

Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations:

A Template for an Integrated Strategy on Violence Against Women for the UK

Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women. (United Nations)

S U M M A R Y

**This is a summary of a report for End Violence Against Women
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Three million women across the UK experience rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, stalking, sexual exploitation and trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM) or crimes in the name of honour *each year*. Individual women and girls count the cost in terms of cuts and bruises, broken bones, miscarriages, sexually transmitted diseases, death in extreme cases, long-term mental health problems, substance abuse and social exclusion. The cost to society is over £40 billion a year in England and Wales alone.

End Violence Against Women (EVAW) is calling for the UK governments to develop and implement an integrated strategy on violence against women based on the foundations of gender equality and human rights. This should begin from the vision of eradicating violence against women.

Gender-based violence is one of the most serious inequalities facing women and girls in the UK today and there are commonalities and connections between all forms of violence including: myths and stereotypes that serve to justify or excuse the abuse; the dynamics of power and control; high levels of under-reporting and extremely low conviction rates; the extent of repeat victimisation; long-term social, psychological and economic consequences for victims and the historic failure by the state to prevent violence.

Despite these connections, the response across the UK is fractured with separate policies on specific forms of violence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland where the focus is primarily on the criminal justice system, even though most victims do not ever report to the police. There has been no equivalent focus on supporting victims and there is no vision of actually preventing violence in the first place.

There are clear connections between poverty and Violence Against Women (VAW). In Scotland, work on VAW is recognised as a cause and consequence of gender inequality and in Sweden measures to end violence against women are systematically integrated into all gender equality work. However, most UK government departments still fail to understand and address the connections between VAW and, for example, child poverty, social exclusion, community cohesion, economic productivity, safety in public spaces and on public transport, health and education. EVAW's experience is that it is not always clear either within or outside government which officials lead on VAW or even gender across Whitehall departments. This problem is replicated at local level. Over a year after the Gender Equality Duty came into force this is unacceptable.

For over 15 years the UN has made repeated calls for the UK and other States to take '*integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women*' and at least 20 countries from all corners of the globe have such approaches including the Scottish Government. Whilst the UK Government has published '*Tackling Violence Against Women: a cross-government narrative*', the UK, Wales and Northern Ireland governments still lack a strategy.

There is overwhelming public support across the UK for this kind of approach. YouGov polling for EVAW found that 84% of people surveyed support cross-government action on violence against women. The Equality and Human Rights Commission also supports this approach, as do the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. The Home Affairs Select Committee recommended in June 2008 that the Government '*adopts a national strategy on domestic violence, or on violence against women more generally, to include explicit emphasis on prevention*' (italics added). We believe that government departments and public bodies will not be able to fulfill their obligations under the public sector equality duties without an integrated strategy on violence against women.

A strategy should not entail duplicating good work where it already exists, but providing a framework under which existing work would sit. It could link into the Scottish Government's framework and any future strategies developed by the devolved governments in Northern Ireland and Wales. The benefits are that it would ensure work is co-ordinated across governments at all levels, bring transparency to policymaking, highlight where there are gaps that need to be filled, fulfill international obligations and make implementation of the equality duties more effective.

Working with women's organisations across the UK, EVAW has developed a Template for an Integrated Strategy on Violence Against Women based on the 6 Ps set out in full from page 27 of the main report; Perspective, Policy, Prevention, Provision, Protection and Prosecution. The new Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) *Violence Against Women Strategy* provides an exemplar for how a whole of government approach could be developed.

'An undeclared war against women'

The vast majority of violence against women and girls is perpetrated by known men; family members, neighbours, friends or colleagues but it is also perpetrated by strangers. Women are more than twice as likely as men to be concerned about violent crime, with young women registering very high levels of worry. Violence denies women and girls the most fundamental of human rights: life, liberty, bodily integrity, freedom of movement and dignity of the person. It constrains women's choices and behaviour since personal safety features strongly in routine decision-making: is it safe to travel or walk alone? to challenge a statement or decision? Women and girls are simply not able to occupy and use public space with the same freedom and ease as men and boys. Interpersonal relationships are frequently marred by the threat and reality of abuse.

