



# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Supplementary National Violence Against Women Guidance Executive Summary



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# Cosla/Ministerial Spokesperson Foreword

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The COVID-19 pandemic, and the measures now in place to control the spread of the coronavirus,<sup>1</sup> are no excuse for the perpetration of violence against women and girls (VAWG). However, they may create an environment whereby the risks to women, children and young people suffering or recovering from domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG are heightened in local communities across Scotland.

Across Scotland, we know that professionals within local authorities and other key community planning organisations are working incredibly hard to reduce risks to, and help safeguard, people within their local communities. Despite the challenging environment they are operating under, local authorities and other key public sector and third sector partners are continuing to play a vital role in ensuring that women, children and young people's needs are met now and throughout this period of heightened risk.

As co-owners of [Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women and Girls](#), COSLA and the Scottish Government have developed this supplementary guidance for local authorities and other key community planning partners to support them with this important task. The guidance has been developed in partnership with the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland and has been informed by a wide range of specialist VAWG organisations working across Scotland, as well as key professional bodies.

Specifically, this guidance aims to ensure that a sustainable, joined-up approach to safeguarding the needs of women, children and young people experiencing VAWG during COVID-19 is embedded at a local strategic level. It is intended to support the strong leadership already being demonstrated by Local Government and other key community planning partners across Scotland in ensuring effective protection and provision of support for people experiencing VAWG.

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1 The Scottish Government introduced [measures](#) as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak requiring people to stay at home and away from others to help protect the NHS and save lives. The [Health Protection \(Coronavirus\)\(Restrictions\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020](#) ("the Coronavirus Regulations") (implemented 26th March) contain the lawful basis for these measures and are reviewed at least once every 21 days. In addition, supporting guidance to the Coronavirus Regulations for circumstances where there may be domestic abuse may be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-domestic-abuse/pages/overview/>.

Ultimately, the guidance is intended to be a useful resource that can support local decision-makers across a wide range of organisations and partnerships. As a live and adaptable resource, it aims to ensure collaborative responses to women, children and young people affected by VAWG continue to be prioritised as part of our wider strategic response to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the significant challenges posed by the coronavirus, we firmly believe that, by continuing to work together to deliver on our shared commitments, we can realise our shared ambition of making Scotland truly Equally Safe.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Parry".

Councillor Kelly Parry  
Community Wellbeing  
Spokeperson, COSLA



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina McKelvie".

Christina McKelvie MSP  
Minister for Older People  
and Equalities

# Introduction and Aims of the Guidance

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## Background

Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls was launched in 2014 and revised in 2016. The strategy sets out the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint vision for a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.

At a local level, Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) are recognised as the multi-agency mechanism for delivering Equally Safe. In 2016, the Scottish Government and COSLA, with the support of the Improvement Service, published updated guidance for VAWPs, which clarifies the roles and responsibilities of these strategic partnerships in coordinating the responses of the key public sector and third sector organisations working locally to ensure the safety and wellbeing of women and children affected by violence and abuse.

In recognition that VAWG damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential, and is a fundamental violation of human rights, the 2016 guidance highlights the importance of collaborative working between VAWPs and other relevant thematic community planning partnerships wherever possible. This includes (but is not limited to): Adult and Child Protection Committees; Community Justice Partnerships; Community Safety Partnerships; Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships and Health and Social Care Partnerships.

## Impact of COVID-19 on Women, Children and Young People

In communities across Scotland, women, children and young people experiencing VAWG are at significant increased risk of harm during the COVID-19 pandemic. International evidence reviews<sup>2</sup> highlight that increased levels of domestic abuse during lockdown phases of the pandemic have been reported in China, Italy, Spain, France and Australia, with evidence from other epidemics and disasters suggesting

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2 [UNFPA, \*Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage\* \(April 2020\)](#)

that the risk of harm from all forms of VAWG will continue to increase post-disaster. This includes domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The current social restrictions on movement in communities across Scotland create new risks to those suffering or recovering from domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. These include perception that statutory services, such as police and homelessness services are not operating; the lack of physical access to normal social networks such as friends and extended family; reduced reach of interventions such as specialist VAWG and universal support services; sickness of frontline specialist service providers; barriers caused through increased use of digital or telephone enabled services; financial dependencies and increased access by perpetrators to women, children and young people because of social distancing and lockdown measures.

