



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

Change That Lasts for Wales

Manifesto 2023



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Welsh Women's Aid

Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

Introduction

Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women. We are a federation of specialist organisations in Wales that provide lifesaving services to survivors of violence and abuse, delivering a range of innovative preventative services in local communities.

We have been at the forefront of shaping a coordinated community response and practice in Wales since we were established in 1978. We do this by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support, and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families, and communities.

We deliver services including the Live Fear Free Helpline funded by Welsh Government, and a National Training Service. We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) and the Change That Lasts project; a strengths-based, needs led approach that supports survivors of all forms of violence against women, and their children, to build resilience, and leads to independence.

Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

We want a world in which women and children live free from domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women, and by doing so achieve independence, freedom and liberation from oppression.

Our manifesto seeks to prioritise violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) for the next UK Government. We use the term VAWDASV as we believe it incorporates all forms of violence that women and girls face across the UK.

Change That Lasts for Wales

1. Support for Migrant Survivors and abolishing NRPF
2. Whole systems approach to prevention to VAWDASV
3. An effective use of the justice system
4. Affordable and Adequate Housing for Women
5. A Benefits System that works for all, including survivors
6. Legislative Reform

Support for Migrant Survivors and abolishing NRPF

No recourse to public funds is a condition imposed on individuals due to their immigration status. Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 states that a person will have 'no recourse to public funds' if they are 'subject to immigration control'. A person will be 'subject to immigration control' if they:

- Have been granted leave to enter or remain in the UK with the condition of 'no recourse to public funds'. This may include women who have joined their husband or partner on a spousal visa or may have limited leave granted under family or private life rules.
- Have leave to enter or remain in the UK but may have a restriction or prohibition on claiming public funds for a period of time. For example, persons from the European Economic Area (EEA) nationals may be prevented from accessing public funds when they do not meet the eligibility criteria.
- Do not have leave to enter or remain, such as those who overstay their visa or who enter illegally.
- Individuals on a time limited visa, such as a student or work visa.

Violence against women disproportionately affects migrant women¹, and it is often common for perpetrators to use immigration status as a weapon of control and coercion² meaning that the survivors are too scared to disclose. Having NRPF means that the individual is subject to immigration control, and they will not be entitled to certain public funds. Survivors who face little to no support, are more

¹ ["Has she got status?": Gender based violence and the needs of migrant women \(senedd.wales\).](#)

² [Safety-Before-Status-Report-2021.pdf \(domesticabusecommissioner.uk\)](#) page 9.

likely to stay in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. No recourse to public funds is a condition attached to visas which stops a person from being able to access the majority of state benefits and funds.

This can leave many survivors in vulnerable situations with no financial support. Perpetrators are often well aware of the barriers that survivors face in accessing funds and support to remove themselves from these dangerous situations. This can be weaponised and creates a further opportunity for perpetrators to take advantage of this lack of support.

Additionally, deportations are particularly unsafe for survivors, women and LGBTQIA+ people. In a European Court of Human Rights decision in 2020, the courts made clear that a failure of a state to protect individuals from domestic abuse is a breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.³ Whilst the UK Government continues to deport survivors and put them in further danger, it continues to breach this protection. The UK Government's Rwanda policy in particular places survivors at further risk of human rights abuses.

We are calling for all political parties to:

- Abolish the policy of No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Put an end to the UK and Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership

The whole systems approach in preventing violence against women and girls

All forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) do not happen in silo, they are rooted in culture, narratives and attitudes of gender inequality and discrimination, which run throughout our society and institutions. VAWDASV violates women and children's human rights and leaves them with significant trauma, whilst they try to navigate their communities and their lives. We believe that everyone must be able to live a life without fear and that it is everybody's responsibility to challenge the structures, practise, and norms which harbour gender inequality in order to eradicate VAWDASV. There needs to be a whole system approach on eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG) to evidence any meaningful change, otherwise the system risks violating women and children all over again.

For years, experts have been referring to violence against women as a major public health problem.⁴ This recognises the intersection of factors occurring at the societal, community, relationship and individual levels which increase the likelihood of VAWDASV.⁵ Applying a public health approach to VAWDASV requires implementing three types of prevention interventions: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.⁶ This whole systems approach is already part of the Welsh Government's strategy for tackling VAWDASV and should be put into practise and extended across the UK.

