

SAFER STREETS, SHARED VOICES

Insights from public
workshops on
preventing violence
against women and
girls in outdoor public
spaces in Belfast



QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST



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Foreword

Every person has the right to feel safe when moving through our city, whether walking home at night, travelling on public transport, or spending time in a park. Yet, for too many women and girls in Belfast, outdoor public spaces are shaped by fear, harassment, and the threat of violence. This is not only a matter of safety and equality, it is a public health issue, affecting health and wellbeing, opportunity and quality of life across our communities. Addressing this issue is urgent, and requires action from communities, institutions, and government working together.

Safer Streets, Shared Voices brings forward the perspectives of people from across Belfast including women and girls, men and boys, and individuals from a wide range of backgrounds including LGBTQIA+ communities, ethnic minorities, and those living with disabilities. Through a series of public deliberation workshops, participants shared their experiences, reflected on possible solutions, and considered how change could work in practice. Their discussions show that preventing violence against women and girls is a shared responsibility.

It depends on education, on the design, management and stewardship of outdoor public spaces, and on building trust and accountability across society.

Seven key recommendations emerged from the workshops which reflect not only the challenges that women and girls face in Belfast, but also the practical, community-informed solutions that can help shape safer and more inclusive outdoor public spaces. They provide a foundation for dialogue and action, rooted in the voices of those who use and share our city every day.

We would like to thank all the participants who contributed their time, insights, and lived experiences, as well as the partner organisations, HERe NI, Womens Resource and Development Agency, YouthAction NI, and RCity, who supported engagement and helped ensure that a wide range of voices were included in this work.



Professor Ruth Hunter
Queen's University Belfast
Principal Investigator

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Executive summary

A series of public deliberation workshops were held in June 2025 involving 45 members of the public from across Belfast.

The workshops were led by researchers from Queen's University Belfast in collaboration with Involve as part of a programme of research which aims to investigate how violence against women and girls (VAWG) can be prevented in outdoor public spaces in Belfast. Prior to these workshops, a series of key action points and solutions were identified by stakeholders with the focus on preventing VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Belfast.

Building on these action points identified by stakeholders, the purpose of these public deliberation workshops was to sense-check the proposed solutions. In total, four workshops consisting of two separate sessions were conducted separately with women, girls, boys, and men. Over the course of the workshops, the research team contextualised VAWG in outdoor public spaces, presented the action points identified by stakeholders, and sought feedback on the effectiveness, feasibility and equity of all solutions.

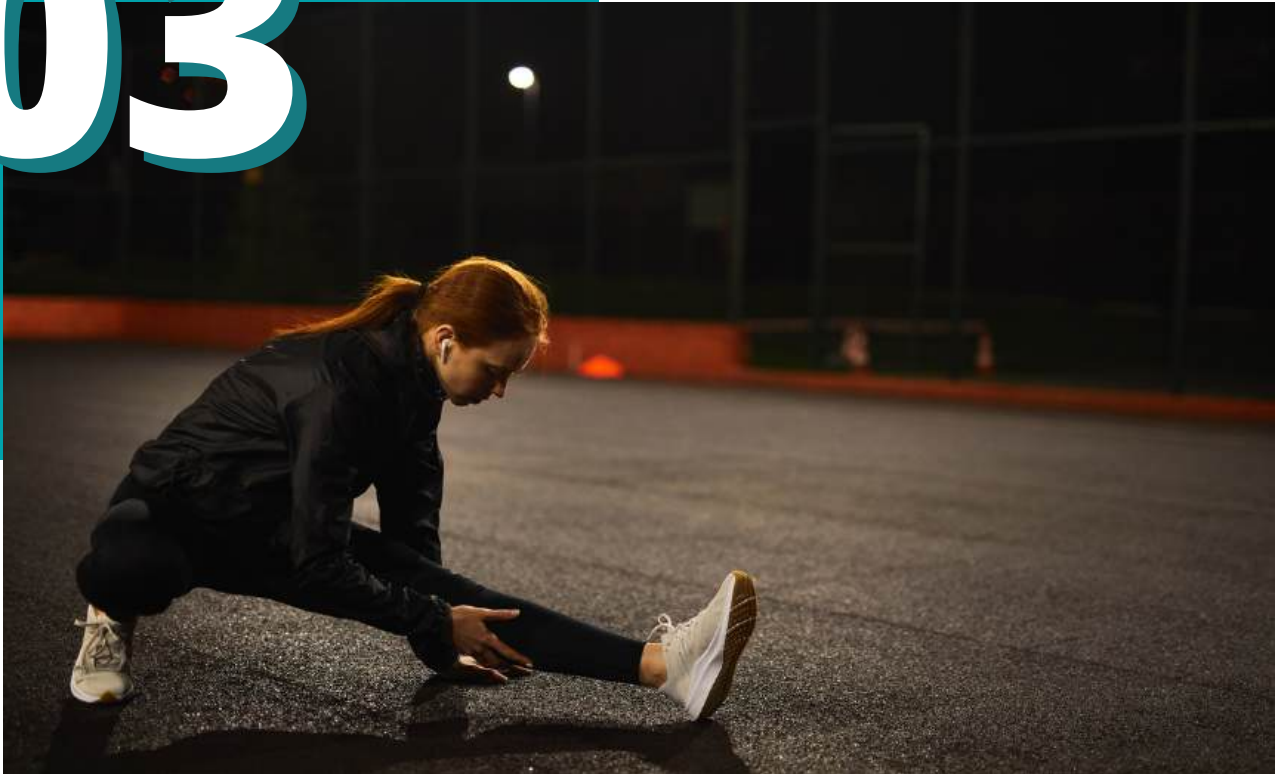
All of these recommendations, as well as the discussions that led to developing them, are set out in this report.

As a result of the workshops, seven recommendations were highlighted:

	RECOMMENDATION
1	Focus on VAWG prevention solutions which are multi-layered and occur across sectors
2	Encourage prevention of VAWG through transparent, inclusive, and accountable management and stewardship of outdoor public spaces
3	Focus design on visible and practical changes that make outdoor public spaces and public transport feel safer during the day and night to prevent VAWG
4	Educate about VAWG and acknowledge the spectrum of violence which occurs every day in outdoor public spaces and on public transport, which often goes unreported
5	Involve people from diverse cultural, social, and identity groups directly in VAWG prevention efforts
6	Enhance sustainable funding focused on preventing VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport
7	Strengthen trust in public institutions to act and prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport

VAWG: Violence Against Women and Girls

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Context

In Northern Ireland, 98% of women (aged 18 years or older) and 73% of girls (aged 12 – 17 years) have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime^{1,2*}.

Around 16% of women report the location of their 'worst recalled violent event' being in public spaces such as parks, forests, streets, and public transport¹. As a result, and because of the associated health, social and economic impacts of violence against women and girls (VAWG), ending VAWG has been identified as a top government priority in Northern Ireland.

Consequently, policymakers, researchers and communities are seeking solutions to end VAWG in outdoor public spaces. As part of this effort, researchers from Queen's University Belfast and their partners were granted funding from the Medical Research Council to focus on the prevention of VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Belfast.

The main aim of the project was to work with women, girls, men, and boys, and other key partners to co-design and develop solutions to end VAWG in outdoor public spaces (e.g., streets, parks, forests, and public transport).

*These statistics refer to women and girls surveyed in Northern Ireland.

Secondary aims of the project were to gain a greater insight into how the public use outdoor public spaces, and the attitudes, behaviours, and the social and cultural norms which exist (including those of men and boys) that perpetuate VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Belfast. This work will directly benefit the health and wellbeing of women and girls through ending violence, abuse, and harassment in outdoor public spaces. The project consisted of three key stages: 1) system mapping; 2) public deliberation; and 3) co-designing solutions.

Systems mapping

The initial stage of the project brought together key partners across multiple sectors (including transport, education, public, and private) to develop a systems map (i.e., a visual diagram) that represented a shared vision of the underlying factors which could contribute to preventing VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Belfast. Building on this understanding, partners further identified pathways with the potential to prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Belfast.

A detailed description of the process and an overview of the outcomes of the systems mapping work can be found in the report - [accessed here](#).



In summary, partners identified three overarching themes which they felt should be targeted when aiming to prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces: (1) improving societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces, (2) improving design of outdoor public spaces, and (3) improving the operation of outdoor public spaces. These overarching themes and their definitions can be found in Table 1.



Table 1 Solutions and priorities identified by partners from systems mapping workshops

THEME	ACTION POINTS FROM PARTNERS	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Improving societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces Societal education in sport Education 	Promote inclusive, age-appropriate education and public engagement across schools, communities, and sports to challenge harmful norms, improve awareness, and foster a culture of respect and accountability in outdoor public spaces and transport.	Public campaign posters in public transport.
Improving design of outdoor public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive and safe design First principles 	Ensure outdoor public spaces and transport are inclusively designed and well-maintained through participatory, data-informed approaches that promote safety, visibility, community use, and confidence—especially for women and girls.	Adequate street lighting and visible sight lines.
Improving operation of outdoor public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park design and operation Standards around reporting in relation to VAWG Investment in neighbourhood policing 	Encourage safer outdoor public spaces and transport by improving the function of outdoor public spaces, and how they are used and maintained.	Increased investment in neighbourhood policing.

