WHERE ARE WE NOW?

10 Year Review of Westminster Government Action to End Violence Against Women and Girls

November 2015

End Violence Against Women Coalition with support from Womankind Worldwide and Equality Now

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About the End Violence Against Women Coalition

The End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition campaigns for governments at all levels around the UK to take urgent action to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. We are the largest coalition of its kind in the UK representing over seven million individuals and organisations. A full list of members is on our website.

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EVAW relies on the generous support of individuals and charitable trusts to fulfil our objectives to achieve a vision of a world without violence against women and girls. If you share our vision and would like to support our important work, then please make a donation by visiting: www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk

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WHERE ARE WE NOW? EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ten years ago in November 2005 a unique coalition of women’s groups and their allies came together to demand government action across all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the UK, with a focus on Westminster government policy. We said that fractured, disconnected and degendered policies were, to put it bluntly, failing. They were failing women who had been sexually abused as children, and girls sexually exploited by older men, who could not find a Rape Crisis Centre because so many had closed due to chronic underinvestment in the sector. They were failing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women and asylum-seeking women who were facing immigration rules that put them more at risk of violent men. Failing to hear women’s concerns about their own safety, about their need for protection and failing to recognise violence targeted at women from particular communities as seriously as all other VAWG and to ensure that they were supported and protected.

Government policies were also failing to counter the message to men and boys from all parts of the media - newspapers, music videos, video games, adverts and pornography - that violent and predatory behaviour towards women and girls is normal. They were failing to challenge men’s entitlement to women’s bodies. Whilst providing huge opportunities for change, technological developments in the last decade have also given a new platform through social media for women and girls to be abused, and the online world has hugely multiplied the images that normalise abuse and exploitation.

Specialist women’s services, academics, experts, unions and human rights groups have united as part of the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition for the last decade to highlight both the successes and the failures in government policy. We have advised all mainstream parties, commented and campaigned in the media and on social media.

Working collaboratively and collectively we have significantly shifted government policy during this time from a fragmented, siloed, fractured approach, to one where, following the Crown Prosecution Service’s lead, there is now a cross-government VAWG Strategy which is underpinned by the UN definition of “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation”. Our society owes a huge debt to the survivors and their families, the local women’s services, the academics, activists and campaigners who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the rights of women and girls are fulfilled. We must also acknowledge the work of those politicians, policy-makers and professionals at all levels of government who have changed policy and practice, and the journalists who have shone a light on these issues.

Change has been spurred on by huge public debates on VAWG arising out of two distinct phenomena: a new wave of feminist activism that took off in 2012 based around both online and offline action; and the revelations that emerged that year about Jimmy Savile’s prolific sexual offending across decades and institutions,
subsequent convictions of high profile men such as Rolf Harris, as well as cases and inquiries into the sexual exploitation of girls by groups of men in towns across Britain. More recently, public debate has centred on allegations of the involvement of senior politicians in sexual offences going back many years.

We started in 2005 by highlighting the case of Ian Huntley, a violent and sexually predatory man who was reported on no less than nine separate occasions for sexually assaulting girls before going on to murder Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. We are deeply saddened that in the decade since Ian Huntley’s conviction, we have continued to see routine and unchecked violence by men and boys against women and girls and a culture that enables it. For example:

- Inquiries and reviews into the rape and exploitation of girls in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford and elsewhere have exposed the same misogynistic and victim-blaming attitudes that allowed Huntley to continue to assault and ultimately kill;
- The case of Jamie Reynolds who, five years before he strangled Georgia Williams, had been given a warning for attempting to strangle another girl and whose parents alerted the authorities to his fascination with violent pornography. Yet the police and other agencies failed to respond to the clear warning signs about his violence towards women;
- Nathan Matthews’ trial and conviction for the sexually motivated murder of his step-sister Becky Watts which showed his fascination with pornography and long history of sexual and domestic violence to his partner, Shauna Hoare, who was convicted of manslaughter;
- The same tired myths and prejudices, the discourse of ‘witch-hunts’ against powerful men that infect public debate and cause so much harm; to survivors who may be deterred from seeking help or reporting, and to the understanding of the dynamics of violence by professionals, jurors and the public more broadly.

We believe there is much to be proud of but much more to do. We urge the Westminster Government to take the following steps as part of our journey towards a safer world for women and girls:

1. A new law to ensure women and girls get the support they need
2. Violence must be prevented in the first place
3. Consistent regulation of harmful media images
4. A coherent approach to tackling international VAWG
5. Violence Against Women and Girls Strategies
1 Where were we then?

On a brisk winter’s day on 25th November 2005, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a unique coalition of women’s groups, human rights groups, trade unions, frontline services supporting survivors, academics and activists launched a new coalition 1 under the auspices of the (since closed) Women’s National Commission and with the support of Amnesty UK and other members. Our purpose: to demand concrete and joined up action by the Westminster Government and around the UK to end all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and to comply with long established human rights obligations.

Speaking with one voice, expert members of the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition showed the failure of disconnected government policies across domestic violence, rape and other sexual violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation and trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM), stalking and harassment. We said that this siloed and fractured approach, which was degendered and did not conform to human rights standards, was harming women’s lives, failing to bring perpetrators to justice and causing huge social and economic damage to society.

We showed how resources were disproportionately focused on improving prosecutions and the criminal justice system (rather than funding vital support services or prevention for example), even though most survivors did not report to the authorities. A conflation of domestic violence with all forms of VAWG had resulted in confusion and ineffective policy-making. Whilst specialist women’s services are shown to be the most effective community response for supporting survivors to escape violence and/or deal with its aftermath, there had been a chronic under-investment in these services. This had resulted in a halving of the number of Rape Crisis Centres in the previous two decades, in contrast to Scotland, where ring-fenced funding for each Centre had led to their expansion.2 The problems that specialist services for minority women dealt with - the impact of racism, language barriers and harsh immigration rules – were little understood by agencies and community cohesion policies which prioritised the views of male community leaders.