The World Health Organisation has described a public health approach to violence prevention as "seeking to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim of a perpetrator of violence".⁷ A public health approach looks at society as a whole and recognises the significant consequences that VAWG has on health and wellbeing over a lifetime⁸ and implements a 3-pronged approach to prevention; primary, secondary and tertiary. The focus on multi-agency and collaborative work is essential as it must be recognised that all institutions, organisations, individuals, and authorities have a role to play and will benefit from the elimination of gender-based violence and abuse.

In our Still We Rise 5 Year Strategy 2019 to 2024 21, we highlighted the foundation we created to prevent violence against women and girls; Change That Lasts. This was informed by research into the systems and interventions at the time, which were found to be having little long-term impact and this was completed in partnership with Women's Aid Federation, England.

Change That Lasts,⁹ places survivors at the centre as experts in their own experience and is a whole system approach to ending violence against women and girls. The approach ensures needs-led, strength-based and trauma-informed support and focuses on prevention, intervention, perpetrator accountability and long-term recovery, which goes beyond short-term crisis intervention. Survivors may be in contact with many different organisations and agencies throughout their lifetime, but they may not always be able to identify the signs of abuse/violence, so opportunities for early intervention and signposting are missed.

A public health approach focuses on an entire society, so its fundamental that different barriers to community engagement are considered.

4 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

5 Hagemann-White et al. (2010) 'Review of Research on Factors at Play in Perpetration'; <https://www.humanconsultancy.com/assets/understanding-perpetration/bin/Review%20of%20Research.pdf>

6 <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-Blueprint-for-the-Prevention-ofVAWDASV27918.pdf>

7 <https://www.who.int/groups/violence-prevention-alliance/approach>

8 <https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/17512/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-a-public-health-approach.pdf>, page 3

9 <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/change-that-lasts/>

We are calling all parties to:

- Ensure that a whole system public health approach that ensures prevention of all forms, that is underpinned by having trauma-informed, strengths based and needs-led support from all services/organisation.
- Achieve sustainable commissioning of all services to ensure the capacity and resource to facilitate prevention, whilst a recognition that primary and secondary prevention is likely to cause an increase in specialist services demand.
- Look for opportunities to up-skill professionals across a wide range of sectors to increase opportunities for prevention.
- Commit to a public health approach and awareness campaigns which particularly support minoritised groups to begin to address additional barriers that are faced.

An effective use of the justice system

Survivors of domestic abuse face countless challenges at all levels of the civil and criminal justice system. From a lack of trust when reporting incidents of VAWDASV to authorities, facing years of waiting for a traumatic trial and facing the family court system, survivors are having to navigate barriers to justice.

The latest overview is due to be published in November, however, last year saw a decline in charging, prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse.¹⁰ Despite the second pillar of the policing framework citing a 'relentless perpetrator pursuit',¹¹ in the latest Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Summary, only 6% of all recorded crimes were closed with a suspect being charged.¹² This is even before survivors face the court system itself.

Concerningly, Rape Crisis data shows that the number of sexual offence cases waiting to go to the Crown Court stood at a record 8,741 in July 2023.¹³ During this waiting time, survivors often face penalties like having to go without their phone, leaving them potentially unable to access support networks¹⁴ and feeling like they are the ones being investigated.

10 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/latest-cps-data-justice-system-still-failing-women-domestic-abuse/>

11 <https://www.college.police.uk/article/police-action-against-men-who-harm-women-girls#:~:text=We%20are%20going%20to%20increase,girls%20going%20about%20their%20lives.>

12 Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls – Policing Performance and Insights Publication Executive Summary - March 2023

13 [Breaking Point | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)

14 [Rape victims among those to be asked to hand phones to police - BBC News](#)

Survivors also experience the weaponisation of the family court system by perpetrators. It is crucial for professionals working in family court settings to have a clear understanding of the role of power and control in domestic abuse and how this may be channelled through a child in the context of contact disputes. Child contact proceedings can often put adult and child survivors of domestic abuse at risk, as it can be used to perpetuate abuse.

