

EVAWG STRATEGY

# CALL FOR VIEWS

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS STRATEGY

SUMMARY REPORT  
AUGUST 2022

...ng  
...ules and  
...attitudes  
...ards women  
...and girls”

“The use of social media was another problem in terms of women and girls being harrassed by known and unknown men and boys”

“Society in general tends to pose the questions about what the victim did wrong, as opposed to focusing on the perpetrator’s actions”

“It will only deliver for women and girls when it provides a genuine safe environment and this is down to culture change”

“Prevention is better than cure”

“The voices of those with lived experience are a crucial element of this process”

“This should be for women and girls in all their diversity, including LGBTQ+ women, migrant women, disabled women and more”

“Providing long-term support is important due to the traumatic impact violence has over women’s lives”

“Having all resources in place is extremely important but women must feel willing to engage with them”

“It is important to have access to robust, accurate and up-to-date data in order to effectively address the issue”



Northern Ireland  
Executive

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# CALL FOR VIEWS

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## SUMMARY

**The development of an Equally Safe Strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls is an Executive priority.**

**The Executive agreed to bring forward a strategy to tackle the root causes of violence against women and girls that must be intersectional and focus on all forms of violence, with a particular emphasis on behavioural and attitudinal change.**

The Call for Views is one of the first steps in helping us gather the data we need, and to grow our understanding, in order to be able to tackle the root causes of this problem.

This will require a cross-departmental effort, to ensure a joined-up approach and coherence with other Strategies, such as the **Gender Equality Strategy** and the **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy**.

- The Gender Equality Strategy will focus on eliminating systemic gender inequality that lies at the root of violence against women and girls;
- The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy will apply to all victims; and
- A Strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls will tackle all forms of violence and abusive or unwanted behaviour.

The Call for Views was the first formal stage in the development of a renewed Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy led by the Department of Health & Department of Justice (DoH/DoJ) and the Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls, led by The Executive Office (TEO).

This report provides an overview of the responses to the Call for Views in relation to development of The Executive

Office's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy only.

The Call for Views opened on 10 January 2022 and after a two week extension closed on 21 March 2022. There were 250 responses to the Victims Survey and 411 responses to the Public Survey with 91 written responses from both individuals and organisations.

### High Level approach

The responses to the Call for Views indicated that the Equally Safe Strategy: A Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) should:

- Be based on **international best practice**
- Adopt a **whole of society and whole of government approach**
- Be developed using appropriate and rigorous **co-design**
- Reflect **the lived experience** of victims and survivors

## Draft Vision and Objectives of the proposed EVAWG Strategy:

- There was wide agreement that a gender specific strategy was needed in Northern Ireland.
- The draft **vision** was broadly supported, although some respondents indicated that the wording should be refined e.g. the vision should incorporate an aspiration for women not just to feel safe, but to be able to thrive and achieve in every aspect of their lives.
- Some also questioned the use of the word 'violence' in the draft vision, in that it can give rise to a perception that the Strategy relates only to physical violence, whereas it also needs to address other forms of abuse (e.g. harassment, cat-calling, coercive control). Often women and girls who suffer abuse which does not involve physical violence, or certain types of physical violence, do not recognise that "violence" includes their experience.
- There was broad support for the draft **objectives** to support the development of the Strategy included in the Call for Views. Some respondents suggested, however, that further objectives should be included e.g. the reform of aspects of the criminal justice system and cultural change.

## Key emerging themes

Response to the Call for Views provided a wealth of information, with a wide variety of viewpoints offered. The themes most commonly mentioned throughout the engagement process, including responses to the Call for Views and in focus groups can be found below:

- The Strategy needs to effect **cultural change across all of society** (public life, religion, schools and workplaces), to deliver behavioural and attitudinal change.
- The culture of **silence, shame and stigma** faced by victims needs challenged and remedied.
- The Strategy needs to **address Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools** which should have a mandated minimum content, be delivered across the curriculum and in an age appropriate way.
- There was a counterpoint made that **RSE provision and content must be balanced**, with the ethos of individual schools.
- The Strategy needs to **address provision of education outside of the formal school setting**, for example in youth clubs, community organisations and workplaces through approaches such as the **Bystander Approach**.
- The Strategy needs to include recommendations for **improved teacher training**, as the attitudes and behaviours of some teachers are gender stereotyped – for example the existing attitude of "boys will boys" amongst some in the profession.

- The Strategy needs to **address misogyny** that has been embedded in society across generations.
- There needs to be **adequate support services** for all women, and these need to be accessible, trauma informed and take into account the needs of individuals.
- Victims and survivors must be able to trust the services provided, and those services must have **long term sustainable funding** in order to be responsive to their needs. These services need to be better **joined up and multi-agency** in approach.
- There needs to be a **focus on the actions of male perpetrators** and less recourse to victim blaming.
- The Strategy needs to have measurable outcomes, and to aid this, there needs to be **robust and accurate data** that can be disaggregated.
- The **scope and scale of the problem is hard to quantify** due to **vast under-reporting**. It is clear from the responses there are multiple victims, and also victims of multiple incidents.
- There are parts of the **criminal justice system** that need to be reformed e.g. bail, sentencing and the casual breaking of protection orders. **The Gillen Report recommendations** need to be fully implemented to improve the confidence of victims and survivors to report incidents.
- The Strategy needs to be **intersectional** and have a focus on marginalised groups of women and girls including older, disabled, LGBTQIA+, rural and migrant women.

- The **portrayal of women in the media**, on television and online, creates gender stereotypes, which can then impact on the attitudes and behaviours of men leading to violence against women and girls; this needs to be addressed.
- **The Strategy needs to address the rise of online abuse which includes online threats, coercion, cyber stalking, revenge porn and cyber flashing, leading to threats, uninvited messages, receipt of unsolicited images and harassment of women and girls.**
- **The Strategy needs to address the rise in prevalence of different forms of violence including harassment, uninvited messages and threats on social media platforms against women and girls, which causes women and girls to adapt their social media use and presence online.** Those impacted range from women and girls in their own home, to public figures.
- **The effect of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children who see violence in the home from an early age, and normalise this as appropriate and acceptable behaviour needs to be considered.**

**A number of the key themes raised were also touched on in the Call for Views on a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy. There will be ongoing liaison with the Department of Justice and the Department of Health to ensure that a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy align with each other and are mutually supportive.**

# CALL FOR VIEWS

# INTRODUCTION

This document provides a summary of responses to the Call for Views on the **Equally Safe Strategy: A Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls**.

In March 2021, the Executive announced the development of a Strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls as a priority in this jurisdiction. In December 2021 a new team was created, with The Executive Office leading the development of the cross- departmental Strategy.

The Call for Views represents the first stage in developing the Strategy, allowing us to gather the information we require to understand the nature, scope and extent of violence experienced by women and girls in Northern Ireland, in particular the testimonies of victims and primary research which add great richness to our information base.

## Background

The Executive Office (hereafter referred to as TEO or 'the Department') together with the Department of Health (DoH) and Department of Justice (DoJ) published a joint Call for Views (CfV). DoH and DoJ, in

relation to the second iteration of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and TEO in relation to the new cross- departmental Equally Safe Strategy; A Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

The CfV was launched on 10 January 2022 by the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Justice Minister and Health Minister.

The CfV was published on departmental websites, with NI Direct's Citizen Space platform providing the online survey facilities. A number of versions were made available including:

- online surveys for both public and victims to complete;
- an online written response template which allowed respondents to provide additional evidence;
- a children and young people's version for those aged under 16; and
- an easy read version of the Call for Views document was also made available.



The CfV was originally intended to close on 7 March 2022, however a two week extension was granted to allow people and organisations additional time to collate and submit responses. The Call closed on 21 March 2022.

Although the CfV was run jointly with DoH and DoJ for efficiency, this report provides an overview of the responses to the CfV in relation to development of TEO's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy only.

A separate CfV report on the **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** is available online.

## Methodology

A wide range of statutory consultees and stakeholders across Northern Ireland were contacted directly via email, with details of the CfV and its supporting documents, including web links to the consultation's website page which contained further information on how to respond. During its ten week term, the consultation was widely and regularly publicised through Departmental websites, social media and on the NICS intranet page to ensure individuals and organisations not already in our stakeholder list had a chance to contribute. Some organisations also provided supported opportunities for their clients, especially those with lived experience of violence, to give their individual views and experiences.

As part of the CfV period, TEO officials, along with DoH and DoJ officials, engaged with a range of stakeholders, including 22 sector specific meetings, 5 public focus groups and a number of meetings with individuals. The full list of engagement events is detailed in Annex A. The views provided during these engagement sections were also considered, and form part of this summary report.

We received 411 responses to the Public Survey, 250 responses to the Victims Survey and 91 written responses. A number of submissions were received directly to the joint mailbox: CallforViews@justice-ni.gov.uk. These responses were manually added to Citizen Space, using the written response template. Both individuals and organisations took the opportunity to respond. A list of organisations who responded is provided at the end of the report, however individuals who responded are not included due to data protection.

## Data Analysis

For each of the questions posed in the CfV, respondents had the chance to submit evidence and examples based on their own experience.

Not all respondents chose to answer every question, and this was reflected in the slightly lower numbers responding to the EAWG related questions. All of the responses

received have been analysed and key recurrent themes have been identified.

The qualitative data within the CfV (responses to open-ended questions) was analysed using a 'thematic analysis' method. This method examines the data to identify common themes; i.e. topics or ideas which occur repeatedly across the collection of responses. For each question, the qualitative responses were coded and a coding framework was developed, based on a review of the discussion questions and sample of responses.

It should be noted that the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions did not permit the quantification of results.

The themes and issues discussed most frequently within responses to each question (i.e. key/common) are listed along with supporting statements. Other points mentioned less frequently by one or more respondents are then summarised below. We have tried to give a full picture of the spectrum of views on each issue, including more and less commonly held positions, but have not been able to include every single nuance.

Some quotations taken directly from the responses have been included under each theme to provide further context.

## Acknowledgments

A small number of organisations submitted additional research with their response, which included written testimonies from victims, along with primary data collected through questionnaires. We appreciate the dedication demonstrated by organisations and victims in coming forward to share their lived experience. This has been very informative and will be considered again as we move forward.

Children and young people also contributed by submitting artwork through a regional competition organised by Women's Aid, providing a representation of their views and experiences. We value the views and experiences of young people and will be working them into our co-design process.

