



National Audit Office



REPORT

# Tackling violence against women and girls

Home Office

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SESSION 2024-25  
31 JANUARY 2025  
HC 547



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# Tackling violence against women and girls

Home Office

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## Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed on 29 January 2025

This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the  
National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House  
of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

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**Gareth Davies**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**  
**National Audit Office**

**23 January 2025**

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# CORRECTION SLIP

Title: Tackling violence against women and girls

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## Correction:

Figure 6 should total 126 commitments but sums to 125 due to an error in the 'Pursuing perpetrators' bar, which should show 17 instead of 16.

Text currently reads:

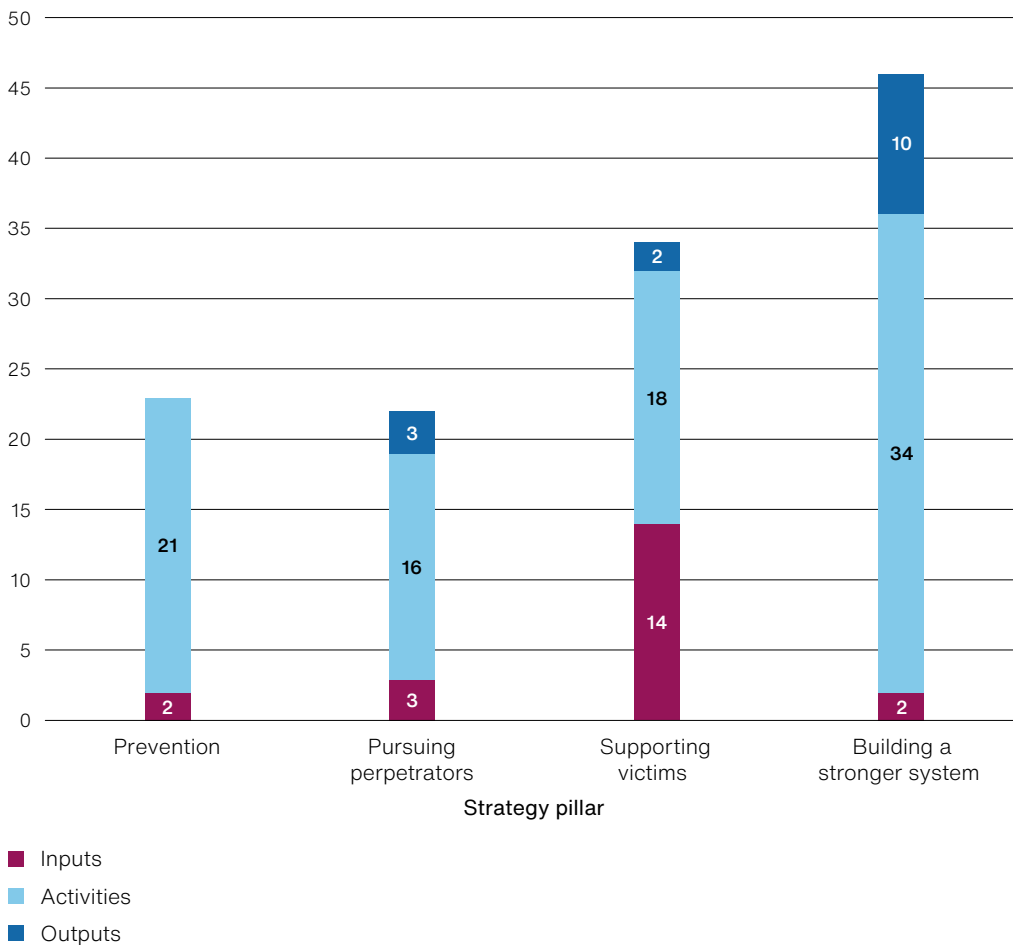
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### Figure 6

Types of commitments made in the Home Office's 2021 "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy and the 2022 "Tackling Domestic Abuse" Plan

The majority of the 126 commitments made were activity based, while none were outcome focused

Number of commitments



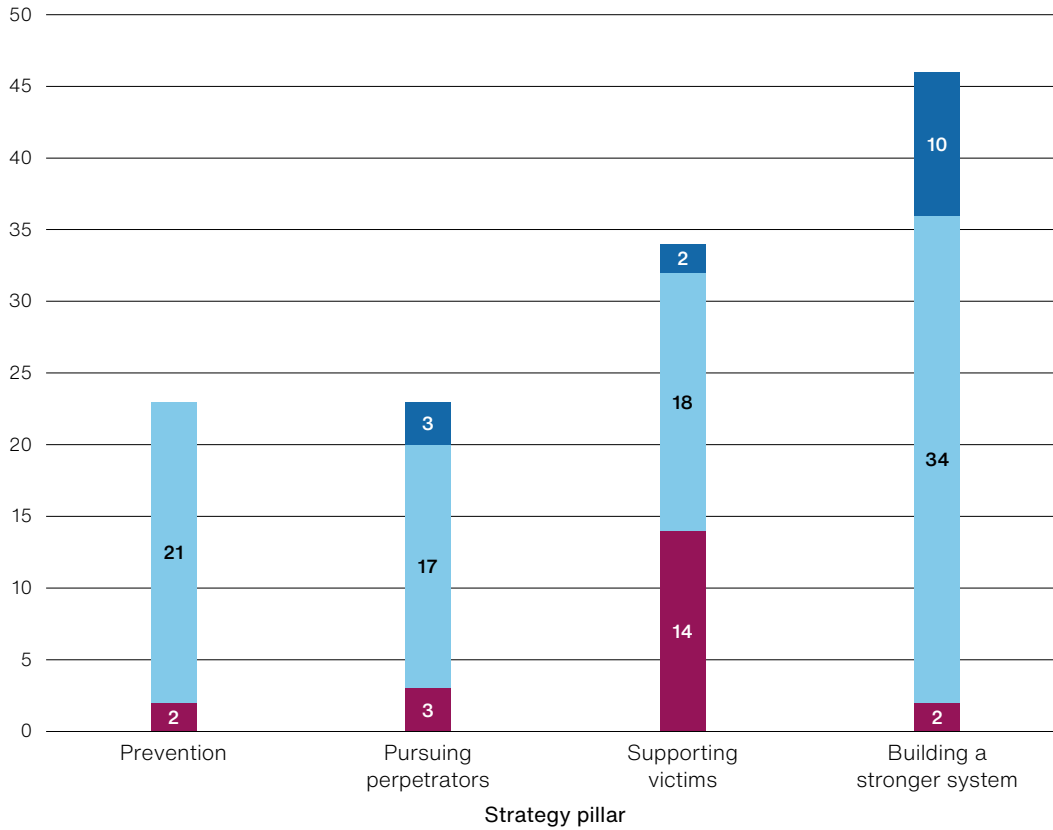
Text should read:

**Figure 6**

Types of commitments made in the Home Office's 2021 "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy and the 2022 "Tackling Domestic Abuse" Plan

The majority of the 126 commitments made were activity based, while none were outcome focused

Number of commitments



- Inputs
- Activities
- Outputs



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## Key facts

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**over  
1 in 4**

women will be a victim of sexual assault or attempted assault in their lifetimes

**20%**

of all police-recorded crime was related to violence against women and girls (VAWG) in 2022-23

**at least  
1 in 12**

women are victims of VAWG-related offences every year

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- 97%** of perpetrators of sexual offences were male in the year ending December 2023, with a high proportion known to the victim
- 86%** of victims of sexual offences were female in the year ending March 2022, according to police-recorded crime data
- 158** the mean number of days from police referring a rape case to the Crown Prosecution Service and the Crown Prosecution Service authorising a charge in April to June 2024. This is compared to a mean average of 46 days for all crime
- £84 billion** equivalent annual economic and social cost of domestic abuse in 2024-25 prices. This has been uplifted to current prices from a 2016-17 estimate produced by the Home Office
- £57 million** Home Office budget to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG), including domestic abuse in 2024-25
- 13** departments and other government bodies with commitments in the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan)
- 78%** percentage of commitments made across both the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan that had been met by July 2024 (the latest data available from the Home Office)

This report focuses on the Home Office’s leadership of the government’s response to violence against women and girls (VAWG). The terms ‘women’ and ‘victims’ are used interchangeably to reflect the gender-based nature of these crimes, although we acknowledge that women and girls do not represent all victims of VAWG-related offences. The term ‘victim’ is used as opposed to ‘survivor’ throughout the report.

We understand that some people may find the issues raised sensitive or upsetting and we have provided a list of organisations and services that are available to offer support at the end of this report.



# Summary

**1** Definitions of the term ‘violence against women and girls’ (VAWG) vary, but the government defines it as “acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls”. It covers crimes including rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and ‘honour’ killings), ‘revenge porn’ and ‘upskirting’.

**2** Over one in four women are estimated to be victims of sexual assault or attempted assault in their lifetime, and one in 12 women are victims of VAWG each year, although the actual number is likely to be much higher. The National Police Chiefs’ Council reported that, in 2022-23, 20% of all police-recorded crime was related to violence against women and girls. The victim was female in 86% of all police-recorded sexual offences in the year to March 2022. In the year ending December 2023, over 97% (23,723) of people convicted of sexual offences were male, and crimes are often committed by someone known to the victim.

**3** Violence against women and girls can have long-term impacts on victims, affecting them physically, mentally, socially and financially. It is estimated that the economic and social cost of domestic abuse could be as high as £84 billion. The Home Office last estimated the societal cost of rape cases in 2018, based on 2015-16 data, when it estimated that the 122,000 rape cases reported that year could have a societal cost of around £4.8 billion.

**4** In 2021, the then government introduced its strategy, “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” (the VAWG Strategy), which outlined a series of commitments focused on:

- prevention – to deliver long-term cultural and societal change;
- supporting victims – to increase support for victims and survivors including providing support services that are run by and for the communities they serve;
- pursuing perpetrators – to transform the criminal justice response to ensure all perpetrators of offences against women are brought to justice; and
- building a stronger system – working with multiple government departments to develop a joined-up system across health, justice, law enforcement, housing, social care and education.

In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent, and in 2022 the Home Office published a separate “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan).

**5** The Home Office leads on the government's response to tackling VAWG, including domestic abuse. However, achieving progress requires the commitment of multiple government departments. There are important roles for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice and other parts of the criminal justice system, the Department for Education and NHS England in, for example, identifying victims and supporting them to feel safe, educating young people in safe relationships and ensuring justice through the courts and prison systems.

**6** The new government has committed to halve the prevalence of VAWG within a decade as part of its 'mission' to make streets safer. The Home Office will lead this mission and is developing a new VAWG strategy. In this report, we have examined the Home Office's leadership of the 2021 "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the 2022 "Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan" (the Domestic Abuse Plan), to identify lessons to support the delivery of the government's ambition to halve violence against women and girls.

## **Key Findings**

### Progress against the 2021 strategy

**7 Violence against women and girls is a serious and growing problem.**

In 2023-24 the prevalence of sexual assault against women aged 16 to 59 in England and Wales (the percentage of the population estimated to have suffered a sexual assault each year) was higher than in 2009-10 (4.3% and 3.4% respectively). Conversely, the prevalence of domestic abuse against women was lower (9.2% and 7.4% respectively). Over the same period incidents of rape and sexual assault against women and girls recorded by police have increased almost fourfold, from 34,000 to 123,000, although this can in part be explained by improved recording of these crimes. The societal landscape against which these crimes are committed has also become increasingly complex and in recent years online harms (such as revenge porn) have been recognised as crimes in themselves (paragraphs 1.2, 1.4, 1.7 to 1.9 and Figures 1 and 2).

**8 To date, the Home Office has not led an effective whole-system response.**

Successfully addressing the harms caused by VAWG requires the coordinated effort and commitment of many government departments. But the cross-departmental governance in place did not ensure all departments were prioritising the VAWG Strategy's aims and were pulling in the same direction. The Home Office created a dedicated team to lead the VAWG Strategy, but it has found it challenging to get buy-in from other government departments. The Home Office's Officials' oversight group, established to progress the Strategy, did not meet until a year after the VAWG Strategy's launch. The Home Office has since revised its governance, which has been welcomed by some departments. While strong ministerial support can encourage cross-government working, the Ministerial oversight group for the VAWG Strategy only met four times in three years (paragraphs 1.10, 3.4 to 3.8).

**9 The Home Office has not had a full understanding of the scale of resources committed to tackling VAWG across government, limiting its ability to prioritise efforts.** As the lead department for tackling VAWG, the Home Office needs to understand the capacity and resources other bodies are committing to the VAWG Strategy so it can effectively coordinate and oversee their work. The Home Office has not centrally coordinated funding for VAWG across government and, in contrast with the 2021 illegal drugs strategy, the relevant departments did not prepare a joint spending review bid during the period of implementing the VAWG Strategy. Our analysis suggests other government departments spent at least £979 million between 2021-22 and 2023-24. The Home Office has historically underspent its own budget allocated to the VAWG Strategy, by an average of 15% between 2021-22 and 2023-24 (paragraphs 2.5 to 2.9 and Figure 7).

**10 The lack of a consistent definition for VAWG across public bodies and their approaches to measuring the scale of VAWG crimes has made it difficult to measure progress in a consistent way.** The Home Office's definition of VAWG includes all victims, across all ages and genders, whereas police forces only include women and girls. The Home Office told us it uses estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales to measure prevalence, which does not include children under the age of 16, even though they are included in the Strategy. The Home Office does not consider police-recorded crime an accurate indicator of the prevalence of VAWG, since it is likely to under-report crimes: the police only record one crime per victim/perpetrator relationship, even where multiple VAWG crimes are committed. This, in addition to gaps in data for some VAWG crime types such as 'honour'-based abuse, limits the data available to measure progress. A consistent definition and approach to measuring the scale of VAWG crimes across all of government and policing would help to create a better shared understanding of the scale of the challenge the government is trying to address (paragraphs 3.16 to 3.21 and Figure 12).

### Developing the strategy

**11 By July 2024, the Home Office had delivered 78% of the commitments in the VAWG Strategy.** Several commitments made in the VAWG Strategy were not new, but a continuation of pre-existing activities. Most of the commitments relate to inputs (such as additional funding), activities (such as holding meetings), or outputs (such as the publication of new guidance). In July 2024, there were 25 of 126 commitments still to deliver (excluding two which were stopped and one which was an ongoing commitment), most of which were the responsibility of the Home Office. The Home Office originally planned to implement all commitments by December 2024 but has not been on track since the beginning of the VAWG Strategy (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.4, Figure 6 and Appendix Two).

**12 The Home Office did not develop the VAWG Strategy based on an understanding of what works.** It has published three VAWG strategies since 2010, all with consistent aims, but we found little evidence that the Home Office had applied learning from previous strategies. The Home Office produced the 2021 VAWG Strategy at speed, largely based on work that was already in train. Despite commitments made in earlier strategies, the Home Office and wider government have a poor understanding of what works to prevent and tackle VAWG. As part of the 2021 VAWG Strategy, the Home Office spent at least £4.2 million from the 'What Works' fund, but the projects it funded are still in progress and have yet to provide insights to inform any future interventions (paragraphs 1.11, 1.12, 2.3 and 3.10 to 3.11).