While all women and children may be at increased risk of harm during the pandemic, it is important to note that women and children with protected characteristics may face additional barriers to support and be at increased risk of exploitation and coercion during the duration of the pandemic response over the coming weeks and months. This includes: minority ethnic women and girls; refugees and asylum seekers; disabled women and girls (including those with learning disabilities); LGBTI people; and women at different ages and stages of life (including older women). Women and children experiencing poverty and deprivation are also likely to experience additional challenges, as are women migrants with no recourse to public funds.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, women, children and young people with complex needs including substance misuse, a history of offending behaviour and/ or mental health issues and trauma who are experiencing VAWG may experience additional challenges and support needs during the pandemic. It is vital that local authorities and other community planning partners ensure they are considering this during all stages of their COVID-19 responses.

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3 <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/safeguarding-adults> includes useful information on safeguarding vulnerable adults.

## Aims of the Supplementary VAW Guidance

The overall aim of this supplementary guidance is to ensure that a sustainable, joined-up approach to safeguarding the needs of women, children and young people experiencing VAWG during COVID-19 is embedded at a local strategic level. Specifically, it aims to:

- Ensure local decision-makers are aware of the suite of COVID-19 guidance that has been developed nationally that will be relevant to supporting women, children and young people affected by VAWG, and tackling perpetrators of that abuse;<sup>4</sup>
- Highlight risks to women, children and young people affected by VAWG in the:
  - Short term (during periods of lockdown and other social restrictions);
  - Medium term (as restrictions are lifted and we move towards recovery); and
  - Long term (as partners transition to a ‘new normal’);
- Support local decision-makers to identify short-, medium- and long-term actions to mitigate risks to women, children and young people as a result of COVID-19 and begin to support early planning for the post-pandemic period in order to ensure women, children and young people’s recovery needs are recognised and addressed at a strategic level.

While aimed primarily at local authorities, the guidance recognises that a joined-up approach across a wide range of public sector and third sector partners will be needed locally in order to ensure women, children and young people are protected during the pandemic, and that tackling and preventing VAWG is embedded in broader medium- and long-term recovery strategies. This includes (but is not limited to) Councils, Police, NHS, Women’s Aid organisations, Rape Crisis services, housing providers, SCRA and other key third sector partners. It is intended to be a ‘live’ document that can be updated to respond to changing challenges and opportunities facing decision-makers over the coming months.

An overview of key risks and mitigating actions for decision-makers to consider is outlined in the table below. More detail on each of these risks and actions is available in the full guidance.

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<sup>4</sup> A list of the [key guidance that has been developed to date](#) has been included as an appendix to this guidance.

## Key Risks and Mitigating Actions for Local Decision-Makers to Consider as Part of Their Wider Strategic Responses to COVID-19

SHORT-TERM: DURING PERIODS OF LOCKDOWN AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS TO SUPPRESS THE SPREAD OF COVID-19	
Area of risk	Effects of COVID-19 pandemic response
Domestic abuse, sexual violence and abuse, FGM and forced marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home is not a safe place for many women, children and young people (WCYP)</li> <li>• There are increased barriers to accessing support and emergency housing during lockdown, particularly for WCYP with protected characteristics</li> <li>• Perpetrators of domestic abuse may increase levels of control, surveillance and violence during periods of lockdown whether living with or apart from WCYP</li> <li>• Women face increased risk of economic dependency because of economic crisis</li> <li>• Vulnerable CYP are particularly at risk as are less visible to agencies/services</li> <li>• There may be increased risk of sexual violence, exploitation of children, online abuse/grooming, FGM and forced marriage because of social isolation</li> </ul>
Prostitution and other forms of Commercial Sexual Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are at increased risk of being targeted to sell sex online</li> <li>• As a result of financial desperation and lack of financial support, women may be forced to sell sex at reduced prices during periods of lockdown, either online or in-person</li> <li>• Women engaged in selling sex in-person are at increased risk of contagion from COVID-19</li> <li>• Regular safety mechanisms and support might not be available to women involved in prostitution and other forms of CSE, increasing risk</li> </ul>
Women with complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social isolation may exacerbate existing mental health issues for survivors</li> <li>• Access to reproductive, abortion and sexual health services reduced; higher risk of abuse going undetected for pregnant women/new mothers; perpetrators may intensify control over reproductive health, so higher risk of unwanted pregnancy and STIs</li> <li>• Women in the criminal justice system released from prison during lockdown may face increased safety risks and reduced access to support</li> <li>• Decreased access to services for women with problem alcohol/drug use</li> </ul>
Perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perpetrators in the criminal justice system released from prison during lockdown may pose increased safety risks to their families</li> <li>• Challenges in ensuring perpetrators remain engaged virtually with programmes/support and continue behaviour change</li> <li>• Perpetrators may use current situation to justify non-compliance &amp; avoid challenge</li> <li>• Emergency provisions in prisons and those related to CPOs may create specific risks</li> </ul>

**Mitigating actions local authorities and other community planning partners may wish to consider during periods of lockdown and other restrictions**