- 45 per cent of women in England and Wales experience domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking in their lifetime. One in five women in Northern Ireland experience domestic violence.¹
- 922 rapes were reported to the Police in Scotland in 2006/07. There were 27 convictions, a record low rate of 2.9%²
- At least 66,000 women and girls in England and Wales have undergone FGM, in the main prior to arrival in the UK, with a further 33,000 girls and young women at risk.³
- Between 1,000 and 10,000 women and girls are trafficked into the UK each year for sexual exploitation.⁴
- An estimated 1,000 British Asian girls are forced into marriage each year.⁵
- Nearly half of teenage girls in one survey had been made to feel guilty for refusing sex, with young women expressing confusion about their right and capacity to 'say no'.⁶
- A study of over 2000 young people in Rochdale found that pornography influences young men's expectations of sexual relationships, 'lead[ing] to pressure on young women to comply'.⁷

It is this scale of violence that Trevor Phillips – Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission – refers to as an 'undeclared war against women'.

1. Walby, S and Allen, J (2004), *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*, London, Home Office. Northern Ireland Office & Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, *Tackling Violence at Home: A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland* (2005)

2. Source: Scottish Government

3. Dorkenoo, E., Morison, L., & Macfarlane, A. (2007) *A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales*, London, Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD).

4. Townsend, M., (2007) 'Sex slaves' win cash in landmark legal deal *The Observer*, Sunday December 16 2007.

5. Reunite, cited on BBC, 1999

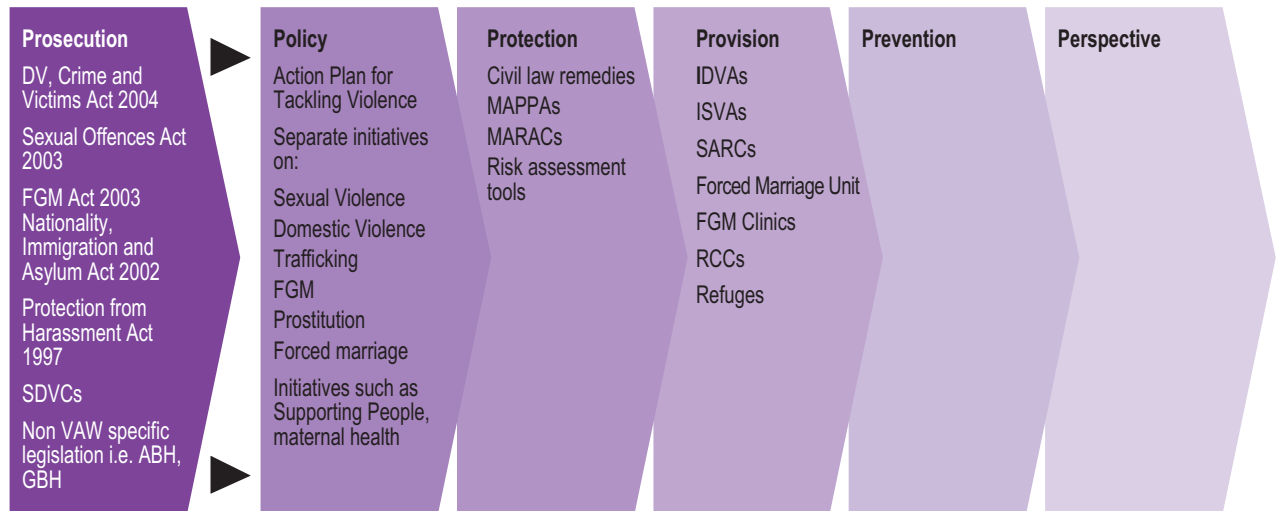
6. NSPCC/Sugar (2006) *Teenage girls reveal unwanted sexual experiences*
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/whatwedo/mediacentre/pressreleases/22_may_2006_unwanted_sexual_experiences_wdn33559.html

7. Redgrave, K. & Limmer, M., (2005) 'It makes you more up for it': School aged young people's perspectives on alcohol and sexual health Rochdale Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

What's the problem with the current approach?

