Consultation Response:

Draft Section 75 Equality and Disability Action Plans 2025-2030

By the Department of Justice

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INTRODUCTION

Men's Alliance Northern Ireland

Men's Alliance (NI) supports male victims and survivors of domestic abuse (DA). We provide support to over 2000 men in NI, providing them with 1-2-1 and peer support, signposting to services, and help with Legal issues and Social Services. We also advocate on behalf of male victims and survivors, raising awareness of their experiences, the challenges they can encounter when seeking help and the lack of Support Services available to them.

Domestic abuse is often described as '*gendered violence*' and '*overwhelmingly*' perpetrated by men. PSNI, NISRA and ONS data consistently report that one in three victims are male and yet research, advocacy and state interventions often centre exclusively on female victims. This means that men's experiences may be minimised or ignored.

Draft Section 75 Equality & Disability Action Plans 2025-2030

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Department of Justice (DoJ) to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity when carrying out their functions. Addressing inequalities within the justice system must be at the heart of reform and a priority across all parts of Government.

Key commitments of the DoJ's Equality Scheme are to carry out an Audit of Inequalities (AOI) and develop a Section 75 Equality Action Plan (EAP) and a Disability Action Plan (DAP) to address these inequalities. This consultation seeks views on the DoJ's draft action plans and associated Audit of Inequalities.

RESPONSE SUMMARY

DoJ's Audit of Inequalities reveals a concerning imbalance in how gender / sex is conceptualised, considered and prioritised within NI's criminal justice system.

The audit overlooks well documented gendered inequalities adversely impacting male victims of domestic abuse. This appears to be a direct consequence of framing both gender / sex equality and domestic abuse as issues that generally impact women.

DoJ's equality action plan emphasise actions targeting "women and girls" in multiple areas, including domestic and sexual abuse strategies and contact with the criminal justice system. By comparison, areas of male disadvantage receive no dedicated attention.

The action plan sets out DoJ's intention to progress positive actions for female victims of domestic abuse on the basis that this crime is perceived to be a form of gender-based violence rooted in gender inequality that disproportionately impacts females. This despite the fact that 1 in every 3 victims of domestic abuse encountered by the PSNI are male and it is also understood that male victims are significantly less likely to report incidents of abuse.

If NI's justice system is intended to serve all citizens equally then DoJ policies and practices must be grounded in comprehensive data analysis rather than selective political narratives. Statutory equality duties require Government Departments to provide impartial consideration of individual rights across all intersecting equality categories. They should not be subverted or exploited to embed default privileging of one group over another.

Male victims can be seen to disadvantaged by direct sex discrimination arising from DoJ's flawed analysis and subsequent one-sided approach to addressing gendered inequalities. Positive action permitted under equality law is intended to address / remove discriminatory practices not create them or seek to justify their existence.

Without proportional positive action amendments including male-inclusive language, dedicated male victim streams, and balanced data analysis, male victims risk continued marginalisation. Adverse impacts for male victims of domestic abuse include: Reinforcement of Stigma and Under-Reporting; Eroded Trust in Justice System; Resource Misallocation; Service Gaps in Justice Responses; and Data Distortion.

We recommend DoJ take the following action: Revise Current Sex Equality Framing; Review & Update the Audit of Inequalities; Review & Update the Equality and Disability Action Plans; Develop a Male Victims of Intimate Violence Plan; Introduce Bias Prevention Training & Guidance; and Improve Data Capture and Analysis.

FULL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT & DRAFT ACTION PLANS

1. Gender Equality Framing & Diminished Regard for Males

Audit of Inequalities - Purpose & Scope
The purpose of an audit of inequalities is to produce a strategic picture of inequalities that DoJ may be in a position to influence. Equality Commission NI Guidance recommends that, when conducting an audit of inequalities, Public Authorities should analyze all available relevant reliable and verifiable data for each S75 equality category.

