

# THE ANNUAL AUDIT

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## 2025



women's aid  
until women & children are safe

# Authors

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**Women's Aid**

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Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. For 50 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 180 organisations which provide over 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 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, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people), the national Women's Aid Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

**Women's Aid Federation of England is a registered charity in England & Wales (1054154) and a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (3171880).**

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# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Executive Summary</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Glossary</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Definitions of service types</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Foreword</b>  | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Methodology</b>   | <b>15</b> |
| <b>1. Demand</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| 1.1 Number of survivors supported  | 20        |
| 1.2 Survivors turned away  | 22        |
| 1.3 Waiting lists  | 23        |
| <b>2. Provision</b>  | <b>26</b> |
| 2.1 General  | 26        |
| 2.2 Specialist provision   | 27        |
| 2.4 Provision for marginalised groups  | 28        |
| 2.5 Provision for children and young people  | 29        |
| 2.6 Additional support needs   | 30        |
| 2.7 Open access services   | 30        |
| <b>3. Funding</b>  | <b>32</b> |
| 3.1 Commissioned funding   | 32        |
| 3.2 Sustainability   | 43        |
| <b>4. Commissioning practices</b>  | <b>48</b> |
| 4.1 Amount of funding  | 50        |
| 4.2 Lengths of contracts   | 51        |
| 4.3 Complexity of commissioning processes  | 51        |
| 4.4 Gender-neutral commissioning   | 52        |
| <b>5. System response</b>  | <b>54</b> |
| 5.1 Local Partnership Boards   | 54        |
| 5.2 Domestic abuse duty response   | 55        |
| <b>6. Other trends and issues</b>  | <b>58</b> |
| 6.1 The cost of living, and staff recruitment and retention                          | 58        |
| 6.2 International conflicts  | 58        |
| <b>Conclusion</b>  | <b>61</b> |
| <b>References</b>  | <b>63</b> |
| <b>Appendix A: Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024 respondents' regional distribution</b> | <b>67</b> |
| <b>Appendix B: Tables on service users' access of support services from On Track</b> | <b>68</b> |
| <b>Appendix C: Data tables on service provision from Routes to Support</b>           | <b>70</b> |

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction and methodological approach

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This report is the 2025 edition of Women's Aid's annual publication on the provision and uptake of domestic abuse services in England, examining the financial year 2023-24. We have structured findings around some key research questions, developed for the purpose of providing an in-depth picture of the provision, usage and work of domestic abuse services in England during the 2023-24 financial year. The report aims to take stock of the reality of

the sector by looking at current demand, provision and funding of domestic abuse services in England, considering where progress is being made and what is still needed to support survivors. The Women's Aid data sources used in this report are On Track,<sup>1</sup> Routes to Support,<sup>2</sup> the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024, and Freedom of Information requests.

## Key findings

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### Section 1: Demand

The On Track national referral estimates estimate that 11,305 women and 12,436 children were supported by refuge services and 112,866 women and 146,726 children were supported in community-based support services.

Due to the national shortage of services, there is currently no definitive measure of demand. Estimates of prevalence, support needs reported by survivors, and data on referrals provide some indication of demand for different types of services. However, until provision and awareness of what remains very much a hidden crime

improves to a point where all of those needing support are able to make contact with services, there will be an unknown quantity in measuring demand.

Best available prevalence estimates from the Crime Survey of England and Wales suggest that 1.6 million women aged 16+ in England experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024. However, as outlined further in this report this data has a number of limitations including that the prevalence estimates are likely to underestimate gender asymmetry (ONS, 2024c).

<sup>1</sup> Women's Aid case management and outcomes monitoring system. On Track national data represents the experiences of over 200,000 survivors supported by local domestic abuse services across England, as well our own Live Chat, email and No Woman Turned Away Project. On Track reports to a core outcomes framework for survivors, developed in partnership with Imkaan.

<sup>2</sup> The UK-wide online database for domestic abuse and other violence against women services. It provides details of services available for women and children throughout the UK, including up-to-date refuge vacancies. Routes to Support was previously called UKrefugesonline (UKROL).

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However using the On Track national referral estimates, this suggests that less than one in ten women who experienced domestic abuse received support from a refuge or community-based support service. On Track data suggests that each woman in service had on average 1.2 children, which could suggest that an estimated 1.8 million children also experienced domestic abuse in that year, excluding older children experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships. Using the On Track national referral estimates, this would mean that less than one in ten children experiencing domestic abuse received support from a refuge or community-based support service.

On Track national referral estimates show that 60.1% of referrals into refuge services were rejected over the past year. The most common reason for rejection was that the refuge service did not have the capacity to support the client (45.7% of rejected referrals). This means that when a survivor was referred into refuge, there was a 27.5% chance that the refuge did not have the capacity to support her. It is important to

recognise that these estimates only tell us about the number of referrals, not the actual demand for refuge space. There will be instances where a professional searches for a vacancy on Routes to Support and finds there are no suitable spaces available to make a referral to, and many survivors do not reach out to services or professionals at all.

Just over half (51.4%) of referrals into community-based domestic abuse support (CBS) services were rejected. The most common reasons for rejection were that the client did not want support (25.7%), the survivor was already being supported by the organisation (23.5%), and the service could not contact the client (22.6%). Whilst the On Track data does not demonstrate a notable overall increase in referrals compared to the previous year, many community-based support services operate waiting lists which research demonstrates can act as a barrier to seeking support. A notable number of respondents also commented on an increasing number of referrals where women had multiple support needs.

## Section 2: Provision

On 1st May 2024 throughout England there were 246 providers running 414 local services. This is a net increase in all service types between 1st May 2023 and 1st May 2024, with the biggest increase in service type being counselling. Although there is some regional variation, there has been an increase in overall bedspaces in England since 2023, continuing an upward trend each year since 2010. However, this figure still falls short by 1,160 spaces of the Council of Europe's recommendation<sup>3</sup> and represents a total shortfall of 20.3%. Despite the year-on-year increase in refuge bedspaces, findings from our previous annual audit reports have demonstrated that the number of vacancies posted on Routes to Support has been going down each year since 2019/20. This suggests that refuge services may be facing issues which are impacting their capacity, with

many respondents in the annual survey citing the current housing crisis as having an impact on their refuge availability.

Some open-ended responses in the annual survey also expressed a lack of recognition for their specialist independent, women-led services, which has had an impact on their ability to provide these services. There were 72 services run exclusively for specific groups of survivors, including services run exclusively for Black and minoritised women (45), and women with substance use and/or mental health support needs (3). Availability of these services continues to be low: spaces in dedicated services made up just 11.6% of all refuge spaces in England, and 42.0% of these spaces are in London. The proportion of vacancies which could consider a woman with no recourse

<sup>3</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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

to public funds increased slightly from 11.7% of all vacancies in 2022-23 but remain low at 12.3% in 2023-24. Vacancies suitable for wheelchair users are incredibly scarce and dropped from 1.0% of all vacancies in 2022-23 to just 0.7% (52) of vacancies in 2023-24. Demand for domestic abuse services with specialist support workers able to provide specific support to survivors with additional support needs outstrips current provision. There has been a concerning decline in the number of specialist support workers who can offer support around alcohol use, substance use, and mental health in both refuge and community-based support services in the past year.

There was a slight increase in the number of refuge services with a dedicated service for Children and Young People (CYP) in England, with 195 CYP services listed on RtS on 1st May 2024. While this increase is positive, just 69.6% of all refuge services and 51.8% of CBS services were offering a dedicated CYP service. There was also a net increase in the number of services providing open access services, such as prevention and awareness raising work, helplines, drop-ins, and online chat, in May 2024 as compared to the previous year. Half (50.0%) of respondents to the annual survey this year ran a helpline during 2023-24.

## Section 3: Funding

Nearly 4 out of 5 refuge services were commissioned by their local authorities for all of their bedspaces in 2023-24 (79.6%). Local authority commissioning does not mean that funding is sufficient to cover all the costs associated with running a refuge service, and providers often need to source additional funding in order to continue to provide their services. Of the respondents to the annual survey who were running refuge services in 2023-24, only around a third reported that their funding had either stayed the same (36.7%) or increased (33.3%) over the past two years.

A notable number of respondents to the annual survey expressed concerns relating to the sustainability of their services, with more than one in ten (15%) respondents telling us they had to close or reduce an area of work in their service over the past financial year. Just over a third (35.0%) of respondents to the annual survey this year were running an area of their domestic

abuse service without dedicated funding during 2023-24. Although this initially appears to be a decrease from last year, there were a much larger proportion of missing responses to this question than last year (20% compared to 0%). Comparatively, the data shows that the most common area of service that organisations were running without dedicated funding, domestic abuse prevention or educational work, has increased this year from 41.2% in 2022-23 to 60.0% in 2023-24.

The proportion of organisations that were running Children and Young People's domestic abuse services in the community without dedicated funding also doubled this year, from 15.7% to 31.4%. A concerning three quarters (71.4%) of domestic abuse organisations responding to the annual survey who were running a service without dedicated funding used their organisational reserves to cover the costs.

## Section 4: Commissioning

Government investment in 2023-24 fell £321 million short of £516 million, which is the minimum level of funding required to fund local specialist women's domestic abuse services, including ring-fenced funding needed to ensure the sustainability of vital 'by and for' organisations

(Women's Aid, 2024f). Similarly to last year, we explored domestic abuse services' perceptions of commissioning practices during 2023-24. Just over a third (34.0%) thought that domestic abuse commissioning had had a mixed impact for survivors over the past year, and 30.0%

thought it had had a mostly positive impact. Only 7.0% thought that commissioning had had a detrimental impact. Over half of respondents (53.0%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'There is more funding available for our service in 2023-24', and two thirds (65.8%) disagreed that 'Funding is easy to access'.

There was a marked increase in domestic abuse providers finding commissioning processes complex this year, with over half (59.1%) either

agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'commissioning processes have been complex.' Last year this figure was less than a third (32.7%). Further concerns were raised in open-ended responses to the annual survey regarding trends in gender-neutral commissioning practices that do not appear to align with the intended provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and its purpose to ratify the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011), the Home Office VAWG commissioning toolkit, or National Statement of Expectations.<sup>4</sup>

## Section 5: System response

Over the past year, domestic abuse services have generally felt positive regarding the partnerships and collaboration they had experienced within commissioning processes, and 67.5% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'There has been positive collaboration and relationships with other partners.' The annual survey found that 65.0% of services were represented on their Local Partnership Board in 2023-24 and open-ended responses in our annual survey demonstrate mostly positive experiences of membership on these boards. Nonetheless, some reservations regarding whether the voice of the domestic abuse sector is sufficiently listened to within these forums remain.

The Annual Survey 2024 investigated to what extent services currently felt that agencies had been collaborating, what their involvement in the duties of the Victim and Prisoners Act 2024<sup>5</sup> had been so far, and what their perceptions were around it. Whilst most respondents felt that commissioning agencies 'somewhat' effectively collaborate (32.0%) on VAWG CBS service funding currently, a quarter felt that collaboration is either 'not effective' (17.0%) or 'very ineffective' (8.0%). Almost half of respondents (49.0%) had not been contacted about the new duty to collaborate as part of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.<sup>6</sup>

## Section 6: Other trends and issues

The increased cost of living has continued to be a major challenge for organisations delivering domestic abuse services. On Track data found that more than a quarter (26.9%) of women in CBS services and almost half of women in refuge (49.0%) reported experiencing increased economic and financial abuse since the increases began. The impact of increased economic abuse and the high cost of living has been profound

for survivors. Over half (53.5%) of survivors in refuge and a third (32.5%) in CBS services were left unable to afford food and many were unable to keep up with debt repayments (11.6% in CBS services, 20.3% in refuge). A notable number of respondents cited recruitment and retention of specialist staff as a main challenge over the past year, which had been further exacerbated by the increased cost of living.

<sup>4</sup> [National Statement of Expectations](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Victim and Prisoners Act 2024](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Victim and Prisoners Act 2024](#)

Escalating international conflicts, such as the one between Hamas and Israel, have been prominent in the news over the past year and some domestic abuse providers, particularly 'by and for' services have reported an impact on their services. Whilst over half of respondents reported no related impact, some respondents described concerns that the conflicts had created deeper divisions in their own local communities and noted the trauma that the instability had caused amongst both the survivors they supported as well as their staff. Services called for greater support for migrant

women and women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), emphasising how the conflict had led to greater demand for immigration services. Many annual survey respondents emphasised how conflicts throughout the world disproportionately affect women and children and regularly exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Overall, services responding to the annual survey were keen to emphasise global solidarity for women and girls affected by international conflicts and humanitarian crises over the past year.

## Concluding remarks

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Provision and demand for domestic abuse services in 2023-24 is similar to previous years, if not slightly worse. In this year, government investment fell an estimated £321 million short of the £516 million minimum needed to fund local specialist women's domestic abuse services, including ring-fenced funding needed to ensure the sustainability of vital 'by and for' organisations (Women's Aid, 2024f)<sup>7</sup>, and the impact of this shortfall is evidenced in this report. The number of bedspaces still falls short by 1,160 spaces of the Council of Europe's recommendation<sup>8</sup>, representing a total shortfall of 20.3%. Despite some improvements, systemic issues with commissioning of domestic abuse services remain. Specialist support for women experiencing additional inequalities continues

to be inaccessible to many survivors, further compounding the inequalities they face. Prevention is a vital component within addressing VAWG and domestic abuse, however, very few services are funded for this work. Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are recognised as survivors of domestic abuse in their own right and therefore should have access to services to support them. It is therefore concerning that services for children and young people are particularly underfunded.

<sup>7</sup> This figure is calculated in *Investing to Save* by Women's Aid, which is updated to include an estimate of ring-fenced funding required for services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised, LGBT+ and d/Deaf and disabled victims and survivors developed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's *Briefing Paper on proposals for a specialist 'By and For' funding pot*. Shortfall was calculated using calculations in this report: *Funding safer futures - Women's Aid*.

<sup>8</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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

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# Glossary

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

**Specialist 'by and for' services:** Specialist 'by and for' services are run by and for the communities they serve, such as for Black and minoritised women, D/deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management, and governance structures of these organisations. For the full Women's Aid definition of a specialist 'by and for' service see *Appendix D*.

**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.

**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.<sup>9</sup>

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

**Service user:** any woman who is accessing/has accessed domestic abuse support services.

**Specialist women's domestic abuse services:** Specialist women's domestic abuse services are run by women's, feminist organisations. They are run by women, and for women and their children. Their core business and organisational purpose it is to support survivors and/or children and young people impacted by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). The services they deliver are specifically designed to support women and children affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or other forms of VAWG. Specialist services differ from generic services because they are independent from the state. They were established as local, grassroots and independent organisations, which is critical for women survivors' ability to trust them. The full Women's Aid definition of specialist women's domestic abuse services and 'by & for' services can be found on the [Women's Aid website](#).

**Survivor:** At Women's Aid, we use the term 'survivor' rather than 'victim' as it speaks to the strength of people experiencing domestic abuse, is less criminal justice focused and more empowering.

<sup>9</sup> Our research has shown that survivors with insecure immigration status may sometimes be misunderstood as having no recourse to public to funds when this is not the case, limiting their access to support to which they are entitled (Women's Aid, 2022a).

## Definitions of service types

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### 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 above. 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 support (CBS) 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 Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (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. It focuses on providing a service to victims judged to be at medium to high risk of harm, aims to address their safety needs and help manage the risk that they face.

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## 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 including 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 who provide emotional support, group work, or 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.

# Foreword



**Farah Nazeer**  
CEO  
Women's Aid

Every year, Women's Aid produces an Annual Audit that provides a comprehensive overview on the state of domestic abuse services in England, considering what progress has been made, as well as identifying any gaps that need to be addressed for women and children who have experienced abuse to be properly supported. This unique report provides up-to-date information on the challenges faced by domestic abuse services, allowing us to work towards meaningful and impactful change in the sector, and for survivors of domestic abuse, going forward.

