Act has led to increased training, stronger guidance, practice change and clear strategic direction throughout the Welsh public service, all impacting on the lives of those affected.

Although significant strides have been made, there is still more work to do. The new Programme for Government (2021 to 2026) commits to expanding the 'Ask and Act' and 'Don't be a Bystander' training and awareness campaigns. It also commits to strengthening the National Strategy for VAWDASV to include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home in order to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

## **The Domestic Abuse Act 2021**

The UK Government led Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was signed into law on 29 April 2021. The Act provides additional protections to those who experience domestic abuse and its provisions contain important advances on matters such as addressing controlling and coercive behaviour and non-fatal strangulation. Significant work took place during 2020 to 2021 to ensure the Welsh context was considered and reflected within the Act.

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The Act also creates the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. Whilst the Commissioner does not have a jurisdiction over devolved matters, Welsh public authorities and Welsh Government will work collaboratively with the Commissioner to further the shared agenda to tackle VAWDASV.

## Response to COVID-19

The 2020 to 2021 reporting period has spanned the global COVID-19 pandemic which has raised exceptional challenges across the VAWDASV sector. This created an urgent need to address the impact of the pandemic on victims, survivors and specialist services. All areas of the national strategy have been touched by the impact of COVID-19 and a flexible approach has been needed to reprioritise and respond at pace.

While restrictions around leaving the home were in place to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that not every home was a place of safety. Enforced isolation, which can be used as a tool for coercive control or as an excuse to inflict violence on victims, made this a particularly challenging time. For this reason, those fleeing VAWDASV or at risk of harm were made exempt from these regulations and communications campaigns throughout periods of restrictions aimed to reassure victims that specialist services were still operating and ready to provide support.

The response to COVID-19 has been underpinned by partnership engagement, listening to specialist sector representatives to understand what victims and survivors need, and acting effectively on that feedback. A VAWDASV COVID-19 Strategic Group was quickly established at the outset of the pandemic and continues to meet to respond to the ongoing situation. This group is made up of key stakeholders, chaired by Welsh Government, and meets regularly to identify where efforts need to be directed to tackle the impact of the pandemic on VAWDASV. It has ensured that the solutions being developed at speed reflect the needs of specialist services, victims and survivors.

Building on this collaboration, significant new funding was provided by Welsh Government to the VAWDASV sector over 2020 to 2021, with more than £4

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million of additional funding made available to deal with the impact of COVID-19. This is an extra 67% compared with the previous year. It has enabled services to reconfigure what they do in a COVID-secure way, such as equipping refuges and supporting victims. It has also facilitated additional training including online training, capacity building and supporting resilience. Crucially it has allowed vital services to continue and to deal with the increasing demand caused by the pandemic.

The additional funding made available to the sector over the reporting period is broken down as follows:

- Over £1.2 million in disbursed community-based accommodation for those for whom refuge provision is not suitable, and for move-on accommodation. This has helped to free up spaces in refuges.
- An additional £0.25 million revenue funding was initially made available at the start of the 2020 to 2021 financial year. This was topped-up with a further £1.567 million of revenue funding and £1 million of capital funding to help the sector address the needs caused by the pandemic.

While sufficient funding has been critical to the response to COVID-19, Welsh Government has worked closely with the sector during this period to determine how best to allocate the additional money. Some examples of how this funding has been utilised are:

- £200k of repurposed capital funding to support COVID-compliance. This included Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as well as providing additional white goods and homeware to enhance hygiene and facilitate social distancing in refuges.
- £120k made available to the specialist sexual violence sector to enable them to reduce their counselling waiting lists.
- £233k provided to VAWDASV regions to enhance 'remote court' hearing facilities across Wales. This enabled regions to purchase equipment that will allow specialist VAWDASV facilities to be adapted to allow victims to present secure evidence safely by video link.
- An additional £167k to the Live Fear Free helpline to enable them to provide support to those seeking help during the pandemic.

To support VAWDASV services further, COVID-19 guidance was developed and issued throughout the reporting period to help services understand what steps they needed to take to keep staff and the people they support safe during the pandemic. This guidance was updated throughout the year alongside the developing situation.

