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VAWG Inquiry Scoping

This scoping paper is intended to inform the Committee for the Executive Office's considerations on potential key lines of inquiry on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

It sets out the current policy and funding landscape in Northern Ireland and other neighbouring jurisdictions, international human rights standards, and issues which are of particular interest to the Committee.

This information is provided to Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in support of their duties, and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as professional legal advice, or as a substitute for it.

Key points

- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls is a key priority for the Northern Ireland Executive. As well as the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework 2024-31, led by The Executive Office (TEO), there is a range of other related work being taken forward across Government, including through the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy. The Strategic Framework is not intended to duplicate work already being taken forward by other Departments and public bodies.
- VAWG is not captured through a single measure in Northern Ireland; rather, it is understood through a range of complementary data sources, each reflecting different aspects of the issue.
- In 2025/2026, £2 million was initially ringfenced for the EVAWG Strategy. The draft Budget proposed by the Finance Minister included continued ringfenced funding, rising to £5.8 million in 2028-29, although this has not been agreed. Other areas of the Budget will impact on VAWG, including funding for the PSNI, and discretionary Departmental budgets.
- A range of actions have been taken forward by the Strategic Framework, including through making grants to both local and regional organisations, awareness-raising campaigns, and research. Further actions have been set out in the Second Delivery Plan, including an Interim Review, and research on men and boys.
- Neighbouring jurisdictions also have a range of strategies and funding streams in relation to addressing VAWG, some of which have been in operation for longer than the Strategic Framework in Northern Ireland.
- The Strategic Framework is focused on the root causes of VAWG, with reference to systematic inequalities and damaging culture, attitudes and beliefs. Both the Framework, and recent research, have also referred to the role of paramilitaries in relation to VAWG.
- The Strategic Framework refers to the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences in VAWG, including proposing future research. The Framework is intended to take a trauma-informed approach.

- The Strategic Framework includes specific actions relating to children and young people. The Youth Assembly Rights and Equality Committee plan to consider EVAWG from the perspective of young men.

Members may wish to consider potential lines of inquiry around:

- **Co-ordination:** How is work through the EVAWG Strategic Framework, and other relevant Strategies being co-ordinated, and monitored across Government, to support a whole-system approach?
- **Data and monitoring:** How effective is the current evidence base in reflecting all forms of VAWG, what work is underway to improve the coherence and consistency of data, and how will progress be monitored?
- **Funding:** Is it clear what funding is available in relation to VAWG across departments and programmes, and is the current funding sufficient, sustainable and effectively co-ordinated?
- **Neighbouring jurisdictions:** What lessons can be learned from other jurisdictions' approaches to EVAWG, including co-ordination and funding?
- **Issues of particular interest to the Committee:** How responsive is the Framework to emerging issues, how resilient is the delivery system, and how effectively is the Framework working to prevent VAWG, including through work with children and young people?

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Introduction

At the Committee for the Executive Office's Strategic Planning session on 29th April 2026, the Committee agreed to consider a potential Inquiry into Ending Violence Against Women (EVAWG) in the absence of the Race Relations legislation.¹ Suggested areas for consideration include; attitudinal change, the underlying causes of abuse, adverse experiences, trauma resilience, and young people.

This paper follows a request to the Research and Information Service (RaISe) to conduct an initial scoping exercise on potential key lines of Inquiry for the Committee to consider before summer recess.

The paper is primarily focused on work being undertaken by TEO in relation to EVAWG. It does not consider reform of civil and criminal law relating to VAWG, for instance issues relating to legislation addressing domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and online abuse.

The Committee has also agreed to engage with organisations who have received funding under the EVAWG Strategic Framework, and request further information from TEO.² The outcomes of these actions may also inform how the Committee wishes to approach any inquiry.

¹ Northern Ireland Assembly, Committee for the Executive Office, [Minutes of proceedings 6 May 2026](#)

² Northern Ireland Assembly, Committee for the Executive Office, [Minutes of proceedings 6 May 2026](#)

1 The Northern Irish policy landscape

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government includes EVAWG as one of its nine cross-cutting priorities for this mandate.³

TEO's work in this area is primarily related to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework. However, it is important to note that across government, there are a range of other relevant strategies and programmes of work, including the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, led by the Department of Health (DoH) and Department of Justice (DoJ). The Strategic Framework is intended not to duplicate already existing workstreams and focus on tackling the wider spectrum of violence, abuse and harm against women and girls as well as the root causes.⁴

1.1 Background

On 9 March 2021, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland launched a petition calling for a VAWG Strategy.⁵ Later that month, the Assembly passed a motion condemning VAWG and calling for a fully resourced strategy, including comprehensive relationships and sexuality education and legislation to include misogyny as a hate crime category.⁶ The Executive subsequently agreed that a cross-sectoral and intersectional approach was needed to address root causes, with a focus on behavioural and attitudinal change, led by TEO.⁷

³ Northern Ireland Executive, [Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most Programme for Government 2024-2027](#) pp. 32-35

⁴ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 11

⁵ Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, [Women's Aid Launch a Petition for a Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy in NI](#) (09/03/2021)

⁶ Northern Ireland Assembly, [Official Report 23rd March 2021](#), vol 137, no 4, pp. 47-66

⁷ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 10

1.2 Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework

Following a co-design process, and consultation⁸, the [Strategic Framework 2024-31](#) and [Foundational Action Plan 2024-2026](#) were launched on 16th September 2024.⁹

The Strategy's vision is one of a changed society where women and girls are free from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse, and harm, including the attitudes, systems, and structural inequalities that cause them.¹⁰

Its themes and outcomes are summarised in Appendix A.

The second [Delivery Plan 2026-2028](#), was launched on 22nd April 2026.¹¹ This includes an action to commission an independent interim review of EVAWG Programme in 2027/28.

1.3 Other relevant strategies

There are a significant number of other workstreams and Strategies that deal with issues relating to VAWG. The EVAWG Strategic Framework is intended '*not to displace or duplicate existing policy remits or funding streams*'¹², but rather '*amplify, accentuate, and accelerate*' other work.¹³ TEO officials reported to the Committee in February 2026 that '*Across departments and agencies, there is now a noticeable, increased focus on violence against women and girls*'.¹⁴

⁸ The Executive Office, [Consultation on a Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Foundational Action Plan](#) (2023)

⁹ The Executive Office, [Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls launched](#) (16/09/2024)

¹⁰ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 3

¹¹ The Executive Office, [First Minister and deputy First Minister launch second Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan](#)

¹² [AQW 46884/22-27](#)

¹³ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 13

¹⁴ Correspondence from TEO officials to Committee for the Executive Office, 26/02/2026

The EVAWG Strategic Framework refers to a range of other strategies and programmes, including¹⁵:

- The [Domestic and Sexual Abuse \(DSA\) Strategy 2024 – 2031](#), led by DoJ and DoH. This strategy is intended to be ‘gender-inclusive’, although refers to additional barriers for different equality groups, including women and girls.
- The implementation of the [Gillen Review](#), led by DoJ
- Early intervention work, including policy development, service delivery and curriculum, led by the Department of Education (DE)
- The development of a suite of [four Executive Social Inclusion Strategies](#) (Anti-Poverty, Disability, Gender Equality, and Sexual Orientation) – led by the Department for Communities (DfC).
- The [Executive Programme on Paramilitary Organised Crime](#) (EPPOC)
- [PSNI Action Plan: Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- Public Prosecution Service (PPS) policy on [Prosecuting Cases of Domestic Abuse](#)

The Domestic and Sexual Abuse (DSA) Strategy 2024-2031 builds on the previous Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland¹⁶, which launched in 2016, as well as previous related strategies and action plans from the mid-2000s.¹⁷

In relation to the Social Inclusion Strategies, the Department has taken a phased approach, with draft Anti-Poverty and Disability Strategies consulted on. As of June 2026, the Minister is considering next steps for the further development of the Gender Equality Strategy.¹⁸

¹⁵ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), Annex A

¹⁶ Department of Justice and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, [Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland: A Seven Year Strategy](#) (2016)

¹⁷ For example, Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, [Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse A Regional Strategy 2008 – 2013](#); Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, [Tackling Violence at Home A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland](#) (2005)

¹⁸ [AQW 48017/22-27](#)

The Strategic Framework sets out a range of oversight and accountability measures¹⁹:

- **Executive Ministers:** will oversee the Strategic Framework and hold those responsible for delivery of key actions to account.
- **Oversight Board:** is chaired by Junior Ministers and includes the Permanent Secretaries of key delivery Departments, and representation from other key agencies and local government and the Community and Voluntary Sector. This Board will review and monitor the implementation of the Strategic Framework taking account of the wider strategic context, including how priorities and actions span Departments and public sector organisations, and linkages to other relevant strategies.
- **Programme Board:** is chaired by the Programme's Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) in the Executive Office. It will monitor progress against Delivery Plan targets and enable updates on the wider EVAWG work of departments, their supported bodies and organisations, and impact of other relevant strategies and activities. Membership will reflect that of the Oversight Board.
- **Insight and Reference Network:** to give strong connection to and support collaboration with, the Community and Voluntary sector, and other partners.
- **Sectoral Groups and Problem-Solving Groups:** to facilitate focused, short-term projects on identified issues, bringing together relevant insights and expertise.

1.4 International Human Rights Standards

The EVAWG Strategic Framework refers to a range of international treaties and human rights standards, which the UK has ratified. Key examples include:

- The [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (directly incorporated into UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998);

¹⁹Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), pp. 43-44.

- The Council of Europe [Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (also known as the Istanbul Convention);
- The United Nations [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW); and
- The United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC)

These treaty bodies, and others, have set out a range of recommendations and concluding observations for the UK, including at a Northern Ireland level, in relation to human rights and EVAWG. For example, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) published a baseline evaluation report on the United Kingdom in relation to the Istanbul Convention in 2025. This was followed by recommendations from the Committee of the Parties on how the UK could better implement the Convention.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) set out a range of human rights standards in their response to the consultation on the draft EVAWG Strategic Framework.²⁰

1.5 Potential lines of inquiry

The Strategic Framework is designed to sit alongside a wide range of existing strategies and programmes, with an explicit aim to amplify, accentuate, and accelerate rather than duplicate delivery.

Oversight arrangements include Executive Ministers, an Oversight Board, and Programme Board structures intended to support cross-government coordination.

²⁰ NIHRC, [Submission to the Executive Office's Consultation on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework](#) (2023)

Members may wish to consider:**Cross-government coordination**

- To what extent is activity relating to VAWG effectively coordinated across departments, agencies and strategies (including the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and wider social inclusion strategies)?

Strategic alignment and coherence

- How does the EVAWG Strategic Framework align with other relevant strategies, particularly where remits overlap (e.g. domestic abuse, gender equality, trauma-informed policy)?
- To what extent does the EVAWG Strategic Framework align with relevant international human rights standards?
- How does the absence of a finalised Gender Equality Strategy affect the coherence of the overall approach to addressing VAWG?

Oversight and accountability

- How effectively are the Oversight Board and Programme Board functioning in practice to monitor delivery and drive coordination?
- How is progress reported across different strategies, and is this sufficiently transparent and consistent?

Whole-system delivery

- To what extent does the current governance model support a genuinely whole-system approach across government and wider sectors?
- Are there gaps or duplication in delivery across programmes and funded activity?

2 Data landscape

There is no single, consistently applied measure of violence against women in Northern Ireland. Instead, the evidence base is drawn from a range of sources, including police and justice statistics, population surveys, research studies and administrative data from service providers.

These sources capture different aspects of VAWG and are not directly comparable. As a result, they provide a partial and fragmented picture, which must be interpreted alongside their respective definitions, coverage and limitations. Table B.1, located in Appendix B, displays prevalence findings from a variety of sources.

TEO have indicated a VAWG dashboard is in development (in collaboration with NISRA), which will likely display PSNI VAWG crime data, and Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS), Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS), and the Northern Ireland Safe Community (NISCS) survey data. An official launch date for this dashboard has yet to be announced.

2.1 Official recorded crime and justice data – VAWG

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has developed a definition of VAWG offences for operational and performance monitoring purposes:

“VAWG offences include female victims of violence against the person and sexual offences (excluding offences of corporate manslaughter, death/serious injury by unlawful driving and assault on police).”

Using this definition, the PSNI reported that in the twelve months to July 2025 there were 21,729 VAWG offences recorded, which was a reduction of 4% compared to the previous 12 months.

Over the period from September 2022 to January 2024, the sanction outcome rate was 26.2%. This is the proportion of recorded crime that result in formal police action, such as a charge, summons or caution. Both the sanction

outcome rate and charges/summons rate for VAWG offences are higher compared to all such offences recorded (24.0% and 18.4% respectively).²¹

This measure provides an indication of police-recorded crime across selected offence types and offers insight into policing outcomes. It reflects a particular operational definition and is best understood as one component of a broader evidence base, alongside other sources which capture different aspects of VAWG.

2.2 Official recorded crime and justice data – domestic abuse

PSNI data on domestic abuse provides one of the most established and consistent sources of information on violence affecting women and girls. These statistics provide information on overall volumes, population rates and trends over time.