**13 The Home Office has not made the most of the available expertise and knowledge to inform the VAWG Strategy.** The Home Office engaged with third sector stakeholders during the development of both the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan. However, stakeholders told us that it was not clear how this engagement informed the Home Office's approach. The ministerial governance board overseeing the VAWG Strategy has not consistently included the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Victims' Commissioner, National Police Lead for VAWG or third-sector specialists. The Home Office has held both minister- and official-led meetings with the third sector, although attendees noted that the invitee list for the more recent roundtables was large, limiting the scope for discussions about issues which disproportionately impact victims from marginalised groups. Although there are examples of local areas innovating in their approach to tackling VAWG, the Home Office has not had a mechanism for identifying and sharing good practice with other areas (paragraphs 2.15 to 2.18 and 3.5).

**14 The Home Office does not know what effect the government's work is having on VAWG.** The Home Office has been working to reduce VAWG since 2010, but the prevalence of sexual assault was higher in 2023-24 than 2009-10, while the prevalence of domestic abuse was lower. While the Home Office has undertaken some small pieces of evaluation, it did not allocate any of the funding dedicated to its VAWG work to evaluation. The Home Office developed a 'theory of change' for the Domestic Abuse Plan and retrospectively applied this to its VAWG Strategy. However, it has no plans to use this to evaluate the impact of the VAWG Strategy or Domestic Abuse Plan. The Home Office told us it would be difficult to attribute any changes to the VAWG Strategy due to the number of factors affecting VAWG (paragraphs 1.8, 1.11, 3.13 to 3.15 and Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 11).

**15 The Home Office has made little progress developing measures to prevent VAWG.** The VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan aimed to increase confidence in the police and levels of reporting. However, stakeholders have raised concerns about the capacity that exists to manage increased demand. The criminal justice system is already under significant pressure and victim support services, including refuges, are unable to meet demand, underlining the importance of preventing VAWG. Most prevention activities to date have focused on reducing reoffending rather than avoiding initial offences. Departments leading prevention activities in the VAWG Strategy told us that their greatest focus was on supporting victims (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.11 and Figure 5).

**16 The Home Office is conducting a review to improve its ability to tackle VAWG, in parallel with developing a new strategy, due in spring 2025.** The review aims to identify gaps in data, improve understanding of what works to tackle VAWG, and gather insights into cross-government capability. The review will predominantly involve consolidating existing evidence from across the Home Office and wider government rather than conducting primary research. The Home Office intends to use the review's findings to inform a new theory of change to underpin a future strategy. Despite the review being due to complete in spring 2025, the scope of the review was still evolving in November 2024. The Home Office will need to ensure that the findings from the review are fully integrated with the development of a new strategy to enable the benefits of this work to be realised (paragraph 3.22 and Figure 13).

## **Conclusion**

**17** Violence against women and girls is a significant and growing problem, affecting one in 12 women and causing significant harm. The Home Office leads the government's efforts to address VAWG, but to date these efforts have not improved outcomes for the victims of these crimes or the safety of women and girls more widely. The Home Office is not currently leading an effective cross-government response. It has a limited understanding of the extent of resources devoted to addressing VAWG across government and the impact this is having. Without this knowledge, the Home Office cannot be confident that the government is doing the best it can to keep women and girls safe.

**18** The new government has set an ambitious target to halve violence against women and girls within the next decade. To meet this ambition the Home Office will need to lead a coordinated, whole-system response that addresses the causes of VAWG. The Home Office's review of the existing evidence base could provide a foundation from which to develop the next strategy. But it will need to maintain a focus on continuous evaluation to ensure it can capture learning from local innovation and adapt its approach. The Home Office also needs to quickly establish the structures and incentives necessary to align all delivery partners behind the goal of reducing the significant harms caused by violence against women and girls.

## Recommendations

**19** Meeting the ambition to halve violence against women and girls will require strong cross-government leadership and the commitment of all departments that have a role in preventing and reducing VAWG. The Home Office, as the lead department for the Safer Streets mission and tackling violence against women and girls, should:

- a** establish a shared vision for how the government's target to halve violence against women and girls will be met, by:
  - agreeing a common definition of VAWG across government and policing and identifying the data that will be used to measure this; and
  - developing a system-level plan for halving VAWG that is informed by an evidence-based theory of change, places a greater emphasis on prevention, and is clear what all delivery partners must contribute.
- b** strengthen accountability for delivering against the government's target by:
  - establishing a cross-government team, based in the Home Office, to lead on the implementation of the new strategy;
  - reviewing existing governance structures and adapting these to align incentives and sharpen accountability for delivering; and
  - coordinating available funding for tackling VAWG, including through considering a joint spending review bid for the strategy.
- c** embed learning and evaluation through the new strategy by:
  - developing and embedding a long-term evaluation plan into the strategy backed by appropriate resources; and
  - encouraging local innovation, particularly on preventing VAWG, and learning from this to identify opportunities to scale up effective interventions.

# Part One

## Background

**1.1** Definitions of the term ‘violence against women and girls’ (VAWG) vary, but the government defines it as “acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls”. Crimes covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and ‘honour’ killings), ‘revenge porn’, ‘upskirting’ as well as many others.

**1.2** Over one in four women will be victims of sexual assault (or attempted assault) in their lifetime, according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the year ending March 2022. In 2024, the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) reported one in 12 women were victims of VAWG each year, although the actual number is likely to be much higher.<sup>1</sup> In the year ending June 2024, there were more than 194,000 police-recorded sexual offences, of which 36% (69,000 offences) were rape cases (**Figure 1** overleaf). Police-recorded crime data showed that there were nearly 621,000 cases of stalking and harassment in the year ending June 2024 and also showed that the victim was female in 86% of all sexual offences in the year ending March 2022.<sup>2</sup> In the year ending December 2023, more than 97% (nearly 24,000) of people convicted of sexual offences were male, and were often known to the victim. The police flagged nearly 831,000 recorded offences (against all people) as domestic abuse-related in the year ending June 2024, including more than 650,000 violence against the person offences.<sup>3</sup> Of all ‘violence against the person’ offences recorded, 33% were flagged as domestic abuse-related (**Figure 2** on page 13).

1 To demonstrate the scale of violence against women and girls, this report uses both the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data and police-recorded crime data. Data is likely to underestimate the true scale of violence against women and girls since victims may be reluctant to share their experiences as part of the CSEW or report to the police.

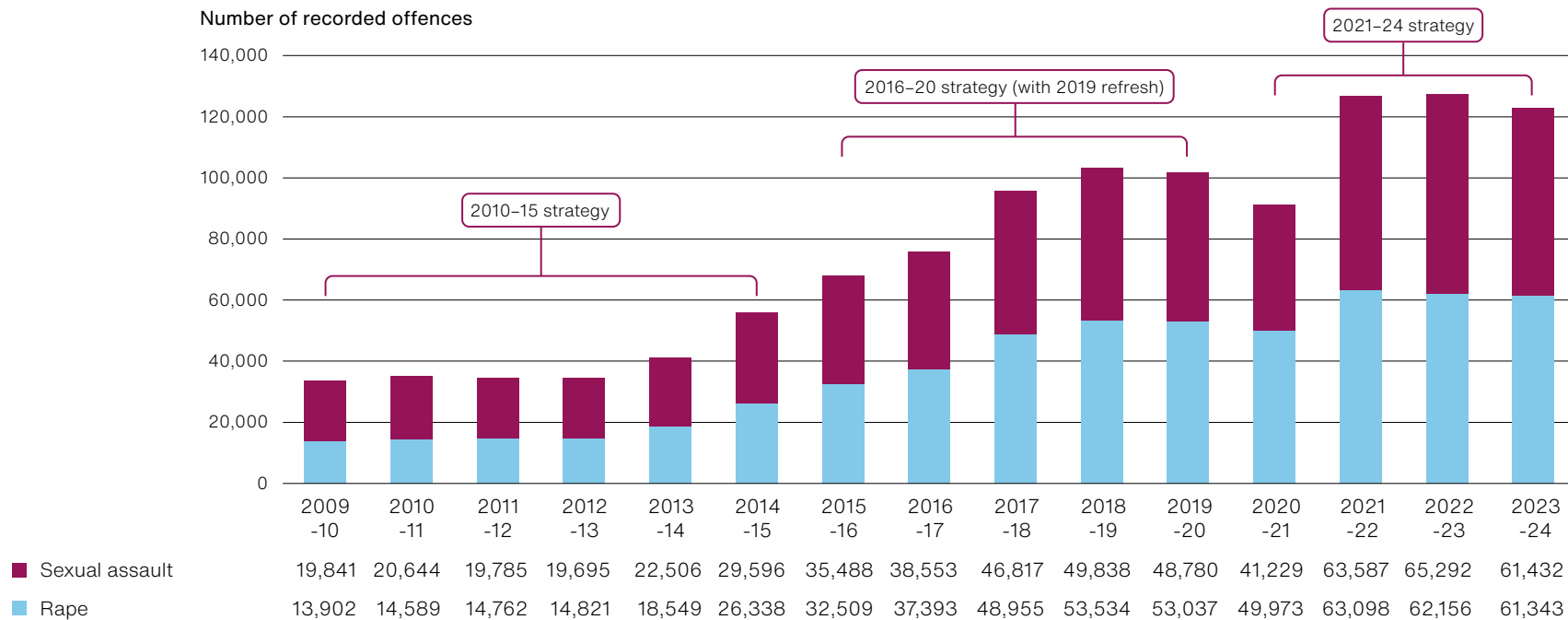
2 Police-recorded crime data for stalking and harassment cannot be broken down to exclude non-VAWG offences.

3 Under UK law, ‘violence against the person’ offences include a range of offences from relatively less serious offences such as harassment and common assault, to more serious offences such as murder, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm.

**Figure 1**

Rape and sexual assault crimes against women and girls recorded by the police between 2009-10 and 2023-24

Rape and sexual assault offences against women and girls recorded by the police have increased by 264% since 2009-10



**Notes**

- 1 These data include the following categories as outlined in the Office for National Statistics data: rape of a female; rape of a female aged 16 or over; rape of a female child under 16; rape of a female child under 13; rape of a female - undefined; indecent assault on a female; sexual assault on a female aged 13 and over; sexual assault on a female child under 13; unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13; unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16.
- 2 The term 'sexual assault' in police-recorded crime refers to one type of sexual offence, that is, the sexual touching of a person without their consent.
- 3 The Home Office published the "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy in July 2021.
- 4 The Home Office published the "Tackling Domestic Abuse" Plan in March 2022 following the passing of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021.

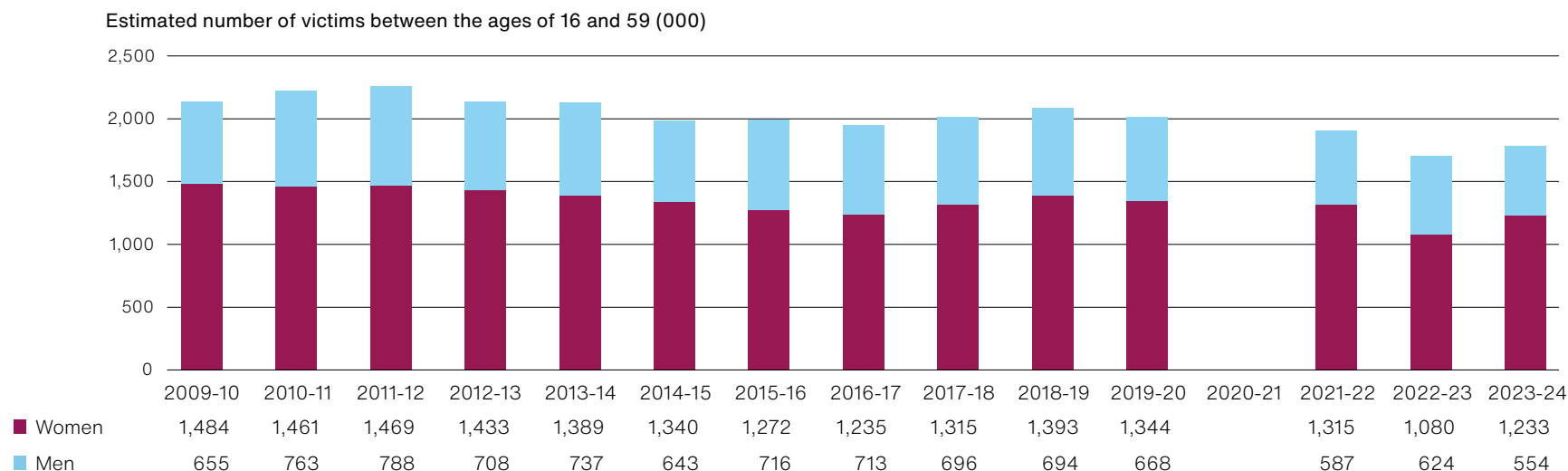
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Office for National Statistics police-recorded crime data, Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables March 2024 release, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesappendixtables>



## Figure 2

### Estimated number of victims of domestic abuse between 2009-10 and 2023-24

In the year ending March 2024, over 1.2 million women and over 550,000 men between the ages of 16 and 59 are estimated to have been victims of domestic abuse



#### Notes

- 1 Estimated victims includes all people aged between 16 and 59. From October 2021, the upper age limit for the self-completion module was removed from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), however, to demonstrate trend over time, this graph maintains consistency of age range of respondents as per earlier surveys. In **Figure 4** we provide an alternative statistic for the estimated number of victims of domestic abuse of 2.2 million, for the year ending June 2024. The 2.2 million includes all victims over the age of 16 and represents the 12 months up to, and including, June 2024.
- 2 Figures reported are estimates based on information gathered by the CSEW. The CSEW contacts households directly and invites them to record crimes they have experienced in the past year whether or not they were reported to the police.
- 3 The CSEW define domestic abuse as outlined in the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act, part 1: Domestic Abuse Act 2021, available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>.
- 4 The CSEW does not give an estimate of the number of victims of domestic abuse for the year 2020-21. The face-to-face CSEW was suspended on 17 March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was replaced with the telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW). Concerns around confidentiality and respondent safeguarding led to domestic abuse questions being excluded from the survey until 4 October 2021 when face-to-face interviewing resumed.
- 5 In the year ending March 2023 survey, an error in the survey resulted in missing data for some respondents from October 2022 to January 2023 inclusive. As a result, estimates for the year ending March 2023 for domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking are based on eight months of interviews and exclude the affected survey months.
- 6 Numbers are derived by multiplying the prevalence rate by the population aged 16 to 59 years in England and Wales (based on mid-2021 population estimates for England and Wales). Due to the way these estimates are calculated, the figures for men and women do not sum to all.
- 7 For more information about CSEW crime data see user guide: Guide to finding crime statistics – Office for National Statistics, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/methodologies/guidetofindingcrimestatisticsoct2016>.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Crime Survey for England and Wales data from the Office for National Statistics, November 2024 release, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/domesticabuseprevalenceandvictimcharacteristicsappendixtables>

**1.3** Some groups of women are more likely to experience abuse and less likely to receive support and justice than others. Between March 2020 and June 2021, domestic abuse charity Refuge found that black women were 14% less likely to be referred than white women who suffered domestic abuse, according to their own survey data. This is despite black women being 3% more likely to report the abuse they experience to the police than white women, over the same period. In March 2022, the CSEW found that people with a disability were more than twice as likely to be victims of domestic abuse or sexual assault (including attempts).