Further guidance has also been developed to support specific areas such as guidance for services for perpetrators of VAWDASV. Communications campaigns have been tailored to reflect the impact of the pandemic and training has been made available to widen the reach of professionals being better able to identify and respond to VAWDASV. These areas are covered in more detail against each of the relevant national strategy objectives.

Significant time, effort and resource has been focussed on dealing with the impact of COVID-19 over the reporting period and this impact is still ongoing. The pandemic has led to more complex cases, a greater strain on resources and an increased demand for services. It has meant reprioritising at speed, outside of the national strategy objectives, to meet the immediate needs of specialist services, victims and survivors.

## National Strategy objectives

The National Strategy on VAWDASV (2016 to 2021) sets out six objectives which contribute to the pursuit of the purpose of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015.

The purpose of the Act is to improve:

- arrangements for the prevention of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- arrangements for the protection of victims of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- support for people affected by violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

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Progress over the reporting period for each of the six objectives is outlined below. As highlighted in the introduction, this will be related in the main to the response to the pandemic and is in addition to the wider and immediate response set out in the COVID-19 section above.

## **Objective 1: Increase awareness and challenge attitudes of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh population**

### **Communications and campaigns**

Recognising the potential for an increase in violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign was launched in May 2020. It aimed to ensure that victims knew that services were still operating and offering support, and to encourage bystanders and concerned others to access help and information.

The campaign featured real life scenarios drawn from calls to the Live Fear Free helpline. It was developed and supported by key specialist agencies and the VAWDASV Communication Group. Campaign content and delivery has been reactive to the pandemic to reflect the timings of restrictions on movement and contacts with friends and family alongside national and local lockdown periods.

'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' is a multi-media campaign, and has been shared across TV, Radio, national and local news and press, online, and with support of community networks such as pharmacies, local supermarkets and police forces, reaching the widest possible audience including the most vulnerable. Campaign material was also shared within COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination centres.

Partnership working proved effective throughout all stages of the campaign; the Live Fear Free helpline number featured on till receipts at Tesco stores across Wales for three months, B&Q stores across Wales displayed campaign posters



along with two independent garden centres and posters were distributed to 716 pharmacies in Wales. Victoria Derbyshire shared the Live Fear Free helpline information on her Twitter to over 149k followers. Luke Evans also promoted the Live Fear Free helpline and access to safe support for victims within a piece to camera.

In December 2020, Welsh Ministers issued a Written Statement to mark five years since the implementation of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015. This highlighted the progress made over five years of the Act which has set out clear strategic direction for the Welsh public service. The resulting work has not only impacted on the lives of those affected, it has put Wales at the forefront of the agenda. The UK Government and the other UK nations have turned to Wales for best practice and to learn lessons from the implementation of the Act.

In March 2021, a Written Statement was issued by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip on women's safety in Wales following the tragic killing of Sarah Everard and subsequent vigils held across the country. While stranger abduction may be rare, violence against women and girls is far too common and the statement outlined the need for changes to society and culture so that all women and girls can live fear free and committed to strengthening the national strategy for VAWDASV.

## Community Communications

In order to raise awareness of local VAWDASV specialist services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and to broaden the reach of the Live Fear Free helpline and 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign, the VAWDASV Communication group and COVID-19 strategic group agreed to distribute £30,000 in funding towards community communication activity to the VAWDASV regions over the reporting period. This means of distribution was favoured to minimise impact and burden upon local VAWDASV specialist services during the pandemic.

This was an additional opportunity to raise awareness of both local specialist services and the Live Fear Free helpline and campaign 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' within community and digital settings.

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Activities included, digital learning sessions covering themes such as older victims, male victims, Child to Parent Abuse, mental health and VAWDASV and isolation and rurality.

Additionally this included large promotional banners used in supermarkets and town centre locations, development of leaflets and journals for high risk victims as well as purchasing and distributing Live Fear Free merchandise.