The PSNI has adopted the definition of domestic abuse as outlined in the strategy ‘Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland’ as:

*‘threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member’.*²²

In 2024/25, the PSNI recorded 29,751 domestic abuse incidents (reported to the police) and 18,393 domestic abuse crimes (where an offence has been recorded). Almost one in five (19.2%) of all crimes recorded involved domestic abuse.²³

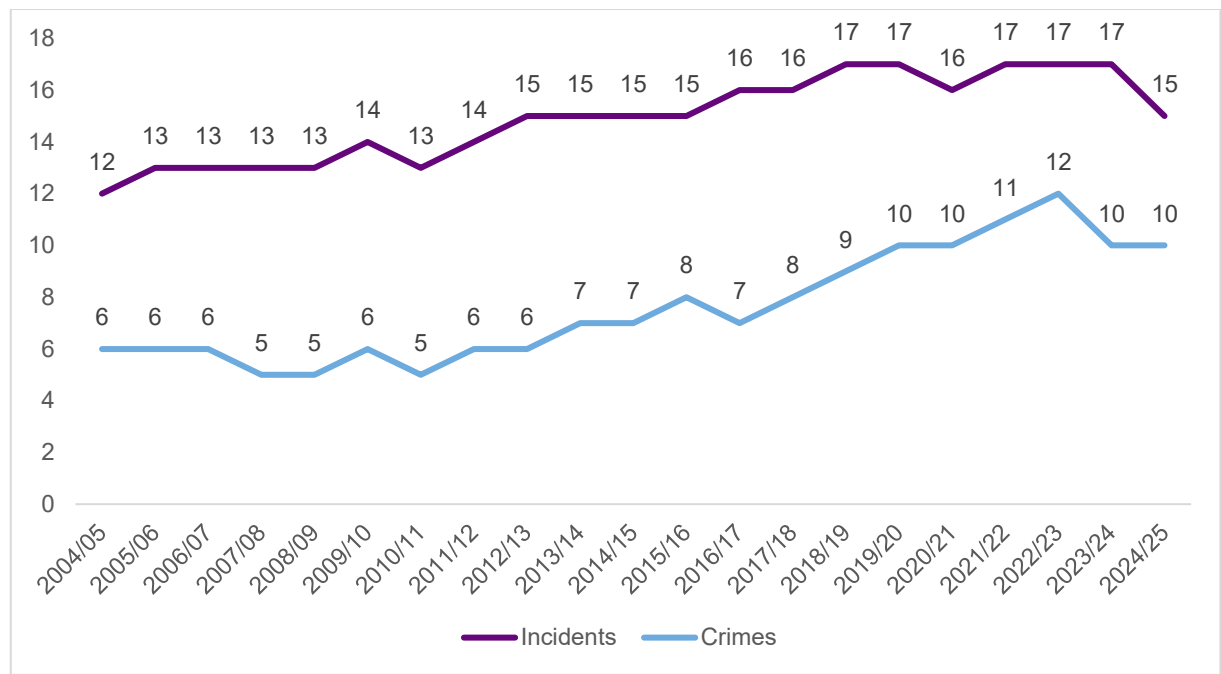
²¹ PSNI, [What we are doing to tackle violence against women and girls?](#)

²² Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety & Department of Justice, [Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland Strategy - 2016](#)

²³ [Almost one in five crimes involved domestic abuse | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

Recorded domestic abuse incident and crime rates have increased over time, although there has been a slight decline from the peak in 2022/23

Figure 2.1 Domestic abuse motivated incidents and crimes Northern Ireland per 1,000 population, Northern Ireland, 2004/05-2024/25²⁴



PSNI data provides a breakdown by gender, demonstrating that females are disproportionately affected. In 2024/25, females accounted for 11,893 of the 17,659 known victims of domestic abuse crimes. This is the equivalent of two thirds (67% of victims), while males accounted for a third (5,747 of victims or 33%). Although domestic abuse affects both females and males, these figures underline the extent to which recorded domestic abuse remains a gendered issue in practice. Females consistently account for the majority of domestic abuse victims, although the proportion of male victims has increased over time.

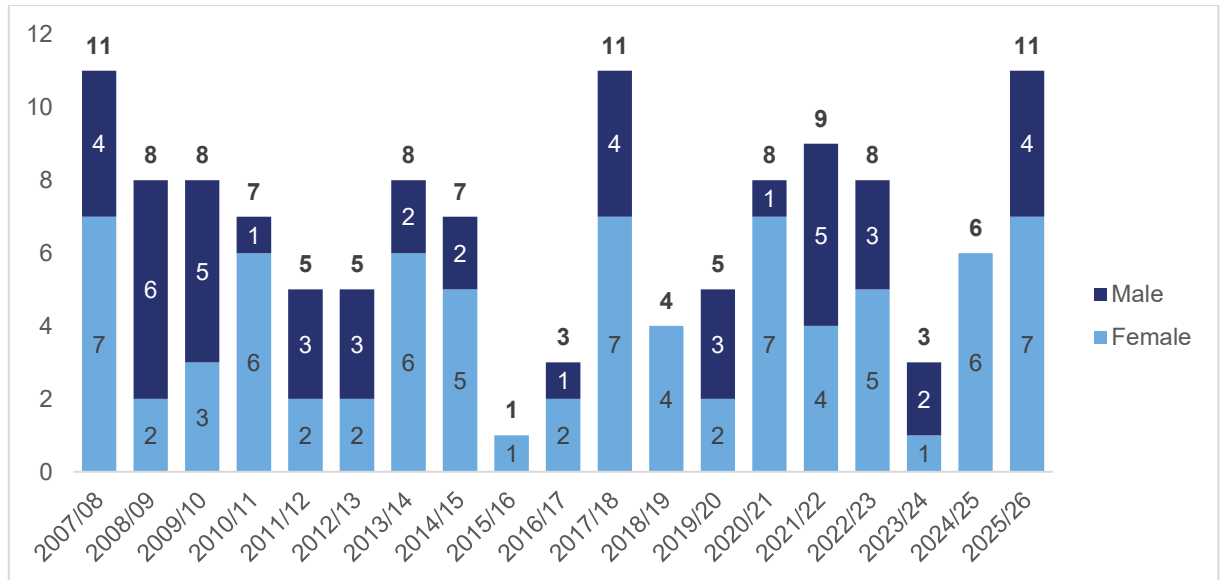
PSNI data also provides detailed breakdowns by offence type including categories such as homicide²⁵, violence with injury, violence without injury, stalking and harassment and sexual offences.

²⁴ PSNI, [Domestic Abuse Statistics](#)

²⁵ Homicide comprises the offences of murder, manslaughter, corporate manslaughter and infanticide.

Domestic abuse-related homicides show year-to-year volatility, with women more frequently victims.

Figure 2.2 Number of homicides with a domestic abuse motivation by gender of victim, Northern Ireland, 2008/08-2025/26^{26 27}



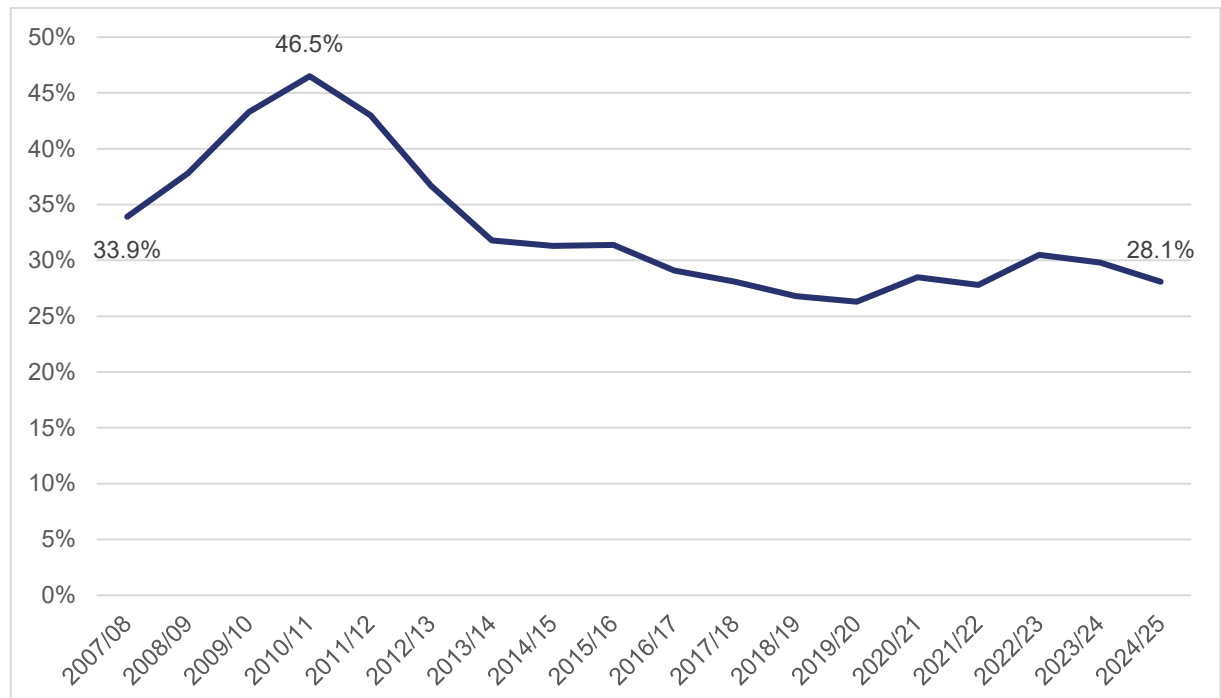
The statistics include information on sanction outcomes, where a recorded crime results in formal police action such as a charge, summons or caution. In 2024/25, there were 5,168 sanction outcomes, representing a rate of 28.1%.

Sanction outcome rates have declined from earlier peaks, with some fluctuation in recent years.

²⁶ PSNI, [Domestic Abuse Statistics](#)

²⁷ The year in which a homicide is recorded for crime recording purposes is based on the date it is established as homicide; the date of death may have occurred in a previous year.

Figure 2.3 Domestic abuse motivated crimes sanction outcome rates, Northern Ireland, 2007/08-2024/25²⁸



Further information on the progression of domestic abuse-related cases through the justice system is available from DoJ) official statistics. This includes data on prosecutions, convictions for cases involving offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, and processing times for cases by court type.

In 2024/25, this data recorded 2,501 prosecutions and 1,408 convictions across all courts, corresponding to an overall conviction rate of 56.3% for those cases. The same statistics show a median processing time of 152 days from offence reported to court disposal, compared with 189 days for all criminal cases in 2024/25.

Together, PSNI and DoJ data describe the volume and characteristics of recorded domestic abuse, as well as the extent to which cases progress through the criminal justice system. However, the evidence is limited to

²⁸ PSNI, [Domestic Abuse Statistics](#)

incidents that are reported to, recorded by, and processed within these systems.

2.3 Population survey data

Population surveys provide a complementary source of information by capturing self-reported experiences, attitudes and perceptions among the general population.

Key survey sources concerning VAWG in Northern Ireland are the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS) and the Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS). These annual surveys of adults and 16-year-olds respectively, capture data on social attitudes, experiences and perceptions in Northern Ireland. They are both used to provide results for TEO's EVAWG reports.²⁹

NILTS includes questions on gender-based violence, covering forms such as physical, sexual, psychological and online violence. 'Gender-based violence' is defined as:

*"violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, or violence that affects people of a particular gender disproportionately. It does not only relate to physical assaults but also includes words and actions that can cause someone to feel afraid, anxious or humiliated."*³⁰

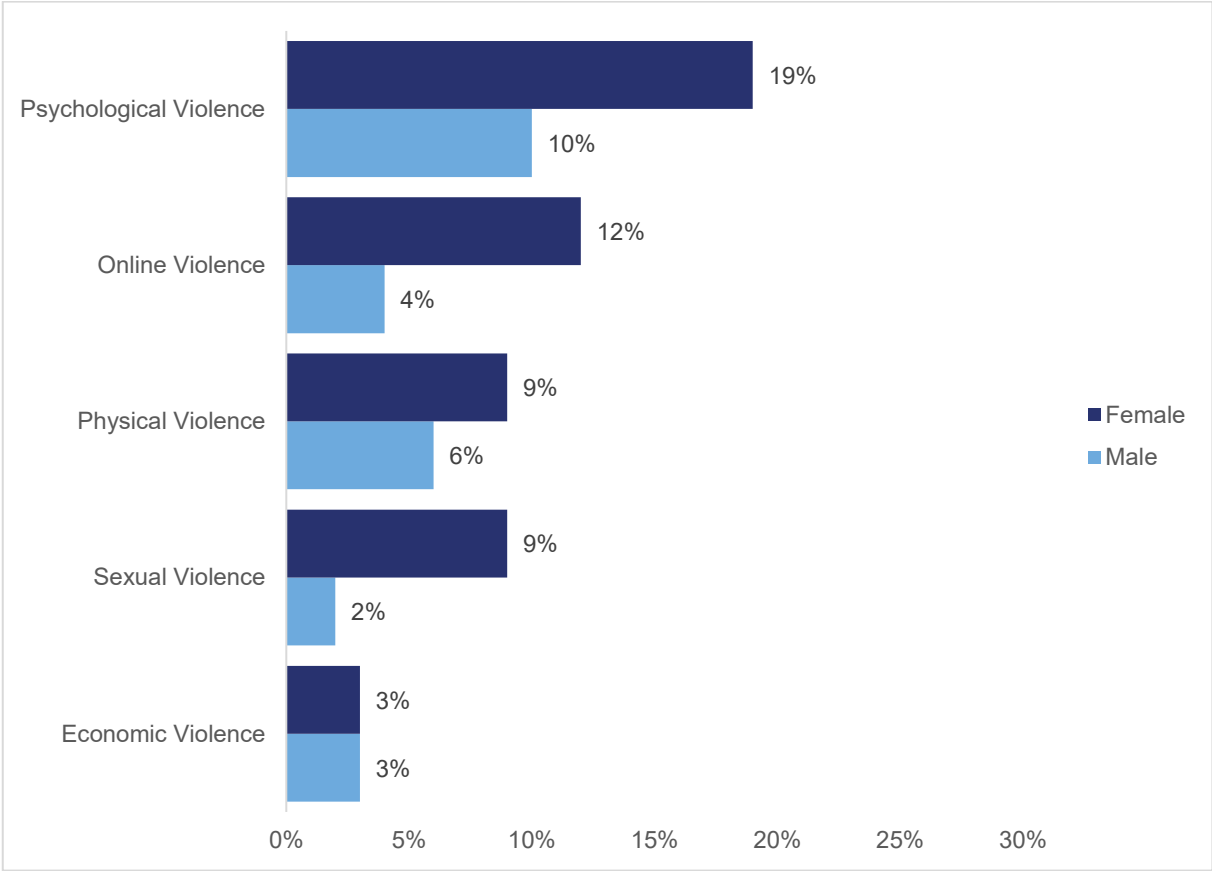
In 2025, 19% of females reported experiencing gender-based psychological violence in the previous five years, compared with 10% of males, while 9% of females reported gender-based sexual violence compared with 2% of males.

Females report higher levels of gender-based violence across most categories, particularly psychological, sexual, and online violence.

