

# The Domestic Abuse Report 2022: Early Release

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A first look at findings on the provision and usage of domestic abuse services in England in 2020-21



**women's aid**  
until women & children are safe

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With support from Women's Aid staff

## Acknowledgements

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Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Over the past 47 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs.

We are a federation of over 170 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. We hold the largest national data set on domestic abuse, and use research and evidence to inform all of our work. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Our support services, which include our Live Chat Helpline, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people in their first relationships), the national Domestic Abuse Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year. [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) [www.loverespect.co.uk](http://www.loverespect.co.uk)

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## Introduction

*The Annual Audit – Early Release* presents information on the provision and usage of domestic abuse services in England. The information in this report is usually published alongside findings from our Annual Survey as part of our series of Domestic Abuse Report publications, which offer a comprehensive evidence base on the national picture of domestic abuse support work year on year.

This year, we are releasing a selection of information ahead of the full report in order to ensure that key data are made available at the earliest opportunity. The information will also be published in *The Domestic Abuse Report 2022: The Annual Audit* in early 2022.

The information released in this publication answers the following key research questions:

1. What are the needs and experiences of survivors accessing domestic abuse support services?
2. What is the scope and nature of domestic abuse service provision in England?
3. What impact has Covid-19 had on the usage and provision of domestic abuse services in England?

The full publication will also use findings from the Annual Survey of domestic abuse services in England<sup>1</sup> to explore the experiences of local services and in particular look at the initial impact of the statutory duty on local authorities to provide safe accommodation, which was introduced in the Domestic Abuse Act<sup>2</sup>. The full report will ask two additional questions:

1. To what extent are domestic abuse services commissioned by local authorities?
2. What has been the initial impact of the statutory duty on refuges and safe accommodation?

Copies of all editions of The Domestic Abuse Report can be downloaded free online at: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/evidence-hub/>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Annual Survey please see our online [Evidence Hub](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places “a duty on local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-overarching-factsheet>

The information being shared in this release covers the numbers of women and children supported by domestic abuse support services across England, as well as what we know about their support needs and experiences of abuse.

In Section 2 of this report, we see that domestic abuse services continue to offer a wide range of service types, though the number delivering some service types fell. The most significant change was in the number of counselling services, with the number of local services providing counselling decreasing by 15. Finally we look at demand for service provision and the journeys women take to access refuge.

## Data sources used for this report

The evidence shown in this early release comes entirely from Women's Aid's two administrative data sources, On Track and Routes to Support. These are a vital part of the evidence base we hold at Women's Aid, and give us a unique insight into the provision, use of and demand for domestic abuse support services across the country. In addition, they provide invaluable tools to frontline staff in the sector and improve outcomes for survivors across the country. To find out more about Women's Aid's evidence base, including On Track and Routes to Support, and how they might support you visit our online Evidence Hub at [www.womensaid.org.uk/evidence-hub](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/evidence-hub)

### On Track: The Women's Aid case management and outcomes monitoring system

On Track provides local domestic abuse services with a case management and outcomes monitoring system. The system provides them with the information they need to report to funders, evaluate their services and improve their understanding of survivor's needs, while the case management tools support them to provide vital life-saving support to survivors and their children. On Track's outcomes monitoring tools are based on the Imkaan<sup>3</sup> and Women's Aid Outcomes Framework. Imkaan developed and runs a sister database, Synthesis, which centres the work of 'by and for' expert organisations<sup>4</sup> for Black and minoritised women.

On Track is used by over 85 local service providers throughout England as well as being used by our own Live Chat and email support services, and the No Woman Turned Away

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/> : "We are the only UK-based, second-tier women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls i.e. women which are defined in policy terms as Black and 'Minority Ethnic' (BME)."

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1: Glossary for definition of 'by and for' expert organisations

project. Every region in England is represented by the organisations contributing data to On Track.

Through the information they collect in their daily work, services contribute to an anonymous national dataset which is held by Women's Aid. At the time of writing (July 2021) On Track contains information on 138,225 survivors who have accessed domestic abuse services since the system was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.

On Track's national data includes a range of information about survivors' journeys, both for adults and for children and young people accessing domestic abuse support services. On Track records data on referral patterns, experiences of abuse, support needs, survivor demographics, support provided, outcomes, feedback and negative experiences of external services (e.g. housing, legal services, local authority safeguarding, NHS, police).

## Routes to Support

Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland. Routes to Support is part funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The resource provides violence against women and girls services with 24-hour access to information that supports their work. Sophisticated search tools can identify the most suitable service for the women, children and men they are supporting. It facilitates referrals through national, regional and local helplines as well as between local services, and has been an integral part of the work of the domestic abuse sector since its creation in 2003.

During the year 2020-21 there were 178,922 logins to the site by staff at domestic abuse support services in England alone, demonstrating how widely it is used. The directory gives Women's Aid comprehensive data on the full range of all domestic abuse services including, but not limited to, those run by Women's Aid members. This includes information about the types of domestic abuse services provided, the number of bed spaces available in refuge services, the people supported by these services and changes to provision over time. The directory is updated on a rolling basis by dedicated staff at Women's Aid, meaning each entry is fully updated every year in addition to any updates received from services during the year. Entries are added and removed throughout the year as providers change.

## Section 1: the service users

### About our sample

The first section of this report details who accessed the domestic abuse support sector (the service users) in the year 2020-21 by looking at survivors and their needs and experiences. This is done by analysing data from a sample of 34,860 female survivors recorded on On Track who finished a period of support from services using the system during the year 2020-21 from domestic abuse services using On Track. Of these:

- 3,274 survivors accessed refuge services;
- 31,586 survivors accessed community-based support (CBS) services<sup>5</sup>.
- Some survivors used both refuge and CBS services during the year, so the sum of the two figures above is more than the total sample.

Throughout the analysis presented here, we show information across the whole sample of 34,860 women (each woman represented only once even where she accessed more than one service type<sup>6</sup>). We only highlight comparative demographics between refuge and CBS services where there is a noteworthy difference in the results.

Women and children escaping abuse come from all backgrounds, have a diverse range of experiences, and require support that meets their needs. This report presents demographic information on service users. It does not set out to explain or analyse the needs and experiences of different groups of women. However, we know that for many women and girls, their experiences and support journeys will be shaped by multiple, often intersecting, inequalities, and the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted more than ever the stark impact of these inequalities (Imkaan, 2020; Runnymede, 2020; Sisters of Frida, 2020).

We are looking at women who have successfully accessed support services. There are many survivors of domestic abuse who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to access specialist help, or are delayed in doing so for a long time. If we were to look at a profile of support needs and demographic background for these survivors, it would likely be different to that of the survivors in our sample from On Track. This is because accessibility is about more than just availability of space in a refuge or a place in a CBS service; when looking at whether provision meets need, we need to consider whether

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<sup>5</sup> Community-based services include floating support, outreach, IDVA and advocacy services

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that this only applies where a woman has accessed more than one service in the same organisation. The data provided from each organisation is independent and therefore if a woman accessed different services from different organisations she would be counted twice in our analysis.

services that are available can meet the needs of diverse women. As Section 2 of this report shows, not all services are resourced to provide for women with specific support needs such as substance use, mental health support, communication or accessibility/mobility; or to accommodate a service user's children and any support and access needs the children may have. This includes the needs of minoritised women and children whose experiences will have been shaped by multiple forms of oppression and discrimination.

Women's Aid's No Woman Turned Away project has consistently found that the most minoritised women tend to face the greatest barriers in their search for refuge provision, with intersecting structural barriers and inequalities (such as poor agency responses or exclusion on the basis on immigration status) impacting on women's ability to access appropriate safety and protection (Women's Aid, 2021a).

## Key findings

Our analysis of national On Track data gives us the following key findings. Our sample was 34,860 survivors (supported by 71 organisations running 199 domestic abuse services in England and using On Track during 2020-21).

1. Most women accessing services have children:
  - 60% of service users in community-based services (CBS) services had children<sup>7</sup> and 5.9% were pregnant<sup>8</sup>.
  - 59.7% of women in refuge services had children<sup>9</sup> and 7.3% were pregnant<sup>10</sup>. There were 42,598 children of service users in the sample, averaging 1.2 children per service user across all services.
2. Immigration status and the associated challenges in accessing benefits continue to be significant barrier for women who are trying to access support:
  - 30% (1,223) of those who weren't British nationals did not have access to public funds and 9.5% did not know if they had recourse to public funds.
3. Abuse can take a range of different forms and can last for a significant length of time:
  - The length of abuse experienced ranged from less than a month to 66 years; the average was six years<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Missing data unknown

<sup>8</sup> Missing data= 0.1%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know= 10%; Not Asked= 3.8%

<sup>9</sup> Missing data unknown

<sup>10</sup> Declined=0%; Don't know=2.6; Not asked= 1.1%

<sup>11</sup> Base (n=12350); Those who are experiencing/ have experienced abuse within the last year



- 88% of a sub-sample of service users<sup>12</sup> had experienced emotional abuse and 66.6% had experienced jealous or controlling behaviour.
  - 35.2% of service users in a sub-sample<sup>13</sup> reported feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts as a result of the abuse. In CBS, this was 34.0% of service users and in refuge services the percentage was much higher at 45.6%.
  - 37.6% of service users disclosed having support needs around their mental health; for service users in CBS, this was 36.3% and for those in refuge services this was higher at 49.2%.
4. Domestic abuse continues to be gendered:
- 94.3% of perpetrators were male<sup>14</sup>.
5. The need for mental health support continues to be prevalent:
- 37.6% of service users had support needs around their mental health<sup>15</sup>.
  - 35.1% of service users from a sub-sample of 31,396 abuse profiles reported feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts as a result of the abuse. In CBS, this was 34.0% of service users and in refuge services the percentage was much higher at 45.6%.

### Note on comparisons

This report presents data on service users under many of the same categories presented in the previous report, *The Domestic Abuse Report 2021: The Annual Audit*. Although this may appear to show change over time, we cannot be confident that we are measuring change over time in service user profiles; rather, we are measuring difference between two samples of service users. With more organisations joining On Track the sample is changing year on year. Although we are consistent with our methodology and analysis, we cannot be sure that differences between them are the result of change due to time passing rather than other factors, for example structural inequalities faced by minoritised people, and differences in representation of minoritised people in each sample.