**We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to each and every person who contributed to the CfV.**



EVAWG STRATEGY

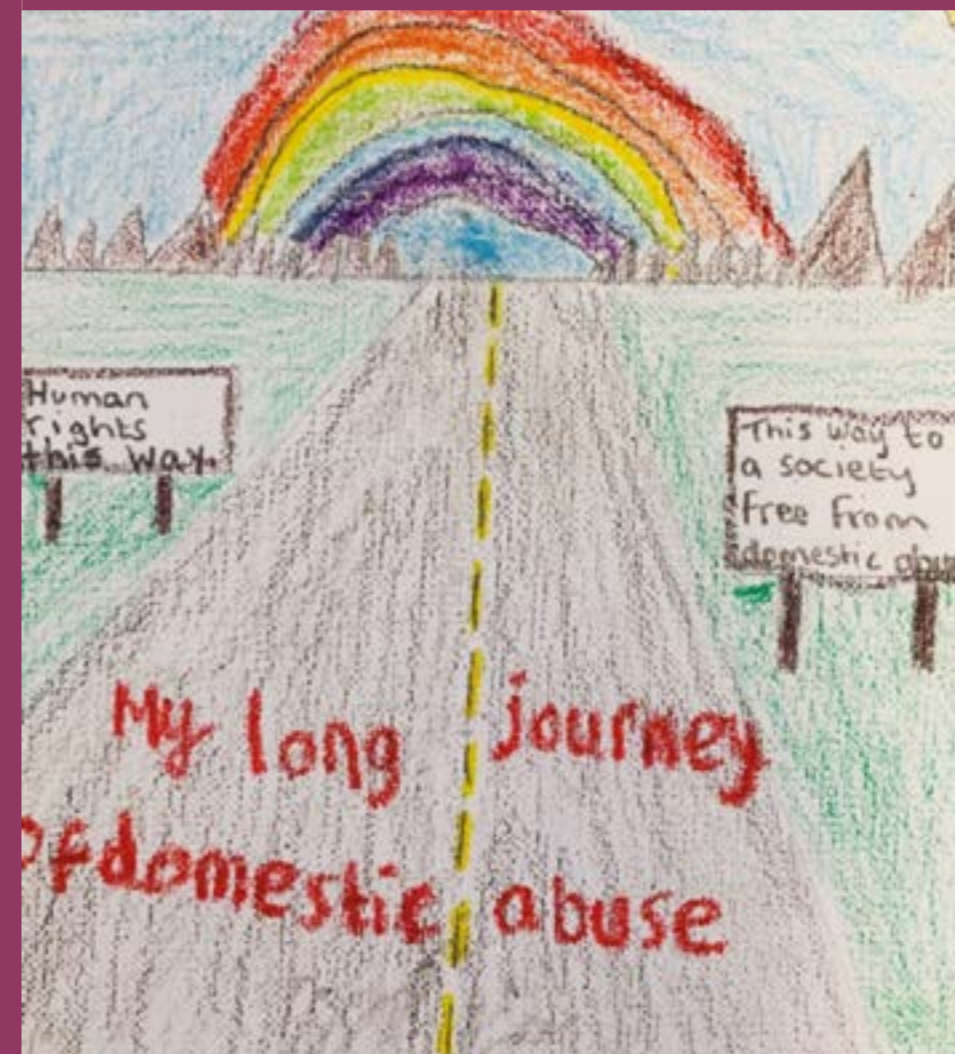
# CALL FOR VIEWS

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMPETITION

Women's Aid Federation NI held a regional art competition, encouraging all children and young people engaged in services to produce and submit a poster/ piece of art focused on one of the following five themes:

1. Everyone has the right to live in a society free from domestic abuse.
2. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse have a right to support.
3. Everyone can do something to stop domestic abuse.
4. Women and girls have a right to be treated equally.
5. Women and girls should be equally protected in our community.

We are delighted to share a selection of artwork including the competition winner's artwork opposite and would like to thank all of the children and young people who took part, including Women's Aid Federation for organising.



## 2.1 PUBLIC SURVEY

A total of 411 individuals completed a public survey, which included 3 questions specific to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. Both the public and victims survey responses reflected views that were also expressed in written responses and the engagement events.

### Respondent Profile

Of the 411 respondents to the Public Survey, 41% reported that they had previously been a victim of domestic or sexual abuse, 48% reported that they had not been a victim, 10% stated that they would prefer not to say and 1% didn't answer the question. In terms of respondent profile, the vast majority of respondents identified as being of

female gender (86%), 92% were aged under 65 (around two thirds were aged between 25 to 54, with 13% under the age of 25), 97% were of white ethnicity and, in terms of sexual orientation, 88% described themselves as straight/heterosexual. 11% of respondents indicated that they had a disability.



## 2.1 QUESTION 1

Are you aware that, in addition to a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, the Northern Ireland Executive is developing an Equally Safe Strategy – a new Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls?

This question was included to alert respondents to the fact that there are two Strategies, in order to guide them to direct their answers to the relevant Strategy.

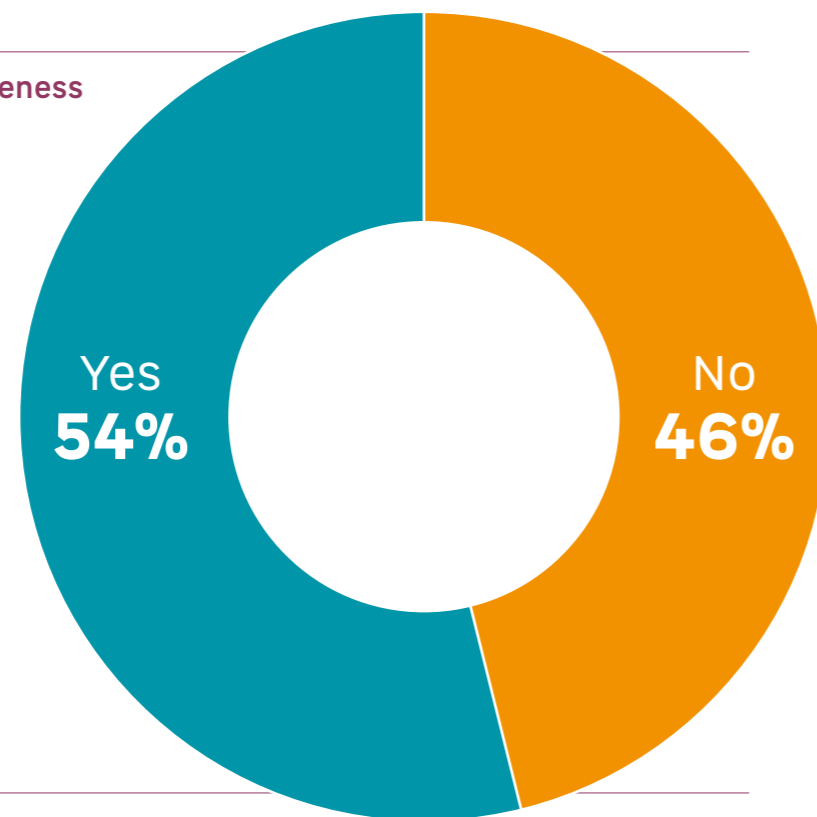
**411** responses were received in total for the Public Survey

**408** responded to this question

FIGURE 1 - Strategy Awareness

### PUBLIC RESPONSE

Are you aware the NI Executive is developing an Equally Safe Strategy?



## 2.1 QUESTION 2

Are there any other forms of violence (other than domestic and sexual abuse) that you would like to see covered under an Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls?

**411**

total responses received for the Public Survey

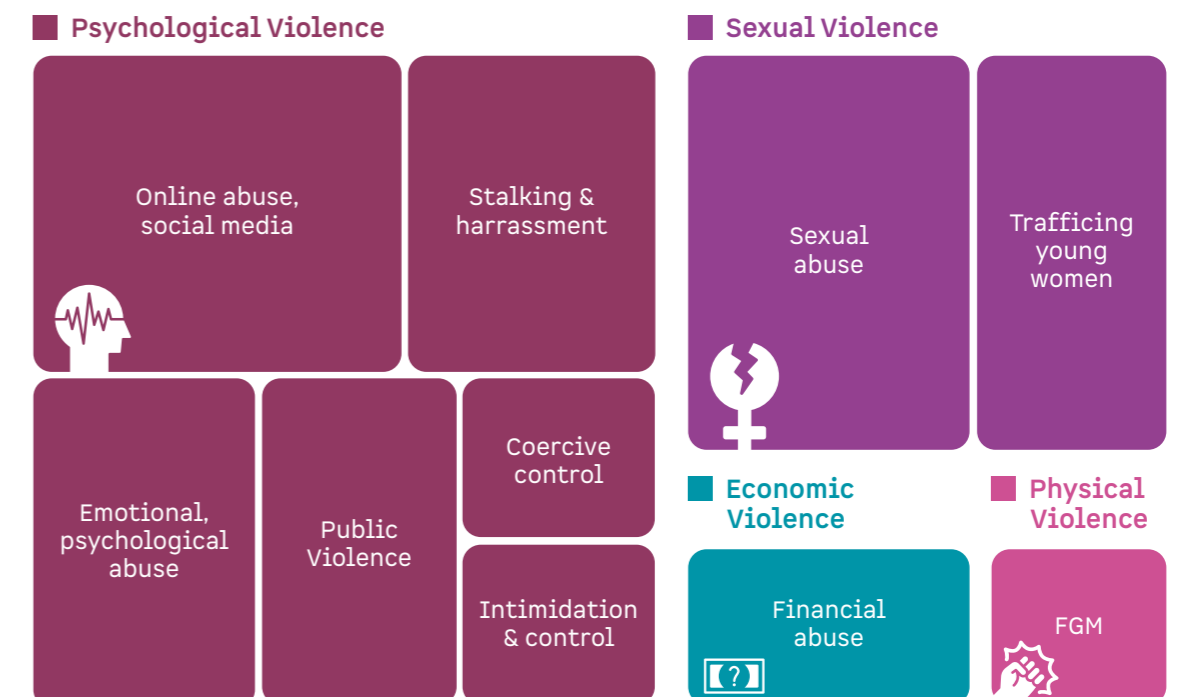
**192**

responded to this question

Responses to this question focused on the range of violence and abuse experienced by women and girls.

The forms of violence that were most prevalent are illustrated in figure 2 below, the colour blocks reflect the strong themes and the size of each section indicates the frequency with which it was mentioned.

FIGURE 2 - Forms of Violence  
PUBLIC RESPONSE



The chart is not a reflection of all types of abuse suffered by victims, however it shows those most prevalent in society and outlined by respondents. The range and types of abuse are many, and this is covered in more detail in question 4 of the written responses, outlined further in this report.

## 2.1 QUESTION 3

If you have any further comments on the Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls, at this stage, please use the box below.

# 411

total responses received for the Public Survey

# 116

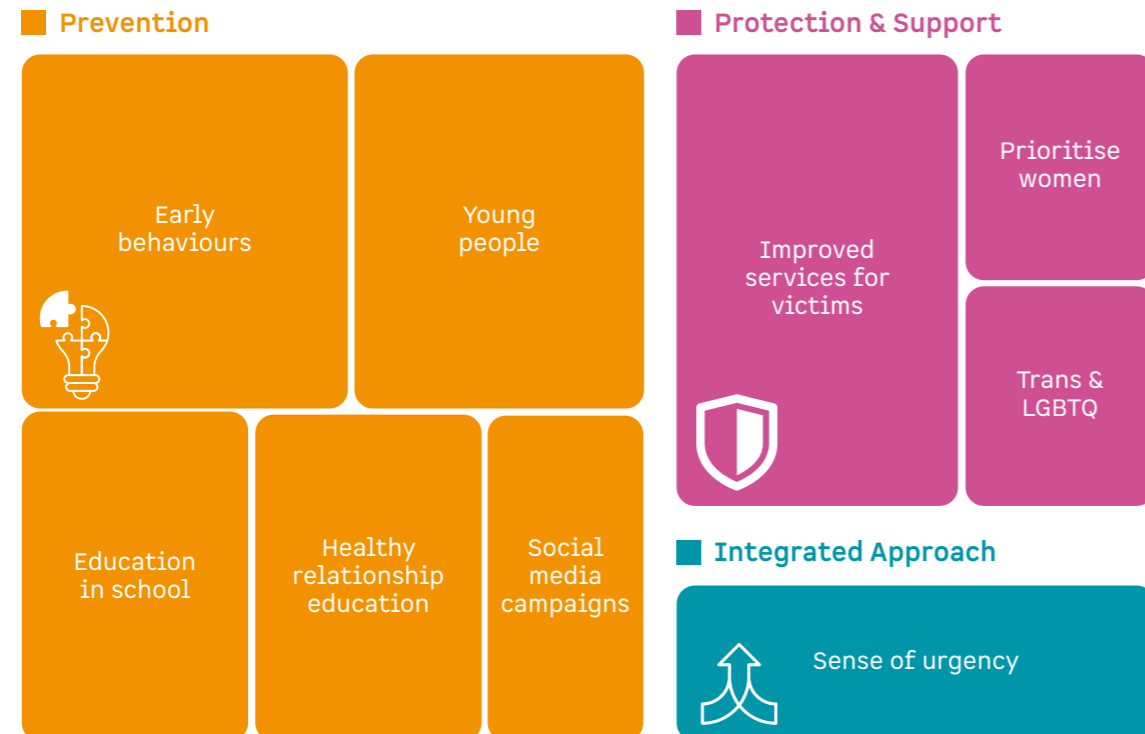
responded to this question

Responses to this question provide respondents with the opportunity to express any other views on the Strategy.