Our subsequent mapping of specialist support services from 2007 to 2009 with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the ‘Map of Gaps’ projects explained the problem visually. One third (30 per cent) of local authorities were found to have no specialist support organisations; this rose to over three quarters (78 per cent) for services for survivors of sexual violence and nine out of ten (89 per cent) for women from Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.3

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2 When the current government was elected, they announced ring-fenced funding for sexual violence services in England and Wales and a number of new Rape Crisis Centres have since opened.

3 Map of Gaps: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain, M Coy, L Kelly and J Foord, End Violence Against Women in partnership with Equality and Human Rights Commission 2007 and Map of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain, M Coy, L Kelly and J Foord, End Violence Against Women in partnership with Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009
Similarly, the UK’s work to tackle international VAWG lacked a comprehensive strategy and tended to focus on individual forms of abuse, rather than understanding and addressing VAWG as a whole. Whilst we found some good practice in the UK’s foreign policy work, for instance around forced marriage, a lack of a coordinated and cross-departmental approach hampered efforts to address VAWG in an integrated way.

We highlighted the case of Ian Huntley where a failure by police and social services to intervene in repeated sexual assaults on girls ultimately enabled him to go on to murder Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. With grim echoes of contemporary inquiries into child sexual exploitation by groups of men across British towns, Huntley’s sexual offending was written off by professionals as ‘consensual’ underage sex. Young women were disbelieved, denied protection, the law was ignored and Huntley operated with virtual impunity, with tragic consequences.

We pointed to the UK’s human rights obligations under the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of VAW, and to General Recommendation 19 of CEDAW as well as the Beijing Platform for Action which requires governments to implement national action plans with:

- effective planning across all areas of government;
- a coherent and integrated approach to prevention, devising and delivering effective protection; and
- full access to, and provision of, support and advocacy.

We set out our expert analysis of each government department in the first Making the Grade? report showing where there had been progress, and where the failings lay. We assessed for coordinated, strategic measures that were compliant with human rights obligations and the overall score in the first year was a paltry 1 out of 10 but never rose above 2 out of 10 in subsequent years. One government department, subject to an Inquiry relating to high levels of sexual harassment, told us that VAWG had nothing to do with them. Other departments referred our enquiries to the Home Office, saying this was a criminal justice matter (with the implication that VAWG has no bearing on economic, social, health or transport policies). The Westminster response contrasted with work by the Scottish Government (then Executive) which had been working with experts in the women’s sector and was moving towards a more strategic approach.

Our stark message about government failings was underlined by the publication of an opinion poll commissioned by our host and a founding member, Amnesty UK, showing highly negative and prejudicial public attitudes towards survivors of rape.

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4 Making the Grade? An independent analysis of government initiatives on violence against women End Violence Against Women, 2005
In the decade since then, our members have worked with all major parties and with national, regional and local governments to show the connections between different forms of violence against women and girls, as set out in What a Waste published jointly by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit and the Women’s National Commission. These include:

- the long-standing myths and stereotypes that serve to justify or excuse violence and abuse and/or to blame victims;
- the dynamics of power and control underlying violence and abuse;
- the social organisation of gender, which produces the disproportionate distribution of victimisation and perpetration;
- high levels of under-reporting across all forms of violence against women and girls;
- the justice gap in relation to prosecutions and convictions, which remain lower than for other crimes;
- the long-term psychological, social and economic impacts and consequences which are borne by survivors;
- the extent of repeat victimisation by both the same and different perpetrators;
- an historic failure of state agencies to respond appropriately, promptly or pre-emptively.

To mark EVAW’s 10 year anniversary on 25th November 2015, we have reviewed progress on our own areas of interest in Westminster VAWG policy over the last decade with generous input from our members and with particular input from Womankind on international policy. We set out below key achievements and challenges and make a set of overarching recommendations for the next decade.

We have not sought to replicate the extensive work of experts from around the UK in providing submissions for the UK mission of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in 2014. We would recommend the report of her full findings in June 2015 for a comprehensive analysis of UK compliance with human rights obligations.

5 What a Waste: The case for integrated violence against women strategy L Kelly and J Lovett, 2004
2 Where are we now?

Changes...

Over the last ten years we have seen momentous changes in the policy approaches to VAWG and it is now regularly subject to high level political and public debate. Successive ministers and officials in key departments, as well as champions at regional and local level, have worked with academics and experts in the VAWG sector to develop more coherent and effective policies. The current Home Secretary drives the agenda and there is leadership from the very top with the Prime Minister declaring sexual abuse a ‘national threat’ in March 2015 and giving his personal backing to action across a range of different issues, including on sexualisation and pornography. Indeed, the Westminster Government has signed, and has promised to soon ratify, the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women), and survivors of violence also have new rights from 2015 under the EU Directive on Victims.8

In the international sphere, the Department for International Development (DFID) has made ending VAWG a priority and increased the budget for VAWG focused programming by 563% from 2012 to 2014.9 It has also developed a Theory of Change on tackling VAWG, invested £25 million in a research programme on what works in ending violence10 and hosted several international initiatives to galvanise action towards ending FGM, early and forced marriage and gender-based violence in emergencies.11 In 2015, DFID launched the The Girl Generation: Together To End FGM which provides funding to support the Africa-led movement to end FGM in one generation.12 Whilst in May 2012, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), which aimed to address the culture of impunity that exists for crimes of sexual violence in conflict, increase the number of perpetrators held to account and ensure better support for survivors. The PSVI’s activities included the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and the launch of a new international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict.13