Contact arrangements need to ensure children are protected and kept safe. Family Court practitioners need in depth training on all forms of VAWDASV in order to manage concerns about the safety and well-being of child and adult survivors. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 made good progress in acknowledging that children are survivors¹⁵ in their own right who experience the effects of domestic abuse.¹⁶ However, the family court system is still re-traumatising for both adult and child survivors.

We strongly believe that any proposals of compulsory pre-court mediation will not create a culture of safety and nor will it protect women and children from harm, and instead fuels an environment of further power and control from the perpetrator and we fundamentally do not agree with this proposal. Compulsory pre-court mediation will put survivors in an untenable position, even with the exemption provided for those able to evidence domestic abuse.

We are calling on all parties to:

- Focus on implementing the recommendations from the Harm panel report to address the deep-rooted systemic concerns with how the court identify and respond to domestic abuse.
- Training for all criminal justice staff to aid them to understand the different types of abuse, what this looks like and how it can impact survivors and their children. Training must incorporate the rights of survivors and their children (as ‘victims’ in their own right) as per the Victim and Prisoners’ Bill.
- Ensure that non-compliance of the Victim’s Code is taken seriously. The Victim and Prisoners’ Bill must go further to ensure that there is specific provision around the lack of compliance, redress, and sanctions.
- Take immediate action to reduce the court backlogs and continue the Pilot Pathfinder Courts.

15 Whilst the legislation provides the word “victim”, we believe that use of the word “survivor” is more empowering
16 Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Affordable and adequate housing for survivors

There are a myriad of obstacles that survivors of VAWDASV face when trying to access housing in the current climate. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, years of austerity, a shortage of housing and now the cost-of-living crisis, finding adequate housing has become- far from a given and fundamental right- an extraordinary challenge to find and to maintain.

While barriers to housing are society-wide, for those experiencing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, for those women who are fleeing violence and abuse, and for those seeking to rebuild their life following this trauma, these barriers are further exacerbated.

The fear of leaving a home and residing somewhere that is or has the potential to also be unsafe is often a reason why survivors remain in a home where abuse or violence is being perpetrated. This has been compounded during the housing and cost-of-living crisis with the difficulty of finding somewhere to live at all greatly increasing. The intersection between housing and VAWDASV cannot be underestimated. Abuse often takes place in the home, a place where everybody should feel safest.

Survivors of financial abuse and/or other forms of abuse and violence will face a multitude of barriers to secure suitable and safe accommodation. They may not be deemed a “desirable candidate” for private landlords due to their financial situation or their association with a perpetrator, in a market which is already grossly competitive.

In a recently published toolkit, Surviving Economic Abuse highlighted that 42% of landlords refused to let properties to those on housing benefits.¹⁷ Private rental properties also often require proof of earnings and a deposit up front. There are many different reasons why a survivor may not have the funds for this, due to financial hardship, and therefore would be unlikely to be able to secure a private rental property, which is exacerbated by a housing shortage.¹⁸

¹⁷ https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10649/3_-wha-economic-abuse.pdf

¹⁸ [Wales' Housing Crisis: Local Housing Allowance and the private rental market in Wales, Winter 2023 - Bevan Foundation](#)

We are calling on all parties to:

- Commit to an adequate programme dedicated to the building of specific social housing and temporary accommodation.
- All individuals who are involved in processing housing claims must be VAWDASV trained to ensure they understand different forms of abuse/violence and the multitude of situations where a survivor may present as homeless or will require a new home.
- Specific training should be provided to ensure that those within housing understand multiple disadvantages and the difficulties marginalised groups face, to ensure systematic barriers are broken down.

A benefits system that works for all, including survivors

Being able to access their own funds can be vital for the safety and well-being of survivors. Perpetrators utilise financial barriers to prevent survivors from achieving independence from the perpetrator and securing financial independence. This is being exacerbated by the current economic climate.¹⁹

Financial institutions including banks and the Department of Work and Pensions need to ensure that they are informed on issues relating to VAWDASV and how survivors may present. Ensuring that all professionals are aware of the barriers that survivors experience enhances a whole system approach that provides them with the support that they need.