²⁹ The Executive Office, [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\)](#)

³⁰ P. Devine and M. McKnight, [Gender-based violence: Safe or unsafe in everyday spaces](#) (2026)

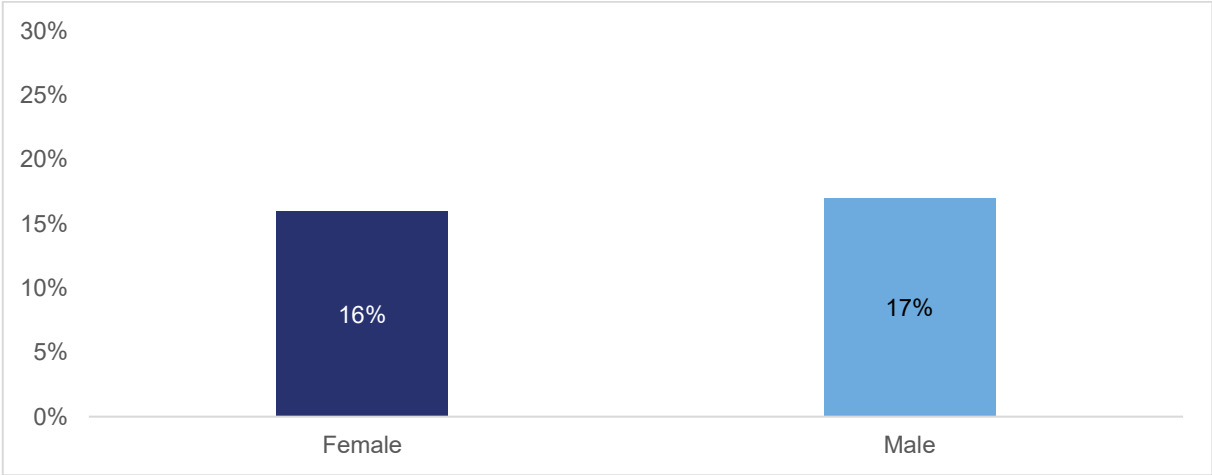
Figure 2.4 Percentage of respondents who have experienced different types of gender based violence in the last five years, Northern Ireland, 2025³¹



³¹ ARK, [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2025](#)

In addition to prevalence measures, NILTS includes questions on perceptions of safety, access to support, awareness of services and exposure to negative attitudes or behaviours towards women and girls in different settings. This data provides insight into the broader social context and perceived barriers associated with violence and abuse. In 2025, around 40% of females and 32% of males reported that they would find it difficult to access support if they were a victim of gender-based violence. Further breakdowns are provided in Figure B.5.

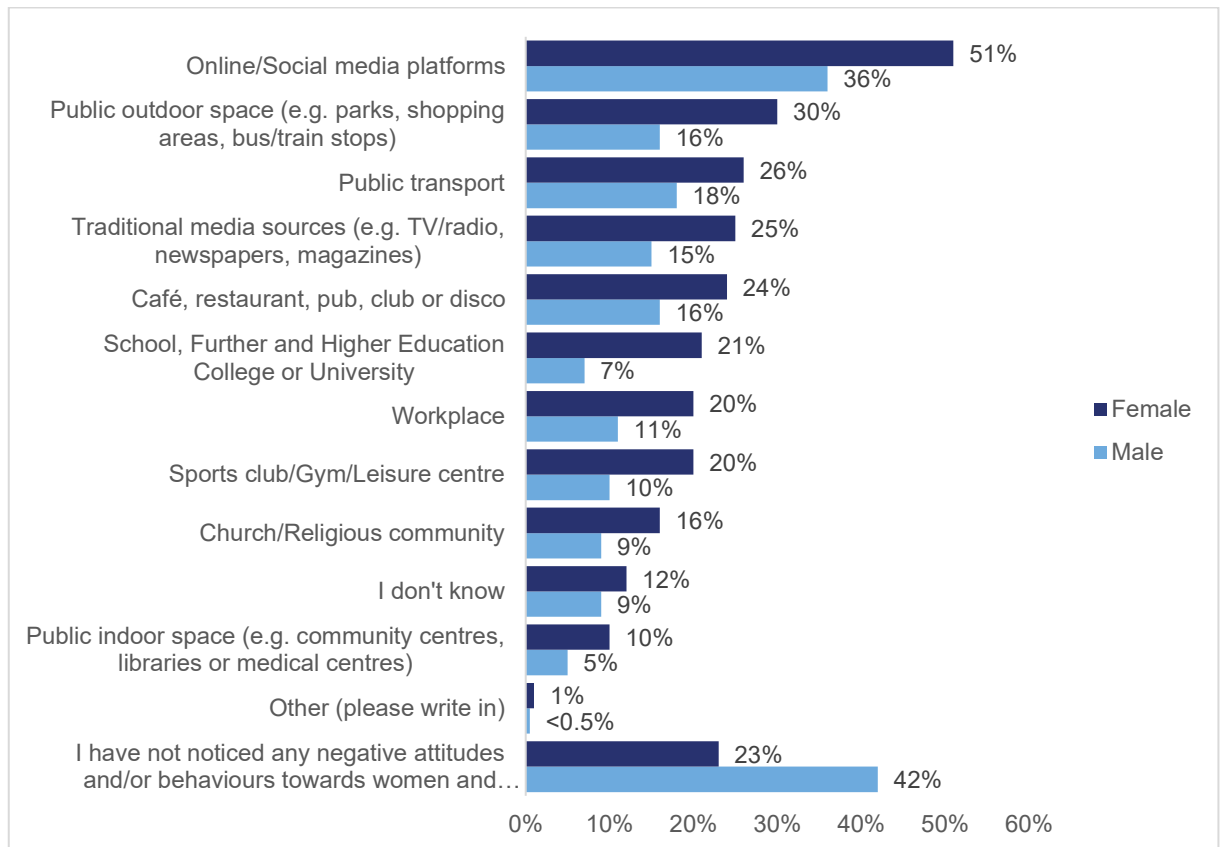
Figure 2.5 Respondents who are aware of any events or activities addressing gender-based violence in Northern Ireland, 2025³² - Awareness of VAWG-related initiatives is low across both men and women



³² ARK, [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2025](#)

Negative attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls are widely observed, particularly in online and public settings, and more frequently reported by females.

Figure 2.6 Percentage of respondents who noticed any negative attitudes and/or behaviours towards women and girls by place, Northern Ireland, 2025 (%)³³



The YLTS provides information on young people’s perceptions of gender-based violence. This includes questions on prevalence (similar to the NILTS) whether respondents believe women and girls are more or less likely to become victims over time, as well as specific questions on online violence.

In 2025, 53% of females believed that women and girls were more likely to become victims of gender-based violence than two years previously, indicating a perceived increase in risk. For further details, see Figure B.6, in Appendix B.

³³ ARK, [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2025](#)

The Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey (NISCS) also provides insight into experiences of domestic abuse that may not be reported to the police. The most recent domestic abuse module was conducted in 2018/19. Although it had been intended to repeat this module in subsequent years, the move from face-to-face to telephone interviewing from 2020/21, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that respondents' privacy and confidentiality could not be assured. As a result, these questions were not included. The 2024/25 survey employed a 'mixed-mode' of both telephone and face-to-face interviews to enable experiences of domestic abuse to be captured, however these results are not available yet.^{34,35}

It estimated that 23.1% of females aged 16 to 74 had experienced at least one form of domestic abuse since the age of 16, while 13.7% had experienced at least one form within the previous three years.

2.4 Research based data

Research-based studies provide further insight into the lived experience of VAWG, including aspects that are not easily captured through standard statistical measures. One such source is the Every Voice Matters (EVM) study, which examines women's experiences of different forms of violence and abuse across the life course. The research defined violence as:

*“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.*³⁶

The EVM data includes measures of whether respondents have experienced specific forms of violence (such as harassment, stalking, sexual violence and psychological abuse), both across their lifetime and within more recent periods. Among respondents, 90.8% reported experiencing at least one form of violence

³⁴ Department of Justice, [Update on the 2021/22 and 2022/23 NISCTS](#)

³⁵ Department of Justice, [Update on Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey 2020/21 and Covid-19](#)

³⁶ S. Lagdon, [Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland](#) (2023)

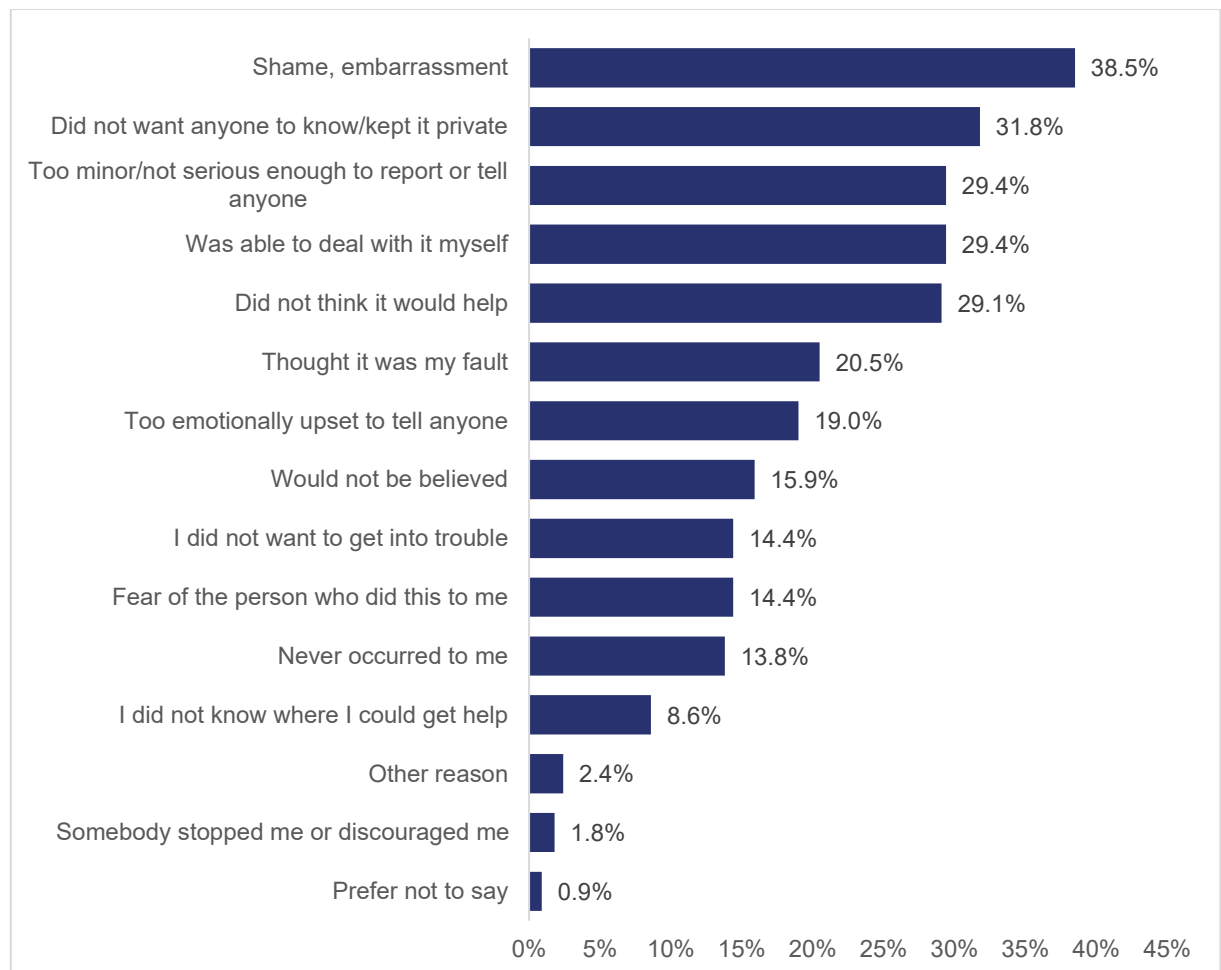
after the age of 18, and 67.9% reported that at least one form had occurred in the previous 12 months.

As this study is based on a self-selecting online survey (i.e. based on voluntary participation rather than probabilistic sampling), the results are likely influenced by selection bias and should not be interpreted as representative.

The study also includes information on disclosure and reporting behaviour. In this dataset, 65.9% of respondents said they had not reported or disclosed an incident, with reasons including shame, concerns about privacy, and a belief that reporting would not help.

Non-reporting appears to be driven by a combination of stigma, perceived lack of benefit, and personal coping responses

Figure 2.7 Percentage reporting reasons for not disclosing the experience of violence or abuse, Northern Ireland, 2023³⁷



TEO-commissioned report *It's Just What Happens* provides further evidence on the experiences of girls and young women in Northern Ireland. The research found that almost three quarters (73%) of young women reported having experienced at least one form of violence.³⁸

³⁷ S. Lagdon, [Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland](#) (2023)

³⁸ S. McAlister et al, [It's Just What Happens' Girls and Young Women's Views and Experiences of Violence in Northern Ireland](#) (2023)

It also highlights the prevalence of 'everyday violence', including street harassment and online abuse, which participants described as routine or normalised experiences.

However, findings should be interpreted with caution. The research was based on an online survey of 200 participants (young women and girls aged 12-17; with an additional 68 participating in qualitative focus groups and one-to-one interviews). As a result, it is not a representative population survey and better interpreted as illustrative of lived experience and the normalisation of violence rather than directly comparable prevalence estimates.

2.5 Administrative data from service providers

Administrative data from service providers offer an additional perspective by capturing information on demand for support services and the characteristics of those accessing them.

