

# **VAWG-CODED:**

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**From AI to Weaponisation  
– the Changing Landscape  
of Violence against Women  
and Girls (VAWG)**

**SNAPSHOT 2025/6  
6TH EDITION**

**MARCH 2026**

**END  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**

**END  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**

## ABOUT EVAW

The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) is a leading coalition of more than 170 specialist women’s support services, researchers, survivors, campaigners, NGOs and other experts working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms. Established in 2005, we campaign for every level of government to adopt better, more joined up approaches to ending and preventing violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate and condone this abuse.

[www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk)

The EVAW Coalition is a company limited by guarantee (no. 7317881) and a registered charity (no. 1161132).

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We also want to acknowledge the work and dedication of the former Victim’s Commissioner for England and Wales – Baroness Helen Newlove, who sadly died in 2025. Baroness Newlove was a committed and passionate advocate for victims, and she will be greatly missed.



Photo of two teenage girls

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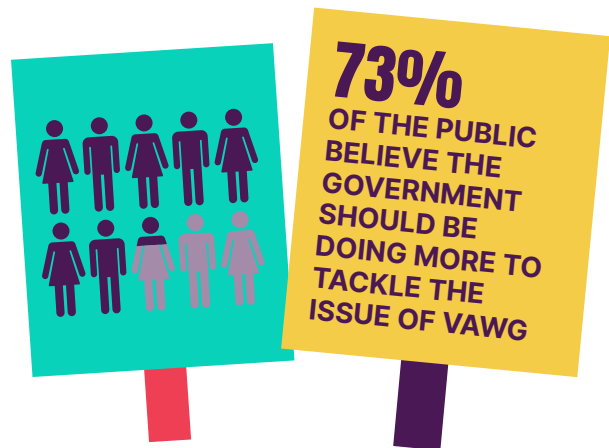


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our annual Snapshot report sets out the state of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the UK across 2025 – with a focus on England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> We have drawn on the latest statistics, findings and insight from the third sector, academics and government to spotlight the pervasiveness of VAWG, bring important trends to light, and produce an overview of the past year's key policy and legislative developments.

In last year's Snapshot report (2024/5), *No Small Change*, we highlighted the scale of the task ahead for a new Labour government in its commitment to halve VAWG; a task that appeared to take a backseat for much of 2025, with the year dominated by immigration policy and prison overcrowding, and delays to the publication of the government's VAWG strategy. This inaction was noted by the public, with 73% of those polled by the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) and YouGov in February 2026 believing the government should be doing more to tackle the issue of violence against women and girls<sup>2</sup> (a figure that has not shifted since last year).<sup>3</sup>

Critically, these delays deepened the funding precarity faced by an already chronically underfunded VAWG sector (p.32), whilst the criminal justice system continued to crumble before our eyes – with record court



## Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

includes sexual violence, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, so-called 'honour-based' abuse, exploitation and abuse of women and girls in online spaces.

VAWG must be understood as a cause and consequence of gender inequality, as these forms of abuse are committed disproportionately against women and girls, and those responsible are overwhelmingly men.

Women's inequality is compounded by structural oppression and discrimination experienced on the basis of race, ethnicity, disability, wealth and social class, sexuality, gender identity, religion, immigration status and age. These inequalities can drive victimisation and mean women are less likely to have access to justice and support.

VAWG is commonly experienced as a continuum of violence, often across women's lifetimes, that cannot be properly understood without acknowledging its interconnected instances and impacts.

1 There is specialist work happening in the devolved nations of Scotland and Northern Ireland which have separate jurisdictions, legal contexts and political landscapes. We have provided data and a number of updates on work in these jurisdictions, but we defer to specialist VAWG organisations and EVAW members in these nations to provide a fuller picture of developments and challenges they face.

2 EVAW and YouGov (2026) [YouGov / End Violence Against Women Survey Results](#)

3 EVAW (2025) [No Small Change – Making Halving VAWG a Reality – Snapshot Fifth Edition](#)



Photo of a young woman on a London Underground train

backlogs,<sup>4</sup> severe prison overcrowding,<sup>5</sup> and the ongoing exposure of racist and misogynistic cultures within policing.<sup>6,7</sup> All of this has unfolded against a backdrop of an on-going epidemic of VAWG experienced by women and girls every day (see Data & Prevalence section – (p.34); and cases such as the prolific abuse perpetrated by Jeffrey Epstein bringing into stark focus the systems and networks which enable abuse, silence victims, and protect the powerful (most notably white, rich men).<sup>8</sup>

Over the course of 2025 we have seen a number of trends emerge, as laid out in our trends section (p.12). Firstly, the weaponisation of VAWG for anti-migrant and

racist agendas – a dangerous trajectory that has caused great harm both to local communities and to survivors. Worryingly, we saw these discourses become mainstreamed by parliamentarians and government, and used to justify draconian immigration policies and increase state surveillance. This is a trend we have described as the ‘The Battle Over the Cultural Narrative of VAWG’, and explore on [page 12](#) with an analysis of the harmful gender norms and racism that underpin such narratives, and how these link to other harmful cultural narratives around gender. From the ‘tradwives’ phenomenon online,<sup>9</sup> to online radicalisation pathways for boys and young men through masculine

4 Rape Crisis England & Wales (2025) [‘Living in Limbo’: Our second report on the retraumatisation of rape and sexual abuse victims and survivors in the Crown Court backlog](#)

5 Public Accounts Committee (2025) [Prisons crisis: As justice system faces total gridlock in 2026, PAC calls for rapid action](#)

6 Daniels, S (2025) [30 Patterns of Harm: A Structural Review of Systemic Racism within the London Metropolitan Police Service](#). Metropolitan Police Service

7 EAW (2025) [Panorama investigation exposes culture of racism, Islamophobia and misogyny in the Met Police](#)

8 Hyde, M. (2026) [Never forget Epstein’s little helpers – the powerful men who knew about his crimes, and helped him out anyway](#). The Guardian

9 Norris, Sian (2023) [Frilly dresses and white supremacy: welcome to the weird, frightening world of ‘trad wives’](#). The Guardian



'ideals',<sup>10,11,12</sup> to the increasing influence of right-wing American lobbies in the UK on issues such as abortion and trans rights,<sup>13,14</sup> this is a pervasive issue. However, the VAWG sector has worked hard to counter these currents and reclaim the cultural narrative around VAWG, with a series of statements tackling head on the misinformation, disinformation and attempts to weaponise VAWG for harmful agendas.

Our second trend documents the ever increasing rise of artificial intelligence (AI) (p.15): from the new ways in which AI is being used to facilitate VAWG, the extent of harm, the lack of tech accountability, and the failures of regulation to respond in a timely manner – let alone prevent abuse from happening in the first place. In recent polling by EVAW and YouGov, over half of women (53%), and 71% of those aged 18-24, stated that they think AI has made it easier to harm women and girls online.<sup>15</sup> All of which can be seen at play in the recent outrage over the mass creation of non-consensual sexually explicit images of women and children by Grok, the AI tool within social media platform X. An estimated 4.4 million images, of which at least 41 percent were sexualised images of women, were created in just 9 days,<sup>16</sup> including many examples of digital misogynoir.<sup>17,18</sup>

**GROK - ESTIMATED  
1.8 MILLION  
SEXUALISED  
IMAGES OF WOMEN  
CREATED IN JUST  
9 DAYS**

In this section, we explore the current realities of nudification apps, deepfakes, and AI chatbots and companions, and the myriad ways they are driving the swell of online VAWG. We also summarise the recent flurry of long-overdue government activity in response to such issues – including 48 hour 'take down' orders for image-based sexual abuse (IBSA),<sup>19</sup> and ensuring AI

chatbot providers abide by illegal content duties in the Online Safety Act.<sup>20</sup> This government action is most welcome, having been long campaigned for by EVAW and our sector partners. We stress the importance of maintaining momentum, ensuring changes are informed by the expertise of the VAWG sector, implemented swiftly, and enforced by the regulator. In this section, we also highlight key ethical and social justice questions around the potential use of AI to counter harm: from the way our privacy is often pitted against our safety, to issues with excessive tech and state surveillance and racial bias within AI models in policing, and the risk of commercial interests monetising the detection of child sexual abuse and VAWG.

Our final trend for 2025 focuses on the increased attention being paid to boys and men in the VAWG (and wider) policy space (p.21). This focus is arguably, in part, a response to the surge of public and media interest following the success of the TV show

10 Hope Not Hate (2025) [State of Hate 2025](#)

11 Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW

12 Equimundo (2025) [The Manosphere, Rewired](#)

13 Archer, N and Provost, C. (2020) [Revealed: \\$280m 'dark money' spent by US Christian Right groups globally](#). Open Democracy

14 Quinn, B. (2025) [US anti-abortion group expands campaign in UK](#). The Guardian

15 EVAW and YouGov (2026) [YouGov / End Violence Against Women Survey Results](#)

16 Conger, K. Freedman, D. and Thompson. S. (2026) [Musk's Chatbot Flooded X With Millions of Sexualized Images in Days, New Estimates Show](#). The New York Times

17 Titcomb, J. (2026) [Musk's AI attacked for turning politicians and celebrities white](#). The Telegraph

18 Gentleman, A. and Horton, H. (2026) [Add blood, forced smile: how Grok's nudification tool went viral](#). The Guardian

19 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026) [Press release: Tech firms will have to take down abusive images within 48 hours under new law to protect women and girls](#)

20 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026) [PM: "No platform gets a free pass": Government takes action to keep children safe online](#)



*Adolescence*, a drama in which a boy is radicalised by the manosphere and kills a young girl. This focus has ranged from much welcome policy directed at prevention through tackling harmful societal attitudes and gender norms, to a stronger focus on the pursuit of perpetrators in the VAWG strategy, and wider policy work understanding boys and men's experiences online and their mental health,<sup>21,22,23</sup> as well as boys' educational attainment.<sup>24</sup> In this section, we emphasise the importance of how this work is framed and the principles that underpin it. We stress the importance of bridging work between men's experiences and VAWG in a way that is gender transformative,<sup>25</sup> with an understanding of the systemic nature of gender and intersecting inequalities and harmful norms, and not losing sight of the experiences of survivors.

And finally at the end of the year, we saw publication of the government's long-awaited VAWG strategy.<sup>26</sup> The strategy has a much welcome focus on prevention, most notably with regard to the education of children and young people, and recognition of the scale of online harms and the need for action. However, although there were a number of welcome funding announcements, including recognition of the value of 'by and for' services, there remains significant concerns about the insufficient resourcing that has accompanied the strategy.<sup>27</sup> It was welcome to see additions from the Department of Health and Social Care, and what is arguably the most cross-government attempt to tackle VAWG to date. But there are concerns about

the level of strategic oversight in how the strategy was brought together as a whole, and the unwieldy nature of the action plan, alongside many unanswered questions about the monitoring and evaluation framework. Critically, we are concerned that a number of the measures in the strategy actively undermine commitments to equality and cause direct harm, and that there is insufficient action to ensure migrant, disabled, LGBT+ and criminalised survivors get the support they need. We provide more in-depth analysis on (p.25) where we have applied the VAWG sector's five key tests<sup>28</sup> for the strategy to assess how well the government's plans meet what is needed to truly tackle VAWG.

The report also evaluates critical policy developments beyond the VAWG strategy – from wider developments in prevention (p.45), online safety (p.50), human rights (p.55), immigration (p.57), the criminal justice system (p.59), family court and children's social care (p.63), housing (p.65), health (p.66), work wealth and the welfare system (p.68), and the media (p.70). We also provide updates on key developments from the 2025 legislative timetable, including the Crime and Policing Bill, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and Victims and Courts Bill.

With the government's VAWG strategy now laid out, we hope that 2026 will be a year of action. We call on the government to build on its commitments and work collaboratively to truly transform the policy landscape around VAWG, and therefore the realities of women and girls' lives and society at large.

21 Movember Institute of Men's Health (2025) [Young men's health in a digital world](#)

22 Equimundo (2025) [The Manosphere, Rewired](#)

23 Common Sense Media (2025) [Boys in the Digital Wild: Online Culture, Identity, and Well-Being](#)

24 The Centre for Social Justice (2025) [Lost Boys: State of the Nation](#)

25 Gender transformative in this context means: "It is not enough to raise awareness about issues such as healthy relationships, men's mental health, or LGBTQI+ inclusion. Nor is it sufficient simply to be sensitive to differences in women and men's experiences. To be genuinely preventative, we must actively work to shift the gender norms and inequities at the roots of these issues". Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW

26 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

27 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) [Domestic Abuse Commissioner responds to government VAWG Strategy](#)

28 EVAW et al (2025) [Does it Pass the Test? 5 Key Tests for the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## In light of the findings in this report, we recommend government:

1. Consistently applies the principles of **equality and anti-discrimination**, alongside a **human rights framework**, to the development, delivery and evaluation of all VAWG related policy – including immigration and AI policy. To include:
  - a. Reaffirming the UK’s commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Human Rights Act – all key to the human rights framework needed to tackle VAWG, and reject any proposals that weaken these frameworks.
  - b. Ensure equal access to support and justice for migrant survivors by dismantling ‘hostile environment’ and asylum policies. This would include:
    - i. Scrapping the No Recourse to Public Funds condition for survivors
    - ii. Going beyond the provisions in the VAWG strategy and implementing a full ‘firewall’ to block data-sharing between statutory agencies and immigration
    - iii. Extending the combined Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain (DVILR) models to all victims/survivors, regardless of immigration status
    - iv. Halt the Home Office’s plans for an earned settlement model which would penalise survivors and facilitate VAWG, including the extension of the baseline qualifying period
    - v. Fully repeal the Illegal Migration Act (2023) and the Nationality and Borders Act (2022).
  - c. Develop actions, in collaboration with the specialist VAWG sector, to back up commitments made in the VAWG strategy to improve support for disabled survivors.
  - d. Ensure LGBT+ survivors’ experiences are embedded and needs are met through the VAWG strategy’s implementation.
  - e. Take forward legislative and policy reforms to provide effective defences for survivors accused of offending and to ensure VAWG is properly considered in proceedings against survivors.
  - f. Forefront equalities and social justice considerations when exploring the use of AI in policing in the name of VAWG, including:
    - i. Halting the use VAWG as a justification for the deployment of facial recognition unless sufficient assurances can be made to remedy the evidenced racial bias with such technology and other inequalities and human rights implications



- ii. Ensuring quality equality impact assessments and evaluations on the impact of interventions on minoritised groups for all future uses of AI for tackling VAWG, alongside a fully up to date register of AI use.
    - iii. Create an independent central body that can set national rules for the application of AI and help police forces innovate responsibly (as called for by JUSTICE).<sup>29</sup>
  - g. Challenge the weaponisation of VAWG for anti-migrant purposes including shifting the government's framing of migration, promoting an accurate picture of violence against women and girls, and holding those who spread misinformation to account.
2. Build on the **prevention** pillar in the VAWG strategy by:
- a. Increasing investment and support for schools to deliver quality relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) to ensure the government meets its aim of ensuring 'every state funded secondary school in England will have a credible offer for educating students about healthy and respectful relationships, with every child able to access support'.
  - b. Widen the support provided to schools, and include support for further educational settings, to implement a whole-of-institution approach to preventing gender-based violence in all educational settings, including making RSHE mandatory for 16-18 year olds at the earliest opportunity.
  - c. Ensure robust evaluation and monitoring framework for the delivery of RHSE and tackling VAWG in schools, including ensuring Ofsted is collecting relevant data and making this publicly available.
  - d. Ensure policy work that seeks to bridge tackling VAWG with improving men's wellbeing is gender transformative,<sup>30</sup> with an understanding of the systemic nature of gender and intersecting inequalities and harmful norms, as well as being relational and accountable, and involving the expertise of the VAWG sector.
3. Ensure **the sustainability of the specialist VAWG sector**, including specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors:
- a. Increase levels of funding for the specialist VAWG sector in line with need and to ensure sustainability, and provide clarity and assurances on a sufficient ring-fenced pot of funding for 'by and for' services.
  - b. Ensure the rehaul of the commissioning landscape, as committed to in the VAWG strategy, is guided by a commitment to anti-discrimination and the Public Sector Equality Duty, and is created in collaboration with the specialist VAWG sector, centering the voice and experiences of 'by and for' services.

29 JUSTICE (2025) [AI in Policing: international lessons and domestic solutions](#)

30 Gender transformative in this context means: "It is not enough to raise awareness about issues such as healthy relationships, men's mental health, or LGBTQI+ inclusion. Nor is it sufficient simply to be sensitive to differences in women and men's experiences. To be genuinely preventative, we must actively work to shift the gender norms and inequities at the roots of these issues". Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW

4. Hasten and prioritise work to **tackle online VAWG**, particularly in the development and delivery of actions that look beyond criminalisation. To include:
  - a. Improve civil laws for survivors of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), including deepfakes, to enable them to take action against perpetrators and tech companies, in line with EVAW's IBSA campaign asks.<sup>31,32</sup>
  - b. Create an Online Abuse Commission to hold tech companies accountable for image-based abuse (including deepfakes), in line with EVAW's IBSA campaign asks.<sup>33</sup>
  - c. Add a definition of 'safety by design' into the Online Safety Act to make clear to Ofcom and services what Parliament intended, and lay secondary legislation to require Ofcom to produce a "safety by design" code of practice including measures that will tackle risks of chatbots, addictive design, and algorithm risks to young people (as called for by the Online Safety Network<sup>34</sup>).
  - d. Ensure the government's upcoming plans to regulate AI are prioritised and meet the needs of survivors VAWG, and take a preventative and safety-by-design approach.
  - e. Fund specialist services that provide support to victims and survivors of image-based abuse (including deepfakes), and increase funding for quality media literacy education. This should in part be funded by a Digital Services Tax and Ofcom fines (see EVAW's IBSA campaign asks<sup>35</sup>).
  - f. Upgrade Ofcom's VAWG guidance to a mandatory VAWG Code of Practice to ensure robust implementation and greater tech accountability.
5. Ensure the **governance and evolution of the VAWG strategy has sufficient strategic focus, and robust monitoring and evaluation**. In particular, this should assess how well it functions in practice as a **cross-government and whole-society approach**, and how well it supports all survivors, centering the **most marginalised**. This should include:
  - a. Expanding the governance structure to include thematic Task & Finish groups, to improve collaboration with the specialist VAWG sector and the quality of delivery of the breadth of actions proposed.
  - b. Ensure the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework is capable of identifying how each department is reducing VAWG and advancing gender equality, and how the impact of their interventions applies to different marginalised groups.

31 EVAW et al (2024) [Stop Image-Based Abuse Campaign – Policy Asks](#)

32 Glitch (2025) [Beyond the Content Takedown: Non-Criminal Redress for Intimate Image Abuse](#)

33 Ibid

34 Online Safety Network (2025) [Strengthening the Online Safety Act: a Ten-Point Plan for Government](#)

35 EVAW et al (2024) [Stop Image-Based Abuse Campaign – Policy Asks](#)



Photo of a group of teenage girls

# INTRODUCTION

In our sixth edition of Snapshot, we bring together key insights from the third sector, academics and government to explore the realities of VAWG and related policy and legislation over 2025, with a focus on England and Wales. We begin by laying out three key trends we have seen emerge over the last year: the weaponisation of VAWG for anti-migrant and racist agendas, and regressive attitudes to gender in *The Battle Over the Cultural Narrative of VAWG* on (p.12); exploration of the AI landscape – *Losing Ground: the Harms and Inequalities of Artificial Intelligence (AI) – from Chatbots and Nudification Apps to Mass Surveillance and Racial Bias* (p.15); and the increased focus on boys and men in the VAWG (and wider) policy landscape (p.21).

This is followed by an analysis of the government's recently published VAWG strategy, and how it meets the VAWG sector's five key tests,<sup>36</sup> followed by a summary of the VAWG sector's funding landscape across 2025. Outlined next is the most up to date data on the prevalence of VAWG, followed by a summary of key policy (p.45) and legislative announcements (p.71) across a range of policy areas related to VAWG – from prevention to the criminal justice system and immigration.

All women and girls deserve to see the end of this year without their lives changed or taken by violence. As such, this report includes a series of recommendations for the government to ensure 2026 is a year of action (p.8).

# TRENDS

## The battle over the cultural narrative of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

With the rise of the far-right and the increasing polarisation of views in the UK,<sup>37,38</sup> cultural narratives around VAWG have become a key battleground. However, despite the heightened focus on the issue, this trend threatens to derail efforts to meaningfully tackle VAWG, and in fact increases the threat of harm for women, especially for the most marginalised.

In last year's Snapshot,<sup>39</sup> we documented the rise of the far-right, a trend we have only seen continue in 2025 – with the UK's largest ever far-right protest in September,<sup>40</sup> and the widespread appearance of Union Jacks and St George's flags on lamp-posts.<sup>41,42</sup> We also saw multiple demonstrations organised outside hotels housing people seeking safety and asylum in the UK which wrongly sought to depict VAWG as an 'imported' problem, and migrant people as the primary perpetrators of sexual violence. Those demonstrating drew on claims of 'protecting women and children' to justify anti-immigration sentiment, exploiting and hijacking genuine public concerns about VAWG to promote a racist



Photo of a woman holding her phone

agenda. This is often referred to as the 'weaponisation of VAWG'.

This narrative has been mirrored by increasing anti-migrant and racist rhetoric from government and parliamentarians. This has included those in power making unfounded claims linking migration and VAWG,<sup>43</sup> using VAWG to justify draconian immigration policies<sup>44</sup> and increased state surveillance,<sup>45</sup> with problematic commitments to release ethnicity and nationality data on suspects, which were publicly criticised in an open letter from Runnymede Trust signed by EAW.<sup>46</sup> In this context, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has

37 Hope Not Hate (2025) [State of Hate 2025](#)

38 Hope Not Hate (2026) [State of Hate 2026](#)

39 EAW (2025) [No Small Change – Making Halving VAWG a Reality – Snapshot Fifth Edition](#)

40 Hope Not Hate (2025) [Britain's Biggest Far-Right Protest: More than 100,000 attend Tommy Robinson's Unite The Kingdom Rally](#)

41 Hope Not Hate (2025) ['Operation Raise the Colours' Organised by Well-Known Far-Right Extremists](#)

42 Hope Not Hate (2026) [State of Hate 2026](#)

43 Courea, E. Bychawski, A. and Elgot, J. (2025). [Disputed or debunked claims about migration and crime in the UK](#) The Guardian

44 LAWRs, Southall Black Sisters, EAW and Hibiscus (2025) [Joint Statement on May 2025 Immigration White Paper](#)

45 Home Office and Ministry of Justice (2025) [New VAWG strategy will leave offenders with nowhere to hide.](#)

46 Runnymede Trust et al (2025) [Open letter calling on the Home Secretary and Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council to withdraw police guidance on naming suspects' ethnicity and nationality](#)



concerningly become a focal point for challenge – despite its crucial role in providing survivors with access to support, safety and justice when they are failed by the state.<sup>47</sup>

The consequences of such rhetoric have rippled across the UK, with devastating attacks on racialised people. This has been felt heavily by women who have been made to feel afraid to leave their homes.<sup>48,49</sup> This year, the Women and Equalities Committee examined the impact of this context on women in Muslim communities across the UK, noting they are ‘disproportionately likely’ to face hostility and abuse (including online), and detailing the impact on women’s freedoms and increasing withdrawal from participation in public life.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, a recent report by Kaur Lab documented the realities of racism, safety, and the lived experiences of minoritised women across the West Midlands,<sup>51</sup> an area which saw a spate of racially aggravated rapes, assaults and abuse of Sikh women. In response to these attacks, Roshni, a frontline VAWG sector organisation, led a local Unity Walk. This was accompanied by a coalition of over 72 sector organisations writing to the safeguarding Minister Jess Philips stressing the impact on local women and support services, and calling for action.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst many of those attending the anti-migrant demonstrations claim to be doing so in the name of women’s safety, there is a documented correlation between those



involved and those perpetrating abuse within their own relationships and homes. For example, two out of five of those arrested for disorder in the riots that followed the appalling murder of three young girls in Southport, had police histories of domestic abuse. These figures illustrate not only the pervasiveness of gender-based violence, but also the disingenuous nature of many of those who claim to have the interests of women and children at heart.<sup>53</sup>

The cultural narrative such groups are seeking to paint is tied to the promotion of traditional and oppressive notions of gender, painting men as the ‘saviours’ of women and framed within white nationalism.<sup>54,55</sup> Much of this is nothing new as the ‘racialisation of rape’ and use of women’s bodies as markers of ‘national’ and ‘ethnic’ boundaries has a long history,<sup>56,57,58,59</sup> but the role of social media as a vehicle to influence and manipulate cultural narratives makes it ever more incendiary.