The election of a new Government, who have made a commitment to halve violence against women and girls over the next decade, means that this year's Audit has particular significance as it will act as the baseline for future years and allow us to measure change as we work towards this goal. As the most common form of violence against women and girls, domestic abuse must be treated with the utmost priority by this Government, and essential funding must be provided to the specialist services that support survivors. These life-saving services work tirelessly to help survivors rebuild their lives away from abuse.

Funding continues to be an ongoing challenge for the sector and services. Alarming, 15.0% of respondents told us they needed to or were close to reducing an area of work in their service over the last financial year due to limited funds. With the rising cost of living, this underfunding of life saving and changing services is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Domestic abuse organisations cannot continue to run services with insufficient or no budget when they face rising energy bills and challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, alongside continued high demand. Women's Aid fear that services may be forced to shut down, leaving survivors without the

support they so desperately need, if the necessary investment is not made.

While this year's Freedom of Information (FOI) requests found that 79.6% of domestic abuse refuge services were commissioned by their local authorities for all their bedspaces in 2023-24, representing a small but positive increase on previous years, it is important to recognise that commissioning does not guarantee the full funding of a service's needs. Commissioned funding may cover costs related to providing support to survivors, such as staff salaries, but not to areas like building maintenance or central running costs. The postcode lottery of support that survivors are currently experiencing needs to be resolved so that all survivors have ability to access support, and the issue of unmet need is addressed, no matter where in the country they are.

The survey this year has identified discrepancies within commissioning, finding that members of Imkaan (the UK-based umbrella women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and Minoritised women and girls) were less likely to be commissioned by the local authority with only 63.2% of services being fully commissioned. While this does mark an increase on the 40% reported in 2022-23, the figure remains significantly lower than the national proportion. This disparity is creating a barrier for Black and minoritised survivors accessing specialist support from 'by and for' organisations.

Survivors living with disabilities have also been identified as experiencing barriers when accessing support. Sadly, this year's survey has highlighted that for some, the situation has gotten worse. The number of vacancies for wheelchair users has dropped to a woefully low 0.7% in 2023-24, from an already disappointing 1.0% in 2022-23. This is deeply concerning, as such limited space means that survivors using wheelchairs may not be able to flee abuse and are forced to stay with their abuser due to refuge spaces not having the facilities needed to accommodate them. This is dangerous and needs to be urgently addressed to ensure that survivors have the ability to flee and live in safety.

Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021, children have been recognised as survivors in their own right. It is, therefore, highly concerning that our estimates suggest that as few as one in ten child survivors of domestic abuse are being supported by a refuge or community-based support service. This excludes children and young people (CYP) under the age of 16 who are experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships as there is currently no data available on the prevalence of domestic abuse in this age group. Furthermore, the proportion of organisations that were running CYP services in the community without dedicated funding also doubled this year. There has never been a more critical need for support for children and young people that centres their needs and the needs of the non-abusive family member(s) caring for them.

Our work on the attitudes of children and young people has demonstrated an urgent need for specialist awareness programmes, yet the most common area of service that organisations were running without dedicated funding was domestic abuse prevention or education work, which increased this year from 41.2% in 2022-23 to 60.0% in 2023-24.

While this Audit has shown some of the ongoing challenges facing the domestic abuse sector, it also provides us with a clear path for improvement and the actions that need to be taken. For the Government to fulfil their commitment of halving violence against women and girls over the next decade, they must recognise the value and cost-effective solution that organisations and experts in this sector bring and work with us to achieve their ambitious goal. Many recent Government announcements and investments on domestic abuse and violence against women and girls have been focused on criminal sanctions, such as police reforms and changes to Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) and there is a need to meet survivors where they are and invest in provision as well as prevention. It is only by working together, and ensuring that the needs of those providing vital, life-saving services are met, that we can work towards a society which has no place for domestic abuse, or any other violence against women and girls.

# Introduction

This report is the 2025 edition of Women's Aid's yearly publication on the provision, usage and work of domestic abuse services in England, examining the financial year 2023-24. The Women's Aid data sources used in this report are On Track, Routes to Support, the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024, and Freedom of Information requests.

The report is framed around a number of interrelated research questions that were used to explore current trends within the domestic abuse sector.

**Copies of all editions of our Annual Audits, along with Women's Aid's other research, can be downloaded for free online on the [Women's Aid website](#).**

**Note on comparisons:** We would advise caution when making comparisons between findings from different Annual Audit reports. We have provided information about indicative trends, however, would note differences in sample size and composition each year that could affect results. 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. For any questions about use of the data please contact Women's Aid: [researchandpolicy@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:researchandpolicy@womensaid.org.uk).

# Methodology

Findings in this report draw upon four data sources: On Track (the Women's Aid case management and outcomes monitoring system); Routes to Support (the UK-wide online database for domestic abuse and other violence against women services); the Annual Survey; and Freedom of Information requests. Details on each of these data sources are described below.

The Annual Audit findings are focused on key areas of demand, provision, funding and

commissioning, as well as wider issues from the previous year to investigate the experiences of domestic abuse services in England during the 2023-24 financial year. This includes analysis of trends and insights into which areas are improving or declining over time.

Full data tables from On Track and Routes to Support can be found in the appendices, or on our online data dashboards and the On Track data briefing.

## On Track

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

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Throughout the report, data is included on the profile, needs and experiences of women accessing domestic abuse support services. To do this, we have used data from On Track, Women's Aid's bespoke case management and outcomes monitoring system. On Track is used by over 100 local domestic abuse services across every region in England.

Where survivors and services consent, the information collected through their daily work with survivors contributes to an anonymous national dataset held by Women's Aid. As of September 2024, the On Track national dataset contained information on 239,234 survivors, 221,712 of whom are female<sup>10</sup>, who have accessed domestic abuse services since the system was launched on 1st April 2016. The On Track national

dataset is the largest dataset in the country on the experiences of survivors and their experiences accessing domestic abuse support services.

The national dataset includes a range of information about survivors' journeys including referral patterns, experiences of abuse, support needs, demographics, types of support provided, outcomes, feedback, negative experiences of external services (e.g. housing, legal services, local authority safeguarding, NHS, police). It contains data on both adults and children and young people accessing domestic abuse support services.

This report provides data on a sample of 40,120 female survivors recorded on On Track who finished a period of support from a refuge or community-based service using On Track in the

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**10** 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.

year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, and who consented for their anonymised data to be shared with Women's Aid. Of these:

- ▶ 3,834 accessed refuge services.
- ▶ 36,899 accessed community-based support (CBS) services.<sup>11</sup>

The full presentation of the On Track national data on the demographics, experiences of abuse and support needs can be viewed in the On Track data briefing, which is supplementary to this report and can be found on the Women's Aid *Annual Audit 2025* webpage.

In this report we are also presenting new data on survivors' experiences in relation to the high cost of living collected through On Track. This data is from a sub-sample of survivors who have completed an additional form on their profile including 325 women who accessed refuge and

859 women who accessed community-based support services. This data demonstrates the devastating impacts the high cost of living is having on survivors, including fears around homelessness, inability to leave a perpetrator due to increasing costs, and experiences of economic abuse.

It is important to note that On Track data is only able to report on the experiences of survivors who have successfully accessed domestic abuse support services. There are many survivors of domestic abuse who 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 such survivors, it would likely be different to that of the survivors in our sample from On Track.

## Routes to Support

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Throughout the report, data is included from a snapshot of the available provision in England on 1st May 2024 and analysis of change during the year from 1st May 2023 along with analysis of refuge referrals and vacancies during that same year<sup>12</sup>. Tables showing a full range of data on service provision are available in *Appendix C*. Information about the services (in England only) was taken from 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 Ministry for Housing, Community and Local Government. 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 2023-24, there were over 170,000 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

<sup>11</sup> Community-based services include floating support, outreach, IDVA and advocacy services.

<sup>12</sup> Vacancies posted to Routes to Support from April 2023 to March 2024.

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abuse services provided, the number of bedspaces 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.

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 that are listed on Routes to Support for the same region which are not using On Track.
- b. **Community-based support (CBS) services:** 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.
- c. **Number of children:** average number of children per woman accessing services from On Track applied to above two estimates.
- d. **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.

## Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024

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The Women's Aid Annual Survey is a national survey of the whole range of specialist domestic abuse services for women and children in England. The online survey was sent in June 2024 (with a deadline of mid-July) to all domestic abuse services in England that run both or one of refuge and/or community-based support (CBS) services, listed on Routes to Support (248 organisations running 415 services in total). We received responses from 100 organisations who were running 177 service entries on Routes to Support. This gives a response rate of 42.7%<sup>13</sup>. Of these 100 respondents:

- ▶ 70 responded that they ran refuge services (28 indicated that they did not, and two did not respond to the question)
- ▶ 79 responded that they provided community-based support services (12 indicated that they did not, and nine did not respond to this question)

Respondents were self-selecting. The survey contained both open and closed questions. Open-text questions were categorised according to common themes. Similar to the Annual Audit 2023, we asked questions to all domestic abuse and VAWG services about the value that they felt they had contributed to survivors and the wider community over the past year, as well as how services were funded in 2023-24, and their experiences of commissioning processes.

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<sup>13</sup> 177 out of 415 services responded.

## Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

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To provide a comprehensive picture of local authority refuge funding in England, we gathered additional evidence sources that were used alongside the snapshot of domestic abuse refuge services in England listed on Routes to Support and the responses to the Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024.

Women’s Aid submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to all local authorities in England in June 2024. The purpose of the FOI request was to build up a picture of national commissioning trends, primarily by mapping which domestic abuse refuge and non-refuge services are commissioned by local authorities. The FOI request was sent to all 317 local authorities in England and of these, 315 local authorities responded (99.4%). 100% of County Councils responded to our request.

Where it was not possible to determine the 2023-24 commissioned status of refuge services using the data sources outlined above, confirmation was sought from the remaining refuge services through phone calls and emails. Analysis and comparison of these data sources, along with Women’s Aid sector expertise and specialist knowledge about domestic abuse service providers, has enabled us to confirm the numbers and proportion of refuge services and bedspaces in England that are funded through local authority commissioning arrangements.

**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 research online](#).**

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# 1. DEMAND

Due to the national shortage of services, there is currently no definitive measure of demand. Estimates of prevalence, support needs reported by survivors, and data on referrals, caseloads and waiting lists provide some indication of demand for different types of services. However, until provision and awareness of what remains very much a hidden crime improves to a point where all of those needing support are able to make contact with services, there will be an unknown quantity in measuring demand.

Current estimates for the prevalence of domestic abuse are drawn from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, however, these figures are subject to a number of limitations including that they are likely to underestimate the gendered nature of domestic abuse.



The On Track national referral estimates estimate that **11,305 women** and **12,436 children** were supported by **refuge** services and **112,866**

**women** and **146,726 children** were supported in **community-based support** services.



An estimated **1.6 million women** in England aged 16+ experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024. This means that **less than**

**one in ten** women estimated to have experienced domestic abuse **received support** from a refuge or community-based support service.



**Each woman in service had on average 1.2 children**, which could mean that an estimated 1.8 million children also experienced domestic

abuse in that year, excluding older children experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships. **This would mean that less than one in ten children experiencing domestic abuse received support in a refuge or community-based support service.**



**60.1% of referrals into refuge services were rejected over the past year.** The most common reason for

rejection was that the refuge service did not have the capacity to support the client (45.7% rejected referrals).



**Just over half (51.4%) of referrals into community-based domestic abuse services were rejected.** The

most common reasons for rejection were that the client did not want support (25.7%), the survivor was already being supported by the organisation (23.5%), and the service could not contact the client (22.6%).



Respondents to the annual survey reported that an increasing volume of referrals into their service had been a significant challenge over the past

year, as well as increasing referrals for women with multiple support needs. **Some services even reported needing to temporarily close referrals for a number of weeks in order to manage demand.**

# 1. Demand

## 1.1 Number of survivors supported

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The On Track national referral estimates estimate that 11,305 women and 12,436 children were supported by refuge services and 112,866 women and 146,726 children were supported in community-based support services.

Due to the national shortage of services, there is currently no definitive measure of demand. Estimates of prevalence, support needs reported by survivors, data on referrals, caseloads and waiting lists, provide some indication of demand for different types of services. However, until provision and awareness of what remains very much a hidden crime improves to a point where all of those needing support are able to make contact with services, there will be an unknown quantity of demand that remains impossible to measure.

In England and Wales, the best available estimates of prevalence of domestic abuse are from the Crime Survey that is carried out annually by the Office for National Statistics. The latest figures, to the year ending March 2024, found that around one in four women (27.4%) have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16. For men, the figure is around one in seven (13.7%). For partner abuse only, the figures are 22.9% for

women and 9.7% for men (ONS, 2024c). In the year ending March 2024, the ONS estimated that 2.3 million people (4.8%) aged 16 years and over (1.6 million women, 6.6% and 712,000 men, 3.0%) experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales (ONS, 2024b). However, these prevalence estimates do not take into account important context and impact information, for example, whether the violence caused fear, who experienced multiple incidents and who experienced coercive and controlling behaviour. The prevalence estimates are therefore likely to underestimate the gendered nature of domestic abuse (Women's Aid, 2024c). Women's Aid has been supporting the development of new questions to better capture coercive control, which are currently being tested by the ONS (ONS, 2023). In addition to underestimating gender inequality, the Crime Survey also underestimates abuse experienced by those living in care settings and other settings not covered by the household survey. Whilst the upper age limit was removed in 2021<sup>14</sup>, experiences of domestic abuse amongst those who are under 16 years are still not captured in the survey. Finally, there have been some limitations around the Crime Survey since the Covid-19 pandemic that can make it difficult to make year on year comparisons.<sup>15</sup>

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**14** The upper age limit was removed in October 2021 following successful campaigning from Women's Aid and others, demonstrating that domestic abuse can be suffered by anyone – daughters, mothers, grandmothers. Prior to this the crime survey only reported on domestic abuse experiences of those up to age of 59.

**15** In the year ending March 2023 survey, an error in the survey resulted in missing data for some respondents from October 2022 to January 2023 inclusive; as a result, estimates for the year ending March 2023 for domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking are based on eight months of interviews and exclude the affected survey months. See: ONS [Domestic Abuse Quality and Methodology Information](#)

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Whilst both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence and abuse, there are important differences between male violence against women and female violence against men, namely the amount, severity and impact. Women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation and are much more likely to be seriously hurt (Walby and Towers, 2018; Walby and Allen, 2004) or killed than male victims of domestic abuse (ONS, 2024b). Further to that, women are more likely to experience higher levels of fear and are more likely to be subjected to coercive and controlling behaviours (Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Hester, 2013; Myhill, 2015). It is particularly important to understand that men do not experience domestic abuse as part of embedded, structural inequalities against their sex. For women, however, domestic abuse is deeply rooted in inequalities between women and men. Other forms of inequality (such as racism, ageism, discrimination against D/deaf and disabled women and women who self-define as LGBT+) also intersect with sexual inequality to affect experiences of domestic abuse.

With the above caveats noted, the Crime Survey estimates that in the year ending March 2024, around 1.6 million women experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales. Whilst the number for England alone has not been published, the prevalence rate for women over the age of 16 experiencing domestic abuse in Wales in that year was 9.9% (ONS, 2024c). The mid-year population estimate for females over the age of 16 in Wales in 2023 was 1,344,124 (ONS, 2023). It could therefore be estimated that approximately 133,068 women experienced domestic abuse in Wales that year, and therefore approximately 1,466,932 women experienced domestic abuse in England in the year ending March 2024 (1,600,000-133,068). This is an estimate; however, it does highlight the current gap between prevalence and provision. Using the above On Track national referral estimates, if 124,171 women were supported by refuge and community-based support services in this year, the estimate suggests that less than one in ten women experiencing domestic abuse received support from a refuge or a community-based support service.