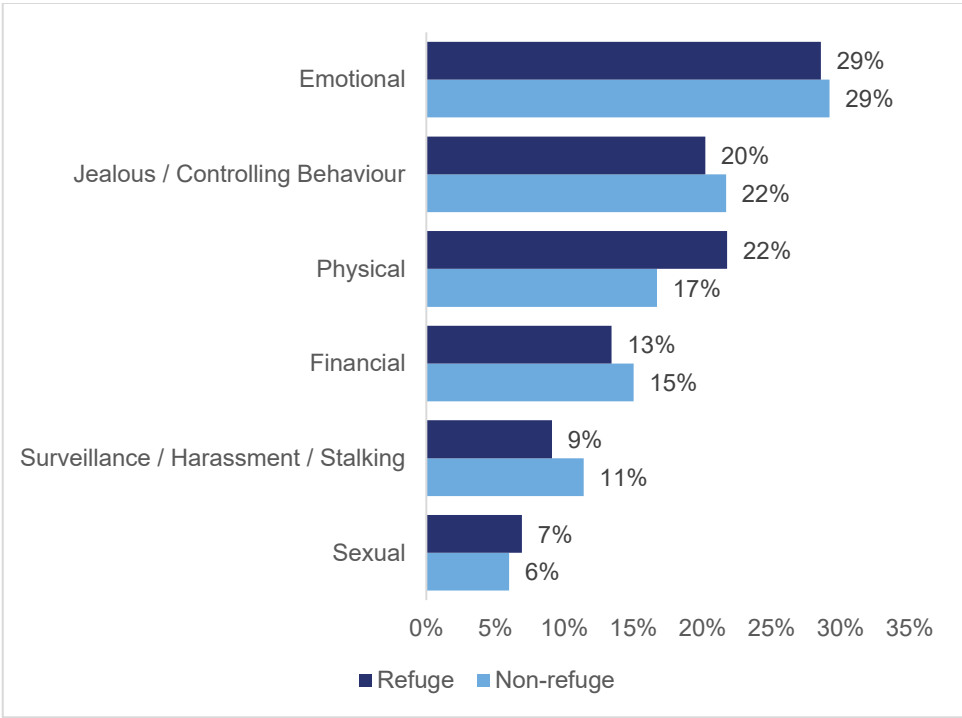
Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic abuse and providing services for women and children, and they provided data to the RaISe team regarding their service provision.

The data includes the number of women and children supported in refuge accommodation, referrals to services, and the number of women supported in the community. In 2024/25, there were 523 women and 364 children housed in a refuge, 8,393 referrals made to services, and 5,810 women who accessed non-refuge services.

Women's Aid also collect information on the main type of abuse experienced, relationship to perpetrator, and key demographic information of the women who use their services. Demographic information in relation to age and ethnicity is available in Appendix B.

Emotional and controlling behaviours are the most commonly reported among service users.

Figure 2.8 Main types of abuse experienced by users of Women’s Aid by service type, Northern Ireland 2024/25



Service-level data does not measure the prevalence of violence in the wider population, but it is important for understanding service demand, capacity pressures and the types of support required.

2.6 Potential lines of inquiry

VAWG is measured through a range of data sources, each providing insight into different aspects of the issue, rather than a single consistent or comparable measure.

Key limitations include gaps in data on repeat victimisation, intersectionality, service demand and system-wide outcomes.

Members may wish to consider:**Monitoring Framework**

- To what extent does the current evidence base provide a sufficiently comprehensive and coherent picture of VAWG to support monitoring of the Strategic Framework?
- The Department has indicated that an EVAWG monitoring dashboard is in development; what progress has been made, and which indicators and data sources will be included to support monitoring of the Strategic Framework?

Consistency and comparability

- To what extent do differences in definitions and data collection methods limit comparability across datasets within Northern Ireland?
- What work is underway to improve coherence and consistency of data across departments and agencies?

Capturing hidden and under-reported harms

- How effectively does the current evidence base capture under-reported forms of violence, including coercive control, psychological abuse and online harms?
- To what extent does available data capture variations in experience across different groups (e.g. by age, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic status)?

3 Funding for EVAWG

Funding for EVAWG in Northern Ireland is delivered across multiple departments and programmes. Available information does not set out a single consolidated budget, and external analysis has highlighted the absence of a comprehensive overview of funding.

The two EVAWG Delivery Plans published so far have not included costings. The 2025/26 financial year was the first year in which ringfenced funding was received for EVAWG, starting with £2 million.³⁹ In June 2025, a further £2.2million was ringfenced by the Department of Finance (DoF) as part of June Monitoring round.

The draft Budget, consulted on by DoF, proposed ringfenced funding for EVAWG of⁴⁰:

- £3.6 million in 2026-27
- £5.8 million in 2027-28
- £5.8 million in 2028-29

Other areas of the Budget will impact on VAWG, including funding for the PSNI, and discretionary Departmental budgets. At the time of drafting this paper, the Executive has not agreed a Budget for 2026-27, nor subsequent years.

In response to a recent Assembly question,⁴¹ TEO set out their expenditure over the last five years in relation to the EVAWG Programme, as illustrated below, with the values rounded.

³⁹ [AQW 43275/22-27](#)

⁴⁰ Department of Finance, [Draft Budget 2026-2029/30](#), p. 31, Table 4.3

⁴¹ [AQW 45838/22-27](#)

Table 3.1: TEO reported expenditure in relation to the EVAWG Programme, reported June 2026 (£, '000)

Expenditure category	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
TEO Associated Programme⁴²	£0	£0	£0	£475k	£648k	£1,123k
Grants⁴³	£0	£0	£0	£1,035k	£4,459k	£5,495k
Campaigns	£0	£0	£0	£25k	£161k	£186k
Staffing	£154k	£1,052k	£1,344k	£1,340k	£1,418k	£5,309k
Consultancy	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Operational costs⁴⁴	£37k	£490k	£322k	£359k	£304k	£1,512k
TEO Total	£192k	£1,542k	£1,666k	£3,235k	£6,991k	£13,626k
Associated programmes (non-TEO expenditure)⁴⁵	£0	£0	£25k	£0	£219k	£244k

Whilst much of the Strategic Framework focuses on preventing VAWG, there are a range of other Government actions focused on, for example, supporting victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

Whilst the initial action plan for the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031 had costs for some actions, many costs remained to be confirmed.⁴⁶ DoH has indicated that in 2025/26, £1.85 million funding was made available to

⁴² TEO associated programme costs are for the Small Business Research Initiative.

⁴³ Grant expenditure figures for 2025/26 are provisional, as final billing has not yet been received, and are therefore subject to change.

⁴⁴ Operational costs include the expenditure necessary to support development and delivery of the Strategy, including Strategic Investment Board (SIB) support, merchandise and materials, conference costs, travel, training, and research.

⁴⁵ Associated programme costs include funding transferred to other Departments to support EVAWG-related activity; for example, PSNI advertising campaigns, the Department for Communities to support DEARA's work with rural women and girls, the Department of Education's Youth Services Engagement Programme and Cinemagic project, and the Department for Infrastructure's Nightmover service.

⁴⁶ Department of Health and Department of Justice, [Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024–2031, Action Plan Year 1-3](#) (2024)

deliver the DSA Strategy as well as £1.733 million of cross-cutting ring-fenced funding.⁴⁷

DOJ has committed funding of £8.4 million over a 7-year period commencing in 2025-26 to ASSIST NI to deliver advocacy services to high risk / high impact victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and with DoH and DfC jointly funds the Domestic Abuse 24-Hour helpline delivered by NEXUS NI which will cost £3.2 million over the next 7 years.⁴⁸

Beyond Departments, other statutory bodies, including the PSNI⁴⁹ and Northern Ireland Housing Executive⁵⁰, have action plans directly related to EVAWG, which may also have spend attached.

The First and deputy First Minister have indicated that they continue to advocate with DoF and other Ministers for appropriate and sustainable funding for victims of domestic and sexual abuse and VAWG.⁵¹

Concerns have also been raised in relation to tracking financial spend on EVAWG programmes across jurisdictions.

In GREVIO's baseline evaluation of how the UK is giving effect to the Istanbul Convention,⁵² it noted that there is no comprehensive overview of the funding for VAWG, and raised concerns at a lack of sufficient funding for services for women and girls who experience violence.

Following this baseline evaluation, the Committee of the Parties recommended appropriate and sustainable funding for tackling VAWG, with separate budget

⁴⁷ Committee for the Executive Office, Clerk's Brief, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (17/06/2026)

⁴⁸ Committee for the Executive Office, Clerk's Brief, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (17/06/2026)

⁴⁹ PSNI, [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan](#) (2022)

⁵⁰ Northern Ireland Housing Executive, [Domestic Abuse Action Plan](#) (2024)

⁵¹ [AQW 46884/22-27](#)

⁵² Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, [Baseline Evaluation Report: United Kingdom](#), pp. 24-26

and funding lines, and sustainable and multi-annual funding for women's rights and community-based organisations.⁵³

3.1 Potential lines of inquiry

Funding is delivered across multiple departments and programmes, with no single consolidated overview of total expenditure and limited visibility of whole system spend. Recent scrutiny and audit work in England and Wales has identified concerns about fragmented funding and limited oversight; to what extent are similar issues evident in Northern Ireland?

Members may wish to consider:

Transparency and visibility

- To what extent can total public expenditure on EVAWG be identified across departments and programmes?
- Is there a clear picture of how much is spent on prevention, protection, justice and support services?

Coordination of funding

- How effectively is funding coordinated across departments and strategies to support a whole-system approach?
- What formal arrangements are in place to ensure that different departments coordinate funding and services relating to VAWG, and how well are these working in practice?

Alignment with strategic priorities

- To what extent does funding align with the priorities set out in the Strategic Framework and Delivery Plans?

⁵³ Committee of the Parties, [Recommendation on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by the United Kingdom](#), IC-CP(2025)22 (2025), pp. 3-4

Sufficiency, sustainability and learning

- Is current funding for EVAWG sufficient, sustainable and effectively coordinated, and
- What lessons from other jurisdictions could inform improvements to funding oversight and alignment?

4 Actions taken forward by the EVAWG Strategic Framework

4.1 Community Investment

A major component of the EVAWG Framework is grant-making to community and voluntary sector organisations, and through the Small Business Research Initiative.

4.1.1 Local Change Funds

The Local Change Funds (LCF) are aimed at equipping grass roots community groups to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls across local communities to ensure wide societal reach.⁵⁴

The LCF was launched in January 2025, with funding shared across the 11 councils to support EVAWG action in their own area.⁵⁵ This included £655,000 Momentum Funding to enable Councils to implement agreed emergency responses to March 2025 raising awareness and building on the-ground momentum for the LCFs.⁵⁶ The Momentum Fund supported 225 Council-led events, impacting over 7,300 people. Evaluation results of the funding focused on the need for community awareness, capacity building and collaboration. Early results reported by TEO showed an⁵⁷:

- 88% increased knowledge of VAWG;
- 81% improved understanding of healthy relationships; and
- 85% felt more confidence in helping EVAWG.

⁵⁴ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025)p. 3.

⁵⁵ The Executive Office, [Ministers launch Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Local Change Fund](#) (08/01/2025)

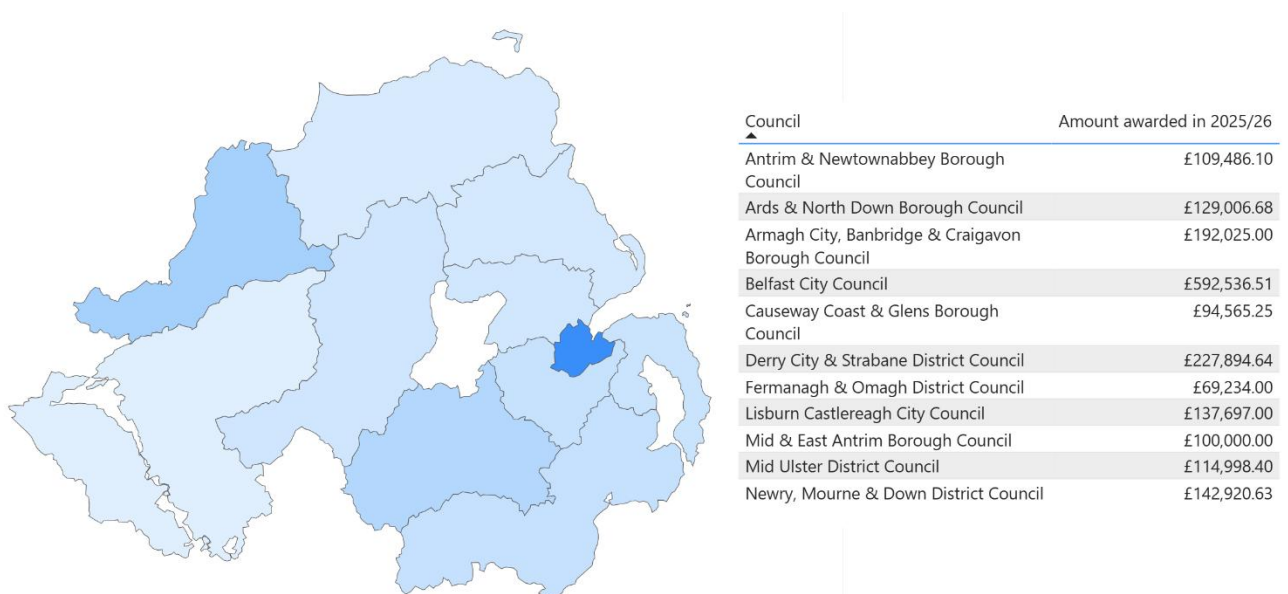
⁵⁶ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025), p.4.

⁵⁷ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025), pp.3-4

In 2025/26, nearly £2 million was awarded across Northern Ireland through local Councils. Organisations funded have included youth groups, sports organisations (boxing, GAA, IFA), schools, businesses, and the arts sector.

Figure 4.1 Heatmap and table of Local Change Fund amount (£) awarded per Council area, Northern Ireland, 2025/26

Local Change Fund allocations vary notably across council areas, with higher levels of funding concentrated in Belfast



4.1.2 Regional Change Fund

The Regional Change Fund (RCF) was also launched in January 2025.⁵⁸ Since then, £2 million has been allocated to this Fund, shared between eight community and voluntary organisations who work across Northern Ireland and have significant experience in relation to VAWG. The RCF is intended to support organisations to raise awareness and understanding of VAWG, build capacity to take action, and equip people to have safe and healthy relationships.