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Sense checking emerging solutions through Public Deliberation

Summary

Using the three overarching solutions and priorities identified in the systems mapping workshops, the next stage of the project sought to sense-check emerging solutions for the prevention of VAWG in outdoor public spaces through a series of public deliberation workshops with members of the public.



Who was involved?

The workshops included members of the general public, ensuring representation from a mix of groups to reflect the population of Belfast. This was inclusive of; teenagers (aged 16 – 19 years), adults (aged over 19 years), gender (women, men, trans, and non-binary), ethnic minorities, individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community, individuals living with a disability and of different socio-economic status.

Sessions were run separately for the following groups:

1. Women (aged over 19 years),
2. Teenage girls and young women (aged 16 – 19 years),
3. Men (aged over 19 years),
4. Teenage boys and young men (aged 16 – 19 years).

Recruitment

Recruitment for the workshops took place through local organisations such as HERe NI (an inclusive organisation who support LGBTQIA+ women across Northern Ireland), Women's Research and Development Agency (an organisation which assists women's groups and networks across Northern Ireland), YouthAction NI (an organisation which supports young people across Northern Ireland) and RCity (a youth project working with young people across Northern Ireland).

In addition, recruitment flyers were disseminated through the research teams' network, and through social media and local sports clubs.

Workshop structure

All workshops were held in June 2025, with each group meeting twice for three hours each time.

First workshop

During the first workshop, participants were introduced to the problem of VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Belfast. This included defining different types of violence (not exhaustive of everyday harassment such as whistling, leering and general intimidation, and more physical forms of violence such as sexual assault or battery), and defining outdoor public spaces (parks, forests, streets, and public transport), as well as highlighting the current context of VAWG in outdoor public spaces in Northern Ireland.

Once the problem was contextualised, participants were introduced to the previously identified key action points and themes that emerged from the systems mapping workshop and were asked, through facilitated discussion, to improve or add to them. The materials shown to participants highlighting the key action points and solutions are shown as Appendix 2.

Those themes were:

- Societal education
- Design of public spaces
- Operation of public spaces



Second workshop

The second public deliberation workshop focused on how to translate those themes into real world action, thinking in particular about what will make each action point work in practice, what barriers exist to implementation, how can they be overcome, and how these solutions will work for women and girls, making sure no one is left out.

Participants also had the opportunity to reflect on who in society has a role to play in addressing the issue of VAWG, including the general public as well as those with more formal responsibilities (e.g., transport workers, policy makers, police).

Outputs from these workshops are presented in the next section. Firstly, an overview of key themes that emerged across the four groups, including where there was commonality as well as distinctions between groups are highlighted; followed by a more in-depth presentation of the discussions for each group separately.



05



Outputs: Overview

Workshop participation

Overall, the workshops were conducted with 45 members of the general public. This included:

- 13 women
- 13 girls
- 10 men
- 9 boys

Each group also included participants of diverse ages and ethnicities, as well as individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community and individuals with disabilities.

Overall synthesis

Across groups, there was a powerful call for:

- Consistent, culturally sensitive operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport, involving women, girls, and diverse communities, in addition to transparency about how and why changes are occurring (for prevention of VAWG in outdoor public spaces).
- Long-term education about VAWG to shift mindsets and reshape social norms, supported by real engagement of women and girls and other marginalised groups (such as individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community, individuals of diverse ethnicities, and individuals with disabilities) in deciding what safety means in practice.
- Visible, practical design changes that make outdoor public spaces and public transport feel safer during the day and night.
- Prevention efforts which balance safety with freedom, avoiding solutions that feel restrictive, isolating or surveillance heavy.

Outputs: Overview

Common themes across all groups

- Importance of design, operation and education together:
 - All groups recognised that making outdoor public spaces and public transport safer is not about a single solution; it needs a mix of better physical design, thoughtful day-to-day operation and education that changes attitudes and behaviours over time.
- Lighting, openness and visibility:
 - Well-lit spaces, clear sightlines, open areas, fewer enclosed spots, and multiple exits consistently came up as crucial to feeling safe.
- Involving people from diverse cultural, social, and identity groups directly:
 - There was strong agreement that diverse groups of women and girls including those of different ages, ethnicities, as well as individuals from minority groups such as LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals with disabilities, must be actively involved in designing, shaping and deciding on safety measures so that solutions truly reflect their lived experiences.
- Education about VAWG as cultural change:
 - All groups saw education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport as a path to long-term change. There was a shared recognition that education should start young and also include parents, teachers and whole communities; as well as occurring across a range of settings (such as workplaces, schools, online etc.) for VAWG prevention.
- Balancing safety and freedom:
 - A shared sense that interventions should not create a sense of surveillance or restriction that ends up discouraging use of outdoor public spaces and public transport, especially for girls and families.
- Importance of ongoing funding for VAWG prevention:
 - All groups acknowledged that there is no one single solution for preventing VAWG in outdoor public spaces, and noted that efforts should be updated, maintained and refined over time.

Outputs: Overview

Differences and unique perspectives

- Women:
 - Women's comments reflected lived experience of immediate safety concerns and the need for solutions now - like women-only spaces, helplines and better policing. They also emphasised design in outdoor public spaces and on public transport that gives choice: private areas for those who want them, alongside open spaces.
- Girls:
 - Girls brought an added focus on independence and empowerment - wanting to learn self-defence, feel heard in decisions about VAWG in outdoor public spaces (including measures taken to prevent VAWG, and consequences for perpetrators), and have spaces that let them spend time safely with friends. They worried about over-surveillance making them feel blamed (i.e., victim shaming) or restricted.
- Men:
 - Men focused more on being part of the solution: mentoring younger men and boys, calling out bad behaviour, and supporting better design and education. They recognised harmful norms among peers and saw the importance of cultural change.
- Boys:
 - Boys highlighted practical ideas: more women-only areas, creative social media education, and clearer information on what to do if someone feels unsafe. They showed awareness that design alone is not enough without good operation and education. Boys also reflected on how older generations hold onto harmful views (such as misogyny), and suggested teaching adults about VAWG in outdoor public spaces as well.

Outputs: Overview

Overlaps and differences

- All groups agreed on better lighting, clear exits and well-designed open spaces. However, there were differences between groups on wanting open, mixed spaces (for genders, and activities) and suggestions for women-only areas.
- There was shared support for improved education about VAWG - but boys especially questioned how women can know if a man is "safe" just because he's educated. They suggested practical, visible measures, such as changes to the design and operation of outdoor public spaces, as well as specific measures (i.e., widespread and permanent information accessible to all). This could include helplines and other ways to ask for help or call out bad behaviour, which is required alongside cultural change.
- Everyone supported more policing or CCTV in principle - yet worried about potential unintended consequences of implementing and maintaining CCTV, due to the cultural sensitivities, and trust in those operating the systems.



Outputs: by group



Women

Women highlighted the need for practical, visible changes in how outdoor public spaces and public transport are designed and operated to improve safety and confidence. Better lighting, operational CCTV in isolated areas, and clearly marked help points were seen as quick, tangible actions that can show women their safety is being taken seriously by local authorities and society.

Alongside physical design, women called for ongoing education and awareness-raising of VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport, including local campaigns and messaging that explain why changes (e.g., to outdoor public spaces or on public transport) are happening.

They also emphasised the need for real accountability from councils, police, and local institutions, with clear, well-publicised helplines and trained officers visible on the streets. The overarching view was that while design changes help immediately, long-term cultural change is equally vital to make outdoor public spaces and public transport feel truly inclusive and safe for all women.

Outputs: by group

Women:

a) Design of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- The physical environment plays a key role in ensuring safety; safety should be a design priority.

How it could be better:

- Use design to address feelings of unsafety (e.g. emergency phones, better lighting).
- Clarify what makes spaces feel safe; use architectural features (such as lighting, and well-maintained hedges) purposefully.
- Remove or redesign spaces that cannot be made safe.

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Allocate funding, draw on expertise and involve communities.
- Public panic buttons, safety apps, signage for safe places, audits of parks.
- Learn from international examples where women report feeling safer.
- Improve late-night transport including the amount of services provided and extend hours.
- Use more CCTV and monitoring.
- Public education through billboards and information.

How do we make it feasible?

- Gender budgeting; new Northern Ireland Executive support.
- Design considerations, including clear signage about entrances and exits.
- Promote positive representations in the media of the kinds of behaviours that keep women and girls safe.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Inclusive design of outdoor public spaces, and public transport involving women and girls of diverse ages, ethnicities as well as those from the LGBTQIA+ community, and with disabilities.