**1.4** The NPCC reported that 20% of all police-recorded crime was related to violence against women and girls in 2022-23. Police-recorded VAWG crime increased by 37% between 2018 and 2023, with one in six murders relating to domestic abuse in 2022-23. The National Police Lead for VAWG described the situation as having reached “epidemic levels”. Since June 2023, the government has recognised VAWG as a national threat by adding it to the Strategic Policing Requirement.<sup>4</sup>

### **Outcomes for victims**

**1.5** In the year ending June 2024, 77% of sexual offence cases that reached court ended in conviction (**Figure 3**). In the first quarter of 2024-25, the mean number of days from police referring a rape case to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the CPS authorising a charge was 158 days, compared to a mean average of 46 days for all crime. Despite the impact of these crimes, the proportion of sexual offence prosecutions leading to convictions was lower than other crimes (**Figure 3**).

**1.6** The low charge rate and long wait times contribute to a considerable drop out by rape victims throughout the case. Other reasons include victims feeling disbelieved or judged, the negative impact the process has on their mental health and the fear of giving evidence in court.

**1.7** Reporting of domestic abuse to the police is lower than estimated prevalence and only a minority of domestic abuse cases recorded by police lead to a charge. In the year ending June 2024, the CSEW estimated that there were around 2.2 million victims of domestic abuse over the age of 16; however, the police recorded only 831,000 offences. The Office for National Statistics reported that, in the year ending March 2024, 7.2% of domestic abuse-related crimes resulted in a charge or summons (**Figure 4** on page 16).

<sup>4</sup> The Strategic Policing Requirement sets out the Home Secretary’s view of the greatest threats to public safety and the national policing capabilities needed to counter those threats. Police and Crime Commissioners need to consider the Strategic Policing Requirement when issuing police and crime plans to local areas.

**Figure 3**

Proportion of completed prosecutions resulting in conviction, in the year ending June 2024

The proportion of sexual offence prosecutions leading to convictions was the lowest in the year ending June 2024 compared with all other crime types

Principal Offence Category	Percentage of completed prosecutions resulting in conviction (%)
Theft and handling	91.9
Drugs offences	90.4
Burglary	86.0
Criminal damage	85.2
Motoring offences	84.8
Fraud and forgery	84.7
Homicide	84.0
All other offences	82.3
Robbery	81.0
Public order offences	80.7
Offences against the person	79.3
Sexual offences	77.3

**Notes**

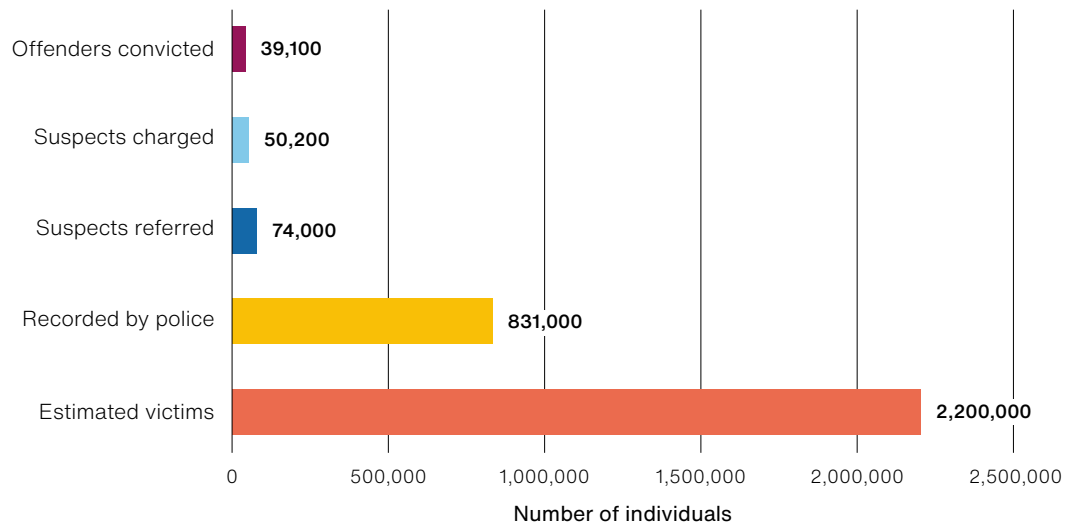
- 1 Categories listed are the 'principal offence category', this indicates the most serious offence which the defendant is charged with at the time the prosecution was finalised.
- 2 Offences are divided into 12 categories listed above; these are the categories used by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).
- 3 Prosecutions are recorded on a defendant basis. In some cases, multiple defendants may be prosecuted together.
- 4 Figures are those reported by the CPS based on the data derived from its case management system, figures are provisional and subject to change.
- 5 The 'principal offence category' comprises a range of individual offences. These cannot be disaggregated to report prosecution outcomes by a specific offence.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Crown Prosecution Service data, Q1 2024-25 release, available at: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-1-2024-2025>

**Figure 4**

The number of victims, recorded crimes, referrals, charges and convictions for domestic abuse in the 12 months to June 2024

In the year ending June 2024, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that there were around 2.2 million victims of domestic abuse over the age of 16

**Notes**

- 1 This graph uses datasets from three different sources. This graph is designed to illustrate that reporting of domestic abuse to the police is lower than estimated prevalence and only a minority of domestic abuse cases recorded by police lead to a charge.
- 2 This graph cannot be considered representative of the charge rate or conviction rate for domestic abuse for the year ending June 2024. Due to the way data are recorded, the number of suspects referred, or charged or offenders convicted cannot be considered as proportional to the 831,000 cases recorded by the police in that same year. These cases may have reached the criminal justice system outside this timeframe and are therefore not directly comparable.
- 3 This graph uses Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data for the estimated number of victims of domestic abuse. Estimated victims includes people aged 16 and over, including men and boys. At time of publication the relevant dataset for the year ending June 2024 had not been released so we have used data provided in the summary bulletin. See section 8 of: June 2024 bulletin, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2024#data-sources-and-quality>.
- 4 In **Figure 2** we provide an alternative statistic for the estimated number of victims of domestic abuse for the year ending March 2024 of approximately 1.8 million. Figure 2 includes estimated victims between the ages of 16 and 59 and represents the 12 months up to, and including, March 2024.
- 5 This graph uses the Office for National Statistics published bulletin (June 2024 release) for police-recorded crime data. See section 8 of: June 2024 bulletin, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2024#data-sources-and-quality>.
- 6 This graph uses Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) data for suspects referred, charged and offenders convicted for the year ending June 2024. See: CPS quarterly publication: pre-charge decisions management information, available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cps.gov.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fpublications%2FPre-Charge-Data-Tables-Q1-24-25.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK> and CPS quarterly publication: prosecution outcomes by crime types management information, available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cps.gov.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fpublications%2FProsecution-Crime-Type-Data-Tables-Q1-24-25.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>.
- 7 The CSEW define domestic abuse as outlined in the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act, part 1, available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>.
- 8 Estimates are derived by multiplying the prevalence rate by the population in England and Wales (based on mid-2021 population estimates for England and Wales). For more information about CSEW crime data see user guide, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/methodologies/guidetofindingcrimestatisticsoct2016>.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Crime Survey for England and Wales data, Office for National Statistics data and Crown Prosecution Service data for the year ending June 2024

**1.8** Between 2009-10 and 2023-24, incidents of rape and sexual assault offences against women and girls recorded by the police have increased almost fourfold, from 34,000 to 123,000. In 2023-24 the prevalence of sexual assault against women aged 16 to 59 in England and Wales (the percentage of women estimated to have suffered a sexual assault) was higher than in 2009-10 (4.3% compared to 3.4% respectively). Conversely, the prevalence of domestic abuse against women was lower (9.2% to 7.4%). The societal landscape against which these crimes are committed has also become increasingly complex and in recent years online harms (such as revenge porn) have been recognised as crimes in themselves.

**1.9** Violence against women and girls can have long-term impacts on victims, affecting them physically, mentally, socially and financially. A 2017 estimate of the economic and social cost of domestic abuse suggested it could be as high as £66 billion, equivalent to £84 billion today.<sup>5</sup> The Home Office last estimated the societal cost of rape cases in 2018 based on 2015-16 data, when it calculated that the 122,000 rape cases reported that year could have a societal cost of around £4.8 billion.

### **The Home Office's strategic approach to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG), including domestic abuse**

**1.10** The Home Office leads the government's response to violence against women and girls, although it relies on the contributions of other departments. For example, there are important roles for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice and other parts of the criminal justice system, the Department for Education and NHS England. The response to VAWG includes areas such as educating young people about safe relationships, providing local support to victims through support services or safe housing and ensuring that there is justice for the victims through pursuing perpetrators.

**1.11** Since 2010 the Home Office has published three separate strategies aimed at reducing the prevalence and supporting victims of VAWG. The Home Office calculated that between 2011-12 and 2020-21 cross-government funding to tackle VAWG had totalled £312.6 million (2021-22 prices).

**1.12** Under the previous government, the Home Office introduced its latest strategy, "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" (the VAWG Strategy), in 2021. In April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent, and the Home Office published the "Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan" (the Domestic Abuse Plan) in March 2022. The Home Office told us the decision to have a separate domestic abuse plan was against the advice of some experts in the VAWG field. While these crimes predominantly affect women, the scope of the government's strategy covers all victims, including men and boys. Both the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan were structured around four common pillars (**Figure 5** overleaf). We found little evidence that the Home Office had applied learning from previous strategies.

<sup>5</sup> The Home Office estimated the economic and social cost of domestic abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2017 to be £66 billion. We have uplifted the figure using the GDP index data released on 30 September 2024 to estimate the equivalent cost for the 2024-25 financial year.

**Figure 5**

The four pillars of the Home Office’s 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan

The pillars are prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators and building a stronger system

Pillar	Objective
Prevention	To prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) through addressing the root causes of the problem. The Home Office recognised that VAWG includes a wide variety of crimes, and that effective prevention may require a range of approaches. The Home Office also acknowledged that it had limited evidence and understanding of what works to prevent VAWG.
Supporting victims	To ensure victims can access quality and timely support, and that they have confidence that when they report abuse the criminal justice system will support them. The Home Office acknowledged that the response to victims of VAWG and domestic abuse had not been good enough.
Pursuing perpetrators	The Home Office identified that prosecution rates for VAWG crimes were very low. It intended to build on findings of the 2021 Rape Review and the roll-out of the new national operating model for the investigation and prosecution of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO), the output of Operation Soteria.
Building a stronger system	The Home Office identified the need for a more coordinated approach to addressing VAWG across government and society more widely. This included more effective engagement between organisations and the need to improve how support services were commissioned and delivered, particularly with regard to the needs of particular groups.

**Notes**

- 1 National Audit Office summary of the Home Office’s four pillars set out in the “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan).
- 2 The scope of the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan covers all victims, including men and boys.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office documentation

**1.13** Both the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan are overseen by a single team within the Home Office, which acts as coordinator across government. We cover ensuring long-term change, including what can be done to support the delivery of future strategies in more detail in Part Three.

**1.14** In its 2024 election manifesto the new government set out its plans for a mission-driven government. One of these missions is ‘Safer Streets’ which aims to halve serious violent crime and raise confidence in the police and criminal justice system. This includes an ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. In the rest of this report, we have examined the Home Office’s progress in delivering the 2021 VAWG Strategy and the 2022 Domestic Abuse Plan. We have identified key areas to support the delivery of the ‘Safer Streets’ mission along with any future strategies to achieve the government’s ambition of halving violence against women and girls. We have based this on our frameworks for effective working across government and operational delivery in government.

# Part Two

## Implementation

**2.1** This part of our report sets out the progress the Home Office and other government departments have made in delivering the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan) from the period including strategy development until July 2024. It discusses:

- progress against the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan;
- funding; and
- ensuring a victim-led approach.

### **Progress in delivering the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan**

**2.2** The Home Office assessed that it had met 78% of the 126 commitments from the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan by July 2024. The Home Office originally planned to implement the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan by the end of December 2024 but, while individual commitments did not have target implementation dates, it was not on track to deliver all commitments by the end of the completion of the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan. Out of 126 commitments, 25 are outstanding, two commitments have been stopped and one is ongoing. The Home Office is responsible for delivering most of the outstanding commitments.

**2.3** The Home Office told us that it developed the VAWG Strategy at speed. In contrast, before developing the Drugs Strategy the Home Office commissioned an independent review which lasted two years. The VAWG Strategy was developed over a period of months. A call for evidence, which the Home Office used to inform the VAWG Strategy and subsequent Domestic Abuse Plan, opened in December 2020. The Home Office published the VAWG Strategy in July 2021. Several commitments made in the VAWG Strategy were not new, but a continuation of pre-existing activities and stakeholders told us that commitments would have been completed even without the VAWG Strategy. The Home Office told us that, given the long-term nature of some interventions, they were still delivering commitments from the 2019 Strategy after the VAWG Strategy had been published.

**2.4** Most of the commitments relate to inputs (such as the provision of additional funding), activities (such as holding meetings) and outputs (including training of staff or publication of new guidance) (**Figure 6**). In June 2024 the Home Office undertook a lessons-learned exercise which recognised this limitation of the VAWG Strategy, noting difficulties in measuring impact when outcome is not the focus. Measuring progress against activities in this way risks providing a false sense of progress, as activities are conducted without all stakeholders understanding how they are contributing to the desired outcomes.

## Funding

**2.5** There is no overarching oversight of all government funding to support tackling VAWG. As the lead department for tackling VAWG, the Home Office does not track spending by other government departments so it cannot coordinate the cross-government funding effort. Our analysis suggests at least £979 million was spent by other government departments between 2021-22 and 2023-24.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the 2021 illegal drugs strategy, the Home Office and its partner departments did not submit a joint spending review bid to cover funding for the VAWG Strategy or the Domestic Abuse Plan.

**2.6** Our review of the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan suggests that different departments could be competing for the same services. The Domestic Abuse Plan referred to £47 million ring-fenced by the Ministry of Justice to deliver community-based services supporting victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence over three years, despite the Home Office already delivering support services through the VAWG Strategy.<sup>7</sup> Where multiple departments are competing for the same services, this can lead to overall cost increases as well as reducing the Home Office's ability to understand service demand. We have previously reported that aligning funding with objectives, governance and accountability is a key part of adopting a whole-system approach and ensuring focus on outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

6 Based on information provided by the Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; Department for Education; Department of Health and Social Care; NHS England; and the Department for Transport.

7 The Ministry of Justice subsequently ringfenced an additional £6 million per year for these services, taking the total to £65 million.