Males face distinct gendered challenges in justice contexts, including as victims, offenders, prisoners and service users. Despite this, there is limited evidence to indicate that DoJ have displayed due regard towards boys and men when conducting their audit and consequently have failed to identify, acknowledge and address significant and evidential inequalities experienced by males encountering the criminal justice system.

Audit of Inequalities - Gender Equality Framed as a 'Woman's Issue'.
DoJ's draft Equality Action Plan and supporting Audit of Inequalities reveals a concerning structural imbalance in how gender / sex equality is currently conceptualised, considered and prioritised within NI's criminal justice system.

This foundational issue is evident from the approach DoJ have taken to frame their perspective on matters of gender equality. This perspective is primarily informed by The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) assertion that: "*gender equality is generally seen as a woman's issue given that women have been to the forefront of gender equality concerns and strategies.*"

This statement is not a neutral observation but a symptomatic endorsement of a narrowed perspective that diminishes the experiences, vulnerabilities, and systemic disadvantages faced by males. By framing gender equality primarily through the lens of historical and contemporary female advocacy, the evidence, narrative and actions that follow perpetuate outcomes where male-specific issues are deprioritised or rendered invisible.

Males constitute roughly 50% of people with protected characteristics under equality and human rights law. Treating gender equality as "*generally a woman's issue*" entirely undermines the Department's statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity and combat discrimination for everyone.

Under both Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976, DoJ have a statutory duty to provide impartial consideration of men and women across all intersecting equality categories, not a default privileging of one.

It is also relevant to note that the EIGE has faced criticism for alleged bias against men as evidenced by analysis of their Gender Equality Index methodology indicating insufficient attention to inequalities impacting men, and potentially downplaying areas where males experience disadvantage (e.g. education / life expectancy / suicide rates).[1]

Audit of Inequalities / Equality Action Plan - Enhanced Regard for Women

Framing gender equality as "*generally a woman's issue*" has real world practical consequences. DoJ's equality action plan emphasise actions targeting "women and girls" in multiple areas, including domestic and sexual abuse strategies and contact with the criminal justice system, while male victims and general male disadvantages receive no dedicated attention.

This is clearly not a mere oversight; it reflects a deeper ideological capture that distorts evidence-based policy. NI's justice system is supposed to serve all citizens, and related policies must be grounded in comprehensive data rather than selective narratives.

Audit of Inequalities - Diminished Regard for Men

Men's Alliance NI welcomes the fact that the audit does at least acknowledge the reality that male victims are less likely to report incidents of domestic abuse. We also welcome the fact that addressing under-reporting is identified in the action plan as a key priority area in the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy for Northern Ireland 2024-2031.[2]

Regrettably, this commitment to address under-reporting by male victims is significantly undermined by DOJ's overarching perspective on domestic abuse outlined in the immediately preceding section of the audit.[3]

DOJ defines domestic abuse as: a form of gender-based violence rooted in gender inequality that disproportionately impacts females. This despite the fact that 1 in every 3 victims of domestic abuse encountered by the PSNI are male and it is understood male victims are less likely to report incidents of abuse.

DoJ's audit of inequalities also fails to identify a number of important and gendered inequalities experienced by male victims of domestic abuse (see section 3). This can be seen to be a direct consequence of framing both gender equality and domestic abuse as generally issues impacting women.

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[1] Schmid & Elliot (2023): An Extended Critique of the EIGE Gender Equality Index.
[2] Page 20, para 2.
[3] Page 18 to19.

DOJ's equality action plan includes positive action to address the identified under reporting by male victims, however no section 75 ground is assigned to explain its inclusion. This is especially relevant to note in the context that implementation and outcomes of DoJ/H's (nominally gender neutral) Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy are identified in the action plan as positive action to address the disproportionate impact of domestic abuse on females (based on 69%).

It is also relevant to note that no similar positive actions are identified to address categories of crimes such as violence against the person (70%) or homicide (75%) that disproportionately impact males to a similar degree.[4] Furthermore, disaggregated data for modern slavery and human trafficking show that the victim population also significantly skews male (67%).[5] Despite this, positive equality actions to address these crimes are identified as a racial equality issue only.