Outputs: by group

Women:

b) Societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport



Why it matters:

- Education empowers society to keep women and girls safe in outdoor public spaces and on public transport which challenges social standards around VAWG.
- Helps break generational cycles of misogyny and harmful social norms, which is vital for both men and women.

How it could be better:

- Start education about VAWG early, from nursery level/pre-school (for example, modelling good behaviour and avoid harmful gendered norms).
- Make Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) mandatory; remove the need for parental consent.
- Dedicated funding for VAWG in outdoor public spaces and public transport, with the inclusion of multi-language materials, and collaboration with at-risk groups (including individuals of diverse age, ethnicities, and from the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals with disabilities).
- More support for staff in schools to help with education efforts and to call out harmful behaviour.
- Educate parents on VAWG.

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Early intervention, so that skills and tools for healthy relationships are taught from the earliest possible age.
- Training for teachers and classroom assistants to recognise trauma behaviours early on.
- Education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport should be embedded, consistent, and supported by adequate funding.
- Involve cultural and community groups to help with education, and engaging hard to reach groups (such as men and boys).
- Appoint champions against VAWG.
- Ministerial responsibility and clear accountability around efforts to prevent VAWG.



Outputs: by group

Women:

b) Societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport



How do we make it feasible?

- Build trust in institutions (such as government and those responsible for policing).
- Engage men and boys without victimising them.
- Create dialogue between men and women around VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.
- Invest in resources to help with education (such as posters on public transport).
- Adapt educational programmes for people who find change difficult.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Use different learning formats such as a mix of visuals, community involvement and social media.
- Apps to support emergency response to incidents of VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.



Outputs: by group

Women:

c) Operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Community involvement is crucial for keeping women and girls safe.

How it could be better:

- Promote healthy relationships through positive imagery and direct messaging.
- Involve private sector and local businesses.
- More community surveillance through increased footfall throughout outdoor public spaces and on public transport.
- Keep outdoor public spaces and public transport active and supervised.
- Reduce paramilitary influence in outdoor public spaces.
- Improve police training and trust amongst communities.
- Share best practice from other sectors, including how the private sector operates outdoor public spaces and transport.
- Be clear what the word operation means.

Outputs: by group

Women:

c) Operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport



How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Hotline apps, trained staff in public spaces and on public transport, and timetabled usage (e.g. women-only hours).
- Stronger laws and higher convictions around VAWG.
- Encourage safe bystander intervention for members of the general public and workers within outdoor public spaces, and on public transport.
- On-site staff and high maintenance standards.
- Transparency in governance about what is being done to prevent VAWG and accountability for consequences of VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.

How do we make it feasible?

- Address trust issues with police.
- Limit alcohol on streets and on public transport.
- Public engagement.
- CCTV.
- Location-tracking apps for transport users.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- More lighting and CCTV.
- Extended public transport hours (available until 1am or later).
- Support for women to act in self-defence.
- Encourage VAWG incidents to be handled by women police officers or support workers.



Outputs: by group

Women:

d) Other reflections from the women's group



- Northern Ireland needs a women's commissioner to tackle this issue.
- There was a call for criminal justice reform, in particular women suggested we need stricter sentences for all forms of VAWG.
- Women highlighted that trust in institutions (e.g., police, government) is weak.
- Women also acknowledged the need for long term impacts, and realised there may not be immediate results, and the importance of allowing things to change and have impact over time.



Outputs: by group



Girls

Girls focused on feeling safe in everyday outdoor public spaces and on public transport - particularly at night and in less busy areas. They wanted smarter, brighter lighting, visible patrols, and easy access to help if something went wrong.

Education about VAWG starting from an early age was seen as key: teaching everyone about consent, respect, acceptable behaviour and harassment, and boundaries to build confidence and a culture of equality.

Girls felt it was important that these changes were explained in a language children and young people could relate to, and suggested creative approaches like videos, local influencers, and messages in places they actually go.

They also spoke about the importance of community champions, sports clubs, and schools being proactive in shaping safer outdoor public spaces and challenging harmful attitudes.

Outputs: by group

Girls:

a) Design of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Listening to women and girls helps design spaces where they feel safe and comfortable.
- Better use of outdoor public spaces and public transport when people feel secure.
- Layout and design (e.g. dark, covered areas) can cause fear and discomfort.
- Open, well-observed spaces and cameras reduce fear and deter harmful behaviour.
- Involving the public ensures outdoor public spaces and public transport meet real needs.

How it could be better:

- More lighting, fewer dense bushes or blind spots.
- Ongoing maintenance and repairs.
- More security presence, cameras, and visible exits.
- Engage with the community to check changes remain effective.
- Combine design improvements with education (such as displaying posters about harmful behaviours on public transport).

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Women-only taxi services (to ensure visibility of females within public and private transport, which can encourage girls to feel safer).
- Alarm systems (in outdoor public spaces, and on public transport).
- Better design on public transport, so that it is easier for the driver and other passengers to see what's happening, as well as ways of making it easier to raise the alarm.
- Support hotspots in outdoor public spaces where help is available if needed.
- Balance open spaces with quiet areas for relaxation.



Outputs: by group

Girls:

a) Design of outdoor public spaces and public transport



How do we make it feasible?

- Involve the wider public as well as victims of VAWG in the design of outdoor public spaces and public transport.
- Pilot design of outdoor public spaces and on public transport and refine them based on results.
- Ensure adequate funding for high quality and maintenance of outdoor public spaces and public transport.
- Ensure that improving visibility in outdoor spaces through lighting and cutting back vegetation does not harm biodiversity.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Focus groups with diverse people, and not assuming accessibility and inclusion is the same for all groups (age, gender, ability, ethnicities, and for individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals with disabilities).
- Make sure men feel welcome in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.
- Involve a wide variety of people in design decisions (such as planners, environmentalists, diverse public groups).



Outputs: by group

Girls:

b) Societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport



Why it matters:

- Greater awareness of VAWG helps prevent violence and empowers bystanders.
- Early education can break negative cycles and foster empathy.
- Many young people currently lack understanding of what violence against women is, and how this looks in outdoor public spaces.
- Education complements design; without it, change is limited.
- Builds confidence to challenge harmful behaviours.

How it could be better:

- Don't censor content around VAWG, teach honestly but sensitively.
- Strengthen secondary school education by embedding high-quality Relationship and Sex Education that actively addresses misogyny, fosters equality, and engages boys in developing respectful attitudes and behaviours.
- Offer self-defence classes.
- Address challenges to delivering education about VAWG (for example, the reluctance of schools to engage in conversations about VAWG).
- Ensure education relating to VAWG is not just targeted towards girls; but that it also meaningfully engages boys (recognise that girls are educated to keep safe, however boys should also be educated to recognise harmful behaviours).
- Ensure that VAWG is an ongoing conversation for lasting impact and reshaping social norms.



Outputs: by group

Girls:

b) Societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport



How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Include VAWG education in school curriculums from a young age.
- Train teachers and staff who work in outdoor public spaces, and on public transport.
- Provide practical skills (e.g. how to intervene safely).
- Public messaging in media, in outdoor public spaces and on public transport (for example around harmful behaviours and how to report or intervene).
- Extend education about VAWG to communities, workplaces and older people to challenge social norms and standards.

How do we make it feasible?

- Discuss VAWG openly, but do not place blame on any specific group.
- Teach men to stand up to their peers - in a way that does not put them in danger (including teaching skills on how to intervene safely).
- Adapt education about VAWG to be engaging and interactive.
- Include older generations and those resistant to change.
- Utilise young people as educators, especially with older generations.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Encourage female role models (for example, within sports).
- Provide online resources to educate people about VAWG, ensuring materials are accessible to all.
- Connect to other social issues (such as mental health, social exclusion, and other forms of violence or abuse against marginalised groups such as age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socio-economic backgrounds).
- Make education about VAWG mandatory in schools and inclusive for all genders.
- Use diverse facilitators (for example, using younger facilitators to educate younger people, so the participants have someone they can relate to).
- Split sessions by gender first to increase comfort, then bring together to have joint discussions and to allow each gender to hear the other.

Outputs: by group

Girls:

c) Operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Local involvement helps young women feel secure and free.
- Community co-design helps create safer, welcoming outdoor public spaces and public transport.
- Police presence can sometimes intimidate rather than reassure, so it is important to consider how safety measures are implemented to avoid unintended consequences.

How it could be better:

- Use community involvement to build trust instead of relying heavily on police.
- Focus on preventing violence so police intervention is not the only solution.
- Use clear terminology, 'operation' is not user friendly, and causes confusion.



Outputs: by group

Girls:

c) Operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport



How can we ensure that this action is effective?