47 Liberty, EVAW et al (2025). [Almost 300 organisations express support for ECHR on 75th anniversary](#)

48 Kaur Bilkhu, R. and Lawson, E. (2025) [Women afraid to be out in public after racially aggravated rapes](#). BBC

49 Parry, L. (2025) [Hotel for asylum families asks for ‘understanding’](#) BBC

50 Women and Equalities Committee (2025) [Discrimination, harassment and abuse against Muslim Women](#). House of Commons

51 Sahdaish Pall BEM (2026) [The Colour of Fear: Racism and Safety Concerns for the Women of Colour in the West Midlands](#). Kaur Lab UK CIC

52 Roshni Birmingham (2025) [Solidarity Statement](#)

53 Smith, J. (2025) [Domestic abuse and public violence: will the state now accept the two go hand in hand?](#) The Guardian

54 Gentlemen, A. (2025) [‘Go-to trope’: how the far right is exploiting violence against women and girls](#). The Guardian

55 Hope Not Hate (2026) [State of Hate 2026](#)

56 Åkerlund, M. (2025) [The Racialisation of Rape: A Far-Right Tool for Boundary-Creation Across Borders](#)

57 Bhattacharyya, G. (2009) *Dangerous Brown Men*. London and New York: Zed Books

58 Soothill, K and Walby, S. (1991). *Sex Crime in the News*. London and New York: Routledge

59 Tufail, W. (2015). ‘Rotherham, Rochdale, and the Racialised threat of ‘Muslim Grooming Gangs’. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*. (Vol.4(3) pp.30-43)



We have seen more evidence this year of the far-right's infiltration of mainstream culture,<sup>60</sup> and how much of it relates to gender: from the 'trad' wife phenomenon online,<sup>61</sup> to the far right's role in the return of thinness ideals for women's bodies<sup>62</sup> alongside radicalisation pathways for boys and young men via harmful discourses on masculinity online.<sup>63,64,65</sup> Research from Frameworks in 2025 illustrates the harm of these cultural narratives for gender equality (and therefore VAWG), stating that from bans on "gender ideology" to 'tradwife' influencers and the manosphere, "regressive understandings of gender are at the center of attempts to re-entrench historical hierarchies and block efforts to advance justice".<sup>66</sup>

There are also reports of a troubling flow of money and influence from right-wing American lobbies seeking to impact debate in the UK on topics relating to gender-discrimination, such as abortion and trans-rights.<sup>67,68</sup> This raises questions about their power and role in the battleground for the cultural narrative on VAWG and women's rights. For example, the US anti-abortion group Alliance Defending Freedom increased its spending on political campaigning and other activities in the UK to more than £1m this year,<sup>69</sup> alongside building relationships with political parties in the UK.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, some have suggested that Tommy Robinson's conversion to Christianity after his recent

stint in prison was driven by a desire to tap into this highly influential and well-funded Christian nationalism in the US.<sup>71</sup>

The VAWG sector has come together to push back against these shifts, working with the anti-racism sector to produce its own counter-narratives, including publication of a number of statements over the last 12 months.<sup>72,73,74</sup> In August 2025, a statement and letter to the Prime Minister and (now previous) Home Secretary was coordinated with VAWG sector partners and supported by over 100+ VAWG organisations and a further 98 organisations in solidarity. Our letter challenged the increase in unfounded claims linking VAWG to migration, asserting the "uncomfortable reality that [VAWG] is committed in every economic group, ethnicity, age and social group – and overwhelmingly by the men who are in women and girls' lives".<sup>75</sup> Women have also been campaigning to counter the weaponisation of VAWG for anti-trans agendas, namely the *Not in our Name* campaign led by the Good Law Project.<sup>76</sup> The government must now show real leadership in its mission to halve VAWG by opposing the weaponisation of VAWG to fuel harmful agendas.

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- 60 Kassam, A. (2025) [It's frightening: How far right is infiltrating everyday culture](#). The Guardian
- 61 Norris, Sian (2023) [Frisly dresses and white supremacy: welcome to the weird, frightening world of 'trad wives'](#). The Guardian
- 62 Shearing, L. (2025). [How the far right is using thinness to radicalise women and teen girls](#). Open Democracy.
- 63 Hope Not Hate (2025) [State of Hate 2025](#)
- 64 Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW
- 65 Equimundo (2025) [The Manosphere, Rewired](#)
- 66 Blustein Lindholm, C. (2025) [3 Things to Know about How Americans are Thinking about Gender in 2024](#). Frameworks
- 67 Archer, N and Provost, C. (2020) [Revealed: \\$280m 'dark money' spent by US Christian Right groups globally](#). Open Democracy
- 68 Boffey, D. (2025) [How huge London far-right march lifted the lid on a toxic transatlantic soup](#). The Guardian
- 69 Quinn, B. (2025) [US anti-abortion group expands campaign in UK](#). The Guardian
- 70 Williams, Z. (2025) [Nigel Farage is cosying up to the US anti-abortion group that challenged Roe v Wade. Women in Britain should know that](#)
- 71 Sherwood, H. and Quinn, B. (2025) [Tommy Robinson says he found Jesus in prison. Churches disagree about how to respond](#). The Guardian
- 72 EVAW et al (2025). [100+ Women's Rights Organisations Warn Against Racist Weaponisation of VAWG](#)
- 73 Imkaan (2025) [Imkaan Statement on the Impact of Far-Right Targeting of VAWG](#)
- 74 Stand Up to Racism (2025) [Open Letter: Women Against the Far Right](#)
- 75 EVAW et al (2025). [100+ Women's Rights Organisations Warn Against Racist Weaponisation of VAWG](#)
- 76 Good Law Project – [Not in Our Name Campaign](#)

## Losing ground: the harms and inequalities of artificial intelligence (AI) – from chatbots and nudification apps to mass surveillance and racial bias

The online VAWG landscape continues to swell at a terrifying rate, outpacing research and regulation. This is felt no more keenly than with the expansion of AI – from the new ways in which it is being used to facilitate VAWG, the extent of harm, the lack of tech accountability, and the failures of regulation to respond in a timely manner, let alone prevent abuse from happening in the first place. In recent polling by EAW and YouGov, over half of women, and over 70% of young people, stated that they think AI has made it easier to harm women and girls online.<sup>77</sup> All of which can be seen at play in the recent outrage over the mass creation of non-consensual sexually explicit images of women and children by Grok, the AI tool within social media platform X. An estimated 4.4 million images, of which at least 41 percent were sexualised images of women, were created in just 9 days,<sup>78</sup> including many examples of digital misogyny.<sup>79,80</sup> Furthermore, AI continues to throw up key ethical and social justice questions in its potential use to counter harm: from the way our privacy is often pitted against our safety, to issues with excessive state surveillance and racist bias within AI models in policing, and the risk of commercial interests



monetising the detection of child sexual abuse and VAWG. It is therefore no surprise that people in the UK are more likely to see AI as a risk than an opportunity, with this view being held more by women than men.<sup>81</sup>

The case of Grok has rightly caught public attention, highlighting the ease and scale with which these sexualised deepfake images were created and shared, the reluctance of tech platforms to take accountability, and the slow pace of our regulatory system in enforcing action.<sup>82</sup> But it is by no means an outlying case. This year we have seen a wealth of evidence highlighting the use and growth of nudification apps and AI chatbots to generate childhood sexual abuse material (CSAM) and non-consensual deepfake images. The annual International AI Safety report noted the “daunting challenges” posed by rapid developments in the field, and describes the growth of deepfake pornography as a “particular concern”.<sup>83</sup>

Deepfake images are now commonplace, especially amongst young people. A poll of 4,300 secondary school teachers in England found that “about one in 10 were aware of students at their school creating “deepfake, sexually explicit videos” in the last academic

77 EAW and YouGov (2026) [YouGov / End Violence Against Women Survey Results](#)

78 Conger, K. Freedman, D. and Thompson. S. (2026) [Musk's Chatbot Flooded X With Millions of Sexualized Images in Days, New Estimates Show](#). The New York Times

79 Titcomb, J. (2026) [Musk's AI attacked for turning politicians and celebrities white](#). The Telegraph

80 Gentleman, A. and Horton, H. (2026) [Add blood, forced smile: how Grok's nudification tool went viral](#). The Guardian

81 IPSOS (2025) [What the UK thinks about AI](#)

82 Hayes, C. Chia, O. and McMahon, L. (2025) [X to stop Grok AI from undressing images of real people after backlash](#). BBC News

83 Bengio, Y et al (2026). [International AI Safety Report 2026](#) as quoted in Milmo, D. (2026) ['Deepfakes spreading and more AI companions': seven takeaways from the latest artificial intelligence safety report](#). The Guardian



year”.<sup>84</sup> In light of this, the Children’s Commissioner published a report on the issue and stated that “the evolution of these [nudification] tools is happening at such scale and speed that it can be overwhelming to try and get a grip on the danger they present”.<sup>85</sup>

We know deepfakes cause a wide range of harms to women and girls, particularly Black and minoritised women,<sup>86</sup> and to society at large.<sup>87</sup> However, a poll this year concerningly noted “1 in 4 people think there is nothing wrong with, or feel neutral about, creating and sharing sexual deepfakes, even when the person depicted has not consented”.<sup>88</sup> It is important to note that this same poll found that “those who think deepfake VAWG is acceptable also hold more misogynistic beliefs; and creators of deepfake VAWG have similar motives to perpetrators of other VAWG crimes”.<sup>89</sup>



We therefore welcome an overdue flurry of activity from government on the issue in recent months. This has included:

- ▶ the (delayed) enactment of the criminalisation of the creation of non-consensual sexually explicit deepfakes, following campaigning by EAW and others to make this offence ‘consent’ based;<sup>90,91</sup>
- ▶ a commitment to ban nudification apps in the VAWG strategy;<sup>92</sup>
- ▶ announcing plans to amend the Crime and Policing Bill to require tech companies to take down intimate images shared without a victim’s consent within 48 hours of notification,<sup>93</sup> partly meeting the civil law campaign asks of EAW and our campaign partners’ IBSA campaign;<sup>94</sup>
- ▶ Ofcom plans to fast-track its decision on proposed new requirements for tech firms to use technology to block illegal intimate images at source,<sup>95</sup> e.g. hash-matching.<sup>96</sup>

We still await much of the detail of these proposals, and call on government to ensure the formulation and delivery of these proposals take heed of VAWG sector expertise and survivor voice. For example, SWGfL (which runs the Revenge Porn Helpline) have stressed the importance of stronger coordinated mechanisms, such as legislating for a non-consensual intimate image register (e.g. the NCII Register),<sup>97</sup> to ensure proposals around ‘take-down’

84 Weale, S. (2025). [The rise of deepfake pornography in schools: ‘One girl was so horrified she vomited’](#). The Guardian

85 The Children’s Commissioner (2025). [“One day this could happen to me” – Children, nudification tools and sexually explicit deepfakes](#)

86 Glitch (2025). [Roundtables on AI harms: Deepfake Abuse & Non-Criminal Redress](#)

87 McGlynn, C. (2024). [Deepfake porn: why we need to make it a crime to create it, not just share it](#). Durham University

88 National Police Chief’s Council (2025) [Police warn of rising threat from sexual deepfakes](#)

89 Crest (2025). [Examining public attitudes to deepfakes – Insights Report](#)

90 EAW (2025) [Government U-turn on deepfakes offence](#)

91 EAW (2026) [Survivors and campaigners welcome new deepfake law but call on government to go further](#)

92 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

93 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026) [Press release: Tech firms will have to take down abusive images within 48 hours under new law to protect women and girls](#)

94 EAW et al (2024) [Stop Image-Based Abuse Campaign – Policy Asks](#)

95 Ofcom (2026) [Press Release: Ofcom fast-tracks decision on measures to block illegal intimate images](#)

96 SWGfL (2025) [Setting a Global Standard for NCII Prevention: The Time to Implement StopNCII.org Is Now](#)

97 <https://stopncii.org/>

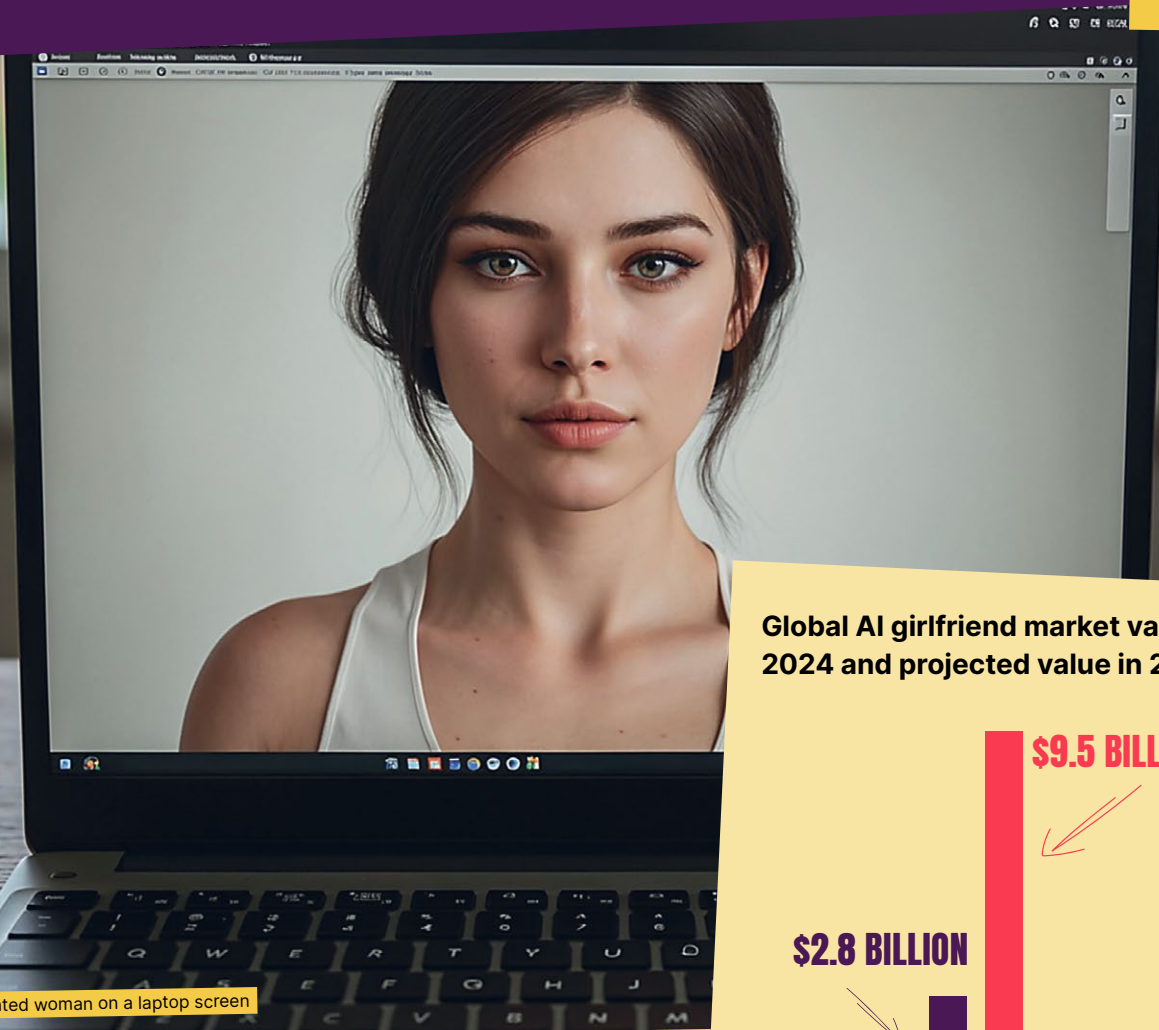
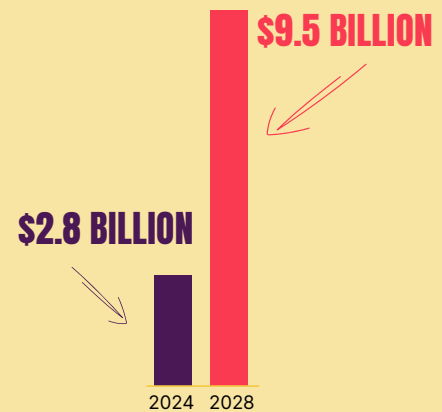


Photo of an AI generated woman on a laptop screen

### Global AI girlfriend market value in 2024 and projected value in 2028



measures and hashmatching are effective.<sup>98</sup> We also emphasise the importance of maintaining momentum, ensuring changes are implemented swiftly, and are enforced by the regulator. We continue to stress the importance of funding more holistic work to support survivors and shift the societal attitudes which underpin this abuse, alongside greater and speedier tech regulation, and widening the civil redress routes for survivors.<sup>99,100</sup>

In 2025 we continued to see the surge in the use of AI chatbots and companions,<sup>101</sup> alongside growing evidence documenting their potential for VAWG related harms.

For example, AI ‘girlfriends’ are no longer the stuff of science fiction, with the global AI girlfriend market valued at \$2.8 billion in 2024 and projected to reach \$9.5 billion by 2028.<sup>102</sup> Experts have warned this trend is “feeding into unhealthy beliefs around gender-based control and violence”,<sup>103</sup> noting the most common AI girlfriend profiles emphasise submissive traits.<sup>104</sup> There have also been cases of AI champions mirroring abusive relationships in their interactions with young girls, with depictions of sexual encounters and threatening commands.<sup>105</sup>

98 SWGfL (2026) [Government Taking Urgent Action to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

99 EAW et al (2024) [Stop Image-Based Abuse Campaign – Policy Asks](#)

100 Glitch (2025) [Beyond the content takedown: non-criminal redress for intimate image abuse](#)

101 Bengio, Y et al (2026). [International AI Safety Report 2026](#) as quoted in Milmo, D. (2026) [‘Deepfakes spreading and more AI companions’: seven takeaways from the latest artificial intelligence safety report](#). The Guardian

102 Shalwa (2025) [AI Girlfriend Statistics 2025: Market Growth, Trends, and Global Impact](#). Artsmart

103 Taylor, J (2023) [Uncharted territory: do AI girlfriend apps promote unhealthy expectations for human relationships?](#). The Guardian

104 Kuznetsova, M (2025). [HER Artificial Voice, His Real Aggression? Can AI Girlfriends Bring a New Wave of Women’s Objectification?](#)

105 Gibson, C. (2025). [Her daughter was unraveling, and she didn’t know why. Then she found the AI chat logs](#). The Washington Post



There is now ample evidence of the ways in which chatbots are encouraging boys and men to abuse women and girls and spread attitudes that constitute misogyny and misogynoir. This includes chatbots hosted by ChatGPT that are providing guidance on how to track and control partners,<sup>106,107</sup> and examples of chatbots telling young men that Black women are more “masculine, aggressive, confrontational and argumentative” than white women.<sup>108</sup> In her 2025 book *The New Age of Sexism – How the AI Revolution is Reinventing Misogyny*,<sup>109</sup> Laura Bates provides extensive evidence of the realities of how AI is currently being used. This includes documenting online spaces set up with AI bots to roleplay violent and illegal acts, such as ‘brothels’ staffed by girls below the age of 15, described on the website as a ‘world without feminism’.<sup>110</sup>

As with so much of the online environment, AI chatbots are profit-driven and are designed to be addictive, as well as human-like and sycophantic. They therefore require a stronger regulatory approach which enforces safety-by-design and addresses algorithmic harms. The Online Safety Network has pulled together a strong evidence base on both the harm caused by AI chatbots and the gaps in the current regulatory framework.<sup>111</sup> This year also saw publication of 5Rights *AI Code for Children*.<sup>112</sup> With the harms mounting, it was positive to see the government recently (February 2026) recognise the need to close a legislative

loophole to ensure AI chatbot providers abide by illegal content duties in the Online Safety Act,<sup>113</sup> and we await further details.<sup>114</sup> We are, however, concerned by ongoing delays to the government’s plans to regulate AI further.<sup>115</sup>

Alongside the many ways AI facilitates harm, it is also frequently put forward as a means to tackle harm. While it is possible that there may be a role for AI in action to end VAWG, it is essential that a human rights-based approach to its use is taken, which centres the impact of interventions on minoritised groups. A critical eye must also be kept on how commercial interests shape developments and impact transparency, as well as considerations about the environmental impact of AI. Concerns have long been raised about racial bias in AI use in policing, including facial recognition technology,<sup>116</sup> with JUSTICE calling on government “to create an independent central body that can set national rules for the application of AI and help police forces innovate responsibly”.<sup>117</sup> This is a call we support in light of our concerns about racial bias and excessive state surveillance with plans to roll out facial recognition technology in policing to detect and pursue perpetrators (as outlined in the government VAWG strategy), and the extent to which AI is referenced in the recent Police White Paper.<sup>118</sup> Without a robust and principled approach, we run the real risk of causing further harm. For example, in Spain, the police’s use of an algorithmic system to assess risk to domestic

106 Norris, S. (2025) [“We know how much harm it can cause”: are domestic abuse perpetrators using AI to harm women?](#) The Stylist

107 Mostrous, A (2026). [‘Choke her lightly’: A chatbot’s dating tips for boys.](#) The Observer

108 Ibid

109 Bates, L. (2025). *The New Age of Sexism – How the AI Revolution is Reinventing Misogyny*: Simon & Schuster UK. As cited in Bates, L (2025). [Online brothels, sex robots, simulated rape: AI is ushering in a new age of violence against women.](#) The Guardian

110 Ibid

111 Online Safety Network (2025) [AI Chatbots Research Brief](#)

112 5Rights Foundation (2025). [Children & AI Design Code](#)

113 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026) [PM: “No platform gets a free pass”: Government takes action to keep children safe online](#)

114 Online Safety Network (2026) [OSA expansion to cover AI chatbots is a win for online safety](#)

115 Courea, E. and Stacey, K. (2025) [UK ministers delay AI regulation amid plans for more ‘comprehensive’ bill.](#) The Guardian

116 JUSTICE (2025) [AI in Policing: international lessons and domestic solutions](#)

117 Ibid

118 Home Office (2026). [From Local to National: a New Model for Policing](#)



Photo of a group of teenagers on their phones

abuse survivors was later evidenced to have severe flaws that led to women's risk being assessed as too low and there being a lack of subsequent support.<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, questions are increasingly being raised about the binary way in which our privacy is often pitted against our safety (or primarily the safety of children) in online spaces. To date, the question of privacy has largely been dominated by proponents arguing for privacy or freedom of speech at the expense of the rights and freedoms of women, children and other marginalised groups.<sup>120</sup> But there is an argument that advocates for the importance of privacy in the name of protecting children and survivors. For example, Chayn describes 'encryption as a feminist issue', documenting why they believe encryption is necessary for protecting child and adult survivors of gender-based violence.<sup>121,122</sup> Meanwhile,

academic Dr Kate Sim notes "there is a tendency on the part of regulators, industry and civil society to separate privacy and safety when it comes to young people's experiences online... But these two issues are not at odds – they're very much connected".<sup>123</sup> Such arguments give rise to concerns about interventions that premise solely on the detection of abusive images, for example, insofar as they create a conducive context for increased state surveillance and offer opportunities for tech companies to profit from either the development of AI detection software and/or opportunities to mine data from weakened privacy standards. Yet their ability to meet the needs of survivors is limited as detection alone does not equate to justice and healing.