Evidence of Gamma Bias in Action Plans and Framing

Gamma bias describes a cognitive distortion where gender differences are simultaneously magnified and minimised in ways that systematically disadvantage males.[6] Gamma bias can lead to policies that result in:

- Selective victimhood emphasis: Female victims are centred; male victims marginalised.
- Perpetration focus: Males highlighted as offenders without balanced context on female perpetration or systemic biases against male offenders.
- Privilege narrative: Implicit assumption that males as a group hold advantage, ignoring male overrepresentation in rough sleeping, suicide, educational underachievement and health inequalities feeding into justice involvement.

DoJ's audit and action plan indicate evidence of gamma bias. The EIGE quote magnifies female experiences while minimising male experiences. Actions on domestic abuse frame it as disproportionately impacting females, despite data showing significant male victimisation. Plans for "Women and girls in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System" receive dedicated focus, while the overwhelmingly male prison population and evidence of harsher sentencing for males are not similarly addressed with equivalent urgency or resourcing.

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[4] PSNI: Police Recorded Crime Statistics.
[5] UK National Referral Mechanism: NI Data Analysis Briefing.
[6] Gamma bias is a cognitive distortion in how societies perceive gender issues, proposed by psychologists. It builds on earlier ideas of alpha bias (exaggerating/magnifying gender differences) and beta bias (minimizing/ignoring them). Gamma bias occurs when these operate simultaneously: certain gender differences or patterns are amplified while others are downplayed, often in ways that portray masculinity more negatively and femininity more positively overall. See: Seager & Barry (2019): Gamma bias and the gender distortion matrix.

Both the audit and equality action plan also identify gender responsive approaches to ending violence against women and girls only. Annual PSNI data consistently shows that the majority of victims of violent crimes in Northern Ireland are male.[7] Even when data for crimes categorised as Violence against the Person (VATP) are combined with crimes categorised as sexual offences, overall approximately 55% of victims are male.

Men's Alliance NI support the use of gender responsive approaches to ending violence and supporting victims. We support positive action to End Violence Against Women and Girls and continue to highlight the urgent need for parallel gender responsive approaches to address the significant structural and attitudinal barriers to justice encountered by male victims of domestic abuse.

DoJ's inaction in this area violates Section 75 and SDO duties by failing to effectively promote equality of opportunity and combat discrimination. Effective policy requires acknowledging and addressing male disadvantages without any need to negate female ones.

Gender / sex equality should not be treated as a zero-sum game where positive actions can be implemented for one group only. Positive action to promote equality should involve creating a better, more balanced system, not creating inequality for others.

[7] PSNI: Police Recorded Crime Statistics.

2. Male Victims of Domestic Abuse: Prevalence & Challenges

Prevalence of Domestic Abuse Against Male Victims in NI
PSNI statistics for 2024/25 record 18,453 DA crimes, with male victims accounting for 33%. Violence against the person comprised 86% of these.[8] Under-reporting is acute. ONS survey data indicates that men are 3 times less likely than women to report abuse.[9] Queen's University Belfast research (2024) found that more than half of male DA victims in NI do not disclose to anyone, citing stigma, fear of disbelief, and concerns about being labelled the perpetrator.

The level of under-reporting is further impacted by the limited services and support available to male victims arising from the NI Executive's uniquely sex segregated approach to service provision in this area.

Approximately 41% of domestic homicide victims in NI are male. Since 2020, 12 adult men and three male children have died in DA incidents, with five adult male murders occurring in the victim's own home.[10]

In Northern Ireland, males consistently account for three-quarters (75%–80%) of all registered suicide deaths. A significant portion of those are due to domestic abuse, issues around child contact, Child Maintenance payments and false allegations to Police, Social Service and Courts.[11]

Research undertaken by the Men's Alliance shows that when domestic homicides and estimated domestic abuse related suicides are considered together, as many as 58% of deaths where domestic abuse is a major factor may be male, compared to 42 percent female.[12]

Male victims experience the same spectrum of coercive control, psychological, emotional, financial, and physical abuse as female victims. However, societal and institutional framing of DA as "gendered" (predominantly male-on-female) leads to minimisation of female-perpetrated abuse. Men report being laughed at by police, advised to "man up," or threatened with arrest when they disclose. False counter-allegations are a common tactic, often weaponised in family proceedings.