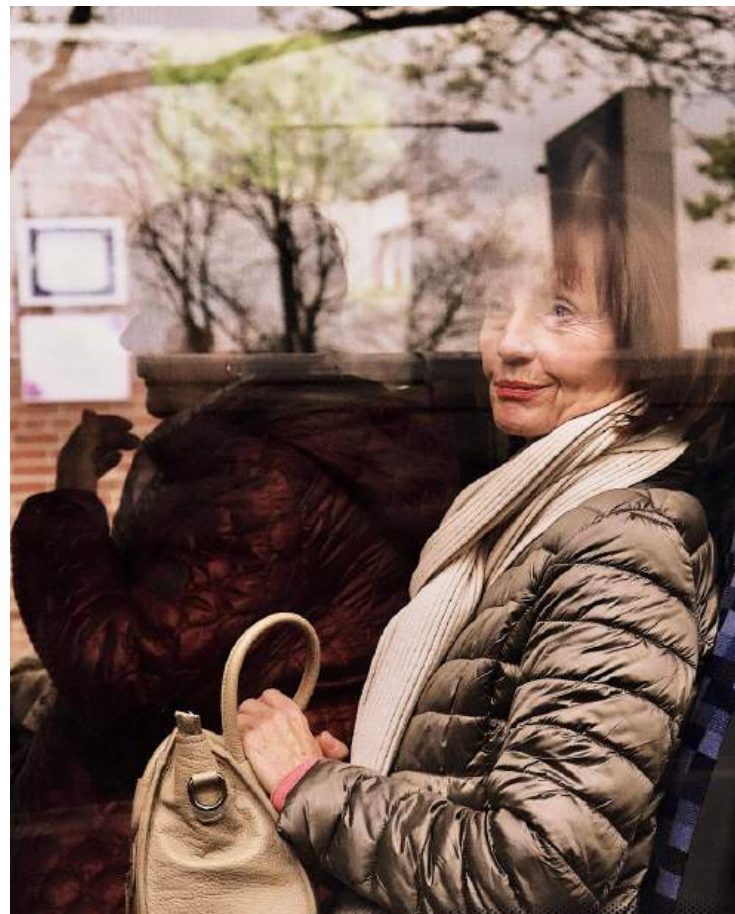
- Community initiatives (e.g. such as 'Ask for Angela', which is a public campaign used to discretely signal they need help).
- Co-design outdoor public spaces and public transport with those who use them.
- Clear communication about safety operations like CCTV.
- Include year-round safety measures (not just around winter, or at certain events).
- Gender-inclusive language in roles/ job titles (for example avoid terms like 'service men').
- Neighbourhood watch groups with proper training.
- Increased presence of staff and operators on public transport.
- Have safety hotspots as designated areas people can go to for support or help.

How do we make it feasible?

- Address challenges like paramilitary control.
- Improve CCTV coverage to remove blind spots.
- Maintain consistent upkeep of outdoor public spaces and public transport (e.g. trimming bushes).

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Involve men, boys, and diverse communities in decisions.
- Ensure agencies responsible for the operation of outdoor public spaces don't have biases against certain groups of people
- Build diverse teams but recognise sensitive roles where women might feel targeted (for example public facing roles on public transport).



Outputs: by group

Girls:

d) Other reflections from the girls' group



Within conversations, girls also raised the challenge of institutions (for example, schools) willing to engage with conversations and educate about VAWG, for fear that the topic is too sensitive. Additionally, they highlighted three topics in particular that needed to be more carefully considered due to unintended consequences:

1. CCTV and surveillance. Ultimately the group decided not to include this as a priority, as they felt the negative consequences of surveillance outweighed the positive.
2. Women only spaces in parks and on transport: they felt that this could lead to victim blaming, predation, exclusion of trans and non-binary people, and further division between sexes.
3. The reporting of VAWG incidents in the media, and how this can lead to certain groups of the population being targeted as perpetrators (e.g., those of different ethnicities)*.

*it is important to highlight these discussions took place in June 2025, at the same time as the anti-immigration protests taking place in Ballymena, which was initially triggered by a VAWG incident.

Outputs: by group



Men

Men's discussions centred around practical design and operational improvements to reduce VAWG in outdoor public spaces and public transport, combined with cultural change driven by education.

They suggested smart lighting, CCTV, public help booths, and visible police or wardens, as well as appropriately strict sentencing to send a clear message that the safety of women and girls in outdoor public spaces is prioritised.

Men saw education about VAWG, from early childhood to adulthood, as the "oil" keeping progress moving, shaping understanding of positive masculinity, consequences of harmful behaviour, and how to be upstanders.

They also raised the question of "effective messaging" to consider how information is spread through the general public. They recognised the need to engage the wider public through creative campaigns, local voices, and clear messaging about new measures and their purpose. Importantly, they also acknowledged the challenges of securing funding, community buy-in, and balancing visible security with community trust, especially in the context of Northern Ireland as a contested society.

Outputs: by group

Men:

a) Design of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Good design in outdoor public spaces and on public transport can immediately and visibly make women and girls feel safer.
- Acts as a deterrent to potential offenders.

How it could be better:

- Improve and extend street lighting, especially in narrow and hidden areas.
- Use smart lighting and sensors in parks and public spaces.
- Install operational CCTV covering critical blind spots.
- Provide public help booths and clearer signage in multiple languages.
- Ensure constant live monitoring by police.
- Maintenance and regular evaluation of outdoor public spaces.
- Visible patrols by wardens, community officers, and specially trained staff.

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Show visual changes so people know action has been taken.
- Use local celebrities and public campaigns to explain why these changes matter.
- Get public input through petitions and surveys.
- Make design changes inclusive and accessible.

How do we make it feasible and equitable?

- Needs funding and community buy-in, which may vary across areas.
- Should benefit all genders and communities equally.
- Consider accountability of organisations and people to carry out these efforts: council, police, local people.

Outputs: by group

Men:

b) Societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport



Why it matters:

- Education supports long-term cultural and behavioural change.
- Helps men and boys understand the problem from women's perspectives.
- Encourages people to act as upstanders rather than bystanders.

How it could be better:

- Start early: age 8 years old and under; teach about consent, respect, and equality.
- Continue through teenage years and adulthood.
- Use creative messaging, real stories, short videos, social media, and street theatre.
- Educate about consequences, laws, and real-life impact of VAWG.
- Engage parents, schools, sports clubs, workplaces, and community groups.
- Promote progressive masculinity and challenge harmful norms.
- Learn from campaigns like "See it, Say it, Sort it" (this is a public campaign slogan used on UK public transport, to encourage passengers to signal anything unusual or suspicious).

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Use trained educators, local influencers, and real-life examples.
- Create safe spaces for discussion.
- Include reminders and regular refreshers.
- Combine with wider messages on drinking, safety, and public behaviour.

How do we make it feasible and equitable?

- Needs ongoing funding and creativity to keep engagement (especially with teenagers).
- Involve marginalised groups (e.g. Travellers, asylum seekers) with culturally sensitive methods.
- Use venues and events to reach large and diverse audiences.

Outputs: by group

Men:

c) Operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Day-to-day operation can actively prevent harm and increase feelings of safety.
- Visible staff and responsive systems build trust.

How it could be better:

- Visible wardens and community officers, trained to help and de-escalate.
- Women-only safe spaces in public areas.
- Better policing and “VAWG squads” (male and female pairs, high-viz, clear messaging), inspired by ‘Pink Squads’ in Mumbai.
- Live surveillance and random checks.
- Emergency helpline number known as widely as 999.
- Summer intervention schemes to reduce youth boredom.
- Collaboration with local councils, police, community champions, and civil society organisations to monitor, operate and animate public spaces.

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- If new services such as VAWG squads or helplines are created, make sure they are publicised widely.
- Show government commitment through clear policies and visible action.
- How does information or messages get spread around the public? For example, the power to change campaign videos has never been seen before, why not? (the power to change campaign is a public campaign aimed at tackling gender-based violence).
- Support and train front-of-house staff (e.g. bouncers) to spot and handle issues.

How do we make it feasible and equitable?

- Funding, staff shortages, and balancing visible policing with community trust are challenges.
- Important not to create ‘divided’ safe/unsafe zones.
- Ensure women feel safe to approach those running operations – including having women and mixed teams.

Outputs: by group

Men:

d) Other reflections from the men's group



- Men noted in particular that education is the “oil” that keeps the whole system moving – but it’s long-term.
- Men also acknowledged that design and operation offer quicker, visible impact, but must be done with women and communities.
- Discussions with men highlighted the importance of messaging and action being tailored to local context – including Belfast/NI’s contested spaces and cultural history.
- Men additionally noted that equity requires including all ages, communities, cultures, and marginalised groups in conversations, decisions, and action around VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.



Outputs: by group



Boys

The boys' group saw that better design of outdoor spaces - like improved lighting, wider paths, more exits, and women-only areas - could quickly help women and girls feel safer, though redesign and funding remain real challenges. They emphasised that women and girls, including those from different cultures, should help shape these designs.

Boys felt that education was the foundation for long-term change and should start young but reach everyone: boys and men of all ages, parents, teachers, and the wider community. They suggested creative approaches like social media, videos, real-life stories, and workshops in schools and sports clubs - while recognising not everyone is reached this way and additionally noting that content must be culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Boys saw operation as both a deterrent and a protection, suggesting more CCTV, well-lit areas, helplines as well-known as 999, stricter laws, and well-trained staff in outdoor public spaces and on public transport shaped by women's input.