⁵⁸ The Executive Office, [Ministers announce £1.2m Regional Change Fund for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#) (21/01/2025)

TEO have indicated that the eight Regional Delivery Partners are working with local community organisations to support projects under the Local Change Fund.⁵⁹

TEO partnered with Belfast City Council to deliver the fund, although delivery is across Northern Ireland. The organisations funded are:

- Nexus;
- Women's Aid Federation NI (WAFNI)
- Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)
- Relate NI
- White Ribbon NI
- Youth Action
- NSPCC
- Barnardo's NI

TEO have highlighted positive early survey results following activities undertaken under the RCF.⁶⁰ They have also pointed to relationship-building which has led to further initiatives, including training for young soldiers,⁶¹ and nursing students.⁶²

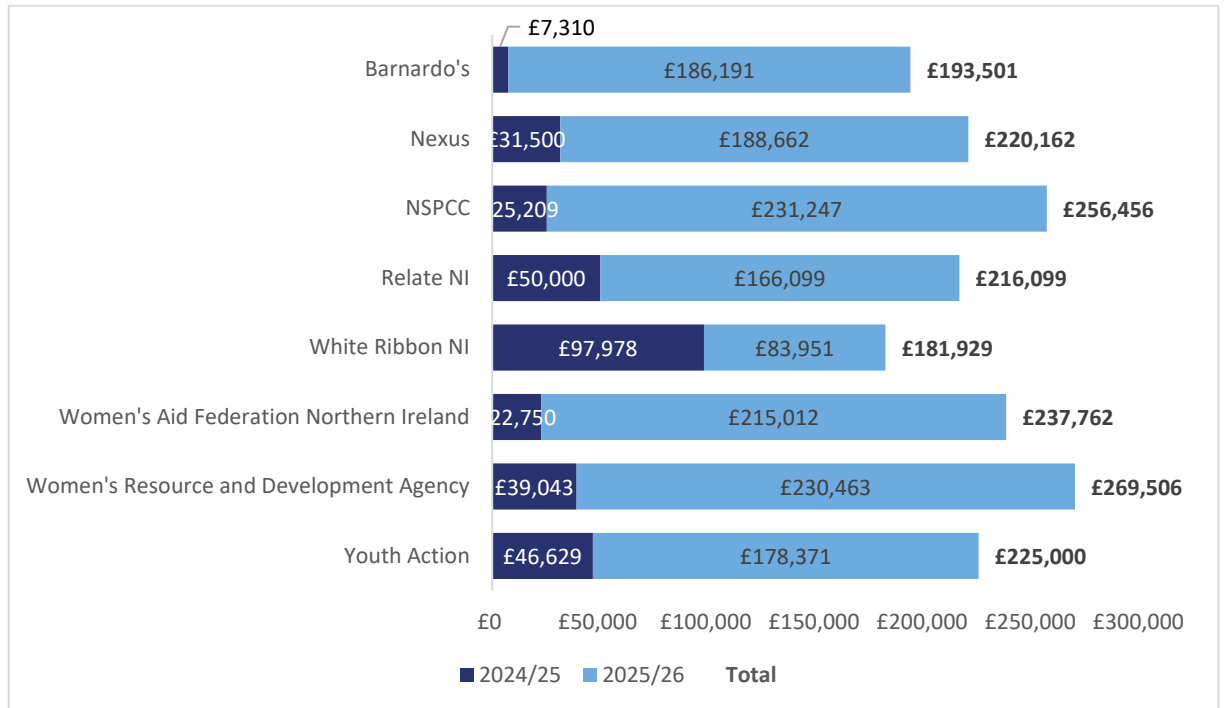
⁵⁹ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025), p.5.

⁶⁰ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025), p.5.

⁶¹ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025), p.5.

⁶² Royal College of Nurses, [Nursing Students to Receive Specialist Training to 'Unlock' a Safer Northern Ireland for Women and Girls](#) (11/06/2025)

Figure 4.2 Regional Change Fund amount awarded per organisation, 2024/25-2025/26 (£)



4.1.3 Small business research initiative

In the 2024/25 financial year, the Department for the Economy released £475k of funding to The Executive Office, through the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) Programme, to support phase one of the SBRI Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Project.⁶³

Six suppliers were selected to work on projects that will use data, tech and design innovations to tackle VAWG and to identify solutions to make spaces safer for women and girls.⁶⁴

⁶³ Committee for the Executive Office, Clerk’s Brief, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (17/06/2026)

⁶⁴ The Executive Office, [Junior Ministers meet innovators seeking to provide solutions to help tackle violence against women and girls](#) (28/11/2024)

4.2 Campaigns

The Power to Change campaign was launched in January 2025, by TEO, DoJ and the PSNI.⁶⁵ It aims to target harmful attitudes and behaviours of men and boys, with targeted messaging on social media, on posters and billboards, buses, in pubs, clubs and restaurants, as well as on the radio.⁶⁶ A Power to Change website,⁶⁷ and toolkit with downloadable graphics and posters is available.⁶⁸ A Phase two of the Power to Change campaign is being developed. TEO have indicated that this will target a younger male demographic and tackle misogyny.⁶⁹

The Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes coercive control campaign and training initiative was launched on 16th June 2026.⁷⁰

An action in the Delivery Plan 2026-2028 is to *'Develop and deliver a major media campaign to focus on VAWG prevention, building understanding of what VAWG is, its root causes and how to play an active role in preventing it'*.⁷¹

4.3 Research and reviews

The Strategic Framework includes *'Evidence based, data driven and joined up – measuring change, outcome based'* as a principle, and emphasises the importance of qualitative and quantitative data.⁷²

As above, as well as using the questions in the YILT and NILT, TEO have commissioned and published research on the experiences of girls and young

⁶⁵ Department of Justice, [Power to Change](#) (28/01/2026)

⁶⁶ The Executive Office, [Update on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(EVAWG\) Strategic Framework](#) (September 2025), p.8.

⁶⁷ <https://powertochange.info/> (accessed 11/06/2026)

⁶⁸ <https://powertochange.info/help-to-act/> (accessed 11/06/2026)

⁶⁹ Committee for the Executive Office, [Official Report: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan: Executive Office](#) (04/03/2026), p.3

⁷⁰ The Executive Office, [Junior Ministers launch H.S.K.T. Coercive Control awareness campaign with Ulster University](#) (17/06/2026)

⁷¹ The Executive Office, [End Violence Against Women and Girls: Delivery Plan 2026-2028](#)

⁷² Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), pp. 18, 40-41

women⁷³, and adult women⁷⁴, in relation to VAWG. Further research is expected to be published in Autumn on the attitudes of men and boys.⁷⁵

A community-led review is underway on rural women and girls⁷⁶, and further reviews are planned on the needs of deaf and disabled women and girls and migrant women and girls.⁷⁷

⁷³ S. McAlister et al, [It's Just What Happens' Girls and Young Women's Views and Experiences of Violence in Northern Ireland](#) (2023)

⁷⁴ S. Lagdon, [Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland](#) (2023)

⁷⁵ Committee for the Executive Office, [Official Report: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan: Executive Office](#) (04/03/2026), p. 3.

⁷⁶ The Executive Office, [Ministers launch Community-led Review on Violence Against Women and Girls in Rural Areas](#) (17/10/2025)

⁷⁷ The Executive Office, [End Violence Against Women and Girls: Delivery Plan 2026-2028](#)

5 The policy, data and funding landscape in neighbouring jurisdictions

TEO officials have indicated to RaISe that they regularly engage with their counterparts across neighbouring jurisdictions, including in relation to the coherence of statistics. Other jurisdictions have had specific VAWG strategies for at least a decade longer than Northern Ireland (although, as above, Northern Ireland had strategies in relation to domestic and sexual abuse).

Across Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, data on VAWG is similarly derived from a combination of administrative crime data and survey data, rather than a single unified statistical measure. Overall, the underlying structure of the data is broadly similar across jurisdictions. In each case, no single dataset provides a comprehensive measure, and differences in legal definitions, statistical frameworks and reporting practices limit direct comparability.

Instead, understanding the issue requires drawing on multiple sources, each reflecting a particular aspect of violence, abuse and system response.

5.1 England and Wales

The Home Office launched a new '*Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls*' in December 2025, in support of their commitment to halve VAWG in a decade.⁷⁸ This followed on from a Tackling violence against women and girls strategy launched in 2021 by the previous Government.⁷⁹

The current Strategy has three objectives:

- prevention & early intervention to address the root causes of abuse;
- the relentless pursuit of its perpetrators;
- and support for all those affected by violence and abuse when it happens.

⁷⁸ Home Office, UK Government, [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls](#) (2025)

⁷⁹ UK Government, [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#) (2021)

There is not one central government ‘pot’ of VAWG funding, but in response to a House of Commons Inquiry Report in 2025, the UK Government has pointed towards⁸⁰:

- £160 million in the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant for 2025/26, which enables local authorities to invest in essential support in frontline safe accommodation services;
- £6m for specialist helplines to support victims of VAWG across England and Wales;
- £2m for a Flexible Fund, administered by Women’s Aid Federation England, which offers direct cash payments to victims fleeing abuse across England and Wales;
- £5.3 million for services supporting children affected by domestic abuse; and
- £53m funding over four years to roll out the Drive Project across England and Wales, which targets high-risk, high-harm, serial domestic abuse perpetrators and keep victims safe.

The National Audit Office (NAO), published a report in January 2025 on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls.⁸¹ It found that, in relation to the 2021 VAWG Strategy in England and Wales, the Home Office has not led an effective whole-system response. It raised concerns about the cross-departmental governance in place and that not all departments were prioritising the VAWG Strategy’s aims.

NAO also identified that there was a lack of overarching oversight of government funding to tackle VAWG.⁸² It recommended co-ordination of

⁸⁰ Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons, [Tackling violence against women and girls: Funding: Government Response](#), Second Special Report of Session 2024–26 HC 1352, p. 2.

⁸¹ National Audit Office, [Tackling violence against women and girls](#), Session 2024-25, 31 January 2025 HC 547

⁸² National Audit Office, [Tackling violence against women and girls](#), Session 2024-25, 31 January 2025 HC 547, p. 20

available funding, including through considering a joint spending review bid for the strategy.⁸³

Similar concerns were raised by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee in their 2025 Inquiry on Tackling violence against women and girls: funding. The Committee recommended mapping exercises at a local and cross-Government level to identify funding to tackle VAWG.⁸⁴

In response, the UK Government pointed to the Duty to Collaborate provisions of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024⁸⁵. This has not been commenced, but would require relevant authorities to collaborate locally in relation to the provision or commissioning of services for domestic abuse, conduct of a sexual nature and serious violence.⁸⁶

The UK Government also pointed to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021⁸⁷, which requires relevant local authorities to establish a domestic abuse Local Partnership Board; assess the support needs of local victims; prepare and publish a local strategy; commission support services to meet identified needs in safe accommodation; monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of local delivery; and report annually on progress. Specific funding is provided to support delivery of these statutory duties.

England and Wales have developed one of the more integrated statistical approaches to VAWG. The ONS publishes annually a *Domestic abuse in England and Wales: overview* bulletin, which combines data from police recorded crime and Crime Survey for England and Wales, alongside other sources.⁸⁸ The ONS has also produced a *Violence against women and girls:*

⁸³ National Audit Office, [Tackling violence against women and girls](#), Session 2024-25, 31 January 2025 HC 547, p. 10

⁸⁴ Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons, [Tackling violence against women and girls: funding](#), Third Report of Session 2024-25 HC 741 (July 2025) pp. 9-10

⁸⁵ Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons, [Tackling violence against women and girls: Funding: Government Response](#), Second Special Report of Session 2024–26 HC 1352 (October 2025), pp. 5-7.

⁸⁶ *Victims and Prisoners Act 2024*, [sec. 13](#)

⁸⁷ *Domestic Abuse Act 2021*, [Part 4](#)

⁸⁸ Office for National Statistics, [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#)

Data landscape, which lists data sources relating to VAWG across the United Kingdom, bringing together a range of different sources from government, academia, and the voluntary sector.⁸⁹ This approach reflects the importance of using a combination of measures rather than a single definition of VAWG.

5.1.1 Wales

Although many issues relating to VAWG are reserved to the UK Government, including crime, public order and policing,⁹⁰ the [Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act](#) 2015 made provision to:

- require the production of national and local strategies for tackling gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence;
- provide the Welsh Ministers with the power to issue guidance to assist certain public bodies in contributing to the pursuit of the purpose of the Act;
- give the Welsh Ministers a power to make regulations to require local authorities to publish information about whether, and if so how, local authority education functions are being exercised to promote the purpose of the Act; and
- provide for the appointment of a National Adviser to tackle violence against women.⁹¹

In line with the Act, the Welsh Government has a Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Strategy 2022 to 2026, which is intended to be a ‘whole of Wales’ Strategy.⁹² Annual plans and progress reports are published.⁹³ The Strategy’s key workstreams are in relation to:

- Gender-based harassment in all public spaces

⁸⁹ Office for National Statistics, [Violence against women and girls: Data landscape](#)

⁹⁰ Senedd Cymru/ Welsh Parliament, [Powers](#) (Last updated 2024, accessed 11/06/2026)

⁹¹ Welsh Government, [Johanna Robinson appointed as National Adviser to tackle violence against women](#) (17/07/2025)

⁹² Welsh Government, [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: strategy 2022 to 2026](#) (2022)

⁹³ Welsh Government, [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: strategy and progress](#) (accessed 11/06/2026)

- Workplace harassment
- Tackling perpetration
- Sustainable commissioning: whole system approach
- Older people's needs
- Children and young people's needs

5.2 Scotland

Scotland's Equally Safe Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls was initially published in 2016, and then updated in 2016 and 2023.⁹⁴ It is led by the Scottish Government, signed by the then-Minister for Victims and Community Safety, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

The priorities of the Equally Safe 2023 refresh are:

- achieving greater gender equality
- intervening early and effectively to prevent violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people
- tackling perpetrators

A progress report was published in March 2026, outlining process in the 2024-2026 delivery plan.⁹⁵ It aims to reflect not only the work of the Scottish Government and COSLA but also partners across the public and third sectors across Scotland.

The Delivering Equally Safe Fund was launched in 2021, and provides almost £23 million each year, over 2026 to 2028, (subject to the annual budget process), to projects and services that prevent violence against women and girls and support victims and survivors.⁹⁶ It is funding 106 organisations delivering 114 services, including third sector organisations and public bodies.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Scottish Government, [Equally Safe - preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls: strategy](#) (2023)

⁹⁵ Scottish Government, [Equally Safe delivery plan: progress report](#) (2026)

⁹⁶ Scottish Government, [Funding to tackle violence against women and girls](#) (accessed 11/06/2026)

⁹⁷ Inspiring Scotland, [Delivering Equally Safe](#) (accessed 11/06/2026)

The Victim Centred Approach Fund will provide £16 million to 23 organisations in 2026 to 2027, including £6 million for special advocacy support for survivors of gender based violence.⁹⁸

In Scotland, relevant data is primarily drawn from police recorded crime statistics⁹⁹ and the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey¹⁰⁰. Scotland has a distinct legislative framework, including the *Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018*, and metrics such as “clear-up rates” provide insight into case outcomes, but reflect legal and procedural definitions specific to the Scottish system.