So how did we get here? Following a series of Making the Grade? reports highlighting gaps, the Crown Prosecution Service worked with VAWG experts to develop its own VAWG strategy in 2008, thereby becoming a beacon of good practice across Whitehall. All Directors of Public Prosecution since then have backed the strategy and have responded proactively to high levels of concern about the inadequacy of the criminal justice system in the treatment of victims. The strategy has led to

10 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-what-works-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls
11 For example, the Girl Summit and the Call to Action to End Gender Based Violence in Emergencies.
12 http://www.equalitynow.org/the_girl_generation_together_to_end_fgm
improved policies, guidance and training for prosecutors and the proportion of charged cases resulting in convictions rose year on year until recently.

During this period we worked with experts around the UK to publish a blueprint for a VAWG Strategy, Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations, in 2008 showing how addressing VAWG was core business for each government department. Following its own extensive period of consultation, the then Labour Government published the first Westminster VAWG Strategy on 25th November 2009. This document was rooted in an equality and human rights framework and marked a significant shift in policy-making. The adoption of the UN definition on gender-based violence - ‘directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately’ – was key and far-reaching.

Critically, there is cross-party support for this approach. After the Coalition Government came to power in May 2010, the Home Secretary published a new VAWG strategy in November 2010 which has been reviewed regularly and annual action plans published. There is a structure supporting the strategy with an Inter-Ministerial Group chaired by the Home Secretary, a delivery group bringing together officials from across government to monitor and implement the strategy, and a number of forums focused on specific VAWG issues such as domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking and FGM. Some Departments also hold regular group and individual meetings with VAWG stakeholders. In 2015, following Labour’s appointment of a dedicated Shadow Preventing VAWG Minister (now reframed as a Shadow Preventing Abuse Minister), the Conservative Government appointed a Minister for Preventing Abuse and Violence.

In London, women’s groups had secured Boris Johnson’s commitment to a pan-London strategy during the Mayoral election in 2008. This remains in place, and there are good examples of strategies in local areas including Bradford, Brighton, Bristol and Lambeth. In addition to the Scotland strategy, a similar approach was taken by the Welsh Government in 2010 and legislation in 2015 included the appointment of a National Advisor for Violence Against Women and other forms of Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. Northern Ireland has a domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy.

One of the key outcomes of this integrated approach is the expansion of the Rape Crisis sector, both in London via the Mayor’s office as well as nationally under the Rape Support Fund. This means that in many parts of the country survivors of sexual violence now have access to specialist support. This has offered a welcome measure of stability for services at a time when local commissioners in the NHS, police, and local authorities consistently fail to prioritise such funding. There has also been an injection of funding to protect women’s refuges, as well as new funding for initiatives on Forced Marriage and FGM, although this is mainly spent by statutory agencies as to specialist women’s organisations.

The focus on preventing violence before it happens is equally critical. Indeed, the first guiding principle of the Westminster VAWG strategy is to “prevent such violence from happening by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it”\(^\text{15}\). The long-running multi-platform ‘This Is Abuse’ campaign is an excellent example of a public campaign aimed at changing harmful attitudes and behaviours in boys and young men before they develop and providing young people with information they need to access support. It has been developed over the years in partnership with experts in the women’s sector. More recently a Taskforce on Violence Against Women at University has been announced and there has been a similarly welcome shift in the UK’s international development work to include a strong focus on primary prevention.

The Westminster Government has taken a series of measures to tackle sexualisation and pornography following reviews commissioned by the previous Labour administration\(^\text{16}\) and then the Coalition Government.\(^\text{17}\) This includes action to restrict children accessing harmful material online, work with media regulators and criminalising viewing and downloading images depicting rape. Women’s groups and academics successfully made the case that action in this area should be linked more closely to the VAWG strategy and to recognise that sexualised popular culture is a “conducive context”\(^\text{18}\) for VAWG.\(^\text{19}\)

There has been a raft of new guidelines, legislation and initiatives on specific forms of violence including; new criminal offences of controlling and coercive behaviour, non-consensual disclosure of sexual images or ‘revenge pornography’, stalking, and forced marriage as well an extension of existing legislation on FGM along with new FGM protection orders and mandatory reporting requirements.

There is no doubt that many of the positive changes, often driven by EVAW members, have been spurred on by huge public debates on VAWG arising out of two distinct phenomena:

- firstly, the new wave of feminist activism that took off in 2012 based around both online and offline action across a range of issues including sexual harassment, media sexism and racism and FGM;
- secondly, the revelations that emerged in the autumn of 2012 about Jimmy Savile’s prolific sexual offending across decades and institutions and subsequent convictions of high profile men, as well as cases and inquiries into the sexual exploitation of girls by groups of men in towns across Britain.

\(^{15}\) A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls, HM Government, 2010

\(^{16}\) Sexualisation of Young People Review, Dr Linda Papadopoulos, 2010

\(^{17}\) Letting Children be Children Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood, Reg Bailey, 2011

\(^{18}\) The concept of ‘conducive context’ was developed by Liz Kelly in relation to trafficking, and has been applied to various forms of violence

\(^{19}\) Coy, M. & Garner, M. (2012) Definitions, discourses and dilemmas: policy and academic engagement with the sexualisation of popular culture. Gender & Education 24(3) 285-301
More recently, public debate has centred on allegations of the involvement of senior politicians in sexual offences going back many years and the possibility of a ‘network’ of high profile child sex abusers. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (the ‘Goddard Inquiry’) is investigating public bodies and other non-state institutions in relation to child sexual abuse in England and Wales and a two-year Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in the family environment by the Children’s Commissioner began in July 2014.