There is a fractured response to violence against women across the UK that, mostly, fails to recognise it as a gender equality issue. There has never been a comprehensive survey across all forms of violence against women so there is no strong evidence base and therefore no benchmark for measuring progress. There are certain groups we know very little about - including the elderly, women in temporary accommodation and institutions including prison and women with learning disabilities and/or mental health problems.

The Six Ps in current Westminster policy



There is no coherent **perspective** on violence against women. Only four UK Govt departments work to UN definitions and none in Northern Ireland do. In contrast, the definition used in the Scottish framework on violence against women is explicitly linked to 'women's and girls' subordinate status in society', 'a function of gender inequality, and an abuse of male power and privilege'.

Policy in most parts of the UK has been gender-neutral and crime-driven (for example the Home Office's *Action Plan for Tackling Violence 2008-2011*). Whilst in Scotland, the government's approach links violence against women to women's equality. In Northern Ireland, the 2006 Gender Equality Strategy now specifically identifies the elimination of 'gender based violence' as an objective, however no departments have action plans, objectives or carry out prevention work.

Women subject to immigration control who experience violence are disproportionately disadvantaged. Changes to law and policy over the last two decades have put power and control over them into the hands of spouses and employers and placed barriers in the way to protection, for instance by reducing access to legal representation and denying access to public funds. Gender-based persecution is not consistently recognised as grounds for asylum. Silo thinking can also lead to a different response to tackling violence against BME women by downplaying their needs for protection in order to be 'culturally sensitive'.

Prevention is the weakest part of UK responses to violence against women, with little investment and single 'one shot' campaigns using end of year under-spend. Work on bullying in schools is de-gendered and the expansion of faith schools is likely to mean that students are denied vital education on sex, sexuality and relationships and may mean that girls are less likely to report violence to their schools and be supported by

them. Daily sexualised messages in the media and the Internet create conducive contexts for violence, reinforce gender inequalities and undermine information campaigns about healthy sexual relationships. Provision for perpetrators is patchy and focused on the criminal justice system. Low reporting and high attrition rates mean that the vast majority of perpetrators are not reached through the criminal justice system.

The strongest story to tell is in relation to **prosecution**. The CPS *Violence Against Women Strategy*, launched in May 2008, is based on a gendered understanding and 'provides an overarching framework for crimes that have been identified as being committed primarily by men, towards women victims.' There have also been procedural changes and guidance to improve investigation and prosecution and enhance good practices within criminal justice agencies, and investment in advocacy around the UK. However, the overall conviction rate for rape in England and Wales is 5.7%, in Scotland it is just 2.9% and there have been no prosecutions for FGM in the UK. A huge challenge for the criminal justice system is how to combine outcome and procedural justice to ensure victims are treated with respect and dignity throughout the process. Moreover criminal and civil processes are still disconnected, meaning that protection and prosecution may not be synchronised.

There is no integrated data collection system across the criminal justice system making tracking of individual cases virtually impossible and systematic monitoring of performance prone to error, especially with respect to domestic violence where all systems rely on the appropriate flagging of cases. Inconsistent recording means that the kind of analysis required by the equality duties is simply not possible. We do not know, therefore, if the operations of the criminal justice system are, or are not, discriminatory. These are surely foundational measures for the EHRC to address.

In relation to **provision**, there is limited understanding in generic statutory services - such as health and social welfare professionals, criminal justice practitioners and educators - of the dynamics of violence against women and girls. Inappropriate responses act as a barrier to protection, provision and prosecution. While some information on domestic violence has been incorporated into vocational courses for social workers, teachers, and probation officers, there is a woeful absence of mandatory inclusion of violence against women across all disciplines.