Data from On Track suggests that women in services had on average 1.2 children. If this figure is applied to the national prevalence estimate of 1,466,932 women who experienced domestic abuse in England in the year ending March 2024, this would mean that an estimated 1,760,318 children also experienced domestic abuse in that year, excluding the abuse experienced by older children in their own relationships. Whilst this figure is an estimate and it is possible that women in service are more likely to have children, it shows the critical importance of children being legally recognised as survivors in their own right and receiving the right support. Using the above On Track national referral estimates, if 159,162 children were supported by refuge and community-based support services, this would also be less than one in ten of the estimated total number of child survivors.

There is currently no definitive data on the support required by survivors. Each survivor's journey and context are different, and each survivor will require different types of support to escape abuse, recover and rebuild their life. The support required will be influenced in particular by the structural inequalities that individuals experience. A survey carried out by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office of around 4,000 survivors who had either accessed or thought about accessing support found that survivors prioritised counselling, therapeutic support and advice (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022, p.34). The paper also found that the type of support that was prioritised varied by different types of populations and that the majority of Black and minoritised survivors (67%), LGBT+ survivors (68%) and over half of Disabled survivors (55%) said that they had wanted to access specialist support that was delivered 'by and for' their own communities.

Whilst demand therefore clearly outstrips provision, there is no definitive measure of shortfall. It is, therefore, important that current specialist service provision be strengthened, so that services are better able to monitor and eventually meet the demands of all survivors of domestic abuse.

## 1.2 Survivors turned away

On Track national referral estimates show that 60.1% of referrals into refuge services were rejected over the past year. The most common reason for rejection was that the refuge service did not have the capacity to support the client, accounting for 45.7% of all unsuccessful referrals into refuge. This includes when the service rejected the referral because they could not meet the support needs of the client. The most common support needs which services could not accommodate include drug and alcohol use (5.6%), mental health (4.6%), NRPF (2.6%) and disability (2.3%). Other reasons referrals into refuges were rejected include because the client declined support, or the service could not contact the client (23.7%).

Just over half (51.4%) of referrals into community-based domestic abuse services were rejected. The most common reasons for rejection were that the client did not want support (25.7%), the survivor was already being supported by the organisation (23.5%), and the service could not contact the client (22.6%). Just over half (50.1%) of the unsuccessful referrals recorded by community-based support services were submitted by the police. The breakdown of reasons for unsuccessful referrals into services can be viewed in **Table B1** in *Appendix B*.

We can expect that the number of rejected referrals recorded in the On Track national dataset underestimates the true demand for domestic abuse services. Recording all unsuccessful referrals places a huge administrative burden on support services and is not always a priority when capacity in services is limited. Additionally, it is not appropriate to collect information about a survivor to record the referral when the service is not going on to support her. Some referrals are made through informal pathways without the information needed to record on a case management system. Support services are, however, more likely to record unsuccessful

referrals which have come from statutory services or through more formal pathways. For example, 50.1% of all unsuccessful referrals into community-based support services were submitted by the police and where services will have to evidence that they took all avenues to get in contact with the survivor and so record the referral in their case management system.

When domestic abuse support services are already at capacity, they will often close referral pathways into their service and stop operating waiting lists. External services will often not refer into domestic abuse services when they know that the service is already at capacity or if they know the service does not have the appropriate facilities to support a survivor with additional support needs. The On Track dataset cannot capture referrals which were not submitted in the first place because the service is oversubscribed. Due to these reasons, not all referrals received by support services will be recorded in this sample and the On Track national dataset will underestimate the unmet demand for domestic abuse support services.

This data from On Track does not demonstrate a notable overall increase in referrals compared to the previous year. However, increases in referrals and shortfall of provision when compared to demand were observed in the annual survey responses. Several annual survey respondents stated that an increasing volume of referrals into their service had presented a challenge over the past year, and many others expressed that they continue to struggle to meet demand overall.

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*Substantial increase in victims coming forward for support +69% year on year and more complex cases - which is not sustainable.”*

Annual Survey 2024

Along with increased demand overall, a notable number of respondents to the annual survey reported an increase in women with one or more support needs.

“*Complex needs of clients (20.22% of our Hampshire clients have multiple vulnerabilities).*”  
**Annual Survey 2024**

Furthermore, more than one service provider noted how for a period of time they had needed to limit the number of new cases they took on and closed their referrals for, in one case, eight weeks. They specified that this was due to funding and staffing issues they were facing and during this time only dealt with high-risk cases.

“*Due to funding and staffing issues we had to close referrals for approximately 8 weeks, we only dealt with HIGH cases. For a period of time we limited the amount of cases we took on due to staffing and funding.*”  
**Annual Survey 2024**

“*We were forced to close the service to professional referrals for periods of time to ensure that safe caseloads were held.*”  
**Annual Survey 2024**

### 1.3 Waiting lists

As demand continues to outweigh capacity, services operate waiting lists to monitor referrals and survivors requiring support.

**Table 1.1** shows the average length of time survivors waited before accessing different service types from On Track. Survivors had to wait nearly two months to access Advocacy (non-IDVA) support, one month to access Outreach services, just over 10 days to access Floating Support and IDVA services, and one week before accessing refuge.

“*We have seen a major increase of referrals for our community services, and we don't have the capacity of staff to meet the increased needs, meaning waiting lists.*”  
**Annual Survey 2024**

| Table 1.1: Average wait time (in days) |                     |                  |      |          |        |
|--|---------------------|------------------|------|----------|--------|
| On Track data                          |                     |                  |      |          |        |
| Service type                           | Advocacy (non-IDVA) | Floating Support | IDVA | Outreach | Refuge |
| Average wait (in days)                 | 58.6                | 11.7             | 11.9 | 30.7     | 7.3    |

On Track data can only report on waiting list times for survivors who successfully accessed the service. Many referrals are placed on a waiting list but do not end with the survivor accessing support. This can happen when there are long waiting times and survivors' circumstances change or because the service had to close the waiting list because they cannot keep up with demand. Operating waiting lists also places an additional administrative burden on services, and it is often difficult to accurately record waiting times. This often leads to gaps in data collection on waiting lists and therefore does not provide the full picture of demand.

“Demand is outstripping capacity. We managed to get additional funding for more children's workers after having to close to new children's outreach referrals - but as soon as we opened for referrals again the numbers have been building up again. We now have over 100 children waiting for support.”

**Annual Survey 2024**

Service providers reported positive experiences with reducing their waiting lists after funding enabled them to increase their capacity.

“Waiting times for our CYP service have reduced by 50% over the last 2 years. We attribute this to increased capacity in the team as a result of MOJ (Ministry of Justice) funded specialist CYP posts.”

**Annual Survey 2024**

“We have for the first time accessed funding for a full-time facilitator. We now deliver group support programmes 5 days per week (2 sessions most days). In the past we had waiting lists (of usually more than 100 women) we have brought our wait time down considerably.”

**Annual Survey 2024**

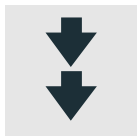
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# 2. PROVISION



Although there is some regional variation, there has been an **increase in overall bedspaces in England** since 2023, continuing an upward trend each year since 2010. However, this figure **still falls short by 1,160 spaces** of the Council of Europe's recommendation<sup>16</sup> and represents a total shortfall of 20.3%.



Despite the year-on-year increase in refuge bedspaces, the number of **vacancies** posted on Routes to Support has been **decreasing** each year since 2019/20. Refuge services may be facing issues that are impacting their capacity, with many respondents in the annual survey citing the **current housing crisis** as impacting their availability of refuge spaces.



There was a **small net increase of domestic abuse service providers** in England in the year, from 236 providers running 401 local services in 2022-23, to 246 providers running 414 local services in 2023-24.



There has been a **decline in the number of specialist support workers** who can offer support around alcohol use, substance use, and mental health in both refuge and community-based services in the past year.



Availability of **services run exclusively for specific groups of survivors**, including services run exclusively for Black and minoritised women, and women with substance use and/or mental health support needs services, **continues to be low**: spaces in dedicated services made up just 11.6% of all refuge spaces in England, and 42.0% of these spaces are in London.



The proportion of vacancies that could consider a woman with **no recourse to public funds** increased slightly from 11.7% of all vacancies in 2022-23 but remains low at 12.3% in 2023-24.



**Vacancies suitable for wheelchair users are incredibly scarce** and dropped from 1.0% of all vacancies in 2022-23 to just 0.7% (52) vacancies in 2023-24.



There was an **increase in the number of local services which offered a dedicated service for children and young people** (CYP) in England, from 238 services offering a CYP service in May 2023 to 247 services in May 2024. This included 195 refuge services which offered a CYP service in May 2024, a slight increase from 187 refuges in May 2023. One hundred forty-five (145) CBS services were offering a CYP service in May 2024, which is little changed from 144 CBS services in May 2023.

Although the number of local services offering a dedicated CYP service has increased slightly, just 69.6% of all refuge services and 51.8% of CBS services running at May 2024 were offering a dedicated CYP service. This means that **just under a third of refuge services and just under half of CBS services did not offer dedicated support for children and young people.**

<sup>16</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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

# 2. Provision

## 2.1 General

On 1st May 2024 throughout England there were 246 providers running 414 local services. These local services continued to offer a wide range of service types and there was a net increase in all service types between 1st May 2023 and 1st May 2024 (see **Table C1** in *Appendix C* for a full breakdown). The service type which saw the biggest net increase was counselling, with 170 local services offering counselling on 1st May 2024 compared to 155 local services on 1st May 2023, a net increase of 25 counselling services. There was also a net increase of nine refuge services, from 271 refuge services on 1st May 2023 to 280 refuge services on 1st May 2024.

There has been an increase in the number of bedspaces in England each year since 2010. There was an increase of 154 refuge spaces from 4,397 spaces on 1st May 2023 to 4,551 spaces on 1st May 2024. There was regional variation with some regions seeing a net increase and some a net decrease. The West Midlands saw the largest net increase with an increase of 99 spaces. The region with the largest net decrease is Yorkshire & Humberside, where there was a net decrease of 36 spaces. Despite the increase in spaces overall, the figure of 4,551 spaces still falls short (by 1,160 spaces) of the Council of Europe's recommendation<sup>17</sup> and represents a total shortfall of 20.3%. This has fallen slightly from the 22.2% shortfall of 1,257 spaces on 1st May 2023.

Despite the year-on-year increase in refuge bedspaces, the number of new vacancies posted on Routes to Support has been going down each

year since 2019/20 (Women's Aid, 2022b, 2023a). There were 7,550 vacancies posted in 2023-24 compared to 7,600 in 2022-23, which is a decrease of 50 vacancies (0.7%). Routes to Support data in 2023-24 showed a 27.0% decline in vacancies in services across England as compared to 2019-20 (see **Table C6** in *Appendix C*). Although in previous years, this annual decline in vacancies has been more significant (there was a 5.6% drop in vacancies between 2021-22 and 2022-23), the vacancies posted on the site are still significantly lower than before the Covid-19 pandemic. These findings suggest that despite the yearly increase in bedspaces, refuge services may be facing issues which are impacting their capacity. This trend will continue to be monitored, and the potential contributing factors will be further investigated.

As discussed in more detail in section 3, despite the increases in spaces, the figure of 4,551 spaces still falls short (by 1,160) of the Council of Europe's minimum recommendation<sup>18</sup> and represents a 20.3% shortfall.

“

*“The current housing crisis and also access limited Refuge provision for survivors, where there have been limited refuge spaces, we often clients have been placed in hotels as a temporary measure by housing teams due to the sheer lack of [temporary accommodation] available especially in London- we know this is a UK wide issue.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

<sup>17</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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

<sup>18</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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

A common thread in responses to the annual survey was that the UK housing crisis is having a direct impact on the capacity of refuges across the country. A large proportion of providers told us that this meant survivors were having to reside in refuges for much longer than necessary.

“

*“Lack of suitable housing for moving on means women and children are staying for longer than needed in refuge - we need to move people on at the appropriate time for their welfare and to free up space for those that need emergency accommodation.”*

Annual Survey 2024

Positively, a very small number of respondents to the annual survey told us that they had been able to expand upon their refuge provision through dispersed properties.

“

*“We have increased our refuge accommodation through dispersed properties. These sit outside of the commissioned contract, and we therefore have more autonomy to swiftly enable survivors to access these units outside of the refuges that must come via the [local authority] pathway.”*

Annual Survey 2024

## 2.2 Specialist provision

The specialist women’s domestic abuse sector has developed, expanded and innovated to meet the varied needs of survivors over the past 50 years. These independent, women-led services are experts in meeting the needs of women and children escaping from perpetrators of domestic abuse and supporting them on the road to recovery, independence and freedom. They are continually improving the overall response to domestic abuse in a way that empowers survivors to lead meaningful lives (Women’s Aid, 2024b).

The value that specialist services deliver is clear and well evidenced. Specialist services are critical in helping women to rebuild their lives (Solace Women’s Aid, 2014), achieve meaningful justice (Bates, *et al*, 2018), and ultimately in preventing homicide (Centre for Women’s Justice and Imkaan, 2023). Specialist services go over and above to support a diversity of needs, engage victims and survivors in the community, identify gaps and fill them, cover statutory services where they are falling short and share knowledge and expertise (Women’s Aid, 2024a). Nevertheless, for over a decade, these services – particularly those services run ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women and marginalised women more widely – have faced systemic issues with funding, procurement and commissioning (Women’s Aid, 2024b).

In the Annual Survey 2024, respondents described the struggles they are facing in providing specialist support for survivors.

“

*“The need for victims of domestic violence to have recovery support to help them recover from trauma and move forward with their lives. We are receiving large numbers of referrals for DV Counselling. We have a very limited amount of funding to provide this service, one 22.5-hour post. This funding is MOJ [Ministry of Justice] funding due to end in March 25. Large numbers of referrals are coming from mental health services. The large [Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner] funded Domestic Violence Service does not offer this provision.”*

Annual Survey 2024

The majority of domestic abuse services listed on Routes to Support are classed as ‘dedicated providers’, however some services are also provided by housing associations or in-house by local authorities. There has been little change in the proportions of services run by different provider types over the course of the last

financial year. Two new local authorities running in-house services were added to Routes to Support this year, increasing the total to 13. Although this is relatively low, we are aware that some local authorities are running domestic abuse services which are not listed on Routes to Support. One service providing CBS services was removed from Routes to Support in 2023-24 because the service was taken in-house by a local authority and the local authority did not enter the service back into the directory. In a FOI request sent to all local authorities in England in 2023, 52.0% (102) of responding local authorities reported that they provided one or more in-house service (Women's Aid, 2024a). Although these services may not all be eligible for inclusion on Routes to Support, many may be – for example, 21 local authorities reported providing a domestic abuse safe accommodation service. There are other types of providers that work on a range of issues who run domestic abuse support services alongside other areas of work (e.g. drug and alcohol support services). These providers may be less likely to be listed on Routes to Support either because they do not meet the criteria to be listed in the directory, or because they are unfamiliar with the resource.