They noted challenges like funding, staff shortages, and trust - so some roles might be better run by women or mixed teams. Overall, boys viewed design, operation, and education as linked: education driving cultural change over time, with design and operational measures offering quicker reassurance - all needing to be shaped by women's voices and lived experiences.

Outputs: by group

Boys:

a) Design of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Good design of outdoor public spaces and public transport alone is limited, but when combined with good operation it has a stronger effect.
- Design changes feel sustainable, effective and can be quicker and more cost effective (e.g. lighting, cameras).

How it could be better/more effective:

- Women-only areas or sections (for example on public transport), designed by women for women.
- Areas for women from different cultures, designed by women from those cultures.
- More well-lit spaces, open areas (less enclosed) and wider paths.
- Spaces with multiple exits and better entrance/exit routes.
- Improve less populated spaces by adding animals and trees to discourage problems.

How do we make it feasible?

- Funding difficulties for resources like lighting.
- Open spaces might reduce biodiversity.
- Need staff to monitor women-only areas.
- Redesigning and rebuilding take time.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Include options for those who want privacy and those who prefer open space.
- Ensure all design choices remain accessible and equitable.



Outputs: by group

Boys:

b) Societal education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport



Why it matters:

- Education about VAWG is foundational and supports better design and operation.
- Long-term change requires generational transformation led by younger people.
- Quicker results might come from operational changes, but education still matters deeply.

How it could be better:

- Make educational content more appealing and concise.
- Teach men and boys about how their actions are perceived by women.
- Include age-appropriate education about VAWG in workplaces to reach parents, but also in communities for people who may not work.
- Educate older men about VAWG as well as boys and young men.

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Teacher training for confidence on sensitive topics such as VAWG.
- Mandatory workshops in schools, clubs and communities.
- Use social media creatively (TikTok, educational videos) and real stories to engage a broad range of audiences.
- Education outside school (workplaces, sports clubs, community groups).
- Promote education on what to do to help, in addition to showing what not to do.

How do we make it feasible?

- Funding for videos and social media campaigns.
- Risk that social media doesn't reach everyone.
- Schools might deprioritise the topic or find it too sensitive.
- Some people may not pay attention or engage.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Social media focus might leave out older generations, to think about ways to engage them.
- Include people/children with learning challenges.
- Start education before age 16.
- Recognise cultural differences in views on women's roles.



Outputs: by group

Boys:

c) Operation of outdoor public spaces and public transport



Why it matters:

- Operation can both deter and restrict opportunities for harm, but effectiveness varies as it relies on people.

How it could be better:

- Directly involve women in planning operational measures for outdoor public spaces and on public transport.
- Avoid over-policing that might discourage use of outdoor public spaces by families.

How can we ensure that this action is effective?

- Strict protocols and clear guidance.
- More CCTV, visible policing and stricter laws.
- Well-trained staff and surveys to understand what women and girls need to make an environment feel safe.
- Widely known helpline numbers, alongside encouragement to speak up.
- Ensure well-lit areas to reassure women and girls.

How do we make it feasible?

- Address funding and staff shortages.
- Address cybersecurity concerns.
- Some women may not trust men to run operations; mixed or women-led teams might be better.
- Some people may find ways to bypass rules.
- Not everyone may feel confident to speak up.

How do we ensure it is equitable?

- Operations run by diverse teams (diversity by genders, age, cultures and communities).
- Care needed with CCTV to respect religious or cultural sensitivities.
- Consider how male-led tech and operations might still leave women feeling unsafe.

Roles and responsibilities

At the end of each workshop, we asked each group to think about who has a role to play in preventing VAWG, and what duties and/or opportunities exist for them to take action.

We divided the roles into formal (those whose duty comes from the job they hold) and informal (those who have a duty as a member of society).

Formal roles

Government & Political Representatives

- Government
- Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly
- Northern Ireland Office
- Member of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament
- Politicians (including Member of the Legislative Assembly and Belfast City Councillors)
- Council (including Belfast City Councillors)

Law Enforcement & Justice

- Police / Police Service Northern Ireland

Education Sector

- Education Authority
- Schools, Colleges and Universities
- Includes VAWG education, upstander training
- Teachers
- Educators

Health & Social Care

- Health workers
- Trauma practitioners
- Social care sector
- Counsellors

Community & Youth

- Youth workers
- Community development workers
- Non-Government Organisations and charities in the third sector
- Charities and voluntary sector organisations (e.g. Show Some Love, LGBTQIA+ charities)

Formal roles

Transport & Public Services

- Translink
- Taxi companies

Design, Events & Public Space

- Architects / Designers
- Designers
- Event workers
- Promoters of open space events (e.g. parks, music concerts)
- Hospitality staff

Employment & Workplace

- Employers
- Faith & Media
- Church leaders
- Journalists

Formal duties and opportunities to act

Policy & Accountability

- Own it!
- Identify and name it!
- Be accountable
- Create policies and procedures

Education & Training

- Teach self-defence
- Offer bystander training / Provide training for everyone in how to intervene safely in outdoor public spaces, including public transport
- Advocate for consistent school programmes (not just one assembly)
- Ongoing training for staff
- Create education programmes
- Keep reviewing and updating programmes

Engagement & Communication

- Listen to young people
- Talk about the issue publicly
- Make it easier to get feedback

Prevention & Safety

- Prevention of VAWG
- Design for safety in public spaces

Resources & Investment

- Provide funding
- Investing
- Find solutions
- Collect data

Informal roles

General Public & Communities

- General public (including diversity in design and strategy development)
- Local communities
- Strangers
- Bystanders
- Peers
- Friends
- Drivers
- Volunteers

Parents & Families

- Parents
- Families

Young People & Youth Spaces

- Young people
- Youth services / youth clubs

Role Models & Influencers

- Celebrities and influencers
- Social media users
- Social media influencers / public figures (e.g. AVA festival)
- High-profile individuals (sport, media, music) as ambassadors and educators
- Coaches
- Role models

Community & Civic Leaders

- Community leaders
- Campaigners / activists

Sports & Recreation

- Sports clubs and teams (all levels and abilities)
 - Includes players, supporters, spectators — emphasising education and zero tolerance

Businesses

- Business owners
- Bars & night-time economy

Informal duties and opportunities to act

Awareness & Attitude

- Be aware
- Be open to change
- Be interested in the issue
- Challenge negative attitudes
- Learn the signs of violence
- Learn how to be challenged
- Learn how to challenge views

Communication & Speaking Up

- Call it out
- Use the right language
- Don't be a bystander – speak up
- Continuously speak about it
- Share your knowledge
- Use your platforms to talk about it

Participation & Engagement

- Participate in democracy
- Participate in programmes
- Encourage each other to participate
- Older people should listen to young people

Support & Safety

- Provide a safe environment
- Be a safe person for others to come to
- Practicing healthy boundaries
- Report antisocial behaviour
- Intervene when safe to do so (including phoning emergency services)

Education & Empowerment

- Educate ourselves and each other
- Parents should educate their kids
- Positive peer influence
- Recognise the role of young people as educators

06



Recommendations

Following the workshops, suggestions from participant discussions were used to develop a series of recommendations for future solutions on how to prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.

These recommendations bring together key points raised by the groups and refine the previous action areas identified by stakeholders, such as highlighting a list of actions for each solution and using clearer terminology (i.e., management and stewardship instead of operation). These recommendations are presented next.

Recommendation 1

Focus on VAWG prevention solutions which are multi-layered and occur across sectors

Purpose: To prioritise prevention solutions that are multi-layered and coordinated across sectors, addressing the structural, social, and environmental factors that contribute to VAWG.

By integrating approaches across government, transport, urban planning, education, and community services, these strategies would aim to reduce risk of VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport, create safer outdoor public spaces, and additionally foster long-term cultural and behavioural change.

Related actions:

- A mix of better physical design, thoughtful day-to-day operation and education that changes attitudes and behaviours over time.
- Combine design improvements with education (such as displaying posters about harmful behaviours on public transport).
- Connect to other social issues (such as mental health, social exclusion, and other forms of violence or abuse against marginalised groups such as age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socio-economic backgrounds).
- Consider accountability of organisations and people to carry out these efforts: council, police, local people.

Recommendation 2

Encourage prevention of VAWG through transparent, inclusive, and accountable management and stewardship of outdoor public spaces

Purpose: To ensure outdoor public spaces and public transport are operated transparently, inclusively, and accountably, so that the ways these spaces are designed, maintained, and used actively to support safety, accessibility, and comfort for all.

This includes reducing opportunities for harassment and other forms of violence, promoting equitable use across different times of day, and fostering public trust in how these spaces function for diverse communities, particularly women and girls.