8 National Audit Office, *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders*, March 2021.

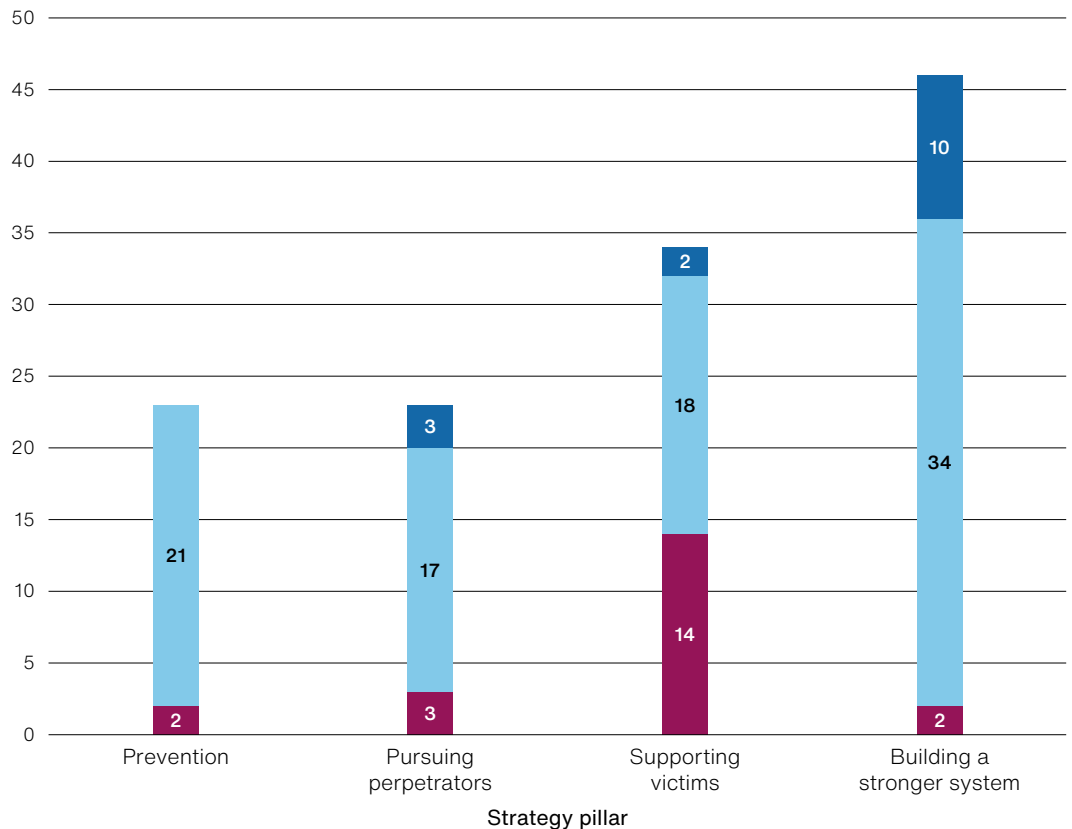


**Figure 6**

Types of commitments made in the Home Office's 2021 "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy and the 2022 "Tackling Domestic Abuse" Plan

The majority of the 126 commitments made were activity based, while none were outcome focused

Number of commitments



- Inputs
- Activities
- Outputs

**Note**

1 Analysis conducted on the basis of definitions developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

- **Inputs:** The funding, skills, knowledge and other resources used for the intervention.
- **Activities:** Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, including funding, knowledge and resources are brought together to produce specific outputs.
- **Outputs:** The things (for example trained staff or new guidance), produced as a result of an intervention. This may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.
- **Outcomes:** The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office data, using definitions developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**2.7** The VAWG Strategy included both pre-existing, such as the £11.1 million fund for Police and Crime Commissioners to run perpetrator programmes, and new commitments. These included seven new financial commitments for the Home Office to fund specific activities. Information provided by the Home Office confirms it met four of the seven financial commitments. The team responsible for delivery could not tell us whether two commitments had been met, because the responsibility for delivery sat elsewhere in the Home Office and they did not have oversight of that funding. The commitment to spend £3.2 million funding Operation Soteria (paragraphs 2.19-2.20) was not met (expenditure in 2021-22 was £1.6 million). There are no formal mechanisms by which the team responsible for delivery monitors spend by other groups within the Home Office, and the team told us that they rely on regular informal engagement.

**2.8** The Home Office has consistently underspent against its annual budget (**Figure 7**). The VAWG Strategy included an allocation of £43 million in 2021-22 to tackle VAWG, the final budget for the team responsible for delivery was £44.9 million for 2021-22, although it only spent £33.1 million that year. Between 2021-22 and 2023-24 the Home Office underspent by £22 million against its total £149 million budget (15%). Underspends reduce the potential for the Home Office to achieve impact. The Home Office told us that underspends in the early years were caused by a combination of factors:

- late confirmation of budgets, which happened as late as February 2022 for the 2022-23 financial year;
- in-year changes to budgets;
- new projects being scaled up; and
- being unable to repurpose underspends due to the time taken to implement new activities along with wider budget constraints before the final Home Office budget was confirmed through the supplementary estimates.

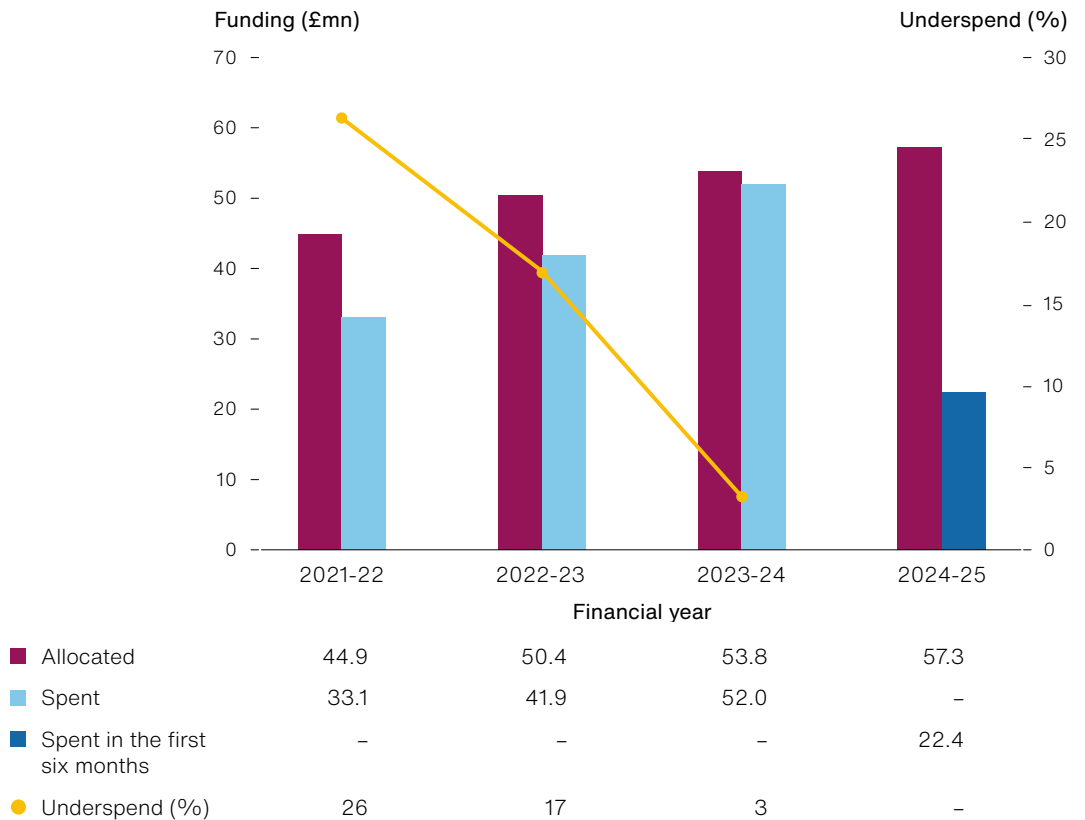
In 2023 the Home Office began work to improve forecasting accuracy and told us this work contributed to the reduced underspend for the 2023-24 financial year.

**2.9** The Home Office budget for the team responsible for tackling VAWG, including domestic abuse has increased every year since 2021-22, to £57 million in 2024-25. The Home Office team has spent £149 million between April 2021 and the end of September 2024 tackling VAWG. The Home Office team tracks spending against thematic grant streams such as frontline and support services, but it does not track spending against specific commitments which would be attributable to either the VAWG Strategy or Domestic Abuse Plan.

**Figure 7**

The budget and spend of the team responsible for tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG), including domestic abuse, within the Home Office, 2021-22 to 2024-25

**The Home Office has consistently under-spent against its budget although the percentage underspend had decreased to 3% in 2023-24**



**Notes**

- 1 The financial information presented relates to all activities undertaken by the team within the Home Office responsible for delivering the 2021 "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy and the 2022 "Tackling Domestic Abuse" Plan.
- 2 Expenditure reported for 2024-25 relates only to the period from April 2024 to the end of September 2024. The Home Office has told us that expenditure has historically been weighted towards the second half of the financial year.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office documents

## Ensuring a victim-led approach

**2.10** The risk of becoming a victim of violence against women and girls is greater for certain cohorts of women. Both the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan highlight the importance of delivering a victim-led approach to tackling VAWG. This is to ensure that support available to victims is tailored towards specific needs, no matter how complex. Recognising this, the Home Office planned to increase the number of victims able to access specialist support both at a local and national level, and made a series of commitments to increase funding, including for specialist and ‘by and for’ services.<sup>9</sup> The Home Office committed to:

- doubling funding for the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, and further increasing funding for all the national helplines;
- increasing funding for specialist helplines;
- increasing funding for ‘by and for’ service provision; and
- increasing funding for organisations who provide specialist support to children affected by domestic abuse.

**2.11** Between 2020-21 and 2023-24 the government increased the funding it provided to VAWG helplines from £1.7 million to £3.2 million. Between 2021-22 and 2023-24 it increased funding for ‘by and for’ services from £1.5 million to £2.8 million.<sup>10</sup> From 2021-22, the Home Office changed the way in which it categorised its financial data showing funding provided to VAWG support services. This change makes it difficult to compare data from 2020-21 with those from subsequent financial years but it does not mean that no funding was provided to ‘by and for’ services in 2020-21 (**Figure 8**). The Home Office told us that this change was made to align the data better with the ambitions of the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan. The Home Office receives quarterly data from grant recipients which include estimates of how many service users have been supported. The Home Office has also evaluated grants on an annual basis since 2021-22 to assess the impact being made and identify challenges to delivery. However, the Home Office told us that more could be done to use this information to inform its approach to funding these services.

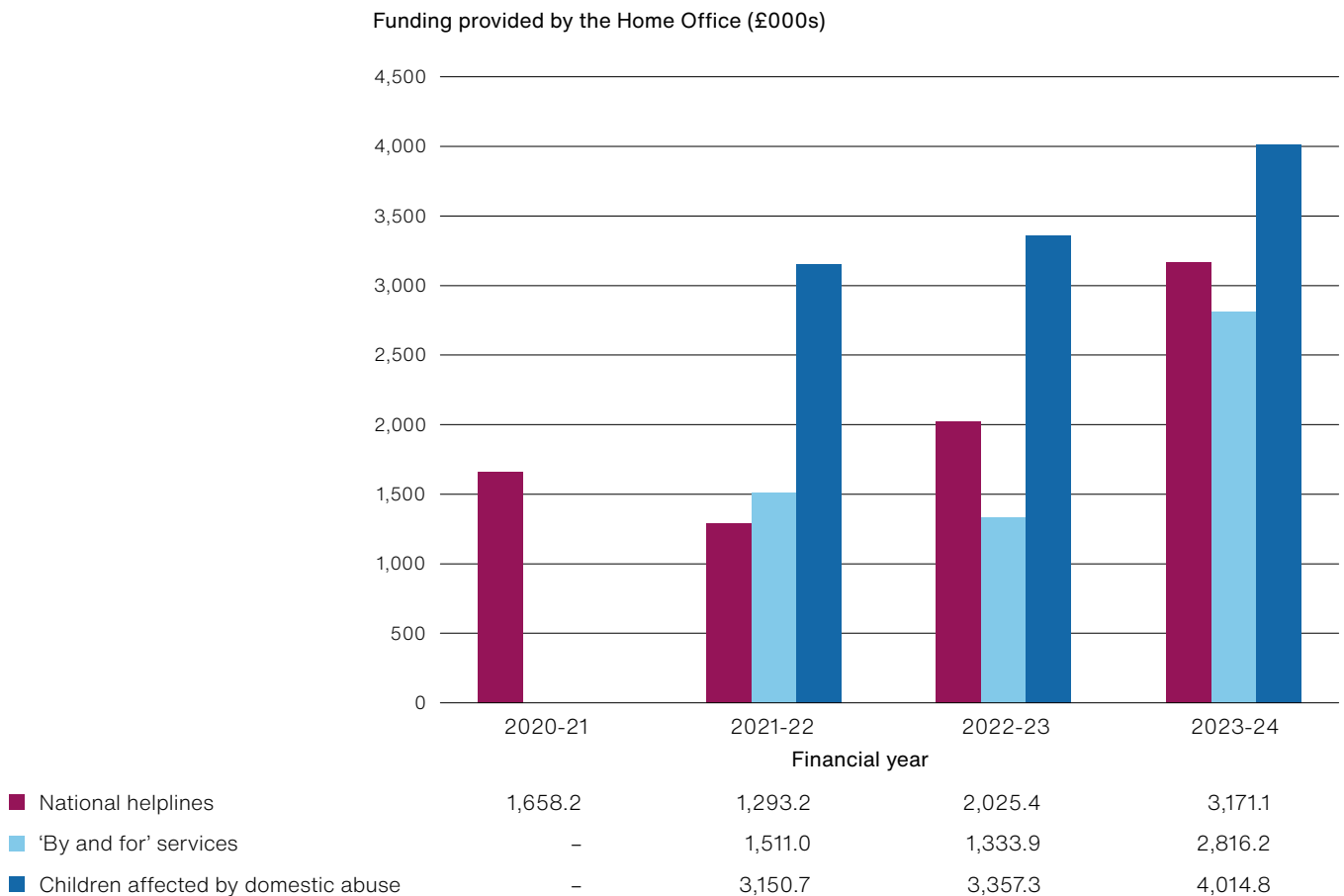
<sup>9</sup> Specialist services include provision designed specifically to support victims from ethnic minority backgrounds, deaf and disabled victims, victims with learning disabilities, male victims, LGBT+ victims, migrant victims, children and young people and older victims. ‘By and for’ services are specialist services that are led, designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve (for example survivors from ethnic minority backgrounds, deaf and disabled victims and LGBT+ victims).

<sup>10</sup> These data do not differentiate between funding for the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, specialist helplines and other VAWG-related national helplines.

