



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

# Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: annual progress report 2021 to 2022

Summary of progress made from April 2021 to March 2022.

**First published:** 21 December 2022

**Last updated:** 21 December 2022

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# Introduction and context

This report focuses on progress the Welsh Government has made in the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and is aligned to the objectives set out in the National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) 2016 to 2021.

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)

Section 3 of the Act sets out the duty of Welsh Ministers to prepare and publish a National Strategy, which can be reviewed at any time deemed suitable. During 2021 to 2022 the Welsh Government was working with key partners, stakeholders and the specialist sector to develop a **new National Strategy**, to build on the learning from the previous iteration and to continue to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

The Strategy will be delivered through a Blueprint approach, which brings together devolved and non-devolved organisations through workstreams that will focus on the objectives for 2022 to 2026, as well as strengthening the partnership between public, private and specialist sectors.

Overseeing the delivery of the Strategy is a new National Partnership Board co-chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and Dafydd Llewelyn, Police and Crime

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Commissioner for Dyfed Powys Police. The first meeting was held on 23 May 2022.

Work on delivering the Strategy is aligned with our Programme for Government, with workstreams for:

- street harassment and safety in public places
- workplace harassment
- tackling perpetration
- sustainable commissioning, children and young people and older people

The Strategy adopts a life course approach to VAWDASV, inclusive of children and adults of all ages, including older people recognising features of abuse throughout an individual's life stages.

During 2021 to 2022, the global COVID-19 pandemic was still very much at the forefront of all aspects of life. The pandemic continued to raise challenges for victims and survivors, and those specialist services that provide crucial, lifesaving support to them as well as those who support perpetrators or those concerned about their behaviour to change. While progress has evidently been made against each of the objectives set out in the National Strategy, the continued impact of the pandemic has to be recognised. The Welsh Government provided additional revenue funding to the third sector and local authorities during 2021 to 2022 to support them to continue vital services and to deal with the increasing demand caused by COVID-19. The specialist VAWDASV sector has continued to support victims and survivors through another challenging year.

## National strategy

The National Strategy on VAWDASV (2016 to 2021) sets out 6 objectives which contribute to the pursuit of the purpose of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015.

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Alongside the objectives, national indicators help public bodies, together with wider stakeholders, to understand the extent to which the shared vision, as set out in the National Strategy, is being achieved.

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

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

### **Communications and campaigns**

Live Fear Free encompasses more than the pan-Wales helpline that is available to support anybody affected by VAWDASV. Live Fear Free is also the Welsh Government's overarching identity that is given to any communication, engagement and call to action relating to VAWDASV. Through our Live Fear Free campaigns, we have continued to raise awareness of stalking, harassment, abuse and violence against women in all aspects of life, including the street and other public places. These campaigns provide practical advice for those who may be suffering abuse as well as highlighting the support available to enable friends, family and the wider community to recognise abuse and take safe action.

In December 2021 we launched the Call out Only campaign, encouraging the

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public (in particular, men) to call out and challenge assumptions about harassment against women; often wrongly seen as harmless; between peers, friends and colleagues. The campaign aimed to help people identify behaviours associated with street harassment and acknowledged that the experiences of women and girls are serious and prevalent and that they can cause fear, alarm and distress.

The Call out Only campaign highlighted how seemingly innocuous actions and words such as “I only wolf-whistled at her” or “I only slapped her bum” that are preceded with the word ONLY become altogether more sinister when that word is removed. It highlighted that these behaviours exist on a spectrum and excusing any form of VAWDASV, excuses all forms including serious sexual assaults and rape.

The campaign provided information that empowered bystanders to take a stand and call out abusive and sexist behaviour among their friends and colleagues in a safe way - promoting a culture of equality and respect. The campaign suggested examples of interventions, including arranging to meet the person involved privately to discuss what was said, not feeling pressured to laugh along to sexist conversations or ‘banter’, questioning behaviour and calling out others on their abusive behaviour. The Call out Only campaign was not designed to humiliate or shame anybody; rather it was about educating and encouraging a change in attitudes.

The Call out Only campaign website contains information on bystander programmes; how to safely help, support and take a stand; information on changing your own behaviour and the support available for those who may be experiencing, or have experienced, sexual harassment, stalking or abuse. The campaign was developed with the support of the VAWDASV stakeholder communication group. The group has been integral in sharing specialist knowledge and has been involved in all stages of its development.

The Call out Only campaign generated over 6.8 million impressions, and over

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20,000 views of the campaign website. During the campaign period contacts to the Live Fear Free helpline increased by 15%.

The Call out Only campaign was also successful in raising awareness amongst those who perpetrate abuse or were concerned about their behaviour. The Live Fear Free helpline saw an increase in perpetrator contacts of 1,267% and Respect saw an increase of 69% to their change that lasts website.