The Westminster government has focused on developing a range of specialist violence against women initiatives in the criminal justice system (Specialist Domestic Violence Courts and Sexual Assault Referral Centres, for example) which are welcome. However at the same time there has been an erosion of specialist services in the women's voluntary sector which supports the vast majority of women who do not report and there is a postcode lottery of specialist provision across the UK as documented in the *Map of Gaps* report. One third of local authorities have no specialised support services for victims and existing services are fragile. Nine out of ten local authorities have no services for BME women experiencing violence and yet BME services meet needs around specific forms of violence such as forced marriage, address language needs and support women with no recourse to public funds. Women in rural areas are also particularly disadvantaged through lack of access to services, an issue that neither *DEFRA's Rural Strategy* nor the *Welsh Spatial Plan* address. Whilst single sex services are lawful where there is a clear need to preserve decency or privacy, for example a domestic violence refuge or Rape Crisis Centre, some local authorities stipulate that specialised women's sector organisations should provide services to men.

Protection of women and girls is also inadequate. Current civil protective orders in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are limited and only apply to specific forms of violence against women, although the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 differs from other protection orders by allowing for third party application. The cost of applying for civil injunctions can be prohibitive for women whose earnings take them over the legal aid threshold. Civil legal aid has reduced by 22% since 1997, resulting in many 'advice deserts' where women are unable to access lawyers and therefore safety and protection.

The connections between violence against women and broader gender equality are often not recognised. Women and girls in institutions such as prisons, children's homes, hostels and mental health settings are often vulnerable to, or dealing with the legacies, of violence. Whilst some institutional policies on domestic violence exist, they rarely extend to cover all forms of violence and harassment or set out protocols for preventing and responding to violence. Women with no recourse to public funds are especially vulnerable to violence since they are unlikely to have independent income. Similarly, women from BME communities who have lower employment rates and pay levels have an additional barrier when they seek to leave abusive relationships.

The community cohesion agenda has encouraged the funding of faith-based organisations that may undermine gender equality and violence against women initiatives. With the shift from multi-culturalism to multi-faithism in many parts of the UK there has been a failure to address the root causes of social exclusion, deprivation, homophobia, gender discrimination and racism. Secular BME women's organisations are facing closure due to funding cuts and yet they have a track record of tackling gender equality, building bridges within and between communities and challenging religious intolerance and racial hatred.

There is **no budget line** that addresses violence against women apart from in Scotland. Much provision and awareness-raising work relies on grants for time-limited or piecemeal projects. Most grants to Rape Crisis Centres in England and Wales are for one year or less which is not compliant with the Government COMPACT agreement with the voluntary sector. This creates fragility and a lack of sustainability. There is also an urgent need for links between all forms of violence against women to be acknowledged in budgetary allocations and Local Area Agreements. Current local commissioning further threatens the women's sector as they favour cheaper, generic providers over specialist services. These processes are administered by Local Strategic Partnerships, in which women's organisations are significantly under-represented. Services for BME women are particularly threatened by these processes since they often incur higher costs because they require interpreting services and resource/time-intensive community outreach work.

A Template for an Integrated Violence Against Women Strategy

This template sets out the spine around which governments at all levels and public bodies can develop strategies to end violence against women. It is intended to be flexible so is not specific to government departments, not least because responsibilities for delivering many of these work streams will fall across several departments and require coordinated working. Below is a summary of the full template that can be found from page 26 of the main report.

An integrated strategy should be based on the foundations of gender equality and human rights, within a vision of ending violence against women. The strategy should focus on how it will deliver on core policy objectives and this should be set out in government departments' equality schemes. It must be mainstreamed across governments at all levels, including in local partnership structures. The strategy should have benchmarks, targets, timelines, a budget, progress reports and monitoring mechanisms. An independent oversight body/observatory should be created as recommended by the UN.