Similarly, the profit-driven nature of AI tech leaves us cautious about its use in supporting survivors of VAWG, e.g. the use of AI

119 Heikkilä, M. (2022). [AI: Decoded: Spain's flawed domestic abuse algorithm](#). Politico

120 Walker, P. (2025) [Reform UK vows to repeal 'borderline dystopian' Online Safety Act](#). The Guardian

121 Chayn (2025) [Encryption is necessary for protecting child and adult survivors of gender-based violence](#) Medium

122 Chayn (2025) [Encryption as a Feminist Issue – A Policy Brief](#). Medium

123 University of Western Australia (2024) [New program to investigate child safety and privacy online](#)

chatbots by support services. While chronic underfunding in the specialist VAWG sector makes such tools appear attractive as a means of meeting demand, emerging research highlights significant ethical, safety and governance concerns. An ongoing study at University College London's (UCL) Department of Computer Science is examining how organisations working in VAWG are responding to the growing presence of AI systems – particularly chatbots and automated agents – in frontline support.<sup>124</sup> Emerging findings point to tensions between the drive for technical innovation and efficiency, chronic resource constraints, data protection and safeguarding obligations, and the imperative to ensure survivor safety. Even where initiatives seek to develop “feminist AI” in survivor support contexts, the structural realities of platform capitalism and data extraction raise important questions about whether automation can safely substitute specialist, trauma-informed human support.

These are difficult questions to grapple with alongside balancing harms and benefits, but ones we must figure out, and quickly. And the public agrees, with 79% of women (and 65% of men) polled by EVAW and YouGov believing more regulation or laws around AI is needed for the protection of women and girls.<sup>125</sup> In light of the speed at which technology is outpacing regulation and the extent of the harm (both current and potential), the government must do more to bring forward a human rights-based approach to AI governance,<sup>126</sup> which emphasises accountability, transparency, and the protection of marginalised groups.

As stated by Laura Bates in her 2025 book:

**79%**  
OF WOMEN  
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WOMEN AND GIRLS



“AI is here, bringing a seismic shift in the way our society operates. Might this mean a future reimagined on equitable terms for women and marginalised groups everywhere? Not unless we fight for it. At present, power remains largely in the hands of a few rich, white men. New AI-driven technologies, with misogyny baked into their design, are putting women in danger, their rights and safety sacrificed at the altar of profitability and reckless speed.”<sup>127</sup>

With this in mind, we applaud efforts by survivors and campaigners in the recent nudification cases involving X's AI tool, Grok. Their advocacy, amplified by media coverage, generated enough backlash and political pressure to force the hand of one of the most powerful and richest men in the world, with X announcing it had taken measures to “prevent the Grok account from allowing the editing of images of real people in revealing clothing.”<sup>128</sup> While this does not undo the harm already caused, and serious questions remain about why such features existed at all, it serves as a reminder that although we may be losing ground, the battle is not lost.

124 UCL Gender and Tech Research Lab (2026) [Chatbots & AI Safety Agents](#)

125 EVAW and YouGov (2026) [YouGov / End Violence Against Women Survey Results](#)

126 Van Niekerk et al. (2024). [Challenging Systematic Prejudices: An Investigation Into Bias Against Women and Girls](#) in Large Language Models. UNESCO, International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI): Ljubljana.

127 Bates, L. (2025). [The New Age of Sexism – How the AI Revolution is Reinventing Misogyny](#): Simon & Schuster UK. As cited in Bates, L (2025). [Online brothels, sex robots, simulated rape: AI is ushering in a new age of violence against women](#). The Guardian

128 X announcement in BBC News (2026) [X to stop Grok AI from undressing images of real people after backlash](#). BBC



Photo of a group of two teenage girls and two teenage boys

## Men and boys brought into the frame

This year has seen a flurry of activity focused on bringing boys and men's experiences into the frame of policy work to tackle VAWG; arguably, in part, in response to increased public and media attention following the success of the TV show *Adolescence* – a drama in which a boy is radicalised by the manosphere and kills a young girl. This increased attention has ranged from much welcome policy directed at prevention through tackling harmful societal attitudes and gender norms, to a stronger focus on the pursuit of perpetrators in the VAWG strategy, wider policy work understanding boys and men's experiences online and their mental health,<sup>129,130,131</sup> and boys' educational attainment.<sup>132</sup> So much so that this increase in policy attention led the Guardian to herald 2025 as 'the year of the boy', Labour MPs to form a new parliamentary group – the Labour group for men and boys,<sup>133</sup> and the Prime Minister to announce a national summit on

the challenges facing men and boys, to take place in 2026.<sup>134</sup>

Policy work to tackle men's poor mental health and gaps in boys' educational attainment is needed, and we are mindful of the risk of demonising or alienating boys and men in work to prevent VAWG. It is critical that instead, we demonstrate how tackling gender inequality and harmful gender norms is beneficial to everyone's wellbeing. However, the surge of focus on boys and men has served as a reminder about the importance of framing and the principles that underpin such efforts, and how such work is bridged with wider efforts to tackle VAWG. It is essential that the realities of harm experienced by women and girls at the hands of men do not become a footnote to policy work framed around improving men's wellbeing. Nor can this harm simply be addressed at the individual level: harmful gender norms are embedded and reproduced at every level of society,<sup>135</sup> and the systemic nature of gender inequality and intersecting inequalities must be addressed. We also note

129 Movember Institute of Men's Health (2025) [Young men's health in a digital world](#)

130 Equimundo (2025) [The Manosphere, Rewired](#).

131 Common Sense Media (2025) [Boys in the Digital Wild: Online Culture, Identity, and Well-Being](#)

132 The Centre for Social Justice (2025) [Lost Boys: State of the Nation](#)

133 Topping, A (2025) [From Adolescence to the manosphere: has 2025 been the year of the boy?](#) The Guardian

134 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

135 Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW

that work to tackle issues faced by boys and men can flatten intersecting inequalities e.g. the role of race, class, sexuality and disability etc in shaping men and boys lives and outcomes.

When we look at how we frame links between challenges to men's mental health and VAWG – this can be bridged by applying the lens of harmful gender norms and how this plays out systemically.<sup>136</sup> As stated in EAW's 2025 report, produced with leading academics Professor Nicole Westmarland and Dr Stephen Burrell, *New paths to prevention: engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women*:<sup>137</sup>

“This violence [VAWG] is holding all of us back. It is rooted in the same social expectations which pressure men and boys to be in control, self-sufficient, tough, risk-taking, stoical, and hypersexual. These masculine norms are linked to a multitude of negative outcomes, including high suicide rates, mental and physical health problems, and lower educational attainment<sup>138</sup>... Yet boys and men are often punished if they resist pressures to never show ‘weakness’ and rewarded for conforming to the status quo, even if that means causing harm to others or themselves.<sup>139</sup> Men’s violence against women is therefore closely connected to men’s violence against other men and boys (e.g., homophobia), and to violence towards themselves.<sup>140</sup> Men who more rigidly follow restrictive gender norms are more likely to engage in all three.”<sup>141</sup>

Such bridging and understanding is essential to avoid feeding narratives which frame men’s mental ill-health and struggles as consequences of the advancement of women’s equality, or as women’s responsibility to hold. This can link to narratives within the incel community that blame women and feminism for their involuntary celibacy and premise on men’s entitlement to women’s bodies, sex, and care. This is a narrative we see becoming increasingly mainstreamed, as seen in a recent case with celebrity Steven Bartlett on his well-known podcast *The Diary of a CEO*,<sup>142,143</sup> and as explored in the aforementioned EAW report, noting how “influential figures [particularly online] are encouraging a sense of ‘instructed victimhood’ based on the notion that boys and men are being persecuted by feminism and that women are to blame for their problem”.<sup>144</sup>

For this reason, we are cautious about the inclusion of an action in the VAWG strategy to ‘develop a framework to support targeted work addressing loneliness among young men in specific sectors’. We are, however, encouraged by recent polling by EAW and YouGov that showed the public can identify that male loneliness is partly rooted in harmful gender norms. Over half (57%) of the respondents linked society’s expectations about what it means to be a man to an increase in male loneliness, alongside just under half (47%) believing the same expectations increase rates of domestic abuse and sexual violence experienced by women and girls. But our optimism is

136 Chemaly, S. (2025) [Why all the Criticism of Good Men Fighting for Healthier Masculinity?](#) Unmanned

137 Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EAW

138 Heilman, B., Barker, G., & Harrison, A. (2017). [The Man Box: A study on being a young man in the US, UK, and Mexico](#). Equimundo and Unilever

139 Way, N., Cressen, J., Bodian, S., Preston, J., Nelson, J., & Hughes, D. (2014). [“It might be nice to be a girl... Then you wouldn't have to be emotionless”: Boys' resistance to norms of masculinity during adolescence](#). *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 15(3), 241-252

140 Burrell, S.R., Ruxton, S., & Westmarland, N. (2019). [Changing gender norms: Engaging with men and boys](#). Government Equalities Office

141 Heilman, B. & Barker, G. (2018). [Masculine norms and violence: Making the connections](#). Promundo-US

142 During a conversation held by celebrity Steven Bartlett on his well-known podcast *The Diary of a CEO*, Bartlett and his psychiatrist guest, Alok Kanojia, refer to men who can't find partners and procreate as a 'mass extinction event' compared to genocide and cancer. Bartlett posed the question "should we put systems in place to make sure those men meet partners?" Bainsinath, B (2026) [Did The Diary of a CEO Take the Red Pill?](#) The Cut

143 YouGov (2025) [Young men, masculinity and misogyny](#)

144 Heilman, B., Guerrero-López, C.M., Ragonese, C., Kelberg, M., & Barker, G. (2019). [The Cost of the Man Box: A study on the economic impacts of harmful masculine stereotypes in the United Kingdom](#). Promundo-US and Unilever



tempered, as only a quarter (25%) of those polled went on to share the belief that gender equality has had a positive impact on society's expectations about what it means to be a man, illustrating the work still to be done to connect the dots.<sup>145</sup> But our optimism is tempered, as only a quarter of those polled went on to share the belief that gender equality has had a positive impact on society's expectations about what it means to be a man,<sup>146</sup> illustrating the work still to be done to connect the dots.

The government's recent Men's Health Strategy also gave reason for caution when it came to pornography, with the strategy focusing on its negative impact on boys and men's body image, dysfunction and addiction, and only a fleeting reference to its impact on healthy relationships. It failed to make the subsequent link to harms experienced by women and girls,<sup>147</sup> or to link online spaces as a source of harmful social norms heavily connected to VAWG. Additionally, the statistics on male perpetration of VAWG were brushed over.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the sole reference to the VAWG strategy did not relate to actions which bridge these two strategies i.e. work to tackle harmful gender norms.

There is also a need for decision-makers and funders to be considerate of the context in which these initiatives and interventions targeting men and boys are emerging. As documented on [page 32](#), the specialist VAWG

sector remains chronically underfunded and has had a particularly difficult year with redundancies and service closures.<sup>149,150,151,152,153</sup> In light of this reality, significant concerns were raised by many services supporting survivors when the government announced £53 million for the Drive Partnership, a project working with high risk perpetrators of domestic abuse, in June 2025.<sup>154,155</sup> This decision was announced six months before survivor services were given any further indication of the funding available to them for the coming year. This is not to suggest that funding for work with perpetrators is not needed, but to highlight disparities in the government's approach to different strands of work. It does not need to be a zero-sum game; the government can choose to prioritise both.

It was, however, positive to see how the upcoming national summit on boys and men was framed in the VAWG strategy, with the Prime Minister noting that 'we must address the misogyny and inequality that are the root causes of violence against women; and part of that is articulating a positive, aspirational vision for boys and men in Britain today'.<sup>156</sup> We wait to see how this will be delivered in practice, and hope to see an intersectional approach that also brings in the expertise of the VAWG sector. As stated in EVAW's 2025 report:

145 EVAW and YouGov (2026) [YouGov / End Violence Against Women Survey Results](#)

146 Ibid

147 Department of Health and Social Care (2025) [Men's health: a strategic vision for England](#)

148 On page 20 of the Men's Health Strategy, statistics on the perpetration of VAWG are noted, citing a National Audit Office report: "with over 97% of people convicted of sexual offences were male, and crimes are often committed by someone known to the victim". The strategy then includes one short paragraph on how exposure to domestic abuse during childhood can increase the risk of being victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse as adults, before moving on to speak about men as victims of domestic abuse. Department of Health and Social Care (2025) [Men's health: a strategic vision for England](#)

149 Long, J. (2025) [Delays to VAWG strategy having devastating impacts for some](#) Channel 4

150 Women's Aid England (2025) [Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025: The funding gap risking the future of domestic abuse services in England](#)

151 Rape Crisis England and Wales (2025) [The Rape Crisis Funding Crisis: a Survey of Managers and Directors](#)

152 The Survivors Trust et al (2025) [Open Letter: 70+ organisations warn: specialist sexual violence services face closure](#)

153 IRISI (2025) [IRISI comments on the closure of the life-saving IRIS Programme in Gwent](#)

154 Imkaan (2025) [No Safety Without Support: Why This Funding Decision Fails Survivors](#)

155 Rape Crisis England and Wales (2025) [Rape Crisis concerned by Home Office decision to invest £53m in Drive Project](#)

156 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

“Engaging boys and men cannot be done in isolation. Whilst men have a responsibility to talk to each other about this problem, it is also vital to ensure that the voices of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people – who have been leading these efforts for decades – are heard.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, research suggests that listening to the women and girls in their lives can be a key motivator for change among men.<sup>158,159,160,161</sup> This helps to ensure that work by and with men and boys is supportive of women’s leadership and accountable to victim-survivors, and does not ‘take over’ the conversation (or funding) at their expense.”<sup>162</sup>

Furthermore, it was encouraging to see recommendations promoting gender equality and addressing VAWG in Equimundo and Beyond Equality’s *The State of Men* report.<sup>163</sup> These included calls to:

- ▶ engage men as allies in gender equality and safer communities.
- The VAWG sector has also produced a series of reports this year which positions boys and men as agents of change in creating a world free from VAWG. For example, EVAW’s aforementioned 2025 report,<sup>164</sup> which explores what is needed to engage boys and men in ending VAWG, lays out the evidence base for this vital prevention work – calling for it to be gender transformative<sup>165</sup> and systemic, relational and accountable, intersectional, and holistic; alongside the need to build relationships, embrace discomfort, and provide a positive vision. Additionally, White Ribbon UK published its report making the case for government to invest in the primary prevention of men’s violence against women and girls,<sup>166</sup> alongside a practical guide from Zero Tolerance on how to talk to men about men’s violence against women and girls and gender equality,<sup>167</sup> which:
- ▶ write new scripts around masculinity and challenge harmful norms through public campaigns, school programs and trusted spaces such as sports
  - ▶ push back against the red pill pipeline by investing in digital literacy, counter-messaging, and inclusive content. Meet men where they scroll – with purpose, not panic
  - ▶ prioritise healthy relationships – make relationship education foundational – from schools to workplaces – to build the skills men need for connection, intimacy, and respect
  - ▶ improves men’s understanding of the link between gender inequality and men’s violence against women and girls, and men’s role in ending it
  - ▶ shows that gender equality benefits everyone and gains support for it
  - ▶ makes ending men’s violence against women and girls feel personally relevant to men.

157 MenEngage Alliance (2023). [The Accountability Framework of Men Engage Alliance](#)

158 Casey, E.A., Tolman, R.M., Carlson, J., Allen, C.T., & Storer, H.L. (2016). [What motivates men’s involvement in gender-based violence prevention? Latent class profiles and correlates in an international sample of men](#). *Men and Masculinities*, 20(3), 294-316

159 Flood, M. (2015) [Work with men to end violence against women: A critical stocktake](#). *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 17(2): 159-176

160 Westmarland, N., Almqvist, A.-L., Egeberg Holmgren, L., Ruxton, S., Burrell, S.R., & Delgado Valbuena, C. (2021). [Men’s Activism to End Violence Against Women: Voices from Spain, Sweden and the UK](#). Policy Pres

161 Wright, C., & Cowburn, M. (2011). [What’s happening in men’s work in the UK? Reflections on policies and processes](#). In: E. Ruspini, J. Hearn, B. Pease, & K. Pringle (Eds.), *Men and Masculinities around the World: Transforming Men’s Practices* (pp. 109-121). Palgrave Macmillan

162 Wild, J. (2023). [Men’s efforts to tackle men’s violence: Negotiating gendered privileges and norms in movement and practice spaces](#). *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 7(2), 304-321

163 Equimundo and Beyond Equality (2025) [State of UK Men](#)

164 Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW

165 Gender transformative: ‘It is not enough to raise awareness about issues such as healthy relationships, men’s mental health, or LGBTQI+ inclusion. Nor is it sufficient simply to be sensitive to differences in women and men’s experiences. To be genuinely preventative, we must actively work to shift the gender norms and inequities at the roots of these issues.’ Burrell, S and Westmarland, N (2025) [New Paths to Prevention: Engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women and girls](#). EVAW

166 White Ribbon (2025) [The case for investing in preventing men’s violence against women and girls](#)

167 Zero Tolerance (2025) [Addressing men’s violence against women: A practical guide on shaping men’s perspectives](#)



Photo of two women looking across the Thames to Parliament

# GOVERNMENT'S VAWG STRATEGY

Following the government's manifesto pledge to halve VAWG in 10 years, we have been awaiting publication of its VAWG strategy, which was originally set for publication in Spring 2025, and was delivered in December 2025. The strategy is structured around three pillars, with a welcome focus on prevention alongside the 'pursuit of perpetrators' and support for victims, and underpinned by a 'whole-society' approach to VAWG (as called for by the VAWG sector's manifesto in 2024).<sup>168</sup> Below we have outlined the five key tests<sup>169</sup> produced by EVAW and 60+ expert VAWG organisations to assess how well the strategy would meaningfully tackle and prevent VAWG.

168 EVAW et al (2024) [VAWG Manifesto](#)

169 EVAW et al (2025) [Does it Pass the Test? 5 Key Tests for the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#)

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests	How well these tests are met by the <u>Government's VAWG Strategy</u>
<p><b>1. Focus on primary prevention:</b> delivering a public health approach to preventing VAWG, from investment in education to public campaigns to raise awareness and shift attitudes and behaviours and regulating the online environment.</p>	<p>This was one of the strongest and most welcome parts of the VAWG strategy, with <b>prevention central to the government's approach to tackling VAWG</b>. Much of the narrative throughout the strategy recognises the need to tackle the root causes of VAWG; citing misogyny, inequality, and harmful social and cultural attitudes – including a welcome focus on the impact of pornography. However, although there is reference to intersecting inequalities such as racism or homophobia, which are entwined in the root causes of VAWG, this understanding is not consistently applied nor translated into action to reduce said inequalities (please also see test 3).</p> <p><b>We welcome the focus on the education of children and young people</b>, including commitments to improve the quality and consistency of RSHE provision, and ambitions that go beyond RSHE. However, if the government is to meet its ambitions in this area it must substantially bolster the accompanying funding. We note the tendency to provide smaller pots of funding for pilot projects (e.g. the Department of Education funding randomised control trial for supporting child victims of domestic abuse, £5million for a training pilot linked to RSHE, and an £8million innovation fund for interventions on working with young people displaying harmful behaviour), rather than providing the essential funding needed for the invaluable work the specialist sector has been doing for years on insufficient resources. We also call on the government to bring forward plans to introduce mandatory RSHE for 16-18 year olds at the earliest opportunity.<sup>170</sup></p> <p><b>We are pleased to see the prominence of tackling online harms</b> in the strategy, including a focus on AI, a ban on nudification apps, and numerous references to 'safety by design' and media literacy. However, we await details of how the government will take forward many of the ambitions in this area. We also <b>stress the importance of thinking outside the box of criminalisation</b>,<sup>171</sup> <b>and the need to accelerate the pace of work</b> in light of the evidence already available,<sup>172,173</sup> scale of harm, rate of technological advancements and the ongoing impunity of tech companies.</p> <p>The strategy does recognise the need for prevention to extend beyond a focus on children and young people, but is weaker in this regard. <b>We welcome the commitment to a long-term national programme of behaviour change campaigns</b>. This is something the sector has long called for, and we call upon government to ensure the VAWG sector's ongoing involvement in the development and delivery of this work.</p> <p>The strategy also mentions policies which seek to tackle gender inequality more widely, for example making paternity leave and unpaid parental leave 'day one' rights through the Employment Rights Act. However, these commitments are very limited.</p>

170 [Make it Mandatory Campaign](#)

171 [Glitch \(2025\) Beyond the Content Takedown: Non-Criminal Redress for Intimate Image Abuse](#)

172 [Glitch \(2025\) Government VAWG Strategy – Our Response](#)

173 [EVAW et al \(2024\) Stop Image-Based Abuse Campaign – Policy Asks](#)

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests	How well these tests are met by the <u>Government's VAWG Strategy</u>
<p><b>2. Address all forms of VAWG in an integrated way:</b> reflecting women and girls' lived realities in both support provision and the metrics used to measure prevalence, frequency, impact and how this differs among different groups of women. This follows concerns about the potential exclusion of child sexual abuse and exploitation from the strategy.</p>	<p><b>We are pleased to see all forms of VAWG reflected in the strategy</b>, albeit to varying degrees of ambition with regard to actions, funding and joined up thinking. This includes sexual violence, domestic abuse, child sexual and exploitation, so called 'honour' based abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, trafficking, stalking, public and work-based sexual harassment, child to parent abuse, economic abuse, and conversion practices. We note that there is a lack of recognition of state violence, i.e. the direct harm many of the government's own systems cause women. For example, how hostile asylum policies perpetuate and exacerbate violence against refugee and asylum seeking women.<sup>174</sup></p> <p>The metrics proposed to measure halving VAWG, and sub-metrics linked to strategy, cover a much more limited range of VAWG. Furthermore, the government notes a lack of disaggregated data to understand how impact differs among different groups of women (please see test 5 and the Data &amp; Prevalence section for further commentary on metrics and evaluation).</p>

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests	How well these tests are met by the <u>Government's VAWG Strategy</u>
<p><b>3. Include all women and girls without discrimination:</b> taking an equalities lens to address the ways Black and minoritised, migrant and asylum-seeking, disabled and LGBT+ survivors are disproportionately subjected to VAWG, ensure access to specialist support and prevent the criminalisation of survivors. This includes a firewall between statutory services and immigration enforcement to stop migrant victims being treated as offenders when they seek safety.</p>	<p><b>Despite some positive rhetoric on inequalities</b> in the strategy's narrative, and a <b>welcome commitment to the value and funding of 'by and for' services, the strategy is at best inconsistent in its application of a principle of equality and anti-discrimination.</b> This includes the absence of an equalities lens within the information provided on the monitoring and evaluation framework, or any concrete plans to improve data collection or needs assessments with these principles in mind.</p> <p><b>Critically, we are concerned that a number of the measures in the strategy actively undermine commitments to equality, and will cause direct harm to minoritised survivors.</b> This includes the weaponisation of VAWG to pass restrictive immigration policies, opening up opportunities for the targeting of racialised communities with the potential misuse of data, and increasing levels of state surveillance with technology known to function with racial bias, i.e. facial recognition.<sup>175</sup></p> <p>There is also <b>little mention of the experiences of disabled<sup>176</sup> or LGBT+ survivors<sup>177</sup></b>, and even fewer corresponding actions, bar a commitment to ban abusive conversion practices and recognition of the need for specialist support.</p>

174 Women for Refugee Women (2025) Women for Refugee Women's Statement on the Government's VAWG Strategy: Leaving Refugee Women Behind

175 JUSTICE (2025) AI in Policing: international lessons and domestic solutions

176 Stay Safe East (2026) Stay Safe East's Response to the Government's VAWG Strategy

177 Galop (2026) Galop's response to the government's VAWG Strategy

Although we welcome the recognition that safe reporting mechanisms are essential for migrant survivors, and the degree of protection offered by the proposed requirement for police to seek a survivor's consent before sharing their information with Immigration Enforcement, **this does not amount to a full, unconditional firewall**. The idea of 'consent' here is problematic in light of the power dynamic between the survivor and police or immigration enforcement, and when considering the distress and acute trauma of the survivor when being asked to give 'consent'.<sup>178,179,180</sup>

We also welcome the continued investment in the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme. But this support is insufficient to meet the needs of all migrant survivors, and the strategy fails to introduce reforms to reduce the risk of harm or meet the needs of migrant survivors i.e. extending the Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain (DVILR) and Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) model for those on partner/spousal visas to all migrant survivors regardless of their immigration status. The strategy does not address the ways in which hostile immigration policies put women at risk of abuse.