## Community communications

An example of the work that the VAWDASV stakeholder communication group has contributed to during the year is awareness raising of VAWDASV and local VAWDASV specialist services for the Beauty industry (hairdressers, barbers, nail technicians, beauticians etc.). Generally speaking, professionals within this industry were not included within the target audience for the VAWDASV National Training Framework and they are also rarely included within local training needs analysis or offered VAWDASV training. However, they work in a close, personal, discreet environment with potential victims of VAWDASV, often building trusted relationships with their clients.

Each VAWDASV region worked with their networks and specialist services to collaborate on the initiative within their regions. Activity varied across Wales, following engagement with the industry around regional needs. A hybrid approach was taken, with information being disseminated, training being offered, visits to salons and digital activity. Tangible resources were developed with Live Fear Free contact details discreetly embedded into them.

Campaign channels also extended to other public spaces, for example the Live Fear Free helpline number was shared on the back of over 400,000 bus tickets across South Wales over a 6 week period.

In order to encourage the prevention of VAWDASV, the campaign also invested

in engagement with barbers, sharing information containing the Respect helpline, with the view to encouraging men to reflect on their behaviour and providing a contact number should they wish to explore theirs or someone else's behaviour further.

In addition to this, a total of £30,000 was distributed between regions to support community communication activity throughout 2021 to 2022.

## **Key achievements**

- The Call out Only campaign generated over 6.8 million impressions, and over 20,000 views of the campaign website. During the campaign period contacts to the Live Fear Free helpline increased by 15%.
- The campaign was successful in raising awareness amongst those who perpetrate or concerned about their behaviour. The Live Fear Free helpline saw an increase of 1,267% (from 12-164) perpetrators contacts and Respect saw an increase of 69% to their Change that Lasts website.

## **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**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of VAWDASV in their own right and this is an important shift that shaped our work in 2021 to 2022 and will continue to do so going forward.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to create unprecedented challenges throughout all aspects of life. In the VAWDASV sector, specialist organisations continued to report that children and young people were increasingly experiencing domestic abuse in their homes, with various restrictions leading to challenges in accessing services and support. Specialist services reported drops

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in the number of children supported in the community as lockdown restrictions presented barriers to support.

During the development of the National Strategy we worked with a number of partners to ensure the voices of children and young people were heard in the consultation period. This included publishing a young person's version of the consultation document together with an online survey. These were used during engagement with children and young people by our partners in the specialist VAWDASV sector, as well as being promoted by the Children's Commissioner and Children in Wales.

As a result of this engagement and the consultation responses, the blueprint model for delivery will have a workstream dedicated to looking at VAWDASV issues affecting children and young people.

In 2021 to 2022, the Welsh Government continued to fund Hafan Cymru's Spectrum project. This 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. In addition to the funding offered to the Spectrum project, we also funded the development of resources for teachers including online training and printed resources on how to effectively deal with disclosures of VAWDASV from pupils.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) held a Wales-wide workshop on 17 February 2022, to explore ways universities, working together with the specialist sector organisations can tackle violence against women within university settings and support victims and survivors, feeding into their 2022 to 2026 strategic plan.

In August 2021, Estyn published a thematic report titled "**We don't tell our teachers**" which described an account of peer-on-peer sexual harassment amongst secondary school pupils in Wales. In December, Welsh Government

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**responded** to Estyn's recommendations.

In response to the report, the Welsh Government is working with a range of stakeholders, including the Police to develop a multi-agency action plan. The action plan is intended for children and young people, and all those working with children and young people in an education setting who would benefit from understanding the actions taken by the Welsh Government and partners to tackle peer on peer sexual harassment in education settings. This action plan will be taken forward as part of the children and young people workstream of the VAWDASV blueprint.

## **Key Achievements**

- The voices of children and young people shaped the development of the VAWDASV National Strategy and our partnership work in this area will continue through the blueprint workstream on issues affecting children and young people.

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

Recognising the continued need for professionals who come into contact with victims and perpetrators in their day-to-day roles (housing, education, social care) to receive training, funding was allocated in 2021 to 2022 for awareness training for working with male victims. This also included recognising and working with perpetrators and working with victims of Honour based abuse.

As reported above, the Call out Only campaign encouraged the public (in particular men) to call out unacceptable behaviour. The key achievements are highlighted under objective 1, including an increase of 1,267% (from 12 to 164)

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people contacting the Live Fear Free helpline with concerns about their own harmful behaviours.

In 2021 to 2022, 7% of the VAWDASV Regional Revenue Grant was ring-fenced for working with those who display harmful behaviours. Provisions commissioned include services for working with those who have perpetrated domestic abuse towards an Intimate Partner (IP), a whole family approach and services to prevent stalking.