1. Ensure MARACs continue to function to identify and ensure safety plans are in place for WCYP at greatest risk of harm
2. Develop a COVID-19 domestic abuse housing policy based on good practice guidance
3. Develop strategy for effective multi-agency communication & data sharing to monitor impact of emergency COVID-19 legislation and other suppression responses
4. Consider how to support and enhance capacity of specialist services. Wherever possible, this will include ensuring that any local funding and contractual expectations are flexible to support service delivery and the changing needs of WCYP
5. Encourage community planning partners to work together to ensure a consistent approach to meeting the needs of WCYP, particularly in adult protection, child protection and criminal justice responses
6. Ensure strategic partnerships work in close collaboration with members of VAW Partnerships, including specialist VAW support services
7. Use digital technology to ensure risks to WCYP are identified and managed early and effectively and encourage flexible, digital communication to support safeguarding processes where appropriate
8. Use social media and other communication channels to highlight local services & support available to WCYP, and ensure different sectors of the workforce know the role they can play in reducing risks
9. Update risk assessment & management plans for convicted perpetrators & intervene directly with perpetrators face-to-face or virtually to support them to change negative behaviours
10. Ensure Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are undertaken when developing any new policies/ responses to COVID-19, to reduce any unintended negative consequences to WCYP experiencing VAWG and ensure they meet the needs of people with protected characteristics



**MEDIUM TERM: ONCE RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED AND WE MOVE TOWARDS RECOVERY**

Area of risk	Effects of COVID-19 pandemic response
Increased demand for support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of prolonged, intense trauma during lockdown, and long-term mental health issues for survivors could have been exacerbated by restrictions</li> <li>• Long waiting lists, lack of person-centred support and lack of support for WCYP with complex needs, all of which could exacerbate issues</li> <li>• WCYP with protected characteristics may face increased barriers to accessing support</li> <li>• Lack of access to support could contribute to some WCYP engaging in harmful or offending behaviours</li> <li>• WCYP leaving perpetrator after lockdown at highest risk of serious physical harm and murder</li> </ul>
Funding and capacity constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased challenges for services to meet surge in demand because of capacity and budget constraints</li> <li>• Potential for multiple lockdowns, leading to significant strain on specialist services</li> </ul>

**Mitigating actions local authorities and other community planning partners may wish to consider during periods of lockdown and other restrictions**

11. Regularly consult with WCYP with lived experience of VAWG and ensure that the recovery systems and services put in place locally recognise and respond to their specific needs
12. Ensure local needs assessment and recovery plans are inclusive to the needs of WCYP affected by VAWG with protected characteristics and/ or complex needs
13. Ensure local workforces have capacity and capability to provide trauma-informed support and services for all WCYP who require it
14. Adopt a whole-systems, child-centred approach to working with families experiencing domestic abuse & ensure children are involved in decision-making where appropriate
15. Ensure perpetrators are held to account through robust use of criminal justice process and resumption of programmed interventions
16. Support specialist VAWG services to identify anticipated levels of demand for crisis, recovery and other support in the coming year, and ensure resources are available to meet these
17. Explore opportunities to lever additional resources to support systems and services to respond to increased levels of demand

**LONG-TERM: AS PARTNERS TRANSITION TO A 'NEW NORMAL'**

Area of risk	Effects of COVID-19 pandemic response
Long-term effects of crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instances of VAWG could go undetected/unreported for many months and years</li> <li>• Economic crisis could exacerbate WCYP's experiences of VAWG</li> <li>• Gender inequality could be further entrenched in social and economic systems</li> <li>• Local recovery does not take into account gender equality and VAWG and the links between the two</li> </ul>
<b>Mitigating actions local authorities and other community planning partners may wish to consider during periods of lockdown and other restrictions</b>	
<p>18. Emphasis on tackling gender inequality and embedding primary prevention programmes, and a focus on prevention &amp; early intervention of VAWG</p> <p>19. Embed a whole-systems, gendered approach to tackling VAWG as part of wider local recovery responses</p> <p>20. Capture and build on good practice from crisis response</p> <p>21. Encourage multi-agency, collaborative working</p> <p>22. Promote commitment to tackling VAWG and promoting gender equality at a leadership level</p>	