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<sup>12</sup> From sub-sample of 25,988 community-based and refuge service users within the overall sample of 34,860 for whom an abuse profile on current abuse is available

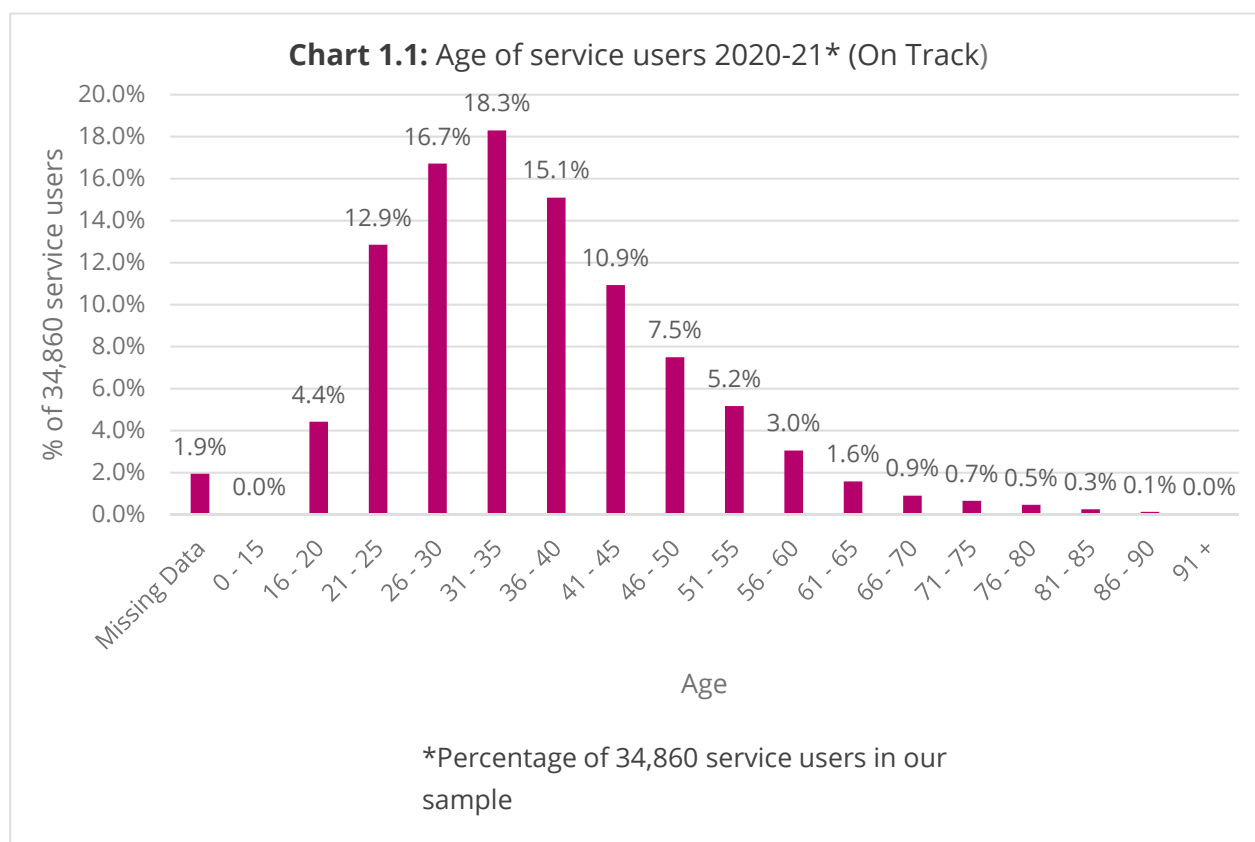
<sup>13</sup> A sub-sample of 31,396 abuse profiles (3,194 refuge and 28, 201 CBS), includes both historic and current abuse.

<sup>14</sup> These are the perpetrators recorded on On Track in cases of domestic abuse against female service users. Information about perpetrators was recorded in 29, 841 cases, there was not a perpetrator(s) recorded for every service user and some service users had multiple perpetrators recorded. Service users where no alleged perpetrator recorded: 5046.

<sup>15</sup> Missing data= 0.3%; Declined to answer= 0.2%; Don't know= 12.6%; Not asked= 4.6%

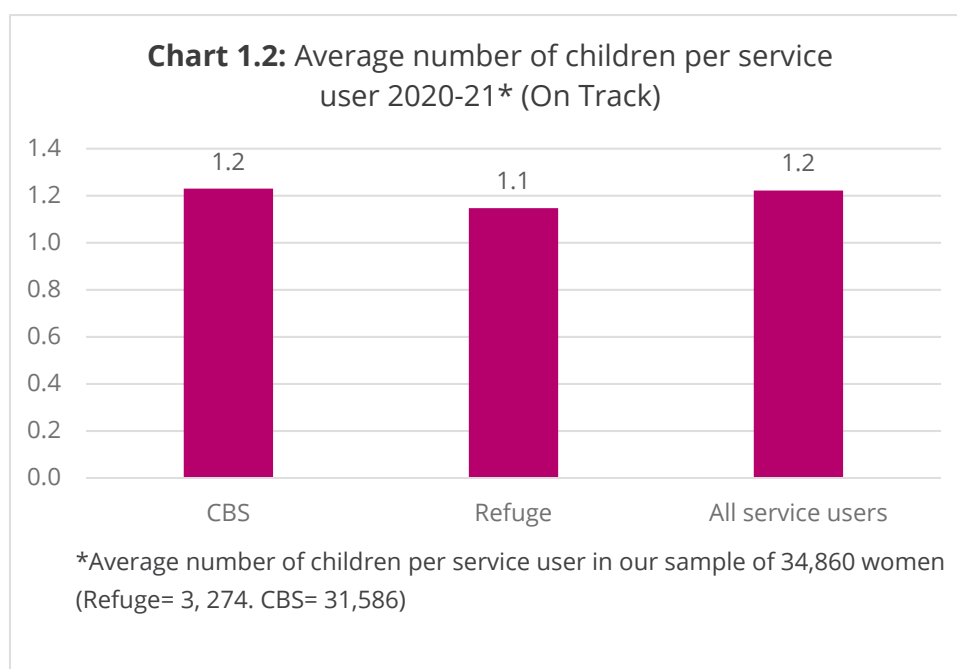
## 1.2 Age

- The ages of survivors in our sample ranged from under 18 to over 91, with the most common age group being 31-35 years (18.3%), closely followed by 26-30 years (16.7%) and 36-40 (15.1%).
- Older women were underrepresented in the sample. Only 4.0% of service users in the total sample were 61 or over and this fell to 1.6% in refuge services. This is unlikely to reflect need, as we know that older women experience particular barriers in accessing support (Age UK, 2019). The most recent *Femicide Census Report* showed that between 2009 and 2018, 14% of femicide victims were aged 66 and over. Of these, 34% were killed by intimate partners, and 25% by their sons (Femicide Census, 2020).
- Although the Crime Survey for England and Wales does not capture the experiences of older women, with their sample not exceeding women over the age of 74, it can be used to demonstrate that young women are an at-risk group for domestic abuse. In the year ending March 2020 women aged 16 to 19 years were significantly more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last year than women aged 25 years and over (ONS, 2020).



### 1.3 Children

- There were 42,598 children of service users in the sample, averaging 1.2 children per service user across all services.
- 60% of service users in CBS services had children<sup>16</sup> and 5.9% were pregnant<sup>17</sup>. On average there were 1.2 children per service user<sup>18</sup>.
- 59.7% of women in refuge services had children<sup>19</sup> and 7.3% were pregnant<sup>20</sup>. On average, there were 1.1 children per service user<sup>21</sup>.
- 21,910 service users within the 34,860 sample had children.



<sup>16</sup> Missing data unknown

<sup>17</sup> Missing data= 0.1%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know= 10%; Not Asked= 3.8%

<sup>18</sup> Missing data unknown

<sup>19</sup> Missing data unknown

<sup>20</sup> Declined=0%; Don't know=2.6; Not asked= 1.1%

<sup>21</sup> Missing data unknown

## 1.4 Disability

- Overall, 24.5% of all survivors in the sample had at least one disability that they disclosed<sup>22</sup>.
- In refuge services 27.5% of all service users reported having a disability; the most common disability reported amongst all service users was having a mental health condition (29.6%), and 7.4% had more than one disability.
- In CBS services 24.2% of all service users were disabled; similar to refuge services, a mental health condition was the most common disability (16%) and 6.0% had more than one disability.

Women with physical disabilities make up a small percentage of women using domestic abuse services, although we know that disabled women are more likely to experience domestic abuse (14.7% of disabled women experienced domestic abuse in the last year compared to 6.0% of women who were not disabled (ONS, 2020)). Of the survivors in the sample, only 9% of women in refuge had physical disabilities, yet demand is likely be much higher than the accessible space available. As detailed in Section 2.6, only 1.2% of refuge vacancies listed on Routes to Support in 2020-21 were suitable for a woman with limited mobility and just 1.4% of vacancies could accommodate a woman requiring a wheelchair accessible space.

## 1.5 Sexual orientation and gender identity

- 2.2% of service users overall (781) identified as lesbian, bisexual, gay, asexual, pansexual or queer<sup>23</sup>. In refuge, this number was 2.9%<sup>24</sup> and in CBS it was 2.2%<sup>25</sup>.
- 0.6% of services users overall (225) were trans<sup>26</sup>.

It is important to note that 13.9% of women did not disclose or were not asked about their sexual orientation<sup>27</sup> and 10.6% did not disclose or were not asked whether they were trans<sup>28</sup>. As we know from research on LGBT+ survivors experiences of abuse,

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<sup>22</sup> Missing data= 0%; Don't know= 9.1%; Not Asked= 4.6%; Declined to answer= 0.1%

<sup>23</sup> Missing data= 0%; Not asked= 0%; Not specified= 0%; Declined to answer= 0.4%; Don't know= 7.4%; Other= 0.1%

<sup>24</sup> Don't know= 2.3%; Not asked= 5.3%; Other= 0.1%

<sup>25</sup> Missing data= 0%; Not asked= 0%; Not specified =0%; Don't know= 7.9%; ; Not asked 6.7%; Not recorded= 0%; Other= 0.1%

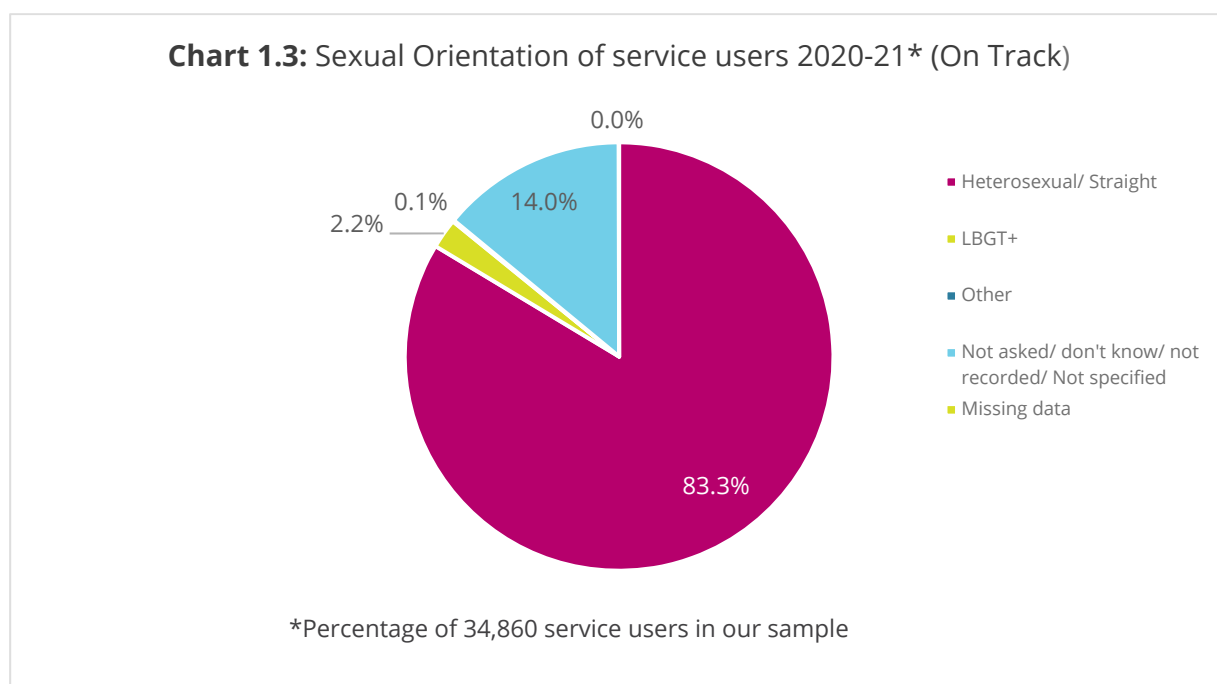
<sup>26</sup> Missing data= 0%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know= 5.4%; Not asked= 5.1%; Not recorded= 0%

<sup>27</sup> Missing data= 0.0%; Not asked 0.0%; Not specified= 0.0%; Don't know 7.4%; Not asked 6.5%; Not recorded 0.0%

<sup>28</sup> Missing data= 0.0%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't Know= 5.4%; Not asked= 5.1%; Not recorded= 0.0%

survivors experience a range of challenges in accessing support (Stonewall, 2018; Gallop, 2020), so it may be that these women did not feel comfortable disclosing or did not feel it was necessary. This is important to consider as there are only five services exclusively for LGBT+ survivors on Routes to Support.