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[8] PSNI (2025): Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes
[9] Mankind Initiative (2023): Key Facts about Male Victims of Abuse.
[10] Men's Alliance (2025): 58% 0f Deaths Relating to Domestic Abuse in NI are Men (and Other Realities).
[11] Ibid
[12] Ibid

Disadvantages in Reporting and Initial Police Response

The first point of contact with the justice system is often the most damaging for male victims. PSNI data shows a clear disparity in sanction rates: only 18.9% of DA crimes against men result in a sanction, compared to approximately 30.5% for women.[13]

Male victims report routine disbelief: officers assume the man is the aggressor based on physical size or societal stereotypes ("men can't be victims"). Qualitative accounts describe officers refusing to take statements, suggesting couples counseling instead of criminal investigation, or arresting the male complainant when the female perpetrator self-reports first.

Research from the US Domestic Abuse Helpline (mirrored in NI experiences) shows 72% of male callers experienced court-system manipulation via false accusations.[14] This is not NI data and should not be treated as prevalence, but it illustrates a pattern frequently described by male victims and highlights the need for NI specific measurement of 'systems abuse', such as misuse of allegations and protective orders in family proceedings).

The absence of male-specific risk assessment tools compounds this. While DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) risk assessments are used, training materials and guidance often default to female-victim templates. Male victims are less likely to be offered specialist DA officer support or referred to appropriate services.[15] Testimonies from service users indicate that when men do report, they frequently withdraw because of secondary victimisation by the system itself.[16]

Prosecution and Court Process Disadvantages

Prosecution files involving male victims are more likely to be discontinued due to "evidential difficulties" or victim non-support—often because the male victim has been further traumatised or faces counter-allegations in family courts.[17]

Conviction data for DA cases in NI (2023/24) shows 90.8% of convicted offenders are male. This reflects charging decisions rather than true perpetration rates. When female perpetrators are prosecuted, sentences are often lighter or non-custodial, reinforcing the perception that female violence is less serious.[18]

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[13] PSNI Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2024/25.
[14] Dim, E. E. (2021). "Male Victims' Experiences With and Perceptions of the Criminal Justice Response to Intimate Partner Abuse," Journal of Family Violence.
[15] Bates, E. A., et al (2021). "What can we learn from Domestic Homicide Reviews with male victims?".
[16] Hine, B., et al. (2020). "'Men's Experiences of Domestic Violence and Abuse in the UK".
[17] PPS (2024): Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Domestic Abuse
[18] DoJ (2025): Domestic Abuse Prosecutions, Convictions and Case Processing Time Statistics 2023/24

3. Male Victims of Domestic Abuse: Section 75 Context

Intersecting Challenges and Disadvantage

The gendered challenges and barriers outlined in the previous section can be encountered by male victims across the Section 75 spectrum of protected characteristics. Males with multiple identities can encounter further disadvantages and challenges directly relating to additional characteristics.

Disability

Men's Alliance NI welcomes actions identified in DoJ's disability action plan to address the heightened vulnerability of disabled individuals to domestic and sexual abuse; to raise awareness of specific barriers encountreted by them; and to tailor support to address their specific needs. We urge the Department to ensure that these commitments adequately address the support and access needs of disabled males.

In March 2026, when responding to the Department for Communities' draft Disability Strategy, we raised concerns that commitments to protect disabled people from violence, exploitation and abuse were restricted to disabled women and girls. Similar to DoJ's audit of inequalities, the narrative supporting action in this area only identified data on disabled female victims of domestic abuse.