It is positive to see some recognition of criminalised survivors. However, there is little specific provision to protect them (bar expunging convictions relating to soliciting for under 18s) and no commitment to introducing legal protections to ensure victim-survivors of VAWG who are accused of offending have an effective defence.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, measures to deport foreign national offenders will impact migrant survivors who are criminalised in the context of abuse.

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178 Southall Black Sisters (2025) [Statement on the Government's VAWG Strategy](#)

179 LAWRS (2025) [Government's new VAWG Strategy: Safe Reporting Mechanisms for Victims and Survivors of VAWG](#)

180 Hibiscus (2025) [Hibiscus' response to the government's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy](#)

181 Centre for Women's Justice (2025) [CWJ welcomes progress on addressing victims' unjust criminalisation but warns urgent legal reforms still needed](#)

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests	How well these tests are met by the <u>Government's VAWG Strategy</u>
<p><b>4. Sustainably fund specialist support services:</b> delivering a national infrastructure of sustainably-funded, specialist VAWG organisations that are resourced to provide the full range of interventions and wraparound support that women and girls need, with ring-fenced funding for services led 'by and for' marginalised survivors and specialist sexual violence services, and systematic reform of the current competitive funding and commissioning landscape.</p>	<p>There are a <b>number of welcome funding commitments for specialist support services, with much greater cross-government involvement and recognition and a commitment to the provision of 'by and for' services.</b><sup>182</sup> However, we are still missing much of the detail to make firm conclusions, and in light of the chronic under- and short-term funding of the sector for many years, alongside a likely increase in demand (as a result of proposals in the strategy), <b>these funding commitments do not yet go far enough to meet need and the long-term sustainability of the specialist sector.</b><sup>183</sup></p> <p>Specialist service funding commitments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ £550m from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for victim support services over 3 years, and welcome confirmation that the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund will continue into 2026/27 and 2027/28. It still remains unclear what percentage of the £550m will be ringfenced for VAWG services specifically, as the pot is for 'victim support services'. Furthermore, while there will be a 2% increase year-on-year, with inflation currently at 3.2% and increases next year to the national living wage, coupled with the previous rise in Employer National Insurance Contributions, this still signifies a real-term cut in funding.</li> <li>▶ The Department of Health &amp; Social Care (DHSC) has committed an additional £5million to the above MoJ funding pot. The DHSC will also fund their commitments to roll out an initiative with GPs and to provide support for victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Again, we await further detail, and have concerns that the funding does not match the ambition.</li> <li>▶ Increased funding commitments from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the local provision of safe accommodation (£499million over the next 3 years – a £19million increase). Sector organisations have advised that further and more sustainable funding is required to meet demand for refuge spaces. For example, Refuge estimates that the current shortfall for refuge service funding is at £62 million, a long way off the £6.3 million a year (£19 million over three) committed to.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, Women's Aid National Audit 2025 documented that 60.1% of referrals into refuge services were rejected over the past year, with the common reason being capacity.<sup>185</sup></li> </ul> <p>It is, however, <b>positive to see a commitment to 'radically overhaul the support services commissioning landscape</b> to build a system that is...fit for purpose, and which recognises the very varied needs women have, including those with disabilities, or from different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>186</sup> This includes a new national commissioning statement that will 'provide clear definitions of 'by-and-for' and specialist services, helping funders allocate funding more effectively'. We await further detail and press upon the government the importance of working with the specialist VAWG sector, most notably 'by and for' services, in its development.</p>

182 Imkaan (2025) VAWG Strategy: Government Commits to Funding Specialist Advocacy Provision including 'by and for' Services

183 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) Domestic Abuse Commissioner responds to government VAWG Strategy

184 Refuge (2025) VAWG Strategy sets ambition, but lacks critical investment

185 Women's Aid England (2025) Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025: The funding gap risking the future of domestic abuse services in England

186 Home Office (2025). Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests	How well these tests are met by the <u>Government's VAWG Strategy</u>
<p><b>5. Cross-departmental commitments with oversight and evaluation:</b> with a clear and monitorable delivery plan and evaluation framework, a human rights and equalities lens, and regular progress reporting incorporating different government departments, with independent oversight and meaningful survivor engagement.</p>	<p><b>Cross-government</b></p> <p><b>This strategy represents the most cross-government piece of work on VAWG to date:</b> a welcome shift in the right direction, notably bringing health to the table.</p> <p>In order to match up to the strong narrative of a ‘whole-society’ and ‘cross-government’ response, <b>its success will rely heavily on good strategic oversight to ensure its disparate parts are brought together as a whole.</b> This would help overcome what currently appears more of a <b>scattergun approach</b>, with an unwieldy action plan that lacks structure, focus and milestones, and actions ranging hugely in detail, scale and relevance.</p> <p>Both actions and metrics are still disproportionately weighted towards criminal justice responses, which needs to be addressed.</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E)</b></p> <p>The government has outlined its topline metric to measure its aim to halve VAWG, and provided an explainer on why it does not cover all forms of VAWG – an approach the sector has raised concern with.<sup>187</sup> The government has also outlined a series of supporting headline metrics focused on female homicide, repeat domestic abuse, and the prevalence of sexual harassment, which will need further development to capture the breadth of VAWG.</p> <p>The government has also put forward a series of sub-metrics under each of the strategy’s pillars. Many of these are still in development, and there remain question marks about how the data will be collected. For example, EVAW has long asked key state bodies for data on the prevalence of online harms to no avail, and the government has provided no further detail on how it will measure <b>shifts in attitudes towards women, misogyny, and harmful behaviour.</b> There is also a question mark over the appropriateness of some of these sub-metrics – for example, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) data under prevention and early intervention, when MARACs are for high risk domestic abuse cases.</p> <p>In general, the <b>M&amp;E framework appears underdeveloped. In particular, we are concerned that it lacks an equality lens</b> and detail on how the government plans to tackle the issue of data quality – most notably disaggregated data – an issue raised by the VAWG sector for many years.<sup>188</sup></p> <p>The strategy notes the creation of an Evaluation Taskforce from a joint Cabinet Office-HM Treasury unit. We recommend that this Taskforce develops the M&amp;E framework in consultation with the VAWG sector to ensure it is fit for purpose and equipped to address inequalities for minoritised survivors.</p>

187 EVAW (2025) New ONS crime data fails to capture full spectrum of VAWG

188 EVAW et al (2023) What’s Changed?: Government’s ‘End-to-End’ Rape Review – Two Years On

### Oversight

**We welcome the establishment of a cross-government VAWG Ministerial Group, and cross-government VAWG team**, particularly the addition of health and education officials. **We are pleased to see the continuation of the Strategy Advisory Board for some VAWG sector input**, and a planned 2026 stakeholder forum.

These are vital components called for in the accountability framework<sup>189</sup> proposed by the VAWG sector in July 2024, but questions remain about meaningful consultation going forward, particularly with organisations outside of the limited number that comprise the Board. We point the government to the recommendation for thematic working groups in the framework, and suggest the government sets up a series of Task&Finish groups as a means. This would harness a broader range of expertise from the specialist VAWG sector and improve the quality of delivery of the breadth of actions proposed.

The quality of consultation and collaboration is key, with consideration needed of how inequalities for minoritised survivors are often also mirrored in consultation and decision-making processes. We also note that although the government mentions the important role of survivors and lived experience in the creation of the strategy, the mechanism for further survivor input is currently unclear.

**We strongly support the commitment to report annually on progress for the necessary public and parliamentary scrutiny**, and will explore options for further independent scrutiny.

A full list of actions the government has committed to can be found in the government's online action plan.<sup>190</sup> We have also sought to include key commitments within the policy sections in this report. This includes a series of welcome criminal justice system commitments which do not fit within the VAWG sector's five key tests – for example, bringing back specialist rape and sexual offences teams in every police force in England and Wales, a commitment to the introduction of Independent Legal Advice for victims of rape, taking forward learning from Operation Soteria in other areas of the criminal justice system, and more robust vetting for police officers.

189 EAW et al (2024) [Ending Violence against Women and Girls \(VAWG\): a Government Framework for Delivery and Accountability](#)

190 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)



Photo of three women in an office

## VAWG SECTOR FUNDING

Despite efforts from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and Victims' Commissioner in their letter to the Prime Minister in June 2025,<sup>191</sup> July's spending review was deeply disappointing for specialist VAWG services for survivors.<sup>192</sup> It was therefore welcome to see the funding commitments made alongside the VAWG strategy in December (p.25 for more details). However, when looking at the figures in the round, these commitments sadly do not yet go far enough

to meet the stark realities facing frontline services and the survivors they support, as noted in the response from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, who says:

“[There is] no long-term sustainable funding for specialist services to ensure victims can actually access support in their area, despite the fact many of these measures will likely drive up referrals.”<sup>193</sup>

191 Victims Commissioner and Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) [Joint letter to the Prime Minister on the Comprehensive Spending Review](#)

192 EAW (2025) [Spending Review fails women and leaves survivors at risk](#)

193 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) [Domestic Abuse Commissioner responds to government VAWG Strategy](#)



In 2025, we saw a number of publications evidence the dire state of affairs for sector funding. This included a report from the Home Affairs Committee in July which stated that funding must be at the ‘heart of the response’ from government, and warned about a system of short-term, bid-based funding which creates financial instability and structurally disadvantages smaller services, particularly those led ‘by and for’ Black, minoritised and marginalised women.<sup>194</sup> The report expanded on how short-term funding cycles were preventing long-term planning, disrupting staffing, and limiting the ability to evaluate services. The committee called for a shift to three-to-five year funding cycles as an essential way to provide stability and improve outcomes for victims and survivors, as well as greater transparency on funding.

The Committee also recommended “that local authorities, police and crime commissioners and mayors conduct mapping exercises to identify where they allocate funding to tackle VAWG; and for government to publish alongside the VAWG strategy its cross-government mapping of where funding to tackle VAWG is being targeted, and provide annual updates” – recommendations rejected by the government.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, a report from the National Audit Office found that the Home Office has historically underspent its own budget allocated to the previous VAWG Strategy by an average of 15% between 2021-22 and 2023-24. This underspend was happening in a context of survivors being unable to access refuge places and facing increased waiting list times for support.<sup>196,197</sup>

These reports sit alongside the wealth of evidence provided by the VAWG sector on the impact of chronic underfunding.<sup>198</sup>

For example, Rape Crisis England & Wales reported that the percentage of Rape Crisis centres expecting a reduction or loss in services sharply increased over a six-month period in 2025 – from half of services in the summer survey (51%) to over three quarters in the winter survey (78%).<sup>199</sup> Over 70 organisations working with adults and children who experience sexual violence wrote to the Lord Chancellor in August warning of the risk of service closures.<sup>200</sup> This is in light of new research published this year that showed the lifetime economic cost of sexual violence and abuse against adults for England and Wales in the year ending September 2024 is estimated to be £292 billion, and £148 billion for sexual violence and abuse against children – underscoring the urgent need for long-term investment in specialist prevention and support services.<sup>201</sup> It is essential that the government expands on its funding commitment to make sure it meets survivor need and ensures the sustainability of the specialist VAWG sector, including sexual violence and ‘by and for’ services.



194 Home Affairs Committee (2025) [Tackling violence against women and girls: funding](#). House of Commons

195 Home Affairs Committee (2025) [Tackling Violence against Women and Girls: Funding: Government Response](#)

196 Women's Aid England (2025) [Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025: The funding gap risking the future of domestic abuse services in England](#)

197 Rape Crisis England and Wales (2025) [The Rape Crisis Funding Crisis: a Survey of Managers and Directors](#)

198 Kitson, B. (2025) [Underfunded, under resourced and under the radar: the state of the women and girls' social sector](#) ROSA

199 Rape Crisis England and Wales (2025) [The Rape Crisis Funding Crisis: a Survey of Managers and Directors](#)

200 The Survivors Trust et al (2025) [Open Letter: 70+ organisations warn: specialist sexual violence services face closure](#)

201 University of Bristol, Rape Crisis England and Wales and Women's Budget Group (2025) [Estimating the costs of Sexual Violence](#)



Photo of a woman in a crowded place

## DATA & PREVALENCE

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains widespread across the UK, yet the full scale and nature of abuse continues to be obscured by fragmented, inconsistent and often inadequate data. How VAWG is measured matters: metrics shape political priorities, influence funding decisions, and determine whose experiences are counted.

### Office for National Statistics (ONS) Combined Measure of VAWG

In July 2025, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) introduced a new combined measure of violence<sup>202</sup> from the Crime Survey of England & Wales (CSEW) to track progress against the UK government's commitment to halve violence against women and girls. This followed work in June by EVAW and VAWG sector partners to develop a set of principles and recommendations for the government's planned metrics.<sup>203</sup> However, while the ONS's combined measure represents an attempt to

move beyond narrow crime categories, the measure – which brings together domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking – does not capture the full spectrum of VAWG, including coercive control, online abuse and economic abuse, nor the experiences of those under 16.<sup>204,205</sup>

The combined measure set out for the year ending (YE) March 2025<sup>206</sup> found:

- ▶ 10.6% of adults experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence or stalking in the last year – equivalent to around 5.1 million people, including 3.2 million women
- ▶ 12.8% of women experienced at least one of these crimes, compared with 8.4% of men.

The combined measure was announced following changes to the domestic abuse question in the CSEW, which attempted to broaden the experiences captured. However, concerns have been raised that these changes risk obscuring gendered patterns of harm and underestimating chronic and coercive abuse.<sup>207</sup>

202 Office for National Statistics (2025) [Developing a combined measure of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking, England and Wales: July 2025](#)

203 EVAW et al (2025) [Measuring the government mission to halve VAWG](#)

204 EVAW (2025) [New ONS crime data fails to capture full spectrum of VAWG](#)

205 Obolenskaya, P. Pullerits, M. and Blom, N. (2025) [Can the ONS new combined measure of violence be used to accurately assess progress in reducing violence against women and girls?](#)

206 Office for National Statistics (2025) [Developing a combined measure of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking, England and Wales: July 2025](#)

207 EVAW (2025) [New ONS crime data fails to capture full spectrum of VAWG](#)

## Sexual violence

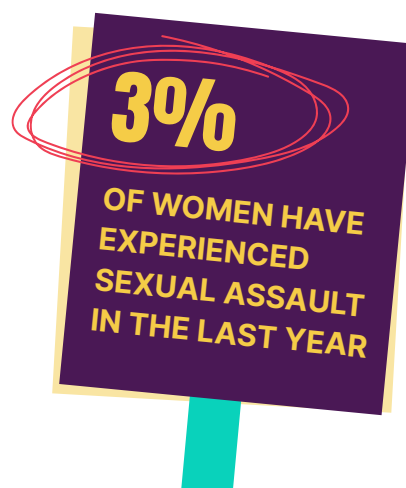
**The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year-ending (YE) March 2025,<sup>208</sup> estimated that:**

### Sexual assault

- ▶ 1.9% of adults experienced sexual assault in the last year: 3% of women, compared with 0.7% of men. The prevalence of sexual assault experienced by people aged 16 to 59 years has decreased slightly compared with YE March 2024 (2.6%), but there has been a significant increase compared with YE March 2015 (1.7%).
- ▶ Since the age of 16, 15.9% of adults – around 7.7 million people – have experienced sexual assault
- ▶ Unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced by people aged 16 years and over in the last year (1.4%).

### Rape

- ▶ 4.5% of people aged 16 years and over (2.2 million) had experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration, including attempts, since the age of 16 years
- ▶ Around 1 in 14 females (7.3%) had experienced rape, including attempts, since the age of 16 years compared with 0.5% of males.
- ▶ Of victims who experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration, including attempts, since the age of 16 years:
  - ▶ around half (51.8%) had been a victim more than once
  - ▶ around 4 in 10 (43.2%) were victimised by their partner or ex-partner (44.5% of females and 20.2% of males)



- ▶ 16.3% were victimised by a stranger (15.0% of females and 37.5% of males)
- ▶ over one-third (38.2%) were victimised in their own home and 8% were victimised on the street, in a car park, park, or another open public space
- ▶ around 1 in 7 (14.7%) reported the assault to the police.

**Criminal Justice Data – England & Wales – in the YE September 2025:<sup>209</sup>**

### Sexual offences

- ▶ There was an 8% increase in police-recorded sexual offences in YE September 2025, rising to 214,816 offences from 198,373 offences the previous year. This is partly because of the introduction of two new sexual offences subcodes within the “other sexual offences” subgroup in January 2024. These subcodes relate to sending or sharing intimate photographs or films following the Online Safety Act 2023.

### Rape

- ▶ There was a 7% increase in recorded rape offences, rising to 74,265 offences from 69,492 offences in YE September 2024. Around 35% of all sexual offences recorded by the police in YE September 2025 were rape offences

208 Office for National Statistics (2025) [Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)

209 Office for National Statistics (2026) [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2025](#)

- ▶ In the YE September 2025, police referred 8,858 'rape flagged' cases to the Crown Prosecution Service – a 15% increase from the previous year. 5,200 suspects were charged – a 25% increase from the previous year, and there were 2,672 convictions – a 9.8% increase from the previous year.<sup>210</sup>

### Scottish government data on recorded crime in Scotland for 2024-25 found that:<sup>211</sup>

- ▶ Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, the number of sexual crimes recorded by the police in Scotland increased by 3% from 14,484 to 14,892
- ▶ Recorded crimes of rape and attempted rape increased by 15%, from 2,522 in 2023-24 to 2,897 in 2024-25
- ▶ Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, recorded crimes of sexual assault increased by 2% from 5,025 to 5,124.
- ▶ It estimates that the volume of sexual crimes that were cyber-crimes has increased from 1,100 in 2013-14 to 4,070 in 2024-25.

## Sexual harassment

- ▶ Girlguiding's *Girls' Attitudes Survey* continues to show that sexual harassment is a routine part of girls' lives, including in schools, public spaces and online; shaping how girls move, dress and participate in public life. For example, in the past year, 68% of girls have changed their everyday behaviour to avoid sexual harassment.<sup>212</sup>

**68%**  
OF GIRLS HAVE  
CHANGED THEIR  
EVERYDAY  
BEHAVIOUR TO  
AVOID SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT



- ▶ In their report *No Grey Area – Part Two*, Welsh Women's Aid document prevalence, impact, and responses to public sexual harassment in Wales. The report found that 92% of respondents had experienced public sexual harassment at some point in their lives, with 81% experiencing sexual harassment at work.<sup>213</sup>
- ▶ Peer research into sexual harassment at London universities by the Young Women's Advisory Board at Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) highlights the prevalence of harassment among young women, especially racially minoritised students, and the gap between lived experience and institutional reporting.<sup>214</sup>

## Domestic abuse

### The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year-ending (YE) March 2025,<sup>215</sup> estimated that:

- ▶ 7.8% of people aged 16 years and over (9.1% of females and 6.5% of males) had experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This equates to an estimated 3.8 million people aged 16 years and over (2.2 million females and 1.5 million males).

210 Crown Prosecution Service (2026) [CPS data summary Quarter 2 2025-2026](#)

211 Scottish Government (2025) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2024-25](#)

212 Girl Guiding (2025) [Girls Attitudes Survey](#)

213 Welsh Women's Aid (2025) [No Grey Area 2025](#)

214 LARS (2025) [Voices of Young Latinas: Peer Research into Sexual Harassment at London Universities](#)

215 Office for National Statistics (2025) [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)

- ▶ Estimates showed that a significantly higher proportion of people aged 16 to 19 years (18.2%) and 20 to 24 years (12.9%) were victims of domestic abuse compared with those in age categories of 25 years and over.

**Criminal Justice Data for England & Wales In the YE September 2025:**<sup>216</sup>

- ▶ The police categorised 826,523 offences as domestic abuse-related in YE September 2025, similar to the previous year (825,645 offences). Of these, 642,072 were violence against the person offences in YE March 2025 (a time period the ONS provides greater detail on the data than YE September):<sup>217</sup>
- ▶ Domestic abuse-related crimes represented 15.4% of all offences recorded by the police in the last year
- ▶ As in previous years, women and girls were disproportionately represented among victims of domestic abuse-related crimes, with 72.1% of all victims in the last year being female
- ▶ The police recorded 49,557 offences of coercive control in England and Wales in YE March 2025. The rise in coercive control offences over recent years may be attributed to improvements made by the police in recognising incidents of coercive control and using the law accordingly
- ▶ The number suspects of domestic abuse-related cases referred from the police to the Crown Prosecution Service increased to 76,393 in YE March 2025
- ▶ The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recorded 54,987 domestic abuse-related prosecutions in the last year, a 7.4% increase compared with the YE March 2024. Of these, 41,070 resulted in convictions and 13,917 resulted in non-convictions. The percentage of prosecutions leading to a conviction decreased from 75.8% in YE March 2024 to 74.7% in YE March 2025.

**Figure 1: Domestic abuse data from incident to conviction**

England and Wales, year ending (YE) March 2025



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics, Police recorded crime data from the Home Office, and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Office for National Statistics (2025) [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2025](#)

216 Office for National Statistics (2026) [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2025](#)

217 Office for National Statistics (2025) [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2025](#)



Photo of a group of teenagers

### Scottish government data on recorded crime in Scotland, 2024-25, found:<sup>218</sup>

- ▶ There were 2,573 crimes recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 in 2024-25, the sixth year this legislation has been in place. This was a 26% increase compared to 2023-24. It should be noted that crimes under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 relate to a course of conduct only and therefore do not include all crimes relating to domestic abuse.
- ▶ Of those crimes, 94% (or 2,410) involved a female victim and 6% (or 163) had a male victim.

