

## Joint VAWG Sector General Election Manifesto Summary

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is endemic across society and remains disturbingly present in the UK. The Istanbul Convention to which the UK government is signatory defines violence against women as follows:

*“Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>1</sup>*

Specialist women-led<sup>1</sup> and ‘by and for’<sup>2</sup> VAWG organisations are grappling with increased demand for support from survivors in the context of a cost of living crisis<sup>3</sup> and with the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Those supporting migrant survivors are confronted with barriers to women’s safety in the form of ‘hostile environment’ policies such as the No Recourse to Public Funds condition and the consequences of new punitive legislation towards people who cross borders. Meanwhile, we have witnessed an explosion of misogyny online, which creates new and ever-emerging opportunities for VAWG in the digital sphere.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that significant action is needed to tackle this problem.

*“The current efforts are just putting a sticking plaster on the issue – it’s not making a difference to survivors.” Survivor, 2023*

**We are calling for a comprehensive whole-system approach to addressing VAWG for all who are subjected to this oppression, both online and offline, and for cohesive support that is strategically aligned to the ‘by and for’ sector.**

### Rights and inequalities

- Uphold the established international and human rights-based definitions of VAWG.
- Preserve and promote domestic and international human rights and equalities legislation, including the principle of universal human rights.
- Lead legal, policy and funding reform to deliver equal protection for all women - embedding the specialist women-led and ‘by and for’ sector’s understanding of intersectionality to meet the needs of all women and girls, and the intersecting forms of oppression which they face.<sup>6</sup>
- Fund and deliver multi-year, long-term public communication campaigns and community responses that challenge harmful social norms and perpetrator and bystander behaviour.
- Equip all relevant government departments and statutory agencies to deliver reforms across government to tackle gender inequality (such as equal pay and shared parental leave), paying close attention to intersecting inequalities and recognising that gender inequality cannot be separated out from other forms of inequality.
- Ensure the collection of comprehensive, comparable and disaggregated data on VAWG across government – at a minimum data must always be collected on the protected characteristics for both victim and perpetrator(s) and their relationship, with appropriate safeguards for anonymity.
- Government must commit to strategic investment to prevent and respond to VAWG in schools and higher education settings, including resourcing the delivery of a Whole School Approach.
- A commitment to protect the future of RSHE and RSE delivery - ensuring it takes an intersectional, inclusive and holistic approach, centres the voices and needs of children and

<sup>1</sup> Specialist support services operate independently from the state and their sole organisational purpose is to support adult and child survivor impacted by VAWG.

<sup>2</sup> [By and For — Imkaan](#)

<sup>3</sup> Various organisations (2022) [Statement on behalf of VAWG organisations in England and Wales on the Cost of Living Crisis](#)

<sup>4</sup> End Violence Against Women Coalition (2020) [Initial briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic and the duty to prevent violence against women and girls](#)

<sup>5</sup> National Police Chief’s Council (2023) [Violence against women and girls strategic risk assessment](#)

<sup>6</sup> 2023, Imkaan’s Participatory Evaluation of the Comic Relief Supporting and Sustaining Specialism Programme for the Black & Minoritised women-led by and for sector

young people. and valuing the expertise of the specialist VAWG sector, including in the development and delivery of curriculum materials.

- A commitment through legislation, and other mechanisms, to better address online VAWG - with a preventative, holistic and intersectional approach. Solutions should focus on safety-by-design and product security and require accountability and transparency from tech companies within a human rights framework. It should also be future-proofed to tackle emerging harms.

### Funding and Commissioning, including 'by and for' provision

- Deliver a secure, national multi-year funding settlement for the specialist VAWG sector, including a national ring-fenced funding for specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, d/Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors.
- Systematically reform the current competitive funding and commissioning landscape to ensure the specialist 'by and for' VAWG sector can fairly access funding.
- Guarantee that local funding and commissioning processes adhere fully to the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Sustainable ring-fenced funding, for specialist sexual violence services, that includes appropriate contributions from Health and Education bodies. The government must commit to re-commissioning of the Rape and Sexual Abuse Fund as a multi-year fund beyond 2025.
- Deliver a robust system of national accountability, based on established quality standards within the VAWG sector, to ensure survivors of all forms of VAWG can access the specialist support services they need - including services led 'by and for' survivors with additional protected characteristics..