**Figure 8**

## Government funding for support services, 2020-21 to 2023-24

The government has nearly doubled funding for national helplines and 'by and for' services between 2021-22 and 2023-24

**Notes**

- 1 The sum of the categories presented above does not represent the Home Office's total funding provided to all services supporting victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG). These categories relate to specific commitments made within the 2021 "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls" Strategy and the 2022 "Tackling Domestic Abuse" Plan.
- 2 From 2021-22, the Home Office changed the way in which it categorised its financial data showing funding provided to VAWG support services. This change makes it difficult to compare data from 2020-21 with subsequent financial years, but it does not mean that no funding was provided to children affected by domestic abuse, or to 'by and for' services in 2020-21.
- 3 These data do not differentiate between funding for the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, specialist helplines and other VAWG-related national helplines.
- 4 Specialist services can be defined as: provision designed specifically to support victims from ethnic minority backgrounds, deaf and disabled victims, victims with learning disabilities, male victims, LGBT+ victims, migrant victims, children and young people and older victims.
- 5 'By and for' services are specialist services that are led, designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve (for example, victims from ethnic minority backgrounds, deaf and disabled victims, and LGBT+ victims).

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office financial data

**2.12** Government commissioning of support services is not straightforward, in part due to some funding streams being distributed from other organisations across government. For example, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) provides funding to Police and Crime Commissioners, which support services can then bid for locally. MoJ and the Home Office also commission some services nationally, such as helpline services for victims (for instance, the 24/7 helpline funded by the MoJ or the Revenge Porn Helpline funded by the Home Office). Funding may also be provided through alternative streams to support separate initiatives which, in part, support the government’s ambition of reducing VAWG but also have wider strategic objectives, for example the Safer Streets Fund.

**2.13** In our report *Lessons learned: a planning and spending framework that enables long-term value for money*, we reported that the government’s spending cycle does not necessarily align with the needs of its partners (in this case, services supporting victims).<sup>11</sup> In some instances, initiatives may require funding commitments that extend beyond one planning and spending cycle. Uncertainty over funding commitments make it difficult to build effective partnerships with local government and the voluntary sector, and to develop pipelines of investment and skills in areas with long-term challenges, such as VAWG.

**2.14** The Home Office told us that it acknowledges the value of specialist and ‘by and for’ services and has taken steps to ensure these services are supported. For example, the Home Office told us that the competition between bids has been designed to enable ‘by and for’ organisations to receive funding through consortia working, so that larger organisations can support smaller organisations by helping to manage financial and operational risks. The Home Office has implemented a minimum threshold bid of £150,000 to manage the volume of bids received and discourage organisations without a specialist VAWG focus. Despite this, the bidding process still presents barriers to organisations receiving sufficient funding, especially ‘by and for’ services. Some of the key challenges are as follows:

- **Lack of long-term funding:** until recently, funding was provided for a year at a time and organisations were required to reapply annually. We heard from stakeholders that this limited organisations’ ability to recruit and retain specialist staff as they were unable to provide long-term employment security;
- **Resource intensive processes:** some stakeholders told us the bidding process was resource intensive, and larger organisations were more likely to have the internal expertise and capability to design successful bids. Other stakeholders have been positive about the assistance the Home Office has provided to improve the quality of bids; and
- **Disbenefits of consortia bidding:** smaller organisations combining bids with larger organisations increases the risk that the value of specialist and ‘by and for’ services is diluted, counteracting the benefits associated with these organisations.

<sup>11</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Lessons learned: a planning and spending framework that enables long-term value for money*, Session 2024-25, HC 234, National Audit Office, October 2024.

## Understanding the needs of local partners

**2.15** In our report *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders* we emphasised the importance of effective engagement with sector experts such as those supporting victims at the local level.<sup>12</sup>

Engagement improves understanding of the diversity of service users' needs while ensuring that changes to policy or processes do not unintentionally harm a particular group of individuals. Focusing on quality, as defined by those who have experienced violence against women and girls, ensures the diversity of service users' needs are met. Stakeholders have told us about innovative approaches taken by local delivery partners aimed at tackling VAWG (paragraphs 2.19 and 2.20). However, the Home Office does not have a formal mechanism for identifying and sharing good practice with these organisations.

**2.16** The Home Office engaged with third sector stakeholders to gather expertise during the development of both the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan. Prior to publication, the Home Office conducted 16 focus groups covering core themes related to the development of the VAWG Strategy, with invitees including charity workers, local government representatives and academics. The Home Office held one meeting with third sector experts in October 2020, and one roundtable hosted by the then Home Secretary in July 2021, a week prior to the launch of the VAWG Strategy, to brief the sector on the upcoming Strategy. Between October 2021 and January 2022, the Home Office conducted two roundtables and three director-chaired meetings with invitees specialising in domestic abuse support.

**2.17** Following the publication of the Domestic Abuse Plan in March 2022, the Home Office held five roundtables including both ministerially led meetings and focused discussions on specific VAWG issues, for example economic and 'honour'-based abuse. Outside of any routine engagement, Home Office officials have chaired four stakeholder meetings since March 2022 to provide progress updates on specific commitments. In January 2023, the Home Office began holding six-monthly VAWG stakeholder meetings chaired by the then Safeguarding Minister to provide insights and understand sector priorities.

**2.18** Stakeholders told us that more transparency is needed to demonstrate how third sector engagement has been used to inform the Home Office's approach to tackling violence against women and girls. Stakeholders noted that the invitee list for the more recent roundtables is large, which limits the scope for discussions about issues impacting marginalised victims. Stakeholders also raised concerns around the lack of progress updates on wider strategic objectives, the decision to develop a separate VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan, and clarity over what the strategies are working to achieve.

<sup>12</sup> National Audit Office, *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders*, March 2021.

## Operation Soteria

**2.19** The Home Office has invested in the development of a new approach to the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) crimes. Operation Soteria began as an initiative in Avon and Somerset Police. The Home Office committed £3.2 million to the programme in 2021-22 and it is currently funded until March 2025. Although this work aims to deliver some of the same strategic objectives, it is not part of the VAWG Strategy or the Domestic Abuse Plan. Avon and Somerset Police are planning to expand this approach to other crimes such as domestic abuse.

**2.20** Operation Soteria is an example of good practice in its use of an academic-led, evidence-based intervention, focused on perpetrator behaviour and providing support to victims. Police forces told us that the Soteria approach was working well, with good support from the National Police Chiefs' Council programme team. Forces echoed the findings of the police inspectorate, noting that, while the model held promise, it would only achieve its potential if RASSO investigations teams were properly resourced and the Soteria approach was consistently implemented and championed within each police force.<sup>13</sup> While Soteria has clear potential to improve RASSO investigations and therefore reduce overall levels of VAWG, it is focused on a relatively narrow area of activity and requires other parts of the system to work effectively (for example, the courts and prison systems).

<sup>13</sup> His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, *Progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations*, August 2024.



## Part Three

### Ensuring long-term change

**3.1** In its 2024 election manifesto, the new government set out its plans for a mission-driven government. One of these missions is 'Safer Streets' which aims to halve serious violent crime and raise confidence in the police and criminal justice system. This includes an ambition to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) within a decade. Achieving this will require a whole-system approach, necessitating a strong cross-government response and buy-in from relevant government departments. This part outlines how the Home Office aims to ensure long-term change, including what more can be done to support the delivery of future strategies and deliver on the government's ambition to halve VAWG in a decade. We have identified three key areas:

- whole-system approach;
- prioritising prevention; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

**Figure 9** overleaf summarises the lessons we have identified from previous work for effective cross-government working.

#### **Whole-system approach**

**3.2** A whole-system approach is needed to deliver complex, cross-government priorities to achieve a shared outcome. Effective cross-government working maximises the impact of interventions, provides an opportunity to share good practice and limits unintended outcomes. It can, however, be resource-intensive, may cost more to get right, and make accountability and funding arrangements more complex. As the lead department for tackling violence against women and girls, the Home Office needs to understand the capacity and resources other bodies are committing to the strategy so it can effectively coordinate and oversee their work.

## Figure 9

### Our evaluative framework for effective working across government

The National Audit Office's (NAO's) good practice guidance highlights important factors for successfully implementing cross-government working

#### Taking a whole-system approach

A clear understanding of what the system is, with all parties involved in developing a picture of how the system works and incentivised to work towards agreed system-level goals.  
An integrated system-level plan developed and maintained aligning working of all parties, managing interdependencies and system-wide constraints.  
Measurable objectives set for bodies responsible for delivering change that are aligned and consistent with overall cross-government goals.  
Capable leaders at all levels of the system drive joined-up working and foster a culture that engages 'hearts and minds' in achieving the goal.

#### Setting up whole-system working

Departments should develop a convincing narrative for why cross-government work is necessary, what it is intended to achieve and how it will provide benefits.

A successful cross-government programme will demonstrate clear incentives for all departments involved.

Clear accountability structures need to be in place to allow senior leaders to be held to account for delivery.

Departments should establish a clear framework for joint working. This should include robust governance structures and clear written agreement between the departments about mutual obligations and responsibilities.

Senior civil servants should provide strong leadership for cross-government working. Leaders should encourage, recognise and reward working collaboratively.

Cross-government projects or programmes need to have senior sponsors, and departments should embed expectations about collaborative working in the project or programme's objectives.

#### Delivering whole-system working

Putting in place robust structures and governance frameworks (such as a Senior Responsible Owner from the lead department) are vital to helping mitigate those risks to cross-government working associated with managing constant change and staff turnover.

For effective cross-government working, departments should manage risks by setting clear short-, medium-, and long-term objectives. Clear communication between departments will help strengthen relationships and ensure resources are used effectively. It is also important to integrate progress and spend monitoring across the programme, to highlight risk areas and inform decision-making.

Departments should set key performance indicators to reflect the desired joint outcomes. Departments involved should share access to, and understanding of, performance metrics and spend data across departments to support this. This information should be used regularly in decision-making.

Good-quality and joined-up datasets are essential for supporting good, evidence-based decision-making. The lead departments need a holistic view of all available datasets across the departments involved in delivering the joint priority outcome.

#### Improving whole-system working

Our audit framework for *Evaluating government spending* (2022) noted that evaluation allows the government to make informed decisions and helps it to learn what works. This allows for improved design and implementation of future initiatives and a greater likelihood of objectives being achieved. The government has taken steps to undertake more evaluation, setting up the Evaluation Task Force, a joint unit staffed by Cabinet Office and HM Treasury specialists whose job it is to ensure that robust evidence on the effectiveness of policies and programmes sits at the heart of government spending decisions.

The government should routinely identify and share good practice in how departments can work across government effectively.

Departments working on cross-government projects and programmes should have access to advice and support on how to work across government effectively. This should include open discussions between the departments involved about what works well and where improvements are needed, and by drawing on central advice and support, evaluation and developing insights into what works.

#### Note

- 1 Information presented is a summary of information provided in the following National Audit Office reports: Comptroller and Auditor General, *Lessons learned: Cross-government working*, Session 2022-23, HC 1659, National Audit Office, July 2023; National Audit Office, *Cross-government working: Good practice guide for leaders and practitioners*, July 2023; Comptroller and Auditor General, *Progress combatting fraud*, Session 2022-23, HC 654, National Audit Office, November 2022; National Audit Office, *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders*, March 2021.

Source: National Audit Office summary of published National Audit Office reports

**3.3** In our report, *Reducing the harm from illegal drugs* we noted the Home Office had created the Joint Combating Drugs Unit (JCDU), a team hosted by the Home Office, but made up of staff seconded to the Home Office from other government departments involved in reducing drug harms.<sup>14</sup> This helped to ensure senior level support and collaboration. Although the Home Office recognised a cross-government response would be needed to address VAWG, it did not use this approach.

## Governance

**3.4** The Home Office set up two groups to oversee the delivery of the “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan) (**Figure 10** overleaf):

- a ministerial group to oversee the implementation of policy, projects and interventions; and
- an officials’ group to support the ministerial group, staffed by directors and deputy directors from departments responsible for delivering the commitments in the VAWG Strategy.

**3.5** The Home Office planned that the Home Secretary, supported by a cross-government ministerial group, would oversee the implementation of the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan. The ministerial group met infrequently; once in December 2021, and then three times between April 2023 and May 2024. The Home Office told us that ministerial engagement has been important to help encourage cross-government progress, and churn in ministers may have had a negative impact on maintaining focus. During the delivery of the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan there have been several Home Secretaries, but only one attended the cross-government ministerial group, in May 2024. The Home Office initially recommended the inclusion of the VAWG National Policing Lead, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victims’ Commissioner, although this advice was later revised to include these individuals by invitation only. By contrast, the Rape Review led by the Ministry of Justice in 2021 included these individuals in its programme governance, in addition to victim support organisations.<sup>15</sup>

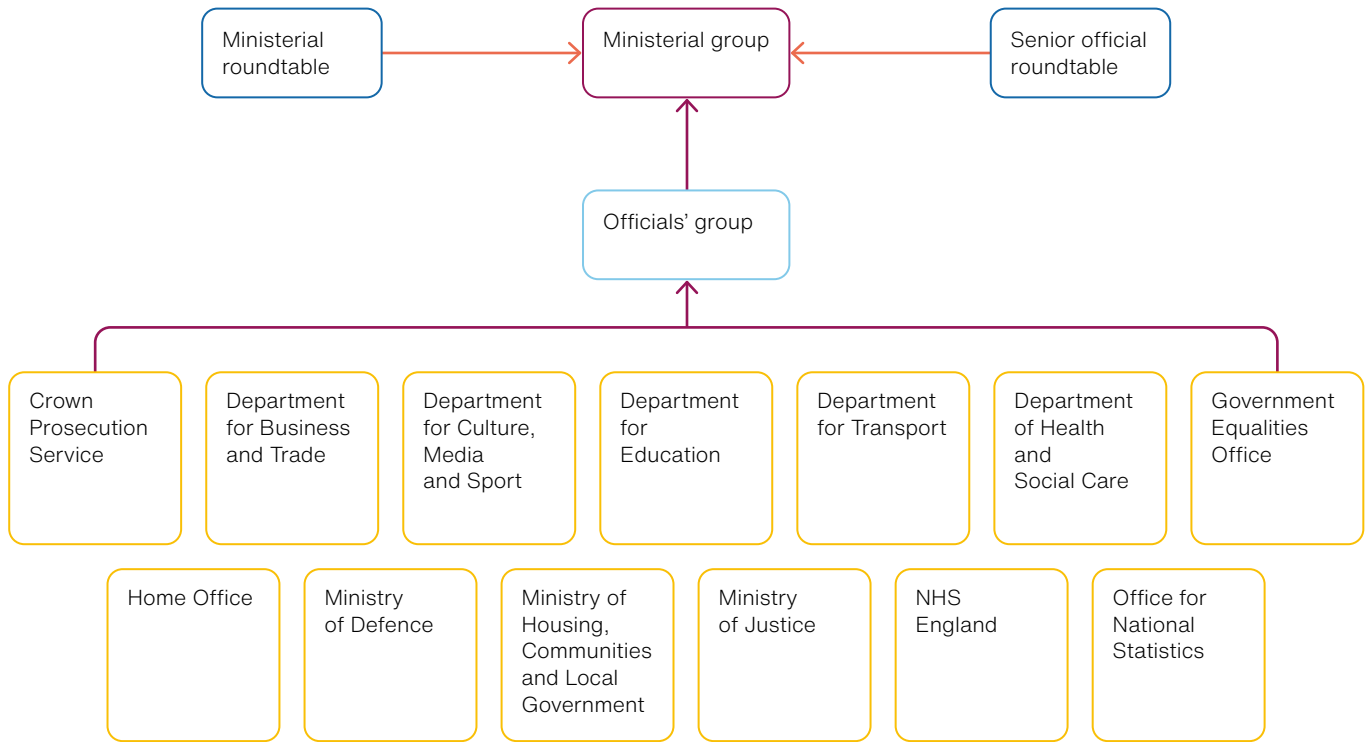
<sup>14</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Reducing the harm from illegal drugs*, Session 2022-23, HC 1864, National Audit Office, October 2023.