“

*“There has been little opportunity for discussion/scrutiny of the changing balance of voluntary-sector versus local authority-led DA services. One impact of this has been some growing isolation around our outreach service – where previously we would have had strong relationships and direct influential contacts at e.g. housing and with the IDVA service, this is now greatly reduced and there is less information sharing.*

*In-house commissioning also erodes the boundaries of what counts as a ‘specialist service’ – we would not say that a statutory IDVA service falls into the definition, but the local authority does refer to this as a specialist service, resulting in less justification for funding third-sector specialist services that meet the WAFE definition.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“[The] VAWG service was taken in-house by the local authority in 2023, leading to job losses for some staff and transfer of client cases to a new provider, which was very unsettling for survivors in the service at the time. The commissioner is now recommissioning the service with a much smaller budget envelope, meaning the service will not be able to reach as many survivors or provide as much support.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

## 2.4 Provision for marginalised groups

In recognition of the diverse needs of women experiencing domestic abuse, there were 72 services run exclusively for particular groups of survivors, a slight increase from 2023 (65). This included services run exclusively for Black and minoritised women (45), and women with substance use and/or mental health support needs (3). There was also a slight net increase in refuge services run exclusively for a specific group of women, with 51 refuge services listed on Routes to Support at May 2024 as compared to 45 refuge services in May 2023. Of the 34 refuges which are

run exclusively for Black and minoritised women, 19 are run by organisations that are members of Imkaan (the UK-based umbrella women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and Minoritised women and girls). Between 1st May 2023 and 1st May 2024, two refuge services running exclusively for specific groups of women were removed from Routes to Support. The eight refuge services running exclusively for specific groups of women that were added to Routes to Support in this period included:

- ▶ Two refuges for South Asian women.
- ▶ One refuge for Polish women.
- ▶ One refuge for young women aged 14-24.
- ▶ One refuge for women aged over 55.
- ▶ One refuge for women with NRPF.
- ▶ One refuge for women with substance use support needs.
- ▶ One refuge for trans survivors.

Not all these services are run by 'by and for' expert organisations led by women or survivors from the group they support. A full list of services run exclusively for specific groups is available in **Table C1** in *Appendix C*.

Availability of these services is very low: spaces in dedicated services made up just 11.6% of all refuge spaces in England, a slight reduction from

12.1% in 2023. Additionally, 42.0% of these spaces are in London. Refuge spaces listed on Routes to Support for women with insecure immigration status dropped from 69 spaces to 21 spaces during this period. This was largely due to one refuge service run exclusively for women with insecure immigration status having a significant number of bedspaces reassigned to a modern slavery service that the provider now delivers alongside their domestic abuse refuge.

Some women face additional barriers to accessing refuge services, for example women with no recourse to public funds, and women with limited mobility. The proportion of vacancies that could consider a woman with no recourse to public funds increased slightly from 11.7% of all vacancies in 2022-23 but remains low at 12.3% in 2023-24. Vacancies suitable for wheelchair users are incredibly scarce and dropped from 1.0% of all vacancies in 2022-23 to just 0.7% (52) of vacancies in 2023-24. Please see **Table C7** in *Appendix C*.

## 2.5 Provision for children and young people

There was an increase in the number of local services which offered a dedicated service for Children and Young People (CYP) in England, from 238 services offering a CYP service in May 2023 compared to 247 services in May 2024. This included 195 refuge services which offered a CYP service in May 2024, a slight increase from 187 refuges in May 2023. The proportion of different types of CYP support (for example formal counselling, individual support, and play therapy) available within refuge services has remained largely the same in 2024 as compared to 2023. One hundred forty-five (145) CBS services were offering a CYP service in May 2024, which is little changed from 144 CBS services in May 2023. Although the number of local services offering a dedicated CYP service has increased slightly, just 69.6% of all refuge services and 51.8% of CBS services running at May 2024 were offering a dedicated CYP service. This means that just under a third of refuge services and just under half of CBS services did not offer dedicated support

for children and young people. A full list of CYP services in refuge and CBS is available in **Tables C12** and **C13** in *Appendix C*.

A number of respondents to the annual survey described the positive contribution to the needs of children and young people that their service had made this year. For some, this was long-term, allowing the service to become an embedded part of provision.

“

*“There is one CYP IDVA and a new CYP domestic abuse service, so we are able to meet need. The new service is funded for three years plus two - which will enable it to be fully embedded and the need recognised.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Other respondents commented on the high demand for children’s services in their area, and how their CYP support workers still struggle to support the level of demand, or to be able to refer CYP for support. The level to which these services are funded is considered in section 3.3. Considerations around the level of demand are outlined in section 1.1.

“We do not provide support for children; however, we are finding it very difficult to find support for the children of our clients due to high demand and limited services available and very long wait times (two years).”

Annual Survey 2024

## 2.6 Additional support needs

On Track data shows that many survivors have additional support needs including around alcohol use (5.8% in community-based support services and 7.4% in refuge) and/or substance use (4.8% in community-based support services and 7.5% in refuge) and physical health (11.8% in community-based support services and 18.3% in refuge). We also saw that 42.3% of survivors accessing community-based support services and 51.7% of survivors in refuge had a mental health support need. This number is likely underestimated due to the specific barriers these women face when accessing support services.

Data from May 2024 shows a decline in both community-based support services and refuge services with specialist support workers compared to May 2023. This is particularly notable in services that have specialist mental health

support workers, with 15 fewer refuge services having specialist workers (33 refuge services in May 2024 compared to 48 in May 2023) and 12 fewer services offering community-based support services having specialist workers (27 in May 2024 compared to 39 in May 2023). There were also 2 fewer refuge services having specialist workers for alcohol use support needs in May 2024 compared to the previous year. See **Tables C8** and **C9** in *Appendix C*.

Demand for specialist services such as these outweighs current provision, and as service providers are constrained by the resources available to them, the limited availability of these services may indicate a lack of funding as opposed to a lack of demand. The full breakdown of data on survivors’ support needs can be accessed via the On Track data briefing.

## 2.7 Open access services

There was a net increase in the number of services providing open access services, such as helplines, drop-ins, and online chat, in May 2024 as compared to the previous year. In May 2024, 181 services were providing a helpline (165 in May 2023); 105 services were providing drop-in services (99 in May 2023); and 63 were providing an online chat service (59 in May 2023).

Half (50.0%) of respondents to the annual survey this year ran a helpline during 2023-24.

**Table 2.1: Did you run a helpline service during 2023-24?**

**Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response     | #          | %           |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| No           | 35         | 35.0%       |
| Yes          | 50         | 50.0%       |
| Missing data | 15         | 15.0%       |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>100%</b> |

# 3. FUNDING



Nearly **4 out of 5** refuge services were **commissioned by their local authorities** for all of their bedspaces in 2023-24 (79.6%). However, having

local authority commissioning does not mean that this funding is sufficient to cover all the costs associated with running a refuge service, and providers often need to source additional funding in order to continue to provide their services.



Around a **third** of annual survey respondents running refuge services, reported that their **funding had either stayed the same** (36.7%) or **increased** (33.3%) over the past two years.



However, almost a **fifth** (15.0%) of respondents to the annual survey **had to close or reduce an area of work** in their service over the past financial year.



Just over a **third** (35.0%) of respondents to the annual survey **ran an area of their domestic abuse service without dedicated funding** during 2023-24.



The most common area of service that organisations were running without dedicated funding, **domestic abuse prevention or educational work**,

has increased this year from 41.2% in 2022-23 to 60.0% in 2023-24.



The proportion of organisations that were running **children and young people's domestic abuse services** in the community **without dedicated**

**funding** also **doubled** this year, from 15.7% to 31.4% of those running a service without dedicated funds. For children and young people's domestic abuse services in refuge, this stayed consistent at 22.9% in 2023-24, compared to 23.5% in 2022-23.



Almost **three quarters** (71.4%)

of domestic abuse organisations responding to the annual survey who were running a service without dedicated funding **used reserves to cover the costs**.

# 3. Funding

## 3.1 Commissioned funding

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### 3.1.1 Refuge services

#### 3.1.1.1 Local authority funding

To determine the level of local authority funding for domestic abuse refuges, we used responses to our annual survey and to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests we sent to local authorities in England. Respondents to the FOI requests were asked which domestic abuse services the local authority funded, and to indicate what form of funding was provided: funding secured through a competitive tender process; grant funding (a sum of money provided under a grant funding agreement where applicants must meet the conditions of a fund); or whether the service was provided in-house. Services were then categorised as 'commissioned' where they received either funding secured through a competitive process, grant funding, or both types. To address any gaps, we sent emails to refuge providers asking for information about local authority funding. (See section on Methodology for more details.)

The proportion of commissioned refuge services in England has slightly increased in recent years. In 2021-22, 71.1% of refuge services were commissioned (192 out of 270), and in 2022-23, 77.1% of refuge services were commissioned (209 out of 271). Nearly 4 out of 5 refuge services were commissioned by their local authorities for all of their bedspaces in 2023-24 (79.6%), see **Table 3.2**. This is a slight increase on the previous year (77.1% in 2022-23). It is worth noting, however, that in previous years there has been a proportion of missing data where it was not possible to determine the commissioned status of some refuge services. There is no missing data for

2023-24, which may account for some changes in percentages. There were 39 refuge services (13.9% of all refuge services) that received no commissioned funding from their local authority, which was a slight increase on the previous year (11.8% in 2022-23). There were also 14 'partially commissioned' refuge services that received funding through a local authority commissioning process for some of the bedspaces in their refuge service but were also providing additional bedspaces that were not included in their commissioned contract and were funded through other means.

There was a regional variation in the proportion of refuge service commissioning across England during 2023-24. Refuge services in some regions were more likely to be commissioned than others. For example, 95.5% of refuges in the East of England were commissioned, 90.5% of refuges in the South East of England, 86.4% of refuges in the South West of England, and 84.2% of refuges in London. Comparatively, refuge services were less likely to be commissioned in certain regions, for example in the West Midlands (61.8% of refuges) and Yorkshire and Humberside (68.0% of refuges). The highest proportion of partially commissioned refuge services was found in North West England (14.7% of refuge services). Please see **Table 3.1** for full details.

There has been an increase in the number of bedspaces in England each year since 2010. There was an increase of 154 spaces from 4,397 bedspaces at 1st May 2023 to 4,551 spaces at 1st May 2024. Despite the increase in spaces, the figure of 4,551 spaces still falls short (by 1,160) of the Council of Europe's minimum recommendation<sup>19</sup>

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**19** 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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398



and represents a 20.3% shortfall. As shown in **Table 3.2**, 11.3% (513) of the total 4,551 bedspaces running at 1st May 2024 were not funded through local authority commissioning arrangements. If these non-commissioned spaces were not available, the level of refuge shortfall

in England would increase from 20.3% (1,160) to 29.0% (1,673). The number of bedspaces here refers to the number of bedspaces in refuge, as per the service definitions above. This does not include the category of floating support, which is associated with maintaining tenancies.

**Table 3.1: Regional breakdown of local authority commissioning of refuge services in 2023-24**  
**FOI Requests 2024**

| Region                 | Commissioned |       | Not Commissioned |       | Other    |        | Partially Commissioned |       | Total      |
|------------------------|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|----------|--------|------------------------|-------|------------|
|                        | #            | %     | #                | %     | #        | %      | #                      | %     |            |
| Channel Islands        | 0            | 0.0%  | 0                | 0.0%  | 2        | 100.0% | 0                      | 0.0%  | 2          |
| East Midlands          | 18           | 78.3% | 3                | 13.0% | 0        | 0.0%   | 2                      | 8.7%  | 23         |
| East of England        | 21           | 95.5% | 1                | 4.5%  | 0        | 0.0%   | 0                      | 0.0%  | 22         |
| London                 | 48           | 84.2% | 9                | 15.8% | 0        | 0.0%   | 0                      | 0.0%  | 57         |
| North East England     | 14           | 73.7% | 4                | 21.1% | 0        | 0.0%   | 1                      | 5.3%  | 19         |
| North West England     | 27           | 79.4% | 2                | 5.9%  | 0        | 0.0%   | 5                      | 14.7% | 34         |
| South East England     | 38           | 90.5% | 2                | 4.8%  | 1        | 2.4%   | 1                      | 2.4%  | 42         |
| South West England     | 19           | 86.4% | 2                | 9.1%  | 0        | 0.0%   | 1                      | 4.5%  | 22         |
| West Midlands          | 21           | 61.8% | 10               | 29.4% | 0        | 0.0%   | 3                      | 8.8%  | 34         |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 17           | 68.0% | 6                | 24.0% | 1        | 4.0%   | 1                      | 4.0%  | 25         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>223</b>   |       | <b>39</b>        |       | <b>4</b> |        | <b>14</b>              |       | <b>280</b> |

Local authority commissioning does not mean that funding is sufficient to cover all the costs associated with running a refuge service, and providers often need to source additional funding

in order to continue to provide their services. Please see section 4.4.1 for further discussion of local authority commissioning.

**Table 3.2: Local authority commissioning of refuge services and bedspaces in 2023-24  
FOI Requests 2024<sup>20</sup>**

| 2023-24                       | #            | % of Total    | 2022-23                       | #            | % of Total    |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Commissioned Refuge           | 223          | 79.6%         | Commissioned Refuge           | 209          | 77.1%         |
| Non-Commissioned Refuge       | 39           | 13.9%         | Non-Commissioned Refuge       | 32           | 11.8%         |
| Partially Commissioned Refuge | 14           | 5.0%          | Partially Commissioned Refuge | 14           | 5.2%          |
| Other                         | 4            | 1.4%          | Other                         | 4            | 1.5%          |
| No Data                       | 0            | 0.0%          | No Data                       | 12           | 4.4%          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>280</b>   | <b>100.0%</b> | <b>Total</b>                  | <b>271</b>   | <b>100%</b>   |
| 2023-24                       |              |               | 2022-23                       |              |               |
| Commissioned bedspaces        | 3,947        | 86.7%         | Commissioned bedspaces        | 3,533        | 80.4%         |
| Non-Commissioned bedspaces    | 513          | 11.3%         | Non-Commissioned bedspaces    | 491          | 11.2%         |
| Bedspaces - Other             | 63           | 1.4%          | Bedspaces - Other             | 60           | 1.4%          |
| Bedspaces - No Data           | 28           | 0.6%          | Bedspaces - No Data           | 313          | 7.1%          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>4,551</b> | <b>100.0%</b> | <b>Total</b>                  | <b>4,397</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

Notes: Four refuge services have been classed as 'other'. Two of these services are located in crown dependencies outside of England and therefore do not operate under the same local government commissioning arrangements. The other two refuge service classed as 'other' are managed and provided directly by the local authority rather than the contract being awarded to another organisation.

<sup>20</sup> Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

## How funding was delivered to commissioned refuge services

Using the data collected from responses to our freedom of information (FOI) requests and our annual survey, we investigated how funding was delivered to refuge services which had been determined to be commissioned, partially commissioned, or ‘other’ (in-house service provision). The most common form of funding delivery was secured through a competitive tender process, with 41.1% of refuge services (99 out of 241) being determined as receiving competitive tendered funding only. A quarter (24.1%) of refuge services in the sample (58 out of 241) were determined to receive a mixture of competitive tendering and grant funding. A much smaller proportion of refuge services were determined to receive grant funding only (9.1%, 22 out of 241).

For 53 refuge services (22.0%), we were unable to determine how funding was delivered due to conflicting information between the local authority responses to the freedom of information requests, and the service responses to the annual survey. This level of discord in responses demonstrates the complicated funding landscape

that domestic abuse services operate in. See **Table 3.3** below.

The annual survey provided further details around the funding landscape for commissioned services. Some respondents to the survey described the challenges they had faced with the competitiveness of these processes.