### Economic barriers

- Better provision of legal services for survivors; introducing an exemption for the means test in civil, family and immigration proceedings for all survivors so they can access justice and the protections they and their families need.
- Emergency funding should be made available for domestic abuse victims, to assist them to flee the abuser and to cover their immediate and short-term costs. The fund should be available to all victims of domestic abuse equally and without discrimination, including migrant women with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Reduced energy costs for all refuges and community-based services during the cost of living crisis, for example by extending the remit of Warm Home Discount Scheme to include refuges and community-based service.
- Ensure the Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations<sup>7</sup> identifies the need for specialist economic advocacy, in partnership with money, debt, and benefits advice as well as financial services, to help survivors re-establish their economic independence and rebuild their lives.

### Partnerships and Multi-Agency Working

- Deliver adequate funding for all public sector agencies to tackle VAWG; ensuring that they have the capacity to participate in a public health approach to preventing and responding to VAWG effectively. This must include with training delivered by specialist VAWG services to ensure professionals provide the right response to survivors and funded care pathways for survivors to access specialist VAWG services that is ring-fenced and sustained.
- Incentivise and encourage local areas to work together to respond to the changing nature of all forms of VAWG in their area - recognising the diversity of survivor experiences, understanding their local population and the specific needs of their communities so that they are adequately meeting the needs of, in particular, minoritised and marginalised survivors.
- Equip Coordinated Community Responses to not just deliver a crisis response to VAWG but work to identify abuse early on and prevent it from happening in the first place. Clearly define the specialist VAWG sector as expert providers and critical strategic partners whose participation is essential for effective local, regional and national VAWG partnerships.

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<sup>7</sup> Home Office (2022). [Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectation](#)

## Health and adult social care

- Mandatory, continuous training on domestic abuse and mental health for healthcare professionals, delivered by specialists.
- Increased understanding among local commissioners of what mental health support survivors want and value.
- Sustainable investment is required to ensure that all ICBs adopt a 'whole health model' including evidence-based interventions such as IRIS in GP practices, ADViSE in sexual health clinics and sexual health services, health IDVAs in acute and mental health settings and maternity services, and a specialist coordinator to ensure this work is embedded at a strategic level as well as operationally.
- Specialist mental health support to meet the needs of child survivors of VAWG without the fear that this will be used as evidence against the mother in any child contact or child protection proceedings.

## Housing

- Improve access to, and availability of, adequate social housing and safe accommodation.
- Clearer local authority allocation schemes to transform our response housing needs of survivors.
- Support local authorities to implement the automatic priority need for housing to survivors of domestic abuse including training, co-location of housing IDVAs and administrative burdens funding.
- Exempt survivors of domestic abuse from local connections or residency requirements for applicants of social housing.
- A simplified legal mechanism for survivors of domestic abuse to apply directly to the county court to remove a perpetrator of domestic abuse from a secure or assured social tenancy.

## Family Courts and Children's Social Care

- Full implementation of the Harm Report recommendations.
- Introduce legislation that psychologists appointed to assess adults or children in the Family Court must be regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council.
- The government should urgently amend Section 1(2A) of the Children Act 1989 to make clear that the presumption of parental involvement does not apply in cases involving allegations of domestic abuse or other forms of serious harm.
- The Judicial College should work collaboratively with specialist VAWG organisations to improve judicial understanding and awareness around VAWG, particularly on less recognised forms such as economic abuse as recognised in the statutory definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. All agencies with responsibility for training family court professionals should work together on the multi-disciplinary training recommended by the Harm Panel.
- Family court professionals should draw on the expertise of 'by and for' specialist domestic abuse support services in order to gain a better understanding of the specific experiences and needs of survivors and children from marginalised and minoritised groups, and the government must provide ring-fenced funding for these services.
- Ensure that local authorities are adhering to statutory guidance on the Children Act 1989, including the particular considerations for No Recourse to Public Funds children and families as part of their broader Section 17 duties.
- Children's social care must seek proactive models of support and advice when supporting parents and children affected by VAWG; embedding best practice models that are holistic and trauma-informed.