## **Key Achievements**

- 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign:
  - Impressions: 19,079,184 Digital channels (Facebook, Twitter, Google, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Spotify, GDN and TrueView).
  - Reach: 24,200,000. National media (TV, Radio and print media).
- There were over 20,800 visits to the Live Fear Free website during the period.
- The campaign stopped the downward trend in contacts to the Live Fear Free helpline that was initially observed when the pandemic struck with levels returning to pre lockdown levels. Contacts during the campaign period increased during each phase. Following all phases of the campaign a 37% increase in contacts had been made to the helpline.
- Written Statements from Welsh Ministers on women's safety in Wales committing to strengthening the National Strategy and to mark five years since the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015 came in to force.
- £30,000 in funding distributed towards community communication activity to VAWDASV regions.

## **Objective 2: Increased awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong**

Throughout the pandemic there have been concerns raised by the VAWDASV specialist sector of the increase in children and young people who have experienced and been witness to violence and abuse at home with less access

to support from appropriate adults. VAWDASV specialist services reported drops in the number of children supported in the community as lockdown restrictions presented barriers to support.

To address these concerns, a VAWDASV Vulnerable Children and Young People Stakeholder Group was established in May 2020 to identify the challenges and issues as a result of COVID-19 and to identify appropriate solutions. The work of the Group led to the development and distribution of numerous resources to help address the concerns raised in school settings during the pandemic. These resources covered forced marriage, domestic abuse and peer abuse.

Working across government with Welsh Government Education and Safeguarding teams, this information was uploaded to 'Hwb', the digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales, for use by practitioners. The resources highlighted the signs to look out for that a child or young person may be experiencing domestic abuse, peer abuse or forced marriage. This included information on organisations which could offer advice, guidance and support, especially if they do not meet the threshold for social services intervention.

Raising children and young people's awareness of equality, respect and consent is a crucial factor to stopping VAWDASV. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) will be made a statutory part of the new curriculum for all learners which comes into effect from 2022. This will ensure that all learners between the ages of 3 and 16 have access to developmentally appropriate, high quality learning that responds to their needs and experiences.

In March 2020, the Minister for Education established an RSE working group which includes relevant stakeholders and practitioners to agree the topics to be covered by schools and to co-construct the detailed guidance to support learning. This is a cross-government issue which has had ongoing input from VAWDASV officials over the reporting period to feed in to the RSE working group.

Over the reporting period work has continued with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to identify support needs and awareness raising activities to assist staff and students during the academic year. VAWDASV guidance for Higher Education Institutions, which was previously published in

partnership with HEFCW in March 2020, was revised in November 2020 to account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding has also continued to be provided to Hafan Cymru's Spectrum project which promotes the importance of healthy relationships and raises awareness of VAWDASV. Spectrum also delivers training for school staff and governors about understanding the impact of domestic abuse on a child and promotes a whole school approach to tackling domestic abuse. Over the course of the reporting year this service has had to quickly adapt due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure that support and awareness raising continued, all resources and sessions were moved online which meant over 11,000 pupils were still able to take part in this important learning. The funding provided by Welsh Government also contributed to the Spectrum Project developing age appropriate bilingual resources for children and young people experiencing abuse which are used during online sessions.

## **Key Achievements**

- Established VAWDASV Vulnerable Children and Young People Stakeholder Group to identify challenges, concerns and solutions due to COVID-19.
- Continued funding Hafan Cymru's Spectrum project. Between April 2020 and March 2021 over 11,570 young people accessed healthy relationship awareness workshops via the project, taking the overall total to 165,626.
- Supported the development of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the new curriculum for all learners through VAWDASV input to the RSE working group.

## **Objective 3: To increase focus on holding perpetrators to account and to provide opportunities to change their behaviour based around victim safety**

The Welsh Government leads the VAWDASV workstream of the 'Framework to support positive change for those at risk of offending in Wales' 2018 to 2023. The group has met quarterly over the reporting period with relevant progress

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reports submitted to the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru Board. In May 2020 an extraordinary meeting was also held to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on services and the challenges they anticipate for the future.

Work with services and commissioners to support the application of the National Standards for VAWDASV perpetrator services continued and Frequently Asked Questions on the application of the standards were published on the IOM Cymru website.