“*The process can be competitive often you are tendering for contracts with partner services who you work closely with, and this can cause resentment.*”

**Annual Survey 2024**

“*The decision to go to competitive tendering was a huge challenge for us and involved us expending significant time and energy, and some financial cost in securing professional Tender advice, in preparing a bid for a service we were already delivering.*”

**Annual Survey 2024**

**Table 3.3: How funding was delivered to refuge services categorised as commissioned (including services categorised as partially commissioned or ‘other’/in-house)**

**FOI requests 2024**

| <b>Funding type</b>                                | <b># commissioned refuge services</b> | <b>% commissioned refuge services</b> |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Secured through a competitive tender process only  | 99                                    | 41.1%                                 |
| Mixture of competitive tendering and grant funding | 58                                    | 24.1%                                 |
| Conflicting information                            | 53                                    | 22.0%                                 |
| Grant funding only                                 | 22                                    | 9.1%                                  |
| No data  | 7                                     | 2.9%                                  |
| In-house funding only                              | 1                                     | 0.4%                                  |
| Mixture of in-house and grant funding              | 1                                     | 0.4%                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>241</b>                            |                                       |

Around a third of annual survey respondents that ran refuge services had their funding from the local authority delivered through a partnership process (36.7%, n=22). Just over half (55.0%, n=33) did not, and five did not respond to this question, 8.3%. One refuge service in the Northwest receiving grant funding only, and through a partnership process, commented:

“Since we have been delivering the refuge service for over 30 years - it was agreed that the commissioners would enter a partnership agreement with us rather than having to go out to tender. This alleviated a lot of stress and enabled us sustainability for a longer period.”

Annual Survey 2024

### Amount of commissioned funding

Of the respondents to the annual survey who were running refuge services in 2023-24, around a third reported that their funding had either stayed the same (36.7%) or increased (33.3%) over the past two years (see **Table 3.4**).

We asked annual survey respondents who were funded for refuge services by the local authority to what degree all of the costs involved in providing the service were covered by this funding, broken down by the type of cost. Local authority funding is related to the ‘support costs’ of running a refuge, which includes staff salaries, training and clinical supervision, along

with ‘activity costs’ and ‘central costs’ involved in running the organisation and premises. The costs associated with accommodation in refuge services, such as rental and service charges, are usually covered by housing-related benefits claimed by refuge residents. It should be noted that this is a major barrier to survivors with no recourse to public funds who are unable to claim state benefit, as well as women who want to keep their employment while resident in refuge, as this would prevent them from being able to claim the benefits needed to pay for their accommodation costs (Women’s Aid, 2023b).

**Table 3.4: Has your refuge service received increased funding from your local authority over the past 2 years?**

Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024

| Response        | #         | %             |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------|
| Decreased       | 7         | 11.7%         |
| Stayed the same | 22        | 36.7%         |
| Increased       | 20        | 33.3%         |
| Don't know      | 6         | 10.0%         |
| Missing data    | 5         | 8.3%          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | <b>60</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

Funding for 'support costs' was found to be higher than for 'activity costs' and 'central costs' and highlights how receiving funding from the local authority does not mean that all costs are necessarily covered by that contract (see **Table 3.5**). This illustrates that even where refuges are commissioned and contracted to provide all the bedspaces in their service, they often need to source additional funding to meet the full costs of running the service in a safe and efficient way.

The annual survey provided further details on the types of support that were funded by local authorities as part of refuge services (see **Table 3.6**). Of the annual survey respondents running refuge services who received funding from the local authority, the most common type of support that was funded was for Safety planning (75.0%), followed by Key work & support planning (73.3%) and Emotional support (71.7%).

**Table 3.5: How much funding did you receive through being commissioned by the local authority for your refuge services in 2023-24?**

**Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| <b>Amount of funding received from local authority</b> | <b>For activity costs<br/>(Direct activity costs,<br/>accessibility costs,<br/>external contractors)</b> | <b>For central costs<br/>(Admin/finance<br/>staff, management/<br/>governance staff,<br/>premises/other)</b> | <b>For support staff costs<br/>(Salaries, additional<br/>employment costs,<br/>clinical supervision,<br/>staff training)</b> |
|--|--|--|--|
| All costs  | 7 (12%)  | 10 (17%)   | 18 (30%)   |
| More than half of costs                                | 10 (17%)   | 11 (18%)   | 28 (47%)   |
| Half or less of costs                                  | 19 (32%)   | 29 (48%)   | 9 (15%)  |
| None   | 19 (32%)   | 5 (8%)   | 0 (0%)   |
| Missing data   | 5 (8%)   | 5 (8%)   | 5 (8%)   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>60</b>  | <b>60</b>  | <b>60</b>  |

**Table 3.6: Did the funding you received from the local authority cover any of the following types of support tied to the accommodation?****Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response   | #  | %     |
|--|----|-------|
| Safety planning  | 45 | 75.0% |
| Key work & support planning (work around support needs including e.g. parenting, finances and wellbeing) | 44 | 73.3% |
| Emotional support  | 43 | 71.7% |
| Access to information and advocacy   | 40 | 66.7% |
| Children and young people's domestic abuse services in refuge  | 38 | 63.3% |
| Practical help   | 34 | 56.7% |
| Access to support for children (where needed)  | 31 | 51.7% |
| Access to recovery work such as counselling and support groups/group work programmes                     | 28 | 46.7% |
| Therapeutic support services (counselling, group work)   | 28 | 46.7% |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for women with complex needs  | 15 | 25.0% |
| Access to specialist support workers (e.g. drugs/alcohol misuse, mental health, sexual abuse)            | 8  | 13.3% |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for Black and minoritised (BME) women                                 | 5  | 8.3%  |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for women with disabilities   | 4  | 6.7%  |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for Lesbian Bisexual Trans (LBT) women                                | 3  | 5.0%  |
| Other  | 5  | 8.3%  |
| None of the above  | 3  | 5.0%  |

### Specialist services - By and for

Members of Imkaan (the UK-based umbrella women’s organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls) were less likely to be commissioned by the local authority, with 12 out of 19 services (63.2%) being fully commissioned (see **Table 3.7**). Although this marks an increase in the proportion of commissioned Imkaan member run refuge services since 2022/23 (where just 40% of Imkaan member refuge services were commissioned), the proportion remains significantly lower than the national proportion (79.6%). The proportion of non-commissioned Imkaan member refuge services also decreased from 50% in 2023 (10 out of 20) to 36.8% in 2024 (7 out of 19). Although this reduction is welcome, Imkaan member services are still providing a much higher proportion of non-commissioned refuge services than the national proportion (13.9%).

There was an increase in the proportion of commissioned bedspaces in refuges run by Imkaan member services in 2024 as compared to 2023.

In 2023, 55.9% of bedspaces provided by Imkaan member services were commissioned, and in 2024, 65.9% of these bedspaces were commissioned. This is still much lower than the national proportion of commissioned bedspaces (86.7%). There was also a drop in the proportion of non-commissioned bedspaces in refuges run by Imkaan member services in 2024 as compared to 2023. In 2023, 44.1% of bedspaces provided by Imkaan member services were non-commissioned, and in 2024, 34.1% of bedspaces were non-commissioned. This is still over three times higher than the national proportion of non-commissioned bedspaces in 2024 (11.3%).

“Awarding contracts to large non specialists who then call us to come and help and support [Black and minoritised] victims in their service.”

Annual Survey 2024

**Table 3.7: Imkaan members - Local authority commissioning of refuge services and bedspaces in 2023-24**

**FOI Requests 2024**

| <b>2023-24</b>                | <b>#</b>   | <b>% of Total</b> | <b>2022-23</b>                | <b>#</b>   | <b>% of Total</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Commissioned Refuge           | 12         | 63.2%             | Commissioned Refuge           | 8          | 40.0%             |
| Non-Commissioned Refuge       | 7          | 36.8%             | Non-Commissioned Refuge       | 10         | 50.0%             |
| Partially Commissioned Refuge | 0          | 0.0%              | Partially Commissioned Refuge | 2          | 10.0%             |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>19</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>     | <b>Total</b>                  | <b>20</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>     |
| <b>2023-24</b>                |            |                   | <b>2022-23</b>                |            |                   |
| Commissioned Bedspaces        | 176        | 65.9%             | Commissioned Bedspaces        | 146        | 55.9%             |
| Non-Commissioned Bedspaces    | 91         | 34.1%             | Non-Commissioned Bedspaces    | 115        | 44.1%             |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>267</b> | <b>100.0%</b>     | <b>Total</b>                  | <b>261</b> | <b>100.0%</b>     |

### 3.1.1.2 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) funding

The annual survey provided further information around funding sources for refuge services from other commissioning bodies. In 2023-24, 17.1% of annual survey respondents running refuge

services received commissioned funding from a PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner). This is a small increase on the previous year (15.0% in 2022-23).

**Table 3.8: Did you receive any commissioned funding for your refuge services from a PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner) in 2023-24?**

Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024

| Response     | Number of respondents | % of those with refuge provision |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| No           | 52                    | 74.3%                            |
| Yes          | 12                    | 17.1%                            |
| Missing data | 6                     | 8.6%                             |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>70</b>             | <b>100.0%</b>                    |

### 3.1.1.3 Integrated Care Board (ICB) funding

In 2023-24, 7.1% of annual survey respondents running refuge services received commissioned funding from an ICB (Integrated Care Board). This

is a small increase on the previous year (2.5% in 2022-23).

**Table 3.9: Did you receive any commissioned funding for your refuge services from an ICB (Integrated Care Board) in 2023-24?**

Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024

| Response     | Number of respondents | % of those with refuge provision |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| No           | 59                    | 84.3%                            |
| Yes          | 5                     | 7.1%                             |
| Missing data | 9                     | 8.6%                             |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>70</b>             | <b>100.0%</b>                    |



### 3.1.2 Community-based support services

#### 3.1.2.1 Local Authority funding

Of the 79 organisations responding to the annual survey that provided community-based support (CBS) services in 2023-24, 79.7% (n=63) were funded by the local authority for that financial year. Eleven (11) respondents had never been funded as a service by the local authority (13.9%) and a further five were not funded for the 2023-24 financial year but had been funded in the past (6.3%).

For the majority of these 63 respondents running CBS services, local authority funding was secured through competitive tendering processes (30.2%, n=19), or a mixture of competitive tendering and grant funding (31.7%, n=20). Just under two thirds of organisations running refuge services, therefore, secured their funding from the local authority through a competitive tendering process. Seventeen (27.0%) respondents reported

that their funding from the local authority was from grant funding specifically.

We asked the 63 respondents running CBS services funded by the local authority to give details about how much of the CBS service provision this funding covered. The results in **Table 3.10** show that funding rarely covered all costs and that ‘being commissioned’ should not be mistaken for being fully funded.

The annual survey provided further details on the types of support that were funded by local authorities as part of CBS services (see **Table 3.11**). Of the annual survey respondents running CBS services who received funding from the local authority, the most common type of support that was funded was for Outreach (61.9%), followed by Domestic abuse advocacy services (58.7%) and Dedicated children and young people’s domestic abuse services in the community (36.5%).

**Table 3.10: How much funding did you receive through being commissioned by the local authority for your community-based support services in 2023-24?**

Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024

| Amount of funding received from local authority | For activity costs (Direct activity costs, accessibility costs, external contractors) | For central costs (Admin/finance staff, management/governance staff, premises/other) | For support staff costs (Salaries, additional employment costs, clinical supervision, staff training) |
|---|---|--|---|
| All costs                                       | 16 (25%)  | 13 (21%)   | 23 (37%)  |
| More than half of costs                         | 11 (17%)  | 11 (17%)   | 23 (37%)  |
| Half or less of costs                           | 12 (19%)  | 27 (43%)   | 14 (22%)  |
| None  | 21 (33%)  | 9 (14%)  | 0 (0%)  |
| Missing data                                    | 3 (5%)  | 3 (5%)   | 3 (5%)  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                    | <b>63</b>   | <b>63</b>  | <b>63</b>   |

**Table 3.11: Did the funding you received from the local authority cover any of the following types of support as part of the community-based support service?****Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response   | #  | %     |
|--|----|-------|
| Outreach   | 39 | 61.9% |
| Domestic abuse advocacy services (including Independent Domestic Violence Advocate or Advisor (IDVA) services) | 37 | 58.7% |
| Dedicated children and young people's domestic abuse services in the community                                 | 23 | 36.5% |
| Floating support   | 17 | 27.0% |
| Therapeutic support such as formal counselling and support groups  | 15 | 23.8% |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for women with complex needs  | 15 | 23.8% |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for Black and minoritised (BME) women                                       | 8  | 12.7% |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for women with disabilities   | 3  | 4.8%  |
| Other  | 7  | 11.1% |
| None of the above  | 2  | 3.2%  |

**3.1.2.2 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) funding**

In 2023-24, over half (53.2%) of annual survey respondents running CBS services received commissioned funding from a PCC (Police and

Crime Commissioner). This is a small decrease on the previous year (57.9% in 2022-23).

**Table 3.12: Did you receive any commissioned funding for your community-based services from a PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner) in 2023-24?****Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response     | Number of respondents | % of those with CBS service provision |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| No           | 33                    | 41.8%                                 |
| Yes          | 42                    | 53.2%                                 |
| Missing data | 4                     | 5.1%                                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>79</b>             | <b>100.0%</b>                         |

### 3.1.2.3 Integrated Care Board (ICB) funding

In 2023-24, 20.3% of annual survey respondents running CBS services received commissioned funding from an ICB (Integrated Care Board). This

is a small increase on the previous year (17.1% in 2022-23).

**Table 3.13: Did you receive any commissioned funding for your community-based support services from an ICB (Integrated Care Board) in 2023-24?**

Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024

| Response     | Number of respondents | % of those with CBS service provision |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| No           | 59                    | 74.7%                                 |
| Yes          | 16                    | 20.3%                                 |
| Missing data | 4                     | 5.1%                                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>79</b>             | <b>100.0%</b>                         |

## 3.2 Sustainability

A marked number of respondents to the annual survey expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of their services, which many told us were already stretched beyond capacity. A key concern relating to this was staff capacity, with limitations on funding restricting their ability to recruit, and in some cases directly impacting the services they were able to deliver, as noted in section 1.2 above.

“

*“We are always short staffed, with many grants not applicable for core funding or staffing costs leaving us unable to employ further staff.”*

Annual Survey 2024

Almost a fifth (15.0%) of respondents to the annual survey said they had to close or reduce an area of work in their service over the past financial year. When asked why they had made the decision to do this, all the answers linked back to a loss of funding, or limited overall funding, usually meaning that they were unable to adequately staff those projects.

“

*“We have reduced our peripatetic workers and Tech Abuse Team due to lack of funding and closed our Modern Slavery service.”*

Annual Survey 2024

“

*“We are restructuring to be a much smaller organisation due to funding cuts - redundancies etc.”*

Annual Survey 2024

**Table 3.14: In 2023-24, did you reduce or stop providing an area of work in your service?  
Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response   | #          | %           |
|--|------------|-------------|
| No, we have not reduced or closed any areas of work in our service | 65         | 65.0%       |
| Yes, we closed an area of work in our service                      | 6          | 6.0%        |
| Yes, we reduced an area of work in our service                     | 9          | 9.0%        |
| Missing data   | 20         | 20.0%       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>100</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Within these responses, several organisations clarified that they had made the decision to close or reduce services that they had previously been running without dedicated funding. **Table 3.15** demonstrates that running an area of a service without dedicated funding continues to be common across domestic abuse providers, with over a third (35.0%) of respondents to the annual survey reporting to have done so.

“*We reduced what we deliver due to lack of funding but this service has not been funded for a long time, so it wasn’t a loss of funding.*”  
**Annual Survey 2024**

“*We stopped taking more than 1,000 referrals each year from the police because they would not provide funding for this referral route.*”  
**Annual Survey 2024**

### 3.2.1 Without dedicated funding

Just over a third (35.0%) of respondents to the annual survey this year were running an area of their domestic abuse service without dedicated funding during 2023-24 (see **Table 3.15**). This is less than in the previous year (49.0% in 2022-23), however, this is not necessarily comparable as there was a much larger number of missing responses to this question this year (20.0%, compared to no missing responses in 2022-23).

There were some potentially significant changes in which areas were most commonly running without dedicated funding this year. For example, the proportion of organisations that were running domestic abuse prevention or educational work without dedicated funding increased this year from 41.2% in 2022-23 to 60.0% in 2023-24 (see **Table 3.16**).