Sexual orientation data should not be used to assume the gender of the perpetrator(s). For example, a service user may be lesbian but the perpetrator(s) may be a male intimate ex-partner or family member/members<sup>29</sup>.



<sup>29</sup> On Track collects information about female and male survivors and survivors who do not define as male or female. This report only presents data from those who have self-defined as female.

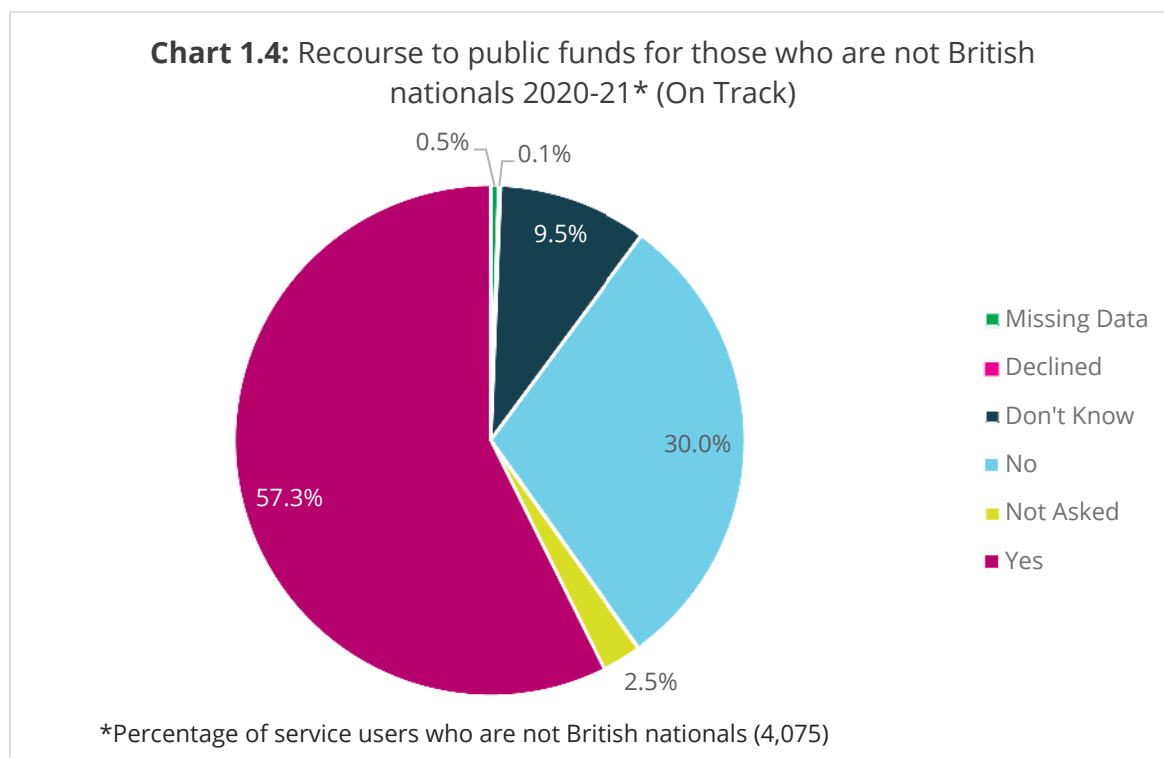
## 1.6 Ethnicity

- Almost two thirds of service users (62.8%) were White British.
- 8.9% of services users were from Asian/Asian British ethnic backgrounds, and 6.2% were from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnic backgrounds.

<b>Table 1.1: What are the ethnic backgrounds of service users? 2020-21 (On Track)</b>	<b>%</b>
Missing data	0.9%
<b>Asian/Asian British</b>	
Indian	1.7%
Pakistani	3.8%
Bangladeshi	1.0%
Chinese	0.3%
Any other Asian background, please describe	2.1%
<b>Black/African/Caribbean/Black British</b>	
African	3.4%
Caribbean	1.5%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe	1.2%
<b>Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Background</b>	
White and Black Caribbean	1.3%
White and Black African	0.3%
White and Asian	0.3%
Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe	1.0%
<b>Other Ethnic group</b>	
Arab	0.8%
Any other ethnic group, please describe	1.3%
<b>White</b>	
British	62.9%
Irish	0.6%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.3%
Eastern European	3.8%
Any other White background, please describe	3.0%
<b>Don't know</b>	5.5%
<b>Not asked</b>	2.9%
<b>Declined</b>	0.2%

## 1.7 Nationality and citizenship

- Of the service users who were not British nationals (4,075), 30% (1,223) had no recourse to public funds<sup>30</sup>.
- 29.6% of service users in CBS did not have recourse to public funds, this rose slightly to 31.8% of those in refuge.
- It is important to note that 9.5% of women did not know if they had recourse to public funds.
- Service users who were not British nationals had a wide range of immigration statuses. Most common was indefinite leave to remain (19.7%), followed by spouse visa (15.9%).
- There was a higher percentage of service users with indefinite leave to remain in refuge than using CBS (11.8% compared to 5.4%).



<sup>30</sup> Missing data= 0.5%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know 9.5%; Not asked= 2.5%

<b>Table 1.2: What are the immigration statuses of service users (of those who are not British nationals)? 2020-21 (On Track)</b>	<b>%</b>
Indefinite leave to remain (ILR)	19.5%
Spouse visa	15.9%
EEA national currently working	9.9%
Unclear/unknown	7.2%
Limited leave to remain	6.7%
UK national	6.4%
EEA national other	5.5%
EEA national receiving welfare benefits	5.1%
EEA family member	4.4%
Not asked	4.0%
Insecure/no status	3.3%
Dependant on husband's/wife's visa	2.6%
Asylum seeker awaiting decision	2.0%
Discretionary leave to remain	1.8%
Refugee	1.2%
EEA national financially self-supporting	1.1%
Study visa	1.1%
Work visa(s)	1.1%
Visitor's visa	0.5%
Missing data	0.3%
EEA national in UK studying	0.2%
Declined	0.2%
Settled status	0.1%
British/EU national	0.0%
Humanitarian protection	0.0%
Husband/wife sponsorship	0.0%



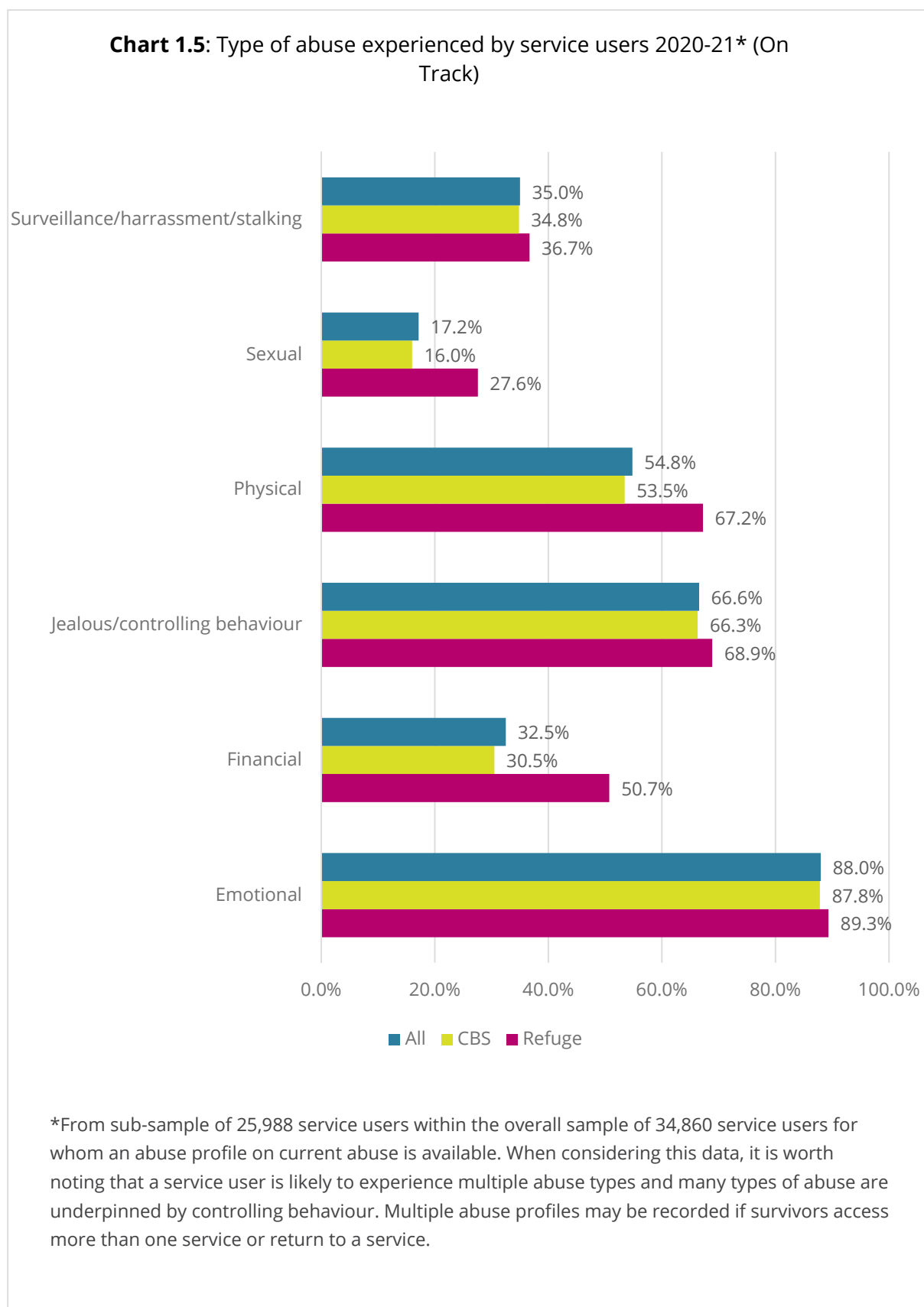
## 1.8 Experiences of abuse

- The length of abuse experienced before accessing the support service ranged from less than a month to 66 years; the average length was six years. 35 women who were supported reported experiencing over 50 years of abuse.
- 94.3% of perpetrators were male<sup>31</sup>.
- 87.8% of a sub-sample of service users<sup>32</sup> had experienced emotional abuse and 66.6% had experienced jealous or controlling behaviour.
- 54.8% of this sub-sample had experienced physical abuse. In refuge the number was much higher at 67.2%.
- 50.7% of service users in refuge, and 30.5% of CBS users in the sub-sample had experienced financial abuse. The economics of abuse however, can spread wider than financial abuse from a perpetrator, with many survivors facing additional economic and housing challenges after leaving the relationship (Women's Aid, 2019).
- 36.7% of service users in refuge in the sub-sample, and 34.8% of CBS users had experienced surveillance, harassment or stalking.
- 16% of service users using CBS in the sub-sample had experienced sexual abuse; this was much higher for those using refuge support (27.6%).

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<sup>31</sup> These are the perpetrators recorded on On Track in cases of domestic abuse against female service users. Information about perpetrators was recorded in 29,841 cases, there was not a perpetrator(s) recorded for every service user and some service users had multiple perpetrators recorded. Service users where no alleged perpetrator recorded: 5046.

