

Political and diplomatic efforts should have primacy over a military solution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Thank you President, and I thank Special Envoy Xia for his briefing today, and welcome the participation of countries of the region in this meeting.

President, the United Kingdom remains deeply concerned by the security situation in the Great Lakes region, in particular the resurgence of violence by M23 in the last week. We call for immediate cessation of violence and the withdrawal of M23 from their current positions. All parties must respect national sovereignty and uphold the principle of territorial integrity.

We call upon countries in the region, with the support of the Special Envoy, to continue to work in close coordination with the Government of the DRC and MONUSCO to bring lasting peace to the country.

President, we have said many times that political and diplomatic efforts should have primacy over a military solution. Humanitarian considerations should also have equal priority. Military action alone will not bring peace to the Great Lakes. So we encourage the resumption of the Nairobi and Luanda processes. The UN, including through the offices of the Special Envoy, should actively support these efforts and ensure coordination with existing efforts, such as the DRC's P-DDRCS process.

President, any military action in Eastern DRC requires careful planning, coordination with MONUSCO, adherence with international law and a clear exit plan. The EAC Force and DRC Armed Forces must substantively engage with MONUSCO on de-confliction of forces, to ensure, primarily, the protection of civilians. We trust Special Envoy Xia will support this coordination.

The United Kingdom remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region. The DRC is suffering from the world's largest food security emergency, with 26 million people in crisis levels of food insecurity. Recent violence is adding to the 5.9 million people already displaced in the DRC. Access to those that need relief is severely limited. Coordination between military and humanitarian operations is vital and we call on all parties to facilitate humanitarian access.

In conclusion, President, we call upon countries in the region to intensify efforts to improve their regional cooperation, address shared security challenges via political and diplomatic means, improve humanitarian access, and bring an end to the violence. Thank you.

Call for bids: Promoting education on consent in Romania

Deadline for submitting project bids is 10 November 2022.

Background

British Embassy Bucharest invites project proposals to promote education on consent and related issues for Romanian young people. This is part of a wider British Embassy portfolio of projects seeking to support efforts to improve the rights of women and girls in Romania, alongside a multi-year programme of projects on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

In the first 6 months of 2021, 10,643 Romanian women and young girls reported battery and other violence, in 65% of the cases the perpetrator was their partner or ex-partner. 84% of the incidents occurred in their residence. The Police intervened in 28,486 cases of domestic violence, out of which 7,659 were of high risk. 22 women were killed. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the cases of sexual harassment among students has gone up, in a country where one third of the women report some type of sexual harassment. Romania is also the EU country with the highest number of trafficked victims to the UK.

Understanding of consent is an important part of preventing sexual assault and violence against women. It also promotes better social attitudes towards women and a broader understanding of respecting individual autonomy. It would also contribute to education on healthy relationships and address violence within relationships.

In this context, we would welcome bids for projects, with a total budget of 48,500 RON, which would improve education on consent in Romania, targeted at both young men and women. These projects can provide education around consent directly, or produce materials and opportunities for teachers to use them.

Objective

- to improve young people's understanding of consent, including, but not limited to consent in a relationship
- to improve young people's understanding of how a lack of consent or manipulated consent can constitute abuse in different circumstances; including violence and sexual assault, but also other forms of coercive control and abuse

Scope of Work

The project should have a national reach, where possible, but we will consider targeted pilot projects. It should also look to build long-lasting resources to be utilised beyond the immediate life of the project.

Activities

It is essential that the project implementer builds effective relationships to secure buy in at a policy and operational level for this project to be successful. Potential activities could include:

- training for teachers in high schools on consent education
- creating an online guide that explains the principles of consent and that can be easily accessed by students
- educational sessions for high school students on consent
- campaigns targeting young people, promoting consent
- pilot projects that can be used as an evidence base to promote further education on consent

This is not an exhaustive list and the British Embassy welcomes innovative proposals from potential implementing partners that suggest additional or alternative activities to deliver the key objectives. We encourage creative proposals and ideas.

Project approach

British Embassy Bucharest will approve project proposals. This proposal will form the basis for project planning. The proposal should set out how the implementing partner will deliver activities to support the objectives set out above with an implementation plan and supporting activity based budget. British Embassy Bucharest will oversee the project planning and provide the necessary contacts to the implementers, including as required with Romanian authorities.

The project implementer will manage project logistics and is expected to consider the pandemic context and its possible impact on the project implementation when submitting the bid.

The Embassy will provide contact persons and focal points for UK institutions or experts that might be needed in the process, including on UK policy on education on consent.