The themes that were most prevalent are illustrated in figure 3 below, the colour blocks reflect the strong themes and the size of each section indicates the frequency with which it was mentioned.

FIGURE 3 - Further comments

### PUBLIC RESPONSE



## 2.2 VICTIMS SURVEY

A total of 250 individuals completed a victims survey, which included 3 questions specific to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. Both the public and victims survey responses reflected views that were also expressed in written responses and at the engagement events.

### Respondent Profile

In terms of respondent profile, a large majority of respondents identified as being of female gender (86%), 97% were aged under 65, 96% were of white ethnicity and, in terms of sexual orientation, 88% described themselves as straight/heterosexual

and 11% identified as LGBTQIA+. In terms of the age profile 75% were aged between 25 and 54, 10% were aged between 16 and 24 while 3% were 65 or older. 21% of respondents indicated that they had a disability.

## 2.2 QUESTION 1

Are you aware that, in addition to a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, the Northern Ireland Executive is developing a new Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls?

This question was included to alert respondents to the fact that there are two Strategies, in order to guide them to direct their answers to the relevant Strategy.

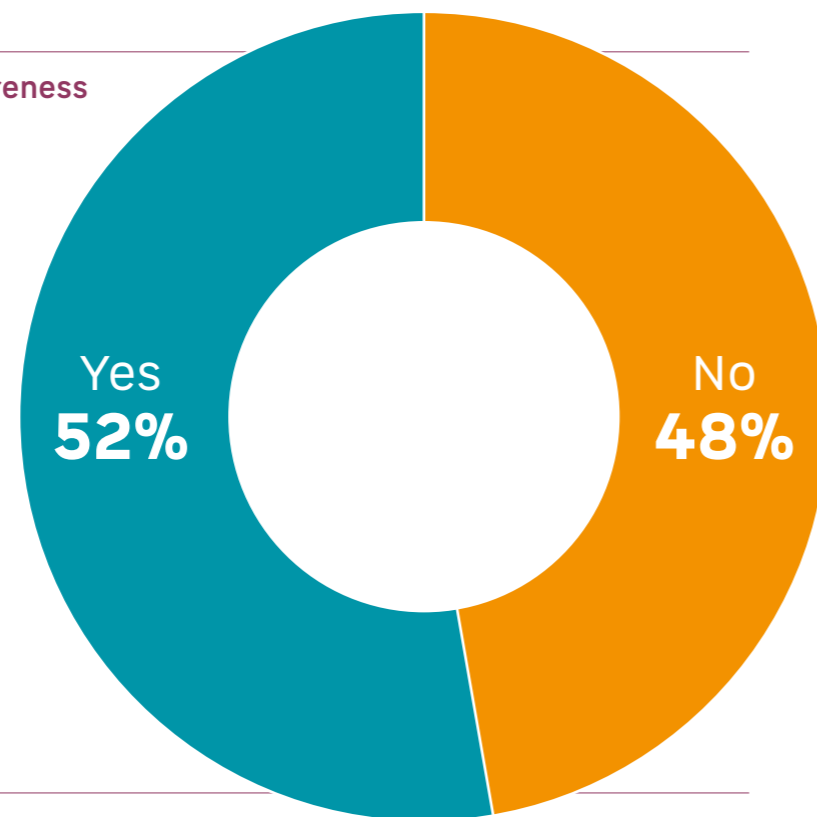
**250** responses were received in total for the Victims Survey

**249** responded to this question

FIGURE 4 - Strategy Awareness

### VICTIMS RESPONSE

Are you aware the NI Executive is developing an Equally Safe Strategy?



## 2.2 QUESTION 2

Are there any other forms of violence (other than domestic and sexual abuse) that you would like to see covered under the Equally Safe Strategy – a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls?

**250** responses received for the Victims Survey

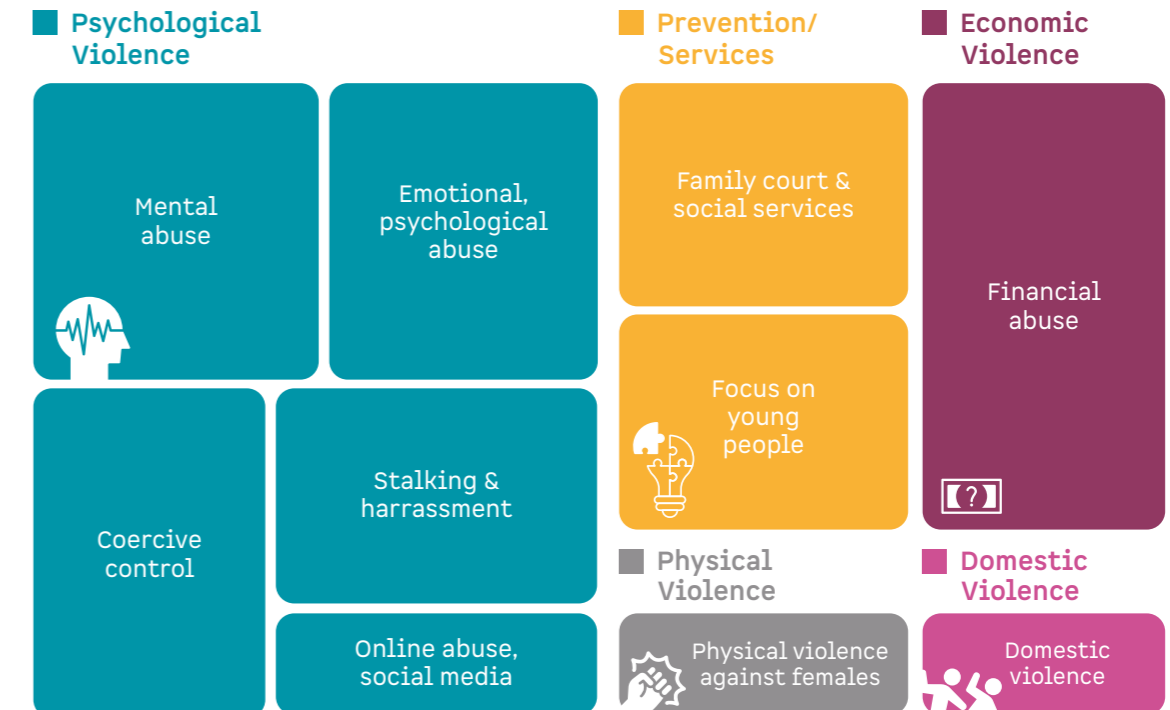
**138** responded to this question

Responses to this question focused on the types of violence and abuse experienced by women.

The forms of violence that were most prevalent are illustrated in the figure 5 below, the colour blocks reflect the strong themes and the size of each section indicates the frequency in which it was mentioned.

FIGURE 5 - Forms of Violence

### VICTIMS RESPONSE



The chart is not a reflection of all types of abuse experienced by victims, however shows those most prevalent in society. The range and types of abuse are many, and this is covered in more detail in question 4 of the written responses, outlined further in this report.

## 2.2 QUESTION 3

Have you any further comments on the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, at this stage?

# 250

responses received for the Victims Survey

# 99

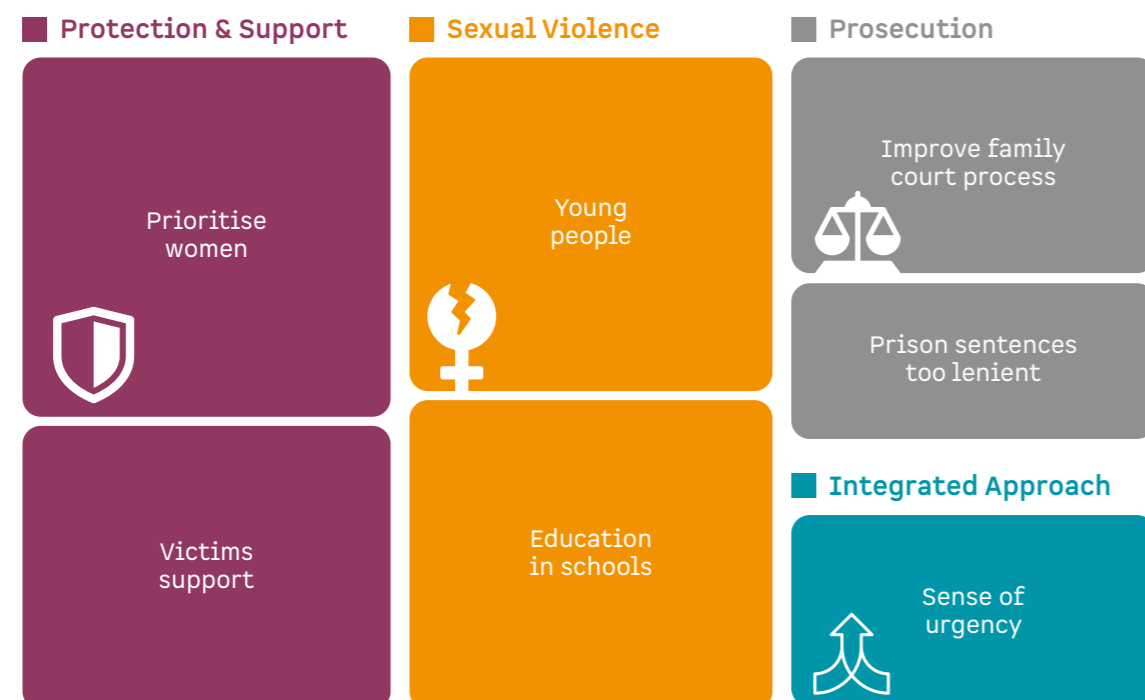
responded to this question

Responses to this question provide respondents with the opportunity to express any other views on the Strategy.

The themes that were most prevalent are illustrated in figure 6 below, the colour blocks reflect the strong themes and the size of each section indicates the frequency with which it was mentioned.

FIGURE 6 - Other comments

### VICTIMS RESPONSE



One difference to highlight between responses to the victims survey and public, is the higher proportion of victims' responses which make reference to the criminal justice system and the services associated with it.

## 2.3 WRITTEN RESPONSES

The themes and issues discussed most frequently within responses to each question are listed in order of frequency along with supporting statements.

Other points mentioned less frequently by one or more respondents are then summarised on the following pages. We have tried to give a full picture of the spectrum of views on each issue, including more and less commonly held positions, but have not been able to include every single nuance.



