

NOWHERE TO TURN, 2024

Findings from the eighth year of the No Woman Turned Away project

The No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project plays a critical role in the national network of domestic abuse services in England by supporting women who face additional barriers to accessing safe accommodation. This report evaluates the NWTa project's role in the context of insufficient refuge spaces, an underfunded network of domestic abuse services and increased demand, highlighting the depth and breadth of knowledge and skills that NWTa practitioners utilise to achieve positive outcomes for survivors.

204 women engaged with and completed support from the NWTa project in 2023, receiving a range of support from the specialist domestic abuse practitioners.

Women were supported around accessing safe accommodation, referral to other services, safety planning, emotional support, health, immigration, finances, safeguarding, and parenting.

The complexity of cases increased in 2023, due to an increase in structural barriers to accessing safe accommodation.

For example, compared with 2022, the percentage of women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) increased by 8.5% to 45.1% of women. Increased complexity is reflected in the 9.8% increase in the average number of hours spent supporting each woman and the increase in the length of cases, which rose by 2.4 weeks compared with 2022.

There is a significant shortage of refuge spaces for women facing additional barriers.

Practitioners searched for refuge vacancies multiple times for a high proportion of women.



For **69** women, no refuge vacancies were available at least once.



55 women were refused at least once from a vacancy that **had been listed on Routes to Support**, the UK-wide violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies.

By the end of support, **few women with additional barriers were accommodated in refuge:**

14.7%
of women with drugs and/or alcohol support needs

8.6%
of disabled women

6.3%
of women with ties to their local area

2.8%
of women with large families

0.0%
of women with older male child(ren)



Only **7.3%** of women with **two or more** barriers, and only **4.3%** of women with **three or more** barriers, were accommodated in refuge.

Women experienced abuse and hardship while waiting for refuge including further abuse from the perpetrator, financial destitution and inadequate support.



23.0%
of women spent time in
emergency accommodation



17.2%
sofa-surfed



4.9%
paid to stay in a
hostel, B&B or hotel



3.4%
stayed in **mixed-sex**
accommodation



2.9%
slept rough

Emergency accommodation often lacked the specialist support needed for recovery from domestic abuse and case studies highlighted how unsuitable accommodation can have particularly harmful impacts on the health and wellbeing of disabled women.

Statutory services often failed to meet their duty to support survivors and the NWTAs practitioners play a key role in holding these services to account.



87 incidents of **statutory agencies**
responding inappropriately to survivors were
recorded by Women's Aid Direct Services in 2023.

For example, housing teams ignored guidance that **local connection rules do not apply** in domestic abuse cases.



16%

Social services failed to meet their obligation to safeguard women and children **for at least 16.3% of survivors** who contacted them.

The NWTAs practitioners ensure women are aware of their rights and, sometimes with the support of solicitors, work to ensure statutory services meet their legal duties.

The NWTa project plays a pivotal role in ensuring a cohesive response between statutory and non-statutory services to ensure survivor's needs are met.

30.9% of practitioner's time was spent liaising with other professionals. The Victims and Prisoners Act has introduced a duty to collaborate¹, and the next Nowhere to Turn report will capture early data on the implementation of this duty, including whether statutory services are collaborating more effectively with non-statutory services.

By the end of support, almost half of women had a new housing outcome and most women felt safer.

22.4% of women were accommodated in refuge.



22.4% were accommodated in emergency accommodation.



4.7% were accommodated in a private rental.



61.3% of women felt that their safety had improved.



Recommendations



Recommendation for the No Woman Turned Away project:

1. Women's Aid to undertake activities to further develop the NWTa project, including adapting data collection tools to evidence changing barriers to support for women accessing the service.

Recommendations for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities:

1. Continue to work with Women's Aid to develop and resource the NWTa project.
2. Create a formal oversight mechanism to ensure that local authorities are meeting their duty to give automatic priority need for homelessness assistance to survivors.
3. Through the National Expert Steering Group on Safe Accommodation, develop robust national oversight of commissioning practices to ensure local commissioning of specialist domestic abuse services – including 'by and for' services for Black and minoritised women – is consistent, informed by best practice, and tailored to local demographics, to ensure funds have maximum impact.

¹ The duty is on Police and Crime Commissioners, local authorities and Integrated Care Boards in England to collaborate locally, to facilitate more holistic and better coordinated victim support services.

Recommendations for statutory agencies:

1. Fund training, developed and delivered by specialist domestic abuse organisations, for those working in all statutory services². Training should align to the legal definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and respond to the full breadth of survivors' needs. The impact of this training should be evaluated to ensure statutory services are meeting their duties³ to survivors of domestic abuse, including children.
2. Commissioners should undertake mandatory, regular and specialist training, developed and delivered by specialist organisations like Women's Aid, in how to commission survivor-centred specialist support in line with statutory guidance for the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Home Office's National Statement of Expectations for VAWG Services (2022).

Recommendations for the Treasury:

1. Commit to a minimum annual funding settlement of £427 million for specialist domestic abuse services in England, of which a minimum of £189 million is ring-fenced for refuge services and ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' refuge services and refuge services for those with No Recourse to Public Funds.⁴
2. Distribute funding in accordance with a national needs assessment, including a review of provision for survivors facing the barriers identified in the report.

² This should include local housing teams, local authority safeguarding and police.

³ Duties including, but not limited to, Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the Housing Act 1996 and section 78 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Equality Act 2010.

⁴ For a full breakdown of costs please see: Women's Aid (2023b) *Investing to save: The economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support*. Bristol: Women's Aid. Available online: www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Investing-to-save-report-ResPublica-and-Womens-Aid.pdf

Recommendations for the Home Office:

1. Equip local domestic abuse services to better support migrant women by funding training for frontline staff on identifying the rights of migrant women.
2. Implement a firewall between Immigration Enforcement and statutory services, to ensure women experiencing abuse are treated as victims first and foremost.
3. Abolish the NRPF condition for survivors of domestic abuse.
4. Extend eligibility for the Domestic Violence (DV) Rule to ensure not only survivors on spousal visas can access a refuge space, financial support and housing.
5. Embed awareness of the housing barriers faced by survivors of domestic abuse.

Recommendation for the Ministry of Justice:

1. Fund training, developed and delivered by specialist domestic abuse organisations, for judges, magistrates and all professionals working in the family court.

For more information on the NWTa project, please visit the Women's Aid website: www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/i-work-with-survivors/no-woman-turned-away.

Copies of all editions of the Nowhere to Turn report series can be downloaded for free online: www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-and-reports.

For information on training delivered by Women's Aid, please see our website: www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/training or email training@womensaid.org.uk.