How to bid

Our process will consist of a one-stage full bid proposal.

Bids should be completed in English. You will need to complete and submit the following documents:

Email these documents to bucharest.projects@fcdo.gov.uk and andrada.petrache@fcdo.gov.uk. The subject of the email should be: name of implementing organisation and title of the project.

The project sponsors reserve the right to request additional information from bidders before making a decision.

Activity based budgets should list the activities needed to deliver the outcomes (results) of the project. All costs should be in Romanian New Lei (RON).

Deadline for submitting project bids is 10 November 2022.

Reporting

The reports to be produced during the course of this project are to be delivered in English:

- an inception note detailing approach and proposed activities. This should also set out key stakeholders who will be engaged, a proposed schedule of activities, risks, safeguarding approach and any additional details, including a communications plan
- a draft report
- three monthly financial reports
- after a facilitated process of commenting, the final report

Composition of the project teams

The British Embassy Bucharest will nominate a Project Director, British Embassy Bucharest (Goran Mandic, 1st Secretary) and a Project Manager, (Andrada Petrache, Senior Political Officer) to oversee the project delivery.

Project proposals should demonstrate that the implementing partner's staffing levels are appropriate to deliver the aims of the project and that the staff have relevant expertise and experience in working on prevention of sexual assault and gender based violence, and education on these topics in Romania, as well as detailed knowledge of the Romanian context. They should also have a demonstrable track record of working with young people and the education system in Romania.

Timing and scope of input

The bidding round is an open and competitive process, assessed by British Embassy Bucharest. The selected partner will be contacted by mid November. Once a bid is approved, a Grant Agreement will be signed with the successful bidders. In the documents section you will find an example of a Grant Agreement.

Your organisation will be expected to sign the contract within one week of the funds being awarded. Failure to do so may result in the funds being re-

allocated. The implementing organisation will be required to submit report updates and a final evaluation of the project.

There are no pre-payments. Reimbursements will be completed once activities have taken place and all receipts submitted. Implementing organisations will request repayments using an invoice (including receipts and a financial report of spend) and the repayments will be carried out during those dates agreed upon in the respective contract.

The budget should be presented in Romanian New Lei (RON). All payments will be made in RON to a bank account held in Romania.

Please send any questions regarding the call for bids to andrada.petrache@fcdo.gov.uk.

It is expected that the project will be carried out from mid-November 2022 to end March 2023. The crucial milestones will be:

- the submission of the draft report: January 2023
- final report: March 2023

Budget

Grant applications must include an estimated budget of at least 48,500 RON.

Depending on the quality of the proposals, the British Embassy reserves the right not to grant all or part of the available funds. The Embassy also reserves the right to award a grant of less than the amount requested by the applicants. In such a case, applicants will be asked to increase the amount that they co-finance, to propose other co-financing means or to decrease the total costs without altering the substance of the proposal.

Over 50,000 female police officers now in forces

The figure of 50,364 women in the 43 police forces achieved today means there are now more female police officers pursuing criminals and serving the public than since records began – making up 34.9% of the overall workforce. Of the recruits hired since April 2020, 42.5% (13,326) are women.

The government is on track to deliver its manifesto commitment to recruit 20,000 additional officers by March 2023, with 15,343 extra police now hired – making up 77% of the target.

The new recruits are already having a positive impact in forces across England and Wales. For example, Avon and Somerset Police has put more

officers into responding to rape and sexual assault through its Operation Soteria following the [Police Uplift Programme](#) and Lancashire Constabulary has expanded its Missing From Home Community Safety Officer team to track down missing children and protect those at risk of exploitation.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman said:

As Home Secretary my first priority is to protect the British public from harm and I am absolutely steadfast in my determination to drive down crime.

That's why I am delighted the government is on track to deliver 20,000 additional police officers by March 2023, with 15,343 already recruited to bring criminals to justice.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for forces to become more representative of the communities they serve and I am heartened to see there are now over 50,000 women in forces across England and Wales for the first time.

With the extra officers recruited I want to continue to see forces doubling down on tackling murder, serious violence and neighbourhood crimes which tear communities apart.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Workforce Diversity and Representation, Deputy Chief Constable Rachel Kearton, said:

Reaching 50,000 female police officers is a really positive milestone. The uplift programme has seen many more women apply to join policing across a range of roles and responsibilities.

We welcome applications from people of all backgrounds – regardless of their age, gender, race, faith or sexual orientation. By increasing diversity we will better represent our communities and those who we police by consent.

We know that more needs to be done to ensure that women see policing as an attractive career and as we continue through the police uplift, we hope this positive increase continues.