**Under pressure...**

Despite these momentous steps forward, major problems remain with the VAWG strategy meaning that the promise to protect women and girls from abuse from men and boys is far from being fulfilled. Whilst the strategy is based on UN principles, the extent to which VAWG is recognised as a human rights issue is limited and international commitments, such as recent ones at the Commission on the Status of Women, have not been fulfilled. The anti-human rights rhetoric from the Westminster Government in a domestic context whilst promoting human rights abroad is inconsistent with and hinders progress. The historic lack of focus on economic, social and cultural rights is now of particular detriment to women in the context of the austerity agenda (see below).

Whilst equality laws have developed in the last decade and the Equality and Human Rights Commission was established in 2008 to monitor their impact, these mechanisms have been under-resourced and face regular challenge, and there is no over-arching gender equality strategy within which work on VAWG should sit. The Istanbul Convention was signed by the UK Government in July 2012 and there have been three years of prevarication about ratifying. The result is that the UK has lost any claims to leadership on this and lost a key opportunity to nominate the new Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention.

The creation of ministerial/shadow ministerial positions that recognise violence is preventable is welcome, however the recent neutral framings of ‘violence and abuse’ rather than VAWG is disappointing and once again renders the highly gendered nature of these crimes invisible.

Women’s groups have long argued that a coherent policy framework is essential to make the social transformation on gender relations needed to eliminate VAWG. It is frustrating, therefore, that the VAWG Strategy fails to properly include action on sexual harassment (the most pervasive form of VAWG). Nor does it address the links between trafficking, sexual exploitation and prostitution. This is unsurprising when generic NGOs have themselves put these issues into separate boxes, overlooking the linked human rights abuses and structural gender inequality inherent
in the practice of paying for sex and consequently the mechanisms and resources needed to address them. Many of the local VAWG strategies suffer from under-resourcing and often do not go beyond domestic violence.

Disappointingly, a decade on from the first Making the Grade? report, the VAWG strategy still does not garner consistent levels of support and ownership across the different government departments in Whitehall. We do not believe that the engagement of key departments should depend on the personal commitment of individual ministers or officials. A stark example of the Government’s inconsistent approach to VAWG is its treatment of women asylum seekers who have experienced sexual violence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. Whilst the UK hosted the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and launched an International Protocol that outlined best practice in interviewing survivors of violence, there was a disconnect with other sexual violence. Moreover, the UK Home Office persisted in using male translators untrained in sexual violence issues to interview women asylum seekers who experienced violence and detaining them, even whilst pregnant.

It is still early days to say whether some of the new legislation has had the intended impact, and some of it was not supported by many experts in the first place, in particular the criminalisation of forced marriage. At the frontline, there is much good practice, but, despite persistent calls for rolling training for professionals, there remains a lack of understanding across different agencies about VAWG, its gendered nature and what interventions are required. This is exacerbated by a lack of coherent data. For example, different agencies in the criminal justice system record data in different ways. A recent Freedom of Information request on sexual offences in schools by the BBC highlighted that when offences are reported to the police, significant details are often not recorded such as the gender or age of the alleged perpetrator.

Since 2010, there have been warnings that the government’s economic policy is disproportionately impacting on women and poorer women in particular and financial insecurity narrows women’s options to escape and/or rebuild their lives in the aftermath of violence. Women who are struggling to keep a roof over their and their children’s heads, or in an insecure job with low pay have to prioritise meeting basic survival needs - such as housing, food and clothing - and this may take priority over seeking protection and support for themselves in the aftermath of violence or seeking justice through the legal system. Financial abuse itself is often a significant element of domestic violence.

26 Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2013 found that nearly 50% of survivors of domestic violence experienced financial abuse
In addition, current austerity measures, combined with local commissioning policies and competitive tendering are having a devastating impact on specialist provision for women and girls who experience abuse from boys and men. These policies remove central coordination, scrutiny and accountability and favour large generic providers who lack expertise on VAWG but offer lower costs. Local women’s services – who support survivors whether or not they report or attend a Sexual Assault Referral Centre - are losing out in rigid funding processes which are linked to the criminal justice system. Their independence and ability to hold government to account is being undermined.27

Further damage to specialist services is committed by creeping gender neutrality and a failure amongst commissioners to recognise the particular needs of BME women, sexual violence victims (adults and children), women with learning and other disabilities. As a consequence of these failed policies, the VAWG sector lost 31% of funding from 2010/2011 to 2011/2012,28 drastically affecting the rights of women’s access to specialist support in breach of the duty of due diligence, and in breach of the EU Directive on Victims.29 According to the Women’s Aid Annual Survey,30 nearly a third (31%) of referrals to refuges in 2013/14 were turned away because of lack of space. Recent investment in the domestic violence and sexual violence sectors, whilst welcome, has provided a sticking plaster, rather than long-term stability. The closure, and risk of closure, of specialist women’s services like Eaves and Apna Haq31 should be a warning that a crisis is developing at a time when there has been an explosion in demand for specialist services in the wake of the Savile revelations and other high profile cases.