In April 2020, COVID-19 Guidance for Services for perpetrators of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence was developed and sent to the sector. This guidance contained advice for services on how to effectively continue their work under the current circumstances, and how to manage risks that may be arising as a result.

The Welsh Government also hosted a series of virtual VAWDASV perpetrator services practice sharing events on 20 August 2020, 2 December 2020 and 17 March 2021 with over 100 attendees.

Over the reporting period more than £135,000 of funding has been provided to support VAWDASV Perpetrator Services across Wales to ensure perpetrators of domestic abuse and sexual violence had access to an approved programme of support. A total of 200 service users benefited from the intervention programmes supported by this funding.

## Key Achievements

- Over £135,000 of funding provided to support VAWDASV Perpetrator Services across Wales to ensure perpetrators of domestic abuse and sexual violence had access to an approved programme of support.
- COVID-19 guidance for services for perpetrators of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence published.
- A series of virtual practice sharing events delivered throughout the year with over 100 attendees.

## **Objective 4: Make early intervention and prevention a priority**

Early intervention is vital to identifying and reducing the harm caused by violence and abuse. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public restrictions has created unique challenges to identifying VAWDASV at the earliest opportunity. It is recognised that it may be harder for victims to seek help when their movements have been restricted during the pandemic. The focus during the reporting period has been on building upon existing measures that make early intervention a priority and provide an appropriate response to minimise impact and harm. Building on these existing measures has ensured that help and support is available to those who need it.

### **Ask and Act**

The 'Ask and Act' programme is a process of targeted enquiry to be practiced across the 'relevant authorities' (as named in the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015) to identify violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The primary objective of 'Ask and Act' is to require relevant professionals to "ask" potential victims about the possibility of domestic abuse in certain circumstances and to "act" so suffering and harm as a result of the violence and abuse is reduced.

By February 2021, the 'Ask and Act' programme was fully operational in seven areas of Wales with further implementation underway at the time in Bridgend, Swansea Western Bay and Cardiff.

By March 2021, a total of 11,834 workers had been trained to 'ask and act'. Specifically during the 2020 to 2021 reporting period, 6,274 people were trained.

An evaluation of the 'Ask and Act' programme was commissioned in autumn 2020. The aim of the evaluation was; to explore the effectiveness of the implementation of the training to date, to explore the impact of the 'Ask and Act'

training on professionals and individuals across Wales and consequently to assess how successful it has been in meeting the aims of the programme. The evaluation is due to be published in winter 2021.

## E-Learning

In April 2020 the VAWDASV E-Learning module, which was previously only available to the workforce of 'relevant authorities' named in the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015, was made available to anyone through guest access. In a time of social distancing and restrictions, victims may not have been able to access the help and support they may have before. This has potentially meant a greater reliance on others to offer support and the aim of expanding this training was to enable anyone to be in a position to help. It has supported a wider range of people to be able to recognise the signs of abuse and know how they can help safely, whether that was volunteers assisting in communities, an emergency contractor, postal services workforce, local shops, or supermarket employees. During this period, over 54,000 people accessed the E-learning course.

## Live Fear Free Helpline

The Live Fear Free helpline is a free, 24/7 service for all victims and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and those close to them, including family, friends and colleagues. One of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic was that more time spent at home, at a time of social distancing restrictions and self-isolation, brought the potential for increased risk for victims of violence and abuse. Over the reporting period, information on keeping safe throughout the COVID-19 outbreak was developed and made available on the [Live Fear Free website](#) alongside ongoing communications campaigns to ensure that victims knew that services were still operating and offering support.

Contacts to the Live Fear Free helpline showed a pattern of decreasing during periods where restrictions on movements were in place, and then increasing significantly when restrictions were lifted. The subsequent 'Home shouldn't be a



place of fear' communications campaign helped to address this pattern as outlined under objective one.

The Live Fear Free helpline reports that calls during the pandemic have been more complex and assessed at higher risk. An additional £167,000 of funding was provided to the Live Fear Free helpline to enable them to respond efficiently to the increase in demand.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, over 31,000 contacts were made to the Live Fear Free helpline through calls, email, text or webchat.