Additionally, the Department for Work and Pensions needs to also be aware of the financial barriers which make it harder for survivors to leave. Limits on accessing funds like the two child tax credit limit and the benefit cap can have a direct impact on how a survivor accesses support. These caps disproportionately affect women as 90% of single parents are mothers²⁰ and therefore can only access £13,400 in Wales.²¹ Women are also more likely to work part-time and less likely to have access to savings. This lack of financial independence can often be a barrier to leaving.²² The rates of those being capped is also increasing as the cost-of-living crisis progresses. Many are also unaware of the impacts that not registering for Child Benefit can have on the state pension.²³

19 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-cost-of-living/>

20 3 Department for Work and Pensions, Benefit Cap Data to August 2018

21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-may-2022/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-may-2022>

22 <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/spring-budget-2022-women-and-employment/>

23 <https://arthurboyd.co.uk/why-you-should-still-register-for-child-benefit-even-if-you-are-a-high-earner/>

As things stand, if a couple are living together, they will need to make a joint claim.²⁴ Guidance on the website is woefully ill-equipped to deal with survivors and even pushes arrangements for separate payment to be temporary. Separate payments are only offered on a case-by-case basis. The rates of those being capped is also increasing as the cost-of-living crisis progresses. Many are also unaware of the impacts that not registering for Child Benefit can have on the state pension.²⁵

We are calling on all parties to:

- Make separate Universal Credit payments as standard.
- Ensure that those in refuge and temporary accommodation can access Universal Credit without delay
- Scrap the two-child tax credit limit.
- Remove the benefits cap which currently stands at £13,400 for a single person.
- Begin a programme of trauma-informed training of all DWP customer-facing staff.

Legislative Reform

Welsh Women's Aid were devastated by the passing of the Illegal Migration Bill in the House of Lords this year. This now means that the Bill will reach royal assent and become law. This Bill is going to catastrophically impact women and children fleeing to the UK, due to the risk of serious harm and persecution in their home country.

The 'stop the small boats' campaign by the government falls short of protecting vulnerable people who are exploited daily by criminal gangs. It fails to recognise the intense re-traumatisation survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence will face under such conditions and the exacerbation of individuals vulnerabilities that the Bill will allow for.

The proposed Illegal Migration Bill will leave migrants who have little choice but to make these life-threatening crossings with no access to anti-slavery protections.

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-couples-an-introduction/universal-credit-further-information-for-couples>

²⁵ [Universal Credit and "survival sex" - Work and Pensions Committee - House of Commons \(parliament.uk\)](#)

We are concerned about the impact that this legislation will have on the many women and children that are forced to flee from their home countries. This will significantly impact those at risk of sexual exploitation and modern slavery, 70% of which are women and girls.²⁶ Female migrants will be left with even fewer options to escape gender-based violence.

Alongside the specialist sector and survivors, Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) were encouraged by the possibility of the Victims Bill and how it could strengthen provision to ensure survivors were at the forefront and that they were able to rebuild their lives after violence and abuse.

We, alongside other specialist sector organisations, also believe that the Bill fails to address inequalities in the access of specialist support and justice for victims from marginalised groups. There have been no references made to migrant victims and those with no recourse to public funds. The Bill will not provide what victims need if it does not address the needs of all victims. The Bill must include protection for migrant victims, alongside implementation of a firewall.

Organisations such as Latin American Women's Right Service (LAWRS) in the #StepUpMigrantWomen campaign have highlighted how there must be an end to data-sharing when victims have insecure immigration status. We are disappointed to see that the UK Government have not implemented an information-sharing firewall between immigration enforcement and statutory services for survivors of domestic abuse.

Further, we are concerned that where survivors are subject to NRPF, their families face additional barriers to support. The Children's Act 1989 remains the principal piece of legislation regarding provision for the safeguarding and welfare of children in Wales. Section 17 of the Act places a statutory duty on local authorities to safeguard 'children in need' in their area, but in many cases of VAWDASV where survivors are subject to NRPF, their families experience poor treatment from statutory services, with the focus often placed on their immigration status rather than their support needs.

²⁶ The Freedom Fund, Gender inequality and modern slavery, How to break the cycle of women and girls' exploitation

We are calling on all parties to:

- Revoke the Illegal Migration Bill
- Insert a firewall within the Victims and Prisoners Bill to prevent third-party data sharing to the Home Office
- In the existence of NRPF, commit to a funding to provide support to survivors of that status and ensure that statutory agencies are fulfilling their responsibilities to survivors and their families.

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