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

The Welsh Government recognises that intervening early is vital to identifying and reducing harm caused by violence and abuse. The Welsh Government's innovative approach to early intervention has seen continued roll out of Ask and Act, a policy and training programme which skills up key public service workers to undertake targeted enquiry to identify abuse.

Identifying VAWDASV at the earliest opportunity and providing an appropriate response to minimise impact and harm is critical in achieving the early intervention and prevention objective of the National Strategy.

The Welsh Government commissioned a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) during 2020 to 2021 to better understand how to communicate effectively with perpetrators of domestic abuse and those who are beginning to display these harmful behaviours and how this can inform media campaigns targeting these cohorts. The findings were **published by the British Psychological Society (BPS)**.

## Ask and Act

The Ask and Act programme is now fully operational in all areas of Wales. By March 2022, a total of 17,600 workers had been trained to 'Ask and Act'. Specifically, during the 2021 to 2022 reporting period, 5,220 people were trained.

An **evaluation of the Ask and Act programme was published** in January 2022. Findings of the report suggest that Ask and Act is an important and valuable programme and there is wide recognition for the need for Ask and Act. Officials have engaged with key stakeholders and have already begun implementing changes to policy as a result of the evaluation. The Welsh Government **published an addendum to the current Ask and Act guidance** to allow further flexibility for delivery of training.

## VAWDASV E-Learning

In April 2020, the VAWDASV E-learning module was made available to anyone through guest access. Previously this E-learning was only available to the workforce of relevant authorities named in the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015. Opening up access to this training has supported a wider range of people to be able to recognise the signs of abuse and know how they can help safely. 67,848 (38,000 guest access) people accessed the E-learning course in 2021 to 2022.

## Survivor Engagement

Survivor voices are essential to our work and must be heard at the highest level if we are to effectively tackle VAWDASV. That is why the Welsh Government previously committed to developing a Survivor Engagement Framework in order to ensure input from a diverse group of survivors of all types of VAWDASV.

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A pilot project, which enabled survivor participation in a national survivor engagement panel, concluded in December 2019. The pilot has been evaluated and the evaluation report, including recommendations for future engagement methods, was published in September 2021.

As a result of this pilot, further research was conducted which explored 'Barriers to Engagement: Engaging Survivors from Diverse Groups'. This has now concluded and the **findings were published** in June 2022..

The research reports have been considered alongside the objectives set within the National Strategy 2022 to 2026 and the development of the VAWDASV blueprint in order to develop a long-term approach to survivor engagement which can inform policy and practices within Wales.

As part of the blueprint, alongside partners, we will develop a Survivor Voice Scrutiny and Involvement Panel to embed survivor voices from the spectrum of VAWDASV experiences and those already engaged with pre-established groups.

This approach will create a national, consistent and inclusive pathway that enables those with lived experiences to not only shape policy direction but to scrutinise the implementation of the National Strategy, the VAWDASV blueprint and its workstreams.

This approach will ensure survivors are at the centre of the blueprint approach to tackling VAWDASV and sets out a structure and way of working based on wellbeing, sustainability and respect.

## Key Achievements

- VAWDASV E-Learning module is still available to anyone through guest access where previously training could only be accessed by relevant

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authorities. This has resulted in over 22,366 people accessing the course in 2021 to 2022.

- By March 2021, a total of 17,600 workers had been trained to 'Ask and Act'. During the 2021 to 2022 reporting period, 5,220 people were trained.

## **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 NTF 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 NTF have a responsibility to undertake training.

In May 2021, the relevant authorities outlined in the Act submitted their fifth annual reports and there continues to be a focus on the planning and implementation of the NTF 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 risk as a result of isolation during the pandemic, additional specialist training was commissioned during this reporting period for both relevant authority staff and staff of other authorities 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 the end of March 2022, 276,903 professionals in Wales had accessed training through the National Training Framework. That is 276,903 professionals who are more knowledgeable, more aware and more confident to respond to those experiencing VAWDASV. This is an increase of over 32,000 since the last reporting period.
- An additional 1,311 professionals received specialist training as a result of further funding in 2021 to 2022.

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

The Welsh Government has continued to fund the Live Fear Free Helpline to offer 24-hour confidential help and support for those experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence. With the ability to contact the helpline through phone or live chat channels, and with translation services available, those who need support can choose the most appropriate route for them. Live Fear Free continued to build relationships with key partners to support with referral pathways for service users, such as health boards and other specialist services.

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## Welsh Government funding in 2021 to 2022

In 2021 to 2022 the Welsh Government provided £7.8 million in revenue and £2.2 million in capital funding to VAWDASV regions and specialist services to provide invaluable and lifesaving support to all victims of VAWADSV. This includes early intervention, preventative and educational support, perpetrator intervention programmes, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates for high-risk victims as well as therapeutic recovery interventions for the ongoing support of those impacted by VAWDASV. This funding ensures that, no matter where a victim lives in Wales, there is a strong public and specialist service ready to help.