## Collecting, Analysing and Sharing Data in Order to Inform Strategic Planning

Timescale	Why capture data on WCYP experiencing VAWG?	How can data be collected?
Short term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic and restrictions are compounding existing risks and inequalities for WCYP</li> <li>• Need to monitor impact of local and national COVID-19 responses on the safety and wellbeing of WCYP, in order to identify and reduce any risks of unintended harm.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police, victim/ survivor organisations and other key partners are collating statistics</li> <li>• Government and statutory agencies are identifying impact of COVID-19 across vulnerable people and communities</li> <li>• Maximising use of data collection processes agreed by SOLACE and COSLA, which include Public Protection datasets</li> </ul>
Medium and long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting data on gender and equalities will help partners understand the long-term impact of COVID-19 on WYCP experiencing VAWG and gender inequality, and support in future strategic planning</li> <li>• Consistent approach to data collection will ensure risks for WYCP are identified and responded to at earliest possible stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit mechanisms for collecting and analysing data to identify any areas for improvement</li> <li>• Set up systems to combine data from a number of sources using a relational database</li> <li>• Develop systems in partnership with VAW Partnerships &amp; Equality Leads</li> <li>• Integrate VAWG data collection with broader recovery data and intelligence systems currently in development</li> <li>• Ensure the highest standards of ethical data collection &amp; storage, given needs for sensitivity and anonymity around VAWG data</li> </ul>

## Promoting Consistent Messaging to Highlight Support for Women, Children and Young People (WCYP) in Local Response to VAWG

Timescale	Why capture data on WCYP experiencing VAWG?	How can data be collected?
<b>KEY MESSAGES LOCAL AUTHORITIES CAN PROMOTE TO SUPPORT WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (WCYP) DURING ALL STAGES OF THE PANDEMIC</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. WCYP experiencing VAWG are not alone and a range of specialist support services are available locally and nationally during and after lockdown;</li> <li>2. The lockdown is not an excuse for perpetrating abuse, and that perpetrators will be identified and held to account for their behaviours; and</li> <li>3. Tackling VAWG is everyone's business and professionals across a wide range of local workforces have a key role play in safely identifying and responding to risks that WCYP may be experiencing</li> </ol>		
<b>KEY AIMS OF COMMUNICATION PLANS LOCAL AUTHORITIES CAN SUPPORT AS PART OF THEIR WIDER STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO COVID-19</b>		
Raising awareness of impact of pandemic and restrictions on WCYP experiencing VAWG	Ensuring professionals are aware of the range of tactics perpetrators might use during the pandemic to increase their control and abuse of WCYP	Ensuring that women with no recourse to public funds can access support and they know how to access this support
Encouraging women not to delay in seeking support	Signposting local and support available for WCYP	Recognising the impact of vicarious trauma and supporting the wellbeing of frontline workers
Encouraging women not to delay in seeking support	Signposting local and support available for WCYP	Recognising the impact of vicarious trauma and supporting the wellbeing of frontline workers

Local authorities can help to ensure that information on key national helplines available to women, children and young people affected by VAWG are promoted locally, alongside details about local support/ services that are available. Key national helplines include:

[Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline](#): 0800 027 1234

[Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline](#): 08088 01 03 02

[Childline](#): 0800 11 11

[CliCK Helpline](#) (for women selling or exchanging sex): 0300 124 5564

# Appendix 1 – Other Relevant Guidance to Support Community Planning

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## Adult Protection and Child Protection

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): adult support and protection guidance](#)

[Supplementary Child Protection guidance](#)

[Children’s Hearings Update & Coronavirus practice guide for panel members](#)

[British Association of Social Workers: Domestic abuse and child welfare: A practice guide for social workers \(including COVID-19 preface\)](#)

## Domestic Abuse

[Safe Lives guidance for multi-agency forums, including MARACS](#)

[Safe and Together Model COVID-19 Quick Guide](#)

[National procurator fiscal for domestic abuse](#)

[Scottish Courts guidance on complying with family court orders](#)

[Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance: safe and ethical social work practice](#)

[Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance: domestic abuse](#)

## Housing and Homelessness

[Guidance for social landlords – domestic abuse and COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 Allocations Advice and Information for the Housing Sector](#)

## Poverty and Inequality

[Poverty, Inequality and COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 Response Planning: Supporting Migrants with no Recourse to Public Funds](#)

[Child Poverty and COVID-19](#)

## Community Justice

[Prisons guidance](#)

Caledonian Guidance [Notes 1 and 2](#) & [Caledonian Advice for areas without Caledonian](#)

Caledonian: Technology, tips and techniques for working safely with women (please contact Community Justice Scotland to access)

[Community Justice Scotland: Working with men who abuse their partners in the context of the COVID-19 crisis](#)

[COPFS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): information for those due to attend court](#)

## Education

[Scottish Government: school and early learning closures – guidance about key workers and vulnerable children](#)

## National COVID-19 Framework

[Scottish Government COVID-19 Decision-Making Framework](#)

## Data Collection and Analysis

[Engender 'COVID-19: Gathering and using data to ensure that the response integrates women's equality and rights](#)



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