## **Research: What Works to Prevent Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)?**

In November 2020, research was commissioned to identify effective practice for the prevention of VAWDASV with the intention that the evidence identified could be used to inform the adoption of evidence-based practice through the refresh of the National Strategy on VAWDASV in Wales in 2021. Research commenced in January 2021 and is funded by the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. A **final report** was published in September 2021.

## **National Survivor Engagement Framework**

The National Survivor Engagement Framework aims to combine multiple ways in which survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence can influence the work of the Welsh Government. It also provides a vehicle for survivors to advocate for themselves and to educate their peers, communities and colleagues.

A pilot project which enabled survivor participation in a national survivor engagement panel concluded in December 2019. Evaluation of the pilot took place throughout 2020 with stakeholder and survivor interviews taking place virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A full **evaluation report** was published in September 2021. This includes recommendations for future engagement methods.

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## Key Achievements

- VAWDASV E-Learning module made available to anyone through guest access where previously training could only be accessed by 'relevant authorities' named in the VAWDASV Act. This resulted in over 54,000 people accessing the course.
- At March 2021, a total of 11,834 workers had been trained to 'ask and act'. Specifically during the 2020-2021 reporting period, 6,274 people were trained.
- Over 31,000 contacts were made to the Live Fear Free helpline through calls, email, text or webchat over the reporting period. These are all important opportunities to offer help and support to someone who needs it.

## Objective 5: Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors

One of the key mechanisms for delivering the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015 is the National Training Framework (NTF). Those experiencing VAWDASV access a range of public services for many reasons such as housing, healthcare and education. These services must provide referral pathways to support for victims. The National Training Framework offers proportionate training to strengthen the response provided across Wales to those experiencing these issues. It sets out ambitious and clear expectations for training standards, outcomes and content on VAWDASV. All levels of staff within groups 1 to 6 identified within the National Training Framework have a responsibility to undertake training.

In May 2020, the 'relevant authorities' outlined in the Act submitted their fourth annual reports and there continues to be a focus on the planning and implementation of the National Training Framework across Wales. Work has continued with relevant authorities to increase the percentage of the workforce completing basic awareness training.

Recognising that cases of VAWDASV have been more complex and at higher

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risk as a result of isolation during the pandemic, additional specialist training was commissioned during this reporting period for both relevant authority and non-relevant authority staff who come into contact with victims and perpetrators in their day to day roles. This additional training covered working with victims of honour-based abuse, male victims and identifying and working with perpetrators of VAWDASV. Offering this additional specialist training to non-relevant authority staff has also resulted in a wider range of professionals being better able to identify and respond to VAWDASV.

## **Key Achievements**

- By April 2021, 243,876 professionals in Wales had accessed training through the National Training Framework. That is 243,876 professionals who are more knowledgeable, more aware and more confident to respond to those experiencing VAWDASV. This is an increase of over 70,676 since the last reporting period.
- An additional 1,337 professionals received specialist training as a result of further funding in 2020 to 2021.

## **Objective 6: Provide victims with equal access to appropriately resourced high quality needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Wales**

The Welsh Government grant funds regions and third sector organisations to deliver direct service provision to support and protect victims of VAWDASV. Underpinning this, statutory guidance developed for commissioning of VAWDASV services promotes high quality collaborative commissioning that delivers more consistent and effective services on a needs-led basis.

While regular monitoring meetings have taken place over the reporting period to review the progress of each region's implementation of the requirements set out in the VAWDASV Commissioning Guidance, there has been a significant focus on the immediate needs identified as a result of the pandemic.

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As outlined in the 'Response to COVID-19' section of this report, significant new funding was provided by Welsh Government to the VAWDASV sector over the reporting period.

This additional funding has been critical to the response to COVID-19 and much of this reporting period has been focussed on working in collaboration with the VAWDASV sector to allocate this funding in the most effective way.

## **Honour-based abuse**

An All Wales Honour-based Abuse Leadership Group is jointly chaired by Welsh Government, BAWSO and the Crown Prosecution Service. The group has set out a framework for key partners to contribute to tackling this issue in Wales, whilst providing the best possible support to survivors.