### Northern Ireland:

- ▶ In 2024-25, 30,203 domestic abuse incidents were recorded, with 18,453 crimes – a small decrease on the previous year<sup>219</sup>

- ▶ Sexual offences among domestic abuse crimes increased by 12.5%<sup>220</sup>
- ▶ Survey evidence with young people shows gendered patterns of violence and safety concerns: among 16-year-olds, 26% of girls experienced online violence, 23% experienced psychological abuse and 17% experienced sexual violence in the last year, compared with lower rates among their male peers. Many reported barriers to reporting and feeling unsafe in public spaces.<sup>221</sup>

Furthermore, the Youth Endowment Fund's annual *Children, Violence and Vulnerability survey*<sup>222</sup> shed light on the scale of teenage relationship abuse, finding that:

- ▶ Two in five teenagers in relationships had experienced emotional or physical abuse – more than one in ten teenagers and the equivalent of 390,000 children.

218 Scottish Government (2025) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2024-25](#)

219 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2025) [Domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by police continue to fall](#)

220 Ibid

221 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and the Executive Office (2025) [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and attitudes of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland in 2024](#)

222 Southgate, J. (2025) ["We're shown so little of what healthy relationships look like": What the Children, Violence and Vulnerability Survey Reveals About Abuse Facing Young Women and Girls](#)



- ▶ Girls were also more likely than boys to say a partner made them feel they couldn't leave, made them afraid to disagree, criticised their appearance, or pressured them into sex.

We also note the commitment to create a statutory definition of child-to-parent abuse in the VAWG strategy which will assist in understanding the scale of this form of domestic abuse. Stay Safe East continues to call on the government to identify and address carer abuse, which is currently absent from the government's definition and understanding of domestic abuse.<sup>223</sup>

## Stalking and harassment

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year-ending (YE) March 2025,<sup>224</sup> estimated that:

- ▶ 4% of women in the last year had experienced stalking compared to 1.8% men, and 2.9% of people overall (around 1.4 million people). This is a slight increase on last year (2.8%)
- ▶ 8.6% (around 4.2 million people) had experienced some form of harassment.

- ▶ The police recorded 188,462 domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences in YE March 2025, accounting for 23.1% of all domestic abuse-related crimes. The majority of domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences fell within the stalking subgroup category (60.6%), followed by the harassment subgroup (28.3%).

## Online abuse

The Online Safety Act 2023 introduced two new sexual offences: 'Sharing or threatening to share intimate photograph or film', and 'Sending etc photograph or film of genitals'. With police forces beginning to record these offences from 31st January 2024, the impact on the offences '88C Other Miscellaneous Sexual Offences' and '88E Exposure and Voyeurism', which they are recorded under, can be identified in YE March 2025 data:<sup>225</sup>

- ▶ The two new sexual offences accounted for over half of the 11% increase recorded by the police between YE March 2024 and YE March 2025, comprising around 13,000 offences.

Refuge recorded increased demand for support relating to technology-facilitated abuse in 2024-25, including digital surveillance, image-based sexual abuse and online coercive control; reinforcing evidence that online abuse frequently forms part of broader patterns of domestic and sexual violence.<sup>226</sup>

Data from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) highlights the scale of AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM):<sup>227</sup>

223 Stay Safe East (2026) [Stay Safe East's Response to the Government's VAWG Strategy](#)

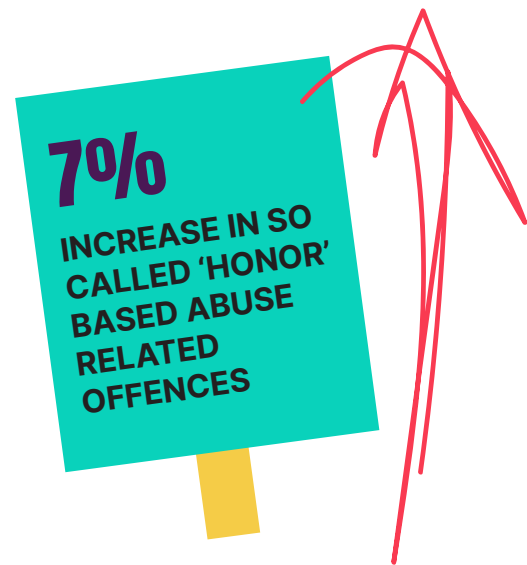
224 Office for National Statistics (2025) [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)

225 Office of National Statistics (2025) [Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)

226 Refuge (2025) [Refuge reveals rise in tech abuse including spycam surveillance ahead of UN'S 16 Days of Activism](#)

227 Internet Watch Foundation (2025) [AI imagery getting more 'extreme' as IWF welcomes new rules allowing thorough testing of AI tools](#)

- ▶ Reports of AI-generated CSAM more than doubled year-on-year, rising from 199 reports in 2024 (1 January–31 October) to 426 in the same period in 2025.
- ▶ The material has also become increasingly extreme: the most serious Category A imagery rose from 2,621 to 3,086 items, now accounting for 56% of all illegal AI-generated material, compared with 41% the previous year.
- ▶ Girls were depicted in 94% of illegal AI-generated images in 2025.
- ▶ Reports of AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery increased by 400%, with material identified on 210 webpages in the first half of 2025, compared with 42 webpages in the same period in 2024.
- ▶ The number of AI-generated videos rose dramatically, from two videos in the first half of 2024 to 1,286 videos in the same period in 2025. All confirmed AI videos were sufficiently realistic to be treated under UK law as real child sexual abuse material. Of these, 1,006 videos were assessed as Category A, depicting the most extreme forms of abuse, including rape and sexual torture.



### So-called 'Honour-Based' abuse, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage

Issues with data collection with regard to so-called 'honour-based' abuse (HBA), FGM and forced marriage are significant and we therefore do not have an accurate picture of the scale of harm taking place. This is in part why sector organisations, led by Karma Nirvana, have been calling for a statutory definition of HBA. The government committed to introducing a statutory definition in the VAWG strategy, and announced an amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill in February 2026 to take these plans forward, along with the power to issue statutory guidance.<sup>228</sup> Additionally, Karma Nirvana is calling for standardised national recording practices, with every police force trained to correctly identify and record HBA to ensure national data reflects reality, not recording discrepancies.<sup>229</sup>

Furthermore, a 2025 Women and Equalities Select Committee report on FGM noted serious concern over the "evidence and data that suggests FGM is taking place in the UK and that UK citizens or residents are being taken abroad to undergo FGM", as well as the important role of survivor-led organisations doing vital work with minimal funding.<sup>230</sup>

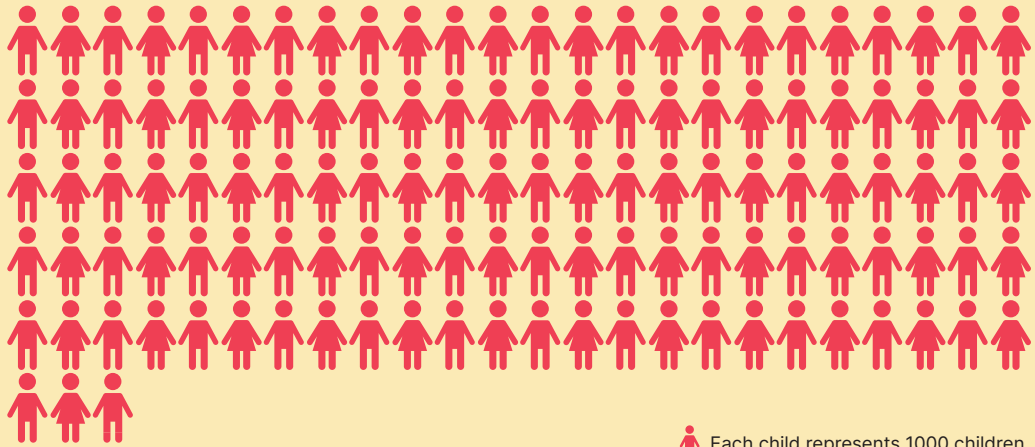


228 Home Office (2026) [Press Release: New laws to protect victims of 'honour'- based abuse](#)

229 Karma Nirvana (2025) [Karma Nirvana Responds to the Home Office's 2025 Honour-Based Abuse Statistics](#)

230 Women and Equalities Committee (2025) [Female Genital Mutilation](#)

## 122,768 CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OFFENCES WERE RECORDED IN 2024



Each child represents 1000 children

From the criminal justice data currently available:<sup>231</sup>

- ▶ In the year-ending March 2025, there were 2,949 HBA-related offences recorded by the police in England and Wales; a 7% increase compared with the year-ending March 2024, when 2,755 offences were recorded.
  - ▶ The rise in these offences was driven by a 35% increase in offences recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service. This rise is likely to be due, in part at least, to improvements in the recording of such offences following the implementation of their new crime recording system in February 2024. The level of these offences has fluctuated between 2,755 and 3,008 over the last 5 years.
  - ▶ Of the 2,949 HBA offences recorded in the latest year, 109 were classified as FGM; two fewer than the previous year (111). These offences had been increasing, from 65 in the YE March 2021, the earliest year for which comparable data is available. Over half (58%, 63 offences) of the FGM offences recorded by the police came from the mandatory reporting duty for FGM.
  - ▶ The police recorded 125 forced marriage offences in the YE March 2025, a fall of 76 compared with the previous year (-38%).
- ▶ In the year ending March 2025, 22% of HBA-related offences were for controlling and coercive behaviour, 13% for assault with injury, and 9% for assault without injury.

Meanwhile, Karma Nirvana's national helpline supported 3,079 individual cases in 2024-25, representing the highest number in their history.<sup>232</sup>

### Child sexual abuse and exploitation

Robust national data on child sexual abuse and exploitation remains limited. The Office for National Statistics does not publish comprehensive prevalence estimates for child sexual abuse or exploitation, and available figures rely largely on data recorded by children's social care services and the police.

Child sexual abuse is significantly under-reported and under-identified: adults may not recognise signs of abuse, children may not disclose, and disclosures are not always passed on to statutory agencies. While reporting childhood sexual abuse is set to become mandatory, there are some concerns about the unintended consequences of this, such as the potential impact on professionals' ability to prioritise safeguarding and building a relationship of trust and confidence –

231 Home Office (2026) [Statistics on so called 'honour-based' abuse offences, England and Wales, year ending March 2025](#)

232 Karma Nirvana (2025) [Karma Nirvana Responds to the Home Office's 2025 Honour-Based Abuse Statistics](#)

although some specific exemptions for specialist services have been welcomed.

This year, the National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (the Casey Audit),<sup>233</sup> referenced further on [page 64](#), highlighted the absence of consistent definitions, research and data on group-based exploitation; undermining both prevention and accountability. But an estimated 500,000 children each year are likely to experience child sexual abuse of some form, yet the vast majority are never identified and do not report to the police, either at the time or later.

From the data available:

NCVPP's *National Analysis of Police Recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) Crimes Report 2024* (published 2025) found that:<sup>234</sup>

- ▶ 122,768 CSAE offences were recorded in 2024, a 6% increase from 2023.
- ▶ Where a relationship was recorded, 83% of victims knew the abuser.
- ▶ CSAE remains a heavily gendered crime. Where the sex was recorded, 78% of CSAE victims were female, and 82% of perpetrators were male.
- ▶ The proportion of reported offences committed by children has decreased from 71% in 2023 to 64% in 2024, in part due to changes in how children involved in self-generated indecent imagery are recorded on police systems.
- ▶ CSAE with an online footprint increased by 26% in 2024, and accounts for at least 42% of all offences. Snapchat, WhatsApp and Instagram were the top three platforms identified through crime summaries.

- ▶ Group-based contact offending accounts for 3.6% of all CSAE crimes recorded in 2024. Familial abuse is the most common context for group-based contact abuse, with child-on-child being the second most common form.

Analysis of data from the Department for Education's 2025 report *Children in need – A focus on sexual abuse and exploitation found that in the year ending March 2025*:<sup>235</sup>

- ▶ 29,560 children were assessed as having been affected by child sexual abuse (CSA) – a figure that has remained relatively stable since 2016.
- ▶ 12,120 children were assessed as having been affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE), the lowest level recorded since 2016.
- ▶ Girls were over-represented, accounting for 57% of CSA and 67% of CSE assessments.
- ▶ Two-thirds of children assessed as affected by CSE were persistently absent from school, and almost one in five had experienced one or more school suspensions.

## Domestic homicide, femicides and suicide

Analysis of the Homicide Index combining three years of data (year-ending March 2022 to year-ending March 2024)<sup>236</sup> shows that:

- ▶ 69.6% of domestic homicide victims were women, compared with non-domestic homicides where 88.6% of victims were men.

233 Home Office (2026) [National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)

234 National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection (2025) [2024 National Analysis of Police-Recorded CSAE crimes report](#). College of Policing and National Police Chiefs Council

235 Department of Education (2025) [Children in need: A focus on sexual abuse and exploitation](#)

236 The Office of National Statistics (2025) [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)

- ▶ Of the 245 women killed in domestic homicides, the suspect was male in 235 cases. In contrast, where men were victims of domestic homicide, suspects were most often male family members rather than partners.
- ▶ Nearly three-quarters (72.7%) of women killed in domestic homicides were killed by a current or former male partner, highlighting the centrality of intimate partner violence in women's deaths.

The Femicide Census continues to provide the most comprehensive analysis of women killed by men in the UK. Its landmark *2000 Women*<sup>237</sup> report shows:

- ▶ Most women killed by men were aged 20-60 (73%), with 22% aged over 60 and 5% teenagers.
- ▶ 61% of women were killed by a current or former partner, 9% by their son, and 6% by another family member.
- ▶ 71% were killed in their own homes, most often the home shared with the perpetrator.
- ▶ 49% were killed using a knife or sharp instrument, 27% by strangulation or asphyxiation.
- ▶ 59% showed evidence of overkill,<sup>238</sup> while 23% involved multiple forms of violence.
- ▶ 12% of men who killed women went on to kill themselves.



The 2025 Femicide Census' review of femicides in 2022<sup>239</sup> identified:

- ▶ 121 women were killed by men or a man was charged with murder or manslaughter.
- ▶ Notably, more women were killed by their son (12%) than by a stranger (9%).
- ▶ Nearly half of women killed by a male partner had recently tried to leave or had ended the relationship (40%), reinforcing evidence that separation is a period of acute risk.

The Femicide Census also found that children are frequently direct and indirect victims:

- ▶ 37 women were killed alongside 53 children, most commonly by the children's father.
- ▶ At least 162 children witnessed the killing of their mother, usually in the home.

Furthermore, Women's Aid's *Nineteen More Child Homicides* report<sup>240</sup> documented that:

- ▶ 67 children have been killed by a parent who was also a perpetrator of domestic abuse, in the context of child contact over the last 30 years.

237 Femicide Census (2025) [2000 Women](#)

238 The Femicide Census defines 'overkill' as "the use of excessive, gratuitous violence beyond that necessary to cause the victim's death. Overkilling is considered when more than one method of killing was recorded, as well as excessive or gratuitous levels of violence within one method."

239 Femicide Census (2025) [2022 Femicide Census](#)

240 Women's Aid England (2025) [Nineteen More Child Homicides](#)

Photo of a woman looking out of a window

- ▶ Between 2015 and 2024 alone, 18 families were affected; a 50% increase on the previous decade, resulting in 28 deaths, including 19 children and three mothers.

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, a joint initiative by the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing, published its year four report on Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides 2020-2024.<sup>241</sup> This report seeks to collect, review, and share learning from all police-recorded domestic homicides, unexpected deaths and suspected suicides of individuals with a history of domestic abuse victimisation. Across the full four-year dataset, the project recorded:

- ▶ 1,012 deaths in 979 incidents
- ▶ Suspected victim suicide following domestic abuse was the most recorded typology across the full four-year dataset (35%)
- ▶ 54% of suspects were known to the police for domestic abuse perpetration prior to the victim's death

- ▶ Black victims were over represented, making up 8% of victims compared to only 4% of the population (2021 census).

However, recent research into victim suicides has suggested official statistics could track as few as 6.5% of the true number.<sup>242</sup> The research stems from a suicide prevention programme in Kent, which found that around a third of all suspected suicides in the region between 2018 and 2024 were affected by domestic abuse. Those conducting the research called this reality a 'national scandal' and are calling for a national taskforce to tackle the issue.

In 2025, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner published a report, *Learning from Loss*, which called for action to ensure the lessons from domestic homicide reviews lead to change.<sup>243</sup> In addition, Southall Black Sisters and Killed Women published a report in 2025, *Invisible Women Made Visible*, on learning from the femicides of Black, minoritised and migrant women.<sup>244</sup>

241 Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme(2025) [Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides 2020-2024 Year 4 Report](#). Home Office, College of Policing and National Police Chiefs Council

242 Al-Othman, H. and McKelvie, G. (2026) [Revealed: The true toll of female suicides with domestic abuse at their core](#). The Guardian

243 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) [Learning from Loss](#)

244 Sanghi, S (2025) [Invisible Women: Learning from the Femicides of Black, Minoritised and Migrant Women](#). Southall Black Sisters and Killed Women

# POLICY AREAS



## 1 IN 10

GIRLS HAVE MISSED SCHOOL TO AVOID SEXUAL HARASSMENT

## Prevention

Prevention remains the cornerstone of any meaningful work to tackle VAWG. Previous EVAW Snapshot reports have repeatedly warned that government responses and strategies have leant too heavily on criminal justice responses while failing to invest in the long-term, systemic work needed to prevent harmful attitudes and stop violence before it starts. In 2025, the Public Accounts Committee echoed these concerns, particularly the Department for Education's lack of action on tackling harmful attitudes and exposure to harm amongst young people, as well as criticising the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)'s reactive approach to tackling online VAWG.<sup>245</sup> A lack of focus and funding for the prevention of VAWG was also raised in the published report for Part Two of Lady Eilish Angiolini's independent inquiry,<sup>246,247</sup> a National Audit Office report on government VAWG funding,<sup>248</sup> and a Home Affairs Committee Report.<sup>249</sup> It was therefore positive to see prevention as one of the three key pillars of the government's VAWG strategy published in December 2025, and its starring role in the government's launch of the strategy. There does, however, remain concern about the level of government investment to back up its ambitions.

## Schools and educational settings

Schools remain both a vital site of opportunity to shift societal attitudes which condone VAWG, and a site of harm. As found in Girlguiding's 2025 *Girls' Attitudes Survey*, 1 in 10 girls have missed school to avoid sexual harassment,<sup>250</sup> and University of Glasgow survey of more than 13,000 pupils aged 11 to 18 found that a third of boys thought girls were 'asking for trouble' if they wear 'revealing' clothes.<sup>251</sup>

It was therefore positive to see a solid focus on the education of young people in the government's VAWG strategy, with a series of measures aiming to ensure "every state funded secondary school in England will have a credible offer for educating students about healthy and respectful relationships, with every child able to access support' by the end of this parliament in 2029".<sup>252</sup> This includes implementing the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) guidance, which was published in July 2025;<sup>253</sup> the launch of a public campaign in 2026 to support parents and caregivers to reinforce positive behaviour and respectful relationships along with an online 'parent hub' with guidance on media literacy and online

245 EVAW (2025) [Government continually failing to fund and prioritise preventing VAWG](#)

246 [The Angiolini Inquiry](#) was established to examine how an off-duty serving police officer was able to abduct, rape and murder a member of the public, and whether there is an ongoing risk of recurrence across policing. Part Two focuses on police culture, women's safety in public spaces, and the systemic failures highlighted by Sarah Everard's murder

247 The Angiolini Inquiry (2025) [The Angiolini Inquiry Part 2 First Report: Prevention of sexually motivated crimes against women in public](#)

248 National Audit Office (2025) [Tackling violence against women and girls](#)

249 Home Affairs Committee (2025) [Tackling violence against women and girls: funding](#)

250 Girl Guiding (2025) [Girls Attitudes Survey](#)

251 Puttick, H (2025) [Girls in revealing clothes 'asking for trouble', say third of boys](#) The Times

252 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

253 Department of Education (2025) [Statutory guidance Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#)



Photo of two young people in a classroom

safety, launched by DSIT in February 2026 under the ‘You Won’t Know until You Ask’ campaign;<sup>254</sup> and a new package of measures for young people displaying harmful behaviours to change their behaviours, including launching a new helpline.<sup>255</sup> There is also an action which sounds very close to the description of a whole-school-approach to VAWG,<sup>256</sup> although no detail as yet regarding how the government would support schools to achieve this.

While these prevention commitments come with funding, the amounts cited appear woefully inadequate in light of the government’s ambitions. This shortfall is most notable when looking at the proposed funding to support teachers and schools with the implementation of RSHE – a mere £3 million for a teacher training fund over the next two years; and £5 million to pilot healthy relationships training delivered by external providers. As noted by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in her response to the VAWG strategy, “overburdened schools on the frontline of the insurgence of misogyny are

not being equipped with the infrastructure they need to safeguard child victims of domestic abuse”.<sup>257</sup> The inadequacies of this support for teachers is yet more apparent when you look at the pace of technological advancements, as explored in our AI trend, with the findings from Sex Education Forum’s *Young People’s RSE poll* warning that without support for teachers, digital risks could undermine relationships and sex education.<sup>258</sup>

It is also imperative to note that many specialist VAWG sector organisations are currently doing much of this vital work with very limited funding. 2025 saw publication of a number of reports documenting this third sector work, for example, Lucy Faithful’s 2025 report, *Everyone’s Safer: Supporting effective leadership responses to harmful sexual behaviour in schools*.<sup>259</sup> This report provides key insight from a three-year research project in collaboration with the University of Surrey, working with 30 schools and thousands of staff, students, and parents to test and refine effective strategies for tackling harmful sexual behaviour and

254 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026): <https://kidsonlinesafety.campaign.gov.uk>

255 Home Office (2025). **Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy**

256 From the government’s VAWG action plan (Home Office (2025). **Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy**): “Support schools to integrate learning about positive relationships and VAWG across every part of a child’s school life. This means that learning about these issues is not confined to RSHE but that schools foster a culture where harmful attitudes and behaviours are consistently challenged, VAWG is understood within the context of other subjects, such as history and geography, gender equality is encouraged, and everyone, from leadership to pupils, plays a role in creating a safe, inclusive environment”

257 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) **Domestic Abuse Commissioner responds to government VAWG Strategy**

258 Sex Education Forum (2025) **Young People’s RSE Poll 2025**

259 Nott, L., Setty, E., Meader, S., Efthymiadou, E. and Loader, B. (2025) **Everyone’s Safer: Supporting effective leadership responses to harmful sexual behaviour in schools**. Lucy Faithful Foundation



creating safer school environments. UK Feminista's new report, *System Change: Why a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment is needed – and how to make it work*, presents the key learning from their scheme supporting schools and colleges to implement a comprehensive whole school approach. The report sets out recommendations for government and education bodies under three core themes: support and funding, progress tracking and monitoring, and accountability.<sup>260</sup> The Youth Endowment Fund's 2025 report, *Education Policy, Children and Violence – Eight recommendations for education policymakers to prevent children's involvement in violence in England and Wales*,<sup>261</sup> includes a recommendation to government on VAWG leads within schools – appointing an existing staff member who can design and deliver a whole-setting VAWG strategy and deliver violence prevention lessons.

It is also important to note that although we welcomed the long-awaited publication of the new statutory RSHE guidance for schools in July 2025, there remains room for improvement.<sup>262</sup> It was positive to see the new focus on helping boys identify positive role models and challenging myths about women and relationships that are spread online, as well as a focus on new and emerging sexual ethics and behaviour in the online age. This includes education on the impact of AI, deepfakes and how pornography links to misogyny. We were, however, disappointed that the guidance did

not place abuse within an intersectional framework by acknowledging the overlapping forms of harm often faced by young people, given that girls from Black and minoritised communities, disabled and LGBTQ+ children face disproportionate levels of sexual harassment and violence. This is supported by the recent findings of Girlguiding's 2025 survey, which found that many of the harms reported by girls were more common for girls who are disabled, neurodivergent or who identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>263</sup> Black girls' experiences are all too often invisible within the policy landscape, hence why peer-led research such as Milk Honey Bees' 2025 report, *See Us, Hear Us: The Perceptions and Wellbeing of Black Girls in London Secondary Schools*,<sup>264</sup> remain invaluable.