Internationally, data from 70 countries over the course of four decades found that the presence of independent feminist movements was the single most important factor in advancing action to tackle violence against women – more important than a country’s wealth or the number of women in government.32 However despite their enormous added value, women’s rights organisations are struggling to survive in the current aid environment marked by changed aid modalities, increasing competition for funding and the heavy demands of the results and value for money agendas. DFID’s mapping of its VAWG programming revealed that only 18% of such programmes are working with, and building the capacity of, women’s rights organisations.33 In addition, the PSVI and the Global Summit included a strong focus on male survivors of sexual violence. Whilst this is welcome, it is important that the UK Government’s work does not take a gender-neutral approach to ending sexual violence in conflict. Violence

27 An Independent Mission: The voluntary sector in 2015 The Baring Foundation
30 Women’s Aid Annual Survey 2014
against women and girls, including sexual violence, is a systematic, widespread and pervasive human rights violation, experienced largely by women because they are women. It occurs because of the pervasive inequality and discrimination experienced by women and girls throughout their lives. Women’s rights activists who attended the Summit as experts told us that whilst the inclusion of sexual violence against men and boys is important, it is vital not to lose sight that the majority of those who experience sexual violence are women and girls and funding should not be diverted away from women survivors.  

The Department of Health is often seen as a reluctant partner on VAWG despite the clear mental and physical health issues and whilst there is expertise on prevention generally within Public Health, at local levels knowledge and funding around VAWG is lost. Whilst there have been significant efforts to improve the criminal justice system, women and girls are still reluctant to report (for example, reports of rape remain at around 15% of actual incidence rates) and many may never report. The government has made a considerable investment in the Troubled Families programme, despite the fact that the evidence base underpinning the Troubled Families analysis is very limited, and remains ungendered, even though it is known that families on the programme have considerable experience of violence and abuse. The Troubled Families programme targeted 120,000 families and was funded to the tune of £450 million, with an additional £200 million allocated for 2015 to 20. A targeted investment in VAWG would reap significant reward.

We also have grave concerns about the impact on women’s lives and safety of policies that conflict with the VAWG strategy - for example the impact that welfare reform will have on women with disabilities, a group which is targeted for abuse but less likely to see justice done, and housing benefit restrictions that could impose additional barriers to young women accessing vital services such as refuges. Whilst employers and unions have a key role to play in action on VAWG, since the third party harassment provisions in the Equality Act were repealed, women cannot hold employers responsible for harassment by third parties. The introduction of employment tribunal fees means that women experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace face even more barriers to accessing justice. Legal aid restrictions limiting access to justice and mean that women in family law cases who are experiencing violence may give up on their rights rather than represent themselves and face their perpetrator in court. Changes to legal aid also risk pushing certain groups of women, particularly BME minority women, into informal community arbitration systems and faith-based tribunals which often do not apply human rights principles or UK law. Restorative justice measures are receiving a great deal of attention at the moment but there are widespread concerns about the management of structural inequalities and power dynamics within these processes.

34 Womankind partners’ responses to questionnaire on the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
36 Finding the Costs of Freedom How women and children rebuild their lives after domestic violence L Kelly, N Sharp and R Klein, Solace Women’s Aid 2014
We are particularly disturbed that certain groups of VAWG survivors, especially the most vulnerable, have almost no access of their rights to protection and support. A wholly inconsistent approach in government policy is evidenced by the detention of VAWG survivors who have fled persecution in their own country.\textsuperscript{37} Women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) cannot access benefits or refuges and face a stark choice if they experience violence from a partner; leave them and risk destitution, or remain and suffer further abuse. Campaigning from specialist BME organisations led to the Sojourner Project fund, now the Destitution and Domestic Violence Concession. However, this short-term support for women with a spousal visa covers a very small number of domestic violence survivors with insecure immigration status. Cuts to specialist services have a particular impact on this group of women because generic services often fail them, lacking expertise and sensitivity.

The UK has clear international obligations to ensure the safety of women and girls by preventing VAWG before it happens; to change attitudes, cultures and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality. There is a growing body of work that government and frontline agencies could draw upon to develop a coherent programme of work on prevention including our own plan \textit{A Different World is Possible},\textsuperscript{38} and AVA’s Prevention Platform.\textsuperscript{39} Yet a review in 2013\textsuperscript{40} found that prevention remains the weakest part of the approach to VAWG, particularly in the domestic context, with the engagement of key departments, such as the Department for Education, dependent on individual Ministers, and little investment in research, monitoring or evaluation.

The approach towards girls’ safety in schools is wholly inadequate and uncoordinated, with funding often going to generic organisations which lack expertise on VAWG and are not linked to specialist support services which are critical for responding to disclosures. Policies on key educational areas, such as bullying, fail to reflect the evidence of abuse and high profile issues remain siloed: for example, Child Sexual Exploitation is rarely linked to other forms of sexual violence or the sexual exploitation of adult women. Moreover, local initiatives often focus on teaching girls to better protect themselves thus risking reinforcing victim-blaming attitudes such as where responsibility for abuse lies, whilst doing nothing to prevent violence by tackling abusive behaviour and attitudes in boys and men. Research for the Children’s Commissioner on young people’s views on sexual consent shows how the sexual double standard of ‘girls get slated, boys get rated’ is alive and well.\textsuperscript{41} Yet the government has resisted introducing statutory sex and relationships education which would give a space for young people to talk about how their perceptions of sex are shaped, including by pornography.