## Victims of VAWDASV with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

In 2021 to 2022, the Welsh Government, in collaboration with partners, established a steering group to review the solutions and support available to those fleeing VAWDASV with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), most commonly because of their migrant status. This steering group is chaired by the National Advisers for Violence against Women, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

We are committed to working with partners within Wales and the UK Government to find solutions that can address the inequalities faced by refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking women fleeing VAWDASV in Wales.

Immigration is not devolved and therefore we have continued to engage with the Home Office as it piloted its Support for Migrant Victims scheme. The pilot was set to end in March 2022 followed by an evaluation prior to any future planning for ongoing funding. The scheme was subsequently extended to cover the evaluation period and will be ongoing until March 2023. We are pressing for a response as soon as possible from the UK Government.

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Our work in this area continues and we will learn from the Sereda report, the Uncharted Territory Reports and the recently published report from the Equality and Social Justice Committee to ensure that the work under the National Strategy is able to impact and benefit all victims including migrant women and those with NRPF.

## **So called ‘honour-based abuse’**

The Welsh Government continued to co-chair the All Wales Honour Based Abuse group alongside BAWSO and the Crown Prosecution Service during 2021 to 2022. The group brought together key partner organisations to work on a number of priorities, including addressing the recommendations in the Socio-Economic Group’s Black and Minority Ethnic subgroup report. In August 2021, honour-based abuse was included as an item for the first time in the Violence Prevention Unit’s report, using data fed in from the Honour Based Abuse group.

We have continued to work in partnership with specialist services to raise awareness of the inequality and safety issues face by women and girls to end all forms of so-called honour-based abuse. A Female Genital Mutilation poster and **factsheet** was also developed and cascaded to teachers via the Hwb network, and to youth centre workers.

Virginity testing and Hymenoplasty are acts of violence against women and girls and cannot be justified as clinical procedures. In April 2022, the Senedd gave its consent for the UK Government to legislate on its behalf and criminalise virginity testing and hymenoplasty in Wales as part of the Health and Care Act 2022. Criminalising these abusive and traumatising practices will ensure greater protection for women and girls.

The Health and Care Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022. The sections of the Act which criminalise virginity testing and hymenoplasty had a commencement date of 1 July 2022.

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The Welsh Government is finalising community communications in order to ensure people in Wales understand the new legislation. Information is expected to be made available to the public by the end of 2022.

## Conclusion and future focus

The National VAWDASV Strategy for 2016 to 2021 was nearing conclusion in the last financial year. To ensure that Welsh Government could continue to build on the successes and learnings of previous years, and to ensure seamless policy development across the VAWDASV spectrum, a public consultation on a draft Strategy was held between 7 December 2021 and 7 February 2022.

Over 120 responses were received. In addition to organisational responses from across the public, private and the third sector, there were responses from individuals who are VAWDASV survivors or whose lives have been directly impacted by VAWDASV.

As part of the consultation process, officials held engagement sessions for people to learn more about the Strategy throughout January 2022. Key partners undertook focus groups, workshop sessions and other engagement with their staff, networks and service users to ensure the survivor voice and the voices of children and young people were heard during the consultation.

Following from this, the [VAWDASV Strategy 2022 to 2026](#) was published in May 2022. The objectives of the new Strategy are:

### Objective 1

Challenge the public attitude to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh population through awareness raising and

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space for public discussion with the aim to decrease its occurrence.

## **Objective 2**

Increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices.

## **Objective 3**

Increase the focus on holding those who commit abuse to account and supporting those who may carry out abusive or violent behaviour to change their behaviour and avoid offending.

## **Objective 4**

Make early intervention and prevention a priority.

## **Objective 5**

Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors.

## **Objective 6**

Provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, inter-sectional, and responsive services across Wales.

The Strategy will be delivered through a Blueprint approach, which brings together devolved and non-devolved organisations, as well as strengthening the partnership between public private and specialist sectors.

As we reflect on the last Strategy, and in particular, the year which is covered by this report, it is clear that we have achieved a lot in pursuit of the objectives set out in the VAWDASV Act 2015. As we work through 2022 to 2023 however there are further challenges to consider like the cost-of-living crisis and we are all still coming to terms with the impact of the pandemic. The publication of the new Strategy and the blueprint approach, as well as the appointment of the two National Advisers means there will be a renewed focus on tackling VAWDASV and the gender inequality and misogyny that lie behind it. We face these challenges as partners and go forward ensuring that, in Wales, tackling VAWDASV is everyone's business.

Wales will not be a bystander to abuse.

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