<sup>32</sup> From sub-sample of 25,988 community-based and refuge service users within the overall sample of 34,860 for whom an abuse profile on current abuse is available

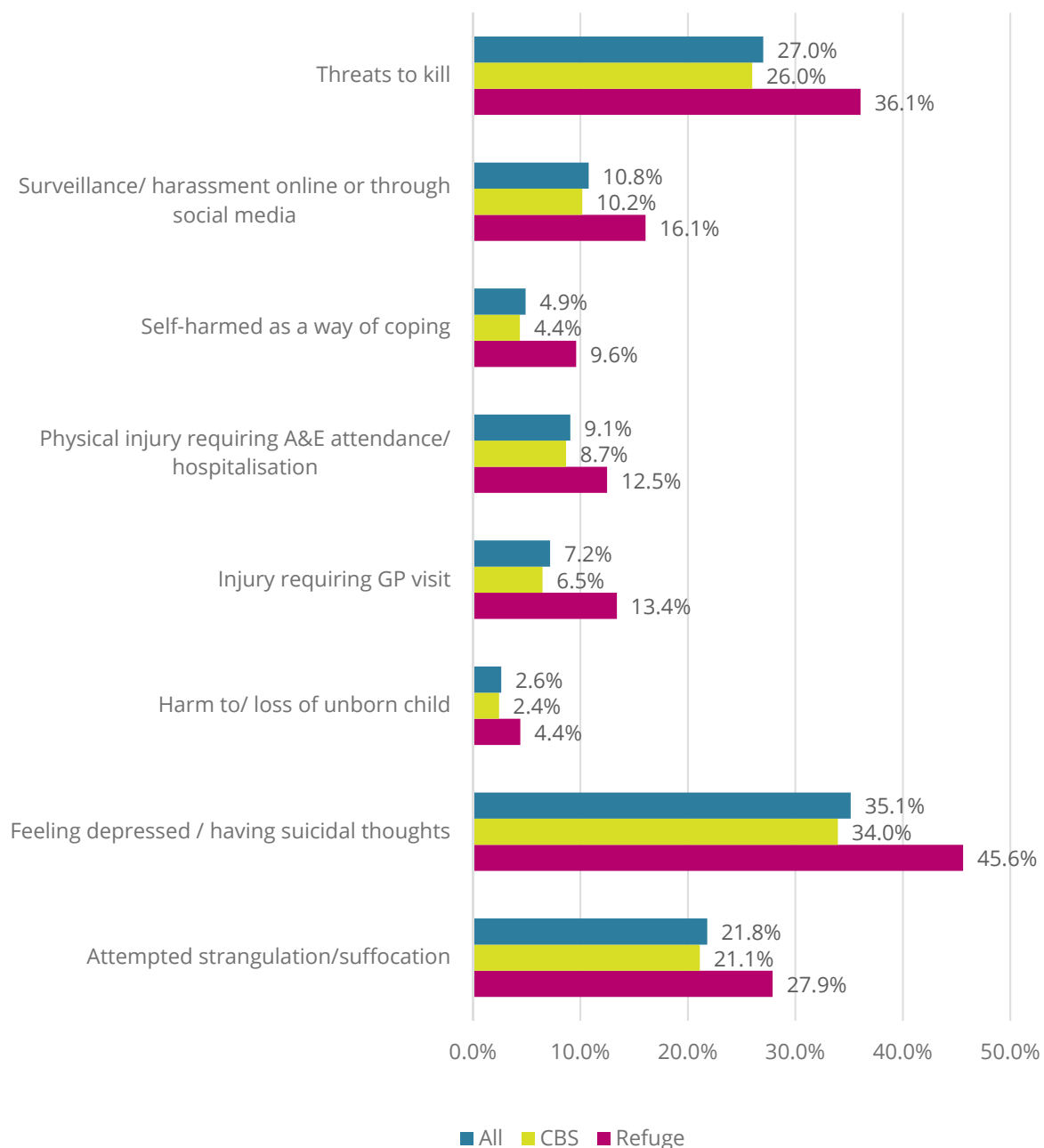


- 21.8 % of a sub-sample of service users<sup>33</sup> had experienced attempted strangulation or suffocation. In refuge the percentage was 27.9% and in CBS it was 21.1%. Under the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021, it is worth noting that non-fatal strangulation is now a criminal offence.
- 27.0% of this sub-sample had experienced threats to kill. In refuge the percentage was 36.1% and in CBS it was 26.0%.
- 35.1% of service users in this sub-sample reported feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts as a result of the abuse. In CBS, this was 34.0% of service users and in refuge services the percentage was much higher at 45.6%.
- 9.6% of refuge service users in this sub-sample said they had self-harmed as a way of dealing with the abuse.

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<sup>33</sup> A sub-sample of 31,396 abuse profiles (3,194 refuge and 28, 201 CBS) , includes both historic and current abuse.

**Chart 1.6:** Type of abuse experienced by service users 2020-21\* (On Track)



\*From a sub-sample of 31,395 CBS and refuge service users within the overall sample of 34,860 for whom an abuse profile is available. Of these 34,860 service users, 21,469 were seeking support for current abuse and 5,907 were seeking support for historic abuse. This information was missing for 2,042 service users (some service users were seeking support for both current and historic abuse). Multiple abuse profiles may be recorded if survivors access multiple services or return to a service within the reporting period.

## 1.9 Support needs

- 37.6% of service users had support needs around their mental health<sup>34</sup>; for service users in CBS, this was 36.3%<sup>35</sup> and for those in refuge services this was higher at 49.2%<sup>36</sup>. 5.8% of service users had a 'dual diagnosis' - support needs for their mental health as well as support needs around alcohol and/or drug issues.
- 10.9% had support needs around their physical health<sup>37</sup>; for service users in CBS this was 10.4%<sup>38</sup> and for those in refuge services this was higher at 16.2%<sup>39</sup>.
- 5.3% of women accessing support services required an interpreter for a spoken language other than English<sup>40</sup>.
- 0.7% were d/Deaf<sup>41</sup> or hearing impaired, some of whom will require a British Sign Language interpreter or other forms of reasonable adjustment to ensure they can access support services.

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<sup>34</sup> Missing data= 0.3%; Declined to answer= 0.2%; Don't know= 12.6%; Not asked= 4.6%

<sup>35</sup> Missing data= 0.3%; Declined to answer= 0.2%; Don't know= 13.5%; Not asked= 5.0%

<sup>36</sup> Missing data= 0.1%; Declined to answer= 0.2%; Don't know= 4.1%; Not asked= 4.6%

<sup>37</sup> Missing data= 0.2%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know= 12.6%; Not asked= 5.4%

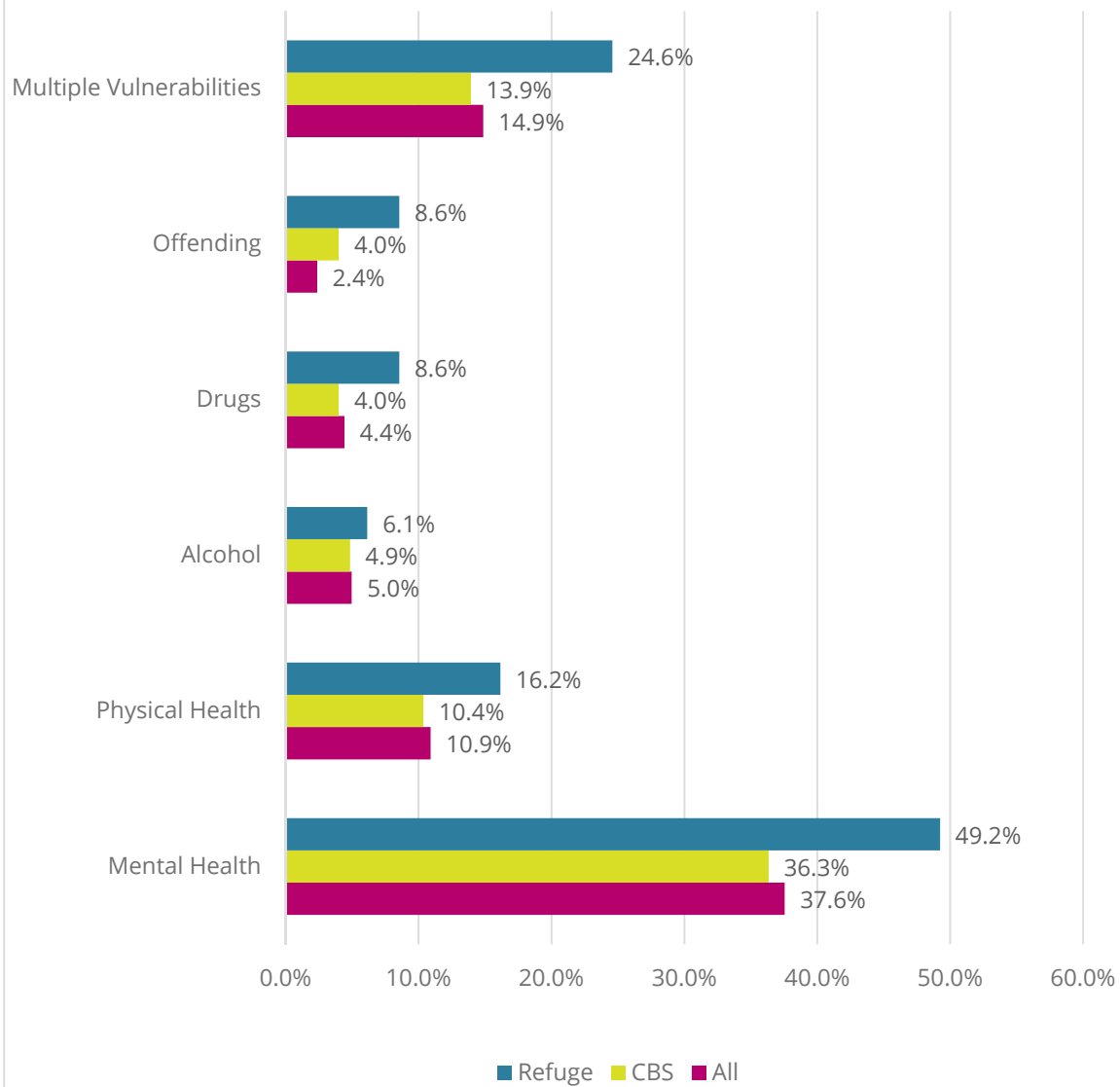
<sup>38</sup> Missing data = 0.2%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know 13.5%; Not asked= 5.8%

<sup>39</sup> Don't know = 3.2%; Not asked = 0.8%

<sup>40</sup> Missing data= 0.1%; Declined to answer= 0.1%; Don't know= 5.5%; Not asked= 1.7%

<sup>41</sup> The word deaf is used to describe or identify anyone who has a severe hearing problem. Deaf with an uppercase D is used by many organisations to refer to people who have been deaf all their lives, or since before they started to learn to talk. Many Deaf people have a sign language as their first language and may need specific language support. For more information, please see [www.signhealth.org.uk/about-deafness/deaf-or-deaf/](http://www.signhealth.org.uk/about-deafness/deaf-or-deaf/)

**Chart 1.7: Support Needs of service users 2020-21\* (On Track)**



\*Percentage of 34,860 service users in our sample. Some survivors will not have been able to access services because the service was not resourced to meet their specific support needs.

## Section 2: The provision of services

This section of the report looks at information from Routes to Support and uses a format employed in previous editions of the Annual Audit to provide the best insight into the numbers and accessibility of local domestic abuse service services in England.