## QUESTION 1

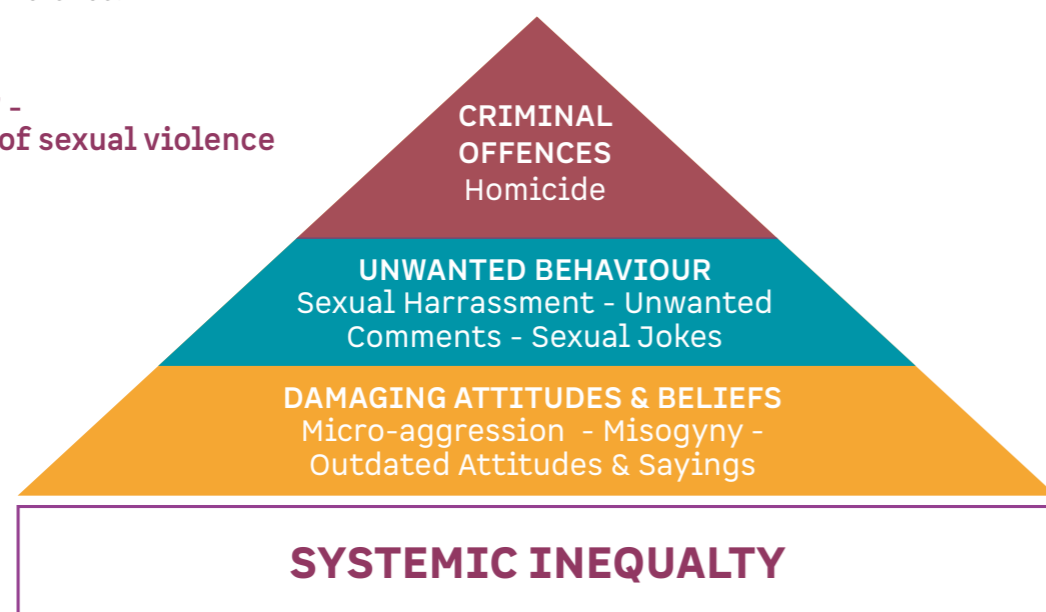
We are inclined to the view that this new Equally Safe Strategy should focus on women and girls. This reflects the different forms of violence and unwanted behaviour against women and its impact within the gendered reality of men's and women's lives. We welcome your views on whether this approach or another approach is more appropriate?

**1.1.**  
There was **strong support** in favour of adopting a gendered approach to the Strategy.

**1.1.1**  
Key points made by respondents included:

- Northern Ireland remains the only devolved administration not to have a Strategy for tackling violence against women and girls.
- Women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence towards them.
- Patriarchal structures and harmful gender stereotypes are putting women and girls at much greater risk of violence.
- Women's experience of violence and harassment exists on a continuum, and ranges from everyday sexism and street harassment, through to assault and sexual offences. The 'Pyramid of Sexual Violence' (figure 7) shows how everyday behaviours, such as 'banter' and sexist jokes, bolster the culture of misogyny.

**FIGURE 7 -**  
Pyramid of sexual violence



- Having a specific strategy to tackle violence against women and girls would not discount the experiences of other gender identities, which are also valid, but would instead address the fact that a greater number of women and girls are affected by such violence.
- Treating everyone in the same way is unlikely to achieve equality of opportunity for people who may have particular needs. Taking positive action for a disproportionately affected group, "where anti-discrimination law permits, is wholly consistent with Section 75".

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

" This should be for women and girls in all their diversity, including LGBTQ+ women, migrant women, disabled women and more"

" Whilst not all crimes committed against women and girls are perpetrated by men and boys, there is a disproportionate level of male violence against women and girls"

**1.2.**  
A common theme called for the Strategy to **focus on the actions of the perpetrator** rather than place blame on the victim.

**1.2.1**  
Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy will only effect real change if the attitudes and behaviours of males are addressed. There is a need to understand why men are perpetuating violence against women and girls, and to put the emphasis on men to address their attitudes and behaviours.
- The main audience for this Strategy should be men.
- The Strategy should be more direct in the language used, and specifically state it will address 'male violence against women', reflecting that perpetrators of violent crimes are predominately men.
- The Strategy should recognise that not all men are abusers, and it should seek the support of such men as allies.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

" Society in general tends to pose the questions about what the victim did wrong, as opposed to focusing on the perpetrator's actions"

" By focusing on perpetrators and instigators of a problem, preventative and early work to intervene is much more likely"

" It is not the victim, it is the community that makes a victim vulnerable"

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The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

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**1.3.**  
Some responses called on the Strategy to acknowledge male victims who also experience violence. A proportion of those called for a parallel Strategy targeting violence against male victims.

**1.3.1**  
Key points made by respondents included:

- Young boys are a particular, vulnerable group and often experience abuse in the home. A point was raised during a focus group on the access of shelter accommodation for older boys in the care of their mother.
- Inclusivity is important and the Strategy should not minimise the impact of violence on any member of our society. A Strategy that focuses on women and girls could discourage male victims from coming forward.
- All victims regardless of gender require support systems which are designed around their specific needs. This includes male victims who are escaping abusive partners, and those from the LGBTQIA+ community.
- The language used in current and upcoming legislation should be inclusive and recognise that domestic abuse can, and does, happen in same gender relationships and, whilst it is largely perpetrated by men, can also be perpetrated by women.
- The title of the Strategy 'Equally Safe' implies that men are safe in our society and do not face any form of violence which is misleading. Rephrasing the title should be considered in a way that acknowledges gender inequality, but respects the lived experiences of male victims of violence.

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**SAMPLE OF COMMENTS**

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“ When society/strategies only focus on female victims, this acts as a barrier to more men coming forward with their stories of abuse”

“ Keep the Equally Safe strategy but [to] create a parallel one for men, which focusses on the service delivery and cultural barriers that men face”

**1.4.**  
Other responses to this question raised a need to address 'gender' and clearly define the term 'woman'.

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy should be inclusive of Trans women, and clearly define the term 'woman' from the outset so there can be no ambiguity as to who is included.
- The Strategy should reflect the experiences of people who are non-binary, gender fluid, intersex, transgender, and gender queer.

**1.5.**  
A number of responses also stated the Strategy must address violence against the LGBTQIA+ community in the form of homophobic and transphobic hate abuse, in any setting. The Strategy must also take into account that lesbian and bisexual women experience violence from both male and female perpetrators.

**1.6.**  
Others expressed a concern that having two separate strategies for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic & Sexual Abuse, would dilute the issues. There should be a joined-up approach across government with streamlined objectives.

## QUESTION 2

We would like to hear your views on whether the draft vision set out below, or different words would best catch the ambition of what we want to do.

### DRAFT VISION

Every woman and girl is safe in our communities, feels safe and can reach their potential. We have a society in which violence against women is not tolerated in any form, in which all victims are supported, and perpetrators are held to account.

#### 2.1

There was **strong support for the draft vision of the Strategy.**

##### 2.1.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy should address the need to feel safe as a basic right, and this should be a thread throughout the Strategy. Women should also feel safe from the threat of violence, at home, at work and on our streets, at any time of day or night.
- The threat of violence can impact negatively on the ability of women to reach their full potential, reflecting that it is not always violent acts which inhibit women.
- Gender inequalities should be eliminated in order for women and girls to reach their full potential. This includes inequalities in the home and the workplace.

#### 2.2

A key theme was the need for a **cultural change within society.**

##### 2.2.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Vision for the Strategy should be broadened to reflect the role that everyone in society, including women, men, girls and boys, have to play in ensuring that women and girls are safe. There is also a need for government and public bodies to work together to challenge abuse both online and offline.
- The Strategy should act as a platform to raise awareness within society of the problems that exist. This is the first stage in acknowledging the issue, before it can be addressed.
- We need a zero tolerance approach to misogynistic and sexist attitudes within society. This includes calling out abuse in public with reference to the “Bystander Approach” which is recognised internationally.
- Women should not have to take preventative measures to feel safe. Examples of such measures include women having to alter their routes, carry keys when walking alone at night, or calling a friend or partner on their journey home.
- The Strategy should address the ‘victim blaming’ culture that persists across society. The perpetrator, not the victim, bears responsibility for their actions, and this must be evident in the Strategy.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ It will only deliver for women and girls when it provides a genuine safe environment and this is down to culture change”

“ Gender based violence is the result of misogynistic cultural norms and wider gender inequality”

## 2.3

A common theme raised was that the Strategy should have a **preventative approach**.

### 2.3.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The RSE programme should be age and developmentally appropriate, responding to the changing needs of children and adolescents so that they may make responsible and well-informed life decisions. A basic RSE curriculum that all children in Northern Ireland may access, regardless of their school's ethos, is an important step toward ensuring young people are better equipped to identify dysfunctional relationships.
- Young women and girls experience violence and abuse from a young age, therefore education needs to be targeted at primary school level to effect real change.
- Families with children should be equipped with the tools and knowledge needed to promote healthy relationships from an early age.
- Prevention needs holistic 'whole family' interventions.
- Every point of access to support provision through authorities, provides a pathway to prevention.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

"It would never be possible to hold all perpetrators to account so the effort needs to be placed on prevention"

"A commonly agreed core RSE curriculum which all children in Northern Ireland can access, regardless of the ethos of their school, is a crucial step towards ensuring young people are better equipped to understand what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships – both online and offline"

## 2.4

Another common theme emphasised, was the need for adequate **support services for victims**.

### 2.4.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The vision should include a commitment to support those victims and survivors who come forward to report offending.
- Providing long-term support is important due to the traumatic impact violence has on women's lives. Support should take into account the diverse needs of women, as a 'one model fits all' approach is not sufficient.
- Organisations which provide support services to women should be adequately funded to be able to properly plan and deliver for communities.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

"Providing long-term support is important due to the traumatic impact violence has over women's lives"

"'Effectively' should be added in terms of supports. While support can be available it may not be in the right form or meet the victims needs"



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The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

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## 2.5. Other responses highlighted the issues within the justice system which act as a barrier to reporting incidents of violence.

### 2.5.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- Focus should not only be on the outcomes of the justice system, but take into consideration prevention programmes.
- The length of time it takes for offenders to be brought to justice is too long. This may be aided by a court-based, fast track system which would deter perpetrators.
- Responses also pointed to the low conviction rates for violent crimes against women and called for tougher sentencing.

## 2.6. Other responses focused on the need to define violence to illustrate the Strategy tackle a spectrum of actions and behaviours.

### 2.6.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- The word ‘violence’ does not reflect all forms of violence and may discourage people from participating. People, especially victims, fail to detect violence in their own lives, such as coercive control. The language should be clearer, and include the word “abuse” to broaden the scope and impact of the Strategy.
- The vision should explicitly make reference to the non-criminal or “gateway” behaviours such as verbal abuse, threats, harassment and intimidation. Unwanted behaviours is considered in more detail later within this summary under Question 5.
- It will be important for the Strategy to make careful use of language. The example was provided of older victims who would not necessarily connect with terminology such as ‘repeat offenders’ or ‘abusers’, and therefore not engage in conversations on the matter.
- A view was offered on the inclusion of state violence within the wider definition. This includes the denial of women’s rights, the removal of women’s rights and enabling the abuse of women and girls through inaction.

## QUESTION 3

Do you agree with the draft objectives suggested for the new Strategy?  
Are there any other objectives that should be included?

### DRAFT OBJECTIVES

- **Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the Strategy is seeking to tackle.**
- **Prevention - Early intervention to get upstream of violence.**
- **A co-designed Strategy which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence.**
- **Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.**

## 3.1 Many responses indicated agreement with the draft objectives.

### 3.1.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to be victim-centred involving a single joined up approach to tackle violence against women and girls.
- The Strategy needs to be co-designed and to include local and international evidence.
- The Strategy needs to reflect the lived experience of victims, with their voice, and that of the organisations that support them.
- The Strategy should align with the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (DSA) and international human rights frameworks including CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.
- The Strategy should incorporate prevention and early intervention with an outline of what measures this will include.
- The Strategy needs to recognise education in order to improve understanding of what healthy relationships are, in a range of settings throughout society.
- The objectives of the Strategy need to have measurable outcomes.
- There needs to be an improvement in data collection which will allow us to determine the scope and scale of violence against women and girls.
- There should be the provision of responsive services that are sufficiently resourced.