A recent Home Office survey showed that job satisfaction was 90% for new recruits who have joined the police as part of the government's recruitment campaign, 79% of new recruits have had their expectations of joining the police met or exceeded, whilst 81% intend to stay in the police for the rest of their working lives.

Compared to other roles in the public sector, voluntary resignations in policing are low at 2.5%.

Total police funding has increased by up to £1.1 billion this year, providing up to £16.9 billion for the policing system. In addition, every police officer received a £1,900 uplift to their salary this year which equalled up to an 8.8% increase for those on the lower salary bands.

All recruits must meet the standards set by the College of Policing and the government has worked with chief constables and the college to modernise, standardise and increase resilience in the recruitment process to ensure forces are able to hire the additional officers to keep communities safe.

Anyone interested in applying to their local force can search [Join the Police](#) to find out more.

[Changes to business rates rules for self-catering properties](#)

From April 2023, new eligibility rules for business rates will apply to self-catering properties in England and Wales.

If you don't meet these rules your property will become eligible for paying Council Tax.

The rules will be used in assessments from 1 April 2023. The information about lettings during the 2022/23 operating year will be used to determine whether a property is eligible.

The changes

The new eligibility rules are different depending on whether your property is in England or Wales.

If your property is in England:

To continue to be eligible for business rates, from 1 April 2023 your property must be:

- available for letting commercially for short periods that total **140 days** or more in the previous and current year.
- actually let commercially for **70 days** or more in the previous 12 months.

If your property is in Wales:

To continue to be eligible for business rates, from 1 April 2023 your property must be:

- available to let commercially for short periods that total **252 days** or more in the previous and current year.

- actually let commercially for **182 days** or more in the previous 12 months.

What being let commercially means

When we talk about commercially let properties, we mean properties that are let with the intention of making a profit. This usually means the property is let at market rates and actively advertised. For example, using holiday cottage websites, estate agents, and tourist web pages to advertise the property.

Any non-commercial lettings, for example lettings to family and friends for amounts below the market rates, would not count towards commercial lettings.

Who is affected

The new rules apply only to properties classified as self-catering holiday lets by the VOA within the broad use category of short stay accommodation . They don't apply to other types of accommodation in this category, such as hotels, hostels and guest houses.

There won't be any exceptions in the application of the new eligibility rules. They will apply equally to all self-catering properties across England and Wales.

New self-catering properties will be liable for Council Tax until the property meets the eligibility rules.

When properties will be assessed using the new rules

Valuation officers conduct a rolling programme to check that properties listed as self-catering properties in the non-domestic rating list meet the eligibility rules. A valuation officer will ask for this information in the 'Request for Information' form, which will be sent to you at a later date. It will consider whether you meet the new rules on your actual lettings for your property in 2022/23.

The rolling programme means we will ask customers to give us information at different times during the 2023/24 operating year. But we will be using a universal date, from which we will assess whether the new eligibility rules have been met, of 01 April 2023.

The new eligibility rules will be used in assessments made from 1 April 2023.

Properties may also be reassessed for other reasons. For example, if there has been a change of circumstances or a change of use.

We usually tell customers to tell us as soon as they know about a change in circumstances, such as a self-catering property no longer being used this way. This is so we can add it to the Council Tax Valuation List, and your local council can contact you about your Council Tax bill.

But you don't need to tell the VOA if you know you won't meet the new

eligibility roles on lettings until after 01 April 2023. This is because we can't make changes to the Rating List on the new eligibility criteria until it comes into force.

The information used in assessments

The VOA issues forms called 'Requests for Information'. One of them has been designed specifically for self-catering units and holiday cottages. The information provided on this form is used to check that the eligibility rules for self-catering properties are met.

It's important that you return this form in time – you will be liable to a financial penalty otherwise. It's also important to complete it accurately, as it's a legal document and there can be serious consequences for including false information, including prosecution.

Support available

There are a number of reliefs available to assist businesses, including the [Small Business Rates Relief scheme \(SBRR\)](#). You can find out more about reliefs by contacting your local council.

Any questions about business rates or Council Tax payments should be made to your local council.

[Urgent action to protect children with disabilities from abuse](#)

A national review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs has revealed serious failures at 3 residential special schools registered as children's homes. The independent review looks at the experiences of 108 children and young adults living at Fullerton House, Wilsic Hall and Wheatley House, located in Doncaster and operated by the Hesley Group.