We recommend that DfC take steps to ensure that disabled male victims of domestic abuse do not feel that their human rights and legal protections are being overlooked or ignored. In support of this recommendation we provided DfC with a report on the experiences and barriers encountered by disabled male victims[19] and especially highlighted the following facts:

- Systematic reviews show that disabled people are more likely to experience threats of violence, physical abuse and sexual assault.[20]
- ONS annual crime surveys show that disabled men experience domestic abuse in higher numbers than non disabled women.[21]
- Research indicates that disabled people in NI experience physical (16%) sexual (12%) psychological (26%) and economic (6%) forms of violence at levels at least 50% higher than non disabled people.[22]

[19] Men's Alliance NI (2026): Identifying the Problem: Disabled Male Victims of Domestic Abuse.
[20] Hughes, et al. (2012): Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities:.
[21] Mankind Initiative (2021): Male victims of domestic abuse and partner abuse: 55 key facts.
[22] NISRA (2022): Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences / attitudes of adults in N.I

- Research indicates that: 72% of male victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in NI met the case criteria for depression, 72% had thoughts of ending their life and of these, 92% had formulated a plan and 47% had made at least one attempt.[23]
- Muckamore Hospital Inquiry testimony has highlighted harrowing incidents of abuse experienced by disabled males in institutional settings. In one incident a staff member allegedly threatened to "cut off" a resident's penis if he spoke out. In another a male patient's genitals were "bruised so badly that they turned black."[24]
- Disabled people encounter multifaceted barriers to support access and disabled male victims face additional gendered barriers including: stigma, fear of not being believed or losing their children and negative social responses.[25]
- Access to specialist safe haven refuges and floating support services are simply not currently an option for disabled males living in NI.[26]

Section 75 - Multiple Gendered Challenges

When challenges encountered by male victims are diminished or overlooked, multiple additional challenges encountered by people across the section 75 spectrum can also be diminished or overlooked.

<u>Age - Over 65</u>

Older victims are significantly more likely to have a disability which often increases their dependency on an abuser who may also be their carer.[27] Roughly 1 in every 3 calls to the Hourglass helpline concerned male victims, which the charity believes is "the tip of the iceberg". Economic abuse is the most common abuse type experienced by older male victims, closely followed by psychological abuse.[28] Older male victims are more likely to suffer from physical abuse than female victims.[29] In cases of psychological abuse, they are also significantly more likely to be dependent on the perpetrator than older female victims.[30]

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[23] Spikol et al (2025): Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence.
[24] BBC (2025): Nature and extent of Muckamore abuse at heart of inquiry.
[25] Mankind Initiative (2023): Key Facts about Male Victims of Abuse.
[26] NI Victims of Crime Commissioner (2025): Mapping Services for Male Adult & Child Victims of DASA.
[27] Safe Lives (2016): Older people and domestic abuse spotlight
[28] Hourglass (2024): Safer Ageing Index: Northern Ireland
[29] COPNI (2016): Financial Abuse of Older People in Northern Ireland: The Unsettling Truth
[30] Hourglass (2023): Older Male Victims – Stereotyped Harm?

Age - Under 18

Research into the experiences of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland, commissioned by The Executive Office's Violence Against Women and Girls Unit, found that 91% of young males have experienced one or more violent acts or behaviours at some point in their lifetime. Young males (47%) experienced abuse or threats on social media at similar levels to young females (50%) and experienced higher proportions of verbal abuse, or threats in person, (69%) and physical assault (59%) than young females (60% and 46% respectively).[31]

Age - Children

Social service reviews and coroner reports have highlighted that practitioner biases and gendered assumptions about domestic violence perpetration can have catastrophic implications for child safety.[32]

Race / Religious Belief

Men and boys from ethnic minority backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to forced marriage and so called honour crime. Annually in the UK, males represent roughly one-fifth of cases reported to the Forced Marriage Unit and one-third of 'honour' killings.[33]

Sexual Orientation

Gay, bisexual and trans men can experience unique forms of abuse based on their sexuality or gender identity. Many young men experience abuse from family members when they are exploring their identity and coming out as gay, bisexual or trans. An abuser can also threaten to 'Out' their victim.[34]

Marital Status

Men who are separated or divorced are more likely to suffer partner abuse than those who are married. 6.7% of divorced men (11.5% women) and 11.3% separated men (16.7% women) suffered partner abuse in 2019/20 while only 1.3% of married men (2.5% married women) did. For cohabiting men, the figure was 3.1% and for women 5.5%.

