

Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP

Home Secretary

Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP

Secretary of State for Justice

CC: Darren Jones MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury; Jess Phillips MP, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls; Alex Davies-Jones MP, Minister for Victims and Violence Against Women and Girls; Rushanara Ali MP, Minister for Homelessness

24th October 2024

Dear Chancellor,

We write to you as 21 organisations who represent or provide specialist domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) services to highlight the urgent need for sustainable funding for specialist services in the upcoming Budget and Spring Spending Review. We also write to share our concerns about the impact of uncertainty on government funding allocations and to urge you to provide updates on allocations impacting VAWG services as soon as possible.

We warmly welcome this Government's commitment to halving VAWG over the next decade, however, we are deeply concerned that this pledge will not become a reality unless the VAWG sector is put on a secure financial footing in the upcoming budget. The expertise and sustainability of the specialist VAWG sector will be vital to delivering this ambition.

Autumn Budget and Spending Review

We urge you to ensure there is sufficient funding for specialist domestic abuse services that have been chronically underfunded - and a decrease in government funding on such services is avoided - starting with investment in specialist domestic abuse services in the upcoming Autumn Budget.

- **A minimum funding settlement of £516m per year in England to enable early intervention with specialist domestic abuse services, which includes:**
 - A minimum of £228m for refuge services via the Statutory Duty to fund safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse, which

forms Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, combined with a minimum of £288m statutory funding for community-based support services.

- **We support the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's recommendation for a minimum total of £178m¹ from this should be ring-fenced funding for specialist led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, migrant women, d/Deaf and disabled women and the LGBT+ community.** It is essential that 'by and for' organisations lead on both the development and evaluation of any ringfenced funding pot, as well as on further research into developing these figures. We also recommend further consultation to better understand barriers and challenges in funding and commissioning that 'by and for' services face. We also recommend further research to better understand the funding and commissioning of services, in particular the barriers facing 'by and for' services.
- **Guaranteed funding at a minimum of £2m for the Home Office Flexible Fund for 2025/26 and beyond,** working with Women's Aid and the other delivery partners to disseminate through their networks, to ensure survivors across England and Wales can access vital funds to flee and increase their long-term independence and stability, and access advocacy support from specialist services.
- **Dedicated funding for child survivors in line with their legal status in Domestic Abuse Act 2021.** Ensure national government and public sector commissioners include dedicated support for children and young people within the £516m annual funding of specialist domestic abuse services, including refuges and specialist services such as 'by and for' organisations for Black and minoritised women and children.

Impact of funding uncertainty on VAWG services

Services commissioned under contracts linked to government funding face a funding cliff-edge, as contracts are due to expire on 31st March 2025. This includes grant funded services from the Ministry of Justice, Home Office, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and services funded via local authorities under the Domestic Abuse Act duty to provide safe accommodation support. For some providers, this represents the majority of services they provide to survivors of abuse.²

¹ This figure is an estimate based on calculations developed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office, using figures from Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) 2023 report [Investing to Save](#).

² Women's Aid, [Annual Audit 2024](#): 271 domestic abuse services provided refuge services in 2023, 77.1% of whom were commissioned by their local authorities for all of their bedspaces in 2022-23.

The impact of this uncertainty on the level of future funding is increasingly becoming apparent. Some local authorities are reporting they have no funding available in 2025/26 and in some cases are starting to decommission services as a result. We fear more will follow. Many organisations, such as smaller providers and specialist 'by and for' organisations, will not have the financial sustainability to operate services with no clear indication of future funding, particularly after facing a funding crisis for over a decade. This is in addition to the impact of how inequalities, migration status, and socio-economic status intersect, manifest and impact survivors, often resulting in these organisations needing to provide more intensive support for longer. This could lead to closures of services and a reduction in specialist support for the most vulnerable survivors. It is far more expensive to re-establish a service than it is to invest in existing support and expertise.

In addition, this uncertainty is impacting the experienced and specialist staff working in the VAWG sector. Those whose roles are linked to government funding may be worried about the future of their roles beyond March 2025 and there is a real risk that knowledge and expertise will be lost from the sector. This would have a detrimental impact on the ability to innovate service delivery and build on best practice. A survey conducted by Women's Aid in 2022 found that 78% of organisations were already struggling to recruit for roles at the salaries they can pay, reaching 92% for 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's services.³

We acknowledge the requirement to wait for the outcome of the Budget on 30 October and we welcome assurances from the Government that our concerns on funding uncertainty have been heard. We urge your Departments to provide updates on funding allocations for VAWG services as soon as possible after 30 October.