We also noted insufficient attention within the guidance on equipping young people with the digital skills needed through robust media literacy. However, we welcomed the focus on media and digital literacy in the government's final report of its review of the curriculum and assessment in England published in November 2025<sup>265</sup> (within which RSHE was deemed outside the scope of the review).<sup>266</sup> As the report positions media literacy and discussions on equality duties and discrimination within 'Citizenship', which it recommends is made statutory from Key Stage 1, we call on the government and schools to ensure that Citizenship curriculum content is complementary to the VAWG prevention work held within RSHE, taking a rights-based approach, and as part of a wider whole-school approach to tackling VAWG.<sup>267</sup>

260 UK Feminista (2026) [System Change: Why a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment is needed – and how to make it work'](#)

261 Youth Endowment Fund (2025) [Education Policy, Children and Violence: Eight recommendations for education policymakers to prevent children's involvement in violence in England and Wales](#)

262 EAW (2025) [New RSHE guidance to address porn, misogyny and VAWG](#)

263 Girl Guiding (2025) [Girls Attitudes Survey](#)

264 Morris-Jarra, N. and Iyere, E. (2025) [See Us Hear Us](#). Milk Honey Bees

265 Department of Education (2025) [Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report](#)

266 It was a concern that RSHE was deemed outside the scope of the review (due to the concurrent review of RSHE content) as this did lead to missed opportunities to draw greater links from RSHE across the whole curriculum on key topics needed for the prevention of VAWG.

267 EAW (2023) [It's #AboutTime: A Whole School Approach to Ending Violence Against Women & Girls](#)



Photo of a group of young people going into school

In light of government data showing that 16-19-year-olds experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group,<sup>268</sup> EVAW continued to support the Make It Mandatory campaign calling for an extension of mandatory RSHE lessons to all 16-18 year olds. In June 2025, Faustine Petron, the survivor leading this campaign, delivered her 100,000-strong petition to 10 Downing Street.<sup>269</sup> We welcome the VAWG strategy's commitment to find the 'most effective route' to extend RSHE and have called on the government to avoid any further delay by accepting an amendment to the current Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill laid in the House of Lords. The government has supported a new Further Education RSHE

toolkit by the Association of Colleges<sup>270</sup> and Further Education Student Support Champion, Polly Harrow, as an interim measure. However, this toolkit would be greatly strengthened by accompanying legislation and guidance to ensure quality and consistency across age groups.

Finally, there is a need for prevention initiatives for young people to extend beyond schools and colleges to other spaces children and young people engage with. It was therefore positive to see the government announce an expansion of youth services in August 2025, with an £88 million investment to support youth clubs and schools to offer more after-school activities.<sup>271</sup>

268 Weir, R. and Barrow-Grint, K. (2025). [VISION Policy Brief: Addressing Abuse in Teenage Relationships](#). City, University of London. Report

269 EVAW (2025) [Make RSE mandatory to 18: 100k-strong petition delivered to Downing Street](#)

270 Association of Colleges (2025) [Relationship Sex Education Toolkit for the Post-16 sector](#)

271 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2025) [Prime Minister unveils new opportunities for young people to re-connect with their communities](#)



This investment was a step towards the government's National Youth Strategy, published in December 2025,<sup>272</sup> and referenced by the Education Minister in the VAWG strategy noting the important connections of this work: “[t]he National Youth Strategy will increase young people’s access to trusted adults and role models to challenge and change attitudes, supporting our drive to stamp out misogyny and abuse across society”.<sup>273</sup> The VAWG strategy also made a series of commitments to harness the power of sport to engage boys and young men, and challenge harmful attitudes.<sup>274</sup>

## Public awareness-raising campaigns

Following delays in the publication of the government's VAWG strategy, there was a question mark over the continuation of the previous government's flagship *Enough* campaign<sup>275</sup> for much of 2025. However, its continuation was confirmed in the latter part of year, and commitment to a long term programme of awareness-raising and behaviour change campaigns was made in the government's VAWG strategy – a long-standing campaign ask for EVAW.<sup>276</sup>

Previous iterations of the *Enough* campaign were widely well-received among experts and the public alike, with opportunities for expert stakeholder engagement to inform its development. The new *Enough* campaign shifts away from modelling safe bystander intervention, focusing on targeting men and boys' harmful behaviours, supported by research to deepen understanding of how societal attitudes towards women and girls

relate to and impact on the prevalence of VAWG. The government's VAWG Strategy Action Plan includes welcome plans to ensure this work is sustained, multi-year, and delivers consistent public messaging on these harms and how to prevent them, as well as using sites of cultural importance, such as football and the upcoming Euros 2028, to reach and engage men and boys.

While the previous government claimed promising results in evaluations of the campaign and its objectives, these evaluations remain unpublished and unavailable for public scrutiny. It is unclear whether evaluations will be made public for the current iteration of the campaign, to enable interrogation of its approach, impact and the prioritisation of this work as a way to tackle VAWG.

Beyond this national campaign, other public information campaigns on VAWG are being delivered in various regions across the country. One notable local campaign is Transport for London's (TfL) 2025 *Act like a friend* campaign,<sup>277</sup> which tells real people's stories of harassment and abuse on London's transport network and models how bystanders stepped in to help. TfL sought the input of expert VAWG and equalities groups in developing this work, and the campaign was largely well received. However, since its launch, a social media advert which depicted a black teenage boy as the aggressor, clipped from the longer campaign film, has been criticised and since withdrawn for reinforcing racial stereotypes – a point raised during the VAWG sector stakeholder consultation process for development of the campaign.<sup>278</sup>

272 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2025) [National Youth Strategy](#)

273 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

274 Ibid

275 Home Office Enough campaign: <https://enough.campaign.gov.uk>

276 EVAW (2022) [EVAW welcomes national campaign to shift attitudes and behaviours](#)

277 Transport for London (2025) [Act Like a Friend campaign](#)

278 BBC News (2026) [TfL advert banned for harmful racial stereotype](#)



Photo of a young girl on her tablet

## Online

There is a mass of evidence from 2025 on the harms disproportionately experienced by women and girls online. For example, this year according to NSPCC research only 9% of girls reported feeling safe in online spaces,<sup>279,280</sup> whilst 61% of those aged 18 to 24 recently polled by EVAW and YouGov believe the internet has become more dangerous for women and girls in the past 12 months.<sup>281</sup> Separately research by Dr Dhir shows racially minoritised women's experiences of technology-facilitated sexual violence continues to be exacerbated by structural and societal inequalities.<sup>282</sup> We give specific recognition to AI (including chatbots, deepfakes and nudification apps) in our Trends section (p.12), with specific consideration of prevalence in our data section (p.34). We want to also spotlight the

emerging threat of wearable technology, such as smart glasses, to facilitate abuse,<sup>283</sup> a concern which has seen increasing media coverage of in recent months<sup>284,285</sup> and one that EVAW has raised with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and Ofcom. As these devices grow in popularity, women are already reporting



279 NSPCC (2025) [Targeting Girls Online](#)

280 Molly Rose Foundation (2025) [Pervasive-by-design: Suicide, self-harm and intense depression content on TikTok and Instagram, and how their algorithms recommend it to teens](#)

281 EVAW and YouGov (2026) [YouGov / End Violence Against Women Survey Results](#)

282 Dhir, A. (2026), Racially Minoritised Women's experiences of technology-facilitated sexual violence and reporting to the police. ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, University of York & University of Leeds

283 Refuge (2026) [Refuge exposes alarming new patterns of abuse involving wearable technology](#)

284 Poncia, G (2026) 'I was secretly filmed with smart glasses and then trolled online' BBC

285 Silvers, I (2025) [The secret spyware epidemic: how abusers are using tech to make women's lives hell](#) Cosmopolitan

being secretly recorded without their consent. This footage is being uploaded online and, in some cases, accompanied by personal details such as names, locations or phone numbers. The consequences include harassment, abuse, doxxing and image-based sexual abuse. This issue requires action from the government and regulators to ensure tech platforms facilitating and profiting from this abuse are held accountable.

## Regulation

The regulatory landscape in 2025 was dominated by the issuing of the Illegal Content Codes of Practice<sup>286</sup> (February) and the Protection of Children Code of Practice<sup>287</sup> (July) by Ofcom. After considerable consultation, these codes place obligations on tech platforms to risk assess and mitigate risks around illegal harms, to proactively remove illegal content, and to ensure specific additional protections for child users, along with the introduction of ‘highly effective’ age assurance for certain platforms, including pornography sites.

The implementation of age assurance provoked significant backlash, with people claiming censorship of the internet, the risk of personal data being harvested or hacked, and stating that children will in any case use VPNs to access pornographic content. However, research subsequently published by Internet Matters did not find evidence of any significant rise in children’s VPN use following the introduction of age-assurance measures.<sup>288</sup>

Despite a petition securing over 500,000 signatures for the Online Safety Act to be

repealed, and a subsequent parliamentary debate led by Labour MP Lewis Atkinson, polling indicated widespread support for the OSA remained across the population.<sup>289</sup> Experts in online harms have stressed repeatedly that while the Online Safety Act may not be perfect, the measures will undoubtedly reduce the number of people encountering harmful material. In fact, specialist organisations continue to express concern at the pace of regulation, and the rigour with which Ofcom is investigating and enforcing against breaches of the Codes. EVAW and its members are largely of the view that without strong enforcement, platforms are likely to default to minimal compliance – to the detriment of women and girls’ rights.

Since her appointment, the Secretary of State, Liz Kendall, has led with some actions signalling that online VAWG is a priority; including publicly expressing deep disappointments at delays to Ofcom’s delivery schedule for implementing additional duties, citing the specific impact to women.<sup>290</sup> Furthermore, the government and regulator have faced some challenge from parliamentary select committees calling for greater action. This includes the Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee’s inquiry into social media and harmful algorithms,<sup>291</sup> and a report from the Women and Equalities Select Committee on image-based sexual abuse.<sup>292</sup> Both committees put forward a series of recommendations for the government and tech platforms, calling for stronger tech accountability, but many remain unenacted or rejected.

286 Ofcom (2025) [Illegal content: Codes of Practice for user-to-user services](#)

287 Ofcom (2025) [Protection of Children Code of Practice for user-to-user services](#)

288 Internet Matters (2025) [New data shows no rise in children’s VPN use after the introduction of online age checks](#)

289 YouGov (2025) [How have Britons reacted to age verification?](#)

290 Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP and Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (2025) [Implementation and enforcement of the Online Safety Act: follow up letter from DSIT Secretary of State to Ofcom](#)

291 Science, Innovation and Technology Committee (2025) [Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms](#)

292 Women and Equalities Committee (2025) [Tackling non-consensual intimate image abuse](#)



Photo of a young girl in a garden

The extent of harm and the slow pace of change has led to growing calls for the UK to follow in the footsteps of Australia and implement a social media ban for children until the age of 16.<sup>293</sup> This included the Conservative party pledging to action such a ban should they return to power,<sup>294</sup> the House of Lords passing an amendment to this effect in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill (likely to be overturned in the Commons),<sup>295</sup> and the government announcing plans for a consultation on the issue.<sup>296</sup> Many expert organisations have voiced concern about a social media ban for children. Glitch advised that “for many children, particularly LGBTQ+ young people and those from other

marginalised communities, social media can be a lifeline – one that is not easily replicable offline”.<sup>297</sup> Several children’s charities, including the NSPCC and the Molly Rose Foundation, joined forces in a public statement advising against such a ban; outlining why, although well-intentioned, such a move would be “a blunt response that fails to address the successive shortcomings of tech companies and governments to act decisively and sooner...[and] risks an array of unintended consequences”.<sup>298</sup>

In November, Ofcom published the much-awaited *Guidance on a Safer Life Online for Women and Girls*.<sup>299</sup> The guidance contained

293 Woods, L. (2025). [Explainer: Australia’s Social Media Ban](#). Online Safety Network

294 Nathoo, L. and Seddon, P. (2026) [Tories would ban under-16s from social media](#)

295 Seddon, P. (2026) [Lords back UK social media ban for under-16s](#)

296 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Department for Education (2026) [Government launches consultation on children’s social media use and bans phones in schools to protect young people’s wellbeing and ensure safer online experiences](#)

297 Glitch (2026) [Protecting the Children? Our Position on Social Media Bans](#)

298 Molly Rose Foundation, NSPCC et al (2026). [Joint statement from children’s and online safety organisations, experts and bereaved families on a social media ban for under-16s](#)

299 Ofcom (2025) [A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls: Practical Guidance for Tech Companies](#)



a number of positive recommendations relating to misogynistic abuse and sexual violence, pile-ons and coordinated harassment, stalking and coercive control, and image-based sexual abuse. Ofcom has committed to reporting on the uptake of the guidance in 2027 and EAW will seek to feed into the metrics they will use to measure its success. This guidance, whilst welcome, is not the Code of Practice we campaigned for, and we remain concerned that its provisions will not have sufficient uptake given it is voluntary and cannot be enforced by the regulator.

The government's move to tackle cyberflashing by strengthening regulation to make it a priority offence was welcome. Cyberflashing has been consistently identified as a gendered form of sexual harassment, with women and girls overwhelmingly targeted. This means platforms have to take specific consideration of it within risk assessments and mitigation. The impact of these measures remains to be seen.

Across 2024 and 2025, EAW and our partners successfully campaigned to make the creation of non-consensual sexually explicit deepfakes illegal; pushing to ensure that such an offence was based on whether there was consent rather than perpetrator's intent. This resulted in a subsequent government U-turn this year on the nature of the offence, which is now consent-based.<sup>300</sup> The Data Use and Access Act was passed into law in June 2025, however this specific provision was not enacted until February 2026, in response to widespread condemnation of X's Grok tool nudifying images of women and children. (Please see our Trends section for further analysis on deepfakes – [page 15](#), including EAW's

campaign asks beyond the criminal justice system).

The government's VAWG strategy accurately frames online abuse as both a driver and extension of offline violence, with commitments to tackle online misogyny, image-based abuse and technology-facilitated coercive control. However, as in previous years, there is a gap between strategic ambition and delivery, particularly in relation to ensuring meaningful tech accountability and resourcing the specialist services that support survivors in the aftermath of online VAWG. For example, Refuge has called for funding for specialist services to ensure disabled women can access dedicated support around tech-facilitated abuse.<sup>301</sup> Among government commitments in this area is the intention to ban nudification apps – the delivery of which would be a significant regulatory and operational challenge – as well as to deploy undercover police officers to tackle violence against women and girls online.<sup>302</sup>

It was also positive to see an overdue flurry of government activity in February 2026 to tackle the harms of AI chatbots, with proposals to ensure AI chatbot providers abide by illegal content duties in the Online Safety Act,<sup>303</sup> and in relation to image-based abuse – including legislation requiring tech companies to take down intimate images shared without a victim's consent within 48 hours of notification.<sup>304</sup> (See our Trends section for more detail – [page 15](#)). We stress the importance of maintaining momentum and ensuring changes are informed by the expertise of the VAWG sector, implemented swiftly, and enforced by the regulator.

300 EAW (2025) [Government U-turn on deepfakes offence](#)

301 Refuge (2025) [When technology hurts: supporting disabled women experiencing abuse](#)

302 Home Office and Ministry of Justice (2025) [New VAWG strategy will leave offenders with nowhere to hide](#)

303 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026) [PM: "No platform gets a free pass": Government takes action to keep children safe online](#)

304 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2026) [Press release: Tech firms will have to take down abusive images within 48 hours under new law to protect women and girls](#)

## Pornography

Pornography featured prominently in both policy and research debates during 2025, reflecting continued concern about its accessibility to children and influence on sexual norms, with the focus overwhelmingly on age assurance and children's access, rather than the content itself. For example, Ofcom's probe into age-check compliance on porn sites could signal a more assertive regulatory stance,<sup>305</sup> though questions remain about enforcement. However, these investigations have focused on age assurance, rather than the vast quantities of illegal content hosted on pornography sites.

We welcomed publication of the *Independent Review of Pornography*<sup>306</sup> in February 2025, with 60 plus recommendations; amongst them a ban on content depicting incest and strangulation, echoing long-standing calls from the VAWG sector.<sup>307</sup> It was therefore positive to see the government action a number of these recommendations, announcing in June 2025 its plans to criminalise depictions of strangulation in pornography in the Crime and Policing Bill,<sup>308</sup> and later in February 2025, measures banning the depiction of incest in pornography.<sup>309</sup> The necessity of such action has been further evidenced by 2025 research from the Children's Commissioner documenting the normalisation of children's exposure to pornography.<sup>310</sup> 70% of respondents reported having seen pornography online, up from 64% in 2023.

Evidence from the Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) highlighted how violent sexual practices are becoming normalised among young people. The research found that over half of young people surveyed (55%) have either been strangled or strangled someone during sex<sup>311</sup> – a real concern considering the established links between sexualised strangulation and serious harm to women.<sup>312</sup>

Pornography's role in perpetuating misogyny and sexual entitlement is identified in the VAWG strategy (though not in the men's health strategy), reinforced by recent research among university students in the Netherlands showing that viewing violent pornography increases their risk of perpetrating sexual violence – especially if they perceive pornography as realistic and their peers have higher levels of rape myth acceptance.<sup>313</sup>

Furthermore, recent media coverage has brought to light a previously under-recognised harm in the moderation of harmful pornographic content by global majority women for billionaire tech platforms, who push to maximise profits through low labour costs and exploitative practices.<sup>314</sup> EVAW has previously called for ethical and protective practices for moderators,<sup>315</sup> and this need is brought into stark reality when taking in the stories of the women who are describing the trauma of moderating violent and harmful content.

305 Ofcom (2025) [Ofcom fines porn company £1 million for not having robust age checks](#)

306 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2025) [Creating a safer world: the challenge of regulating online pornography](#)

307 EVAW et al (2025) [Does it Pass the Test? 5 Key Tests for the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#)

308 Ministry of Justice (2025) [Press release: Strangulation in pornography to be made illegal](#)

309 Home Office and Ministry of Justice (2026) [Letter from Lord Hanson and Baroness Levitt to Lord Davies detailing government amendments for Lords Report stage: 23 February 2026](#)

310 Children's Commissioner (2025) ["Sex is kind of broken now": Children and Pornography](#)

311 Institute for Addressing Strangulation (2024) [Report on Strangulation During Sex in the UK](#)

312 Ibid

313 Roos, M. and Ferrando, E. (2025) [Moderating Effects on the Link between Violent Pornography and Sexual Aggression](#). Archives of Sexual Behaviour 54, 2671–2684 (2025)

314 Behal, A. (2026) ["In the end, you feel blank": India's female workers watching hours of abusive content to train AI](#) The Guardian

315 EVAW et al (2022) [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) Code of Practice](#)

## Human rights

### European Convention on Human Rights

Some major political parties' immigration plans have further solidified around the rollback of human rights protections, with withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) now established as both Conservative and Reform UK policy – and the UK government itself pushing for the narrowing of rights within Europe. In Parliament, this has been accompanied by increasing commentary pitting women's rights against migrant rights.

These developments are alarming given how crucial such human rights frameworks are to tackling VAWG, underlined by the principle of universal human rights for all. Whilst the Labour government has spoken of the benefits of the ECHR, the government has conceded ground that rights should be curtailed for particular groups, including people who migrate to the UK and people criminalised. The UK government has also sought to play a more active role in pushing for ECHR reforms across Europe, with the Prime Minister joining forces with the Danish Prime Minister to make the case for change.<sup>316</sup>

The government has already said it will legislate to clarify how Article 8, the right to a private life, is interpreted in the domestic courts with regard to immigration rules – i.e. to limit these rights in national law. There have also been murmurings around the government's hopes to alter the interpretation of Article 3, which prohibits torture and degrading treatment.

Both Article 3 and 8 are crucial for upholding women's rights to live free from violence and abuse. We are alarmed by how the threat of eroding rights will impact survivors, along

with the consequences of a continual chipping away at the principle of universal human rights for all.

### Supreme Court Ruling – Legal Definition of a 'Woman'

In April 2025, the Supreme Court ruled that the definition of 'sex' and 'women' in the Equality Act 2010 is based on biological sex; therefore excluding trans women with Gender Recognition Certificates (GRCs).<sup>317</sup> The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published interim advice days later on the 'practical implications' of the ruling, however this was later withdrawn following legal challenges. Whilst organisations are considering and consulting on the implications of the ruling, the EHRC has also now consulted on a statutory Code of Practice. This will be published by the EHRC for the purpose of explaining how this will work in practice, and the steps that service providers should take to make sure that people with protected characteristics are not discriminated against.

However, the ruling is already having a worrying knock-on effect in the meantime, with a number of organisations announcing they have felt left with no choice but to change their membership policies to now exclude trans girls and women. Galop, the UK's LGBT+ anti-abuse charity, noted in response to the the Supreme Court ruling:

"[The LGBT+ community] is facing an increasingly hostile environment and further challenges to accessing the support we need and deserve. The EHRC's subsequent proposed guidance on the Supreme Court Ruling risks leaving LGBT+ victims and survivors with less access to support, and more vulnerable to abuse."<sup>318</sup>

316 The Guardian (2025) [We must protect our borders to defend our democracies. Here's how Keir Starmer and Mette Frederiksen](#)

317 The Supreme Court (2025) JUDGMENT: For Women Scotland Ltd (Appellant) v The Scottish Ministers (Respondent)

318 Galop (2025) [Galop's response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\) Code of Practice](#)



Photo of a woman and two children looking out of a window

## Immigration and asylum

The government's decisions on immigration and asylum continue to harm migrant women and curb migrant survivors' already limited access to support and safety. The government's hardline approach has escalated to the point that the Home

Secretary's speeches and policies have been celebrated by Tommy Robinson,<sup>319</sup> as well as Reform UK.<sup>320</sup> Over the course of 2025, a number of politicians and groups increasingly drew on claims of 'protecting women and children' to justify anti-immigration sentiment, otherwise known as the 'weaponisation of VAWG' (as discussed in our Trends section)'.

319 Cooke, M. (2025) [Tommy Robinson backs Shabana Mahmood's asylum reforms](#). The Independent

320 Sparrow, A. (2025) [Reform MP invites Mahmood to join his party, saying he 'welcomes' and 'recognises' her rhetoric – as it happened](#). The Guardian



When introducing the Immigration White Paper, the Prime Minister's speech referred to 'an island of strangers', and was widely criticised for its echoes of Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech. EAW worked with Latin American Women's Rights Service, Southall Black Sisters and Hibiscus to highlight the impact of the government's plans on migrant women, survivors, and Black and minoritised communities more broadly. Our joint statement<sup>321</sup> and analysis,<sup>322</sup> published in May 2025, highlights the damaging consequences of the Immigration White Paper, ranging from policies which cut off entirely or devalue the "low-skilled" roles overwhelmingly held by migrant women in the UK, the absence of any accompanying protections for migrant survivors, and the increased difficulty of recruitment into the 'by and for' VAWG specialist sector due to an increase in the general salary threshold for Skilled Workers above average sector pay.

In November 2025, the Home Secretary went on to announce what she described as "the most significant changes to our asylum system in modern times", including proposals to limit refugee status to a temporary status of 30 months, a staggering 20-year wait for settlement, the removal of the duty to support asylum seekers, and an (as yet unpublished) consultation on the enforced removals of families and children.<sup>323</sup> Our subsequent joint statement<sup>324</sup> warned that these changes would have

"devastating and life-threatening consequences for women and children, particularly those trapped in cycles of abuse. They will further restrict women's already limited ability to escape violence and exploitation."