Information about honour-based abuse was included for the first time in the Wales Violence Prevention Unit's report in August 2020, with data provided by the All Wales Honour-based Abuse Leadership Group.

In response to the First Minister's BAME COVID-19 advisory group report of the socioeconomic subgroup, the Honour-based Abuse Leadership Group has also been working to identify the particular risks and barriers faced by the BAME community, in addition to those faced by the wider population, and to make recommendations to address them. Contributions have also been provided to support a review of the recommendations set out in the 2013 'Uncharted Territory: Violence against migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women in Wales' funded by Public Health Wales.

In September 2020, resources for teachers were developed and circulated via the Hwb network to raise awareness of female genital mutilation (FGM) and the signs that a young girl could be at risk of FGM.

In October 2020, an awareness raising training contract was awarded to Karma Nirvana to provide twenty free virtual 'roadshows' to professionals working within Wales to build confidence when challenging honour-based abuse and forced marriage.

The roadshows took place between January and March 2021 and aimed to improve multi-agency awareness and responses to honour-based abuse through providing and broadening 'safer spaces' for victims and survivors to speak and confidentially make disclosures.

## Key Achievements

- More than £4 million of additional funding made available to the VAWDASV sector to deal with the impact of COVID-19.
- Honour-based abuse data was included for the first time in the Wales Violence Prevention Unit's report in August 2020.
- Between January and March 2021, twenty honour-based abuse virtual roadshows were delivered. These were attended by 657 professionals from 120 organisations.
- Resources on female genital mutilation (FGM) developed and circulated amongst teachers via the Hwb network.

## Conclusion and next steps

This reporting year has been one of unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. While progress has been made against the objectives set out in the national strategy, there has rightly been a shift over this reporting period to focus on the immediate needs raised as a result of the pandemic and its impact on victims, survivors and VAWDASV specialist services.

It is anticipated that the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the economy and mental health of the population will be reflected in a prolonged increase in the risk of abuse. Work to support the VAWDASV sector to address this ongoing impact will continue to be a focus of the reporting years ahead.

Alongside this, the new Welsh Government Programme for Government (2021 to 2026) commits to:

- Strengthening the VAWDASV national strategy to include a focus on

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violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home.

- Expand the 'Ask and Act' and 'Don't be a Bystander' training and awareness campaigns.
- Make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

Work to review and strengthen the national strategy on VAWDASV is already underway. A working group of key partner organisations has been meeting throughout 2021 to review the effectiveness of the aims and objectives of the existing strategy and determine what revisions are required in light of policy changes and other developments, as well as the changing landscape since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A public consultation is planned for late 2021.

The new Programme for Government commitments and engagement feedback from the national strategy working group will be used to inform communications campaigns for 2021 to 2022. Initial engagement with the VAWDASV Communication group is underway to explore a new campaign direction on 'harassment' for autumn 2021.

Work will also continue to build upon the good progress of the current national strategy including;

- continuing to assess and respond to the needs of children and young people
- continuing to work on a cross-governmental basis to ensure that VAWDASV is considered across the board in policy making
- expanding the training offering for professionals who come into contact with victims and perpetrators in their day to day roles such as housing, education and social care
- considering future engagement methods to ensure survivors' voices are heard
- developing a monitoring framework to assess compliance with existing commissioning guidance and to support regions to work together to provide an effective commissioning and delivery framework
- building upon the work of the All-Wales Honour Based Abuse Leadership Group to review and consider the next steps that can be taken to support victims and survivors aligning with the new national strategy.

While positive steps have and continue to be taken to tackle violence against

women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales, there is always more work to do. It is a societal problem which requires a societal response by challenging attitudes and changing the behaviours of those who behave abusively. A whole system approach will be critical to underpinning the next steps in this journey and all organisations, both devolved and non-devolved, must work together. The ambition remains clear, to end VAWDASV and to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

## About this document

This document is a copy of the web page [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: annual progress report 2020 to 2021](#) downloaded.

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