The Six Ps in an integrated strategy Benchmarking and the knowledge base



- The UK should undertake a violence against women prevalence study every 10 years.
- The British Crime Survey Interpersonal Violence module should be enhanced and should count all incidents in the previous 12 months.
- Studies on the extent of forms of violence such as FGM and forced marriage should be undertaken within affected communities.
- Data should be rigorously recorded and collated, and disaggregated by gender, race, age, disability and sexuality.
- There should be investment in the strong research culture on violence against women.

Perspective

- Governments and agencies across the UK should adopt the UN definition of violence against women.
- The due diligence standard should be applied.
- The principle of non-discrimination means that all women resident in the UK should have equal access to protection, justice and specialised support services.

Policy

- An integrated violence against women strategy should be a priority policy area for UK governments, administrations and local authorities.
- Violence against women should be included in all training for professional qualification, and in-service training.
- Government Equalities Office or Cabinet Office, and relevant equivalents in devolved nations, should lead the co-ordination of the strategy.
- Multi-agency violence against women partnerships should be established in every local authority area and violence against women should be mainstreamed in existing local partnerships.
- Public bodies should take action on violence against women as a central part of compliance with the equality duties.
- Outcomes for victim-survivors, in terms of safety, well-being, empowerment and access to support should be the measure of success across the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Prevention

- Schools should develop education programmes on all forms of violence against women.
- Training on gender and violence against women should be introduced at all levels of teacher training and professional development.
- Provision of self-defence training, based on a gendered analysis, for women and girls should be enhanced.
- Public awareness raising campaigns should challenge attitudes to violence against women.
- Governments and public bodies should seek to limit sexualisation of women and girls in popular culture and public spaces.
- Preventative programmes with perpetrators based on a gendered perspective should be available across the UK.

Provision

- Specialised third sector violence against women organisations, including those supporting BME women, should be acknowledged as sources of expertise and the strategic and economic value of women-only provision should be recognised and promoted.
- An index of necessary services should be developed which each local authority is expected to fulfil.
- Areas without specialised violence against women support services, particularly rural areas, should develop provision, including helplines.
- Specialised third sector women-only provision should be maintained and extended in the long-term interests of cohesion and to meet legal standards.
- The model of women's centres, as recommended by the Corston report, should be implemented.
- There should be ongoing training on violence against women for all relevant professionals including health and social welfare, education and criminal justice.

Protection

- High quality support services should be recognised as a key provider of protection.
- Civil law protection orders should be extended to cover all forms of violence against women, and no woman should have to pay to be safe.

- Government should review the impact of legal aid reforms on the ability of women to access civil protection.
- Women who are endangered because of current or past violence and who have insecure immigration status must be afforded equity of protection to guarantee their safety.
- The community cohesion agenda should be re-visioned to include a gender perspective, with all equality grounds as a non-negotiable foundational principle.
- The Corporate Alliance on Domestic Violence should be broadened to all forms of violence against women.
- Civil society should be equipped with information and resources to provide protection and support to victims they know.