Related actions:

- Ensure adequate funding for high quality and maintenance of outdoor public spaces and public transport.
- More community surveillance through increased footfall throughout outdoor public spaces and on public transport.
- Clear communication about safety operations like CCTV.
- Ensure women and girls feel safe to approach those running operations – including having women and mixed teams.
- Hotline apps, trained staff in public spaces and on public transport, and timetabled usage (e.g. women-only hours).
- Women-only taxi services to ensure visibility of females within public and private transport, which can encourage girls to feel safer.

Recommendation 3

Focus design on visible and practical changes that make outdoor public spaces and public transport feel safer during the day and night to prevent VAWG

Purpose: To deliver visible and practical design improvements in outdoor public spaces and on public transport that enhance safety, accessibility, and reassurance for all users.

This includes measures such as improved lighting, clear sightlines, well-maintained facilities, wayfinding, and inclusive infrastructure that reduce opportunities for harassment and other forms of violence. By addressing both daytime and nighttime use, these solutions will hope to lower fear, mitigate risk of VAWG, and foster confidence and comfort for women, girls, and other vulnerable groups while using these spaces.

Related actions:

- Use design to address feelings of unsafety (e.g. emergency phones, better lighting).
- Better design on public transport, so that it is easier for the driver and other passengers to see what is happening, as well as ways of making it easier to raise the alarm.
- Pilot design of outdoor public spaces and on public transport and refine them based on results.
- Involve a wide variety of people in design decisions (such as planners, environmentalists, diverse public groups).
- Show visual changes so people know action has been taken.

Recommendation 4

Educate about VAWG and acknowledge the spectrum of violence which occurs every day in outdoor public spaces and on public transport which often goes unreported

Purpose: To use innovative and engaging approaches to raise awareness and educate the public about the full spectrum of VAWG that occurs in outdoor public spaces and on public transport, including incidents that often go unreported.

This aims to increase recognition of these harms, challenge tolerance of unacceptable behaviour, empower bystanders and communities to respond, and contribute to safer, more respectful environments for all users.

Related actions:

- Education about VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport should be embedded, consistent, and supported by adequate funding.
- Educate about consequences, laws, and real-life impact of VAWG.
- Use diverse facilitators (for example using younger facilitators to educate younger people, so the participants have someone they can relate to).
- Make educational content more appealing and concise.
- Extend education about VAWG to communities, workplaces and older people to challenge social norms and standards.
- Public education through billboards and information.
- Strengthen secondary school education by embedding high-quality relationship and sex education that actively addresses misogyny, fosters equality, and engages boys in developing respectful attitudes and behaviours.

Recommendation 5

Involve people from diverse cultural, social, and identity groups directly in VAWG prevention efforts

Purpose: To centre the voices of individuals and groups historically excluded from decision-making by actively embedding their perspectives throughout the design, education, operation, and governance of VAWG prevention strategies.

This ensures that interventions are responsive to diverse lived experiences, address the specific needs and risks faced by different communities, and promote inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive solutions. By involving these perspectives at every stage, strategies are more likely to be trusted, effective, and reflective of the people they are intended to protect.

Related actions:

- Inclusive design of outdoor public spaces, and public transport involving women and girls of diverse ages, ethnicities as well as those from the LGBTQIA+ community, and with disabilities.
- Make education about VAWG mandatory and inclusive for all genders.
- For educating about VAWG, use venues and events to reach large and diverse audiences.
- Gender-inclusive language in roles/ job titles (for example avoid terms like 'service men').
- Make design changes inclusive and accessible.
- Co-design outdoor public spaces and public transport with those who use them.

Recommendation 6

Enhance sustainable funding focused on preventing VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport

Purpose: To ensure sustained investment in prevention measures that reduce the risk of VAWG in outdoor public spaces and public transport, strengthen perceptions of safety, and foster long-term cultural and behavioural change.

This includes funding for infrastructure improvements, public awareness campaigns, training for staff, community engagement, and support services, all designed to create safer, more inclusive environments. By maintaining consistent resources, these investments enable proactive, rather than reactive, approaches to preventing VAWG and promote equitable use of outdoor public spaces.

Related actions:

- Allocate funding, draw on expertise and involve communities.
- Dedicated funding for VAWG in outdoor public spaces and public transport, with the inclusion of multi-language materials, and collaboration with at-risk groups (including individuals of diverse age, ethnicities, and from the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals with disabilities).
- Needs ongoing funding and creativity to keep engagement (especially with teenagers).
- Funding for videos and social media campaigns.
- Invest in resources to help with education (such as posters on public transport).
- Address funding and staff shortages.

Recommendation 7

Strengthen trust in public institutions to act and prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport

Purpose: To build confidence among women and girls in accessing protection and justice by improving the responsiveness, transparency, and accountability of public institutions such as the police, judiciary, social services, and local authorities.

Strengthening these institutions ensures confidence from the public, and ensures women and girls are treated with dignity, supported effectively, and able to pursue justice without fear of stigma, neglect, or retaliation.

Related actions:

- Build trust in institutions (such as government and those responsible for policing).
- Transparency in governance about what is being done to prevent VAWG and accountability for consequences of VAWG in outdoor public spaces and on public transport.
- Collaboration with local councils, police, community champions, and civil society organisations to monitor, operate and animate public spaces.
- Improve police training and trust amongst communities.
- Real accountability from councils, police, and local institutions, with clear, well-publicised helplines and trained officers visible on the streets.

Methods

Public deliberation

The purpose of these workshops was to sense-check emerging action areas for the prevention of VAWG in outdoor public spaces, and to build on the considerations that relate to those actions identified in the systems mapping workshop held in January 2025.

The objectives of the workshops were to look to the public for ideas and innovation, and priorities and recommendations for how the identified actions can be most effective to address the issue of VAWG in outdoor public spaces.

Engagement design: The nature of VAWG means that public engagement comes with significant risks of harm, retraumatisation, and conflict between participants who may be identified as victims or perpetrators of the problems being addressed. Because of this, we have identified a number of key considerations that have informed our design and will be braided through decisions about participation, session design, facilitation, and reporting.

Those considerations include:

1. Intersectionality - how can we recognise race, disability, LGBTQIA+ identity and other factors that intersect with gender to affect experiences of VAWG?
2. Safety and trust - how do we ensure psychological and physical safety for those participating in this process.
3. Collaboration - who can we work with to ensure the representation of affected communities, practitioners with specialist experience in supporting victims and survivors, and designers.
4. Recognition of trauma and resilience - how to hold space to acknowledge past experiences of violence and amplify lived experience, while not forcing anyone to share anything they don't feel comfortable with.
5. Framing men's involvement - how can we enable men to collaborate while centering the experiences and needs of women and girls.

Methodological approach

Enclave Deliberations

Deliberative public engagement most often occurs in what is referred to as 'mini-publics'—groups that reflect society in all its diversity. This formation is seen in models such as citizens' assemblies and citizen juries.

The rationale for this is that demographic diversity, ensured through the random selection of participants, helps to capture a broad range of perspectives, experiences, and values.

This diversity strengthens the legitimacy of the process and increases the likelihood of well-rounded, informed decision making.

However, not all deliberation follows this model.

Enclave deliberation refers to deliberation that takes place within more homogenous groups—those that share a particular identity, experience, or perspective. These groups might be formed around gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, age, political ideology, or lived experience of a particular issue.

Enclave deliberation allows for deeper discussion within communities that may otherwise struggle to have their voices heard in broader deliberative processes. It is a suitable approach when it forms just one part of a wider participatory process, such as this one where there are actions agreed by a range of partners and where the enclave deliberation feeds into a further codesign process.



Enclave deliberation can serve several crucial functions:

- Empowerment of marginalised voices: In mixed-group deliberations, some voices can be overshadowed by more dominant groups. Enclave deliberation creates a safer space for people from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds to articulate their perspectives freely.
- Brave spaces for privileged voices to reflect and learn: On some issues, specific identity groups might be used to having their experiences 'centred'. Challenging that privilege can result in anger, defensiveness, victimhood, or other reactions which can, in mixed groups, cause harm to people with experiences of oppression.
- Deepened issue exploration: Enclave deliberation enables more nuanced and detailed conversations that might be diluted in a diverse group setting.
- Building confidence for wider participation: When people deliberate within an enclave, they often gain confidence in articulating their views, making them better prepared to engage in larger, more diverse forums later.
- Trust-building and solidarity: Particularly on issues where perspectives might be divided along identity lines, enclave deliberation can help foster trust and solidarity within communities before they engage in dialogue with others.

Enclave deliberation on the topic of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in outdoor public spaces provides a structured way to surface lived experiences, identify specific concerns, and develop solutions that are informed by those most affected. It provides safe spaces for sharing and learning, accounts for intersectional experiences, and provides for meaningful involvement of men and boys.



Recruitment and onboarding

Through established partnerships and organisations, participants were invited to take part in the public deliberation workshops in May 2025.

These organisations included HERe NI, Women's Research and Development Agency, YouthAction NI, and RCity.