The proportion of organisations that were running children and young people’s domestic abuse services in the community without dedicated funding doubled this year, from 15.7% to 31.4%. Considering the slight increase in the number of refuge services with a dedicated service for children and young people (CYP) in England seen this year (from 187 services in 2023 to 195 services in May 2024), it is troubling that an increasing number of these are not running with dedicated and sustainable funding.

**Table 3.15: Were you running an area(s) of your domestic abuse service for women WITHOUT dedicated funding in 2023-24?****Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response     | #          | %             |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| No           | 45         | 45.0%         |
| Yes          | 35         | 35.0%         |
| Missing data | 20         | 20.0%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

**Table 3.16: Which areas of your domestic abuse service were you running without dedicated funding in 2023-24****Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Area of service ran without dedicated funding  | % of respondents running an area of service without dedicated funding (35) |
|--|--|
| Domestic abuse prevention or educational work  | 60.0%  |
| Community-based domestic abuse services for women (outreach, floating support, advocacy) | 40.0%  |
| Children and young people's domestic abuse services in the community                     | 31.4%  |
| Domestic abuse refuge provision  | 28.6%  |
| Children and young people's domestic abuse services in refuge                            | 22.9%  |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for women with complex needs                          | 22.9%  |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for Black and minoritised (BME) women                 | 22.9%  |
| Accommodation-based services (other than refuge)   | 20.0%  |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for Lesbian Bisexual Trans (LBT) women                | 17.1%  |
| Specialist domestic abuse services for women with disabilities                           | 14.3%  |
| Tick box question – respondents can tick more than one category.                         |  |

### 3.2.2 Use of reserves

Nearly three quarters (71.4%) of domestic abuse organisations responding to the annual survey who were running a service without dedicated funding used reserves<sup>21</sup> to cover the costs. This is around the same as the previous year (72.5% in 2022-23). Even where mitigations such as the use of financial reserves have been possible for services, funding for these are failing to be replenished and therefore the use of reserves are unsustainable over time.



*“It was very challenging to secure funding for our outreach service, and we were forced to use our reserves whilst applying for grants and raising unrestricted income from community donations.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

**Table 3.17: How did this lack of dedicated funding impact delivery of the service?**

**Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024**

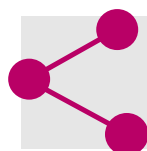
| Response   | #  | %     |
|--|----|-------|
| We used reserves to cover the costs  | 25 | 71.4% |
| We are unable to plan for the future and this impacts on the service we deliver              | 15 | 42.9% |
| We have had to reduce the number of women we can support in the service                      | 11 | 31.4% |
| We relied on volunteers to deliver the service   | 11 | 31.4% |
| We lost staff as a result of job insecurity  | 11 | 31.4% |
| We have had to reduce the number of children and young people we can support in the service  | 10 | 28.6% |
| We have had to reduce staff hours within the service   | 9  | 25.7% |
| We are unable to support women with more complex needs due to the level of support available | 8  | 22.9% |
| Other  | 6  | 17.1% |

<sup>21</sup> Financial reserves are funds set aside to protect a charity from loss of income, therefore they must be replenished to protect from future uncertainties.

# 4. COMMISSIONING PRACTICES



In 2023-24, **government investment fell £321 million short** of the minimum £516 million needed to fund local specialist support for women and child survivors of domestic abuse, including the ring-fenced funding needed to ensure the sustainability of vital 'by and for' organisations (Women's Aid, 2024f).



**Only 7.0% thought that commissioning had had a detrimental impact for survivors over the past year.** Around a third (34.0%) thought that domestic abuse commissioning had had a mixed impact for survivors, and a further third (30.0%) thought it had had a mostly positive impact.



**Two thirds (65.8%) of annual survey respondents disagreed that 'Funding is easy to access'.**



Services continue to be **concerned around the length of commissioned contracts** and emphasised that they need to be longer in order to provide an embedded and sustainable service.



Annual survey respondents were **even more concerned around the complexity of commissioning processes than last year**, with over half (59.1%) of annual survey 2024 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'commissioning processes have been complex'. Only 9.6% disagreed with this statement.

# 4. Commissioning practices

The annual survey explored the perceptions of commissioning practices during 2023-24 amongst domestic abuse service providers.

Effective commissioning practices can directly support the government’s challenge of meeting ‘unmet need’ for domestic abuse survivors (though this ‘need’ is difficult to quantify, as set out in the earlier section ‘1. Demand’), but poor practices can exacerbate the challenge even further. National guidelines for commissioning<sup>22</sup> set out particular requirements of commissioning,

including valuing specialisms. Nevertheless, a number of providers responding to the survey did not feel that commissioning has been collaborative or improved funding in their area, and some were concerned about the protection of specialisms. Just over a third (34.0%) thought that domestic abuse commissioning had had a mixed impact for survivors over the past year, and 30.0% thought it had had a mostly positive impact. Only 7.0% thought that commissioning had had a detrimental impact.

**Table 4.1: Which of the following statements do you feel aligns most closely with your views?  
Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response   | #          | %             |
|--|------------|---------------|
| ‘Domestic abuse commissioning in my local area during 2023-24 has had a mixed impact for survivors’              | 34         | 34.0%         |
| ‘Domestic abuse commissioning in my local area during 2023-24 has had a mostly positive impact for survivors’    | 30         | 30.0%         |
| ‘Domestic abuse commissioning in my local area during 2023-24 has had a mostly detrimental impact for survivors’ | 7          | 7.0%          |
| ‘Domestic abuse commissioning in my local area during 2023-24 has had little to no impact for survivors’         | 1          | 1.0%          |
| I don’t know   | 7          | 7.0%          |
| Missing data   | 21         | 21.0%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>100</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

<sup>22</sup> For example, the Home Office [VAWG commissioning toolkit](#) or [National Statement of Expectations](#).



Annual survey respondents were asked a further series of position statements and asked if they agreed or disagreed. Areas that particularly stood out within this, both in the statements below and in the qualitative, open-text responses more

generally, were the amount of funding, length of contracts, the complexity of commissioning practices and concerns around gender-neutral commissioning.

**Table 4.2: To what extent do you feel you have experienced the following practices in the commissioning of domestic abuse services in your area in 2023-24?**

**Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Statements  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| There is more funding available for our service in 2023-24                  | 7.2%           | 16.9% | 22.9%                      | 34.9%    | 18.1%             |
| Funding is easy to access   | 0.0%           | 7.3%  | 26.8%                      | 40.2%    | 25.6%             |
| Tenders do not recognise quality  | 14.6%          | 26.8% | 34.1%                      | 23.2%    | 1.2%              |
| Relationships with commissioners / councillors have been challenging        | 12.0%          | 20.5% | 32.5%                      | 27.7%    | 7.2%              |
| Smaller specialists have lost contracts                                     | 17.1%          | 29.3% | 47.6%                      | 6.1%     | 0.0%              |
| Funding contracts have been mostly long-term                                | 7.3%           | 28.0% | 29.3%                      | 19.5%    | 15.9%             |
| Funding contracts have been mostly short-term                               | 17.1%          | 24.4% | 30.5%                      | 25.6%    | 2.4%              |
| Commissioners have consulted well with local stakeholders                   | 14.5%          | 28.9% | 27.7%                      | 18.1%    | 10.8%             |
| There has been positive collaboration and relationships with other partners | 16.9%          | 50.6% | 25.3%                      | 7.2%     | 0.0%              |
| Commissioning processes have been complex                                   | 13.3%          | 45.8% | 31.3%                      | 7.2%     | 2.4%              |

## 4.1 Amount of funding

Nationally, Women's Aid has estimated that a minimum of £516 million per year needs to be allocated to sustain specialist domestic abuse services, uprated in line with inflation and population changes (Women's Aid, 2024f). Of this, £228 million is required for refuges and £288 million for community-based support services in England (Women's Aid, 2024d).<sup>23</sup> A minimum of £178m from this is required to be ring-fenced for specialist led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, migrant women, D/deaf and disabled women and the LGBT+ community to resource the higher costs of delivering these services and to improve the provision and geographical spread of 'by and for' services across England.

Women's Aid has previously found that the government spent an estimated £195 million on local domestic abuse support services in England in 2023-24, whilst recognising that there are a number of limitations to this estimate resulting from the level of data publicly available (Women's Aid, 2024b). This funding was delivered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities at the time), the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office. No public information was available on funding from the Department of Health and Social Care or the Department for Education for domestic abuse support services, at either local or national level, despite the lack of services commissioned by ICBs and the position of children as survivors of domestic abuse in their own right (Women's Aid, 2024b).

As such, it can be estimated that government investment fell £321 million short of the £516 million minimum needed to fund local specialist women's domestic abuse services, including ring-fenced funding needed to ensure the sustainability of vital 'by and for' organisations.

This figure comprises £103 million additional funding that is required for refuges and £220 million additional funding that is required for community-based support services in England (Women's Aid, 2024f).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the amount of funding received through commissioning in England continues to be a significant concern amongst respondents to the annual survey, particularly outreach services for some organisations.

Over half of respondents (53.0%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'There is more funding available for our service in 2023-24', and two thirds (65.8%) disagreed that 'Funding is easy to access'.

Respondents frequently described how they were having to rely on fundraising and donations, as well as using their reserves.

“

*"[We are] continuing to run the outreach service on reduced income and using reserves for some shortfall. Remaining outreach funders are cutting our funding year on year due to an unassessed belief that the new provider is offering an appropriate service. Other partner agencies frequently ask us to provide training and specialist support to women as they find the new service not able to meet these needs."*

**Annual Survey 2024**

<sup>23</sup> This figure is calculated in [Investing to save](#) - Women's Aid, which is updated to include an estimate of ring-fenced funding required for services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised, LGBT+ and d/Deaf and disabled victims and survivors developed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's [Briefing Paper on proposals for a specialist 'By and For' funding pot](#) - Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

## 4.2 Lengths of contracts

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Respondents to the annual survey were split around their perception of contract lengths over the past year, with 41.5% of annual survey respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that funding contracts have been mostly short-term during the past year. However, at the same time, an equal proportion of respondents agreed (35.4%) and disagreed (35.4%) that contracts had been mostly long-term, so it is possible that some services are receiving longer contracts from commissioners. We will keep track of this over the coming years.

In the open-text questions, many respondents to the annual survey described the impact that shorter-term contracts were having on their organisations and the difficulties they can cause.

“

*“Lack of longer-term contracts that has an impact on the delivery of service. A stop start approach loses credibility.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“One-year contracts are very frustrating as commissioners do not consider the amount of work, and subsequent cost, throughout the entire process from [Invitation To Tender] to contract award. This short-term nature of funding makes it very difficult for charities to effectively plan and increases stress for staff on fixed-term contracts.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“Funding being short-term has meant constantly having to write funding bids.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“Often our work is funding for specific timescales, e.g. one year, two years, etc. Going forward permanent funding would have a huge positive impact on the services we provide.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

## 4.3 Complexity of commissioning processes

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Over half (59.1%) of annual survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘commissioning processes have been complex’ and only 9.6% disagreed with this statement. This represents an increase on 2022-23, whereby 32.7% of annual survey respondents reported that they faced the challenge of ‘complex commissioning processes’.

In the 2023-24 annual survey, respondents described the negative impact that spending additional time on these procedures can have.

“

*“It takes [as] much effort and resource to apply for a £20,000 grant as it does to apply for a £150,000 one.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

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## 4.4 Gender-neutral commissioning

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Some respondents to this year's annual survey described concerns around trends within commissioning practices towards prioritising gender-neutral services. This was, in particular, in relation to the intended provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and its purpose to ratify the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011), as well as the purpose of the Home Office VAWG commissioning toolkit and National Statement of Expectations, to recognise the disproportionality of how women and girls experience domestic abuse and violence.

“

*“Short-timescales, lack of social value, no strategy to commission to, poor information, not answering questions, openly trying to create competition, poor equalities impact assessment, move towards not protecting single-sex provision - and victimising providers that do, biased commissioning.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“It feels more recently that women are silenced - and that the focus has moved to male victims of DA.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

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# 5. SYSTEM RESPONSE



Domestic abuse services **have generally felt positive** regarding the **partnerships** and **collaboration** they had experienced within commissioning processes during 2023-24.



Over **two thirds** (67.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'There has been **positive collaboration** and **relationships** with other partners.'



**Local Partnership Boards seem to be improving** compared to previous years and work as a strong mechanism to support collaborative working on safe accommodation. The annual survey found that 65.0% of services were represented on their Local Partnership Board in 2023-24 and open-ended responses in our annual survey demonstrate mostly positive experiences of membership on these boards.



Nonetheless, **some reservations remain** regarding whether the voice of the domestic abuse sector is sufficiently listened to within these forums.

# 5. System response

## 5.1 Local Partnership Boards

Generally, services felt positive about the partnerships and collaboration they had experienced within commissioning processes over the past year, with 67.5% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, 'There has been positive collaboration and relationships with other partners'.

Local Partnership Boards (LPB) are a key site where this collaboration takes place. The annual survey found that 65.0% of services were represented on their Local Partnership Board in 2023-24. This is around the same as 2022-23, whereby 63.8% of respondents to the annual survey were part of their Local Partnership Board. Overall, most respondents shared positive experiences of membership on their board, noting that they are an informative, helpful and collaborative space, especially when they are well engaged with by statutory agencies.

“

*"[Our Local Partnership Board is a] good way to analyse the data and discuss challenges."*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*"Positive space to be heard and make suggestions."*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Nevertheless, concerns still remain from some services about whether the voice of the domestic abuse sector is sufficiently listened to within these forums. The expertise provided by specialist domestic abuse services is essential to the effective functioning of an LPB, to provide a unique level of insight into trends, emerging challenges and the needs and experiences of survivors.

“

*"There have been vast improvements in local council representation on this board, new directors are having a positive impact which in turn has led to improvements for the sector, but the board is still heavily influenced by council officers and whilst the DA sector find it difficult to support each other, our influence will be stifled."*

**Annual Survey 2024**

**Table 5.1: Is your domestic abuse service represented on the Local Partnership Board?  
Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response     | #          | %             |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| No           | 17         | 17.0%         |
| Yes          | 65         | 65.0%         |
| Missing data | 18         | 18.0%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

## 5.2 Domestic abuse duty response

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024<sup>24</sup> introduces a joint statutory duty on Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and local authorities to work together when commissioning support services for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and other serious violence, so that services can be strategically coordinated and targeted where survivors need them. The Annual Survey 2024 investigated to what extent services currently felt that agencies had been collaborating, what their involvement in the duties of the Act had been so far, and what their perceptions were around it.

As shown in **Table 5.2**, most respondents felt that commissioning agencies ‘somewhat’ effectively collaborate (32.0%) on VAWG CBS service funding currently, or ‘very’ effectively (8.0%). However, a quarter of respondents felt that collaboration is either ‘not effective (17.0%) or ‘very ineffective’ (8.0%).

Almost half of respondents to the annual survey (49.0%) had not been contacted about the new duty to collaborate (see **Table 5.3**). Of those that had, some had provided data and narrative for the needs assessments or joined the consultation process to flag current gaps in service provision. Others had accessed webinars and training in preparation or raising awareness.

Some respondents described effective consultation procedures and evidence of positive co-commissioning, but this approach was varied and did not appear to be the case nationally. Working in silos and a lack of transparency were of particular concern for some, as well as a fear that this lack of transparency would cause services not to be commissioned because of an assumption that they are funded from elsewhere, regardless of demand.

**Table 5.2: To what extent do you feel that commissioning agencies currently collaborate effectively on the funding of local VAWG community-based support services?**

**Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response           | #          | %             |
|--------------------|------------|---------------|
| Not effective      | 17         | 17.0%         |
| Very ineffective   | 8          | 8.0%          |
| Somewhat effective | 32         | 32.0%         |
| Very effective     | 8          | 8.0%          |
| Don't know         | 15         | 15.0%         |
| Missing data       | 20         | 20.0%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       | <b>100</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

**Table 5.3: Have you been contacted about the new duty to collaborate?  
Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| Response     | #          | %             |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| No           | 47         | 47.0%         |
| Yes          | 11         | 11.0%         |
| Don't know   | 22         | 22.0%         |
| Missing data | 20         | 20.0%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

For other annual survey respondents, however, consultation had been handled particularly well during this process, which should be replicated more widely.