\textsuperscript{38} The model which was adapted can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/funding/daphne3/multi-level_interactive_model/understanding_perpetration_start_unix.html
\textsuperscript{39} www.preventionplatform.co.uk
\textsuperscript{40} Deeds or Words? Analysis of Westminster Government action to prevent violence against women and girls, H Dustin, H Shepherd, End Violence Against Women, 2013
\textsuperscript{41} “It’s wrong… but you get used to it” A qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England, Beckett, H with Brodie, I; Factor, F; Melrose, M; Pearce, J; Pitts, J; Shuker, L and Warrington, C. University of Bedfordshire and Children’s Commissioner, November 2013
Other departments which are key to prevention also lag behind. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is often on the back-foot in addressing the harmful role that the media plays in providing a ‘conducive context’ for VAWG to flourish, or provide new platforms for abuse. Inconsistent policies mean that the same images that would be banned on television or only shown after the watershed are routinely displayed in newspapers in the bottom shelf of the newsagents, an issue raised by women’s groups before the Leveson Inquiry and reflected in the final report. Criminal justice agencies are often too slow to tackle VAWG perpetrated via social media, or have to be urged into action via campaigns by feminists, as happened with the abuse and naming of the young woman in the Ched Evans case. Women’s groups and academics campaigned for a change in the extreme pornography law to criminalise the possession of images depicting rape, but it is unclear how robustly this law is being enforced.

As outlined above, over the past three years DFID’s policies and programmes have significantly scaled up the focus on primary prevention. However, concerns remain over the FCO’s approach to preventing violence, which continues to rely heavily on prosecutions. Across both departments, there is a need to substantially increase quality support to local and national women’s rights organisations. Whilst the UK has significantly increased aid with gender equality as a primary focus from 188 million in 2012 to 417 million in 2013, support for women’s rights organisations and gender equality institutions accounted for only USD 14 million - or 0.3 % of total UK aid in 2013. In addition, the UK has continued to focus on specific forms of violence, particularly FGM, early and forced marriage and sexual violence. It is critical as the Government moves forward it ensures a balanced programmatic portfolio that addresses all forms of VAWG and that efforts to end abuse are mainstreamed across, amongst others, health, education, governance programming.

In the public arena, the debate about violence and abuse of women and girls has also ebbed and flowed. The myths and prejudices that swirl around these issues and that hinder change are very deeply held. Whilst the convictions for sexual offences of ‘national treasures’ such as Stuart Hall and Rolf Harris opened the space for debate, the acquittals of Michael Le Vell and Nigel Evans provided little-needed impetus for re-hashed and myth-driven debates about whether those accused or charged with sexual offences should be afforded anonymity until conviction (in contrast to other serious offences). At heart, this is a debate about whether women and girls (in some cases boys and men) can be believed. For some journalists and commentators, Jimmy Savile’s offending was monstrously unique and the resulting debate has been little more than a ‘witch-hunt’ against men in powerful positions, rather than offering an opportunity to examine the routine and everyday nature of perpetration and a culture that enables abusive men to prey with impunity.

42 New Technology: Same Old Problems Report of a roundtable on social media and violence against women and girls, End Violence Against Women, December 2013
43 www.levesoninquiry.org.uk
44 http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/Aid%20in%20support%20of%20gender%20equality%20in%202015_EN_Full.pdf
3 The Reality for women and girls

Absolute Beginners: Girls and young women going through School, College and University

Schools have a range of legal obligations to ensure young people are safe and to promote equality. Nevertheless, for children at primary school in England there is still, in too many cases, a reluctance to give them the age-appropriate information that they need to develop respectful and equal attitudes and behaviours and where to seek support if they are being abused in the home or from peers, friends or family. The broader aspects of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and Personal Social Health and Economic education (PSHE) are not compulsory despite the Education Select Committee’s recommendation that they are, and nor is the teaching of consent.

Girls of primary school age are most at risk of FGM and it is likely to be an issue in all local authority areas (City University/Equality Now)

Children and young people attending secondary schools are more likely to be given some level of information, although as attitudes and behaviours develop early and many girls experience abuse at a young age, this is already too late for many. Furthermore, many girls and boys receive patchy and weak information and teaching about issues ranging from sexual consent, teen abuse to forced marriage, use of or exposure to pornography and the impact of sexist and racist media images. This may be particularly the case for children with disabilities.

A BBC Freedom of Information request found that 5,500 sexual offences in UK schools were reported to the police in a 3 year period

A girl or young woman who is being pressured into unwanted sex by a controlling boyfriend may find that school staff do not provide her with information about specialist support from local women’s organisations or that she is steered by outside agencies towards contraceptive advice. If explicit pictures of her are circulated around class by her boyfriend she may be told she shouldn’t have put herself in that position and sexual bullying/name calling by classmates go unchecked. A ‘boys will be boys’ attitude is widespread. In a 2013 Joint Inspectorate study of young sex offenders almost half of the cases contained documented evidence of the young men and boys exhibiting previous “concerning sexualised behaviour” that was either not identified at the time or was subject to disbelief, minimisation and denial by professionals and families - crucially missing the opportunity to intervene and prevent abuse. Some professionals who are concerned find themselves isolated and unsupported.
“I am a secondary science teacher. I witness on a daily basis the girls in my classes being called 'whore' 'bitch' 'slag' 'slut' as a matter of course, heckled if they dare to speak in class, their shirts being forcibly undone and their skirts being lifted and held by groups of boys, (I WANT TO EMPHASISE THAT THIS IS MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A DAILY EVENT, AND OFTEN BORDERS ON ASSAULT). On a daily basis I am forced to confiscate mobile phones as boys are watching hardcore pornography videos in lessons.” (Everyday Sexism Project)

One in three teenage girls who had been in a relationship had experienced sexual violence from a partner (NSPCC 2009)

A young Muslim woman at college who is being pressured by her parents and wider family to marry a man she has never met may be brushed off by student welfare services who think this is just ‘part of her culture’. She may worry that anti-immigration and counter terror policies mean that her family will be branded as extremists if she goes to the police. She may find that the local women’s service specialising in supporting BME women lost its funding recently because local Commissioners didn’t understand the importance of these organisations and there is now just a generic service which does not have expertise in forced marriage cases.