These organisations made initial contact with potential participants, and with the participants consent, passed on expressions of interest back to the research team.

Following an expression of interest, each potential participant was followed up by a member of the research team and was taken through an onboarding process. This involved a researcher talking through the overall aim of the research, the boundaries of the workshops (i.e., outdoor public spaces) and the safeguarding in place to support participants through the research.

Each participant was also given an opportunity during this time to ask any questions they had about the overall project, or the research workshops.



Partner reflections

Women's Resource and Development Agency immediately welcomed the fact that this project took place; it has always been the case that VAWG in public spaces, especially outdoors, has been overlooked and under-researched. In addition, it has rarely been seen as something worth taking seriously, particularly by the justice system, since in the main it involves "less serious" incidents and is notoriously difficult to prosecute because the perpetrators are so often strangers to the victim. The public reaction to Reclaim the Night events very clearly underlines this, even at the same time that there have been several high-profile murders that have taken place in outdoor public places in recent years.

As such, we were delighted to take part. The mapping events that took place in Queen's University Belfast in early 2025 were genuinely collaborative; involved organisations whom all had opportunities to contribute insights and to expand the bounds of the issues covered, as well as to learn from other participants.

We were glad also to be asked to help recruit for the focus groups with women, girls, men, and boys that took place in the summer of 2025; too often researchers do not hear from the people who regularly contribute to the work of Community and Voluntary Sector organisations because there is no natural link between them, so researchers who understand that and encourage the form of recruitment that we saw in this case are invariably going to gather a wider and more diverse set of views and experiences.



Elaine Crory
Women's Resource and
Development Agency

Partner reflections

It is important that the LGBTQIA+ community are involved in this research and that their voices were represented within the focus groups. When I put out a call to the HERe NI older women's group, advertising the focus groups, the response was overwhelming; in fact, the groups were oversubscribed which illuminated the desire among LGBTQIA+ women for more spaces to meet and share their experiences.

The overwhelming response was also reflective that LGBTQIA+ women felt that this was a space they could be seen and included, that would offer safety and provide visibility to their personal stories. I was able to feel confident to refer LGBTQIA+ women into the focus groups knowing that we had shared consensus on the importance safety, visibility and inclusion.

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Sophie Nelson
HERe NI



Partner reflections

As part of these workshops with Queen's University Belfast, I had the opportunity to work and recruit young people to gain their perspectives of what is needed to prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces.

My role focused on recruitment and engagement, and through this process, I gained valuable insight into how young people respond to these conversations - and how important it is to include them meaningfully. Recruiting young people wasn't always straightforward. I noticed clear differences in how young men and women engaged with the programme, with young women being more open and willing to share their stories. Many were eager to talk about their experiences and contribute to the workshops in a real and personal way.

Young men, on the other hand, were more hesitant as some felt like the programme was targeting them or challenging their identity. It took more time, reassurance, and thoughtful conversations to help them feel safe and included.

One thing that became really clear to me is how vital it is to include young people in these conversations - not just to listen, but to lead.

Being part of this initiative helped me see the world through a different lens. I saw how powerful it is when young people feel heard and respected. I saw how important it is to create spaces where everyone - regardless of gender - can speak openly and learn from each other. This experience reminded me that change doesn't happen in silence. It happens in conversation, in connection, and in community.



Naomi English
YouthAction NI

08



Conclusion and Vision

This report emphasises the importance of involving women and girls, as well as the broader public from diverse backgrounds, in co-developing approaches to prevent VAWG in outdoor public spaces. Their reflections and lived experiences strengthen identified action areas, making responses more effective, sustainable, and responsive, helping to create environments where women and girls can confidently and freely use outdoor public spaces without fear or threat of violence.

Going forward, it is hoped that this report will:

- Centre the views of individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds on the issue of violence against women and girls in outdoor public spaces.
- Highlight the urgency of the issue to policymakers and support them in driving innovative solutions to end violence against women and girls in outdoor public spaces.
- Provide evidence for individuals and colleagues in the community voluntary sector and third sector to support ongoing advocacy efforts in preventing violence against women and girls.
- Support practitioner strategies and policies for designing and regenerating outdoor public spaces that consider safety and inclusivity for women and girls.
- Provide practical, community-informed solutions for transport providers (e.g. Translink) to improve public transport environments for women and girls.

Afterword

We are grateful to the team at Queen's University Belfast, and all participants who took part, for this insightful report on the process and outputs of the public deliberation workshops. This phase of the research builds on the earlier systems mapping exercise, which enabled a deeper understanding of the complex, interacting factors that contribute to VAWG in public spaces. It underlines again that women and girls' lives continue to be significantly shaped, and constrained, by the threat and actuality of VAWG.

The value of this report lies not only in its findings but in the process that was used, ensuring the voices that understand the realities are centred, consistent with the core principles of the EVAWG Strategic Framework. The public deliberation workshops were essential in surfacing lived experience, enabling more nuanced discussion, and creating space for voices that can be underrepresented in broader engagement processes. It highlights the value and expertise that lived experience can bring into policy development and ensures that the perspectives of women and girls, as well as men and boys, are meaningfully reflected in the development of potential solutions.

The research project continues to reinforce and build on our journey together as a society to achieving the prevention outcomes of the EVAWG Strategic Framework so that women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere. The outputs of the public deliberations underscore the need for collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches to prevention of VAWG in public spaces. It emphasises the interconnected roles of public spaces and transport design and operation, and the importance of society wide education on VAWG as foundational in shaping public spaces that are inclusive and safe for women and girls.

We look forward to being part of the next steps as the research progresses into the co-design and development of potential interventions to ensure that women feel safe and are safe wherever they live, work, play and socialise in the city of Belfast.



The Executive Office
Ending Violence Against
Women and Girls Team

Appendix 1: Participant Evaluation

Following participation in the workshops, participants were asked to complete a short evaluation. Their feedback is provided here.

Section 1: Support received to take part

	Very unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	% Satisfied
...the support and assistance provided by the organisers?	3*			1	33	92%
...the communication you received about the arrangements in the run-up to the workshops?	3*			5	29	92%
...the organisation of the workshops?	3*			1	33	92%

*some of these may be inaccurate due to form errors (highlighted after by participants)

"Do you have any further comments about the support you received to take part in the workshops?"

- "No, would love to hear feedback in future" – participant from women's workshop
- "It was good to have a phone call first" – participant from women's workshop
- "It was lovely and useful" – participant from women's workshop
- "very insightful and educational" – participant from women's workshop
- "I think that the support I received was good" – participant from women's workshop
- "I enjoyed the 2nd workshop as it was more in-depth than the first. It felt like we were all heard" – participant from women's workshop
- "I would of liked to visit the areas we discussed e.g., public squares" – participant from young women's workshop
- "I wasn't pressured to speak up at any time and spoke only on own terms, which made me feel comfortable" – participant from young women's workshop
- "No. It was very good to take part" – participant from young women's workshop
- "Felt completely supported and the facilitator took careful steps to ensure conversation was safe" – participant from young women's workshop
- "The facilitators were really approachable and were able to explain anything I didn't understand" – participant from young women's workshop
- "I felt very comfortable as I was aware of the services that could be provided if needs be" – participant from young women's workshop
- "I felt listened by the facilitator and that my thoughts and opinions were carefully considered" – participant from young women's workshop
- "I was made to feel very comfortable and to feel confident in answering and contributing to the workshop" – participant from young men's workshop
- "They treated us very well" – participant from young women's workshop
- "I found the workshop really supportive and easily accessible" – participant from young women's workshop
- "It was very informative and give you an insight into what plans that have been designed by stakeholders" – participant from men's workshop
- "Very well thought out and thought provoking" – participant from men's workshop
- "Really enjoyed the workshop, was interesting and educational" – participant from men's workshop
- "Very well delivered. Very interactive. Helped to raise awareness on an important and relevant topic. Provided a safe space for discussion" – participant from men's workshop
- "Organisers took brilliant care of us, including providing mental support during the workshop" – participant from men's workshop

Section 2: Overall impression of the workshops

How would you rate...	Very bad	Bad	Neither bad nor good	Good	Very good	% Good
...the workshop sessions?				12	25	100%
...the quality of presentations?				12	25	100%
...the facilitation team?				4	33	100%

Do you have any further comments about your overall impressions of these workshops?