### Key findings

1. Domestic abuse services continue to offer a wide range of service types:
  - On 1st May 2021, there were 229 domestic abuse service providers running 391 local services throughout England.
  - These 391 services deliver a range of service types including community-based support, open-access support such as helplines and therapeutic support like counselling. Of the 391 services, 269 included refuge services and 223 included dedicated services for children/young people.
  - Between 1st May 2020 and 1st May 2021, 20 local services had a net increase in the number of service types they offered. Only 55.0% of these had a corresponding increase in staff.
  - The number of services delivering some service types fell. The most significant change was in the number of counselling services, with the number of local services providing counselling decreasing by 15.
  - Two refuge services run exclusively for LGBT+ survivors were added to Routes to Support in 2020-21
2. We saw an increase in refuge spaces, largely due to emergency funding made available in response to the pandemic. However more needs to be done to make sure these spaces are sustainable and accessible to all:
  - The number of spaces in refuge services increased by 354 from 3,935 on 1st May 2020 to 4,289 on 1st May 2021; although this is a net change and does not give a full picture of change in the sector as it does not account for services opening or closing during the year. This is the highest increase seen in recent years, yet this figure still falls short of the number of spaces recommended by the Council of Europe by 1,366, which represents a 24.2% shortfall<sup>42</sup>. It is yet to be seen whether refuge spaces set up with emergency Covid-19 funding will remain once this funding has come to an end. We know that a significant proportion of refuge spaces, and in particular spaces in 'by and for' expert women's organisations<sup>43</sup> for Black and minoritised women,

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<sup>42</sup> Council of Europe (2008): "...safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10,000 head of population." (p. 51)

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 1: Glossary for definition of 'by and for' expert organisations

are not funded through local authority commissioning arrangements, leaving them in a precarious position and reliant on insecure funding streams (Women's Aid, 2021b).

- Many of the additional spaces made available between May 2020 and May 2021 were available to men, which means the overall number of spaces for men has increased by 55.2% (100 additional spaces). On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021 there were a total of 281 refuge spaces available to men, 23 for men only and 258 for either men or women.
- Only 6.3% of all vacancies posted on Routes to Support in 2020-2021<sup>44</sup> could consider women who had no recourse to public funds. This makes it even more challenging to assess the level of demand from this marginalised group of women.
- Less than half of refuge vacancies posted on Routes to Support in 2020-2021<sup>45</sup> could accommodate a woman with two children. This fell to less than one in five for a woman with three children.

3. Women continued to face barriers to accessing support services and travelled significant distances to seek refuge:

- 61.9% of all the referrals received in refuge services using On Track were rejected. The main reason why referrals to refuge services were rejected was a lack of space or capacity; with 26.5% of rejected referrals being for this reason. This also equates to 15.6% of all referrals received being rejected due to lack of space or capacity.
- 45.0% of all the referrals received in community-based services (see Table 2.9) were rejected (for any reason). The main reasons for rejection were that the survivor did not want support (31.4% of all those referrals were rejected), that the service was unable to contact the survivor (22.7% of all those referrals were rejected) and that the client was already in service (21.8%)
- The majority of women (79.6%) placed in refuge between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 came from a different local authority area to the refuge they moved to (2,788 out of 3,503 women<sup>46</sup>).

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<sup>44</sup> April 2020 to March 2021

<sup>45</sup> April 2020 to March 2021

<sup>46</sup> In addition to the 3,503 women for which a previous location was recorded, there were 1,771 women placed in refuge between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 for which their previous location was recorded as 'unknown'.



- The majority of women travelled to a refuge that was located within the same region<sup>47</sup> as their previous home (71.9%, 2,518 out of 3,503 women), however over a quarter of women travelled to another region to access a refuge suitable for her needs that was located in an area away from the perpetrator/s of abuse (28.1%, 985 out of 3,503 women).
4. The restrictions related to Covid-19 presented challenges to domestic abuse services and meant they had to identify new ways of providing their services:
- There were significantly fewer refuge vacancies compared to the previous year. This was largely due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic; we know services faced a range of issues related to Covid-19 that impacted on refuge availability, such as difficulties finding move-on accommodation for women, being unable to accept new referrals due to staffing capacity and having to reduce the number of women/families in the refuge to meet government guidance (Women's Aid, 2020a). Despite the overall increase in refuge spaces, there were 2060 fewer vacancies posted in 2020-21 than in 2019-20 (a fall of almost one-fifth, 19.9%). The reduction in availability was mainly in the first half of the year when pandemic restrictions were more severe. There were 26.6% fewer vacancies posted between April and September 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, falling to 8.5% fewer vacancies posted between October 2020 and March 2021 compared to the same period in the previous year.
  - Online live chat was added as service type on Routes to Support for the first time, in recognition that many local services now offer this type of service. 28 local services were recorded as running an online chat service on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

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<sup>47</sup> Region here refers to another region of England, for example, the North West of England, or another country in the UK (Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales)

## 2.1 Who are the service providers?

There were 229 domestic abuse service providers with services listed on Routes to Support in England in May 2021. These organisations were running 391 local services between them throughout England. 269 of these included refuge services and 223 included dedicated services for children/young people. Of the 229 providers, 160 (running 229 local services) are members of Women's Aid and 23 (running 28 local services) are members of Imkaan<sup>48</sup>. Of these 23 Imkaan members, 21 (26 local services) are members of both Imkaan and Women's Aid. 44 providers (running 94 local services) hold the Women's Aid National Quality Standards.<sup>49</sup>

The majority (66.8%) of local domestic abuse support services are run by dedicated providers<sup>50</sup>. Of the 269 local services with a refuge service, 65.8% of these are run by a dedicated provider. Just over a third of local domestic abuse services are run by organisations that also offer other types of services or have a wider remit, including housing associations, other charities, or local authorities. Some local services provide specialist support dedicated to certain groups of women, with 76.7% of these services being run by dedicated providers (see 2.4).

International conventions and frameworks include domestic abuse within a wider definition of violence against women and girls (VAWG), a term which also encompasses other interlinked forms of violence such as sexual violence and so called 'honour'-based violence<sup>51</sup>. Of the domestic abuse services included in this report, most also support women who have experienced/are experiencing another form of VAWG, as shown in **Table 2.1** below.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/> : "We are the only UK-based, second-tier women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls i.e. women who are defined in policy terms as Black and 'Minority Ethnic' (BME)."

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/national-quality-standards/> : "The Standards support dedicated specialist domestic abuse services by providing a set of criteria against which they can evidence their quality."

<sup>50</sup> Organisations constituted solely for the purpose of delivering violence against women and girls (VAWG) support services.

<sup>51</sup> The **Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence** recognises "the structural nature of violence against women as gender-based violence, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men"

<https://www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>

**Table 2.1:** Support for women experiencing other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), May 2021 (Routes to Support)

Form of VAWG	Number of refuges	% of refuges	Number of CBS services	% of CBS services
Female genital mutilation (FGM)	238	88.5%	221	64.6%
Forced marriage	264	98.1%	266	77.8%
So called 'honour'-based violence	253	94.1%	247	72.2%
Sexual violence	175	65.1%	186	54.4%
Trafficking	178	66.2%	164	48.0%
<b>All</b>	<b>269</b>		<b>342</b>	

We have seen a net increase of 21 local services since 1st May 2020, when 222 providers were running 370 services, compared with 229 providers running 391 services at 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021. Net change, however, does not reflect the changes to provision that happen throughout the year, for example where new services are established in some areas, others may be closing elsewhere due to lack of funding. Tendering processes can also result in services shifting to other providers over the course of the year, however this happened with less frequency in 2020-21 compared to recent years. There were 32 local services added to Routes to Support and 11 services removed from the system during 2020-21<sup>52</sup>. Of the 11 services removed from Routes to Support, five of these were removed because the tender for the service changed hands to another provider, compared to the 12 and 10 services respectively that were removed from Routes to Support due to a tender change in 2019-20 and 2018-19. This may suggest that some contracts were extended in 2020-21 to reduce disruption at a time when services were under significant pressure due to Covid-19.

<sup>52</sup> Between 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## 2.2 Specialist support for women experiencing additional inequalities

In recognition of the specific needs and experiences of women experiencing additional inequalities and the intersecting forms of discrimination that women face, there are services across the country which provide dedicated support to certain groups of women. There are 39 refuges in England which are run for a specific group of women. Availability of these services is very low: spaces in dedicated services make up just 11.4% of all refuge spaces in England, and just under half of these are in London. Not all of these services are 'by and for' expert organisations, led by women from the group they support. Of the 28 refuges which are run exclusively for Black and minoritised women, 18 are run by organisations that are members of Imkaan. Of the 10 refuge services which are not members of Imkaan, 6 are run by dedicated domestic abuse services, 3 are run by housing associations and one is run by a charity which also provides wider services other than VAWG support. Two refuge services run exclusively for LGBT+ survivors were added to Routes to Support in 2020-21. Table 2.2 gives a full breakdown of services run exclusively for a specific group and shows the services that are based in London. Table 2.3 shows a breakdown of the different types of providers running these services. Table 2.3 shows a breakdown of the different types of providers running these services.

**Table 2.2: Services (with number of refuge bed spaces) exclusively for groups, May 2021 (Routes to Support)**

<b>Service dedicated for</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>All England</b>
Black and minoritised women	20 (202)	37 (364)
Women with insecure immigration status	0 (0)	1 (62)
Women from specific religious group (no refuge services)	2 (0)	2 (0)
Eastern European women (no refuge services)	1 (0)	3 (0)
Women with substance use/alcohol use/mental health support needs	2 (14)	3 (21)
d/Deaf women (no refuge services)	1 (0)	2 (0)
Women who have experienced/are experiencing forced marriage (no refuge services)	0 (0)	2 (0)
LGBT+ survivors (no refuge services)	2 (0)	5 (8)
Women over 45	0 (0)	1 (4)
Young women (16-24)	0 (0)	2 (19)
Women with learning disability	2 (12)	2 (12)
<b>Total</b>	<b>29 (228)</b>	<b>60 (490)</b>

<b>Table 2.3: Provider types of services run exclusively for groups, May 2021 (Routes to Support)</b>				
<b>Service dedicated for</b>	<b>Dedicated provider</b>	<b>Housing Association</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>All</b>
Black and minoritised women	32	3	2	37
Women with insecure immigration status	0	0	1	1
Women from specific religious group	2	0	0	2
Eastern European women	3	0	0	3
Women with substance use/alcohol use/mental health support needs	2	1	0	3
d/Deaf women	0	0	2	2
Women who have experienced/are experiencing forced marriage	2	0	0	2
LGBT+ survivors	4	1	0	5
Women over 45	1	0	0	1
Young women (16-24)	2	0	0	2
Women with learning disability	0	1	1	2
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>46 (76.7%)</b>	<b>6 (10.0%)</b>	<b>6 (10.0%)</b>	<b>60</b>

## 2.3 Types of services

Local domestic abuse service providers in England offer a range of service types to meet the needs of the survivors and child survivors they support (**Table 2.3**). Service types include:

- refuge services (including a range of accommodation types such as shared, self-contained or dispersed, which meet the different needs of women and children accessing the service);
- resettlement services for women moving on from refuge services;
- community-based support (CBS) services (including outreach, floating support and advocacy);
- open access services (such as a helpline, drop-in services or other non-referral services);
- dedicated support for children and young people (CYPS);
- therapeutic services (such as formal counselling, support groups or group work programmes); and
- prevention work (such as educational work with schools).

Full definitions of these service types and the work they do can be seen in Appendix 3. Both refuge and CBS services run CYPS and therapeutic support as part of their core work, alongside delivering a planned programme of emotional and practical support and facilitating peer support between service users.