5.3 Republic of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland’s current framework for tackling domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is the “*Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022–2026*”, a whole-of-government strategy published in June 2022.¹⁰¹ The Minister of Justice has said “*this strategy is the firmest demonstration yet of Ireland’s determination to change*”.¹⁰²

Its purpose is to embed zero tolerance of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) across Irish society and to deliver sustained reductions in violence through coordinated policy, service development, and legislative reform. The strategy is run in five phases, with annual progress reports published.¹⁰³

A major institutional reform under the Strategy is the creation of Cuan, the new standalone statutory agency (established January 2024), responsible for coordinating implementation, setting national service standards, expanding

⁹⁸ Scottish Government, [Funding to tackle violence against women and girls](#) (accessed 11/06/2026)

⁹⁹ Scottish Government, [Domestic Abuse Recorded By The Police In Scotland, 2021-22](#)

¹⁰⁰ Scottish Government, [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey](#)

¹⁰¹ Irish Government, [Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026](#)

¹⁰² Irish Government, [Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026](#), p. 3.

¹⁰³ Irish Government, [Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026](#), p. 3.

refuge capacity, and leading research and data development.¹⁰⁴ Prior to Cuan's formation, responsibility for tackling DSGBV in the Republic of Ireland was spread across multiple departments, agencies, and NGOs. Cuan's establishment was specifically to bring these efforts together into a more unified and coordinated system.¹⁰⁵

Cuan is also mandated to ensure helpline availability and quality standards across all DSGBV services, with funding routed through the agency from 2024 onwards¹⁰⁶.

Like Northern Ireland's Strategic Framework, the Republic of Ireland's Strategy is structured around the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention:

- Prevention - addressing root causes, shifting societal attitudes, and delivering targeted education and awareness campaigns.
- Protection - through expanded refuge and safe-home provision, strengthened helplines, and improved access to justice.
- Prosecution - via legislative reform, enhanced policing responses, and improved prosecution processes, including anonymity protections and legal representation for victims in certain sexual offence trials.
- Policy coordination - through Cuan, cross-departmental oversight, and a national research and data plan.

The Republic of Ireland also does not operate a single centralised "VAWG fund". Instead, funding is distributed across multiple streams, primarily through the Department of Justice, Cuan, and Tusla (during the transition period). Key recent allocations include an additional €12 million for DSGBV in 2024 announced by the Minister for Justice, representing a 25% increase in funding for DSGBV services.¹⁰⁷ This includes:

¹⁰⁴ Irish Government, [Cuan's Functions](#) (accessed 25/06/2026)

¹⁰⁵ L Dunphy, [Ireland's first statutory domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence agency is established](#) (2024)

¹⁰⁶ Irish Government, [Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026: 2024 Implementation Plan](#)

¹⁰⁷ Irish Government, [Minister McEntee details extra funding for DSGBV service providers](#) (17/11/2023)

- €2.5m for domestic violence services to address sustainability pressures, rural coverage, and children's support services.
- €1.3m for sexual violence services, including supports for younger people and areas with geographical gaps.
- €2.5m for safe accommodation, prioritising refuge development under the Strategy, including staffing for new refuges.
- €3.8m via a targeted call to DSGBV organisations for service expansion and unmet need.

Funding allocations were also made towards refuge and safe accommodation expansions. The 2024 implementation plan included¹⁰⁸:

- Delivery of 8 new family refuge units in 2024.
- 25 additional units to be under construction by 2025.
- A national strategic plan for safe accommodation, including expansion of safe homes.

The Irish Strategy does not align to a single statistical definition or measure. Statistical reporting remains distributed across Central Statistics Office recorded crime statistics, based on incidents recorded by the police and periodic survey data, such as the Sexual Violence Survey 2022¹⁰⁹, which provides prevalence estimates but is not part of a routine annual series.

5.4 Potential lines of inquiry

Although Northern Ireland has had some form of specific strategy to address domestic and sexual abuse for nearly 20 years, other jurisdictions have been progressing broader VAWG Strategies since the 2010's. There is therefore an opportunity to learn from their experiences.

¹⁰⁸ Irish Government, [Minister McEntee details extra funding for DSGBV service providers \(17/11/2023\)](#)

¹⁰⁹ Central Statistics Office, [Sexual Violence Survey 2022](#)

Members may wish to consider:**Effectiveness of approaches across jurisdictions**

- How effective have other jurisdictions been in addressing VAWG, and what lessons can we learn from their approaches?
- What lessons from other jurisdictions could inform improvements to funding oversight and alignment?
- How do other jurisdictions ensure co-ordination across government departments, public bodies, and other stakeholders, including statutory duties?

Comparability and progress across jurisdictions

- What work is underway to improve alignment of definitions, indicators or reporting approaches across jurisdictions?

6 Issues of particular interest to the Committee

The Committee has raised some potential areas of particular interest to the Inquiry, including attitudinal change, the underlying causes of abuse, adverse experiences, trauma resilience, and young people.

6.1 The underlying causes of abuse

The co-design group identified that '*Societal culture and systemic attitudes and beliefs enable violence against women and girls*', as the core problem for the Framework to address.¹¹⁰ The Framework outlines that VAWG is '*rooted in historical inequalities, gender-based discrimination, and power imbalances between men and women*'.¹¹¹

The Strategic Framework notes that the proposed Gender Equality Strategy is intended to deal with wider issues of systemic gender inequality,¹¹² but, as above, a draft strategy has not been published, and the Communities Minister is considering next steps.¹¹³

6.1.1 Misogynistic attitudes

Whilst the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy also includes actions in relation to preventing these crimes by challenging attitudes and behaviours,¹¹⁴ the Strategic Framework has highlighted the importance of working to tackle root causes which lie lower levels, including systematic inequalities and damaging culture, attitudes and beliefs.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 15.

¹¹¹ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 15.

¹¹² Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 11.

¹¹³ [AQW 48017/22-27](#)

¹¹⁴ Department of Health and Department of Justice, [Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031 Action Plan Year 1-3](#), pp. 5-8

¹¹⁵ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 12.

In the Strategic Framework¹¹⁶, misogyny is defined as ‘a way of thinking that upholds the idea that men are superior to women and that it is right for women to have less power and freedom than men. This way of thinking can express itself in attitudes and behaviours which can be controlling, offensive and abusive. Misogyny includes but is not limited to contempt for women as a group and ranges from disrespecting women and promotion of harmful stereotypes to physical and sexual violence.’

The Framework refers to ‘a recent rise of online influencers who have a toxic influence on men and boys in our society, and negatively impact their views on women and girls’.¹¹⁷

As above, the Framework and associated action plans propose a number of actions to promote attitudinal change, including through public information campaigns and educational activity. Many of these actions involve collaboration with existing bodies and forums, including Councils, sports clubs, workplaces, and schools and youth clubs.

The Women and Equalities Committee launched an inquiry in May 2025 examining how the “manosphere” and other online content is fuelling misogyny.¹¹⁸ Currently, on-going, the inquiry is looking at the impact of this content on attitudes and behaviour both online and offline, and what can be done to tackle it. They are due to produce a report in Autumn 2026.

6.1.2 Paramilitaries

The Committee also plans to take forward work in relation to Communities in Transition (CIT).¹¹⁹ CIT’s work includes a focus on exploitation, including sexual exploitation. More broadly, the Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and

¹¹⁶ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 12.

¹¹⁷ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 28.

¹¹⁸ Women and Equalities Committee, [Inquiry into misogyny: the manosphere and online content](#), 9 May 2025.

¹¹⁹ Northern Ireland Assembly, Committee for the Executive Office, [Minutes of proceedings 6 May 2026](#)

Organised Crime programme aims to address issues associated with paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.¹²⁰

Recent research undertaken by Professor Aisling Swaine for the Foyle Family Justice Centre has highlighted women's experiences of Paramilitary-related Gendered Coercive Control.¹²¹ Referring to this research, and previous work by Dr Jessica Doyle and Prof. Monica McWilliams¹²², the Independent Reporting Commission, which includes Prof. McWilliams, has also highlighted the need for '*leadership on all fronts if we are to develop a society where women and girls are safe from the actions and manifestations of paramilitarism*'.¹²³

The Strategic Framework refers to working with those taking action on paramilitary violence.¹²⁴ The 'Ending the Harm' campaign refers to paramilitary and organised crime groups perpetrating VAWG.¹²⁵

6.2 Adverse childhood experiences and trauma

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic exposures, that may be experienced during childhood. Exposure to ACEs is related to increased risk for a range of negative health, social, educational and employment outcomes.¹²⁶ Witnessing or experiencing domestic violence as a child is considered to be an ACE.¹²⁷

Research commissioned by the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime found that 60% of adults reported at least one ACE, and

¹²⁰ Department of Justice, [Executive programme for tackling paramilitary activity and organised crime](#) (accessed 18/06/2026)

¹²¹ A. Swaine, '[When you know what they are capable of: Paramilitary-related Gendered Coercive Control](#)', Foyle Family Justice Centre (2024)

¹²² J. Doyle and M. McWilliams, [Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Insights and Lessons from Northern Ireland](#) (2018)

¹²³ Independent Reporting Commission, [Seventh Report](#), HC 704 (2025), pp. 51-52.

¹²⁴ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 11.

¹²⁵ www.endingtheharm.com/why-this-matters/ (accessed 18/06/2026)

¹²⁶ C Walsh et al, [The Prevalence and Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland](#) (2025), p. 11.

¹²⁷ World Health Organisation, [Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire](#) (ACE-IQ) (2020)

17.6% experienced four or more ACEs (a critical threshold for elevated risk).¹²⁸ Adults with at least four ACEs were 12.4 times more likely to have experienced domestic violence as an adult.

Under the Justice System outcome, the Strategic Framework refers to undertaking '*research to further understand the reinforcing factors for offending which can include adverse childhood experience (ACE's), substance misuse, and mental ill health*'.¹²⁹

RaISe has previously provided the Committee with a [briefing paper on trauma-informed approaches](#), in the context of the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.¹³⁰ Key points of this paper included that:

- Traumatic events can have a long-lasting impact on individuals. Trauma can be defined as the traumatic event that took place, the individuals experience of the event and the effect of the event;
- A trauma-informed approaches is grounded in four key assumptions; realisation; recognition; response; and resisting re-traumatisation;
- There are six principles of a trauma-informed approach, including safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment and inclusion/cultural considerations.

The EVAWG Strategic Framework is intended to take a trauma informed approach, by recognising the prevalence of trauma in our society, and when trauma may have impacted upon a person affecting their behaviour, their coping responses and their relationships. The Framework intends to support the development of trauma sensitive/trauma responsive skills, which inform service delivery and policy development at all levels, supporting positive outcomes.¹³¹

¹²⁸ C Walsh et al, [The Prevalence and Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland \(2025\)](#), p. 9

¹²⁹ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 39.

¹³⁰ M Greig, [Trauma-informed Approaches](#), NI Assembly Research and Information Service, (2025)

¹³¹ Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), p. 18.

6.3 Young people

Many of the priority areas of Outcome 2 of the Strategic Framework, 'Healthy, Respectful Relationships', relate to children and young people.¹³²

As well as funding relevant programmes through the RCF and LCF, the EVAWG Delivery Plan 2026-2028 includes actions to¹³³:

- Deliver in partnership with DE an agreed EVAWG action plan to coordinate interventions targeted at children and young people and focused on healthy relationships, delivered with early years providers, schools and community groups, parents and carers; and
- Partner with DE and the Education Authority Youth Services to embed a diverse youth voice in the EVAWG programme through integration of EVAWG into curriculum, youth leader training and Youth Voice structures.

The Youth Assembly Rights and Equality Committee plan to consider EVAWG from the perspective of young men. They are currently engaging with experts and finalising their Terms of Reference. They will be reporting in June 2027.

6.4 Potential lines of inquiry

The Strategic Framework includes a commitment to review and adapt, including an independent interim review planned for 2027/28.

The wider paper identifies emerging issues including misogyny, online harms, and changing patterns of violence.

Members may wish to consider:

Responsiveness to emerging issues

- How flexible is the Strategic Framework in responding to emerging forms of violence, including online abuse and evolving patterns of harm?

¹³² Northern Ireland Executive, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-2031](#), pp. 28-31.

¹³³ The Executive Office, [End Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan 2026-2028](#)

- How are new risks identified and incorporated into policy and delivery?
- How effectively does the Strategic Framework engage with key delivery partners (e.g. education, justice and community sectors) to address emerging risks?
- How effectively is VAWG being addressed within wider government programmes, including work to tackle paramilitarism and organised crime?

Resilience of the delivery system

- To what extent does the EVAWG Strategic Framework take account of capacity pressures across relevant services in its design and delivery?
- How does the Strategic Framework monitor and respond to changes in demand, including increasing complexity of need?

Prevention and long-term change

- How effectively does the current approach address underlying causes, including attitudes, inequalities and adverse childhood experiences?
- To what extent does the Strategic Framework address key attitudinal drivers of VAWG, including engagement with groups less likely to be reached by existing interventions, and the influence of misogynistic or harmful online content?
- How does the absence of a finalised Gender Equality Strategy affect the coherence of the overall approach to prevention and addressing the underlying causes of VAWG?

Children and young people

- How effectively is the Strategic Framework engaging with children and young people, including through collaboration with the Department of Education and other relevant partners?

