

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Response to the UN Secretary General’s invitation to provide information on: The Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment; Trafficking in women and girls; Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation

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Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/73/148):

Measures to address sexual harassment against women and girls

Aid must be delivered in a way that does no harm. The UK has helped drive work to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) in the aid sector since early 2018. This work roots out perpetrators, improves support to survivors and victims, and builds capability. We continue to engage stakeholders to advance this agenda, including by convening: a cross-sector group of all those who made commitments at the October 2018 Safeguarding Summit (including UN, IFIs, donors, CSOs and private sector); an Independent Reference Group; and a working group of 22 bilateral donors.

In December 2019, the UK launched a new £10 million [Resource and Support Hub](#) to support organisations to build their capability on safeguarding. We have a £10 million project with INTERPOL as part of a package of initiatives to help stop perpetrators of SEAH moving around the sector undetected, and are developing a package of support for survivors and victims. We published three progress reports in October 2019, which can be found along with other relevant material on this [website](#).

The UK Prime Minister is a member of the UN Secretary-General's Circle of Leadership on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and our Ministers and senior officials set the tone from the top through regular messaging on the importance of safeguarding, including preventing and responding to sexual harassment. The UK has continued to push for tackling SEAH to remain a priority for all Member States in our response to Covid-19, as evidence suggests that exploitation and abuse increase during crises and we must not become complacent. The Department for International Development (DFID) has commissioned safeguarding guidance notes on Covid-19 which can be found [here](#) along with other relevant material.

Impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in regards to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

The UK is recognised as a global leader in tackling violence against women and girls in all its forms, by pioneering approaches around the world that have shown reductions in violence of around 50%, proving that VAWG is preventable.

We are deeply concerned by the surge in violence against women and girls as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. We are working across the UK government and with global partners to prevent and respond to violence both **domestically** and **overseas**.

Domestic Response

On 28 April, the Home Office announced £3m of funding to support specialist services for children affected by domestic abuse, as a continuation of the [Children Affected by Domestic Abuse Fund](#).

On 8 April, the Chancellor announced a £750m support package to bolster charities, including those which support victims of domestic abuse. £28m of this is to help survivors of domestic abuse and their children by providing more safe spaces, accommodation, and access to support services during the coronavirus outbreak.

In April 2020, the Home Secretary launched a new awareness campaign to signpost victims to the support services available. The campaign, under the hashtag **#YouAreNotAlone**, aims to reassure those affected by domestic abuse that support services remain available during this difficult time.

The Home Office has also issued specific guidance to help and support victims of domestic abuse and is working closely with the charity sector and the police to ensure that these vital services remain open.

The UK government will continue the progression of the [Domestic Abuse Bill](#) through Parliament to better protect victims and bring perpetrators to justice. The Bill includes a statutory definition of domestic abuse, recognising the many forms abuse can take – psychological, physical, economic, sexual, and emotional.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) also published COVID-19 guidance for those running supported living facilities and refuges, to ensure that help is always available, which also offers advice on safety, cleaning, and isolation.

Overseas Response

The UK government is working to ensure that women and girls have access to the vital services they need, including urging all governments, UN agencies, and other global partners to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their response plans for COVID-19.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has:

Supported scaled up reporting, protection and support services for women and girls affected by gender-based violence in the world's poorest countries through new funding. We have already provided £10 million of UK aid to UNFPA and £20 million to UNICEF to scale up protection and support services for women and girls. We launched a call for proposals under our Rapid Response Facility, which required all projects to mainstream gender, protection, and safeguarding. This year we will launch a new flagship £67.5 million programme to scale up violence prevention – the largest investment by any donor government in programming and research to prevent VAWG globally.

Published evidence to inform the response. We commissioned a report through DFID's VAWG Helpdesk to summarise early evidence on the likely impact of COVID-19 on VAWG and have shared this with other donors, multilateral organisations, civil society, and the Call to Action on Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

Urgently reoriented our programming to mitigate the risks to women and girls. For example, in **Malawi**, we have redirected our programme towards influencing the national public health response and adapting its programming to ensure activities can continue safely, such as using national and community radio to increase awareness of VAWG services and women's right to access these. In **Nepal**, the UK is helping ensure that women and girls can continue to report gender-based violence and seek support during the lockdown – the UK has financed 14 Women and Children Service Centres across the country, and 62 One Stop Management Crisis Centres within Health Centres. In **Uganda**, DFID is supporting the Government's response to the spikes in VAWG by funding 13 shelters across the country and supporting revision of standard operating procedures to ensure safety of frontline staff and survivors.

Use of technology and innovation in responding to VAWG in the context of COVID-19

The UK government is committed to supporting vulnerable people during the crisis and acknowledges that lockdown measures have led to an increased use of the internet and social media to help people stay abreast of developments and to stay connected. We also acknowledge that perpetrators may have shifted their behaviours leading to potential increases in online harms and of abuse taking place within the home.

We are taking action in the UK to address this. The UK government has provided Refuge, a charity providing domestic abuse support, with £250,000 to provide specialist nationwide support to staff and survivors who experience technologically facilitated abuse.

We have also been tackling intimate image abuse, or the threat of it, through

additional funding to help the Revenge Porn Helpline bolster their services. The UK government is working closely with the Law Commission Project, which is currently reviewing the wider law around non-consensual taking and sharing of intimate images, as part of their review into offensive and abusive online communications. The review will consider the revenge porn offence and issues such as cyber-flashing and deep-fake pornography. It will make recommendations to ensure that the criminal law provides consistent and effective protection against intimate image abuse.

The Home Secretary announced £2 million funding on 11 April to immediately bolster the technological capacity of domestic abuse services, to ensure their services remain accessible at all times. Just under £1m of this has been allocated to providers of national helpline and web-based services.