As shown in Table 2.4 below, there have been changes in the number of all service types compared with figures at May 2020. The most significant change has been in the number of counselling services, with the number of local services providing counselling decreasing by 15. We know that many services faced staffing issues and had to change the ways in which they operated in 2020-21 due to the pandemic (Women's Aid, 2020a). Online chat was added as a service type option on Routes to Support during 2020-21, in recognition that many local services now offer this type of service. In May 2021, 28 local services were recorded as running an online chat service. An online chat service enables survivors to access support and information directly from a trained support worker in real time through a computer, phone or other internet device. Covid-19 restrictions that were in place throughout 2020-21 meant that many women experiencing domestic abuse were spending increased amounts of time at home with the perpetrator of abuse (Women's Aid, 2020). Accessing an online chat service can be more discrete than, for example, making a phone call to a helpline, and can therefore provide vital access to support when making contact with other support services is difficult. Other notable changes to types of services are an increase in the number of local services providing a helpline, and an increase in the number of services offering prevention work. There has also been a slight increase in the overall number of refuge services.

Analysis of staffing levels at local services and the numbers of service types being delivered during 2020-21 indicate that some local services extended their provision without a corresponding increase in staffing. For example, of the 24 services that had a net increase in the number of service types they offered between May 2020 and May 2021, 50.0% reported no change to staffing level and one service reported they were operating with a smaller staff team despite providing additional service types. This continues a trend seen in recent years of some local services having to increase their provision without a corresponding increase in resource.

**Table 2.4:** Types of support services for women available in England, May 2021 (Routes to Support)

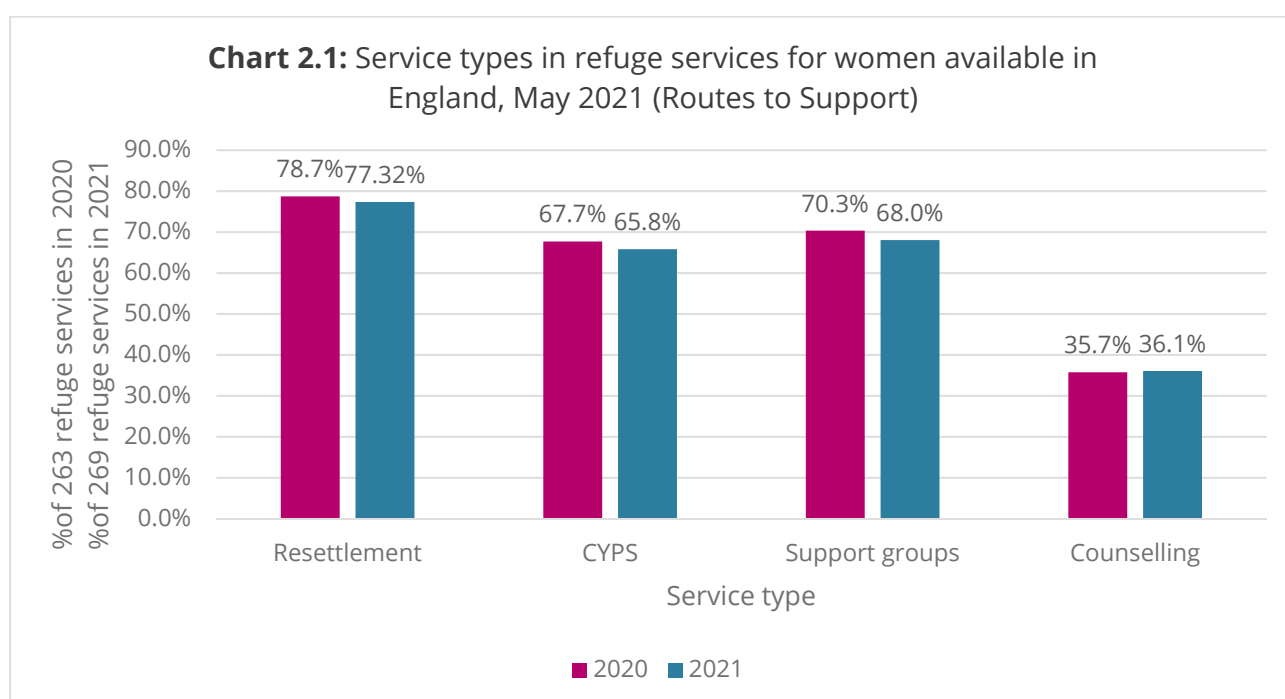
Service types	Number of services	Change from May 2020
Refuge	269	+6
Resettlement	208	+1
Floating support	78	-6
Outreach	196	+1
IDVA service*	142	+7
Prevention work	148	+8
Helpline	146	+9
Drop-in	93	-3
Online chat**	28	-
Formal counselling	137	-15
Support groups	255	+2
CYPS	223	+3

\*This is the number of Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) services, not the number of individual staff members working as IDVAs.  
 \*\*Online chat was added as a service type on Routes to Support during 2020-21

## 2.4 Refuge services and spaces

As mentioned in Section 2.3, 269 of the 391 local services available in England on 1st May 2021 were running refuge services. Refuge services include accommodation in shared, communal accommodation, self-contained properties located on the same site or dispersed properties in the community. They are distinct from other types of emergency accommodation because residents receive a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support designed to facilitate women’s recovery from experiences of domestic abuse. This support is informed by women’s strengths, choices and needs, and can involve (but is not limited to) one-to-one emotional support, group

work with other residents, legal advice and support with housing. Other service types are often run alongside refuge to assist with different aspects of a woman’s recovery, such as a formal counselling service to process the emotional and psychological effects of domestic abuse, or a resettlement service to support with the transition from refuge to independent living. As shown in Chart 2.1, many local services running a refuge service do not have the resource to provide these additional service types. There has been little change since 2020 in the percentage of refuge services which offer additional service types, and it is still the case that less than three-quarters (68.0%) of local refuge services were able to provide support group/group work programmes to residents and only 65.8% of refuge services have a dedicated CYPS service. Only 36.1% of refuge services - just over a third - were able to provide a formal counselling service.



Refuge services varied in size from just one shared house with space for two households, to a refuge service with over 75 units of accommodation across different sites. This variation means that, to examine the current level of refuge provision and changes over time, we need to look at the number of spaces available in refuge services. One space is one unit of accommodation for a woman and her children (one household), regardless of how many beds or cots are in the unit.

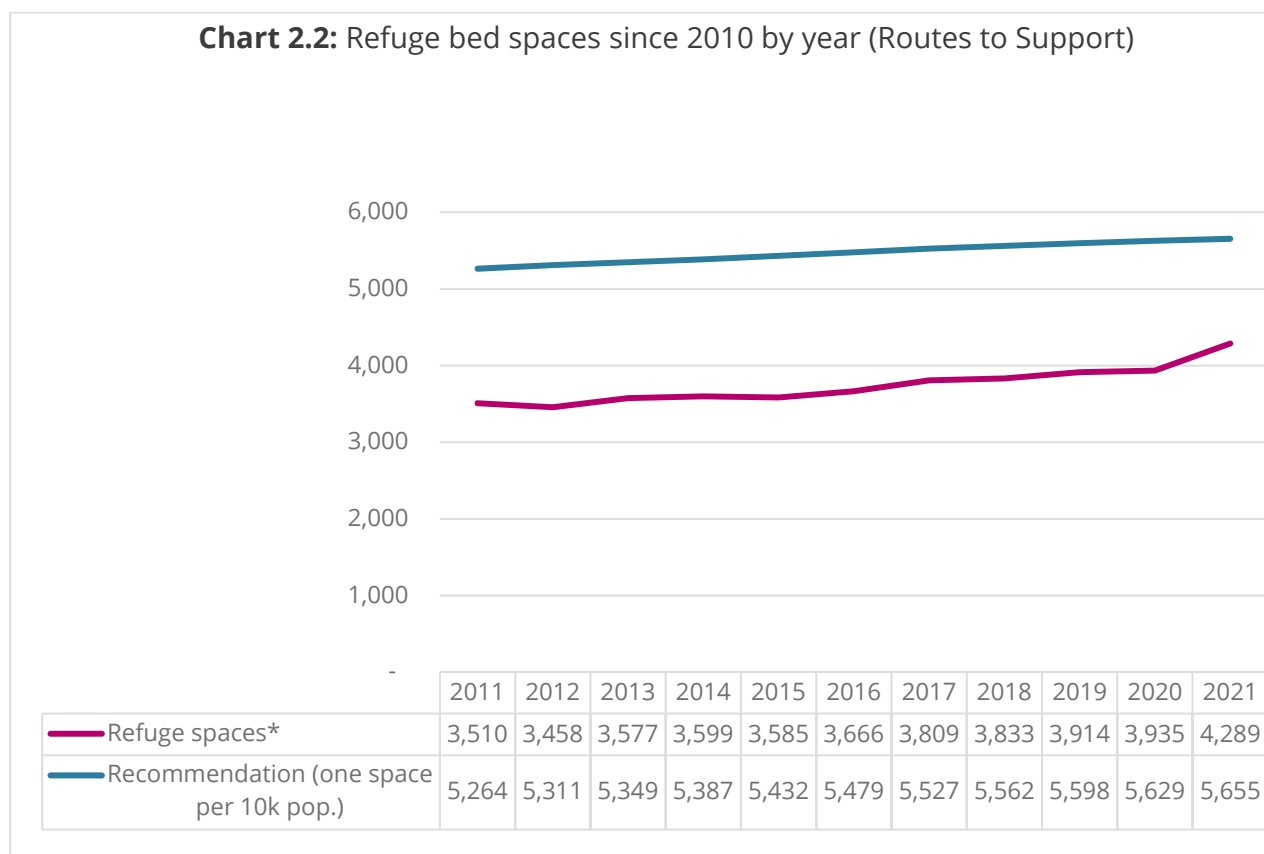
There has been an increase in the number of spaces in England every year since 2010. Between May 2020 and May 2021, we have seen the highest ever yearly increase, largely as a result of additional refuge spaces that were set up with emergency funding made available in response to Covid-19. In the year ending May 2021, there was an increase of 354 spaces, from 3,935 bed spaces for women at May 2020 to 4,289 bed spaces at May 2021. Some of these spaces are not exclusively for women, with 258 of these 4,289



spaces being for either men or women. See 2.8 for full details of the provision that is available for men. Many of the additional spaces made available between May 2020 and May 2021 were available to men, which means the overall number of spaces for men has increased by 55.2% (100 additional spaces) from May 2020 to May 2021.

Despite the increase in spaces, the figure of 4,289 still falls short (by 1,366) of the Council of Europe’s minimum recommendation<sup>53</sup> (see **Chart 2.2**), which represents a 24.2% shortfall. There is regional variation, and although refuge space shortfall in England has reduced overall (compared to 30.1% on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020) largely as a result of the increase in spaces that were set up with emergency Covid-19 funding, it has not fallen in every region. We know the refuge sector is supported by a considerable number of spaces which receive no local authority commissioned funding (18.5% of all refuge bedspaces running in November 2020), with a disproportionate number of these non-commissioned spaces provided within expert services by and for Black and minoritised women (Women’s Aid, 2021b). The level of shortfall would be significantly higher if these non-commissioned services were not available.

**Chart 2.2:** Refuge bed spaces since 2010 by year (Routes to Support)



<sup>53</sup> Council of Europe (2008): “...safe accommodation in specialised women’s shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10,000 head of population.” (p. 51). Based on ONS mid-year estimate for 2018: 55,977,178.

The shortfall in refuge spaces means there will only be a limited number of spaces available on any given day, and significantly fewer vacancies were made available during 2020-21 overall. As shown in Table 2.5, there were 2,060 less vacancies posted during 2020-21 compared to the number made available in 2019-20, which is a decrease of almost one-fifth (19.9%). The average number of times each space became available fell from 2.6 times per year in 2019-20 to 1.9 times per year in 2020-21, despite the increase in the number of spaces overall. Spaces likely became available less frequently in 2020-21 due to the impact of Covid-19. For example, some refuge services experienced difficulties sourcing move-on accommodation due to restrictions or had to reduce the number of referrals they could take due to government guidelines on shared housing (Women's Aid, 2020). These issues had a greater impact on vacancies in the first half of the year when pandemic restrictions were more severe, with there being 26.6% fewer vacancies posted between April and September 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, falling to 8.5% fewer vacancies posted between October 2020 and March 2021 compared to the same period in the previous year.