Appendix A: EVAWG Strategic Framework: Themes and Outcomes

Table A:1:Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework Themes and Outcomes

Themes	Outcomes
Prevention	Changed attitudes, behaviours, and culture - Everyone in society understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, and plays an active role in preventing it
	Healthy, respectful relationships – Everyone in society is equipped and empowered to enjoy healthy, respectful relationships
	Women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere – Organisations and institutions across government and society embed the prevention of violence against women and girls in all that they do, so that women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere
Protection and Provision	Quality frontline services, protection, and provision for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls – Provision of high-quality services for women and girls who are victims and survivors of violence against women and girls
Justice System	A justice system which has the confidence of victims, survivors and the public in its ability to address violence against women and girls – In the context of violence against women and girls, a justice system that is trauma informed, considers the needs of people who come into contact with it,

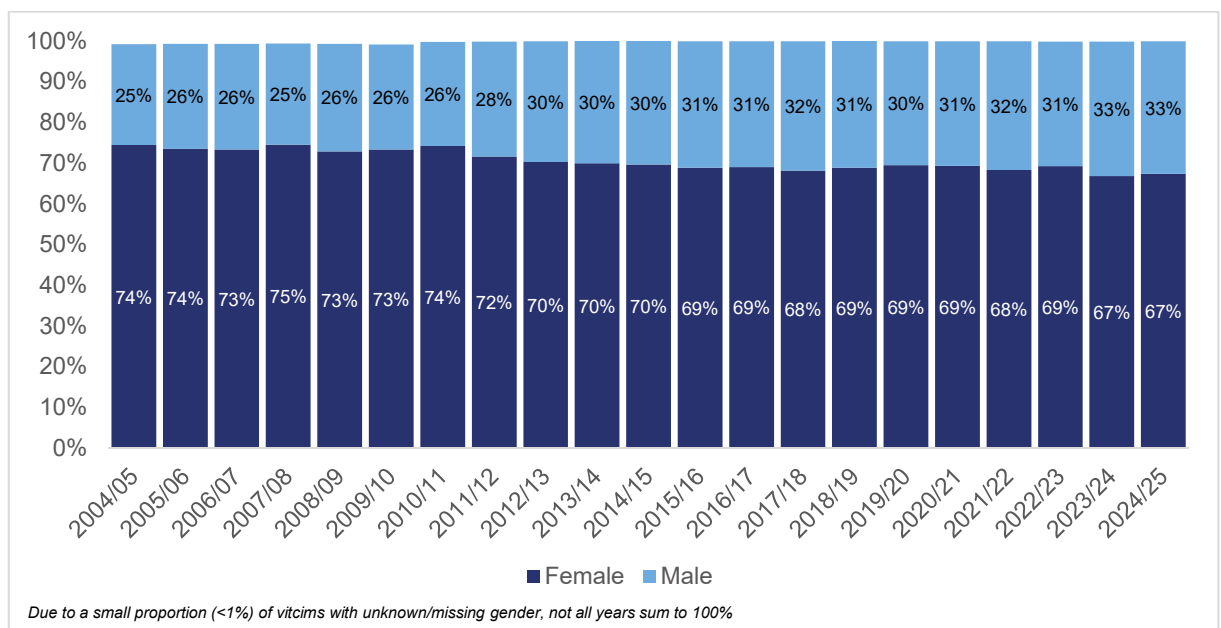
	gives victims and survivors a voice and a place in the process, holds perpetrators to account, while challenging and supporting them to change and has the confidence of the public
Working Better Together	All of government and society working better together to end violence against women and girls – A whole system approach with collaboration and cooperation by default across central and local government, statutory bodies, and with, within and between the community, voluntary, trade unions, employers, business and other sectors

Appendix B: Additional data

This Appendix outlines additional relevant data which may be of interest to the Committee.

Females consistently account for the majority of domestic abuse victims, although the proportion of male victims has increased over time

Figure B.1 Proportion of domestic abuse motivated crimes by gender of victim, Northern Ireland, 2004/05-2024/25 (%)¹³⁴

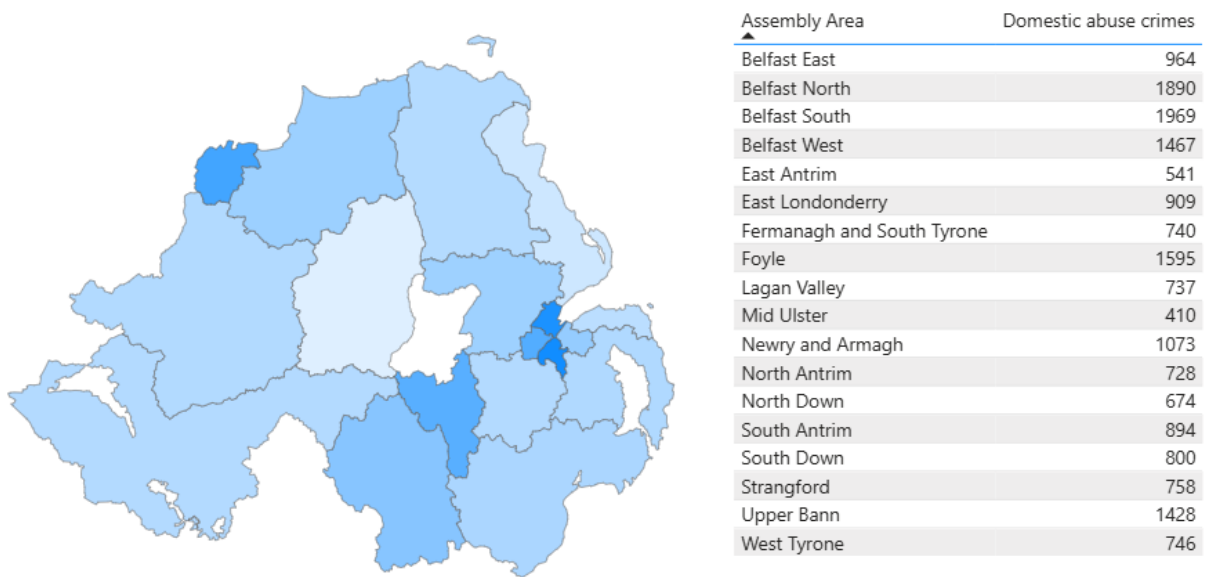


¹³⁴ PSNI, [Domestic Abuse Statistics](#)

Domestic abuse offences are unevenly distributed geographically, with higher volumes concentrated in urban areas of higher population

Figure B.2 Domestic abuse motivated crimes by Assembly Area, 2024/25 (heatmap, darker shading equals higher numbers of crimes)¹³⁵

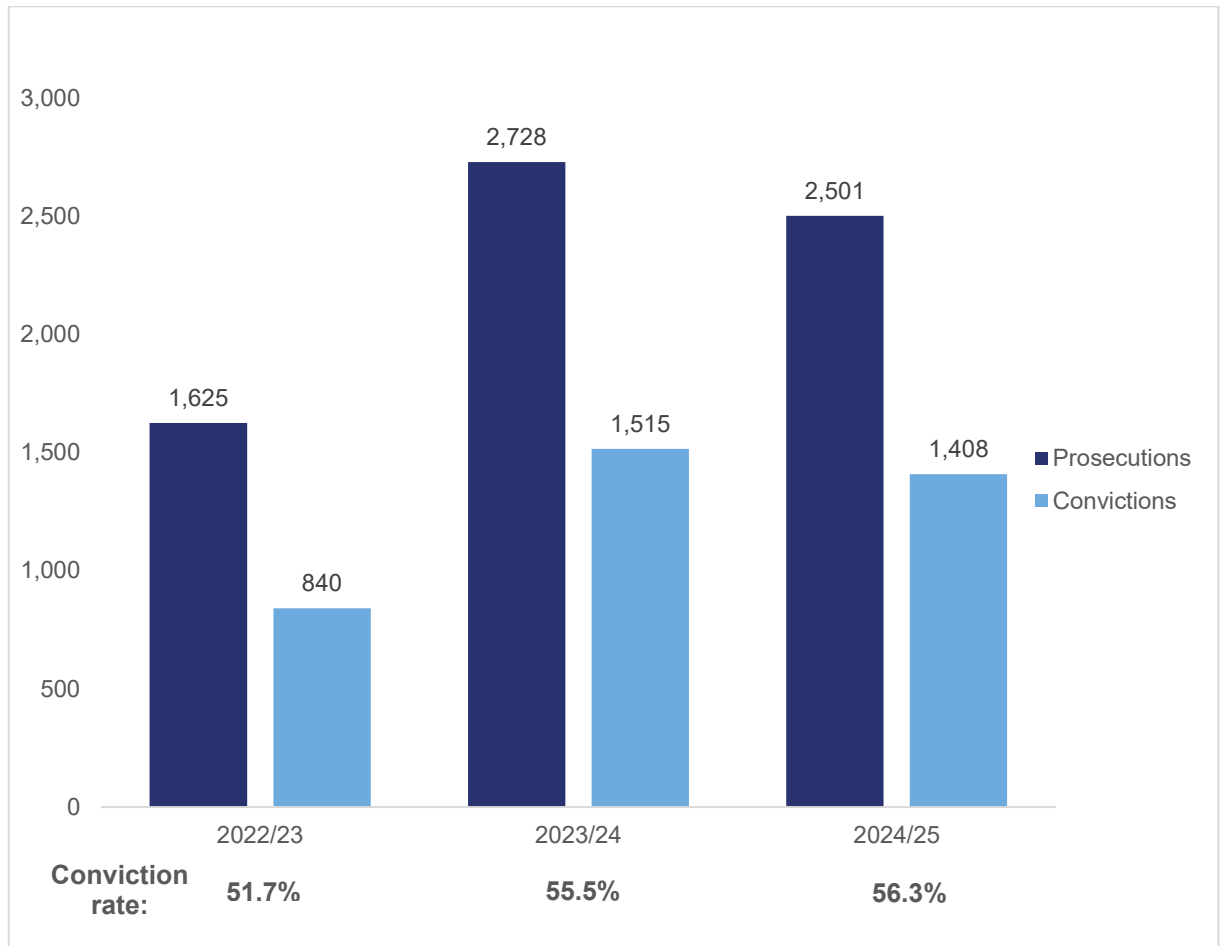
OBJ



¹³⁵ PSNI, [Domestic Abuse Statistics](#)

Prosecutions and convictions have increased since the introduction of the legislation, with conviction rates remaining relatively stable.

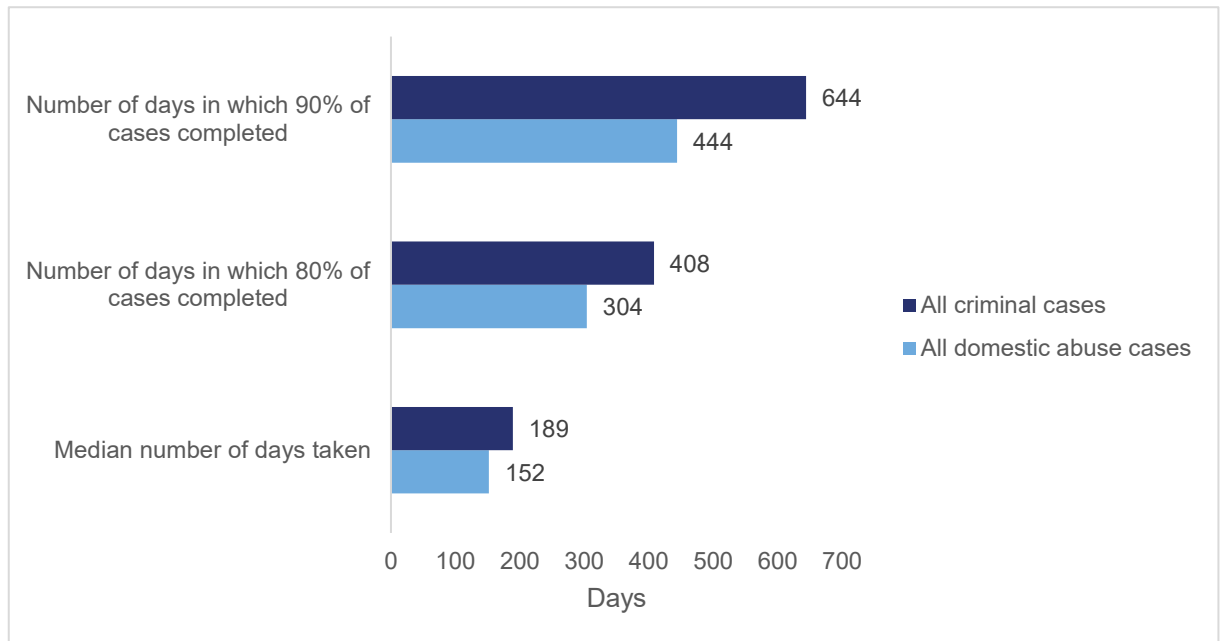
Figure B.3 Prosecutions, convictions and conviction rates for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 dealt with at all courts, Northern Ireland, 2022/23-2024/25¹³⁶



¹³⁶ Department of Justice, [Domestic Abuse Related Cases Dealt With in 2024/25](#)

Domestic abuse cases are processed more quickly than the average criminal case, though timelines remain substantial

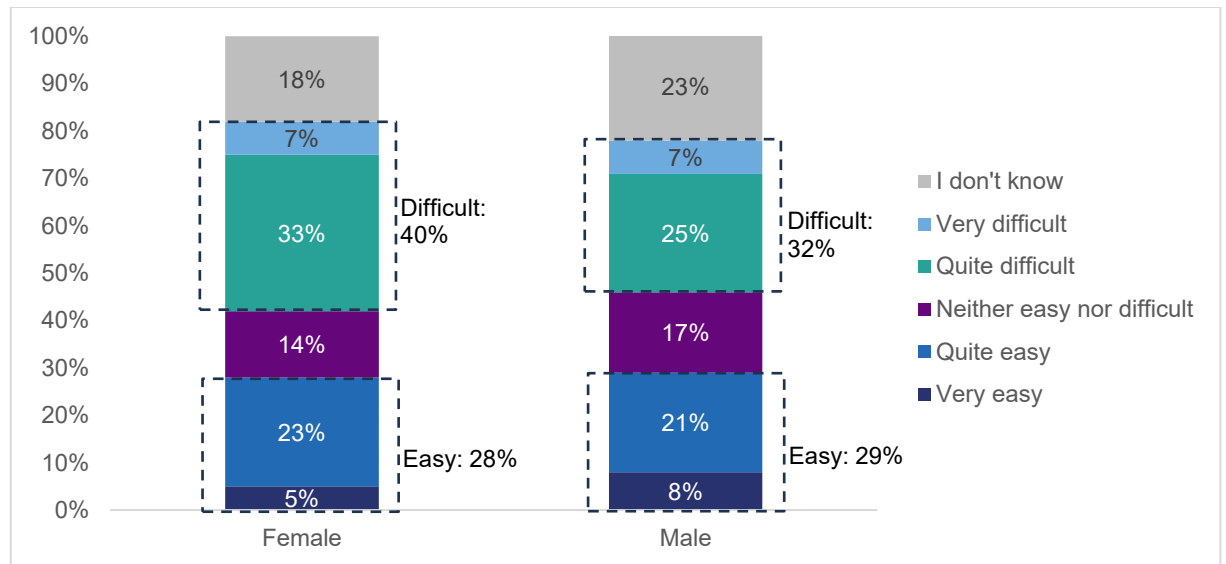
Figure B.4 Processing time (days) for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 and all criminal cases at all courts, Northern Ireland, 2024/25¹³⁷