### 3.2

#### Other points made by respondents on proposed objectives included:

- A specific objective should be included focusing on reform of parts of the criminal justice system (including court proceedings and sentencing) to improve the experience of women and girls – and to shift the dynamic from one in which victims are afraid of the criminal justice process to one where they are listened to and supported.
- A further objective of effecting cultural change to tackle misogyny, gender inequality, discrimination and harmful gender norms and stereotypes across society should be included.
- The Strategy should concentrate on tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls. The service based objective should be included in the DSA Strategy rather than in the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, in order to ensure that services are available to all victims of domestic and sexual violence through evidence based objective need.
- The objectives of the Strategy need to be clearer in terms of its aims and the evidence base that will underpin the Strategy and should mirror the work already done.

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS



### 3.3

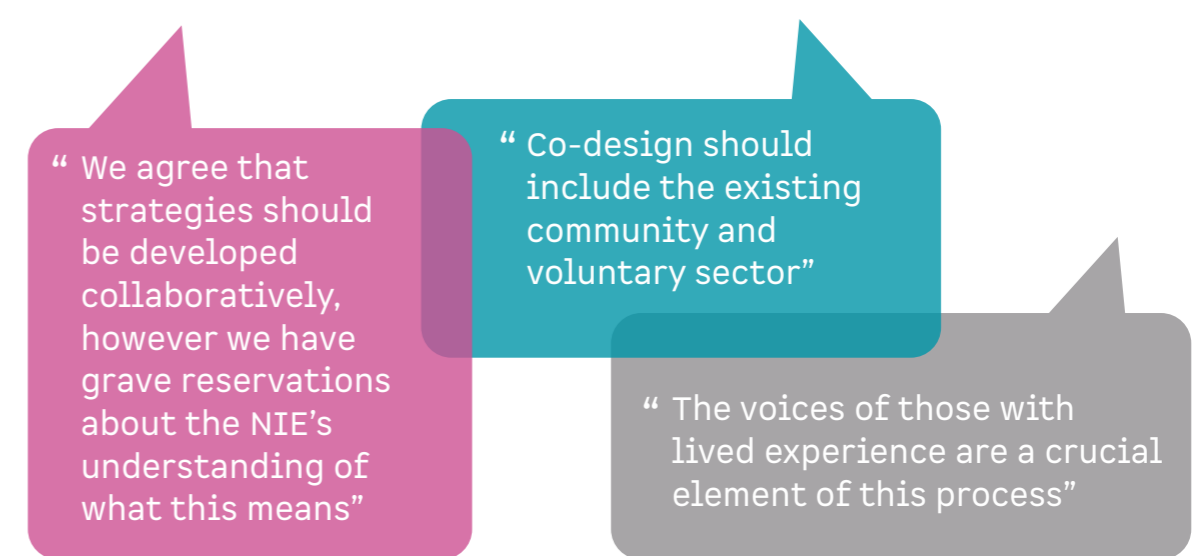
#### A key theme to emerge related to the need for the Strategy to be co-designed.

##### 3.3.1

#### Key points made by respondents included:

- Decision makers within the community and voluntary sector should be involved throughout the development and design process, incorporating co-design.
- The Strategy needs to be based on local and international evidence and best practice and this best practice needs to integrate across departments to ensure a joined-up approach.
- Collaboration is needed across a range of sectors to ensure the lived experience of victims and survivors is included.
- A co-production approach is required where service providers and users work to reach a collective outcome.
- One response indicated that a taskforce should be established which seeks to engage with the faith communities, due to the potential impact of faith stakeholders on the outworking of the objectives.
- The need for a clear, shared understanding of what constitutes co-design was noted given previous experiences with the co-design of other strategies.
- The need to work together effectively to deliver what is required, with tangible actions and outcomes and to capture lived experiences in the Strategy, was noted.

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS



**3.4**  
**Another key theme related to education as a means of early intervention.**

**3.4.1**  
**Key points made by respondents included:**

- Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is required to help children and young people understand what constitutes healthy relationships, the meaning of consent and what different forms of abuse look like.
- RSE with mandatory minimum content can be used as a tool to change attitudes and behaviours at an age before harmful norms are formed.
- Standardised and mandatory RSE that is all inclusive, recognising a range of relationships, and that includes all children, needs to be adopted and delivered in an age appropriate manner.
- Schools and teachers should be provided with the capacity to deliver RSE through training, and with the resources and support required to deliver programmes and affect change in attitudes and behaviours, with measures to assess impact.
- It is important to ensure that education outside of a formal school setting is delivered throughout society in community settings and the workplace, in an ongoing process to change behaviour.
- The violence and abuse that women face does not exist in a vacuum, therefore educating whole communities and achieving core attitudinal and societal change are important preventative measures.

**SAMPLE OF COMMENTS**



**3.5**  
**A common theme related to the need for better support services.**

**3.5.1**  
**Key points made by respondents included:**

- Services must be victim-centred, and women must have trust and confidence to avail of those services.
- Services must be safe for women and responsive to the range of abuses suffered by victims and survivors.
- The level of support received from government and public agencies needs to improve.
- There needs to be enhanced provision of specialist and holistic support services, including trauma informed services, for women and girls.
- The delivery of better support services needs to be resourced and funded in order to meet the needs of victims and survivors.

**SAMPLE OF COMMENTS**



### 3.6

#### A further common theme commented on the need for prevention and early intervention.

##### 3.6.1

###### Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy should define what prevention and early intervention measures will be taken, as they are two different approaches.
- Consideration should be given to adapting the phrase “getting upstream of violence” by using clearer language which defines the prevention and early intervention measures required to tackle the root causes, attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence.
- A focus on early intervention measures was welcomed as a significant means of tackling the root causes of violence.
- Violence and harassment operate on a continuum in which attitudes and behaviours need challenged.
- The Strategy needs to take a whole of government approach, with action required across departments to embed prevention and early intervention.
- Prevention measures should have a greater focus on perpetrators in order to change their attitudes and behaviours.
- The Bystander Approach is a starting point in relation to inclusivity and a whole of society approach, with its value being to get people in the room who aren't aware of their behaviour.

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ Prevention is better than cure”

“ Any reference prevention and / or early intervention should reflect exactly what this will mean for men and boys in respect of the education for example”

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#### The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

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### 3.7

#### Other responses included:

- An alternative view was proffered that RSE should be made available to pupils in keeping with the ethos of a school.
- The Strategy should include an approach which specifically addresses the needs of marginalised groups - specific groups mentioned included LGBTQIA+, sex workers, disabled people, refugees, children and migrants. This also extends to some hard to reach areas including rural communities, and those women in more affluent areas, who are not necessarily considered.
- There is a need for adequate disaggregation of data to allow us to comprehend the challenges and trends in different communities, including the scale of violence including within the LGBTQIA+ community.
- There should be facilitation of long term planning to sustain and support people coming into contact with services, and to ensure the continued delivery of services with access to funding, to allow the support services the time to engage and deliver early interventions.
- In order to monitor the effectiveness of the Strategy, meaningful and measurable outcomes are required. In terms of monitoring the Strategy, it will be important to gather the right data and measure the right things, if we are to be able to assess whether things are improving.
- The scope and scale of violence against women and girls is difficult to quantify due to the absence of robust data and under-reporting. Under-reporting can be the result of a lack of faith in the justice system, fear of not being believed, lack of accurate recording of incidents, a victim's immigration status preventing them from reporting, and fear of the perpetrator or connections they may have.
- The word “violence” is often perceived as relating to physical abuse only, which may result in women and girls not recognising their incidents as being violence and/or abuse.
- Those with lived experience should have their voices heard. Lived experience panels should include both adults and young people and they should be facilitated with support mechanisms to ensure victims are not re-traumatised.
- There needs to be a focus on perpetrators when developing policies of prevention.
- Another view was offered that the Strategy needs to address the impact of state violence on women and girls, in particular with regard to access to reproductive healthcare.
- The negative portrayal of women in the media and the impact of online behaviour, particularly on social media, continues to contribute to the scale of violence against women and girls.



## QUESTION 4

What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of acts or threats of gender based violence (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) that result in, or are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls?

### 4.1

The responses to this question revealed a multitude of acts, threats and behaviours that are experienced by women on a daily basis.

Detailed responses were provided, along with case studies, illustrating the first-hand experience of victims. The information included details on the nature of violent acts, frequency, as well as location. From those responses, it is clear that violence is experienced in many different settings including at home, on the street, in the workplace, public transport and in health care facilities.

#### 4.1.1

A number of additional points were raised during various focus groups which are detailed below:

- Women in rural areas can find it difficult to escape violent marriages due to cultural concerns surrounding farm succession planning, with women frequently being held financially liable for large loans for farm machinery and other items.
- The specific issue of lack of recourse to public funds was also raised, and is a particular issue for those financially dependent on their partner and migrant women.
- A point raised at a focus group was the impact of parental alienation, in terms of restricting or stopping access to children, which was highlighted as a form of abuse faced by some.
- Forced marriage was also highlighted, with an emphasis on awareness raising. There also needs to be better support systems in place for those affected or at risk.

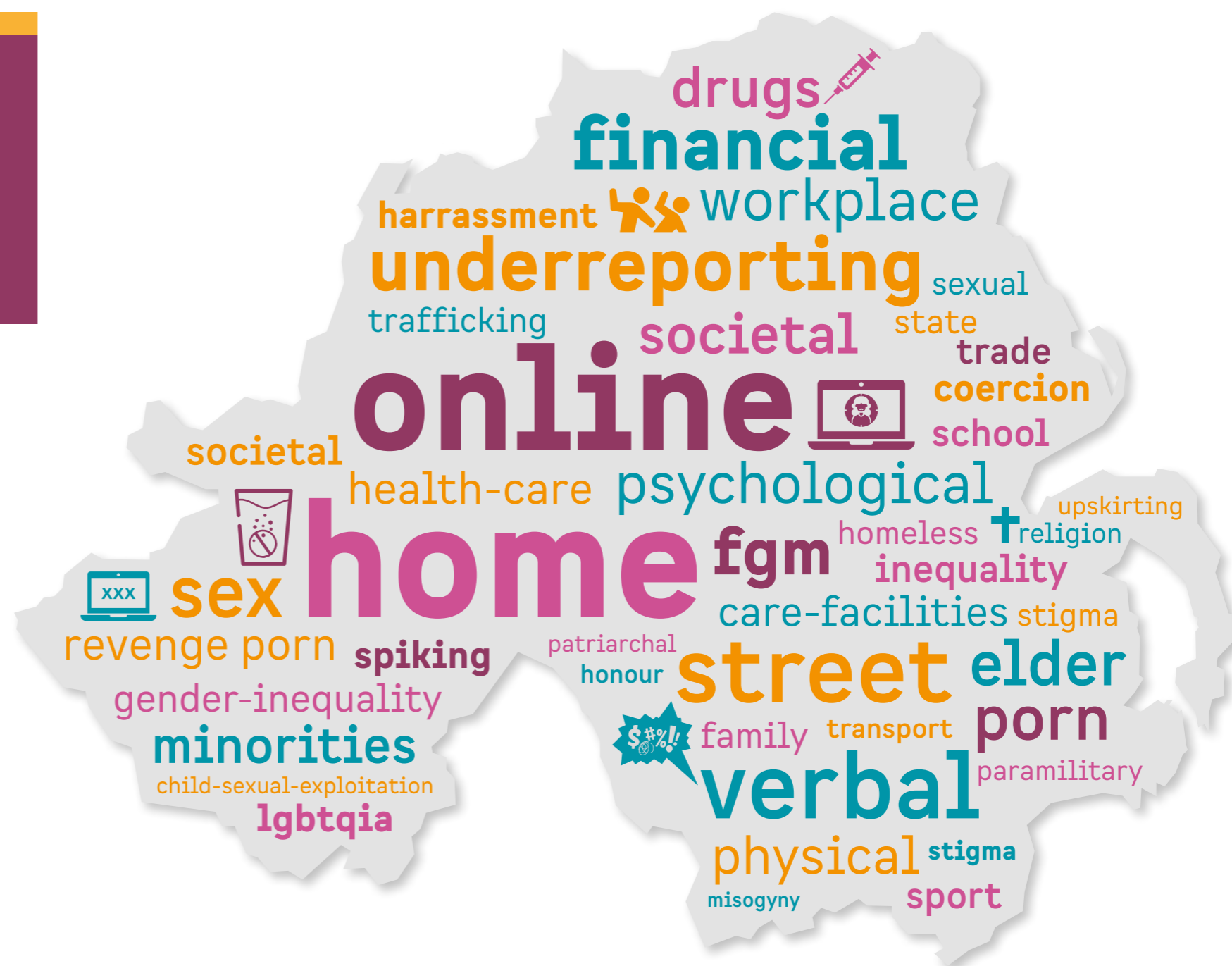


FIGURE 8

The word cloud above is a representation of the responses received on the scope, scale and prevalence of acts or threats of gender based violence. The size of each word indicates its frequency across all responses.