The actual number of spaces available to a woman looking for refuge will be dependent on whether available spaces are appropriate for her specific needs and circumstances. To determine how many spaces will be suitable a referring agency will ask a number of questions. These questions can include the following:

### **1. How many children does she have?**

Units of refuge spaces vary in size and will be able to accommodate either single women only or families of different sizes. The availability of suitable spaces will depend on the number of children the woman is fleeing with. Of the vacancies listed on Routes to Support in 2020-21, 42.2% were suitable for a woman with two children. Less than one in five vacancies (15.3%) could accommodate a woman with three children.

### **2. Is she in paid employment?**

Housing costs are higher in supported accommodation services such as refuges due to a number of factors, such as maintenance of communal areas and security arrangements, meaning women in low-paid employment may need to leave their jobs in order to access benefits to cover the cost of staying in refuge. For women in paid employment who are able to cover these costs, going into refuge may still mean having to leave her job for safety reasons. If a woman does wish to remain in paid employment and it is safe for her to do so, this can restrict the geographical area in which she can search for refuge as she will generally need to be located close to her place of work.

### **3. Does she have additional support needs?**

Refuges are only able to accept a referral if they have the staff capacity, suitable facilities and specialist support that may be required to meet a woman's specific needs. Some

women require additional support around mental health, or drug/alcohol use and this is often related to their experiences of domestic abuse. As the information on vacancies (**Table 2.5**) and the availability of specialist workers (**Tables 2.6** and **2.7** on page 35) shows, it can be difficult for a woman to access a refuge space if she has additional support needs around mental health, or drug/alcohol use. The number of refuge services with specialist support workers has decreased slightly from 2020; now only 14.5% of all refuge services have a specialist mental health support worker(s) and only 9.3% have a specialist drug use workers and specialist alcohol use workers. As noted in Section 2.5, the number of local services which provide a counselling service has fallen by 15 since 2020. Refuge service providers also have to consider the needs of existing residents and dynamics in the refuge when assessing the suitability of a referral.

#### 4. Does she have accessibility needs?

For women who need vacancies in physically accessible rooms (for themselves or their children), options are very limited. During 2020-21 only 1.4% of vacancies were in rooms fully accessible for wheelchairs and a further 1.2% were suitable for someone with limited mobility. These figures vary from region to region. Women with hearing or vision impairments are also likely to require specific facilities for services to be accessible to them.

#### 5. Does she have recourse to public funds?

If a woman is denied recourse to public funds<sup>54</sup> the spaces available to her will be limited. As shown in **Table 2.5** only 6.3% of all vacancies listed during 2020-21 could consider women who were not eligible to access public funds. This is little changed from the 5.4% of vacancies listed during 2019-20. In many cases this is also conditional on another agency, such as social services, guaranteeing funding to cover her stay. The low numbers of vacancies that are suitable for women with no recourse makes it even more challenging to assess the level of demand from this marginalised group of women. Data from Routes to Support shows that there were only 79 women with no recourse to public funds who made successful referrals to refuge services in London between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, yet in the same period there were 102 recorded instances of women with no recourse to public funds who made unsuccessful referrals in London. This isn't a reflection of unmet need however as it includes only those referrals made when a vacancy suitable for a woman with no recourse was available.

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<sup>54</sup> If someone's residence permit to live in the UK includes the condition 'no recourse to public funds' then that person will not be able to claim most state benefits.

**Table 2.5:** Refuge vacancies posted in 2020-21. % vacancies for each group (change from 2019-20)

Types of vacancies	Vacancies available to different groups	Change since 2019-20
# All vacancies posted, England	8,280	-2,060
Woman plus two children	42.2%	-0.8%
Woman plus three children	15.3%	+0.2%
No recourse to public funds	6.3%	+2.3%
Full wheelchair access	1.4%	+0.5%
Person with limited mobility	1.2%	0.0%

**Table 2.6:** Community-based services with specialist support workers, May 2021 (Routes to Support)

Specialist worker type	Mental health support needs	Drug use support needs	Alcohol use support needs
Number of community-based services	29	16	15
Change from 2020	-1	-2	-2

**Table 2.7:** Refugees with specialist support workers, May 2021 (Routes to Support)

Specialist worker type	Mental health support needs	Drug use	Alcohol use
Number of refuge services	39	25	25
Change from May 2020	-1	-1	-1

## 2.5 Service capacity and demand for support

Although domestic abuse services supported large numbers of women and children over the previous financial year, this annual audit shows the great need for domestic abuse services and the gaps that exist between capacity and demand for support. Using On Track national data as our baseline data, we have produced national estimates of what the referral numbers would look like if 100% of services had been using On Track (see Appendix 2 for methods). We calculate that all refuge services in England supported an estimated 10,809 women and 11,890 children in 2020-21 and all community-based services supported an estimated 124,044 women and 148,852 children (see **Table 2.8** on national referrals estimates). These estimated referral numbers demonstrate that many domestic abuse services do not have the capacity or the resources to meet the demand for their support.

We found that 61.9% of all the referrals received by refuge services using On Track were rejected. The main reason why referrals to refuge services were rejected was a lack of space or capacity, with 26.5% of rejected referrals being for this reason. This also equates to 15.6% of all referrals received being rejected due to lack of space or capacity. With this in mind it is worth noting that the number of vacancies in refuge services fell by almost one-fifth (19.9%) over the last year (see Section 2.6). It is important to note that the referral figures reported here are likely to be lower than they would have been because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the percentage of declined referrals remains in line with what we have presented in previous years, there was a reduction the number of vacancies posted by refuge services on Routes to Support between April and September 2020. This means the actual number of referrals are lower, as there was a 40.6% decrease in availability of refuge vacancies between 23rd March and 31st May 2020. This continued until September when we saw vacancy numbers return to previous levels, largely due to emergency funding.

45.0% of all the referrals received in community-based services (Table 2.8) were rejected (for any reason). The main reasons for rejection were that the survivor did not want support (31.4% of rejected referrals), that the service was unable to contact the survivor (22.7% of all those referrals were rejected) and that the client was already in another service (21.8%). As discussed in previous reports, it is important to bear in mind that the decision to access and accept support can be a very difficult one for a survivor. A survivor may be scared of a controlling perpetrator discovering that she has accessed support. Also, her situation may have changed since the referral was first made, for example, she may have moved out of the area or is accessing support elsewhere. A referral may have been made on her behalf by a third party without her permission or full support.

These figures for declined referrals are unlikely to tell the whole story of demand. There are likely to be survivors who could have benefitted from accessing domestic abuse services but were never referred because the referring agency already knew that the service was over-subscribed or full, or that it was not resourced to support women with specific needs (for example, needs around drugs and alcohol use, needs around a mental health diagnosis). In addition, many survivors do not reach out for support or will delay doing so for a long time, or they are prevented from doing so by a controlling perpetrator(s).

There may be many reasons why women wish to access refuge in a certain area of the country, for example, to be near to family and support networks, or to be able to access places of worship. It may be necessary to remain in a particular area to complete a course of medical treatment or to maintain contact arrangements with her children. Geographical restrictions can, then, along with the factors outlined above, further limit women's options. During 2020-21, data on the journeys women made to access refuge was collected through Routes to Support for the first time. When a refuge service accepted a referral and removed the vacancy from Routes to Support, the worker removing the vacancy was asked to record which local authority the woman was located in before coming to the refuge. As shown in **Table 2.9**, 79.6% of women placed in refuge between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 came from a different local authority area to the refuge they moved to (2,788 out of 3,503 women<sup>55</sup>). The majority of women travelled to a refuge that was located within the same region<sup>56</sup> as their previous home (71.9%, 2,518 out of 3,503 women), however over a quarter of women travelled to another region to access refuge in a safe location that was suitable for her needs (28.1%, 985 out of 3,503 women).

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<sup>55</sup> In addition to the 3,503 women for which a previous location was recorded, there were 1,771 women placed in refuge between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 for which their previous location was recorded as 'unknown'.

<sup>56</sup> Region here refers to another region of England, for example, the North West of England, or another country in the UK (Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales)

**Table 2.8:** Referrals to all services in 2020-21 (estimates calculated from baseline data from On Track)

	Refuge services	CBS services
<b>Women</b>		
Estimated referrals accepted/women supported during the year	10,809	124,044
Estimated referrals declined during the year	17,561	101,490
Estimated total referrals received during the year	28,370	225,534
<b>Children</b>		
Estimated children supported during the year	11,890	148,852

**Table 2.9:** Journeys made by women accessing refuge services, July 2020 - March 2021 (Routes to Support)

Previous locations of women	Number of women	% of women
Same local authority as refuge	715	20.4%
Different local authority to refuge	2,788	79.6%
Same region as refuge	2,518	71.9%
Different region to refuge	985	28.1%
<b>Total women (where previous local authority home was known)</b>	<b>3,503</b>	

## 2.6 Dedicated services for children and young people

Of the 269 refuge services running in England in May 2021, 230 (85.5%) were running at least one dedicated children and young people service (CYPS). 169 (62.8%) refuges employed a dedicated CYP worker, whose primary role it is to engage young people, offer them emotional support, and assist families with essential tasks such as school admission. Dedicated children's workers create a separate space for children in refuge where they can begin to understand life there and their experiences that led them to it. As shown in **Table 2.9**, refuge services offer a range of other dedicated services, such as play therapy and mentoring, to support children and young people and help them recover from their experiences of abuse.

**Table 2.9:** Dedicated services for children and young people (CYP) in refuges, May 2021 (Routes to Support)

Service	Number of refuges	% of refuges	% change from 2020
Dedicated emotional support	195	72.5%	-1.3%
Outings/activities/play sessions	195	72.5%	-2.0%
Individual support	175	65.1%	+0.4%
CYP worker	169	62.8%	-1.1%
Advocacy	53	19.7%	-0.4%
Play therapy	106	39.4%	-0.1%
Support group	89	33.1%	-2.7%
Mentoring	42	15.6%	0.0%
CYP counselling	33	12.3%	-0.3%
Family support worker	5	1.9%	-0.4%
Art therapy	2	0.7%	0.0%
Refuges with a dedicated CYP service	177	65.8%	-1.9%
Total number of refuges	269		



## 2.7 Services for men

Routes to Support is primarily a directory of services available for women and children. The information in this section is not therefore an exhaustive account of support services available for men experiencing domestic abuse because dedicated specialist services for men (such as the Men's Advice Line, the national helpline for men run by Respect<sup>57</sup>) are not listed in the directory. Routes to Support does, however, tell us where services for women and children also offer support for men, including the numbers of refuge spaces available for men.

It is important to note that there are differences in the domestic abuse typically experienced by women and by men, in that more women experience domestic abuse than men, and women are more likely to be repeat victims, to be seriously harmed or killed, and to be subjected to coercive control (Women's Aid, 2020b). There is some evidence that male victims need different services to female victims. A report published by the organisation Respect notes:

"From our helpline data from nearly 17,823 male victims it seems that men do not have the same needs as female victims. It would not be helpful for male victims simply to replicate the services or ways of helping female victims – projects working with male victims need to continue to monitor male victims' needs and ways of presenting for help, in order to help them best and to make best use of our resources." (Respect, 2019)

The report also notes that very few of the men contacting the Men's Advice Line were looking for a space in a refuge (only 1.2% of 17,823 male helpline callers were signposted to refuge services) and that the most common forms of help requested were legal advice, help in accessing the Criminal Justice System and accessing a local male domestic abuse service. However, the report acknowledges that more research is needed into the reasons behind this (Respect, 2019).