<sup>15</sup> The 2021 end-to-end Rape Review was conducted by the Ministry of Justice in response to historically low levels of charging and prosecution for rape offences. The review examined each stage of the criminal justice response to rape offences and made a series of recommendations for improving prosecutions and provision of support to victims throughout the process; HM Government, *The end-to-end rape review report on findings and actions*, CP437, June 2021, available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60ed551c8fa8f50c6ef84fbc/end-to-end-rape-review-report-with-correction-slip.pdf>

**Figure 10**

Governance of the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan)

**13 government departments and bodies have responsibility for delivering the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan**



- Ministerial level
- Officials level
- External
- Government departments/Implementing bodies
- ➔ Reports to
- ➔ Informed by

**Notes**

- 1 The Officials' group is attended by violence against women and girls (VAWG) leads from relevant departments and was implemented to support the ministerial group.
- 2 The 13 departments shown in the figure are those with commitments under the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan.
- 3 The Officials' group has attendees from departments without commitments which are not included in the figure.
- 4 The Home Office has engaged with sector experts through roundtables led by both ministers and senior officials.
- 5 Following a machinery of government change in 2022, responsibilities which previously lay with Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) were transferred to the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT). However, the commitments listed in the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan were completed by DCMS while responsibility still lay with it.
- 6 Since October 2024 the Government Equalities Office has been known as the Office for Equality and Opportunity.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office documents

**3.6** Despite the VAWG Strategy being published in July 2021, the Officials' group did not meet until a year later and did not meet as often as originally planned. The Home Office told us the infrequency of meetings was because it was developing its governance structures, including seeking ministerial approval for its preferred approach. When meetings did occur, actions were allocated to departments but not followed up at subsequent meetings. Some government departments were positive about Home Office engagement, but did note there was duplication of effort when providing progress updates. The Home Office did not routinely include all government bodies with responsibility for delivering commitments, for example NHS England, in meetings to develop the Strategy.

**3.7** The Home Office told us that it has lacked leverage over, and buy-in from, all government departments involved in delivering the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan. While it is the lead department, the Home Office has not provided most departments with funding to deliver their strategy commitments, some of which are delivered through departments' own budgets. This may have limited its influence over other departments.

**3.8** Our report *Lessons learned from Major Programmes* highlighted the importance of adopting an agile approach to governance arrangements.<sup>16</sup> Refreshes in governance can provide a useful opportunity to consider membership against an evolving landscape and ensure structures are staffed by the correct individuals. The Home Office revised the governance in 2023, after which ministerial attendance increased. The changes implemented were also welcomed by some departments.

### **Prioritising prevention**

**3.9** Reducing violence against women and girls, in line with the new government's priorities, will require a greater focus on, and a more innovative approach to, prevention. Stakeholders have raised concerns about tackling VAWG through a criminal justice-based response, noting the pressure this would place on other parts of the system, including housing, courts and prison places. Stakeholders told us it is not practicable to tackle VAWG solely through a criminal justice or victim support-based approach.

<sup>16</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Lessons learned from Major Programmes*, Session 2019–2021, HC 960, National Audit Office, November 2020.

**3.10** The Home Office and wider government have a limited understanding of what works in preventing VAWG. The VAWG Strategy stated that while some initiatives, such as awareness-raising activities (for example communication or advocacy campaigns), showed promise, there was limited evidence on their effectiveness at reducing VAWG or changing perpetrator behaviour. The government needs evidence of what works so it can effectively design, fund and implement interventions with confidence they will have the desired effect. Since 2021-22, the Home Office has spent at least £4.2 million on new research into what works, but the projects funded have yet to be completed and have yet to provide significant insights to inform any future interventions. The Home Office told us it intends to use the results from these projects as part of its bid in the 2025-26 Spending Review. The Home Office had limited evidence of what works from prior iterations of the Strategy to draw on in developing the 2021 version, despite commitments each time to improve the evidence available. The Home Office told us this lack of evidence is a wider problem which also affects its international counterparts.

**3.11** Although prevention is one of the pillars of both the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan, to date, the Home Office has not prioritised prevention activities. The majority of the Home Office's VAWG-specific prevention activity focuses on addressing re-offending rather than preventing VAWG in the first instance. A quarter of commitments relating to prevention were allocated to the Department for Education (DfE), however DfE told us that it had spent £0.52 million across all activities relating to the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan between 2021-22 and 2023-24, with much of its work on supporting victims rather than prevention. A Home Office exercise to reallocate funding made available in 2022-23 considered 23 activities, but only two referenced prevention. A similar exercise in 2023-24 gave no additional funding to prevention activities. As part of its own prevention activities the Home Office delivered the 'Enough' campaign, which aimed to deliver long-term change in attitudes. Despite the challenges demonstrating impact from communications campaigns (paragraph 3.10), DfE spoke positively about the impact achieved. The Home Office acknowledged that it has not prioritised prevention and that the mission-driven approach (see paragraphs 1.14 and 3.1) may help address this.

## Monitoring and evaluation

**3.12** HM Treasury's *Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation* highlights the benefits of using evaluation to inform thinking before, during and after an intervention's implementation.<sup>17</sup> Evaluation can:

- help manage risk and uncertainty;
- improve current interventions by providing the evidence to make better decisions;
- provide a general understanding of what works and generate examples for future policy-making; and
- develop evidence to inform future interventions.

**3.13** The Home Office did not allocate funding within the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan to evaluate impact. Instead, work is funded by the Home Office's existing analysis and insights budget, which faces competition for resources from other areas of the Home Office. The Home Office recognised the importance of evaluation, but told us that prioritising it is challenging when budgets are under pressure, particularly when it can be perceived as diverting funding from frontline services.

**3.14** The VAWG Strategy was developed without a theory of change, although the Home Office designed a theory of change during the development of the Domestic Abuse Plan which was then retrospectively applied to both the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan (**Figure 11** overleaf).<sup>18</sup> The Home Office does not intend to evaluate the extent to which it has achieved the intended outcomes using the theory of change. The Home Office told us that there are many different factors which may have influenced key indicators, therefore making it difficult to attribute these changes to the delivery of the VAWG Strategy or the Domestic Abuse Plan.

**3.15** The Home Office has completed some small evaluations relating to specific interventions (for example, it has published evaluations of the Safety of Women at Night Fund, Support for Migrant Victims Pilot, the Domestic Abuse Emergency Fund, and the Domestic Abuse and Stalking Perpetrator Intervention Fund). Without systematically evaluating the impact of the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan, the Home Office may never know the extent to which it has supported the intended outcomes.

<sup>17</sup> HM Treasury, *Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation*, March 2020.

<sup>18</sup> A theory of change captures the theory of how an intervention is expected to work by setting out all the steps expected to be involved in achieving the desired outcomes. It includes the assumptions made, the quality and strength of the evidence supporting them as well as wider contextual factors.

**Figure 11**

Framework of the Home Office’s Theory of Change for the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan)

The Home Office outlined six intended outcomes from the delivery of the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan with assigned success criteria and key datasets with which to measure progress. However, it is not using it to measure success

Intended outcome	Key data	Success criteria
Increased reporting of violence against women and girls to police	Victim reporting to police (Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW))	Increase in proportion of victims reporting to the police
	Police-recorded offences (Home Office)	Increase in volume of police-recorded VAWG offences
Increase in number of perpetrators brought to justice	Police referrals to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (CPS receipts)	Increases in number of police referrals to CPS
	Police outcomes data (Home Office)	Increase in volume and proportion of cases charged
	Prosecutions and convictions (CPS and Ministry of Justice (MoJ))	Increase in number of prosecutions
	Protective Orders made (MoJ)	Increase in number of protective orders made
Decrease in the proportion of victims withdrawing from criminal justice system (CJS) proceedings	Police outcomes data (Home Office)	Reduction in number and proportion of cases ending due to victim withdrawal at police, CPS and court stage
	CPS prosecutions data (CPS)	
	Effective trials data (MoJ)	
Reduction in the prevalence of VAWG	Estimated number/proportion of victims (CSEW)	Reduction in proportion of victims
		Reduction in number of estimated victims
		Reduction in number of domestic homicides
Increase in the number of victims accessing and using support services	Government funding for support services	Increased funding for support services
	Users of support services	Increased numbers of users of support services
		Reduction in number of users unable to access desired services
Greater collaboration and coordination between organisations	No data source – relevant outputs will be tracked	

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office documentation



## Data quality

**3.16** Our 2021 report *Evaluating government spending* highlighted the importance of incorporating evaluative methods into the design of government interventions.<sup>19</sup> While evaluation is important to understanding the impact interventions are having, performance monitoring also provides valuable insight into progress being made. A lack of quality data available limits the Home Office's understanding of the impact the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan are having.

**3.17** A lack of consistent definition for violence against women and girls across public bodies and their approaches to measuring the scale of VAWG crimes make it difficult to measure progress in a consistent way. The Home Office definition of VAWG includes all victims, across all age ranges and genders, whereas police forces only include women and girls, and other members of the criminal justice system also record data in different ways. This makes it difficult to monitor progress against intended outcomes in a consistent way, across the whole system. For the new government to achieve its aim of halving VAWG, it must first develop a shared and agreed understanding of what it is trying to halve.

**3.18** The Home Office uses Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates as its primary indicator of the prevalence of VAWG. The CSEW does not include children under the age of 16 within its survey responses for VAWG-related crimes.<sup>20</sup> It also only provides prevalence estimates for domestic abuse, rape, sexual offences and stalking (**Figure 12** on pages 38 and 39).

**3.19** In February 2022, the Home Office conducted a data gap analysis to understand the landscape of data available to measure progress in achieving the intended outcomes (Figure 12). This showed that data available to monitor progress differ significantly for different crime types. For VAWG offences which disproportionately affect ethnic minority women, such as 'honour'-based abuse, fewer datasets are available. Without addressing these gaps in data, it will be difficult for the Home Office to effectively support all victims.

**3.20** Police only record one VAWG crime per victim/perpetrator relationship, including in instances where multiple VAWG crimes are committed. Home Office counting rules (HOCR) outline how police should be recording crimes to provide national standards for counting crimes. The HOCR work on a 'principal crime rule', which stipulates that one crime per victim/perpetrator relationship is recorded based on the crime that is the most harmful to the victim.

<sup>19</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Evaluating government spending*, Session 2021-22, HC 860, National Audit Office, December 2021.

<sup>20</sup> In 2016 the Crime Survey for England and Wales undertook a module of questions which asked adults whether they had been abused as a child. This covered psychological, physical, sexual and domestic abuse. Findings from this module have not been reported by the Office for National Statistics since 2016.

**Figure 12**  
Data available to measure progress against intended outcomes of the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan, as of February 2022

Data available to monitor progress in tackling violence against women and girls differ for different crime types

Outcome	Metric	Domestic abuse	Sexual offences	Rape	Stalking	Harassment	‘Honour’-based abuse	Female genital mutilation	Forced marriage	Revenge porn	Data source	Owner
Increased reporting of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) to Police	Number of recorded VAWG crimes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Police recorded crime statistics	Home Office
	Proportion of people stating they reported to police	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)	Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Increase in number of perpetrators brought to justice	Number of cases charged by police and/or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Crime outcomes data CPS quarterly data summary	Home Office CPS
	Number of referrals to CPS	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	CPS referrals data	CPS
	Number of defendants prosecuted and convicted	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Ministry of Justice court (MoJ) data and CPS data for domestic abuse offences	MoJ
	Number of protective orders granted	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	Number of stalking protection orders, sexual harm protection orders, sexual risk orders	MoJ His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS)
Decrease in the proportion of victims withdrawing from the criminal justice system (increase in victim satisfaction)	Number/proportion of cases ending in evidential difficulties: victim does not support	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Crime outcomes data	Home Office
	Number of cases not reaching prosecution due to victim withdrawal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	CPS: reasons for non-conviction outcomes	CPS
	Number of cases where victim or witness no longer supports the court case	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Court data: cases where complainant withdraws	MoJ
	Improved victim experience with the police	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Victim satisfaction with police survey	Home Office
Reduce prevalence of VAWG	Proportion of population victims and estimated number of victims	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	CSEW sex offences and domestic abuse publications	ONS
Increase in the number of victims accessing and using support services	Funding provided for support services	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Government funding for support services	Home Office, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and MoJ
	Number of people accessing support services funded by Home Office and MoJ	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Support organisations	Service providers, Home Office and MoJ

● Data available   ● Data not yet published   ● Data unavailable   ○ Metrics not applicable for crime type

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office documentation

**3.21** In 2017, the Home Office changed the ‘principal crime rule’, meaning that when multiple offences were reported by the victim and one of them was a course of conduct offence (such as stalking, harassment, or coercive and controlling behaviour), then two offences would be recorded. This change was later reversed in 2023, and the police returned to use of the ‘principal crime rule’ due to concerns that the change had not improved the police identification of, and response to, VAWG offences. At the same time as the police returned to the ‘principal crime rule’ there was also a change to the way in which crime severity was considered, which gave course of conduct offences greater prominence. The Home Office told us that it does not consider police-recorded crime an accurate indicator of prevalence due to high levels of under-reporting. This further limits the quantity of data available to monitor a reduction in violence against women and girls over time (Figure 11 and Figure 12).

#### Future evaluation plans

**3.22** Following the 2024 General Election, the Home Secretary requested that the Home Office conduct a review to take stock of progress in tackling VAWG. The Home Office intends to use the review findings to inform the development of a new theory of change to underpin a future strategy or strategy refresh, although no additional budget has been given to this work. The Home Office is developing the new strategy in parallel, with both due for completion in spring 2025. The Home Office has split the review into five workstreams (**Figure 13**), but as of November 2024, the scope of this work was still evolving. The review predominantly involves consolidating existing evidence from across the Home Office and wider government rather than conducting primary research. The Home Office will need to ensure that the findings from the review are fully integrated with the development of a new strategy to enable the benefits of this work to be realised.

**Figure 13**

The Home Office's review of progress tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG), due for completion in spring 2025

The programme is made up of five workstreams

Workstream	Aim of workstream
What works	To update the Home Office's understanding of what works to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG) and identify evidence gaps to propose for the spending review.
Metrics	To build a suitable suite of metrics to measure progress being made against the strategy's objectives and overall ambition of halving VAWG.
Strategy	To identify areas across government and the wider system where there is capacity to do more to achieve the Home Office's overall ambition.
International comparisons	To understand good practice from other countries and form positive relationships to share data and evidence.
Deep dives	To identify areas of interest and build further knowledge and understanding to inform the future VAWG policy programmes.