Considering the new duty overall, respondents were hopeful of the impact it could have as a potentially positive step towards more coordinated and effective support services, whilst also noting some concerns.

“*We are well respected and trusted as a specialist provider, and have a good working relationship with the lead at the Local Authority, who is very knowledgeable in the field of DA. We are included and our opinion/ input is sought and respected.*”

**Annual Survey 2024**

“*By supporting collaboration and strategic resource allocation, this initiative has the potential to significantly enhance the support available to victims. However, careful implementation, ongoing training, and rigorous monitoring are essential to realise its full benefits and address any challenges that may arise.*”

**Annual Survey 2024**

“*The Board is playing a key role in this co-ordination; all agencies have voice and are able to contribute. There is clear governance ... the service can feed directly to this.*”

**Annual Survey 2024**



# 6. OTHER TRENDS AND ISSUES

Impact of the rise in the cost of living continued to be a major challenge for organisations delivering domestic abuse services over the past year.



**40.9%** of women in refuge reported that the perpetrator had **increased the use of economic and financial abuse** since the higher cost of living began.



The impact of increased economic abuse and the increased cost of living has been profound for survivors. **Over half** (53.5%) of survivors in refuge and a third in CBS services were left **unable to afford food** and many were unable to keep up with debt repayments (11.6% in CBS services, 20.3% in refuge).



Experiences of economic abuse included **limiting the survivors access to money** (18.6% in CBS services, 36.0% in refuge), and **restricting or controlling survivors' access to essential resources** such as food and clothing (15.0% in CBS services and 33.8% in refuge).

Annual survey respondents reported on the impact they had experienced over the past year as a result of international conflicts, and particularly the escalation of conflict in Gaza and Israel.



Some respondents described concerns that the **conflicts** had created **deeper divisions** in their own local communities and noted the **trauma** that the **instability** had caused amongst both the survivors they supported as well as their staff.



Many annual survey respondents highlighted how conflicts throughout the world **disproportionately affect women and children** and regularly exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.



For some, there had been **significant impact from the conflict on demand for their services**, and particularly the number of survivors with NRPF or without the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC).



Respondents **emphasised global solidarity** for women and girls affected by international conflicts and humanitarian crises, over the past year.

# 6. Other trends and issues

## 6.1 The cost of living, and staff recruitment and retention

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Impact of the high cost of living permeated organisations' experiences of delivering domestic abuse services over the past year, with a notable number of respondents to the annual survey citing it as a main challenge.

“

*“Recruitment and retention of specialist staff, which has been a challenge across the sector, which has been exacerbated further by the current cost of living crisis. A rise in energy costs has disproportionately affected safe accommodation and refuge accommodation services. These costs are not fully recoverable from housing benefit and have had to be covered by charitable funding instead. These increased costs also increased economic barriers for survivors wanting to leave their abuser, making it harder for them to flee.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Over the past year, On Track has collected data on the experiences of 859 women in CBS services and 325 women in refuge, specifically in relation to the cost of living. More than a quarter (26.9%) of women in CBS services and 40.9% of women

in refuge reported that the perpetrator had increased the use of economic and financial abuse since the cost of living began to rise. Experiences of economic abuse included limiting the survivors' access to money (18.6% in CBS services, 36.0% in refuge), using survivors' money without her permission (14.1% in CBS services, 21.2% in refuge) and restricting or controlling survivors' access to essential resources such as food and clothing (15.0% in CBS services and 33.8% in refuge).

The impacts of this financial/economic abuse and the rise in the cost of living more generally on survivors include homelessness (10.4% in CBS services, 30.5% in refuge), and leaving survivors unable to afford food (32.5% in CBS services, 53.5% in refuge) and unable to keep up with debt repayments (11.6% in CBS services, 20.3% in refuge).

“

*“We have noticed trends in line with the increased cost of living. There is increased demand for financial support and services.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

## 6.2 International conflicts

---

The escalation of international conflicts and humanitarian crises have been prominent in the news over the past year and, for 'by and for' services in particular, have had a reported impact on domestic abuse and VAWG services, as well as the survivors that they support. A small number

of questions in the Annual Survey 2024 aimed to explore the extent of the impact.

Around half of respondents to these questions reported they had experienced no impact. Of those that had, some respondents described

---

concerns that the conflicts had created deeper divisions in their own local communities and noted the trauma that the instability had caused amongst both the survivors they supported as well as their staff.

“

*“It has exacerbated the division in society and communities.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“This is having an impact on our beneficiaries and staff alike seeing daily trauma on social media channels on the conflict in Gaza and Israel.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Others emphasised the significant impact that the conflict had had on demand for their services, and particularly the number of survivors with NRPF or without the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) (formerly known as the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC)), often needing immigration advice.

“

*“Increased demand for services - migrant and refugee women face cultural barriers and distrust of authorities Triggering past trauma.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“We have seen an influx in referrals for women with no recourse, in most cases we have been able to accept when we have had space but this a significant impact on staff time.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Further to greater exposure to traumatic events, there was a concern that the frequency of these images and of national threat on the media

may also lead to a possible delayed recovery for survivors.

“

*“It is challenging for DA [domestic abuse] survivors to engage with crisis headlines and images of conflict, especially where children are impacted, when this is heavily reported in the media. This impacts on ability to relax and recover. The coverage limits available space to report on DA/VAWG issues.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“The reports can lead to vicarious trauma and a sense of hopelessness which may impact on someone’s recovery.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Meanwhile, many annual survey respondents emphasised how conflicts throughout the world disproportionately affect women and children and regularly exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. This impact has a wide reach into multiple aspects of women’s lives, including their freedom and empowerment. Alongside this, there was a strong recognition of how an increase in far-right activities increases the prevalence and tolerance of violence against women and girls.

“

*“International conflicts increase challenges to women’s rights by increasing vulnerabilities to violence, including sexual and domestic abuse. They disrupt access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, making it harder for women to achieve equality and empowerment. Conflicts often lead to displacement, where women and girls face heightened risks of exploitation and gender-based violence in refugee camps and conflict zones. Additionally, the instability hinders the enforcement of legal protections and support services for women, further entrenching gender inequalities and hindering progress on women’s rights globally.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“[The] move to the right across the world makes GBV [gender-based violence] more likely and accepted.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Services called for greater support for migrant women and women with NRPF through increased investment to provide specialist safe accommodation, as well as increased funding for the sector overall. Specialist support services were considered vital to how this crisis can be responded to and support survivors in a trauma informed way.

“

*“Local authorities should continue to consider the complex needs of displaced victims and support specialist domestic abuse services to provide specialist accessible support to them.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“Providing them with trauma informed support, listening to their concerns and ensuring support is available.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Data collection for the Annual Survey 2024 took place during June and July 2024, therefore slightly before the escalation of Islamophobic and racist riots that took place in August 2024 (Women’s Aid, 2024e). Nonetheless, a more effective national response to racism and the need for anti-racist policies throughout society and services were underlined by respondents, including with strong leadership.

“

*“[It’s] so important to have good anti-racist policies and practice within the services but also to highlight wider impacts within society and importance of robust responses to reports of racism.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

Overall services responding to the annual survey were keen to emphasise global solidarity for women and girls affected by international conflicts, particularly between Hamas and Israel over the past year.

“

*“We are a global movement - we must stand with our sisters everywhere.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

“

*“There is a solidarity between women across the world.”*

**Annual Survey 2024**

# Conclusion

*The Annual Audit 2025* has shown that whilst there have been some improvements in provision, the gap between provision and demand for domestic abuse services in 2023-24 is similar to previous years, if not slightly worse. In this year, government investment fell £321 million short of the £516 million needed to properly fund local specialist women's domestic abuse services, including ring-fenced funding needed to ensure the sustainability of vital 'by and for' organisations (Women's Aid, 2024f)<sup>25</sup>, and the impact of this shortfall is evidenced in this report in a number of ways.

The number of bedspaces still falls short by 1,160 spaces of the Council of Europe's recommendation<sup>26</sup>, representing a total shortfall of 20.3%. While this year's Freedom of Information (FOI) requests found that 79.6% of domestic abuse refuge services were commissioned by their local authorities for all their bedspaces in 2023-24, representing a small but positive increase on previous years, it is important to recognise that commissioning does not guarantee the full funding of a service's needs. Commissioned funding may cover costs related to providing support to survivors, such as staff salaries, but not to areas like building maintenance or central running costs. Rather, systemic issues with commissioning of domestic abuse services remain. Two thirds (65.8%) of annual survey respondents disagreed that 'funding is easy to

access' and services continue to be concerned around the length of commissioned contracts and emphasised that they need to be longer in order to provide an embedded and sustainable service.

Respondents to the annual survey also reported that an increasing volume of referrals into their service had been a significant challenge over the past year, as well as increasing referrals where women had multiple support needs. Yet, at the same time there has been a decline in the number of specialist support workers who can offer support around alcohol use, substance use, and mental health in both refuge and community-based services in the past year.

Specialist support for women experiencing additional inequalities continues to be inaccessible to many survivors, further compounding the inequalities they face. Members of Imkaan were less likely to be commissioned by the local authority with only 63.2% of services being fully commissioned. While this does mark an increase on the 40% reported in 2022-23, the figure remains significantly lower than the national proportion noted above. Furthermore, the proportion of vacancies that could consider a woman with no recourse to public funds remains low at 12.3% of all vacancies in 2023-24. Vacancies suitable for wheelchair users are incredibly scarce and dropped from 1.0% of all vacancies in 2022-23 to just 0.7% (52) vacancies in 2023-24.

<sup>25</sup> This figure is calculated in *Investing to Save*, Women's Aid, which is updated to include an estimate of ring-fenced funding required for services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised, LGBT+ and d/Deaf and disabled victims and survivors developed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's *Briefing Paper on proposals for a specialist 'By and For' funding pot*. Shortfall was calculated using calculations in this report: *Funding safer futures*, Women's Aid.

<sup>26</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 the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

Prevention is a vital component within the wider picture of addressing VAWG and domestic abuse, however, very few services are funded for this work. Almost two thirds (60.0%) of annual survey respondents who were running a service without dedicated funding told us that they were running prevention or education work unfunded.

Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are recognised as survivors of domestic abuse in their own right and therefore should have access to services to support them. This year there was a slight increase in the number of refuge services with a dedicated service for children and young people (CYP) in England, from 187 CYP services in 2022-2023, to 195 CYP services in 2023-24, reflecting some progress in this area. At the same time, the proportion of organisations running children and young people's domestic abuse services in refuge without dedicated funds has remained consistent at 22.9% in 2023-24, compared to 23.5% in 2022-23. Furthermore, services who were running children and young people's domestic abuse services in the community without dedicated funding actually doubled this year, from 15.7% of those running a service without dedicated funding in 2022-23, to 31.4% in 2023-24.

Meanwhile, wider external issues have shaped the experiences of services and survivors. The impact of the rise in the cost of living was a major challenge over the past year, with 40.9% of women in refuge reporting that the perpetrator had increased the use of economic and financial abuse since the cost of living rise. At the same time, many had observed impacts as a result of international conflicts and humanitarian crises over the past year. Some had seen the creation of deeper divisions within their own local communities and noted the trauma that the instability had caused amongst both the survivors they supported as well as their staff. For some, there had been significant impact from the conflict

on demand for their services, and particularly the number of survivors with NRPF.

Nevertheless, this year's Annual Audit has demonstrated the multitude of ways that the sector is continuing to work together to face these challenges, prevent domestic abuse and support survivors, and advocate for the rights of women and girls. In particular, domestic abuse services felt positive about the partnerships and collaboration they had experienced within commissioning processes during 2023-24, and Local Partnership Boards are also improving and largely work as an effective mechanism to support collaborative working on safe accommodation. Finally, annual survey respondents emphasised global solidarity for women and girls affected by international conflicts and humanitarian crises over the past year.

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# Appendix A

## Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024 respondents' regional distribution

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**Table A1: Regional distribution of survey respondents**

**Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024**

| <b>Region</b>            | <b>Number of respondents</b> | <b>% of total respondents (100)</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| East Midlands            | 14                           | 14.0%                               |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 16                           | 16.0%                               |
| West Midlands            | 18                           | 18.0%                               |
| North West England       | 22                           | 22.0%                               |
| North East England       | 13                           | 13.0%                               |
| South East England       | 26                           | 26.0%                               |
| South West England       | 12                           | 12.0%                               |
| London                   | 17                           | 17.0%                               |
| East of England          | 16                           | 16.0%                               |

Respondents could choose more than one region.

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# Appendix B

## Tables on service users' access of support services from On Track

The full presentation of the On Track national data on the demographics, experiences of abuse and support needs can be viewed in the On Track data briefing which is supplementary to this report and can be found on the *Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025* webpage.

| <b>Table B1: Reasons for rejected referrals</b>                | <b>Community-based support services</b> | <b>Refuge</b> |
|--|---|---------------|
| Accepted alternative safe accommodation                        | -                                       | 1.7%          |
| Advice and information provided only                           | 4.1%                                    | 0.1%          |
| Already active in service                                      | 23.5%                                   | 0.9%          |
| Client / survivor does not want support                        | 25.6%                                   | 16.8%         |
| Client / survivor was referred by agency without their consent | 0.8%                                    | 0.1%          |
| Client wanted self-contained accommodation                     | -                                       | 0.5%          |
| Duplicate referral   | 1.5%                                    | <0.0%         |
| Identified as perpetrator                                      | 0.2%                                    | 0.1%          |
| Identified as unsafe to work with                              | 0.1%                                    | 1.7%          |
| Ineligible for support (age)                                   | <0.0%                                   | 0.2%          |
| Ineligible for support (borough)                               | 3.0%                                    | 1.2%          |
| Ineligible for support (not domestic abuse)                    | 1.6%                                    | -             |
| Ineligible for support (service description)                   | 3.0%                                    | 1.3%          |
| Internal move  | 0.5%                                    | -             |

| <b>Table B1 continued: Reasons for rejected referrals</b>          | <b>Community-based support services</b> | <b>Refuge</b> |
|--|---|---------------|
| Location of refuge is unsafe                                       | -                                       | 2.5%          |
| Location of refuge is unsuitable (e.g. for accessing work/schools) | -                                       | 0.9%          |
| Needs better met elsewhere - Referred to a partner agency          | 4.9%                                    | 3.9%          |
| Needs better met elsewhere - already supported by DV agency        | 2.7%                                    | 3.7%          |
| No response from referral agency                                   | 0.1%                                    | 1.2%          |
| No space / capacity to support                                     | 0.5%                                    | 28.4%         |
| Personal connection to refuge staff or another client              | -                                       | 0.3%          |
| Previous convictions for violent / sexual offences / arson         | -                                       | 0.6%          |
| Prioritised a different client due to risk level                   | -                                       | 0.2%          |
| Unable to accommodate pets   | -                                       | 0.1%          |
| Unable to afford refuge space                                      | -                                       | 0.7%          |
| Unable to contact client / survivor                                | 22.6%                                   | 6.9%          |
| Unable to meet client / survivor's child(ren)'s support needs      | -                                       | 0.1%          |
| Unable to meet support needs around NRPF                           | <0.0%                                   | 2.6%          |
| Unable to meet support needs around disability                     | <0.0%                                   | 2.3%          |
| Unable to meet support needs around drug and alcohol               | <0.0%                                   | 5.6%          |
| Unable to meet support needs around language                       | <0.0%                                   | 0.8%          |
| Unable to meet support needs around large family                   | <0.0%                                   | 1.4%          |
| Unable to meet support needs around mental health                  | <0.0%                                   | 4.6%          |
| Other  | 3.4%                                    | 3.4%          |
| Missing data   | 1.4%                                    | 1.9%          |