## QUESTION 5

We want to understand the “unwanted” behaviour or actions (including on-line) that emanate from an attitude to, or perception of, women and girls that lacks respect. What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of such behaviour?

### 5.1

A key theme related to online activity, including social media as a means for unwanted behaviours.

#### 5.1.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the rise of online abuse, which includes threats, stalking and coercion, on various social media platforms.
- There has been an increase in the types of abuse carried out online including cyber stalking, revenge porn and cyber flashing leading to threats, uninvited messages, receipt of unsolicited images and harassment of women and girls.
- This increase in the various forms of unwanted behaviours online including women in public life, raises concerns that this type of behaviour has become normalised in the online space to the detriment of women and girls.
- Perpetrators are using increasingly sophisticated technology, for example software to produce deep-fake images and using trackers to threaten, coerce and harass women and girls.
- The Strategy needs to focus on perpetrators’ actions in the digital world with the same vigour as if they were happening in the real world (offline).
- The increase in the availability of online pornography has altered how boys perceive sex and how they view healthy relationships and consent.
- The sexualisation of women and girls online has impacted on the perception of women and girls leading to derogatory language, abuse and threats.
- A specific online threat was referenced during a focus group, where victims are being threatened with having their sexual identity disclosed to friends and family if they don’t share intimate photographs for example, or as a threat made by abusive partners when someone tries to leave.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ Women we work with have reported stalking, having unsolicited pictures of male genitalia sent to them, cat-calling, having ex-partners spread explicit information & sexualised images online, being recorded having sex, without consent and these videos shared online”

“ The online abuse also women have to take is very common, whether it be an abuser contacting them or abuser using social media and things to stalk and use things against them”

“ The use of social media was another problem in terms of women and girls being harassed by known and unknown men and boys”

## 5.2

A common theme related to how misogyny gives rise to unwanted behaviours.

### 5.2.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the scale of misogyny that operates both online and in the real world.
- The culture of “incel” groups is an increasing issue, where men retreat online to form a community and create discussion boards to vent misogynistic comments.
- The presence and impact of misogyny has extended throughout society into workplaces, places of education, sporting environments, the media and social settings.
- Misogynistic language and attitudes are creating an environment for violence against women and girls to flourish.
- The Strategy needs to address the casual dismissal of misogynistic language, attitudes and behaviours as being “banter” and “joking” in an attempt to undermine its seriousness and impact on women and girls.
- The behaviours that emanate from misogyny are, for example catcalling, harassment, misogynistic comments, uninvited approaches and unwanted attention and touching.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ In many cases this type of behaviour is described as just being “banter” or “slagging” which tries to undermine its seriousness and the impact that it has on those who experience it”

“ Need to ensure that the often normalised and ‘low level’ harassment and micro-aggressions which they and peers can experience in everyday life, whether in the form of verbal or image based comments or jokes or inappropriate touching or contact, should be fully addressed in the strategies”

## 5.3

A further common theme related to the effect of harmful norms and attitudes on unwanted behaviours.

### 5.3.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the norms and attitudes held by boys and men across society which encourage and help facilitate unwanted behaviour towards women and girls.
- The intergenerational impact of patriarchal norms and attitudes throughout society on violence against women and girls needs to be addressed.
- These attitudes and beliefs exist across workplaces, places of education, in social settings, in public, religious institutions and in the media (including social media), and toleration of these acts as a driver for their continuation.
- Unwanted behaviours include for example harassment both online and offline, sexist jokes and inappropriate comments.
- The Strategy needs to address the perception of gender norms and roles, which creates a view of masculinity that is entitled, controlling and sexist.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ Men with sexist beliefs who feel comfortable making jokes or enforcing their old-fashioned beliefs on women create an uncomfortable setting and also breeding ground for these beliefs to spread through generations”

“ Living in a society where women are objectified, and where there will often be no sanction for actions and behaviours which will offend women, perpetuates this form of male entitlement”

## 5.4

A number of responses focused how the lack of education contributes to unwanted behaviour towards women and girls.

### 5.4.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the inadequacies of educational programmes within schools, in both their content and effectiveness.
- The gaps in content and effectiveness results in boys and men having a lack of understanding of healthy relationships, consent, and respect when they move into adulthood, which generates attitudes leading to unwanted behaviours.
- These unwanted behaviours include harassment, inappropriate and sexist language, uninvited messages (online), and approaches and unwanted touching.
- There needs to be a greater focus on the impact of bullying in schools, the reporting mechanisms of bullying incidents and the collection of that data.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ In order to tackle violence against women and girls, we need to look at how society teach and educate people around gender, sexual orientation, consent, healthy relationships and how to have conversations about inappropriate or bad behavior”

“ It must also focus on why men and boys never consider the impact on the survivor, and what institutions and societal norms allow them to remain ignorant of the impact of their behaviour and actions on women and girls”

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The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

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## 5.5

Other responses included:

- The Strategy needs to address the specific behaviour of unwanted touching. This occurs in public, social settings, schools, colleges, universities, sporting environments and workplaces – which demonstrates the scope and scale of this across society. There needs to be education around the need for respect, in terms of personal space, and that unwanted and uninvited touching is wrong and constitutes harassment.
- Some respondents focused on women and girls leading their lives in fear of being a victim of violence due to the fact that unwanted behaviour is a common occurrence with some men and boys. This impinges on their everyday lives online and offline, and prevents them from reporting an incident due to fear of the abuser, or of not being believed.
- This fear has affected how women and girls feel about their safety. The prevalence of unwanted behaviour, coupled with a feeling a fear, has forced women and girls to reconsider how they travel, the time of day or night they go out, and whether they feel safer being accompanied.
- The Strategy needs to address the culture of victim blaming, which focuses on the victim and their circumstances and not on the perpetrator’s actions. The prevalence of victim blaming can affect the confidence of victims to report incidents of unwanted behaviour and abuse.
- A view was offered that families of victims and survivors need support services, both statutory and within the community and voluntary sector. These services need to be accessible, comprehensive, funded, resourced and specialist.
- The justice system needs to provide robust and timely interventions to improve the confidence of victims and survivors.



## QUESTION 6

We want to understand the root causes of violence against women and girls, and would especially welcome learning on intersectional approaches and on what works in promoting behavioural and attitudinal change.

### 6.1 A key theme related to misogyny as a root cause of violence against women and girls.

#### 6.1.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the deep-rooted misogyny embedded across society from generation to generation, and which results in inequality for women across the workplace, education system and the media.
- This deep-rooted misogyny includes sexist behaviours and attitudes, use of misogynistic language, gender stereotyping, harassment, and discrimination.
- These behaviours and attitudes underpin violence against women and girls and the Strategy needs to address this cultural problem.
- Misogyny and its outworking's lead to all forms of abuse including psychological, physical, economic and coercive control.
- The Strategy needs to address the prevalence of misogynistic language, sexist jokes and "lad's banter" and its continuing negative impact on the perception of women.
- A view was offered on legislating misogyny as a hate crime.
- The need to address the effect of religion and its teachings on misogynistic practices and its impact on gender inequality was noted.
- Identifying the underlying reasons for perpetrators holding misogynistic views is required.

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

" Misogynistic and sexist attitudes are fundamental components of violence against women and girls"

" In order to understand why some men hold misogynistic views or perpetrate violence and abuse against women and girls we must uncover and address the drivers that lead to such behaviours"

### 6.2

Another key theme related to unsatisfactory education as a root cause of violence against women and girls. Education was also flagged as a means to promote behavioural and attitudinal change.

#### 6.2.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- The attitudes that create behaviours leading to violence against women and girls can be developed at an early age and form a child's early experiences.
- The Strategy needs to address RSE, and this must be provided to children at age appropriate stages, to tackle outdated views on gender and gender roles.
- RSE content needs to focus on healthy relationships, consent, identifying unwanted behaviours and abuse. RSE can be a means to effect behavioural and attitudinal change, by challenging learned cultural behaviours and promoting gender equality.
- The Strategy needs to include education outside of the school setting including for example youth settings, community groups and workplaces incorporating the Bystander Approach.
- The programmes required to effect behavioural and attitudinal change need to be adequately resourced, funded and measured.
- There is a need for improved teacher training, as the attitudes and behaviours of some teachers are gender stereotyped - for example the attitude of "boys will boys" amongst some in the profession.
- **The early attitudes of children are formed in their home life and the type of environment and familial attitudes encountered can produce learned behaviours. Intervention at the early years' stage can help equip parents with the tools and learning to effect attitudinal and behavioural change.**

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

" Educative work in relation to positive relationships from an early age is important as often the views held by offenders are long-standing and unchallenged"

" There is therefore now an opportunity to develop innovative and inclusive practices for effectively supporting and developing mutual respect and healthy relationships through schools, as a means for driving wider attitudinal change"

### 6.3

A common theme related to historical male dominance as a root cause of violence against women and girls.

#### 6.3.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the structure of society, which has created a patriarchal structure of male dominance producing negative stereotypes, portraying females as the weaker sex, and leading to women not being seen as equal partners.
- The historical predominance of males has created a society where men dominate leadership roles, with women in public life negatively stereotyped and under-represented in senior roles across society.
- This is present across society, and has given rise to some males behaving in a manner that has gone unchallenged and leads to violence.
- The Strategy needs to challenge these learnt behaviours that are often excused from an early age, and which enable gender inequality and lead to abusive relationships.
- The Strategy needs to recognise that a power imbalance has been created across society resulting in gender inequality, deep rooted misogyny, discrimination and sexism.
- Historical male predominance is rooted in a sense of entitlement and a conception of ownership, which is illustrated for example by coercive control.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ The idea of the head of the household being the man is still prevalent in our society here in Northern Ireland”

“ Women continue to be under-represented in all senior roles in society, including political leadership, business leadership and leadership roles across public sector organisations”

### 6.4

A further common theme identified the effect of family and upbringing as a root cause of violence against women and girls.