**Notes**

- 1 The review programme is due for completion in spring 2025 to align with the development of a new strategy aimed at tackling violence against women and girls.
- 2 The structure of the review received ministerial clearance in October 2024; however, the Home Office had not decided the specifics of what the workstreams will include as of November 2024.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office documentation

# Appendix One

## Our audit approach

### Our scope

**1** This report has examined the work of the Home Office and its partners to implement the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan” (the Domestic Abuse Plan).

**2** We have undertaken this work now because the new government has committed to halve the prevalence of VAWG within a decade as part of its ‘mission’ to make streets safer. The Home Office will lead this mission and is developing a new VAWG strategy. We have used this report to identify lessons to support the delivery of the government’s ambition to help halve violence against women and girls. In doing so we have:

- described government activity in this area and evaluated the extent to which progress has been made, and identified learning to support the successful delivery of future intended outcomes;
- investigated how the Home Office has learned from previous experience, and that of stakeholders, to build consensus around the strategy, as well as how well aligned and coordinated activities are;
- looked into how the Home Office has tracked progress and identified what works; and
- assessed how well the Home Office has set up governance structures to enable it to deliver the strategy, including whether it has managed its budget effectively, and met financial commitments made within the strategy.

**3** We have based our assessment on NAO good practice guides on cross-government working and operational delivery in government.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> National Audit Office, *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders*, March 2021; Comptroller and Auditor General, *Lessons learned: Cross-government working*, Session 2022-23, HC 1659, National Audit Office, July 2023.

**4** While recognising the criticality of other government departments and organisations in delivering the strategy, the report does not assess how well they have delivered their own commitments.

**5** We reached conclusions based on our analysis of evidence collected during fieldwork between June and November 2024.

**6** Throughout the report, financial years are written as, for example, '2023-24', and run from 1 April to 31 March.

## **Our evidence base**

### Interviews

**7** We have conducted around 11 interviews with Home Office staff, many of whom worked in the team responsible for delivering the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan. We selected these participants based on their job roles. We tailored interviews to the role of the person being interviewed. We synthesised evidence by extracting key insights from each of the interviews and organising findings in an evidence matrix to identify common trends across the evidence base. We designed the interviews to provide:

- an understanding of the Home Office's approach to designing, developing, implementing the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan, and evaluating their impact;
- an understanding of the key risks and challenges to achieving progress in tackling violence against women and girls;
- further documentary evidence that might be of use; and
- triangulation against evidence from other sources.

**8** We also interviewed other government organisations to understand their role in delivering the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan and how well the Home Office is working with them to achieve the intended outcomes. We engaged with other government departments listed as having responsibility for specific commitments within the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan, as well as central government departments including the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury. We interviewed the following government departments:

- Ministry of Justice;
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government;
- Department for Health and Social Care; and
- Department for Education.

We also interviewed the following stakeholders:

- NHS England;
- the Crown Prosecution Service;
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and of Fire & Rescue Services;
- the National Police Chiefs' Council;
- the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners;
- the Local Government Association;
- the College of Policing;
- the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office; and
- the Victims' Commissioner's Office.

**9** We also spoke to organisations outside of government to understand the key challenges in this space from the perspective of those working on the frontline to support victims of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. This involved discussions around how well the current funding structures support progress in this space as well as specific barriers faced by marginalised groups of victims, including what the government can do to mitigate some of these risks. We spoke to the following third sector organisations:

- Women's Aid; and
- SafeLives.

## Stakeholder engagement

**10** To support our findings from our interviews with the third sector, we invited a range of charities to submit written evidence to allow us to gather views on the most significant challenges faced by services supporting victims of VAWG and domestic abuse. We sent the call for evidence to a specified list of relevant sector stakeholders, identified using minutes of stakeholder roundtables and suggestions from the Home Office and third-sector organisations. We ensured the list of organisations adequately reflected all the specialist needs for victims, including those for marginalised groups of women and the different size of organisations involved.

**11** The organisations which submitted evidence to our study were:

- Advance;
- Advocacy after Fatal Domestic Abuse;
- End Violence Against Women;
- Imkaan;
- Women's Aid; and
- Signhealth.

## Document review

**12** We reviewed published and unpublished documentation to understand work being delivered across government to address VAWG, and the progress made through the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan. We reviewed documents including:

- strategic implementation plan;
- theory of change;
- evaluative work;
- public statements and legislation relating to the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan;
- progress reports;
- risks registers;
- business cases for specific interventions;
- ministerial submissions;
- financial monitoring information; and
- meeting minutes and terms of reference.



**13** We drew on the National Audit Office's back catalogue of reports and good practice guides, including:

- *Lessons learned: Cross-government working* (July 2023);
- *Improving operational delivery in government: A good practice guide for senior leaders* (March 2021);
- *Progress combatting fraud* (November 2022); and
- *Reducing the harm from illegal drugs* (October 2023).

#### Data analysis

**14** To understand progress being made in this space, we analysed Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data measuring the prevalence of VAWG, including domestic abuse. We also used published datasets from the Office for National Statistics, as well as data gathered during our interviews with third sector organisations. We triangulated these sources to inform our understanding of the prevalence and complexity of the different VAWG crime types.

**15** To quantify funding for and spending on tackling VAWG across government we analysed Home Office financial data. We also contacted certain departments and organisations with commitments under the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan requesting they provide information of and evidence for relevant expenditure. The departments and organisations we contacted were:

- Ministry of Justice;
- Department for Transport;
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government;
- Department for Education;
- NHS England; and
- Department of Health and Social Care.

## Case studies

**16** To illustrate the findings from our other methods, we carried out case studies with three police forces to understand how the VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan were working to achieve progress within specific police forces. Through our engagement with the National Police Chiefs' Council we gathered a long list of police forces across England and Wales with different experiences of tackling VAWG and domestic abuse. This included considering the prevalence of VAWG in the location of the police forces and the resources available to deliver this work. We used our engagement with police forces to understand how well the VAWG Strategy is achieving progress to support victims most effectively by embedding a victim-led culture throughout the criminal justice response. The police forces we met with were:

- Kent Police;
- West Mercia Police; and
- West Yorkshire Police.

## Appendix Two

### Commitments made under the 2021 “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy (the VAWG Strategy) and the 2022 “Tackling Domestic Abuse” Plan (the Domestic Abuse Plan)

Completion status as reported by the Home Office and responsible departments as of July 2024.

Commitment	Responsible department	Status	Type of commitment
<b>Prevention – VAWG Strategy</b>			
Use pre-legislative scrutiny of the Online Safety Bill to explore ways to better protect children from pornography	Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)	Completed	Activity
Train safeguarding leads to identify and respond to child sexual abuse and strengthen the support for them in schools	Department for Education (DfE)	Completed	Activity
Explore how undergraduates might be utilised to support peer delivery of Relationships, Sex and Health Education lessons in schools	DfE	Stopped	Activity
Working with partners to support effective safeguarding arrangements with schools	DfE	Completed	Activity
Work with local authorities on safeguarding work addressing female genital mutilation (FGM)	DfE	Completed	Activity
Work with Further Education bodies to better understand how to promote healthy relationships among students	DfE	Completed	Activity
Consult on street design that could help improve personal safety, and perception of safety	Department for Transport (DfT)	Completed	Activity
Appoint a violence against women and girls (VAWG) transport champion	DfT	Completed	Activity
Launch a campaign to raise awareness of the support available through sexual assault referral centres	Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)	Completed	Activity
Introduce a duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, including protections from harassment by third parties	Government Equalities Office (GEO)	Completed	Activity
Launch a VAWG communications campaign to raise awareness	Home Office (HO)	Completed	Activity
Funding for research into ‘What Works’ to prevent VAWG	HO	Completed	Input
Funding for the Safety of Women at Night Fund	HO	Completed	Input
Work with the Security Industry Authority to improve the response on VAWG	HO	Completed	Activity
Launch an online tool to enable people to report areas where they feel unsafe (StreetSafe)	HO	Completed	Activity

<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Responsible department</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Type of commitment</b>
Seek out community advocates on FGM and forced marriage	HO	Completed	Activity
Support development of tools to evaluate interventions supporting children experiencing domestic abuse	HO	Completed	Activity
<b>Prevention – Domestic Abuse Plan</b>			
Develop a package of support for teachers to deliver the Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum	DfE	Not completed	Activity
Publish updated guidance for frontline practitioners on child-to-parent abuse	HO	Not completed	Activity
Revise guidance on the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme	HO	Completed	Activity
Work with the National Police Chiefs' Council to review police forces with the highest rates of serious domestic abuse and domestic homicide	HO	Completed	Activity
Work with stakeholders to agree a definition and terminology of child-to-parent abuse	HO	Not completed	Activity
Review the national police response to children experiencing domestic abuse	HO	Not completed	Activity
<b>Supporting victims – VAWG Strategy</b>			
Work with the Office for Students to tackle sexual harassment and abuse in higher education	DfE	Not completed	Activity
Review options to limit the use of non-disclosure agreements in cases of sexual harassment within higher education	DfE	Completed	Activity
Increased 'by and for' service provision	HO	Completed	Input
Increased funding for specialist helplines	HO	Completed	Input
Publish an updated male victims position statement	HO	Completed	Activity
Local 'pathfinder' projects for enhanced mental health support for sexual abuse survivors with the most complex needs	NHS England (NHSE)	Not completed	Activity
Launch a communications campaign to raise awareness of the support available to victims and survivors through sexual assault referral centres	NHSE	Completed	Activity
<b>Supporting victims – Domestic Abuse Plan</b>			
Review whether current statutory leave provision supports employees who are escaping domestic abuse	Department for Business & Trade (DBT)	Completed	Activity
Share best practice on workplace support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse	DBT	Completed	Activity
Share learning from the 'What Works for Children's Social Care' trials with schools and safeguarding partners	DfE	Completed	Activity
All departments to put in place policies and support plans for employees who experience domestic abuse	HO	Completed	Output
Continue raising awareness of domestic abuse and drive best practice among employers	HO	Not completed	Activity
Invest in Operation Encompass: Provide a national teachers' helpline	HO	Completed	Input
Use results of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping exercise to better target funding to local support services	HO	Completed	Activity

Commitment	Responsible department	Status	Type of commitment
Double funding for National Domestic Abuse Helpline, and further increase funding for all the national helplines	HO	Completed	Input
Double dedicated funding for survivors of sexual violence	HO	Completed	Input
Supporting migrant victims	HO	Completed	Input
Increase funding for organisations which provide specialist support to children who are victims of domestic abuse	HO	Completed	Input
Double funding to continue improving our response to economic abuse and providing vital support and economic safety for victims and survivors	HO	Completed	Input
Trial of the flexible funding model for charities to purchase vital goods and services for victims and survivors	HO	Completed	Activity
Develop and implement an Immigration Enforcement Migrant Victims Protocol	HO	Not completed	Activity
Consider a range of initiatives to promote the reporting of crime amongst migrants with insecure immigration status	HO	Not completed	Activity
Encourage more employers to join the Employers' Domestic Abuse Covenant and the Employers' Domestic Abuse Initiative	HO	Not completed	Activity
Domestic Abuse Commissioner to establish a Victim Engagement Mechanism	HO	Completed	Output
Invest in Operation Encompass: Evaluation of the current scheme	HO	Not completed	Input
Invest in Operation Encompass: Expand the ongoing pilot scheme	HO	Completed	Input
Invest in Operation Encompass: Evaluation of the extension of the scheme	HO	Not completed	Input
Invest in Operation Encompass: Research feasibility of expanding the scheme to other harm types	HO	Not completed	Input
Offer multi-year awards of funding to organisations supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse	HO and MoJ	Completed	Input
Ensure concurrent jurisdiction is embedded so that cases are handled appropriately in both military and civilian justice systems	Ministry of Defence (MoD)	Completed	Activity
Look at introducing national commissioning standards across all victim support services, with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Quality Standards for support in safe accommodation aligned	MoJ	Completed	Activity
Increasing funding for victim and witness support services including funding for Police and Crime Commissioners	MoJ	Completed	Input
Improve access to support from independent domestic violence advisors for women in custody who have experienced domestic abuse	MoJ	Completed	Activity
Review and build on workplace policies to support staff affected by domestic abuse	NHSE	Not completed <sup>22</sup>	Activity

22 NHSE reported this commitment as completed by October 2024.

Commitment	Responsible department	Status	Type of commitment
<b>Pursuing perpetrators – VAWG Strategy</b>			
Consider the Law Commission review and whether additional offences to address harmful online behaviour are needed	DCMS	Completed	Activity
Set up an independent expert panel into the clinical and ethical aspects of hymenoplasty and whether it should be criminalised	DHSC	Completed	Activity
Work to criminalise 'virginity testing'	DHSC	Completed	Output
Research looking at the escalation of sexual offending amongst repeat perpetrators	HO and MoJ	Completed	Activity
Invest £500,000 in 2021-22 for the National Crime Agency to identify new data-led methods of identifying serial sex offenders	HO	Completed	Input
Independent review of management of registered sex offenders	HO	Completed	Activity
Ensure police and prosecutors are confident about how to respond to public sexual harassment	HO	Completed	Activity
Consider whether there are additional measures to address aspects of sex work that have the potential to cause harm or exploitation	HO	Not completed	Activity
Work with the police to ensure that all forces make proper use of Stalking Protection Orders	HO	Completed	Activity
College of Policing to produce advice for police officers to advise how to deal with 'honour'-based abuse	HO	Not completed	Activity
<b>Pursuing perpetrators – Domestic Abuse Plan</b>			
Rollout of the Domestic Abuse Matters training to police forces which have yet to deliver it, or do not have specific domestic abuse training	HO	Not completed	Input
Develop a set of national standards and principles for domestic abuse perpetrator interventions	HO	Completed	Activity
Empower local areas to develop their own perpetrator strategies	HO	Not completed	Activity
Share findings and emerging evidence from evaluations into perpetrator interventions	HO	Not completed	Activity
Invest in perpetrator interventions and further research on perpetrators including exploring focused deterrence models	HO	Completed	Input
Develop and pilot the rollout by police of a predictive risk tool to identify highest-risk domestic abuse perpetrators	HO	Not completed	Output
Review data on domestic abuse cases closed due to evidential difficulties, specifically Outcomes 15 or 16	HO	Completed	Activity
Explore ways to actively manage the most harmful perpetrators, including through the creation of a register of domestic abuse offenders	HO	Completed	Activity
Review ways to facilitate personnel attending perpetrator programmes	MoD	Completed	Activity
Examine how data from the Civilian Justice System can be consolidated with data from the Service Justice System	MoD	Not completed	Activity