# Appendix C

## Data tables on service provision from Routes to Support

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**Table C1: Services (with number of refuge bedspaces) exclusively for groups, May 2024**  
**Routes to Support**

| <b>Service dedicated for</b>   | <b>London</b>   | <b>All England</b> |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|
| Black and minoritised women  | 22 (196)        | 45 (415)           |
| d/Deaf women   | 0 (0)           | 1 (0)              |
| Eastern European women   | 1 (0)           | 4 (9)              |
| LGBT+ survivors  | 2 (0)           | 7 (9)              |
| Women from specific religious group  | 0 (0)           | 1 (0)              |
| Women aged over 45   | 0 (0)           | 2 (9)              |
| Women with insecure immigration status   | 0 (0)           | 3 (21)             |
| Women with learning disability   | 2 (12)          | 2 (12)             |
| Women with substance use/alcohol use/<br>mental health support needs                   | 2 (14)          | 3 (29)             |
| Women who have experienced/are<br>experiencing forced marriage (no refuge<br>services) | 0 (0)           | 1 (0)              |
| Young women (aged 16-25)   | 0 (0)           | 3 (24)             |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>29 (222)</b> | <b>72 (528)</b>    |

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**Table C2: Provider types of services run exclusively for groups, May 2024****Routes to Support**

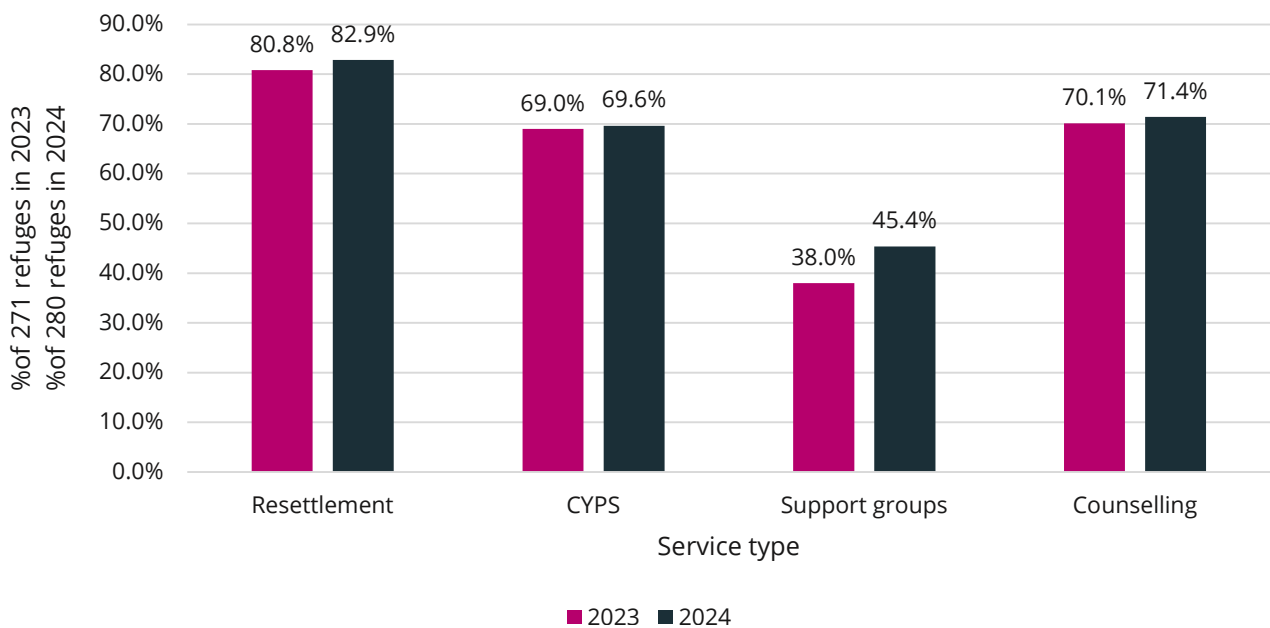
| <b>Service dedicated for</b>   | <b>Dedicated provider</b> | <b>Housing Association</b> | <b>Other</b>    | <b>All</b> |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Black and minoritised women  | 40                        | 3                          | 2               | <b>45</b>  |
| d/Deaf women   | 0                         | 0                          | 1               | <b>1</b>   |
| Eastern European women   | 4                         | 0                          | 0               | <b>4</b>   |
| LGBT+ survivors  | 6                         | 1                          | 0               | <b>7</b>   |
| Women from specific religious group  | 1                         | 0                          | 0               | <b>1</b>   |
| Women over 45  | 1                         | 1                          | 0               | <b>2</b>   |
| Women with insecure immigration status   | 2                         | 0                          | 1               | <b>3</b>   |
| Women with learning disability   | 0                         | 1                          | 1               | <b>2</b>   |
| Women with substance use/alcohol use/mental health support needs                 | 3                         | 0                          | 0               | <b>3</b>   |
| Women who have experienced/are experiencing forced marriage (no refuge services) | 1                         | 0                          | 0               | <b>1</b>   |
| Young women (16-24)  | 3                         | 0                          | 0               | <b>3</b>   |
| <b>Total (%)</b>   | <b>61 (84.7%)</b>         | <b>6 (8.3%)</b>            | <b>5 (6.9%)</b> | <b>72</b>  |

**Table C3: Types of support services for women available in England, May 2024**  
**Routes to Support**

| Service types      | Number of services | Change from May 2023 |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Refuge             | 280                | +9                   |
| Resettlement       | 233                | +13                  |
| Floating support   | 89                 | +11                  |
| Outreach           | 218                | +8                   |
| IDVA service*      | 170                | +8                   |
| Prevention work    | 186                | +15                  |
| Helpline           | 181                | +16                  |
| Drop-in            | 105                | +6                   |
| Online chat        | 63                 | +4                   |
| Formal counselling | 170                | +25                  |
| Support groups     | 280                | +12                  |
| CYP service        | 247                | +9                   |

\*This is the number of Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) services, not the number of individual staff members working as IDVAs.

**Chart C1: Service types in refuge services for women available in England, May 2024 (Routes to Support)**





**Table C4: Refuge bedspaces and level of shortfall, May 2024**

**Routes to Support**

| Year | Total bedspaces for women | Number of bedspaces recommended* | Shortfall | % shortfall |
|------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 2024 | 4,551                     | 5,711                            | 1,160     | 20.3%       |
| 2023 | 4,397                     | 5,654                            | 1257      | 22.2%       |

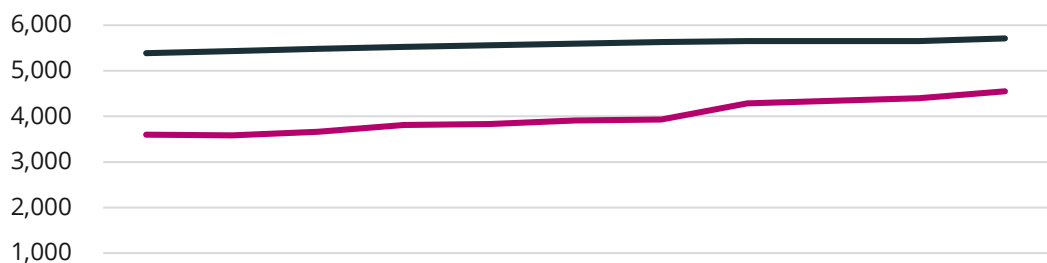
\*This is based on the number of spaces recommended by the Council of Europe 2008): "...safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10,000 head of population." (p. 51) and calculated using ONS mid-year population estimates.

**Table C5: Refuge bedspaces for women and numbers available for men, May 2024**

**Routes to Support**

| Year | Total bedspaces for women | Bedspaces for women only | Bedspaces available for women or men | Dedicated bedspaces for men |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2024 | 4,551                     | 4,177                    | 374                                  | 33                          |
| 2023 | 4,397                     | 4,063                    | 334                                  | 27                          |

**Chart C2: Refuge bed spaces since 2013 by year (Routes to Support)**



|                   | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| — Refuge spaces   | 3,599 | 3,585 | 3,666 | 3,809 | 3,833 | 3,914 | 3,935 | 4,289 | 4,344 | 4,397 | 4,551 |
| — Recommendation* | 5,387 | 5,432 | 5,479 | 5,527 | 5,562 | 5,598 | 5,629 | 5,655 | 5,655 | 5,654 | 5,711 |

\* (one space per 10k pop.)

**Table C6: Bedspaces and vacancies on Routes to Support May 2024 (change from 2019-20 before the Covid-19 pandemic)****Routes to Support**

| Year    | # bedspaces | # vacancies | Change to vacancies from 2019-20 | % decrease from 2019-20 |
|---------|-------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2019-20 | 3,935       | 10,340      | -                                | -                       |
| 2020-21 | 4,289       | 8,280       | -2,060                           | 19.9%                   |
| 2021-22 | 4,344       | 8,051       | -2,289                           | 22.1%                   |
| 2022-23 | 4,397       | 7,600       | -2,740                           | 26.5%                   |
| 2023-24 | 4,551       | 7,550       | -2,790                           | 27.0%                   |

**Table C7: Refuge vacancies posted to Routes to Support in 2023-24. % vacancies for each group (change from 2022-23)****Routes to Support**

| Types of vacancies              | Vacancies available to different groups | Change since 2022-23 |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| # All vacancies posted, England | 7,550                                   | -50                  |
| Woman plus two children         | 38.2%                                   | 0.4%                 |
| Woman plus three children       | 15.3%                                   | 0.0%                 |
| No recourse to public funds     | 12.3%                                   | 0.6%                 |
| Full wheelchair access          | 0.7%                                    | -0.3%                |
| Person with limited mobility    | 1.8%                                    | 0.4%                 |

**Table C8: Community-based services with specialist support workers, May 2024****Routes to Support**

| Specialist worker type             | Mental health support needs | Drug use support needs | Alcohol use support needs |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Number of community-based services | 27                          | 20                     | 20                        |
| <b>Change from 2023</b>            | <b>-12</b>                  | <b>-1</b>              | <b>-1</b>                 |

**Table C9: Refugees with specialist support workers, May 2024****Routes to Support**

| Specialist worker type      | Mental health support needs | Drug use  | Alcohol use |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Number of refuge services   | 33                          | 30        | 32          |
| <b>Change from May 2023</b> | <b>-15</b>                  | <b>-1</b> | <b>-2</b>   |

**Table C10: Referrals to all services in 2023-24 (estimates calculated from baseline data from On Track)**

|  | Refuge services | CBS services |
|--|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>Women</b>   |                 |              |
| Estimated referrals accepted/women supported during the year | 11,305          | 112,866      |
| Estimated referrals declined during the year                 | 17,028          | 119,369      |
| Estimated total referrals received during the year           | 28,333          | 232,235      |
| <b>Children</b>  |                 |              |
| Estimated children supported during the year                 | 12,436          | 146,726      |

**Table C11: Journeys made by women accessing refuge services 2023-24****Routes to Support**

| <b>Previous locations of women</b>                                  | <b>Number of women</b> | <b>% of women</b> |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|
| Same local authority as refuge                                      | 721                    | 79.3%             |
| Different local authority to refuge                                 | 2,757                  | 20.7%             |
| <b>Total women (where previous local authority home was known*)</b> | <b>3,478</b>           |                   |
| <b>Previous locations of women</b>                                  | <b>Number of women</b> | <b>% of women</b> |
| Same region** as refuge   | 2,394                  | 64.1%             |
| Different region to refuge  | 1,343                  | 35.9%             |
| <b>Total women (where previous region home was known***)</b>        | <b>3,737</b>           |                   |

\* In addition to the 3,487 women placed in refuge where their previous local authority was known, there were a further 1,430 women placed in refuge during 2023-24 for which their previous location was not known.

\*\* 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)

\*\*\* In addition to the 3,373 women for which it was possible to determine whether they had travelled to another region, there were 1,171 women placed in refuge during 2023-24 for whom it was not possible to determine their journey.

**Table C12: Dedicated services for children and young people (CYP) in refuges\*, May 2024****Routes to Support**

| Service                                | Number of refuges | % of refuges | % change from 2023 |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Dedicated emotional support            | 209               | 74.6%        | 0.5%               |
| Outings/activities/play sessions       | 206               | 73.6%        | 0.5%               |
| Individual support                     | 187               | 66.8%        | -0.4%              |
| CYP worker                             | 201               | 71.8%        | 4.6%               |
| Advocacy                               | 81                | 28.9%        | -4.7%              |
| Play therapy                           | 119               | 42.5%        | 1.9%               |
| Support group                          | 90                | 32.1%        | -0.3%              |
| Mentoring                              | 40                | 14.3%        | 2.8%               |
| CYP counselling                        | 48                | 17.1%        | 5.7%               |
| Family support worker                  | 3                 | 1.1%         | -0.8%              |
| Art therapy                            | 3                 | 1.1%         | 0.0%               |
| Refuges with a dedicated CYP service** | 195               | 69.6%        | 0.6%               |
| <b>Total number of refuges</b>         | <b>280</b>        |              |                    |

\* A total of 247 local services were running a CYP service at May 2024, in either their refuge, CBS services or both.

\*\* Note that some refuge services reported on Routes to Support that they provided one or more of the services outlined in this table without indicating they offer a dedicated CYP service.

**Table C13: Dedicated services for children and young people (CYP) in CBS service\*, May 2024****Routes to Support**

| <b>Service</b>                              | <b>Number of services offering CBS</b> | <b>% of services offering CBS</b> | <b>% change from 2023</b> |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Dedicated emotional support                 | 145                                    | 51.8%                             | 2.2%                      |
| Outings/activities/play sessions            | 83                                     | 29.6%                             | 0.2%                      |
| Individual support                          | 146                                    | 52.1%                             | 4.4%                      |
| CYP worker                                  | 137                                    | 48.9%                             | 3.0%                      |
| Advocacy                                    | 77                                     | 27.5%                             | 2.1%                      |
| Play therapy                                | 63                                     | 22.5%                             | 2.7%                      |
| Support group                               | 84                                     | 30.0%                             | 2.8%                      |
| Mentoring                                   | 33                                     | 11.8%                             | 1.3%                      |
| CYP counselling                             | 37                                     | 13.2%                             | 3.5%                      |
| Family support worker                       | 2                                      | 0.7%                              | 0.0%                      |
| Art therapy                                 | 1                                      | 0.4%                              | 0.0%                      |
| CBS services with a dedicated CYP service** | 145                                    | 51.8%                             | -1.9%                     |
| <b>Total number of CBS services</b>         | <b>280</b>                             |                                   |                           |

\* A total of 247 local services were running a CYP service at May 2024, in either their refuge, CBS services or both.

\*\* Note that some CBS services reported on Routes to Support that they provided one or more of the services outlined in this table without indicating they offer a dedicated CYP service.

**Table C14: Services for men in England\*, May 2024 (and change from May 2023)****Routes to Support**

| <b>Service types</b>                                   | <b>Number of services in England in May 2024</b> | <b>Net change since May 2023</b> |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Refuges with bedspace for men                          | 59   | +11                              |
| Floating support                                       | 44   | +12                              |
| Helpline   | 112  | 0                                |
| Outreach   | 140  | +7                               |
| Project based  | 25   | -7                               |
| Domestic violence advocacy project                     | 121  | +11                              |
| Sexual violence advocacy project                       | 37   | +1                               |
| Information and advice                                 | 147  | +13                              |
| <b>Total entries with one or more services for men</b> | <b>213</b>                                       | <b>+5</b>                        |

\* This is not an exhaustive list of the services provided for male victims, rather these numbers are for services offering support to women who also work with male victims

*The Annual Audit 2025*

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