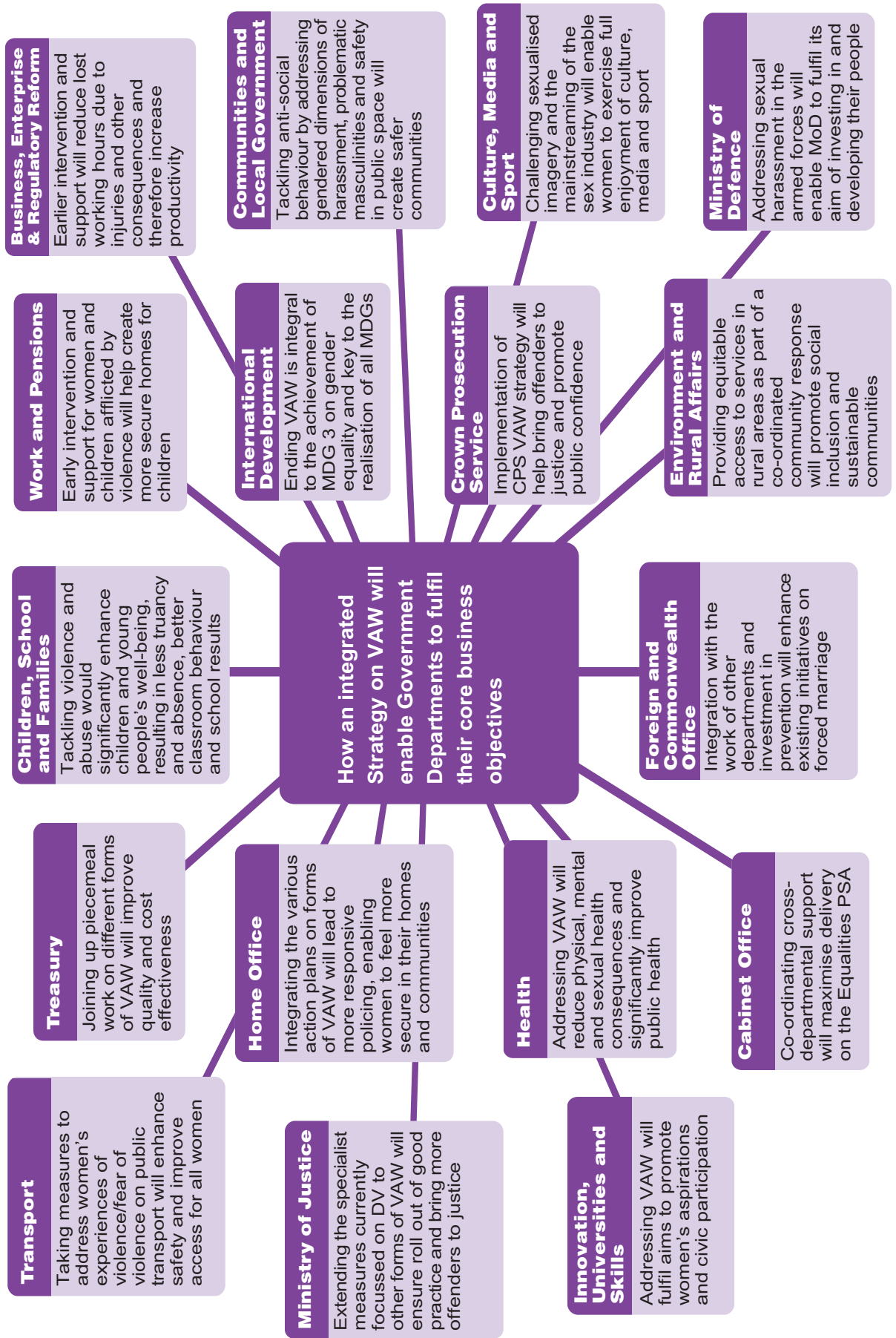
Prosecution

- Attrition needs to be effectively addressed.
- Increased reporting needs to be accompanied by increased resources for support and advocacy.
- Criminal justice system data collection and collation systems should meet obligations for monitoring under the equality duties.
- Courts should systematically take domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse into account when making child contact and/or child protection orders.
- The principle and understanding of procedural justice should be promoted across the criminal justice system.
- The local target to encourage reporting must be supplemented by availability of options that increases safety, security, well-being and addresses the harms of violence.

Budgets and Funding

- Ring-fenced funding for the specialised violence against women services in the voluntary sector should be introduced across the UK and these should be secured through local commissioning frameworks.
- Funding cycles should be at a minimum, three-yearly, and COMPACT compliant.
- Commissioning guidance should stress the value and legality of women-only services and those serving minority women.
- Long-term prevention work must be resourced.

Violence Against Women as core business for Westminster departments





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