Commitment	Responsible department	Status	Type of commitment
Launch a communications drive to improve national and local organisations' awareness of the service which prevents unwanted contact from prisoners	MoJ	Completed	Activity
Introduce a project to test the effectiveness of electronically monitoring prisoners identified to be at risk of perpetrating domestic abuse on their release	MoJ	Completed	Activity
Draft a statutory code of practice to prescribe when community and diversionary cautions may be given	MoJ	Completed	Output
<b>Building a stronger system – VAWG Strategy</b>			
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to refresh its overarching Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy	CPS	Not completed	Activity
Encourage local areas to improve multi-agency working and update keyworkers' best practice on violence against women and girls	MHCLG	Completed	Activity
Make clear expectations for the Domestic Abuse Act duty on local authorities in Statutory Guidance	MHCLG	Completed	Activity
Launch the Women's Health Strategy	DHSC	Completed	Output
Create 42 integrated care systems (ICSs)	DHSC	Completed	Output
Appoint new National Policing Lead for Violence Against Women and Girls	HO	Completed	Activity
Explore options to better understand the experience victims have with policing and wider criminal justice system partners	HO	Completed	Activity
Produce a resource pack for local authorities, the police, schools, the NHS and others on forced marriage	HO	Completed	Output
Host a technology roundtable to encourage industry to act on VAWG	HO	Completed	Activity
Commission a review of the disclosure and barring regime to provide assurance on its effectiveness in safeguarding the vulnerable	HO	Completed	Activity
Raise awareness of the FGM mandatory reporting duty	HO	Completed	Activity
Publish a refreshed National Statement of Expectations	HO	Completed	Output
Hold a VAWG summit hosted by the Minister for Safeguarding with representatives across government	HO	Completed	Activity
Review current available data on VAWG	HO	Completed	Activity
Explore options to better understand the prevalence of FGM and forced marriage	HO	Completed	Activity
Explore ways to create eligibility for criminal record checks for those who are self-employed, in sport and other sectors	HO and MoJ	Completed	Activity
Continue to improve data on rape offences across the Criminal Justice System	MoJ	Completed	Activity
Improve alignment between ICSs and victim support services for survivors of sexual violence and domestic abuse	NHSE	Completed	Activity

Commitment	Responsible department	Status	Type of commitment
<b>Building a stronger system – Domestic Abuse Plan</b>			
Share learning from the 'engaging schools' multi-agency safeguarding arrangements projects	DfE	Completed	Output
Develop an online resource hub for designated safeguarding leads in schools and colleges	DfE	Stopped	Output
Embed meaningful learning and actions with the healthcare system from recommendations in domestic homicide reviews (DHRs)	DHSC	Completed	Activity
Produce the Women's Health Strategy	DHSC	Completed	Activity
Launch a public discussion paper to inform the development of a new longer-term mental health strategy	DHSC	Completed	Activity
Explore ways to increase awareness and promote greater understanding of how to respond to the needs of victims and survivors with no recourse to public funds	HO	Completed	Activity
Launch an online repository of all DHRs	HO	Completed	Output
Incorporate additional content on suicides in the context of domestic abuse into IRIS Programme training for GPs	HO	Completed	Activity
Reform DHRs	HO	Completed	Activity
In cases of unexplained death or suspected suicide, police to consider whether domestic abuse may be a contributory factor and whether any criminal offence has been committed	HO	Completed	Activity
Police to ensure that all suspected victim suicides where there is a history of domestic abuse, which meet the criteria under statutory guidance, are referred for a DHR	HO	Not completed	Activity
Continue funding the Domestic Homicide Project	HO	Ongoing	Input
Set up effective interventions within healthcare settings, to upskill healthcare professionals and improve coordination	HO	Completed	Activity
Identify best practice in identifying appropriate suicide cases to be referred for DHRs	HO	Not completed	Activity
Police authorised professional practice on suicide to explicitly include references to domestic abuse	HO	Completed	Output
Continue to work with charities and the police to build a coordinated community response	HO	Completed	Activity
Reform DHRs: Update the Statutory Guidance	HO	Not completed	Output
Reform DHRs: More intense, compulsory training for DHR Chairs	HO	Completed	Activity
Reform DHRs: DHR oversight mechanism	HO	Completed	Activity
Trial and consider a national rollout of the 'Ask for ANI' codeword scheme across the Jobcentre Plus network	HO	Completed	Activity
Fund the College of Policing to support exploratory analysis of accident & emergency data to assess whether it can help police forces target those at risk of domestic abuse	HO	Completed	Input
Review the general safeguarding training requirements across the whole force (civilian and military)	MoD	Completed	Activity
Tailored materials for personnel, detailing the different routes to support	MoD	Completed	Output



Commitment	Responsible department	Status	Type of commitment
Possible overhaul of the current investigation management system used by the Service Police	MoD	Completed	Activity
Promote evidence-based approaches to domestic abuse through guidance and engagement with the new ICSs	NHSE	Completed	Activity
Remove the current upper age limit for respondents to capture Crime Survey for England and Wales data on victims and survivors aged over 74	Office for National Statistics (ONS)	Completed	Activity
Explore options for expanding the Crime Survey for England and Wales to include those in residential care settings	ONS	Completed	Activity
Look to publish more disaggregated characteristics data on domestic abuse victims and survivors	ONS	Completed	Activity

**Notes**

- 1 Status of commitments as reported by the Home Office and responsible departments as at July 2024.
- 2 Type of commitment assessed against definitions developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.
  - **Inputs:** The funding, skills, knowledge and other resources used for the intervention.
  - **Activities:** Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, including funding, knowledge and resources are brought together to produce specific outputs.
  - **Outputs:** The things (for example trained staff or new guidance), produced as result of an intervention. This may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.
  - **Outcomes:** The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office data

## Appendix Three

### Help and support services available

#### **Advance**

Advance provides community-based support to women and girls experiencing domestic abuse in London. If you live in London and need support, you can call Advance on 0800 0590 108, email [angelou@advancecharity.org.uk](mailto:angelou@advancecharity.org.uk), or alternatively, they can contact you confidentially if required.

#### **Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA)**

Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) is an independent, pioneering and unique charity offering specialist and expert advocacy and peer support after fatal domestic abuse. Visit their website at: [www.aafda.org.uk](http://www.aafda.org.uk)

They:

- help those left behind after fatal domestic abuse;
- increase community awareness of domestic abuse and risk factors;
- help agencies improve their work on preventing domestic abuse and fatal domestic abuse; and
- improve reviews of domestic abuse related deaths.

Telephone: 07887 488 464 (9am to 5pm)

Email: [help@aafda.org.uk](mailto:help@aafda.org.uk)

#### **Bawso**

The lead organisation in Wales providing practical and emotional support to survivors from ethnic minorities who have experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage.

BAWSO Wales-wide Helpline can be contacted 24/7 via:

Telephone: 0800 731 8147

Email: [referrals@bawso.org.uk](mailto:referrals@bawso.org.uk)

### **Centre for Women's Justice**

The Centre for Women's Justice provides legal advice to staff at frontline women's organisations as a second-tier service. They are unable to give legal advice directly to members of the public but provide links to help you find specialist legal advice on their website: [www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/advice-home](http://www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/advice-home)

### **Children's Commissioner – Help at Hand advice and assistance service**

Help at Hand is the Children's Commissioner for England's advice and assistance service for children in care, children with a social worker, children living away from home, and care leavers under 25.

Telephone: 0800 528 0731

Email: [help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](mailto:help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

### **Children's Society**

The Children's Society is a national charity working to transform the hopes and happiness of young people facing abuse, exploitation and neglect. If you are a young person seeking advice, visit [www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/young-people/advice](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/young-people/advice)

Email: [safeguarding@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@childrenssociety.org.uk)

### **Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales**

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC) for England and Wales is the independent voice for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The DAC is legally prohibited from providing support to individuals or intervening in individual cases, however, you can find information and links to helplines at: [www.domesticabusecommissioner.uk/i-need-help/](http://www.domesticabusecommissioner.uk/i-need-help/)

### **End Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition**

A group of feminist organisations and experts from across the UK, working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms. To seek support visit: [www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/find-help/](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/find-help/)

### **Galop**

Galop is the national helpline for LGBT+ victims and survivors of abuse and violence. Galop provides a helpline that is available to anyone in the UK who is LGBT+ and has experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime or so-called conversion therapy. Galop also supports friends, family members, and professionals supporting LGBT+ victims of abuse.

Telephone: 0800 999 5428 (open Monday to Tuesday 9am to 8pm, Wednesday to Friday 9:15am to 4:30pm, and closed weekends)

Email: [help@galop.org.uk](mailto:help@galop.org.uk)

Webchat: [www.galop.org.uk/get-help/helplines/](http://www.galop.org.uk/get-help/helplines/)

### **Hestia**

Hestia provides domestic abuse refuges for women and children experiencing domestic abuse. If you need a refuge space outside of London, please call Refuge's National Domestic Abuse helpline (see below).

Telephone (Hestia's Refuge Referral Line): 0808 169 9975 (open Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm)

Email: [refuge.space@hestia.org](mailto:refuge.space@hestia.org).

Hestia also has a 'Bright Sky' app and website which include practical advice and a directory of support services for people experiencing domestic abuse, their friends and family, and colleagues. Visit: <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

Hestia also offers a 'Respond to Abuse' advice line which is a resource for employers, offering advice on how to approach disclosures of domestic abuse by their employees, and to triage such employees into the appropriate local specialist domestic abuse services. Visit their website for more information: <https://www.hestia.org/respond-to-abuse>

Employers seeking advice can:

Telephone: 0203 879 3695 or,

Email: [adviceline.EB@hestia.org](mailto:adviceline.EB@hestia.org) between 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday for support.

### **Hourglass**

Hourglass is the only UK charity dedicated to ending harm and abuse of older people. Hourglass offers a 24/7 helpline to support those in need.

Telephone (open all hours): 0808 808 8141

Text: 078 6005 2906

Email: [helpline@wearehourglass.org](mailto:helpline@wearehourglass.org)

Email, text and instant messaging options are currently only available during business hours, (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm). Your number remains confidential and there is no charge.

For more ways to receive support and information visit: [www.wearehourglass.org/hourglass-services](http://www.wearehourglass.org/hourglass-services)

### **Imkaan**

Imkaan is the UK's only national feminist umbrella organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls. You can refer to their website for a directory of general helplines and services: [www.imkaan.org.uk/get-help](http://www.imkaan.org.uk/get-help)

### **Karma Nirvana**

Karma Nirvana is dedicated to ending 'honour'-based abuse in the UK. Their website provides information on what 'honour'-based abuse is, and how you may be being affected by it. Karma Nirvana runs the free national 'honour'-based abuse helpline. For more information visit: [www.karmanirvana.org.uk/get-help/what-is-honour-based-abuse/](http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/get-help/what-is-honour-based-abuse/)

Telephone: 0800 5999 247 (open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Contact form: [www.karmanirvana.org.uk/about/contact-us/](http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/about/contact-us/)

### **Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)**

Latin American Women's Rights Service offers free and confidential specialist services for all Latin American women, including advice and counselling for women facing gender violence, legal advice in welfare benefits, housing and employment rights, as well as integration activities and groups where you can meet other women in the community. Services are delivered in Spanish and Portuguese. For more information visit: [www.lawrs.org.uk/contact/](http://www.lawrs.org.uk/contact/)

Telephone: 0808 145 4909 (open Tuesday to Friday 11am to 1pm)

### **Rape Crisis England and Wales**

Rape Crisis England and Wales is a feminist charity working to end sexual violence and abuse. Rape Crisis's national helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for free support. Rape Crisis also offers a free online chat. For further information visit: [www.rapecrisis.org.uk/about-us/](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/about-us/)

Telephone: 0808 500 2222 (open all hours)

Webchat: [www.rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/) (open all hours)

### **Refuge**

Refuge's national domestic abuse helpline is available on 0808 2000 247, 24 hours a day 7 days a week, for free, confidential specialist support. Refuge also offers a live chat service, which is available 10am–10pm, Monday to Friday. For further information and advice visit their website <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk>

For support with tech-facilitated abuse visit <https://refugetechsafety.org>

### **SafeLives**

A UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good. For more information visit: [www.safelives.org.uk/about-domestic-abuse/get-help-support/](http://www.safelives.org.uk/about-domestic-abuse/get-help-support/)

**SignHealth**

SignHealth's domestic abuse service is the national BSL service to support deaf victims/survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence in England. They provide information, advice, support, and emotional support to deaf people who are experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence.

Contact hours are Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4:30pm, 07800 003 421 (Text ONLY)

Email: [da@signhealth.org.uk](mailto:da@signhealth.org.uk)

Online contact form can be found at: [www.signhealth.org.uk/contact](http://www.signhealth.org.uk/contact)

**Southall Black Sisters**

Southall Black Sisters is a 'by and for' black, minoritised and migrant women's organisation addressing domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls. Southall Black Sisters provides community-based services including helpline advice services, advocacy, counselling, and peer support group work. Southall Black Sisters conducts direct domestic abuse casework with victim-survivors of current or recent domestic abuse who reside in Ealing, Hounslow, and Hillingdon, but offers a free helpline and online contact form to any individuals in need of support.

Helpline: 020 8571 0800 (open Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm)

Online Contact Form: <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/contact-us/>

Email: [info@southallblacksisters.co.uk](mailto:info@southallblacksisters.co.uk)

**Surviving Economic Abuse**

Surviving Economic Abuse is a charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse (a form of domestic abuse) and transforming responses to it. Their website provides information to help you understand what economic abuse is and signposts towards support services. Visit: [www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/) for more information.

**Suzy Lamplugh Trust**

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust operates the national stalking helpline, which gives practical information, support and advice to victims of stalking, their friends, family and professionals working with them. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust offers a free tool to help individuals assess whether what they are experiencing is stalking. You can find this at: [www.suzylamplugh.org/am-i-being-stalked-tool](http://www.suzylamplugh.org/am-i-being-stalked-tool)

Telephone: 0808 802 0300

Opening hours for telephone:

9:30am to 8pm – Monday and Wednesday

9:30am to 4pm – Tuesday, Thursday and Friday

Alternatively contact via email at: [www.suzylamplugh.org/forms/national-stalking-helpline-enquiry-form](http://www.suzylamplugh.org/forms/national-stalking-helpline-enquiry-form)

### **Victim Support**

Victim Support is an independent charity dedicated to supporting people affected by crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales. The charity's services help people affected by all types of crime, providing free and confidential support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year - regardless of whether someone has reported the crime to the police or when it occurred. Visit their website to contact your nearest victim support team at: [www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/)

Telephone: 0808 1689 111 (open all hours)

Webchat: [www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/live-chat/](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/live-chat/) (open all hours)

Online contact form: [www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/request-support/](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/request-support/)

### **Welsh Women's Aid**

Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women. They deliver services including the Live Fear Free Helpline which offers help and advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for those experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence. Support is available in both English and Welsh, with all conversations taken confidentially by staff that are highly experienced and fully trained.

Telephone: 0808 80 10 800

Text: 0786077333

Email: [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto:info@livefearfreehelpline.wales)

Webchat: [www.gov.wales/live-fear-free/contact-live-fear-free](http://www.gov.wales/live-fear-free/contact-live-fear-free)

### **Women's Aid Federation of England (Women's Aid)**

Women's Aid provides support to women and child survivors of domestic abuse through:

Live chat: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>

Email: [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk)

Directory of services: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>

The Survivor's Handbook: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/the-survivors-handbook/>

Survivors' Forum (18+): <https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/messageboards/>

Love Respect (CYP): <https://loverespect.co.uk/>

Travel to Refuge: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-our-members/travel-to-refuge/>

No Woman Turned Away: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/no-woman-turned-away/>

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