In the same month, the Home Office opened its consultation on significant reforms to the current settlement system, with a new premise that settlement is no longer automatically granted after a fixed period (usually five years). Instead, people will need to earn it by "demonstrating sustained good conduct, contribution and integration", with sanctions introduced in the form of indefinitely extending the length of time before a person can obtain settlement. Under the proposals, for example:

1. Use of public funds for less than 12 months increases the qualifying period by 5 years.
2. Use of public funds for more than 12 months increases it by 10 years.
3. Overstaying, entering as a visitor or irregular entry may add up to 20 years.

As laid out by Southall Black Sisters,<sup>325</sup> proposals which penalise a person for access to public funds, irregular entry, prior debt and criminalisation by increasing their qualifying period for ILR will directly harm survivors, for whom these experiences are often direct consequences of VAWG and structural inequalities. Penalising these experiences, rather than recognising them as evidence of harm, represents a profound erosion of migrant women's ability to seek safety and stability. If successful, these proposals are set to create even greater precarity and elevate the risk of abuse for migrant women.

321 LAWRS, Southall Black Sisters, EAW and Hibiscus (2025) [Joint Statement on May 2025 Immigration White Paper](#)

322 LAWRS, Southall Black Sisters, EAW and Hibiscus (2025) [Analysis of the UK Government's May 2025 Immigration White Paper](#)

323 Home Office (2025) [Oral statement to Parliament: Asylum and returns policy](#)

324 EAW and Southall Black Sisters Hibiscus, and Latin American Women's Rights (2025) [Joint statement on government plans to overhaul refugee protection in the UK](#)

325 Southall Black Sisters (2025) [Response to Earned Settlement Announcement](#)



Photo of the Old Bailey

## Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system remains on the brink of collapse, and continues to fail many survivors of VAWG. Despite a year once again dominated by reviews, strategies and reform announcements, progress remains incremental, fragmented and insufficient to address the scale and severity of systemic failure.

### Delays

Court delays have become a defining feature of the justice response to violence against women and girls. Rape Crisis' *Living in Limbo* report revealed that 13,238 sexual offence cases were awaiting trial – a staggering 66% increase since 2022, with survivors waiting an average of 499 days – almost twice as

long as for other offences.<sup>326</sup> These delays are not a neutral byproduct of pressure on the system, but a form of structural harm that disproportionately impacts women subjected to sexual and domestic abuse, forcing many to disengage with the justice process.

Policing delays compound this injustice. A super-complaint by Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre, Centre for Women's Justice, Rape Crisis England & Wales and Bindmans LLP showed that more than 37,000 survivors waited more than three years for police investigations to conclude over the past decade. More than half of these investigations had taken longer than four years, and many considerably longer.<sup>327</sup> These prolonged investigations undermine evidential integrity, exacerbate trauma and directly drive attrition. Data from London shows 69% of adult rape survivors withdraw

326 Rape Crisis England and Wales (2025) [Living in Limbo: Our second report on the retraumatisation of rape and sexual abuse victims and survivors in the Crown Court backlog](#)

327 Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre, Centre for Women's Justice, Rape Crisis England & Wales and Bindmans LLP (2025) [Police super-complaint submitted in relation to severely delayed police investigations into sexual offences](#)



from cases.<sup>328</sup> This attrition is not a failure of survivor resilience, but of system design.<sup>329</sup>

## Court reform

The Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (Leveson Review) Part I<sup>330</sup> was published in July 2025 and set out significant proposals to address Crown Court delays, including restricting jury trial rights and expanding magistrates' sentencing powers – the majority of which will be enacted by government in a forthcoming Courts Bill.<sup>331</sup> These reforms have not been developed with sufficient equalities analysis or consultation, while evidence that jury trials are the primary driver of the backlog is weak. The Institute for Government recently claimed judge-only criminal trials will save less than 2% of time in crown courts.<sup>332</sup> Reforms that streamline throughput without addressing survivor support, investigative practices, or prosecutorial decision-making risk accelerating injustice rather than reducing it. We particularly highlight the potential differential impacts on minoritised groups and criminalised women – many of whom are survivors of abuse. We are concerned these concerns have not been adequately assessed, whilst the government has drawn on VAWG as a means to justify significant changes, without proper consultations with the VAWG sector.

Part II of the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (Leveson Review) was published in February 2026, and examined opportunities for efficiencies in the criminal court.<sup>333</sup> We welcome the review's recommendations in relation to rape and

sexual offence cases, many of which echo calls that have repeatedly been made by specialist VAWG organisations and others for years – for example, EVAW's joint campaigning work on third party material and bad character evidence.<sup>334</sup> We also welcome plans to take learning from Operation Soteria into the Crown Court, the need to expand funding for community-based facilities for women as an alternative to custody, and improvements to the quality and efficiency of the way in which pre-recorded evidence and interviews are conducted. These now need to be implemented at pace, not only to address the appalling backlogs in the criminal justice system, but to ensure that rape victim-survivors are not re-traumatised in the process.

The report, however, falls short when considering the intersectional experiences of those in the criminal justice system, and the ways in which this impacts their access to justice. This risks not only exacerbating existing inequalities but the confidence of marginalised women to engage with the criminal justice system and believe that it will work for them.

## Prisons and sentencing

Prison overcrowding has driven reactive policy decisions with significant implications for survivor confidence, safety and wellbeing. Between September 2024 and June 2025, almost 40,000 prisoners were released early after serving reduced portions of their sentence, including individuals convicted of sexual offences.<sup>335</sup> Despite assurances of scrutiny relating to VAWG offenders through

328 Mayor of London Office for Police and Crime (2025) [Understanding Victim Withdrawal in London](#)

329 Ibid

330 Ministry of Justice (2025) [Independent Review of the Criminal Courts: Part 1](#)

331 Ministry of Justice (2025) [Criminal Court Reform Statement](#) UK Parliament

332 Siddique, H. and Syal, R. (2025) [Judge-only trials in England and Wales will not wipe out crown court backlog, report says](#). The Guardian

333 Ministry of Justice (2025) [Independent Review of the Criminal Courts: Part 2](#)

334 EVAW's [Rape Justice Now campaign page](#)

335 Kotecha, S (2025) [Nearly 40,000 prisoners released early under government scheme](#). BBC News



Photo of two police officers

increased electronic monitoring and tagging, concerns have been raised about the government's ability to deliver on measures introduced to mitigate risks to survivors' safety, including by the Justice and Home Affairs Committee.<sup>336</sup>

The Sentencing Review<sup>337</sup> reflects this tension. While proposals to reduce short custodial sentences could instigate broader social reforms and benefit women, who make up the majority of those sentenced to 12 months or less (77%), recommendations also risk entrenching harm. EVAW has been particularly critical of proposals relating to chemical suppression for sexual offenders, which risks replicating coercive approaches rather than preventing harm.

## Police reform

2025 saw yet more exposure of entrenched racism and misogyny within policing. The second Angiolini Review report identified

persistent police failures to act on known risks,<sup>338</sup> and we await Part III this coming year, which specifically looks into the abuses of former officer and serial rapist David Carrick.<sup>339</sup> In addition, a Panorama investigation into the Metropolitan Police exposed a culture of racism, Islamophobia and misogyny,<sup>340</sup> whilst a major review found anti-Black racism to be “baked in” to the force.<sup>341</sup> Further reports revealed that officers accused of rape and serious abuse may remain in post, while the High Court's decision limiting vetting-based dismissals<sup>342</sup> raised serious concerns about forces' ability to remove dangerous individuals. The government subsequently passed a measure in parliament to ensure background checks became legal requirements for all serving officers.<sup>343</sup> All of this reinforces EVAW's long-held position that abusive police conduct is not aberrational but systemic, and further demonstrates how institutional tolerance of sexism and racism undermines both survivor safety and public trust.

336 Dunton, J. (2025) [Probation Service 'being set up to fail' with tagging expansion, committee says](#). Civil Service World

337 Ministry of Justice (2025). [Independent Sentencing Review: Final report](#)

338 The Angiolini Inquiry (2025) [The Angiolini Inquiry Part 2 First Report: Prevention of sexually motivated crimes against women in public](#)

339 EVAW (2023). [Serial rapist kept his job as a Met Police officer despite multiple reports against him](#)

340 EVAW (2025). [Panorama investigation exposes culture of racism, Islamophobia and misogyny in the Met Police](#)

341 Daniels, S (2025) [30 Patterns of Harm: A Structural Review of Systemic Racism within the London Metropolitan Police Service](#). Metropolitan Police Service

342 EVAW (2025). [Met Police officers facing reports of rape and abuse may remain in the force](#)

343 Home Office (2025). [Police vetting reforms to boost officer standards](#)

2025 saw the establishment of the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection. This is an initiative between the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing, with the stated aim of achieving consistency of practice, professionalising public protection and tackling the scale of the challenge posed by violence against women and girls.<sup>344</sup> This new centre is referenced in the government's VAWG strategy, with £13.1 million of investment from the Home Office in its first year.

In light of the all-time low in public confidence in the police, most notably among women, the government announced a series of major reforms in January 2026 with its Police White Paper.<sup>345</sup> This paper is the vehicle in which the government proposes to action many of the welcome commitments in the VAWG strategy relating to improved vetting and misconduct of officers. It also makes a series of much wider reforms, including abolishing the existing 43 police forces to replace them with a smaller number of bigger organisations, establishing a new National Police Service to 'handle national policing responsibilities', scrapping Police and Crime Commissioners, which is significant for commissioning processes for specialist VAWG services, and expanding both neighbourhood policing and the use of AI in policing (please note our concerns with this expansion on p.18).

## Inequality, exclusion and criminalisation

The criminal justice system continues to harm and marginalise those most affected by

violence. Research from the Victim's Commissioner highlighted the significant barriers to reporting and support faced by disabled survivors due to a lack of professional knowledge and reasonable adjustments.<sup>346</sup> In 2025, there was also further research on the experiences of sex workers reporting violence to the police, finding themselves criminalised, disbelieved and retraumatised, with a strong distrust of the police.<sup>347</sup> In February 2026, the Women's Budget Group and Traveller Movement published a joint briefing highlighting the intersecting socioeconomic and structural inequalities faced by women and girls from Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities. This explored how Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system due to over-policing, poverty-related offences, and judicial bias, alongside systemic discrimination in education, health, employment, and social care.<sup>348</sup>

Criminalised women – two-thirds of whom report experiencing domestic abuse – are routinely punished for survival strategies shaped by trauma and coercion. The establishment of the Women's Justice Board, which first met in March 2025, is therefore a welcome recognition that women's pathways into and through the justice system are distinct, and we hope to see more outputs from the board this coming year.<sup>349</sup> EVAW stresses that reducing women's imprisonment requires investment in specialist services, housing, income security and trauma-informed alternatives to prosecution, not simply criminal justice and sentencing reform in isolation.

344 College of Policing (2025). [National centre for violence against women and girls and public protection](#)

345 Home Office (2026). [From local to national: a new model for policing](#)

346 Victim's Commissioners (2025). [Disabled Victims' experiences of criminal justice systems: A systematic review](#)

347 Sanders, T. Scoular, J. and Smailes, H. (2025). [Sex workers' experiences of criminal justice in the United Kingdom: Improving responses to sexual violence and harms](#). British Society of Criminology

348 Women's Budget Group and Traveller Movement (2026) [Uneven Paths: Socio-Economic and Structural Inequalities Facing Women from Romani \(Gypsy\), Roma and Irish Traveller Communities](#)

349 Ministry of Justice (2025). [Women's Justice Board begins plans to send fewer women to prison](#)

## Progress

Against this backdrop, campaigning by EVAW and our partners RCEW, Imkaan, Centre for Women's Justice and Rights of Women secured important progress for survivors of rape. Government commitments arising from our *Bad Experiences Not Bad Character* campaign<sup>350</sup> will updated guidance to restrict the routine use of survivors' previous, unrelated disclosures of sexual violence to undermine their credibility. Meanwhile, measures won as part of our *Keep Counselling Confidential* campaign,<sup>351</sup> enacted in January 2026 through the Victim Information Requests Code of Practice, should reduce the frequency of intrusive requests for survivors' personal counselling and therapy records.

The Law Commission's report on Evidence in Sexual Offences Prosecutions acknowledged many survivor concerns, but stopped short of recommendations for the structural reforms required to dismantle some of the most problematic adversarial practices that retraumatise complainants and entrench rape myths.<sup>352</sup> We also welcomed legislative changes which now means courts have a legal duty to consider pregnancy and motherhood when making the decision on whether to grant bail, a significant campaign win for sector partners Level Up.<sup>353</sup>

The much anticipated VAWG strategy<sup>354</sup> announced a wide range of criminal justice measures – from embedding specialist rape and sexual offences teams in every police force to expanding the 'Clare's Law' disclosure scheme, the national roll out of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs), a commitment to the introduction of Independent Legal Advice for victims of rape,

and extending Operation Soteria's<sup>355</sup> victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led approach to the courts.

We also saw the methodology of Operation Soteria applied to domestic abuse with Operation Bright Light.<sup>356</sup> The project highlighted the current flaws in the police response to domestic abuse, finding that:

- ▶ The statutory definition of domestic abuse is too broad for effective operational policing
- ▶ Existing police structures cannot cope with current levels of demand
- ▶ The risk assessment process is not fit for purpose
- ▶ Intimate partner violence is still responded to as a series of isolated incidents rather than as patterns of abuse.

If reforms are to be effective in improving support and access to justice for survivors, reducing harms and extending beyond procedural changes, such reforms must be accompanied by proper oversight and evaluation, along with accompanying funding for specialist support. In EVAW's view, accountability and transparency is especially vital when considering the roll out of programmes such as Project Vigilant, which involves undercover officers in the nighttime economy seeking to disrupt incidents of VAWG, and the increased use of facial recognition technology, as both carry risks including reinforcing inequalities and discrimination (see trends section for more discussion of the use of AI in policing).

350 EVAW et al (2026) [Campaign Win: Bad Experiences Not 'Bad Character'](#)

351 EVAW et al (2026) [Campaign Win: #Keep Counselling Confidential](#)

352 Law Commission (2025) [Evidence in sexual offences prosecutions](#)

353 Level Up (2026) [Campaign win – No Births Behind Bars](#)

354 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

355 National Police Chiefs Council – [Operation Soteria](#)

356 Project Blue Light (2025) [Transforming the Police Response to Domestic Abuse: Policy Briefing](#). London Metropolitan University



## Family courts and children's social care

In 2025 we saw a long overdue and significant development for the family courts, with the government announcing plans to repeal the presumption of parental involvement from the Children Act 1989 in order to protect children from abusive parents.<sup>357</sup> This is a welcome decision, following extensive campaigning efforts of organisations and survivors – notably Claire Throssell, and her campaign work with Women's Aid's *Child First* campaign.<sup>358</sup> Ahead of the government announcement, Women's Aid published its report *Nineteen More Child Homicides*, almost a decade after the publication of the original campaign report, documenting children who have been killed by domestic abuse perpetrators following unsafe contact arrangements.<sup>359</sup> The government also took forward proposals to restrict parental responsibility for parents convicted of serious sexual offences against any child via the Victims and Courts Bill, another welcome and long overdue change in the system.<sup>360</sup>

The wider changes needed to the family court were well documented by the 2021 *Harm Panel Report*, and in 2025 the Domestic Abuse Commissioner published a report on the national monitoring mechanism, held within her office, as recommended in the 2021 report. The mechanism seeks to

“maintain oversight of and report regularly on the family courts’ performance in protecting children and adult victims from domestic abuse and other risks of harm in private law children’s proceedings”.<sup>361</sup> Worryingly, despite some improvements, the Commissioner found “most allegations of domestic abuse being treated as marginal or not relevant to the court’s decision-making in the child arrangements application..[with] evidence of abuse ignored, minimised or dismissed”.<sup>362</sup>

In light of this reality, we welcome the government’s reassertion of its commitment to reform the family courts in the VAWG strategy, including plans to strengthen the Family Justice Board and to increase transparency in the courts.<sup>363</sup> It was also positive to see the Bar Council call for all family court cases involving domestic abuse to be brought within the scope of legal aid and for means testing to be scrapped for alleged victims and survivors of domestic abuse,<sup>364</sup> alongside a campaign by The Law Society to secure urgent funding for legal aid in the family courts.<sup>365</sup>

In further good news, in October 2025 the High Court overturned a finding that a mother had ‘alienated’ her children in a case supported by Rights of Women – ruling that the decision was based on flawed evidence from an unregulated psychologist.<sup>366</sup> This has come after years of campaigning challenging the use of unregulated ‘experts’ in the family court and use of the discredited concept of

357 Ministry of Justice (2025). [Government action to protect children from abusive parents](#)

358 Women's Aid England (2025) [Women's Aid marks momentous Ministry of Justice decision by honouring children killed and ignored by dangerous practices in family courts](#)

359 Women's Aid England (2025) [Nineteen More Child Homicides](#)

360 Ministry of Justice (2025) [Press release: Thousands of children protected from abuse under victim reforms](#)

361 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) [Everyday Business: Addressing domestic abuse and continuing harm through a family court review and reporting mechanism](#)

362 Ibid

363 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

364 The Bar Council (2025) [Family courts central to tackling public emergency of violence against women and girls](#)

365 The Law Society (2025) [Legal Aid Campaign](#)

366 Rights of Women (2025) [Important new decision: expert's opinion that children were 'alienated' thrown out 5 years after court removed children from mother](#)

parental alienation.<sup>367,368</sup> It was therefore positive to see an action in the government's VAWG strategy to "prevent the instruction of unregulated experts in family law children's proceedings".<sup>369</sup>

The experience of children and young people affected by domestic abuse was the focus of a second report from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC) this year.<sup>370</sup> The report found that due to chronic underfunding and patchy provision, most children will not receive the domestic abuse support they need at the time they need it. The report goes on to make a series of recommendations calling on government for coordinated action "to revolutionise cross-government working and build a robust multi-agency response at the local level".<sup>371</sup> The Department for Education provided an official reply to the DAC's report and to her 66 recommendations,<sup>372</sup> in which it pointed to the (then) upcoming VAWG strategy as a document which will set out the government's plans to improve support for victims of domestic abuse – including for babies, children and young people – as well as noting the updated RSHE guidance, the Family First Partnership, a new Social Work Induction programme, and implementing a new duty for information sharing.

There were a number of commitments relating to children's social care in the VAWG strategy, with some specific to VAWG, but most being more general. However, there is little additional detail to that which had

already been announced (and outlined above), with the additional reference to the new Best Start Family Hubs.<sup>373</sup> Those actions more specific to VAWG included DfE funding for the What Works Centre, foundations to carry out an evaluation of support services for child victims of domestic abuse, for the NSPCC to make learning materials relating to children affected by domestic abuse, and reference to wider investment in skills and knowledge of the relevant workforces to include VAWG.

In April 2025, the government published a progress report setting out its timeline to deliver several of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's (IICSA) recommendations.<sup>374</sup> This included an update on plans to develop child protection bodies and mechanisms, upcoming legislation on mandatory reporting of child rape and sexual abuse, and therapeutic service provision for victims and survivors of child rape and sexual abuse. Additionally, the VAWG strategy reiterates its acceptance of the recommendations made by Baroness Casey in her audit of group-based child sexual exploitation, published in June 2025.<sup>375</sup> Once again, we note our concerns about problematic commitments to release ethnicity and nationality data on suspects.<sup>376</sup> The VAWG strategy also restates the appointment of Baroness Anne Longfield as the Chair of the upcoming Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs.

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- 367 Choudhry, S. and Rodriguez Gutierrez, D. (2024). [The Family Justice Response to Domestic Abuse A Six Country Empirical Study of the Experiences of Survivors, Judges, Lawyers and Court Appointed Experts](#)
- 368 Women's Aid (2024) [The Family Justice Response to Domestic Abuse](#)
- 369 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)
- 370 Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) [Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people's experience of domestic abuse](#)
- 371 Ibid
- 372 HM Government (2025) [Government Response to Domestic Abuse Commissioner Report – Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people's experience of domestic abuse](#)
- 373 Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care (2025) [Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies: guidance for local authorities](#)
- 374 The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/>
- 375 Home Office (2026) [National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)
- 376 Runnymede Trust et al (2025) [Open letter calling on the Home Secretary and Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council to withdraw police guidance on naming suspects' ethnicity and nationality](#)

## Housing

Housing remains a key barrier to women and girls seeking to live a life free from abuse,<sup>377</sup> particularly for the most marginalised in society. Women's Aid annual *No Women Turned Away* report this year focused on the barriers faced by survivors with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), the impacts of the introduction of the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) in 2024, and the failures of statutory services to meet their legal duties.<sup>378</sup> Women's Aid also published a report this year highlighting the challenges of move-on accommodation after a survivor has managed to flee to a refuge.<sup>379</sup> In this report, Women's Aid lists three key barriers to sourcing appropriate move-on accommodation:

- ▶ The national housing crisis and availability of appropriate social housing
- ▶ Inconsistent implementation of statutory guidance and local authority understanding of domestic abuse
- ▶ Understanding the support needs of survivors.

Housing is an integral part of any government response to tackling VAWG, and we therefore welcome recognition of this essential part of the puzzle within the government VAWG strategy, as well as reference to domestic abuse as a significant risk factor for homelessness in the recent Homelessness Strategy.<sup>380</sup> This recognition was coupled with some additional funding, including a new multiple disadvantage programme from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and an additional £19 million for

safe accommodation over three years (totaling £499 million to fund the Safe Accommodation Duty).<sup>381</sup> Refuge has described this figure as a

“drop in the ocean compared to the number of survivors for whom safe housing could be the difference between life and death”

noting the estimated current shortfall for refuge service funding is at £62 million a year, a long way off the £19 million over three years committed to.<sup>382</sup> Furthermore, Women's Aid's *National Audit 2025* documented that 60.1% of referrals into refuge services were rejected over the past year, with the common reason being capacity.<sup>383</sup>

The VAWG strategy's housing commitments must also be developed to deliver safe asylum accommodation for women and minimum safety standards, especially when considered alongside the government's plans to expand the use of large-scale, isolated accommodation sites. As highlighted by Women for Refugee Women, failure to act in this regard risks worsening harms faced by women seeking safety in the UK.<sup>384</sup>

In light of the real ongoing housing challenges survivors are facing and the significant gaps in state provision, frontline services have looked to corporate partners to meet some of these immediate needs. For example, Refuge has partnerships with Omaze,<sup>385</sup> and Women's Aid and MOPAC have partnered with Airbnb.<sup>386</sup> However, the sector's attempts to meet survivor needs in desperate times are not a replacement for the long-term and sufficient investment needed from government.