In 2014, the Government’s Forced Marriage Unit gave advice or support to over 1200 victims of Forced Marriage - the vast majority being girls and young women under 21 years of age

A young man at University who uses institutional computers to access pornography faces no action because his University does not have a policy on this and has failed to tackle a culture of sexism and sexual harassment.

**Boys Keep Swinging: Exploitation and abuse of girls and young women**

There has been huge public debate about sexual abuse and exploitation of girls and young women. Exposure of the prolific offending of Jimmy Savile and subsequent convictions of celebrity abusers such as Stuart Hall, Rolf Harris and Max Clifford have highlighted how sexual assaults of men on girls and young women can and do take place in workplaces, hospitals and other public institutions, private bodies such as media organisations, public events. Anywhere in fact. Whilst there has been much focus on sexual exploitation and abuse outside the home, girls are especially at risk of sexual abuse in the home – commonly from fathers, step-fathers, brothers, uncles,
family friends. They face a wall of silence and disbelief, particularly those with disabilities or other vulnerabilities. So much so, that it can take women years, even decades to tell anyone what has happened, to find support, to begin the process of recovery.

In recent years there has been strong media focus on cases of groups of men commercially sexually exploiting girls in Oxford, Telford, Derby, Rotherham and Rochdale. In these cases, girls as young as eleven were taken to hotels where they were raped by men (who often escaped prosecution) in exchange for money to the exploiters.

In a 14 month period from August 2010 to October 2011 2,409 children were known to be victims of child sexual exploitation, with 16,500 children and young people at risk (OCC)

Girls who are sexually exploited may end up involved in prostitution as adults. Yet government policy fails to make this connection and there is pressure from NGOs to disconnect policies on CSE and prostitution meaning the experiences of these girls and women, especially those who continue to struggle to survive each day, are erased. The focus is on the organisers and exploiters rather than the perpetrators buying sex from children.

Studies show that between one third and two thirds of women in prostitution first sold sex as children (Melrose 1999 and Bindel 2013)

Moreover, young BME women being sexually exploited or sexually abused in the family or by groups of men in the community may be bewildered by media headlines such as;

“Oxford grooming gang: We will regret ignoring Asian thugs who target white girls.”

And;

“Bad parenting made young white girls an easy target for ‘grotesque’ exploitation at the hands of Asian sex gangs, says Judge”

An overfocus on race and underfocus on gender skews debate and that can have an impact on whether or not action is taken, and what action, at local levels.

Asian girls who are sexually exploited from men in their own community are being failed by agencies. Notions of shame and dishonour are used to prevent them from reporting (Muslim Women’s network)

45 Daily Telegraph online 15th May 2013
46 Daily Mail online 7th September 2015
**Women overseas targeted for abuse...**

Whilst tackling VAWG has been high on the international community’s agenda, the reality for women and girls around the world remains extremely bleak. Men’s perpetration of intimate partner violence is as high as 80% in Bougainville, PNG and between 10-12% of women in Peru, Samoa and urban Tanzania report non-partner sexual violence. In many countries, there remains no laws on VAWG and in some countries, survivors who report violence are themselves arrested for ‘moral crimes’. For women who flee violence, there are often limited (if any) specialist services. Even for those who do manage to access specialist services, they may be forced to return to the perpetrator due to lack of economic opportunities. Whilst feminist activism has been found to be the most important factor in driving change on violence against women, local and national women’s rights organisations remain severely underfunded - a global survey of 1119 women’s rights organisations found that one-fifth faced threats of closure and half had never received core funding.

**Worldwide, 38% of all women who have been murdered were murdered by their intimate partners. (Womankind)**

**One women’s rights organisation running several shelters and a toll free line told us that donors are particularly reluctant to fund core costs. In the most extreme case, this has led the staff member who runs the toll free line working 24/7. Her health has deteriorated and she worries about the quality and depth of the service that can be delivered with only one person providing mobile counselling.**

**...and seeking protection from persecution in the UK**

And if a woman seeks refuge from persecution in the UK she may well face disbelief about her experiences and her need for protection. Measures that should be in place for victims of sexual violence in conflict and victims of crime are not offered to victims of the same sexual violence seeking asylum in the UK despite the fact...
these would enhance credibility assessments. A woman may be placed in initial accommodation that is not segregated and receive financial support that is far below that required to bring up children.\textsuperscript{56} She may not be able to access specialist support because services for minority women are facing such a severe funding shortage. She may even be locked up in Yarl’s Wood immigration removal centre, where she is further dehumanised and traumatised.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{quote}
“I am 13 and I am so scared to have sex it makes me cry nearly every day. We had sex education in year six and I felt fine about it but now some of the boys at school keep sending us these videos of sex which are much worse than what we learnt about and it looks so horrible and like it hurts and it keeps coming in to my mind and at night I get really scared that one day I will have to do it.” (Everyday Sexism Project)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Research into anal sex among 16-18 year old heterosexuals found it to be “painful, risky and coercive, particularly for women” with pornography frequently cited as an explanation for engaging in it. (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 2014)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01909#fullreport

Ending violence against women and girls – the next decade

We have witnessed huge change in Westminster government responses to violence against women and girls over the last decade and we need to celebrate the achievements of the survivors and their families, the local women’s services, the academics, activists and campaigners who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the rights of women and girls are fulfilled. We also want to acknowledge the work of those politicians, policy-makers and professionals at all levels of government who have changed policy and practice, and the journalists who have shone a light on these issues.