## Criminal Justice Reform

- Establish a national scheme of independent legal advice for survivors of rape and sexual abuse engaged with the criminal justice process<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rape Crisis England & Wales, Centre for Women's Justice, End Violence Against Women Coalition (May 2023) Independent Legal Advice and Representation for Survivors of Sexual Violence and Abuse: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/11th-May-final-ILAR-briefing.pdf>

- Introduce better protection for survivors' counselling and therapy records with a higher legal threshold for disclosure and decision-making by a judge.<sup>9</sup>
- Ensure fast-track priority listing and guaranteed fixture of rape and sexual offences trials.
- Ensure availability of specialist sexual offence courts where all staff receive trauma-informed training and special measures as default.<sup>10 11</sup>
- Introduce Banaz's Law to make the use of 'honour' an aggravating factor in sentencing on honour-based abuse and VAWG.<sup>12</sup>
- Introduce a more robust police vetting and suspension pending investigation for all officers charged with VAWG related misconduct.

## Perpetrators

- Ensure that quality assured perpetrator interventions are consistently available – addressing risks from primary prevention (like bystander responses and awareness raising communication campaigns) to behaviour change group work, to specialist responses for the most dangerous and serial perpetrators.
- Review the effectiveness of sexual harm prevention orders given that criminal justice neither sanctions nor deters the vast majority of offenders;
- Connect sexual violence and domestic abuse offences to any new online harms strategy where a large amount of connected 'online offending' take place and where new forms of abuse are rapidly emerging and expanding;
- Establish a quality assurance system for perpetrator work which ensures that interventions funded by public sector agencies are always accredited, designed to keep survivors and their children safe, and delivered alongside support provided by specialist VAWG organisations.
- Deliver effective leadership and multi-agency arrangements ensuring all government departments and public services are actively holding perpetrators accountable, that professionals are trained to identify and respond to perpetrators, and there are clear pathways into safe and effective perpetrator interventions.

## Acknowledgements

Ahead of the next general election, a coalition of over 70 leading organisations working to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) have signed this joint manifesto calling on all political parties to adopt its priorities for ending this abuse.

End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)  
 Women's Aid Federation of England (WA)  
 Advance  
 Agenda Alliance  
 Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre  
 Angelou Centre  
 Apna Haq  
 Ashiana Network  
 Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)  
 AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)  
 BAWSO  
 Bold Voices  
 Cassandra Centre  
 Centre for Military Justice  
 Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ)  
 Chayn  
 Deaf Ethnic Women Association (DEWA)  
 Drive Partnership  
 Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA)

<sup>9</sup> Rape Crisis England & Wales, Centre for Women's Justice, End Violence Against Women Coalition (2023) Keep Counselling Confidential: The Problems and Solutions with the Disclosure of Counselling Notes: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Keep-Counselling-Confidential-FINAL-10th-May-23.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Rape Crisis England & Wales (2023) Breaking Point: the re-traumatisation of rape and sexual abuse survivors in the Crown Court backlog.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/RapeReviewReport-160623FINAL.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Mahmood, B and Siddiqui, H (2022) No Safe Place: Murdered by Our Father <https://www.amazon.co.uk/No-Safe-Place-Murdered-Father/dp/1913543056>

Ellas  
Forward  
Galop  
Her Centre  
Hibiscus  
Hull Sisters  
Humraaz  
Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS)  
IKWRO (Iranian & Kurdish Womens Rights Organisation)  
Imkaan  
IRISi  
Jewish Women's Aid  
Juno Women's Aid  
JURIES  
Karma Nirvana  
Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation (KMEWO)  
Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA)  
Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)  
London VAWG Consortium  
Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation (MEWSO)  
Network of Eritrean Women-UK  
P.H.O.E.B.E  
Police Spies Out of Lives  
Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC)  
Rape Crisis England and Wales (RCEW)  
Refuge  
Respect  
Restored  
Rights of Women  
Rochdale Women's Welfare Association  
Roshni  
Safe Lives  
Safer Places  
Safety4Sisters  
SARSAS (Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support)  
Sign Health  
Sisters of Frida  
Solace Women's Aid  
Southall Black Sisters (SBS)  
Standing Together  
Stay Safe East  
Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA)  
Suzy Lamplugh Trust  
The Women's Liberation Collective (Own My Life)  
Traveller Movement  
Welsh Women's Aid  
White Ribbon  
Womankind Worldwide  
Women and Girls Network  
Women for Refugee Women  
Women in Prison  
women@the well  
Women's Resource Centre (WRC)  
Working Chance  
WWIN (Wearside Women In Need)