¹³⁷ Department of Justice, [Domestic Abuse Related Cases Dealt With in 2024/25](#)

A substantial proportion of respondents, particularly women, perceive barriers to accessing help and support

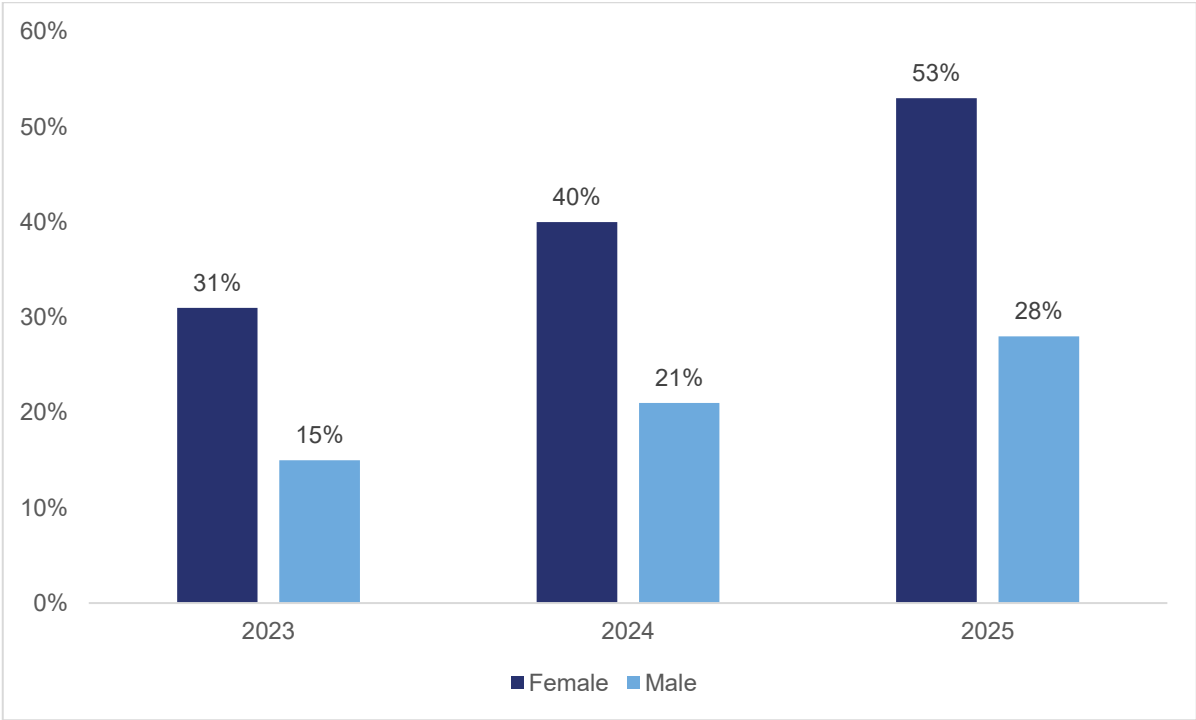
Figure B.5 How easy or difficult respondents think it would be to get help and support if they were a victim of gender-based violence, 2025 (%)¹³⁸



¹³⁸ ARK, [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2025](#)

Perceptions of increasing risk have risen over time, particularly among female respondents.

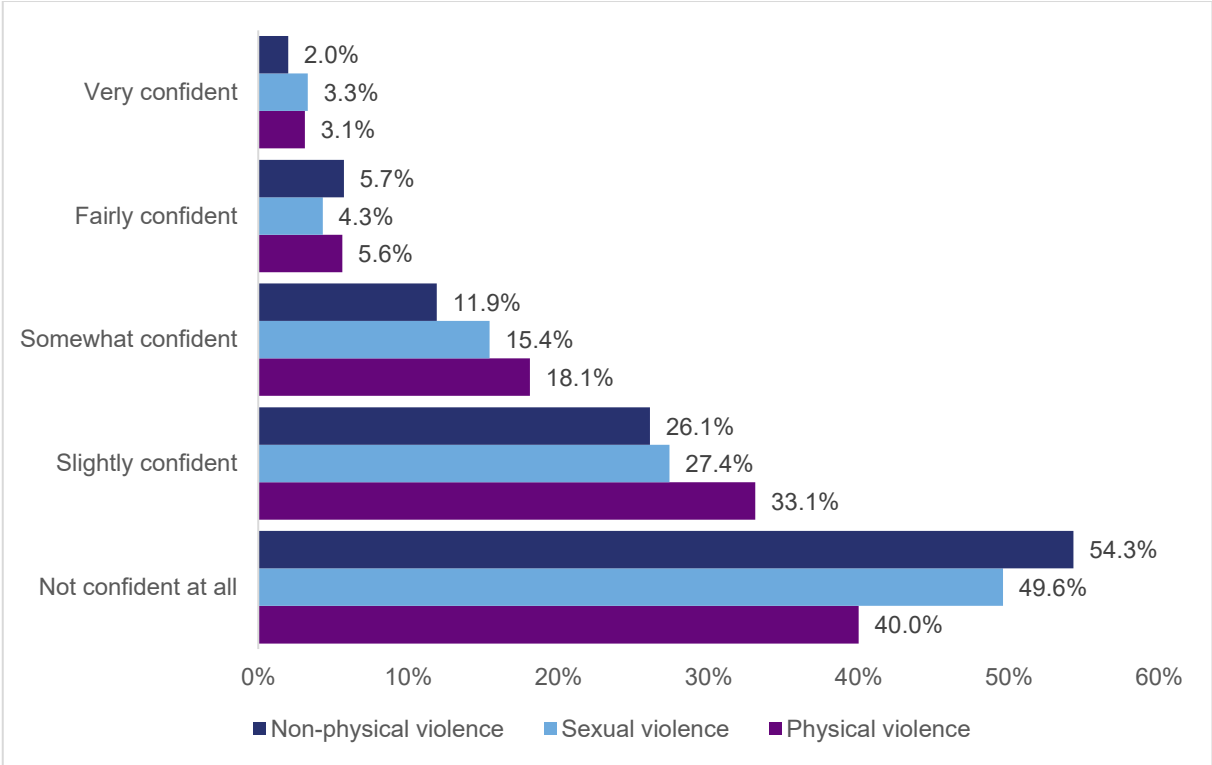
Figure B. 6 Percentage of respondents who think women and girls are more likely to become victims of gender-based violence, Northern Ireland 2023-2025¹³⁹



¹³⁹ ARK, [Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey](#)

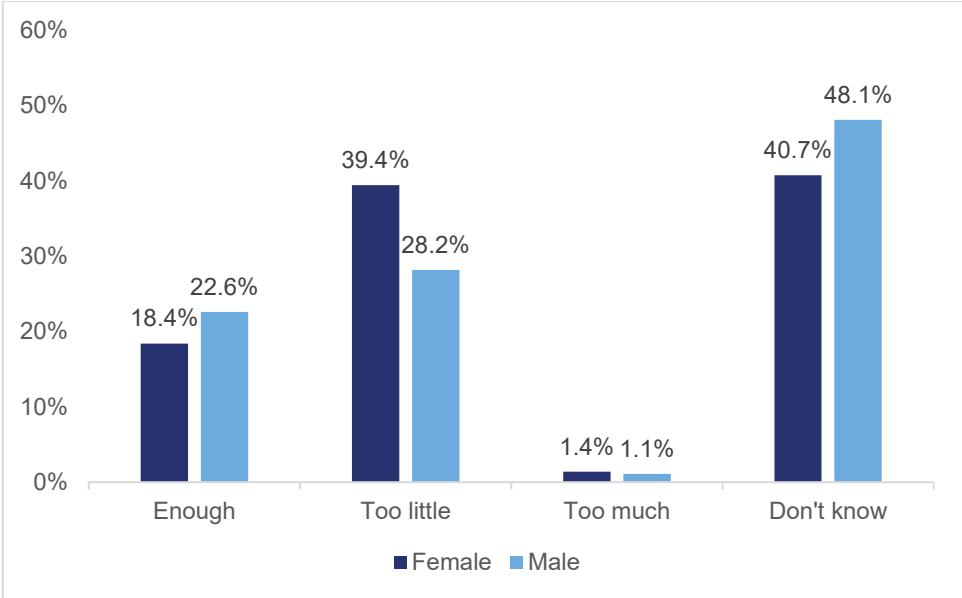
Confidence in reporting violence is low and more pronounced with non-physical and sexual violence

Figure B. 7 Percentage who are confidence in reporting types of violence to the PSNI, Northern Ireland, 2023¹⁴⁰ -



¹⁴⁰ S. Lagdon, [Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland](#) (2023)

Figure B.8 Perceptions of whether the government and other agencies are doing enough about domestic abuse, 2018/19¹⁴¹ - Public views are mixed, with many respondents unsure and a sizeable proportion believing too little is being done



¹⁴¹ Department of Justice, [Experience of domestic abuse findings from the 2018/19 NISCS](#)

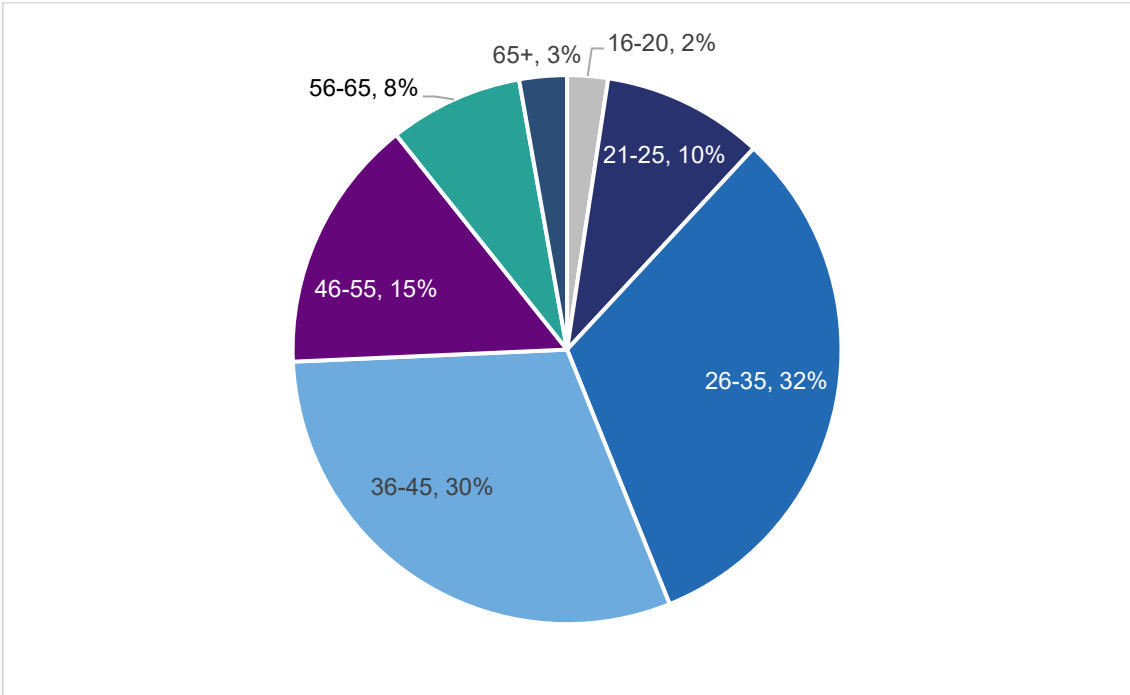
Table B.1 Comparative overview of measures of violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland

Name	Source	Type	Date	Prevalence				
				Source	Key term	Timeframe	Demographics	Finding
What we are doing to tackle violence against women and girls?	PSNI	Bulletin	2024/25	VAWG offences recorded by PSNI	VAWG	Twelve months to June 2025	Victims of VAWG	21,729 VAWG offences recorded
Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland	PSNI	Crime statistics	2024/25	Domestic abuse motivated crimes per 1000 population	Domestic abuse	2024/25	Victims of domestic abuse	10 crimes per 1,000 population; or 0.1% of population
Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey	Department of Justice	Survey	2018/19	Prevalence of domestic abuse among adults aged 16-74 by offence group and gender	Domestic abuse	Lifetime	Survey respondents (weighted, representative sample); persons aged 16-74	18.8% of people have experienced at least one form of domestic abuse since age 16
Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey	ARK	Survey	2025	Have you personally experienced any of the following in the last five years?	Gender-based violence	In the last five years	Survey respondents (weighted, representative sample); persons aged 18 and over	Violence experienced: Physical - 7% Sexual - 6% Psychological - 15% Economic - 3% Online - 8%
Young Life and Times Survey	ARK	Survey	2025	Have you personally experienced any of the following in the last year because of your gender?	Gender-based violence	In the last year	Survey respondents (population based sample); persons aged 16	Violence experienced: Physical - 5% Sexual - 10% Psychological - 15% Online - 15%

Women’s Aid NI Service Users Demographic Data

Service use is concentrated among women aged 26-45, indicating peak demand in this age group

Figure B.9 Age Range of users of all Women’s Aid services, Northern Ireland, 2024/25



Most service users are White British / Irish / Northern Irish, though women from a range of backgrounds access the services

Figure B.10 Ethnicity of all Women’s Aid services, Northern Ireland, 2024/25