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021, 186 out of 391 entries (47.6%) on Routes to Support had one or more services for men, including 39 out of 269 refuges (14.5 % of refuges) which could also accommodate men. There were 277 refuge spaces available for men, 23 for men only and 254<sup>58</sup> for either men or women. Although the number of spaces for men only has fallen by one space since May 2020, the overall number of spaces which men can access (because they are available to both men and women) has gone up significantly by 100 spaces, which represents a 55.2% increase. We have also seen an increase in most other

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<sup>57</sup> Respect describes its work as "a pioneering UK domestic abuse organisation leading the development of safe, effective work with perpetrators, male victims and young people using violence in their close relationships." <https://www.respect.uk.net>

<sup>58</sup> These 258 spaces are also included in the 4,289 spaces for women mentioned earlier in this report.

services types provided for men, continuing a trend for service provision for men overall rising year on year. See **Tables 2.9** and **2.10** below.

<b>Table 2.9 Services for men in England*, May 2021 (and change from May 2020) (Routes to Support)</b>		
<b>Service types</b>	<b>Number of services in England in May 2021</b>	<b>Net change since May 2020</b>
<b>Refuges with space for men</b>	39	+6
<b>Floating support</b>	27	-2
<b>Helpline</b>	93	+6
<b>Outreach</b>	114	-1
<b>Project based</b>	32	+3
<b>Domestic violence advocacy project</b>	90	+7
<b>Sexual violence advocacy project</b>	28	+4
<b>Information and advice</b>	119	+1
<b>Total entries with one or more services for men</b>	186	
*This is not an exhaustive list of the services provided for male victims or perpetrators, rather these numbers are for services offering support to women who also work with male victims or perpetrators		

<b>Table 2.10 Refuge bed spaces for men in England*, May 2021 (and change from May 2020) (Routes to Support)</b>			
	<b>Bed spaces available to men</b>	<b>% of all refuges with space for men</b>	<b>% of all spaces available to men</b>
<b>Number at May 2021</b>	281	14.5%	6.5%
<b>Net change from May 2020</b>	+100	+2.0%	+1.9%
* This is not an exhaustive list of the services provided for male victims or perpetrators; rather these numbers are for services offering support to women who also work with male victims or perpetrators.			

## Conclusion

This year, domestic abuse providers across England continued to support thousands of women experiencing abuse, and even more children with an average of 1.2 children for every woman supported. Throughout the year, an estimated 10,809 women and 11,890 children were supported by refuge services and an estimated 124,044 women and 148,852 children accessed community-based support services. During the year, 61.9% of all the referrals received in refuge services using On Track were rejected, the majority due to lack of space, meaning demand for services continues to exceed provision available, in spite of an increase in the number of refuge spaces available.

Where space is available it may not be accessible or suitable for all women. Whilst there is no such thing as a 'typical' survivor (as shown in our On Track data), minoritised women continue to experience additional barriers, for example, 30.0% of the women accessing services who were not British nationals, had no access to public funds.

We know there are many survivors of domestic abuse who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to access specialist help or are delayed in doing so for a long time. Survivors accessing specialist domestic abuse services have often been living with the abuse for long periods of time; the average length of abuse women face before accessing support continues to be six years. The impact this has on women, their safety and their mental health is staggering - it is no surprise, given this, that at least 37.6% of survivors in the sample had mental health support needs, rising to 49.2% of women accessing refuge services. Over a third of service users in this year reported feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts as a result of the abuse, rising to 45.6% for those women in refuge services. This makes the fact that 15 fewer services than last year were able to provide a formal counselling service especially concerning.

It remains clear that refuge is a national network - women travelled significant distances to seek refuge. The majority of women (79.6%) placed in refuge between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 came from a different local authority area to the refuge they moved to and over a quarter of women travelled to another region of the country. As well as the need for a national network of refuge services, these findings illustrate the severe impact and disruption that domestic abuse has on the lives of those experiencing it.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic presented new challenges for services in 2020-21. Emergency funding supported the creation of additional refuge spaces. The pandemic forced services to develop innovative ways of working to continue reaching survivors who needed their support. This is evident in the number of services now running a live

chat service, with live chat services being added to Routes to Support for the first time this year.

We have seen positive changes during the year including the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act. With the Act comes a statutory duty on local authorities to commission safe accommodation in their area. The information released in this report will enable us to monitor the impact this has had on demand and provision. Further, in order to fully understand the impact of the duty we need to know how the changes are affecting local providers. Our Annual Survey of providers will explore this in more detail and our upcoming publication, *The Domestic Abuse Report 2022: The Annual Audit* will also answer the question “What has been the initial impact of the statutory duty on refuges and safe accommodation? “

## Appendix 1: Glossary

**Service types:** Routes to Support details which service types are offered against each entry, an entry can contain multiple service types.

**Service provider:** any organisation providing a domestic abuse service. This could be a dedicated provider or a larger organisation running a domestic abuse service, for example a housing association.

**Service user:** any woman who is accessing/has accessed domestic abuse support services. Dedicated provider: an organisation constituted for the sole and specialist purpose of delivering domestic abuse services.

**Entry/entries:** one service listing on Routes to Support. A service provider may have multiple entries where they operate in more than one local authority or have services in the same local authority with different referral criteria, for example a general access refuge and another for Black and minoritised women only.

**Bed spaces:** a unit of accommodation for one woman and her children, regardless of how many beds/cots are in the unit.

**No recourse to public funds:** If someone's residence permit to live in the UK includes the condition 'no recourse to public funds' then that person will not be able to claim most state benefits.

**The 'by and for' expert sector:** For this report Women's Aid uses the definition of the 'by and for' expert sector as set out by Imkaan in the Alternative Bill (Imkaan, 2018). This definition is aligned with the principles of the Women's Aid Quality Standards, the Shared Sector Standards<sup>59</sup> and the National Statement of Expectations<sup>60</sup>. "We define women-only VAWG specialist organisations as the by and for expert sector (sometimes written as by and for expert services or organisations). This term refers to specialist services that are designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve. This can include, for example, services led by and for Black and minoritised women, disabled women, LGBT+ women, etc. In the context of VAWG we refer to women-only VAWG services as manifesting specific expertise designed and developed to address VAWG." Imkaan, 2018

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/national-quality-standards/>

<sup>60</sup> The National Statement of Expectations, published by the Home Office in December 2016 as part of the government's violence against women and girls strategy, stresses that the government expects local services to put the victim at the centre of service delivery, including by having "access to a broad diversity of provision, considering how services will be accessible to BME disabled, LGBTQQI and older victims and survivors, and those from isolated or marginalised communities".

## Appendix 2: Methodology

### Section 1: The service users

This section looks at the profile, needs and experiences of women accessing support services. To do this we have used data from On Track, Women's Aid's case management and outcomes monitoring system, which allows front-line workers in local domestic abuse services to record information about service users and contains data on the experiences of over 100,000 women supported by local domestic abuse services across England (see section on data sources for more information). Information about service users for this report was taken from cases closed between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. These data relate to 34,860 female survivors<sup>61</sup> (where sub-samples are used, this is highlighted in the report). Data were collected by 71 organisations running 199 domestic abuse services (of which three organisations started using On Track during the reporting period).

### Section 2: The provision of services

This section includes a snapshot of the available provision in England on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021 and analysis of change during the year from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 along with analysis of refuge referrals and vacancies during that same year.

Information about the services in England only was taken from Routes to Support as snapshots on 1st May each year. Refuge vacancies added to the Routes to Support database during the year 2020-21 were analysed. Routes to Support provides information about the types of domestic abuse services, the number of bed spaces in refuge services, who these services can support and changes to provision over time. The directory is updated on a rolling basis by dedicated staff at Women's Aid meaning each entry is fully updated every year in addition to any updates received from services during the year. Entries are added and removed throughout the year as providers change.

Referral estimates used in the report are calculated by using baseline data from On Track. The following steps were taken:

- a. Refuge: ratio of women housed to refuge space for services using On Track applied to services not using On Track that are listed on Routes to Support for the same region.

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<sup>61</sup> On Track collects information about female and male survivors and survivors who do not define as either male or female. This report will only present information on female survivors.

- b. Community-based services (CBS): ratio of women supported to individual service type (e.g. outreach, IDVA, floating support) for responding services applied to services not using On Track that are listed on Routes to Support for the same region. Numbers of children: average number of children per woman accessing services from On Track applied to above two estimates.
- c. Estimated number of referrals declined to refuge and community-based services: the percentage of referrals accepted and declined from our baseline data was applied to the estimated numbers of women accepted in steps A and B above to give an estimated number of referrals declined to each service type.

## Appendix 3: Definitions of service types

### Accommodation

**Refuge:** Offers accommodation and support only for women experiencing domestic abuse which is tied to that accommodation. The address will not be publicly available. It will have a set number of places. Residents will receive a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support from staff and access peer support from other residents. This will include:

- Access to information and advocacy
- Emotional support
- Access to specialist support workers (e.g. drugs/alcohol use, mental health, sexual abuse)
- Access to recovery work
- Access to support for children (where needed)
- Practical help
- Key work and support planning (work around support needs including parenting, finances and wellbeing)
- Safety planning
- Counselling

**Accommodation (other than refuge):** Any accommodation offered to women experiencing domestic abuse which does not meet the definition below. For example this may be move-on accommodation, a shelter where the address is disclosed or dispersed accommodation without the planned programme of support.

**Resettlement:** Only available to refuge residents moving on to independent living. A service is available to women staying in the refuge prior to move-on and post move-on.

### Community-based services

**Floating support:** Tied to accommodation, but the accommodation is not offered as part of the service. Will also have a set number of places. These services are primarily about supporting women and children to maintain their accommodation.

**Outreach:** Not offered in the project's building and it does not have a set number of spaces. The support offered is broader and not focused on accommodation. Women can access these services in a range of community centres or the service may come to the women in their home or other venues (e.g. cafes or neutral meeting places).



**Domestic abuse advocacy project (including IDVA):** Involves the provision of advice, information and support to survivors living in the community based on an assessment of risk and its management. Operates within an inter-agency context, and is usually part of a multiagency risk management strategy or MARAC process and focuses on providing a service to victims judged to be at medium to high risk of harm to address their safety needs and help manage the risk that they face.

## Open access services

These services are available without a planned programme of support and can be accessed anonymously as and when the woman needs to.

**Helpline:** A helpline is a support and referral service that is accessed by phone and can be accessed anonymously. It needs to have a designated telephone line and be a specific service offered at fixed advertised times. The service is delivered by dedicated staff or volunteers trained for that purpose and not engaged in other tasks.

**Drop-in service:** Women can access support at a specified venue without a pre-arranged appointment from trained staff.

**Advice and information service:** Other open access support projects, this would include crisis intervention services and other advice services whether accessed by telephone or in person.

**Online chat:** Online chat is a support and referral service that is accessed via the web. It needs to be a specific service offered at fixed advertised times by dedicated staff or volunteers trained for that purpose and not engaged in other tasks.

## Recovery work

These services do not offer accommodation, but may be offered to refuge residents. A woman and/or child has to attend the project's building to access these services.

**Counselling:** Counselling is formal counselling offered by qualified practitioners

**Group work programmes:** Group work programmes are defined groups facilitated by trained staff

**Support groups:** Support groups are attended by survivors within a refuge or community-based support setting and offer peer support/self-help work.

## Dedicated children and young people's service

**Children's work:** Staffed by trained children's workers. A service where they provide emotional support, group work, activities, afterschool clubs or holiday clubs for the children or do specific outreach work.

**Young people's work:** Staffed by trained youth workers. A service where they provide emotional support, group work, activities.

## Other

**Prevention work:** Work carried out in community groups such as schools aimed at prevention/awareness raising. Clients do not self-refer but the service may be booked by professionals.

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