- "This was very informational for me" – participant from women's workshop
- "It was a safe space" – participant from women's workshop
- "Use more basic terminology" – participant from women's workshop
- "Such an important topic. Expertly handled by the facilitators. The rooming was an issue in the first session; but feedback was taken onboard and rectified by the second session. The team were highly skilled. Great team." – participant from women's workshop
- "Very interesting" – participant from women's workshop
- "It was all very professional and welcoming at the same time. And one could feel comfortable at all times" – participant from young women's workshop
- "The material was relevant & easy to follow thanks to the considerate facilitators" – participant from young women's workshop
- "They [facilitators] were very clear when addressing the aim" – participant from young women's workshop
- "All info was presented clearly and there was a good order / progression of what we were doing. I also liked the relaxed atmosphere and how we weren't rushed" – participant from young women's workshop
- "I really enjoyed being able to voice my opinions and seeing how that can develop into change" – participant from young women's workshop
- "it was a very comfortable environment" – young female participant
- "They [facilitators] explained everything very clearly, and helped if we didn't understand/confused" – participant from young women's workshop
- "Easy to be involved in. David made it clear there was no wrong answers making it very comfortable to speak out. He done this through conversing and his facial expressions" – participant from young men's workshop
- "I was really impressed with the organisation of the workshops. Providing handouts with really valid information" – participant from young men's workshop
- "They were very genuine and easy to get on with" – participant from young men's workshop
- "Extremely useful and enlightening" – participant from young men's workshop
- "Very good and informative" – participant from men's workshop
- "The messaging and organisation was great and accommodating" – participant from men's workshop
- "I felt very accommodated e.g food / beverages etc. Felt very comfortable throughout" – participant from men's workshop
- "Professionally facilitated and handled" – participant from men's workshop

Section 3: Experience of participating in the workshops

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Completely agree	% Agree
I have had enough information to participate effectively.			2	4	31	95%
The information I have received has been fair and balanced between different viewpoints.			1	5	31	97%
I have understood almost everything that other members of my small group said during our discussions.		1	1	13	22	95%
I have had enough opportunity in the small group discussions to express my views.				6	31	100%
The other members of my small group respected what I had to say, even when they didn't agree with me.				3	34	92%
Overall, my experience in this research was positive.				4	33	89%

Section 4: Participant views on violence against women and girls

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Completely agree	% Agree
I learned a lot from participating in these workshops.				7	30	81%
I think there will be improvements as a result of these workshops.			5	8	24	86%
Taking part in these workshops has made me want to be more involved in other aspects of decision-making that affect my local area.				10	27	100%
Participating in the workshops changed my perspective on how we can prevent violence against women and girls in outdoor public spaces.			1	12	24	97%
Participating in the workshops increased my support towards actions preventing violence against women and girls in outdoor public spaces.			1	5	31	97%

Section 5: Additional feedback / further reflections: Women/young women

- "Here's hoping that things change when these workshops are done that society changes for women and people to be made to feel safe alone at all times" – participant from women's workshops
- "Thanks! Lets make women safer" – participant from women's workshops
- "Lack of trust in police or other authorities make me apprehensive about the change" - participant from women's workshops
- "Very limited time, when there was potential for further discussion" - participant from women's workshops
- "Facilitators fantastic. Respected. Felt heard and mattered, respected and valued" - participant from women's workshops
- "Really good workshops. The ladies were very nice, and my experience was very insightful and helpful for me and my girls" - participant from women's workshops
- "It was great to see ways in which VAWG can be reduced and to think about ways how to do that and to know that something will actually be done with our ideas and views" - participant from young women's workshops
- "Thanks to these workshops I feel more equipped to challenge violence against women and girls and that I'm more educated in the topic" - participant from young women's workshops
- "Thank you for allowing me to share my opinion and making me feel like what I have to say matters" - participant from young women's workshops
- "I really enjoyed the workshop and found them very insightful. I am keen to learn more and be involved in more projects / things on this topic" - participant from young women's workshops
- "Run for greater age range such as 35+ to see what could be changed for them to teach their kids and grandkids" - participant from young women's workshops

Section 5: Additional feedback / further reflections: Men/young men

- “Instead of trying to change the past educate the present to better the future” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “This work is important as it teaches us how to respect women at a young age” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “This is very important as it shows young men the problems faced by women” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “This opened my eyes and helped me become more aware of the matter which will help me to act more accordingly and be mindful” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “Tiered multi-agency approach” - participant from men’s workshop
- “This workshop has made me more aware of the issues regarding VAWG. I will take a lot back with me regarding this workshop” – participant from men’s workshop
- “I had a great time learning and discussing about a serious yet real topic. I felt very included and overall my experience was positive” – participant from men’s workshop
- “Should have some public affairs official / law makers / expert / political leaders message on what they think. What is existing? What are they working on currently? Short videos, online messages on presence will bring more accountable thoughts” – participant from men’s workshop
- “I feel a lot more educated about violence against women in Northern Ireland” – participant from men’s workshops
- “David and Leandro were fantastic in delivering such an important topic, with sensitivity and engagement” – participant from men’s workshops
- “I am here today to be one of the voices for VAWG as this message will help the policy makers to refine, dedicate and bring law and policy in action” – participant from men’s workshops
- “This workshop raised awareness of the issue that exists and gave me hope that we have the opportunity to change that. Fingers crossed!”
- “I feel it is very important that people should be educated about VAWG” – participant from men’s workshops

Section 5: Additional feedback / further reflections: Men/young men

- “I am here today because to share my point of view about this subject. This work is so important because awareness is first step to prevent problem” – participant from men’s workshops
- “Overall, I am really impressed with the workshops, with the information which has been given as well as the ability to be able to speak openly about thoughts regarding VAWG. I am encouraged to take part in more research regarding this” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “We are under a moral and societal obligation to hold each other accountable and are called to live to a higher standard” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “As someone who is only a young adult, this has been a great amount of information and will be really helpful as I grow up” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “I am here today as I thought it would be very interesting to understand the other half of society. This work is important to help gain a message in today’s society” - participant from young men’s workshops
- “I am here today as I believe the initiative is important to end violence against girls and women. I hope the information provided is successful in steps into the next level of this process and isn’t restricted by funding restrictions” – participant from men’s workshops
- “I am here today as I am a husband and father to a 10 year old girl. It is important to help reduce/prevent violence against women and girls and the participants in this workshop has allowed me to have my opinion and voice heard” – participant from men’s workshops
- “It was a very relatable workshop. Thank you to the facilitators and team. The topic of utter importance and we were able to develop thinking of what people in the world think about this” – participant from men’s workshops

Appendix 2:

Action points and solutions presented to participants

(Continued overleaf)

IMPROVING OPERATION OF OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACES



Purpose:

Encourage safer outdoor public spaces and transport by combining community co-design, visible safety measures, responsible media representation, and supportive policy and policing to improve trust, awareness, and resilience against VAWG.

HOW THIS COULD LOOK:

- **Invest in neighbourhood policing**—more visible, engaged officers and active public participation.
- **Encourage community policing** and bystander intervention.
- **Use footfall and other data to track use** and safety improvements.
- **Co-design park operations with women and girls** to meet their specific needs.
- **Promote supportive policy, standards, and media representation** around VAWG.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

Challenges:

- Prioritisation of resources for neighbourhood safety and park maintenance.

Opportunities:

- Greater trust and confidence in public safety.
- Community investment in local safety.
- Tailored, targeted policy and frontline response.
- Creation of safe third spaces linked across neighbourhoods.

CLEAR

IMPORTANT

COULD BE BETTER

IMPROVING SOCIETAL EDUCATION ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS (VAWG)



IN OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACES

Purpose: Help people better understand violence against women and girls (VAWG) in public spaces through education, clearer language, and access to useful information, empowering them to take action.

HOW THIS COULD LOOK:

- **Inclusive, age-appropriate education** through schools, community life-course learning, and sports.
- **Public engagement campaigns** to challenge harmful norms.
- **Promote media literacy**, responsible reporting, and fact-checking practices.
- **Use inclusive language** and co-design approaches to ensure accessibility and relevance.
- **Leverage sport to deliver education**—train players, coaches, and fans to foster a culture of respect and accountability.
- **Promote codes of conduct, role models, and fair enforcement** in sporting environments (e.g., match bans, fines).

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

Challenges:

- Kickback (from public/policy makers etc.)
- Investment in the issue and in education.

Opportunities:

- Empowering women and girls to know their rights.
- Improving societal understanding and reducing VAWG through prevention.
- Better value for public money.
- Engaging wider society and promoting inclusion.

CLEAR

IMPORTANT

COULD BE BETTER

IMPROVING DESIGN OF OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACES



Purpose:

Make public spaces feel safer and more welcoming for everyone by designing them to be visible, inclusive, well-used, and multi-functional, thereby discouraging neglect and promoting safety.

HOW THIS COULD LOOK:

- **Well-lit spaces** with active frontages (the front part of a building that faces a road) and passive surveillance.
- **Create flexible, inclusive, and multi-use spaces** with visible seating.
- **Use data to inform design** decisions and evaluate interventions.
- **Embed inclusive, participatory design** standards from the outset

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

Challenges:

- Securing support from local communities.
- Retrofitting existing infrastructure.
- Balancing design with concerns like biodiversity.

Opportunities:

- Increased perceived safety.
- Stronger community cohesion and connection.
- Safer, open parks and third spaces (especially at night).
- Future-proofed infrastructure that supports community use.
- Building infrastructure for future proofing.

CLEAR

IMPORTANT

COULD BE BETTER



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