However, abusive men and boys continue to sexually harass women and girls in the street, in their workplaces and schools, to intimidate and assault their girlfriends and partners, uncles and grandfathers. Girls continue to be at risk of sexual abuse from their (step)-fathers and brothers, of being forced to marry someone they don’t want, of FGM, of sexual exploitation, trafficking and online abuse. Perpetrators often act with near impunity and survivors struggle to access the specialist support they need. The media messages that men and boys receive - through newspapers, adverts, music videos, films and pornography - continue to normalise violent and predatory behaviour and men’s entitlement to women’s bodies. Technological developments in the last decade have given a new platform through social media for women and girls to be abused, and the online world has hugely multiplied the images that normalise abuse and exploitation.

We started in 2005 by highlighting the case of Ian Huntley, a violent and sexually predatory man who was reported on no less than nine separate occasions for sexually assaulting girls whom he targeted for their vulnerability and perceived lack of credibility before going on to murder Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.

It is truly shocking that more than a decade after Ian Huntley’s conviction, inquiries and reviews into the rape and exploitation of children in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford and elsewhere have exposed the same misogynistic, victim-blaming attitudes continue to enable violent and predatory men to abuse girls. A review into the case of Jamie Reynolds found that, five years before he strangled Georgia Williams, he had been given a warning for attempting to strangle another girl. Despite his parents alerting the authorities to his fascination with violent pornography, police and other agencies failed to respond to the clear warning signs about his violence towards women. During the preparation of this review, Nathan Matthews’ trial and conviction for the sexually motivated murder of his step-sister Becky Watts showed his fascination with pornography and long history of sexual and domestic violence to his partner, Shauna Hoare, who was convicted of manslaughter.
We know that there is a genuine desire to create a safer and more equal world for women and girls. We set out below the key overarching changes that we believe the Westminster Government needs to deliver in order to achieve this. We are calling on all political parties to get behind these reforms:

**Step 1. A new law to ensure women and girls get the support they need**

Localism and commissioning policies are failing to ensure that women and girls who experience violence and abuse, particularly the most marginalised, have access to specialist women’s support services. This is quite simply a breach of their human rights and unlawful under the EU Victims Directive.

We are calling for the Westminster Government to make the requirement to provide specialist VAWG support services statutory and to require commissioners to adopt quality service standards developed by the VAWG sector.58

It is imperative that existing central funding streams for sexual violence services are maintained and uplifted, that a long-term sustainable funding solution is found for refuges and that a specific centrally administered fund is established for local specialist BME-led services and for asylum seekers.

We believe the failure of commissioning policies and breach of EU rules means that VAWG services need to be moved to simpler and more secure procedures such as ring-fenced grant-based funding.

**Step 2. Violence must be prevented in the first place**

A coherent prevention strategy – linked to specialist support – is long overdue. We urge the Westminster Government to work with experts in the women’s sector to develop a strategic, sustained programme of work on preventing male violence including:

- Ensuring that all schools take a ‘whole school approach’ to prevention including compulsory sex and relationship education/PSHE, teacher training, development of appropriate and effective policies within schools, access to local specialist services, proactively challenging abusive behaviours and attitudes and promoting respect and gender equality

- The University VAWG taskforce should result in all Universities and colleges developing their own comprehensive VAWG policies, including Forced Marriage and sexual exploitation. Access to specialist support services, including BME services, should be integral to these policies alongside disclosure training, data collection and prevention programming.

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58 For further detail see Survivors’ Rights: The UK’s new legal responsibilities to provide specialist support for women and girls who have experienced violence, EVAW Coalition Briefing Paper, September 2015
• ‘This Is Abuse’ should be built upon and developed into a comprehensive campaign targeted at different sections of the population to challenge abusive attitudes and behaviours across a range of VAWG. There should be long-term investment in research, monitoring and evaluation and learning from the THINK! Road safety campaign.

• Taking a consistent approach to preventing all VAWG, including preventing the harms caused by the prostitution industry - this means decriminalisation of and support for those selling sex and criminalising the demand from buyers.

**Step 3. Consistent regulation of harmful media images**

Positive action on online pornography and media regulation should be expanded further. We want to see a consistent approach to regulation of images across television, film, music videos, games, advertising and print media using harm-based criteria.

Rapid technological advances and children’s access to the internet means there is an urgent need for a comprehensive response to the harms of pornography. This includes coherent regulation/restriction and enforcement, as well as age-appropriate teaching about the harms of pornography, sexism and racism in the media, sexual consent and respectful relationships.

**Step 4. Coherent approach to tackling international VAWG**

We want to see a coherent approach to tackling VAWG internationally that is within a human rights framework and an understanding of gender equality. The Westminster Government should:

• Ensure policies and programmes aim to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls

• Significantly increase core, flexible and long-term funding that is available to local and national women’s rights organisations

• Ensure VAWG is mainstreamed throughout DFID’s health, education and governance programming, including ensuring VAWG is measured and has targets in these programmes

• Ensure a consistent survivor-centred approach to women survivors of violence, especially in regards to the UK’s foreign policy on survivors of sexual violence and the Home Office’s approach to women seeking asylum.

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58 [http://think.direct.gov.uk/](http://think.direct.gov.uk/)
Step 5. Violence Against Women and Girls Strategies

We believe that the time is right for a new law requiring national and local governments to work with and fund the women’s sector, and the survivors they work with, to develop violence against women and girls strategies and plans, ensure resources for frontline services and consistent human rights compliant approaches from all agencies wherever the abuse happens, including online and on social media. The law should cover all forms of violence against women and girls, according to the UN definition, including those experienced by women with uncertain immigration status and refugee and asylum seeking women, so that all women have protection from violence, access to specialist support in the aftermath of violence and that there is a targeted and effective response to male violence from all agencies.

The Westminster Government should develop and implement, in consultation with women’s organisations, an overarching gender equality strategy within which work on VAWG would sit.