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[31] The Executive Office NI (2022): EVAWG Experiences Attitudes of 16 Year-olds in NI.
[32] See: NSPCC (2022): The national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson: CASPAR briefing and Community Care (2020): social-workers-missed-complex-dynamics.
[33] Home Office: Forced Marriage Unit Statistics.
[34] Safe Lives: Spotlight on LGTB+ People Experiencing Domestic Abuse.

4. Adverse Impact of Diminished Regard for Male Victims

Gaps in Support and Service Provision for Male Victims
NI Executive practices related to gender budgeting, objective needs assessments and service procurement mean that male victims across the Section 75 spectrum, including disabled victims, are not provided an equitable standard or range of services and support, solely on the basis of their sex.

This has been understood for well over two decades. The significant gaps in services were highlighted during the consultation process for the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (2023 - 2030) when Victim Support NI advised DoJ/H that, for their strategy to meet its vision, adequately funded services, including floating support, must be in place to meet the needs of male victims.[35]

Recent research by QUB into male victims experiences in NI concluded that the issue is '***a significant public health issue which warrants immediate attention***', that Public Authorities, including the Department of Justice should act to support male victims and that the creation of an Executive task force would be 'invaluable'.[36]

A recent mapping exercise found highly significant gaps in service provision and that:

- Where dedicated support services are available to male victims in NI, they are provided by grassroots organisations run wholly or in part supported by volunteers and with precarious funding arrangements.
- 'The system is struggling to manage and support the complexity of need for victim-survivors of abuse more generally and that this has resulted in males being "overlooked" when it comes to provision of services and supports.'
- There are 'challenging dynamics and contention' within the domestic abuse support sector, particularly between female and male service providers. There was a sense from participants that this is in part fuelled by concerns over funding, which has been noted to contribute more generally to 'siloed working and competitive practices'.

Report recommendations included: Service improvement, including further exploration of gaps in provision e.g. expansion of refuges; More and sustainable funding; and Raising awareness of the gender-inclusive DASA Strategy.

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[35] Victim Support NI (2023): Response to the Draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2030.
[36] Spikol et al (2025): Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence

5. Impact of Proposed Equality Related Positive Action

Adverse Impacts Arising from Proposed Equality Related Positive Actions
In the specific context on equality and human rights law, male victims can be seen to disadvantaged by direct sex discrimination arising from DoJ's proposed one-sided approach to addressing perceived gendered inequalities.

Positive action permitted under equality law is intended to address / remove potentially discriminatory practices not create them or seek to justify their existence. Without proportional positive action amendments including male-inclusive language, dedicated male victim streams, and balanced data analysis, male victims risk continued marginalisation.

This outcome would not only contradict the purpose of equality duties, it would indicate an explicit subversion of their intended purpose. Adverse impacts for male victims of domestic abuse include:

- Reinforcement of Stigma and Under-Reporting: Framing abuse as primarily a "women and girls" issue (via EVAWG and disproportionate impact language) perpetuates explicit bias. Male victims may feel further invalidated, reducing reporting. Evidence shows male victims already face disbelief; the absence of proportionate parallel positive action plans to address make disadvantage risk exacerbating this.
- Eroded Trust in Justice System: Males, seeing plans that frame their gender primarily through perpetration/privilege lenses, may perceive bias. This affects cooperation as witnesses, jurors, or users of services.
- Resource Misallocation: Funding and services skewed toward female-centric programs leave male-specific needs (e.g., male shelters, perpetrator programs acknowledging bidirectional abuse, trauma support for male victims of female perpetrators) underfunded.[37]
- Service Gaps in Justice Responses: Police training, court processes, and victim support may prioritise female narratives, leading to poorer outcomes for male victims (e.g., higher dismissal rates, less protection orders granted).
- Data Distortion: If monitoring and data analysis approaches continue to indicate bias, male victim data gaps may persist, hindering evidence-based improvements.