Impact of short-term contracts and need for multi-year commitments in Spending Review 2025

The funding challenges facing specialist domestic abuse services are multi-faceted. Undervalued contracts are leaving specialist organisations reliant on insecure fundraised income to subsidise operational costs and staff salaries. This insecurity has been exacerbated by a growing trend towards short-term contracts and regular competitive tendering in the local commissioning of domestic abuse services. Recently published research from Refuge into commissioning trends across the country found

³ Women's Aid, '[Leading Violence Against Women and Girls organisations issue urgent joint letter to Government highlighting the ongoing recruitment and retention crisis in the sector](#),' March 2024.

that the prevalence of short-term contracts of one year or less had increased by 70% from 2022/23 to 2023/24.⁴

Piecemeal, short-term contracts make it extremely difficult to strategically plan service delivery and compound the recruitment and retention crisis across the sector. Services cannot raise salaries in line with inflation or offer long-term employment security to prospective staff. This is more critical than ever in the context of high cost-of-living when staff are struggling with increased and more challenging workloads.⁵

The administrative burden of bidding for multiple contracts is incredibly disruptive and time-consuming for services that are already stretched beyond capacity. These challenges are felt most acutely by smaller 'by and for' services, who are at a greater disadvantage in the competitive procurement process because they typically have fewer resources than large service providers and are statistically less likely to be commissioned. Research from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that 'by- and-for' services are six times less likely to receive statutory funding than mainstream women's specialist domestic abuse services. This locks minoritised women out of life-saving support.⁶

Survivors already face a postcode lottery of support and short-term contracts make it even harder for them to access sustainable support throughout the time they need it. It takes time to implement and embed a service. Often, just as soon as a service becomes known in an area, its contract comes to an end, meaning survivors must look for support elsewhere. This can be hugely unsettling and traumatising for survivors at a critical point in their journey to safety.

We therefore urge you to commit to multi-year funding for domestic abuse services following the Spring 2025 Spending Review. This would put services on a sustainable footing, enabling them to plan service delivery and ensure continuity of support for survivors. We also urge you to establish a separate, national 'by and for' funding pot to provide long overdue investment in specialist services for D/deaf and disabled, LGBTQ+, Black, minoritised, and migrant women, including those with no recourse to public funds.

The first Autumn Budget and Spending Review of the new Government will set the direction, intention and commitment to their missions for years to come. We warmly

⁴ The prevalence of short-term contracts (one year or less) in 2023/24 has increased to 41 compared to 24 contracts in 2022/23. This is the highest number of short-term contracts commissioned in the last four years. [Refuge \(2024\) Annual Commissioning Report 2023/24.](#)

⁵ 63.5% of organisations responding to a Women's Aid survey reported that staff were struggling with increased and more challenging workloads. [Women's Aid \(2024\) The Domestic Abuse Report 2024: The Annual Audit.](#)

⁶ [Domestic Abuse Commissioner \(2022\) A Patchwork of Provisions: How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales.](#)

welcome the Government's commitment to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the next decade. However, domestic abuse and other VAWG services should be put on equal footing with other state-funded emergency services. Without dedicated investment, survivors will continue to face barriers accessing the lifesaving support they urgently need and the Government's ambition to halve VAWG will face significant threat. The chronic underfunding of specialist domestic abuse and VAWG services is rightly recognised in the Ending VAWG Green Paper, with promises for a Labour Government to provide sustainable long-term funding of services and separate funding streams for specialist 'by and for' led services.

We are acutely aware of the challenges and tough decisions that lie ahead for the government given the economic outlook. However, by committing to the funding proposals outlined in this letter in the upcoming Budget and Spending Review, there will be long overdue savings to the public purse, but most importantly, the lives of women and child survivors will be saved.

Yours faithfully,

Farah Nazeer, CEO, Women's Aid

Diana Nammi, Executive Director, IKWRO - Women's Rights Organisation

Angie Herrera, Director, Latin American Women's Aid

Estelle du Boulay, Director, Rights of Women

Souad Tals; MBE, Founder and CEO, Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre

Andrea Simon, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition

Selma Taha, Executive Director, Southall Black Sisters

Liz Mack, CEO, Advance

Natasha Rattu, Director, Karma Nirvana

Cherryl Henry-Leach, CEO, Standing Together

Abigail Ampofo, Interim CEO, Refuge

Ghadah Alnasseri, Co-Executive Director, Imkaan

Jo Todd CBE, CEO, Respect

Gurpreet Virdee, Co-CEO, Women and Girls Network

Heidi Riedel, CEO, Woman's Trust

Medina Johnson, Chief Executive, IRISi

Shani Lee, London VAWG Consortium

Cherryl Henry-Leach, CEO, Standing Together

Nahar Choudhury, CEO, Solace

Sam Smethers, Interim CEO, Surviving Economic Abuse

Gisela Valle, Executive Director, Latin American Women's Rights Service