

DOES IT PASS THE TEST?

5 Key Tests for the government's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

OUR ANALYSIS

April 2026



Following the 2024 Labour manifesto pledge to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in 10 years, the government published its **VAWG strategy** 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**). Below we have outlined the **five key tests** produced by over 60 expert VAWG organisations and used them to analyse how well the strategy will meaningfully tackle and prevent VAWG.

Please note the government's VAWG strategy applies to areas under UK government responsibility – commitments on crime, policing, and justice apply to England and Wales, while those on health, social care, housing, transport, and education apply to England only, as these are devolved matters.

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests

1. Focus on primary prevention:

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.

How well these tests are met by the government's VAWG Strategy

This was one of the strongest and most welcome parts of the VAWG strategy, with **prevention central to the government's approach to tackling VAWG**. 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 and 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).

We welcome the focus on the education of children and young people, 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**, and note that increased awareness will increase referrals to specialist services who remain chronically underfunded. We also 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), and stress the importance of providing sufficient funding for quality interventions the specialist sector has been doing for years on scarce resources. We also call on the government to bring forward plans to introduce mandatory RSHE for 16-18 year olds at the earliest opportunity.¹

We are pleased to see the prominence of tackling online harms 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.

¹ [Make it Mandatory Campaign](#)

We also **stress the importance of thinking outside the box of criminalisation,² and the need to accelerate the pace of work** in light of the evidence already available,^{3,4} scale of harm, rate of technological advancements and the ongoing impunity of tech companies.

The strategy does recognise the need for prevention to extend beyond a focus on children and young people, but is weaker in this regard. **We welcome the commitment to a long-term national programme of behaviour change campaigns.** This is something the sector has long called for, and we urge the government to ensure the VAWG sector's ongoing involvement in the development and delivery of this work.

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.

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests

2. Address all forms of VAWG in an integrated way:

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.

How well these tests are met by the government's VAWG Strategy

We are pleased to see all forms of VAWG reflected in the strategy, albeit to varying degrees of ambition with regard to actions, joined up thinking and funding: noting the ongoing precarity of many frontline services including 'by and for' and specialist sexual violence services. This includes reference to sexual violence, domestic abuse, child sexual abuse and exploitation, '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. 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.⁵

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 also see test 5).

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

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

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

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

3. Include all women and girls without discrimination:

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.

How well these tests are met by the government's VAWG Strategy

Despite some positive rhetoric on inequalities in the strategy's narrative, and a **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.** 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.

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. 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.⁶

There is also **little mention of the experiences of disabled⁷ or LGBT+ survivors,⁸** and even fewer corresponding actions, bar a commitment to ban abusive conversion practices and recognition of the need for specialist support.

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'.^{9,10,11}

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.

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

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

8 Galop (2026) [Galop's response to the government's VAWG Strategy](#)

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

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

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

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.¹² Furthermore, measures to deport foreign national offenders will impact migrant survivors who are criminalised in the context of abuse.

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests

4. Sustainably fund specialist support services:

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.

How well these tests are met by the government's VAWG Strategy

There are a **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.**¹³ 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), **these funding commitments do not yet go far enough to meet the needs of survivors with a sustainable specialist sector.**¹⁴

Specialist service funding commitments include:

- ▶ £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 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. And the reality for many frontline services remains precarious – for example over 75% of Rape Crisis Centres were expecting a reduction or loss in services in 2025.¹⁵
- ▶ The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) has committed an additional £5m 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.

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

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

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

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

- ▶ Increased funding commitments from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the local provision of safe accommodation (£499m over the next 3 years – a £19m increase). Sector organisations have advised that further and more sustainable funding is required to meet demand for refuge spaces. For example, Refuge estimates there remains a funding gap of £55.5m per year,¹⁶ whilst Women's Aid National Audit 2025 documented that 60.1% of referrals into refuge services were rejected over the past year, with the most common reason being capacity.¹⁷ It is important to stress the extent to which housing is a key barrier for survivors of VAWG, with domestic abuse the lead cause of homelessness in the UK, and note concerns about the lack of ringfenced funding for the domestic abuse aspect of the new homelessness, rough sleeping and domestic abuse fund.¹⁸

It is, however, **positive to see a commitment to “radically overhaul the support services commissioning landscape** 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”.¹⁹ 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.

VAWG Sector Five Key Tests

5. Cross-departmental commitments with oversight and evaluation:

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.

How well these tests are met by the government's VAWG Strategy

Cross-government

This strategy represents the most cross-government piece of work on VAWG to date: a welcome shift in the right direction, notably bringing health to the table.

In order to match up to the strong narrative of a ‘whole-society’ and ‘cross-government’ response, **its success will rely heavily on good strategic oversight to ensure its disparate parts are brought together as a whole.** This would help overcome what currently appears more of a **scattergun approach**, with an unwieldy action plan that lacks structure, focus and milestones, and actions ranging hugely in detail, scale and relevance.

Both actions and metrics are still disproportionately weighted towards criminal justice responses, which needs to be addressed.

¹⁶ Refuge (2026) [Home is where the Hurt is campaign](#)

¹⁷ Women's Aid England (2025) [Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025: The funding gap risking the future of domestic abuse services in England](#)

¹⁸ Solace (2025) [‘Where will I go?’ Access to housing for domestic abuse survivors](#)

¹⁹ Home Office (2025). [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy](#)

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

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.²⁰ 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.

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, ERAW 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 '*shifts in attitudes towards women, misogyny, and harmful behaviour*'.

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.

In general, the **M&E framework appears underdeveloped. In particular, we are concerned that it lacks an equalities lens** 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.²¹

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&E framework in consultation with the VAWG sector to ensure it is fit for purpose and equipped to address inequalities for minoritised survivors.

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 framework²² 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.

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

21 ERAW et al (2023) [What's Changed?: Government's 'End-to-End' Rape Review – Two Years On](#)

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

A full list of actions the government has committed to can be found in the **government's online action plan**. EVAW has also included key commitments and gaps within its annual policy report – **Snapshot 6th Edition: VAWG-Coded: From AI to Weaponisation – the Changing Landscape of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)** – from family courts to housing and the criminal justice system.

