

The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit

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Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. For almost 50 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We are a federation of nearly 170 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country.

This briefing summarises the 2023 edition of Women's Aid's yearly publication on the provision and uptake of domestic abuse services in England, from April 2021 – March 2022. Available [here](#).

Key findings

The 2023 Annual Audit highlights the ongoing work of dedicated domestic abuse services and how specialist, accessible provision is essential for supporting survivors. Services continue to feel the pressure of inadequate funding and believe that commissioning should place transparency, an understanding of violence against women and girls and the need for specialist and holistic services at the centre of practices.

Service users

- ▶ [On Track](#) data showed that domestic abuse is a gendered crime - **94.6%** of perpetrators were male and **73.0%** were a partner/ex-partner of the service user.
- ▶ Most women (**62.0%**) had children, with an average of 1.3 children per service user.
- ▶ Over a quarter of survivors (**28.7%**) reported having a disability and, of these, **56.0%** had a mental health disability and **22.3%** had a physical disability.
- ▶ The length of time abuse was experienced ranged from **0 to 66 years**, with an average of **six years and one month**.
- ▶ 4,611 (**12.1%**) women were not British nationals and **30%** of these women had no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

Provision of services

- ▶ Of the 395 services in [Routes to Support](#)¹, there was a **net increase** in the number of all service types offered, except drop-in services which have remained the same.
- ▶ An **additional 55 bedspaces** were available, but there were **229 fewer vacancies** than the previous year. Despite the increase in bedspaces, the figure of 4,344 still falls short (by 1,311) of the Council of Europe's minimum recommendation, this is a **23.2%** shortfall.
- ▶ **61.6%** of all the referrals received in refuge services using On Track were rejected, with **26.2%** of these due to lack of space.
- ▶ Only **9.1%** of vacancies could consider women with NRPF, and **less than half** of refuge vacancies could accommodate a woman with two children. Less than **1%** of all vacancies were wheelchair accessible.
- ▶ **71.1%** of refuge services were commissioned by their local authorities, a small increase on the previous year. Of respondents to the Women's Aid Annual Survey², **44.0%** had been running an area of their service without any dedicated funding, and statutory duty³.

Recommendations

Women's Aid is calling for:

- ▶ **The Government to commit to a funding settlement of £426.5 million per year⁴ as a minimum for specialist domestic abuse services, and ring-fence funding for specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors.**
- ▶ **The Government to strengthen monitoring and national oversight of the statutory duty.**
- ▶ **Local authorities to ensure they adhere to national commissioning guidance.**

¹ Routes to Support is the UK-wide online database for domestic abuse and other violence against women services, and provides up-to-date refuge vacancies for women and children.

² The Women's Aid Annual Survey is a national survey of the whole range of specialist domestic abuse services for women and children in England. The online survey was sent in May 2022 (with a deadline of mid-June) to all domestic abuse services in England that run both or one of refuge and/or community-based support services, listed in Routes to Support (395 services in total).

³ The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a statutory duty on tier one local authorities in England to provide support for victims of domestic abuse, including children, within safe accommodation.

⁴ Women's Aid. (2022) *Funding specialist support for domestic abuse survivors: revised estimates* December 2022. Bristol: Women's Aid

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