The report shows a culture of abuse and harm, including evidence of physical abuse and violence, neglect, emotional abuse and sexual harm. There was also evidence that medication was misused and maladministered, an over-use of restraints, and unsafe and inappropriate use of temporary confinement. The children affected were placed at these homes from 55 local authorities across the country and there is a complex abuse investigation underway by the Doncaster Safeguarding Partnership, which includes a concurrent criminal investigation by South Yorkshire Police.

Given the severity of the allegations and evidence uncovered, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has issued an urgent action to all local

authorities to ensure all children with complex needs and disabilities currently living in similar children's homes are safe and well.

Panel Chair, Annie Hudson said:

This national review seeks to make sense of how and why a significant number of children with disabilities and complex needs came to suffer very serious abuse and neglect whilst living in 3 privately provided residential settings.

Our evidence shows that the system of checks and balances which should have detected that things were going wrong simply did not work.

While there are many skilled professionals who work with children with disabilities, we are concerned that these are not isolated incidents. That's why we have asked all local authorities and Ofsted to take urgent action to ensure all children living in similar circumstances are safe and well.

Lead Panel Member for the review, Dr Susan Tranter, said:

Children with disabilities and complex health needs are some of the most vulnerable in our society but they are too often overlooked and forgotten.

Following allegations that a significant number of children who were living far away from home, often with limited communication skills, were trapped in settings where systemic and sustained abuse was inflicted with no respite, we spoke to those responsible for placing the children in these settings and for checking on their welfare to understand exactly what went wrong.

It is clear to us that the standards of practice in care are failing to meet the needs of children with complex needs. The second phase of this national review will explore the systemic issues in children's social care, health and education that must be addressed to ensure we learn from these horrific incidents and to prevent this from happening again.

Dame Christine Lenehan, Strategic Director of the National Children's Bureau and Council for Disabled Children, said:

This review demonstrates that the residential settings responsible for taking care of these children did not have a clear vision to safeguard them from abuse. The lack of accountability across the residential care system means there is too little ownership for the safety of children with complex needs and, as a consequence, many

have suffered, or are at risk of suffering, harm and abuse. We urgently need a shift in thinking, so that these children's rights to live safely in supportive and nurturing homes is guaranteed.

While the complex abuse investigation will hold to account those directly involved in the harm of these children, the national review found that the safety net that should have identified and responded to this abuse failed to act on concerns.

The [phase one report](#) sets out that Ofsted had received a number of complaints dating back to at least 2015, expressing concerns over staffing levels, staff conduct and possible abuse of the children. These complaints had promoted additional monitoring visits and an emergency inspection, but the review has found these were insufficient as both settings had been judged 'good' by Ofsted at the most recent inspection visit. In light of the most recent allegations, Ofsted conducted emergency inspections of the settings in March 2021 and notices of suspension of the service were served.

Additionally, local authorities and partner agencies placing children at these homes put great reliance on the reports provided by the settings despite professionals in different roles having separate information indicating concerns. The processes in place for bringing together information from a range of sources to analyse the pattern of safeguarding concerns was not effective.

To address these, the panel has requested local authorities and Ofsted to undertake urgent action:

- local authorities should review complaints and concerns relating to the workforce in each individual residential special school registered as a children's home over the last three years, and ensure these have been appropriately actioned
- OFSTED should conduct an immediate analysis of their evidence around workforce sufficiency focusing on suitability, training and support

The panel has been assured that the urgent actions will be completed by the end of November 2022. A second phase of this review will be published in early 2023, setting out the progress against the urgent actions and providing recommendations to government to improve safeguarding in the residential special school and care system.

The independent national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel is an independent body that was set up in July 2018 to identify, commission and oversee reviews of serious child safeguarding cases. It brings together experts from social care, policing, health, education and the third sector to provide a multi-agency view on cases which they believe raise issues that are complex, or of national importance.

On 5 March 2021, the Doncaster Safeguarding Partnership agreed to initiate a complex abuse investigation (Operation Lemur Alpha) into the 3 specialist residential settings run by the Hesley Group. This was in response to

information gathered following a whistleblowing referral reporting 12 allegations of abuse and concerns for children in Fullerton House, which was received by the Doncaster Children Services Trust on 26 February 2021. Further information about the criminal investigation should be referred to South Yorkshire Police, and about the wider complex abuse investigation should be referred to Doncaster Council – contact details available on request.

These matters were formally reported by the Doncaster Safeguarding Partnership to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in September 2021. The review was formally launched in January 2022. The terms of reference for the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings](#) is available on GOV.UK. The panel has worked in close co-operation with Doncaster Safeguarding Partners to deliver this phase one review report.

Any families who have concerns about a child can find more information on the [Council for Disabled Children's website](#).