377 Refuge (2025) [How the housing crisis traps women in abuse: 'Nowhere to go, nowhere to heal'](#)

378 Women's Aid England (2025) [Nowhere to Turn 2025](#)

379 Women's Aid England (2025) [From Safety to Stability: Access to move-on accommodation after refuge](#)

380 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2025) [Policy paper: A National Plan to End Homelessness](#)

381 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

382 Refuge (2025) [VAWG Strategy sets ambition, but lacks critical investment](#)

383 Women's Aid England (2025) [Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025: The funding gap risking the future of domestic abuse services in England](#)

384 Women for Refugee Women (2025) [Women for Refugee Women's Statement on the Government's VAWG Strategy: Leaving Refugee Women Behind](#)

385 Refuge (2025) [Safe homes save lives: Refuge and Omaze launch campaign to provide safe housing for survivors](#)

386 Women's Aid, Air BnB and Mayor of London (2025) [Airbnb, Women's Aid and London Mayor announce accommodation programme](#)

## Health

VAWG was once again deemed a public health emergency this year, following publication of research by Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA). STADA's report examined all the official reviews of domestic abuse-related homicides and suicides (DHRs) published in 2024, finding that around 90% of DHRs cited safeguarding failings by the NHS, and that a lack of domestic abuse training was the most frequent criticism.<sup>387</sup> This is a critique mirrored in Suzy Lamplugh's 2025 report on the health sector's response to stalking, which found that 85% of frontline healthcare professionals "do not know what specialist stalking services exist and where to refer patients for specialist support".<sup>388</sup>

2025 also saw the publication of a study by the Lancet Regional Health Europe, which calculated that over a quarter (26%) of all women who died by suicide, and were known to secondary mental health services, had experienced domestic abuse. This is a statistic which makes even more essential reading of both Imkaan's 2025 policy briefing – *Why Should Our Rage be Tidy? Minoritised Survivors' Experiences of Mental Health in the context of Violence Abuse*,<sup>389</sup> and Women's Trust's report *Living Without Hope – The case for improving the mental health response for survivors of domestic abuse*.<sup>390</sup> In this context, it was deeply concerning to see that VAWG was largely absent<sup>391</sup> from the NHS 10 Year Plan published in July 2025,<sup>392</sup> and we are left questioning the references to the 10 Year Plan in the VAWG strategy



considering the lack of joined up thinking or relevant commitments.

In this landscape, concrete commitments from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in the VAWG strategy are strongly welcome, particularly given their relative absence in previous strategies and VAWG commissioning to date. In the strategy, we see two proposals put forward by the DHSC, alongside an additional £5m funding contribution to the £550m from the MoJ for victim services. These proposals are a new national NHS initiative that will connect patients to specialist VAWG support via their GPs, called the *Steps to Safety* Initiative; and £50million to support child sexual abuse survivors with specialist, trauma-informed care via the the multi-agency model *Child House*.<sup>393</sup>

We await further details on both initiatives. But we must note that whilst *Child House* evaluations point to greater improvements in emotional wellbeing than some other services, some concerns have been raised about its ability to meet the needs of children who face

387 Standing Together (2025) [Never again: a Review of Health Recommendations Following a Domestic Abuse Related Death](#)

388 Suzy Lamplugh Trust (2025) [Health Response: Spotting Stalking](#)

389 Imkaan, Women and Girls Network and Warwick University (2025) [Summary of Key Findings: 'Why Should Our Rage be Tidy?' Minoritised Survivors' Experiences of Mental Health in the context of Violence Abuse](#)

390 Women's Trust (2025) [Living Without Hope: The case for improving the mental health response for survivors of domestic abuse](#)

391 IRIS (2025) [You can't halve VAWG without naming it: where is violence against women in the NHS 10 Year Plan?](#)

392 Department of Health and Social Care (2025) [Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England](#). The plan seeks to "create a new model of care, fit for the future...reinvent[ing] the NHS through 3 radical shifts – 1) hospital to community, 2) analogue to digital, and 3) sickness to prevention."

393 Home Office (2021) [Guidance: Child sexual abuse: Child House](#)



or have experienced systemic discrimination as the model involves so many state agencies in one place. Such concerns highlight the importance of ‘by and for’ services in meeting the needs of the most marginalised groups excluded from statutory support, alongside questions about the proportionality and equitability of funding allocated across these initiatives and services.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the lack of consultation with the VAWG sector to date on such proposals, and we press upon the DHSC to rectify this going forward.<sup>394</sup> In particular, we note that the *Steps to Safety* Initiative appears to be a replication of the IRISi model of support,<sup>395</sup> which has been delivering its evidence-based model for almost two decades. The expertise of IRISi is therefore key in ensuring *Steps to Safety* fulfills its huge potential to reach survivors and get the support they need. Yet like much of the VAWG sector, IRISi have instead experienced funding cuts and service closures.<sup>396</sup>

We also hope to see such initiatives move beyond primary care. Standing Together, IRISi and Respect estimate that it will take around £53.5m per year to deliver a well-integrated ‘whole health’ response to domestic abuse – from primary care to acute, maternity to mental health, and patient needs to staffing needs.<sup>397</sup> They go on to call for health to:

1. Publish a comprehensive plan for health to address domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, across all areas of the NHS, by January 2027.
2. Increase the DHSC contribution to the VAWG strategy in future budgets.

3. Ensure a comprehensive and specialised rollout of NHS training on domestic abuse.
4. Ensure the *Steps to Safety* primary care project is delivered to a high standard and is integrated.
5. Build systems for learning from domestic abuse-related deaths, and for wider domestic abuse data collection in health settings.

Alongside the VAWG strategy, we welcomed the appointment of Jess Asato MP as a new advisor to overhaul the NHS response to VAWG for a six-month period,<sup>398</sup> noting her children’s and VAWG sector experience. We hope both her appointment and the DHSC’s actions in the VAWG strategy are just the beginning of meaningful, and much needed, engagement from health in our efforts to tackle VAWG.

The campaign to decriminalise abortion has continued in 2025, with the welcome success of an amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill for England and Wales,<sup>399</sup> and the campaign coalition *Let’s Change the Act* trying to bring about similar changes in Scotland.<sup>400</sup> [Please also see the reference to abortion in Trend one (p.12) and the Crime and Policing Bill (p.71)].

IT WILL TAKE AROUND  
**£53.5M**  
PER YEAR TO DELIVER  
A WELL-INTEGRATED  
'WHOLE HEALTH'  
RESPONSE TO  
DOMESTIC ABUSE

394 IRISi (2025) [IRISi responds to today's government announcement about a new national initiative called Steps to Safety that will involve GP surgeries being better equipped to identify and respond to domestic abuse and sexual violence](#)

395 <https://irisi.org>

396 IRISi (2025) [IRISi comments on the closure of the life-saving IRIS Programme in Gwent](#)

397 Standing Together, Respect and IRISi (2026) Joint Briefing: Westminster Hall Debate: Domestic Abuse and Health

398 Cooke, M. (2025) [Government drafts in new violence against women and girls adviser amid fears it will miss its target](#)

399 Tonkin, T. (2025) [MPs back decriminalisation of abortion](#). British Medical Association

400 [Lets Change the Act campaign](#)



Photo of a woman looking over the London skyline

## Work, wealth and the welfare system

Gender inequality is at the root of the epidemic of VAWG, and as such, tackling all manifestations of gender inequality is key to ending VAWG – including economic inequality. For example, we know that financial barriers to leaving abusive relationships have a significant impact on

victims and survivors. As such, it is essential to take stock of the relevant welfare policy developments over this past year, as well as developments relating to employment, wealth and the economy more widely.

In March 2025, the government's own analysis of its Spring Statement acknowledged that single women would be the largest group hit by its planned disability benefit cuts.<sup>401</sup> The Women's Budget Group

**SINGLE WOMEN  
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DISABILITY  
BENEFIT CUTS**

wrote to the Chancellor evidencing the dire effect such plans would have on women and their economic independence.<sup>402</sup> Refuge also expressed concerns about this direction of travel, noting that “financial independence is a crucial lifeline for those fleeing abuse” and that “disabled women are more than twice as likely to experience abuse compared to non-disabled women”.<sup>403</sup>

The Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in June 2025. However, campaigners called for it to be dropped due to significant concerns about its introduction without consultation with disabled people, proper assessment or a planned review of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). In the first Parliamentary debate, the government faced rebellion from its own backbenchers and subsequently rolled back some of its proposals. However, plans to cut the health element of Universal Credit for new applicants will still proceed. In response to the government’s VAWG Strategy, Stay Safe East laid out the impacts of the government’s wider proposed or

potential welfare reforms on disabled survivors and called for more joint-up thinking. For example, they noted the planned removal of entitlement to the Universal Credit Health Element for those under 22 will have a very detrimental impact on the age group that is most at risk of domestic abuse.<sup>404</sup>

Longstanding campaigning and political pressure also led the government to commit to abolishing the abhorrent two-child tax limit in the Autumn statement,<sup>405</sup> including the inhuman ‘rape clause’ – a call the VAWG sector has been making since its inception in 2017.<sup>406</sup> We also saw a Private Members’ Bill put forward by Alex McIntyre MP (Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill)<sup>407</sup> which, if picked up by the government, would require employers to provide 10 days of paid leave for survivors of domestic abuse.

We are pleased to see a number of additions to the government’s VAWG strategy relating to the workplace. These include recognising sexual harassment in the workplace and strengthening legal protections against harassment by introducing three amendments to the Equality Act 2010’s harassment provisions, working with employers to strengthen their response to VAWG, and ensuring that employers are no longer able to misuse Non-Disclosure Agreements to prevent workers from speaking about harassment, including sexual harassment, and discrimination.<sup>408</sup> The strategy also made a series of important commitments aimed at tackling economic abuse including joint mortgage abuse, coerced debt and the impact on credit scores.<sup>409</sup>

402 Women’s Budget Group (2025) [Cuts to Social Security for Disabled Women](#)

403 Refuge (2025) [Welfare reforms will have devastating impacts on disabled survivors](#)

404 Stay Safe East (2026) [Stay Safe East’s Response to the Government’s VAWG Strategy](#)

405 Department for Work & Pensions (2025) [Removing the two-child limit on Universal Credit: Impact on low income poverty levels in the United Kingdom](#)

406 EAW (2017) [Call to scrap the two child limit and ‘rape clause’](#)

407 UK Parliament (2025) [Domestic Abuse \(Safe Leave\) Bill](#)

408 Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

409 Surviving Economic Abuse (2025) [Surviving Economic Abuse’s reacts to the VAWG strategy announcement](#)

## Media

VAWG continued to dominate headlines this year, reflecting the new government's stated mission to halve VAWG and public interest in this ambition. While there has been a noticeable shift towards increased reporting on online forms of violence, reflecting rising awareness of this abuse, media reporting still tends to frame VAWG as a criminal justice issue, with coverage on VAWG largely focusing on policing and courts.

High-profile suspects remain a significant focus of coverage, with figures such as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, Jeffrey Epstein and David Walliams occupying headlines and airtime. While this reflects a public interest in exposing the institutions and systems that enable and mask abuse, as noted in our *Reporting on rape: Changing the narrative resource*,<sup>410</sup> there is a stark difference in how these cases are framed compared with suspects of lower socioeconomic status, and racialised suspects, who are afforded a lesser degree of 'himpathy'.

The media has also played a key role in the weaponisation of sexual violence for far-right political agendas (as discussed in our trend section). While such rhetoric often originates in the political sphere, the press can play a significant role in amplifying misleading and harmful narratives, whether through inadequate fact-checking, selective use of data, or the distortion of statistics to align with political or ideological agendas. This reflects a wider pattern in which cases of VAWG involving racialised men are disproportionately reported in the press, while similar crimes committed by white British perpetrators, if reported on, are more often framed using neutral or less racialised

language (for example, being described as 'organised networks' rather than 'grooming gangs'). It was therefore positive to see reference to our concerns about the media's role in this form of weaponisation highlighted in the Press Recognition Panel's 2026 report on regulation of the UK press,<sup>411</sup> alongside a direct quote from EAW's submission on the wider impact of poor reporting on VAWG:

"Poor, irresponsible press reporting on violence against women and girls causes direct harm to victims and survivors whose cases are reported on, as well as women and girls more broadly by hampering progress towards gender equality."<sup>412</sup>

The positive power of the media to drive accountability and positive change was once again evidenced in EAW's 2025 Write to End Violence Against Women Awards,<sup>413</sup> which recognises excellence in reporting on VAWG. Last year's winners and finalists included journalists whose investigations have driven legal and practice change in the family courts, exposed the shocking rates of matricide and explored the impacts of FGM. There was also a special recognition award given to Metro for its sector-leading *This Is Not Right* campaign. This campaign not only increased the volume and quality of its reporting on violence against women, but changed Metro's internal practices and policies, including standards and ethics for interviewing survivors and experts and training for how to report sensitively and responsibly on VAWG; showing the power of synergy between the media and campaigning.



410 EAW (2024). [Reporting on Rape: Changing the Narrative](#)

411 The Press Recognition Panel (2026) [10th Annual Report on the Recognition System](#)

412 EAW's submission to the The Press Recognition Panel as cited in The Press Recognition Panel (2026) [10th Annual Report on the Recognition System](#)

413 EAW (2025) [Winners announced: Write to End Violence Against Women Awards 2025](#)



Photo of the Houses of Parliament

# LEGISLATION

## Crime and Policing Bill<sup>414</sup>

The Crime and Policing Bill was introduced to parliament in February 2025, with the stated aim of supporting “the delivery of the government’s Safer Streets mission”. The Bill has a broad scope, with measures connected to knife crime, VAWG, anti-social behaviour, retail crime, serious and organised crime, fraud, theft, public order, terrorism and sexual offending – with several amendments made during its passage.

In its original form, several of its amended provisions were first proposed by the Conservative government under the Criminal Justice Bill 2023-24,<sup>415</sup> including new protest-related police powers to ban face coverings and an offence for climbing on memorials. These, alongside provisions for new civil Respect Orders (referred to as ‘rebranded ASBOs’), and increased police dispersal powers and fines, have been criticised by human rights groups for risking criminalising those in poverty and who protest; and therefore criminalising women.<sup>416</sup>

The Bill includes measures on spiking, including creating a new criminal offence, accompanied by a new nationwide training programme for staff in the nighttime economy. There are further measures to tackle stalking, including statutory guidance enabling police to release identities on online stalkers and a review of stalking legislation. It also includes mandatory reporting measures aimed at tackling those organising, failing to report or covering up child sexual abuse, along with the welcome disregard of convictions or cautions for loitering or soliciting when under 18.

Most recently, the government has introduced welcome amendments to criminalise the depiction of strangulation, suffocation and incest in pornography; one of the key recommendations from Baroness Bertin’s *Independent Review into Pornography*, and following campaigning from parts of the VAWG sector.

414 Crime and Policing Bill: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3938>

415 Criminal Justice Bill 2024: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

416 Liberty (2025) [Crime and Policing Bill: Liberty’s Submission to the Public Bills Committee](#)



We also saw a welcome amendment passed in the House of Commons that takes us closer to ending the persecution of women seeking terminations in England and Wales.<sup>417</sup>

There are proposed amendments to the Bill intended broadly to strengthen protections and access to justice for survivors, that are supported by some VAWG sector organisations. Southall Black Sisters has been campaigning for the Banaz's Law amendment, which seeks to explicitly recognise so-called 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) as an aggravating factor in sentencing for relevant offences, supported by statutory guidance, as well as an amendment to ensure that cases of suicides and self-harm linked to domestic and HBA are properly investigated and recognised as part of the continuum of violence against women and treated as murder. Karma Nirvana has been campaigning for the introduction of a statutory definition of HBA, which the government committed to in the VAWG strategy, and announced in February 2026 plans for an amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill to take this forward.<sup>418</sup>

## Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill<sup>419</sup>

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in December 2024 and is currently continuing its passage through the House of Lords. This Bill makes provisions about 'the safeguarding and welfare of children', including the introduction of a Single Unique Identifier (SUI) intended to improve information sharing where there are concerns about a child's

welfare, changes to school admissions for previously looked after children and free breakfast clubs in primary schools.

Along with survivor-led campaign group Make It Mandatory, Sex Education Forum and Brook, EVAW has been campaigning for an amendment to the Bill that extends mandatory RSE to all 16-18 year olds.<sup>420</sup> Thankfully, the government has accepted the need for change in the law, and outlined its intention to introduce it in the VAWG strategy. However, disappointingly it is currently delaying action by rejecting this Bill as a legislative vehicle, despite it being in scope.

An amendment in the Lords banning social media for under 16's was passed, and will now be debated when the Bill returns to the Commons.

We are supportive of amendments to embed specialist domestic abuse support in multi-agency child protection teams, and to ensure that clear safeguards are put in place to protect child victims at risk of being seriously harmed or killed.<sup>421</sup>

## Victims and Courts Bill<sup>422</sup>

This Bill is narrowly intended to improve the experiences of victims within the criminal justice system, with measures also relating to the functions of the Victims Commissioner and about procedure and the administration of criminal justice. New measures in the Bill include the automatic restriction of the exercise of parental responsibility for cases of children born of rape and offenders sentenced to four or more years in prison for a 'serious' child sexual abuse offence against

417 The amendment removes women from the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and the Infant Life Preservation Act 1929 in relation to their own pregnancies – bringing England and Wales into line with Northern Ireland. Tonkin, T. (2025) [MPs back decriminalisation of abortion](#). British Medical Association.

418 Home Office (2026) [Press Release: New laws to protect victims of 'honour'- based abuse](#)

419 Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3909>

420 Mandatory RSHE currently applies to primary and secondary schools, including those with Sixth Forms, but not to further education colleges

421 Safe Lives (2025) [Is this a turning point for the family courts?](#)

422 Victims and Courts Bill: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3968>



any child. It also includes other measures intended to improve the experiences of victims in the criminal justice system, such as measures that order offenders to attend their sentencing hearings as advocated for by bereaved families, measures to introduce victims' right to receive information post-conviction and to make representations through updating the Victim Contact Scheme, and to strengthen the powers of the Victims' Commissioner. EAW is supportive of a cross-sector amendment for the introduction of a duty to commission specialist support services for victims and survivors of exploitation and abuse, led by Women's Aid Federation England, the NSPCC, Barnardo's, Action for Children and the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.<sup>423</sup>

## Sentencing Act<sup>424</sup>

On 22 January 2026, following the Independent Sentencing Review led by David Gauke, the Sentencing Bill received Royal Assent. The Review was commissioned in October 2024 to reevaluate sentencing after the country faced a severe prison overcrowding crisis, with projections showing demand far exceeding capacity, resulting in two tranches of prisoners being released early. The Review found that short sentences were ineffective at reducing reoffending, and it recommended a series of reforms to reduce pressure on prison capacity. The Sentencing Act introduced reforms to shift focus from short custodial sentences to community-based alternatives, including a presumption to suspend sentences under a year, increasing maximum suspended sentences from two to three years, creating new community requirements for community sentences (including restriction zones

relevant for the safety of survivors) and introducing an earned progression model for prisoners, with a default release at one-third for standard sentences. The Act makes a change to the Bail Act 1976 to ensure that courts now have a legal duty to factor in pregnancy and whether someone is a primary carer when making the decision about whether to grant bail or remand someone in prison before their trial or sentence – a significant campaign win for VAWG sector partners, Level Up. The Act also introduces a formal judicial finding of domestic abuse at the point of sentencing, so that domestic abuse cases are clearly recorded and flagged. Changes under the Act will be phased in over the next two years.

## Data (Use & Access) Act<sup>425</sup>

The Data (Use and Access) Act gained Royal Assent in June 2025. This Act includes a measure which creates a new offence to criminalise non-consensual sexually explicit deepfakes. After campaigning by NotYourPorn, survivor-campaigner Jodie, Professor Clare McGlynn, GLAMOUR UK and the End Violence Against Women Coalition, the government confirmed that this offence is solely based on consent, rather than proof of intent. The Act became law in June 2025, and the government announced in January 2026 that the deepfake measure will come into force the following month.

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423 Women's Aid Federation England, the NSPCC, Barnardo's, Action for Children and the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2026) [Joint Submission on the Victims and Courts Bill Committee](#)

424 Sentencing Act: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4012>

425 Data (Use & Access) Act: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3825>

## Employment Rights Act<sup>426</sup>

The Employment Rights Act was introduced into the House of Commons in October 2024 and gained Royal Assent in December 2025. This legislation is described as a “key pillar of the government’s Plan to Make Work Pay” and is aimed at “growing the economy, boosting wages and reducing insecure work”.

The Bill brings in broader protections for workplace harassment and violence by placing a legal duty on employers to proactively prevent violence and harassment in the workplace. It also strengthens existing harassment protections in the Worker Protection Act, requiring employers to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment, an improvement to the weaker “reasonable steps” which Rights of Women amongst others had consistently challenged. This includes a new clause which makes Non-Disclosure Agreements void if they attempt to prevent workers from disclosing details of harassment or discrimination, following successful campaigning by the *Can’t Buy My Silence* campaign.

The Bill also explicitly recognises that reporting sexual harassment constitutes a protected disclosure for whistleblowing purposes, as well as welcome provisions to extend the three-month Employment Tribunal time limit to six months for most claims, whilst recognising that this still falls short of the 12 month time limit called for by many in the sector.

There are also provisions that provide better protection from unfair dismissal and insecure contracts, improve protections for pregnant workers and those returning from maternity leave, strengthening of paternity leave and menopause support for women, all of which are welcome.

## Renters Rights Act<sup>427</sup>

This Renters Rights Act gained Royal Assent in October 2025 and will come into force from May 2026 onwards. It introduces important protections for renters, including an end to Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions and an end to discriminatory policies, such as ‘no kids’ and ‘no DSS (benefit recipients)’ blanket bans for renters. It will also introduce indefinite ‘periodic’ tenancies to allow renters to have stable long-term rents replace fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies, as well as longer notice periods for evictions, more flexibility for renters who need to move house and limits on requests for rent to be paid in advance of tenancy starts. Positively, it also includes steps to introduce greater accountability of landlords, including a national register of private landlords. This Act is the result of years of campaigning from the homelessness sector amongst others, and introduces some important protections for victim-survivors of VAWG.

## Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act<sup>428</sup>

This Bill, introduced in early 2025, received Royal Assent in December 2025. While it includes some positive measures, including the repealing of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration Act) and much of the Illegal Migration Act, it frames migration as a ‘national security’ issue, without creating safe routes to reach the UK. The Bill contains a series of punitive measures, including new powers for immigration officials to search and seize items, and expanding information sharing capabilities.

426 Employment Rights Act 2025: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3737>

427 Renters’ Rights Act 2025: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3764>

428 Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3929>

## Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Act<sup>429</sup>

This Bill, which gained Royal Assent in December, is designed to ‘protect public funds’ by tackling fraud, error and debt in the public sector, giving the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Public Sector Fraud Authorities new powers. We were supportive of calls by Surviving Economic Abuse to ensure that enforcing authorities, primarily the DWP, are required to identify and prevent harm to domestic abuse victim-survivors when exercising the new debt recovery powers in the Bill. It is positive to see the draft Code of Practice, which sits alongside the Act, explicitly includes commitments to identifying and supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse, including economic abuse.

## The Online Safety Act<sup>430</sup>

The Online Safety Act gained Royal Assent in October 2023 under the previous government, however many measures in the Act only came into force in July 2025. In the past year, the government has expanded the list of priority offences which require platforms to ‘proactively prevent these harms’ and imposes stricter duties on tech companies. The list now includes cyberflashing, encouraging serious self-harm, sharing or threatening to share intimate images and harm-based communications.

## Relevant Private Members Bills

### Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill<sup>431</sup>

This Bill, introduced as a 10 Minute Bill by Alex McIntyre MP, intends to make provision for an entitlement to paid safe leave for victims of domestic abuse.

### Interpersonal Abuse and Violence Against Men and Boys (Strategy) Bill<sup>432</sup>

This Bill, introduced as a 10 Minute Bill by Ben Obese-Jecty MP, would require the Secretary of State to prepare and publish a specific strategy for tackling interpersonal abuse and violence against men and boys.

### Images (Non-consensual Recording and Distribution) Bill<sup>433</sup>

This Bill, introduced by Wera Hobhouse MP, would create offences relating to the non-consensual recording of images of a person and the online distribution of such images for profit with the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification or of causing humiliation or distress to that person; and for connected purposes.

429 Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Act: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3921>

430 The Online Safety Act: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

431 Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3915>

432 Interpersonal Abuse and Violence Against Men and Boys (Strategy) Bill: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3964>

433 Images (Non-consensual Recording and Distribution) Bill: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4078>

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