#### 6.4.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The familial attitudes in an upbringing environment influence and impact the early attitudes and behaviours of children. Therefore children's views of what it means to be a man and a woman can be harmfully influenced by stereotyped gender roles in families. these attitudes formed in their home environment, through parents, guardians and wider family.
- This can create a lack of respect for women and girls, within some environments and can lead to young people adopting attitudes that result in unwanted behaviours and abuse.
- There is a role for parents and family members to be early educators of children, providing information and guidance to young people on what constitutes healthy relationships, respect, and gender equality.
- The Strategy must take account of the upbringing of some children, and provide for early intervention and prevention measures that tackle

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ Children learn what it means to be male and female in society from their environment and their parents i.e. division of labour in the home, who does the cooking and cleaning etc. With rigid gender stereotypes, women and girls who do not conform are seen as not fulfilling their 'given' roles within society”

“ Our understanding is that beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are most often established in childhood, influenced by parents, culture and environment”

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The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

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### 6.5 Some responses outlined the impact of religious factors.

- The Strategy needs to address women and girls being victim blamed in some religious communities, with the interpretation that they acted ‘improperly’ and bear responsibility for the abuse they have suffered.
- The actions of perpetrators within faith communities using the cover of silence and shame was noted, the Strategy must address this culture of stigma.
- In many religions and religious families, sex is treated as taboo which provides an unclear message to young people on issues such as consent and healthy relationships.
- The need to address religious teaching which promotes male authority, and the view that women are different from men was noted.
- Particularly in rural areas, families seek advice from religious groups where support can be dependent on the group’s attitude to domestic violence, divorce, and the rights of the wife and children; this can differ across faith groups.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

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“ Religious social structures across all faiths reinforce unequal attitudes to women vs men”

“ It is also very much reinforced by church teaching which promotes male authority in a very unbalanced way”

### 6.6 Other root causes of violence against women and girls reflected by some respondents included:

- There is a lack of faith and trust in the criminal justice system. Some of the issues noted, include the process of bail which has allowed perpetrators freedom to continue with abuse; poor conviction rates; ineffectual and lenient sentences; consistent breaches of protection orders without consequences and a high level of re-offending.
- The Strategy needs to address the normalised social attitudes that result in gender inequality and gender stereotypes. This cultural change requires resources, investment in prevention and attitudinal change to enable all women to fully participate in society.
- The Strategy needs to address the impact of how women are stereotyped in the media and abused on social media. Users of online platforms appear to operate without significant sanction, and are able to abuse women through posts and comments that are discriminatory, misogynistic and threatening.
- There is a need to address male perpetrators who by their actions are at the root of violence against women and girls.
- A view was offered that the Strategy needs to address the impact on children of both witnessing and being subject to violence. In Northern Ireland, parents and guardians can still use the defence of reasonable punishment – legislation needs enacted that addresses this and brings Northern Ireland in line with other jurisdictions.

## QUESTION 7

We want to understand whether there are particular groups of women and girls, including those with specific vulnerabilities, who are more at risk of particular offences or 'unwanted' behaviour or actions.

### 7.1

The responses to this question revealed that victims from a range of backgrounds and circumstances are impacted by violence against women and girls.

#### 7.1.1

A number of additional points were raised during various focus groups which are detailed below:

- The need for more outreach to women in rural communities was raised as they can be considerably more marginalised. The geographical isolation, lower population density and the dispersed nature of many rural settlements, have been highlighted as issues for women who experience abuse which can often go unnoticed.
- A view was offered that schools in rural and border communities are often left out of emotional and wellness programmes for primary and secondary students.
- Some women could not attend learning events in the community if men were present due to their religious beliefs. The Strategy needs to integrate what we know about their culture into the learning.
- Children with disabilities are more vulnerable and are unable to contact support services as easily.
- The vulnerability of people including those with disabilities, older people or people with medical conditions, who are wholly reliant on carers was also raised.
- If a victim decides to leave the home, there is a risk they will become homeless. There needs to be a greater awareness of the potential for this to happen.
- Refugee families and asylum seekers face additional barriers including language barrier. The availability of interpreters was highlighted, as was the additional trauma faced by women having to recount their experiences through a third person, who may have connections to her community.
- "Trans-widows" are a particular hidden group who may experience elements of coercive control from a male transitioning partner or spouse, and there is a lack of support systems for women in these relationships. This is especially the case when children are involved.

FIGURE 9

The word cloud below is a representation of the responses received on the particular groups of women and girls who are at risk in Question 7. The size of each word indicates its frequency across all responses to this question. Please note that the reference to vulnerable includes women and girls with addiction, in or having been through the care system and who are homeless.



- A view was offered that younger women are less likely to join some of the women-only groups or safe spaces for support and therefore less information is known about this age group.
- Discriminatory behaviour is evident against the Traveller community, and extends to a basic lack of support service provision.



## QUESTION 8

We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls who are victims of crime (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) in the criminal justice system that you would like to draw to our attention.

### 8.1

The responses to this question covered a wide range of components relating to the justice system, from initial reporting through to conviction and after care.

### 8.2

A key theme centred on the need to improve the processes that currently exist within the justice system.

#### 8.2.1

**Key points made by respondents included:**

- The time endured by victims for cases to reach court is unnecessarily long, and a fast track approach would greatly benefit victims. Examples were provided by respondents, detailing how the perpetrator will often re-offend in this time period, and in certain cases will intimidate the victim.
- Non-molestation orders, one of the most common legal remedies for victims of domestic violence are not enforced effectively, with breaches often going unpunished.
- Communication between authorities and victims is not consistent, with victims only learning of changes to court dates at the last minute, or receiving no information at all, such as whether charges are being dropped.
- Improved service coordination should allow front-line, first responders to identify any previous violence and any support systems already in place for victims.
- The legal system should be reformed to better suit the needs of women, especially those who are primary caregivers for children or disabled dependants, and find it difficult to attend lengthy sessions in court.
- Jury trials in high profile cases should be replaced with a judge-led panel.
- The recommendations contained within the Gillen Review should be implemented in full.

### 8.3

A common theme offered by respondents outlined that sentencing for crimes of violence against women and girls is inadequate and that this can act as a deterrent to reporting a crime.

#### 8.3.1

**Key points made by respondents included:**

- Conviction rates, especially for violent crimes are low and do nothing to deter perpetrators from carrying out violent acts.
- Sentencing is not always proportionate to the seriousness of the crime committed, and tougher sentencing is required.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ You’re given less to nothing when it is so personal. It’s about me, and I can’t get information about me”

“ Victims are incidental to the whole process of prosecutions, and are disrespected”

## 8.4

Another common theme was the need for extended wrap around support services.

### 8.4.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy should ensure that a trauma informed approach is adopted. Women reporting a crime to the police will often have to recount their experience to several officers which is traumatic for the victim. Reducing the number of officers involved would assist in addressing this.
- There is a higher victim attrition rate where the victim is female rather than male, indicating that there is a pressing need for additional support services to address the extent and scale of the problem.
- The trauma that victims experience, lasts long after the incident and throughout the legal process. Help should be available at all times to ensure that victims are supported throughout the judicial process, including after any conviction because the impacts will still be felt.
- Older women, particularly those who provide care, should be considered in safeguarding pathways. Women who care for an abuser as their primary caregiver may feel responsible and hence be less inclined to disclose incidents for example.
- More involvement with representatives and victims/survivors from marginalised groups is needed. An independent LGBTQIA+ Domestic Violence Advocate would aid this process.
- Victims of forced marriage who come forward need help to navigate the justice process and should get specialist support.

## SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ There is a clinical attitude that does not take into account the emotions of victims and the re-traumatisation aspect of court”

“ There is a higher victim attrition rate where the victim is female rather than male, reflecting that there is a stark requirement for extended support services to address the scope and scale of the issue where women and girls are victims of crimes”

## 8.5

Further responses indicated training of frontline staff across all organisations and public bodies is inconsistent, and can negatively impact the victims

### 8.5.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- Capacity building for professionals across the justice system is required to address the stereotypes and myths that exist and contribute to the negative experience felt by victims.
- Front line responders should be trained to understand the impact of abuse within families. The Strategy will need to address the inconsistent approach to training across the board.
- Men frequently hold positions of power and their misogynistic beliefs can lead to bias during the court process.

## The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

- Other comments emphasised the obligation that media organisations have when covering criminal proceedings, as they frequently foster a victim-blaming culture.
- Increased public awareness of current legislation to tackle violent crimes against women would be useful, and public awareness campaigns should be co-developed with community representative organisations.
- Other responses called for the minimum age of marriage to be raised to 18.
- A view was offered that the Strategy should consider gender budgeting as a tool to examine the gendered effects of spending and revenue-raising decisions, and to make it easier to promote gender equality through these processes.

## QUESTION 9

We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the treatment of perpetrators of violence against women and girls by the criminal justice system, or other public services, which reflect good practice or which could be improved.

### 9.1 A key theme related to the need for intervention and rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators.

#### 9.1.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- Those convicted must engage in programmes related to gender based violence before they are released. This is a core element to help reduce reoffending rates.
- Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of perpetrator intervention programmes. Responses referenced the upcoming review of the 'Promoting Positive Relationships Programme' undertaken by the Probation Board.
- There is a need to design an adolescent and adult child violence programme, given the rise in child to parent and adult child to parent abuse.
- The reform, or review, of any current rehabilitation programmes should ensure they are LGBTQIA+ inclusive.
- Rehabilitation programmes should also address violence and abuse inflicted by family members. Not all abuse that takes place in the home involves intimate partners.
- Those who come forward and self-report as abusers are not able to access adequate support, due to a lack of service provision.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ There has been a recognised gap in respect of perpetrator behavioural programmes in both the adjudicated and un-adjudicated”

“ Despite widespread use of domestic violence perpetrator programmes there is limited evidence of their effectiveness”

### 9.2

Another key theme raised by respondents to this question is the lack of faith in the system's ability to hold perpetrators accountable..

#### 9.2.1 Key points made by respondents included:

- The conviction rates for violent crimes against women are too low, and sentencing is too lenient. This leads to a negative viewpoint of the legal system and encourages under-reporting of crimes.
- Perpetrators often receive more lenient sentencing where addiction issues are involved.
- In circumstances where the offender should be removed from a violent setting, Northern Ireland's services are not responsive, reinforcing women's sense of powerlessness.
- There are no good practice examples in Northern Ireland.
- Before a case goes to court, perpetrators are able to remain at home, and victims feel unsafe because of the perpetrator's presence in their community.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ Women and marginalised groups are often not treated fairly in the criminal justice system and as a result of this lack trust in it. Therefore, the onus is on the criminal justice system to improve in order to build trust”

“ If perpetrators are not punished quickly and severely then women and girls will never feel safe and confident to report harassment and violence”

### 9.3

#### A common theme was the need for **trauma informed practices**.

##### 9.3.1

##### Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy should address the need to introduce adequate trauma informed witness preparation, which includes pre-recorded cross-examination of vulnerable victims and witnesses. The concept of witness proofing, which is common practice in Australia and USA, should be considered further.
- Authorities should be aware of the sensitivity surrounding certain violent crimes, and more female experts made available to conduct interviews.