[37] Note: Direct sex discrimination in the provision of services in NI has been illegal since the 1970's.

Potential Positive Impacts Arising from Proposed Actions

Men's Alliance NI supports the use of gender responsive approaches. We support positive action for women and girls and believe that mitigation to address the identified adverse impacts for male victims can be addressed by taking additional positive action to support the gendered needs of male victims also.

We also acknowledge that the implementation of the cross-Departmental Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031 will have positive impacts for male victims . For example:

- Cross-departmental funding of the national helpline accessible to all. Inclusive marketing and positive action outreach measures have significantly increased the number of male service users with no adverse impact to females.
- Strategy implementation has shown that it is possible to deliver inclusive awareness campaigns and training that benefit both male and female victims.
- General data improvements or accessibility actions could benefit all victims if implemented in an inclusive manner.

6. Human Rights and Statutory Duties

We would take this opportunity to remind the Department that direct sex discrimination in the provision of services in Northern Ireland has been illegal since the 1970's.

Domestic and sexual abuse are grave violations of human rights, against which victims have a legal right to protection and redress through the courts. They can involve the breach of a number of rights protected by The Human Rights Act 1998, most particularly:

- Article 2 - the right to life;
- Article 3 - the right not to be tortured / subject to degrading treatment;
- Article 8 - the right to respect for private and family life;
- Article 14 - the right to be free from discrimination.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to show due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine equality grounds, including between men and women.

Public authorities should also consider the intersecting needs and experiences of people with more than one relevant protected characteristic. For example, the provision of accessible and equitable support services for older men with disabilities experiencing IPV, or young men from an ethnic minority background at risk of forced marriage.

The NI Victims Charter 2015 establishes that women and men are entitled to be recognised and treated in a respectful, dignified, courteous, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner by the service providers covered by the Charter, irrespective of their gender.

Direct sex discrimination in service provision and public policy has been illegal in Northern Ireland since the 1970's.

The European Convention of Human Rights; UN Conventions on both the Rights of the Child, and Rights of People with Disabilities; The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and The EU Victims Directive all contain articles asserting protection from discrimination due to personal characteristics. Even The Istanbul Convention encourages State Parties to apply the Convention to all victims of domestic violence.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations will assist DoJ to mitigate against the potential adverse impacts for male victims of abuse arising from their proposed actions without the need to remove or diminish positive actions to address the gendered experiences of female victims. These are as follow:

- **Revise Current Sex Equality Framing**: Ensure that relevant DoJ statements and narratives affirm that sex / gender equality concerns all and acknowledge that both males and females can encounter challenges and disadvantages related to sex.

- **Review & Update the Audit of Inequalities:** To ensure that it adequately identifies inequalities impacting on men as well as on women.

- **Review & Update the Equality Action Plan:** To include positive action to address identified areas of male inequality, as well as female inequality.

- **Review & Update the Disability Action Plan:** To ensure that commitments to address the heightened vulnerability and access needs of disabled people adequately address the support and access needs of disabled males.

- **Develop a Male Victims of Intimate Violence Plan:** To complement the EVWAG actions and address gendered issues and barriers to support and justice encountered by male victims, specifically because they are male.

- **Introduce Bias Prevention Training & Guidance:** To debunk harmful stereotypes, such as "men cannot be victims", female perpetrated abuse is less severe and that sex equality is a woman's issue.

- **Improve Data Capture and Analysis:** Ensure availability of robust, sex-disaggregated data to support tracking of male victim support uptake and justice outcomes.