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ Whether familiarisation remains an information session or a preparation session, it seems logical to develop trauma-informed training for those tasked to deal with witnesses (defence or prosecution) or suspect clients and indeed client family members”

#### The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

- A number of responses stated a Serial Domestic Abuse Perpetrator and Stalker Register would be useful for identifying serial and repeat offenders. This should be made available worldwide to prevent re-offending.
- If misogyny is to be treated in the same way as a hate crime, respondents wanted sentencing standards to reflect this, allowing criminal justice outcomes to reflect the effect, hurt, and harm caused.
- A view was offered that women who are victims of abuse must have access to single sex spaces where they can feel safe. This extends to women only prisons, with female only guards etc.
- A view was offered that publicly funded legal representation should be granted to all complainants in all serious sexual offence cases.
- It is important to take older victims' needs into account. Other choices for reducing harm and promoting safety may be needed, such as options for keeping safe at home or moving the perpetrator instead. Often older people do not desire drastic change, e.g., don't want to leave their home.

## QUESTION 10

We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls, or of men and boys, in the community, which you would like to draw to our attention in understanding violence against women and girls and how it can be combatted.

### 10.1

#### A key theme related to the importance of **education** in tackling violence against women and girls.

##### 10.1.1

##### Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to provide for RSE which is standardised, at an age appropriate stage, as a means to tackle gender stereotypes and to provide knowledge and learning of what constitutes consent and healthy relationships.
- The alternative to not providing standardised RSE is that young people will utilise other avenues including online pornography, opinions of their peers and social media to access sex education.
- There is a need to address, through training, the attitudes and approach of teachers to school situations involving violence against girls, for example around harassment and inappropriate jokes.
- The Strategy needs to address education outside of the classroom to raise awareness of the effects of pornography and the benefits of trauma informed early interventions.
- The implementation of early intervention and prevention educational programmes offers a means to tackle the underlying attitudes and culture that lead to violence against women and girls.
- The Bystander Approach must provide a positive message to males that their approach and influence can help effect attitudinal and behavioural change.

#### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ The solution needs to lie in education, in particular, the education of men and boys. Teacher actions/inactions are a common problem”

“ Men and boys should hold other men and boys to account. Men and boys should be advocates against male violence against women and girls”



## 10.2

### A common theme related to the need to address male violence.

#### 10.2.1

##### Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy must address male violence as a significant contributing factor to violence against women and girls. The majority of perpetrators are male and this must be taken into account.
- There is a need for the projection of a clear message to help males understand the impact of all forms of violence on women and girls.
- The impact of gender inequality, harmful gender stereotypes, misogyny and harassment, on allowing male violence against women to flourish, needs to be recognised.
- The prevalence of patriarchal norms and misogyny have allowed harmful attitudes and behaviours to become embedded in many males, creating an environment of entitlement and violence.
- There is a misunderstood and harmful perception of masculinity that leads to attitudes and behaviours that are controlling, dominant and entitled.
- The Strategy needs to provide an opportunity for males who are not perpetrators to play a more active role in preventing, and speaking out against those males who perpetrate, violence against women and girls.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ It is important for men and boys to understand the impact of harassment and violence against women and girls. Some perpetrators do not understand the wider impacts of misogynistic behaviour and how they can add to a culture of fear for women and girls and limit their lives. There is a lack of understanding of how even low levels of everyday sexism have an impact”

“ It is men and boys who are attacking, sexually abusing, threatening and murdering women”

“ Encouraging society, and in particular males, to pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls (in all of its various forms) is crucial to changing those behaviours and attitudes that can, in due course, nurture eventual physical violence”

## 10.3

### A further common theme outlined the importance of funding, resources and training.

#### 10.3.1

##### Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to provide significant long term funding to make an impact on tackling violence against women and girls.
- The long term funding needs to be directed into organisations and programmes working with victims and survivors at both a local and regional level.
- Resources need to be rolled out across government departments to help joined up working succeed.
- The provision of long term funding can provide resources to educative programmes, such as the Bystander Approach, and schemes to empower women from a young age.
- The application of long term planning and funding can improve the linkages required to help multi-agency working.
- The Strategy needs to provide resources to train workers and volunteers engaging with victims and survivors across community/voluntary and public sector organisations.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

“ More resources for wellbeing and support - some groups offer supports but resources in mental health are still largely underfunded. Keep improving the CJS to further support and help those females who choose to report”

“ Joined up services, partnership working and the availability of adequate resources to work effectively across departments”

“ There is a need to recognise the impact of violence against women and girls and for funding for specialist support to help them address these issues”

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The themes and topic areas mentioned less frequently by respondents are detailed below.

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#### 10.4

A number of respondents highlighted the impact of societal attitudes on violence against women and girls.

##### 10.4.1

Key points made by respondents included:

- The Strategy needs to address the societal attitudes that provide the platform for violence against women and girls to flourish. These societal attitudes include gender stereotyping, gender inequality, patriarchal norms and a culture of misogyny.
- The Strategy needs to address the behaviours that these attitudes have created, for example harassment, online abuse, physical abuse, financial abuse and psychological abuse.
- The proliferation of these societal attitudes have impacted on women and girls lives in the home, in public, in education and in the workplace. The Strategy must challenge these attitudes that continue to create barriers for women and girls across society.

### SAMPLE OF COMMENTS

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“ Therefore, it is important to reiterate that while the strategy should focus on women and girls, the debate must cut across society and identify inequality as an issue for everyone”

“ Challenging unwritten rules and cultural attitudes towards women and girls”

#### 10.5

Other responses commented on:

- The need to reform the criminal justice system to earn the trust and confidence of victims and survivors, through more appropriate sentencing and new legislation to deal with developing offences against women and girls.
- The effect of the impact of paramilitarism on some of our communities which has created a climate of entitlement, fear, silence and impunity. This results in an under-reporting of offences within these communities, and in paramilitaries gaining a hold over victims where they have ‘removed’ perpetrators from the area.
- The gender stereotyped portrayal of women in the media and on social media reinforces harmful gender norms and inequality. One response indicated aiming prevention campaigns at offenders and bystanders, as opposed to women and girls having to change their behaviour or way of life.
- There is a need for a whole of government and whole of society approach, which is joined-up, to tackle violence against women and girls. This includes working in unison with other strategies, and raising awareness of the scale and types of abuse within communities.
- The individual and societal economic impact of violence against women and girls was noted. Individually this can limit career choices or the capacity to earn to money and the cost to society across housing, health, justice and education budgets.

# CALL FOR VIEWS

# NEXT STEPS

## Next Steps

The EVAWG team has commissioned a programme of research to explore international best practice, lived experience in Northern Ireland, and a comprehensive landscape review of existing strategies and legislation in Northern Ireland. Examining current data sources in Northern Ireland is also part of this process. This is crucial so that we are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to deliver the Strategy, by working collaboratively across government, and with civil society. It will also enable us to develop accurate key performance indicators, which will allow us to track when, and how we are making a difference to the problem, and target our efforts and resources effectively.

TEO will collate the information received to inform the co-design phase of the Strategy. This is an important step as we grasp the core elements required to build the Strategy. The co-design stage will involve liaising with stakeholders across government, society and the third sector to draft a robust Framework Strategy for equality impact assessment and wide public consultation. This is due to commence in the autumn.

It is the intention to have a draft framework available towards the end of 2022 to allow for a consultation period in early 2023. The Strategy will run over a seven year period, and in 2023 we will co-design action plans across each pillar of the Framework, bid for resources and begin to implement them.



## List of Stakeholder Events

DATE	SECTOR
24 January 2022	Stakeholder Assurance Group
25 January 2022	Northern Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership
28 January 2022	Western Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership
2 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Female Victims (Belfast Feminist Network; NI Women's Budget Group; NI Women's European Platform; Victim Support NI; Women's Policy Group; Women's Regional Consortium; Women's Resource and Development Agency; Women's Support Network; Woman's Aid Federation NI)
8 February 2022	All Party Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence
8 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Children and Young People (Barnardos; Children in Northern Ireland; Education Authority Northern Ireland; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children NI; The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre)
9 February 2022	Public Event
10 February 2022	Public Event
11 February 2022	Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline
14 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Sexual Abuse Victims (Nexus NI; Rape Crisis NI; Victim Support NI).
15 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Male Victims (La Dolce Vita;
15 February 2022	Men's Action Network; Men's Alliance NI; Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline Nexus NI)
16 February 2022	Belfast Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership
22 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Minority Ethnic Communities (Bomoko NI; Ethnic Minorities Support Worker, Building Communities Resource Centre, Causeway Area; Flourish NI; Migrant Centre NI; Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality)
23 February 2022	Public Event
23 February 2022	Public Event
24 February 2022	Criminal Justice Organisations (Criminal Justice Inspection NI; Office of the Attorney General NI; Police Service of Northern Ireland; Public Prosecution Service; Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service; Youth Justice Agency)
24 February 2022	Public Event
1 March 2022	Organisations Supporting Older People (Age NI; Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey Older People's Project; Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne, Newtownabbey Women's Aid; Hourglass)
08 March 2022	Victim Support NI service users
10 March 2022	Organisations Supporting the LGBTQIA+ community (HERE NI; Rainbow)
14 March 2022	Southern Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership

DATE	SECTOR
15 March 2022	Organisations Supporting Minority Ethnic Communities (Armagh Support Group; Chinese Welfare Association; Belfast Islamic Centre; Inter Ethnic Forum; South Tyrone Empowerment Group (STEP); Sudanese Women's Group; Irish Traveller)
15 March 2022	Nexus NI Service Users
15 March 2022	Girl Guides
16 March 2022	Organisations Supporting People with a Disability (Disability Action)
21 March 2022	Northern Ireland Civil Service Student Network

## List of Respondents (Alphabetical)

- Action for Children
- Age NI
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Barnardo's Northern Ireland
- Belfast Area Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership
- Both Parents Matter Cymru
- British Medical Association
- Children in Northern Ireland
- Church and Society Commission (CASC) of the Church of Ireland
- Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland
- Disability Action
- Education Authority
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Evangelical Alliance NI
- Girlguiding Ulster
- Hear Our Voices - Mid-Ulster
- Here NI and Cara Friend
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- La Dolce Vita Project
- Law Centre NI
- Lisburn & Castlereagh Policing & Community Safety Partnership
- ManKind Initiative
- Men & Boys Coalition
- Men's Alliance (NI)
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Migrant Centre NI
- Mothers' Union
- National Secular Society
- Newry Next Chapter Group
- Nexus NI
- Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO women's group)
- NI Public Service Alliance
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)
- Pharmacy Forum NI
- Police Service of Northern Ireland (Public Protection Branch)
- Practitioners Forum
- Public Prosecution Service
- Queen's University Belfast
- Rape Crisis Service for Northern Ireland (Rape Crisis NI)
- Regional Trauma Network - SHSCT
- Relate NI
- South Eastern Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership
- Sinn Féin
- Stop Street Harassment NI
- South West Grid for Learning Helplines
- The Men's Advisory Project
- The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
- The Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland
- The Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)
- The Rainbow Project
- Ulster Unionist Party
- UNISON Northern Ireland
- Victim Support NI
- White Ribbon NI
- Women in Sport
- Women's Policy Group NI
- Women's Regional Consortium
- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
- Women's Platform
- Workers Party



EVAWG STRATEGY

# CALL FOR VIEWS

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## Signposts to support resources:

The Domestic and Sexual Abuse (DSA) helpline is available 24/7, for both men and women on **0808 8021414**. It's free and confidential.

Web chat is also available at [dsahelpline.org](http://dsahelpline.org) or **email**.

Children can contact Childline on **0800 1111** or via via their **website**.

Emotional and practical support is available from Victim Support NI if you have been affected by any type of crime. Contact the Belfast Hub on **028 9024 3133** or **email**. Contact the Foyle Hub on **028 7137 0086** or **email**.

If you need help from the police call **101**. In an emergency always call **999**. If you are scared to speak, a 'silent solution' exists to **press 55** when prompted. This allows police to know it is a genuine emergency.

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We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to each and every person who contributed to the CfV.



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